



Think Of England Tour Blog Nov/Dec 2016

Week 1 Blog Post by Pip Brignall:

"HELLO TOWER, THIS IS D-DUCHESS. ARE WE CLEAR TO TAKE OFF? OVER."

Our rendezvous point is AIAWTC's 50/50 night at The Pleasance on a drizzly November Sunday evening. The Duchess (our tour van/people carrier, named after the play's Wellington Bomber) is packed and ready to go, and high on the buzz of a brilliant show, we hit the road to Malvern with Jack (Corporal Frank Lamb) in the Skipper role. We arrive at 01:30 am sleepy, cold and psyched for two days of teching, dress rehearsals, and one heck of a lot of keepy-uppy.

Monday begins at midday making sure all costume is sorted and running through the tech of the show with our wonderful, hardworking and hirsute techie Stokesy. He has managed to procure an amount of festoon lighting to make a fairy wedding in the woods at Christmas blush and the Malvern Coach House Theatre dazzles as we begin to bring Maddie Gould's beautiful play to life in full 1940s retrograde (Insta eat your ❤️ out!).

After a late night of delicious food in the joyous company of our show parents (Robbo an Maureen), Tuesday is a long and busy day, with our first full dress run of the play (twice? I genuinely can't remember) and lots of Q to Q runs, as we will be teching the show ourselves once on the road, bringing us neatly to...

WEDNESDAY - day 1 of #TOETour2016....

We make it to The Fleece Inn in Bretforton for 2 pm, just in time for a quick pub lunch and another dress rehearsal. The barn where we will perform is stunning - if I knew how to take a photo with the back camera on my phone I would have filtered and grammed the #OMG #TooCute out of it all afternoon. Come 8 pm, the seats are heaving and the pints of local ale are toasting the first night, and what a night! The audience were fantastic - so responsive, so engaged and so full of smiles, laughter, shocked gasps, and stunned silence as the play unfolded among their tables - this is what rural touring is about!

Thursday takes us to Ashby De La Launde, where we are touched by the amount of service men and women, both veteran and current, who have come to watch the show, and their wonderful feedback afterwards. We're even invited to bring the play to the local RAF base in Digby in the new year - what an honour that would be! Fingers crossed we can make that happen (no pressure Leila and Bips ☺)

After the cosiest of nights in the super-secluded At Last B&B in peaceful Edlington, it's just a 5 minute drive to Minting, one of Britain's few 'Thankful Villages' where all of the young men who went to war in both WWI and WWII returned home, and our third stop. Another terrific audience (with some very impressive dancers showing us up!) and an abundance of cream and jam scones for post-show famish-feeding, despite the delicious fresh home-made pasta we served before we opened - why does performing make me so hungry!? Then back to the B&B and straight to slumber!

With check-out at 10 am, we squeeze in a visit to Richard III's grave in Leicester on Saturday as we head to Leicester Forest East (and their very fancy hall!) for our penultimate show of the week. Another full-house and Paul and his team have even managed to get hold of some fantastic replica memorabilia - from propaganda comics to ration advice for pregnant women, which they kindly donated to the tour, making a fascinating addition to our tea party tables!

We drive back to Malvern after the show, so that we can get up bright and early for the Remembrance Day service at the Priory. The church is packed, and just as with the show, it is great to see a moment of reflection bring the local community together. A big cast lunch sets us up for our final show of the week, as we point The Duchess towards Fairfield, where the local community have spent the day in remembrance together eagerly anticipating one of the first professional productions to tread their hall's boards. And don't they half appreciate it! Wolf-whistles and heckles at the kisses, hisses for the 'nasty one' (please can I play the nice guy next time guys??) and rapturous applause, beaming smiles and wonderful feedback (and cake) afterwards. The perfect end to a smashing first week. Someone wake me up on Wednesday....?

Xxxx

Week 2 Blog Post by Ashlea Kaye:

Week 2 started in AIAW's hometown of Malvern, with a performance at The Coach House. Being an end-on theatre space we had the challenge of changing the space to be as close to a village hall feel as possible. Luckily it was mission accomplished and the theatre was transformed, impressing the locals! It was also a special show, as we had the gorgeous writer, Madeline Gould, in for the first time along with friends and family. The show went down a treat and we celebrated with a group curry.

Our second performance this week took us to the beautiful village of St Michael's in Tenbury Wells. We had a stunning drive to the venue, with bright sunshine and a giant rainbow. Being a city girl, it's the first time I've seen a rainbow with a countryside background and it was

really quite breathtaking. On arrival to the village hall we were greeted by two year old twins who we shared a table with to have dinner. They certainly gave the rainbow some competition for most gorgeous thing seen that day! We had a great turnout, filling the hall, and receiving the most interesting heckle from an audience member so far who shouted out...'Give it to the RSPCA!' Please come and see the show and you'll realise how random, hilarious and inventive this is! Overall- lovely village hall, lovely people and treated to homemade apple and cinnamon cake. [#whatawonderfulworld](#)

From Worcestershire to Warwickshire, day 3 took us to the most picturesque of venues, a tiny little chapel in Whatcote..."what coat?" "wot cut?" what?? - Apparently either pronunciation is acceptable! Tonight's performance was quite a wake up call for us actors. Without giving anything away, the play uses harsh language at times, and raises difficult subject matters. Living in today's world, it can take a lot to shock us and we can become numb to the meaning of insults. In the chapel, my awareness became crystal clear and words being spoken were pinging in the space like they hadn't before. The intimate audience were full of positive comments and we were honoured to meet a lovely sparkly eyed elderly gentleman. He shared his memories of being six years old when his elder brother, who flew in a Wellington bomber (as mentioned in the play), sadly got shot down. It was a really valuable evening and a strong reminder of how powerful this play is.

Next stop - a personal favourite - my second home of Derbyshire. Rolling hills covered in snow and sheep, bacon and cheese oatcakes, the famous Buxton water, good company. What more could you ask for - except for a warmer winter coat? The Burton Institute hosted us tonight and what a way to finish our week. Total sell-out, by which I mean we had more people than we could fit in the hall. But hey - how many actors does it take to figure out a logistical, mathematical puzzle like this? Well... apparently five, with the help of everyone else in the building. It was glorious. We squeezed them all in and they all had a jolly good time! I also had a jolly good time watching Leila walking into a cupboard, mistaking it for a door... twice. The night finished with a good old drive home singing Spice Girls and Little Mix at the top of our voices and this special song which came on the radio which we'd like to share with you: <https://vimeo.com/81478235>

That's week 2. Over and out.

