

“THEATRE is a SHARED experience that no GAMES CONSOLE can replace”

Arts cuts are placing our theatres at risk. Equity members such as **Hugh Bonneville** are reaching out to audiences to ask for support on stage and, as in this extract, theatre programmes

My parents loved taking their three kids to theatre. Those outings were a thread in the tapestry of my childhood: Bernard Miles frightening the life out of me, annually, as Long John Silver at The Mermaid; Peter Brook's famous Royal Shakespeare Company production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when I was seven; countless shows, too, at my local theatre in Greenwich, south east London. These productions fed my imagination and helped weave the fabric of my developing mind.

I would have had none of these formative experiences were local funding not a part of the lifeblood of those theatre companies. They simply wouldn't have existed. The same was true when I became a professional actor, appearing at the Leicester Haymarket, Colchester Mercury, the National Theatre, the RSC and on tour with the Bush theatre – all companies that depended to a greater or lesser extent on subsidy through taxation.

Theatre is the sort of live, shared experience that no games console can ever replace. The best theatre feeds our souls and even if the mediocre fails to do that, it does still, indirectly, feed the local economy outside the stage door: the bars and restaurants, the impulse buy in a nearby shop

before the matinee, the babysitter at the end of our evening out. At a time of global financial crisis, Germany recently increased arts funding by 8% within an overall budget cut of 3.1%, stating that the arts are “an indispensable investment in the future of our society”.

By contrast, in November 2010, Somerset County Council announced cuts in arts funding of 100%.

Westminster followed suit. That means nothing, nada, diddlysquat from the local tax purse to support the theatres that breathe cultural and economic life into the local area. Add to that an Arts Council England policy that it will not continue to fund organisations where a withdrawal of council funding has made them unviable and you can see why many theatres are now on the brink of oblivion. If you care about theatre – and my hunch is that if you're reading this, you do – then please add your name to the list of those who believe that My Theatre Matters.

And visit the mytheatrematters.com website.

Yes, times are tough. But I believe we annihilate sources of spiritual nourishment at our peril. I wish to continue supporting theatre through my taxes, as I have done throughout my working life. I want our grandchildren's children to enjoy live theatre, which is why My Theatre Matters. And so does yours. 🌸

This piece was written for theatre programmes in 2013, sign up at www.mytheatrematters.com

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