

ecoTheater

Europe Leading The Way?

Posted by lawler on March 2, 2008

Sometimes I like to investigate who is reading ecoTheater. And sometimes I get encouraging information. Recently, it seems, my posts (or links to them, at least) concerning my 2007 conversation with Larry Fried and Theresa May found their way into The Ashden Directory, a UK-based site concerned with, in their own words, “bringing together environmentalism and the performing arts.”

I was no doubt pleased to have ecoTheater mentioned among the serious sustainability movements of London theater, and disappointed that my posts on Fried and May now seem so rail thin in substance. I was, at the time of those posts, withholding a bit because I was working on my ill-fated bit of reportage for American Theatre, as well as beginning to deal with other issues in life. The planned piece for AT has since morphed into an opinion piece, leaving some fertile fact ground left untended—or least unreported. I plan to release it as I can in new ecoTheater posts.

But, back to London. If you’ve bothered to check the links above, you may already have read this information, but perhaps it’s worth repeating: for starters, the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, has joined up with several arts organizations, including some theaters, to create a “Climate Change Action Plan for London Theatre.” The main objective of the coalition? To make London’s theaters more energy efficient. “Tackling climate change doesn’t mean we have to stop enjoying ourselves, but it does mean that every sector of London life has to consider its impact on global warming,” Livingstone said recently. “It is extremely encouraging to see the key players from across the theatre sector showing real leadership and commitment to reduce emissions and tackle climate change.”

What can I say? Wow, I suppose, would be an appropriate response. When will Mayor Bloomberg stand up and say such things about the American equivalent of London theater—Broadway? That isn’t to say that Bloomberg isn’t doing anything about greening up NYC, but what a boon it would be if he stepped up like Livingstone and said, “Okay, guys, let’s work together to make your huge dollar-generating operations more sustainable.”

A few examples from The Ashden Directory of innovative approaches to sustainability in theater:

1) Arcola Theatre

Perhaps the theater company most dedicated to sustainability in the world, U.S. theater could learn a lesson or two about commitment from Arcola Theatre, and it’s

offshoot, Arcola Energy. The theater has recently installed a 5kW hydrogen fuel cell in its foyer, using it to power its cafe/bar, as well as some of its stage productions. The first show to be powered by the hydrogen cell, which produces only water as its waste, is the theater's upcoming production of *The Living Unknown Soldier*. The hydrogen cell is just one piece of Arcola's sustainability plan, though. The theater also focuses on reducing waste, hoping to become a "zero waste-to-landfill" operation, among other green practices.

The theater (and Arcola Energy) has also started a blog to connect with the theater community at large—this in itself could be the source of inspiration and knowledge for those of us in the States dedicated to creating similar organizations on this side of the pond.

2) Dominion Theatre

This one is close to my heart, for some odd reason: the Dominion has begun a battery-recycling program in an attempt to avert the hundreds of wasted batteries used in their wireless mics. As a theater tech, I am all-too-familiar with the practice of tossing barely used batteries in order to avoid the possibility of a mic battery dying onstage during a performance, and winced at the practice taking place under my management recently here in Madison. The Ashden Directory estimates that one million such batteries are thrown away each year by London theaters. So, what's a responsible tech to do? As I compose an environmental policy for my theater, it is such small details that need to be remembered, because they can go a very long way.

3) Cilgwyn Theatre

Back in December, the Cilgwyn sustainably produced *The Faerie Queen*, using sets, props, and costumes created from recycled and reclaimed materials for the puppetry production. As The Ashden Directory noted in Kellie Gutman's article (inspiring this post), the show was a "striking example of less is more."

<http://ecotheater.wordpress.com/2008/03/02/europe-leads-the-way-as-usual/>