

OUR FOUNDERS AND THE HISTORY OF EASTSIDE EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Chris Enticott and Rakhee Jasani were the co-founders and co-directors of Eastside from 1994-2017.

In 1994, the year that Eastside was launched, John Major was Prime Minister, the Channel Tunnel opened, the Docklands Light Railway didn't run after 6pm or at weekends and Facebook, Twitter and Google were yet to be invented. It was in the summer of that year that our founding directors Chris Enticott and Rakhee Jasani staged Eastside's inaugural production, an all-singing and all-dancing youth theatre production of the musical *Bugsy Malone*. The show, complete with full set and costumes, original choreography, custard pies, working splurge guns and a live orchestra, featured a cast of 40 children from a number of schools in Tower Hamlets. Beginning with a series of drama workshops and auditions during the summer term and rehearsals throughout the long summer holiday, the production culminated in a week-long run of performances at The Emery Theatre in Poplar. In fact Eastside takes its name from the story of *Bugsy Malone* which was set on the Lower East-Side of New York. Chris produced and directed the musical and Rakhee came on board to provide administrative and management support. Chris believed that creativity and the professional disciplines that the arts engender, were key to success across the board and he wanted to share his enthusiasm for live theatre with young people that wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to experience it. Chris comments: "*Bugsy Malone set the bar high. We worked with a very committed group of talented young people that summer and it was that early success which paved the way to everything else that Eastside went on to achieve.*"

During the first three years, Chris and Rakhee worked unpaid, alongside their other 'day jobs' in order to establish Eastside as a creative force for young Londoners. By 1998, They were delivering a varied creative summer holiday programme running participatory drama, dance and music projects in deprived areas across East London. Alongside the summer programme Eastside also began to offer after-school arts programmes and arts-inspired educational projects responding to demand from schools wishing to extend and enhance the creative learning offer to their students. In 1998 Eastside became a registered charity and by the year 2000, we had worked in every London borough. Eastside went on to also work with schools outside of London, including national and international projects. The programme grew from our initial performing arts and music workshops to include literature, visual arts and then film and digital media.

Eastside's first office was above The Green Room Club in Adam Street, just off The Strand, but we then moved aboard HMS President (1918), one of the last surviving Royal Navy warships of the First World War, moored on Victoria Embankment. The organisation spent three years as 'London's only underwater theatre company' before moving to terra firma and an office at Hamilton House in Blackfriars. In 2005, Eastside moved further east to its present home on Hackney Road in Shoreditch. From our base in East London, we partnered with the Arts Council of England to launch The Arts Award in London, worked alongside Creative Partnerships to deliver the Associate Schools Programme and were involved in the government's national pilot scheme Find Your Talent, designed to give children access to a wide range of quality cultural experiences. Chris and Rakhee strived to deliver a varied programme which not only met the priorities of schools, but also enriched the lives of young people and enhanced their employment opportunities. Programmes like Cultural Ambassadors empowered young people in Hackney to experience and promote the arts in their local area to their peers, whilst Adobe Youth Voices and the BFI Film Academy both proved .

successful in supporting young filmmakers as they took their first steps in their professional careers.

With Chris and Rakhee at the helm, Eastside set two official Guinness World Records and gained a number of prestigious awards and quality assurance kite marks, which included winning The European Award for Languages (twice), receiving The Prince of Wales Arts and Kids Foundation Award and being presented with The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. In recognition of their work, Chris and Rakhee were also invited to a Royal Garden Party in the grounds of Buckingham Palace. The charity's tenth anniversary was marked with a reception at The House of Commons (in 2004) and the House of Lords held a reception to commemorate our twentieth anniversary (in 2014). In 2017, after jointly running Eastside for twenty-three years, Chris and Rakhee both stepped down as the charity's directors.

Chris reflects on the changes he has witnessed: "When I think back over the past twenty-three years, so much has changed; when we were starting out in 1994, Gillian Shepherd was Education Secretary and the focus in schools was for a revised curriculum. The arts were sidelined as unnecessary in the return to 'traditional' academic values. Now the merits of creativity and arts based learning are much more widely understood and the creative industries have been recognised as major contributors to the UK economy. The one thing that stayed true through all our work and what I enjoyed the most, was the freedom we had to come up with an idea and see the project through to completion. Whether offering mentorships to young writers, enabling them to see their work published on billboards and on buses in Write Up Your Street, or producing a series of films to support language learning for Translingual Express - a project which took us to four European capital cities, or seeing young people perform their own original work on stage and on screen, I always derived an immense sense of satisfaction from seeing so many young people develop their interest in the arts and I took great pride in watching those that went on to launch their own creative careers. It's a real testament to our work that we have worked with some of the world's biggest and most respected creative companies and that we were the UK strategic partner for Adobe and Disney, bringing Adobe Youth Voices and Disney Musicals in Schools to the UK - both for the very first time. We started Eastside from literally nothing and I'm proud to have built it up into a thriving youth arts organisation with a newly refurbished building in the heart of Shoreditch and a proven track record and an enviable reputation for creative excellence. I hope the charity will go on helping young people to develop their creative thinking, so they can become the problem solvers of tomorrow and I look forward to seeing the important work that we have started, continue for many more years to come.

Rakhee has always been passionate about opening the door to the arts for everyone. Believing that everyone has a skill or talent waiting to be expressed, Rakhee found that Eastside gave her a perfect outlet for her skills as an arts manager. *"We were determined to run a truly creative organisation and what amazes me is that over twenty-three years we never ran out of ideas or challenges! Riding the waves of change has been a fascinating journey and I have always thought it important to be responsive to evolving needs. I can remember getting our first email, but as film and digital technology took centre stage, we helped participants to develop their skills in these areas and to forge their careers. Delivering a global programme like Adobe Youth Voices (AYV) in London was a fantastic opportunity and one which enabled us to learn from youth arts organisations worldwide. Whilst AYV had a wide reach, I was also interested in how we could have a more sustained impact. I am so proud that we were able to establish long-term projects like The Arts Award which gave young people additional qualifications in the arts and Verse vs. Verse our creative literacy programme for primary school children. It was with trepidation we moved from a small office to having our own space but as with so many of the decisions we made, it was in response to changing needs and like us it feels like London has also moved eastwards. Our decision to move to Shoreditch well over a decade ago*

has given the organisation roots in a creative and exciting community. Above all creating Eastside has been fun. It is rewarding to be leaving Eastside with a number of exciting projects and partnerships waiting to be delivered. We can't wait to see what the next twenty years will bring."

In 2017, Matt Lane joined the Eastside team as the new CEO / Artistic Director.

"When I was offered the opportunity to take the leadership of Eastside forward late in 2016, I was filled with a great deal of excitement and a fair amount of trepidation.

Having met Chris and Rakhee I was very grateful that we were going to be working together for the first three months of 2017 to ensure that I could receive a really thorough handover whilst also receiving support with the organisation's next application to the Arts Council for future funding.

I was very moved by Chris and Rakhee's great perseverance and commitment to establish, sustain and grow Eastside bringing it to where it was and for all of the incredible work that they had achieved for and with young people over their 23 years of service.

I also saw an opportunity to build upon their great work and start a new phase of Eastside's existence. One in which Eastside could reimagine its future, grow its presence and become more widely known for all of the great work it delivers.

The first few years were a steep learning curve - there was a huge amount to learn. Firstly about how the organisation operated, what were its strengths and what could be done differently. There were two memorable events that really struck me early on - Firstly the Verse vs Verse poetry slam event at The Criterion Theatre - I saw groups of young people get up on that stage and express themselves with joy and confidence through spoken word poetry - it was deeply moving. I glimpsed the great potential of developing many more young poets through working with schools and the Spoken Word Poetry artform. And then the BFI Film Academy project showcase. I witnessed young people who had been training with Eastside over 5 months present their original short films which were of very high quality. I sensed great potential for Eastside to become an organisation that embraces digital, in particular the power of film as a force for good and how young people can and do use digital media in their modern day lives to communicate with the wider world.

I also spotted great potential for the Eastside building to become a hub for great creativity and a space to be shared with many others. With the help of the staff and trustees we put time into designing and developing a new vision statement for the organisation - A future in which All Children and Young People's Creativity is nurtured, valued and celebrated - along with a new mission, refreshed values, aims and North Star statement all of which fed into a new business plan. From all of this early work, we were able to plot our course and evolve our work.

By the time we reached 2019, we had grown our impact dramatically, taken over West End stages at the Lyceum as well as The Criterion for major youth sharing events, we had refreshed our brand and website and had a new look building. Our artist pool was growing and becoming ever more diverse boasting a fantastic range of skills. Our core team comprised expert professionals who were stretching themselves and working hard to keep up with our growth and expansion.

And then of course the world changed in 2020 at a time when we were poised to deliver a number of high profile, large scale programmes the likes of which our sector had never seen - including a continuous 25 hour spoken word poetry marathon on a West End stage, a festival of youth creativity in East London as well as a free theatre programme for the 20,000 children and young people resident in Southwark. We were forced to cut, cancel, postpone, redesign, review and redeliver all of our work in those most uncertain of times. The survival of the organisation was under threat and there was no let up from the challenges that unfolded.

Thanks to vital support from DCMS with the Cultural Recovery Fund emergency support funding alongside other funding support, Eastside not only navigated the lockdowns, but also continued to deliver vital creative work for young people and communities, delivering workshops and entire training courses via Zoom when needed. We also emerged with the encouragement that through live streaming our workshops and activities we could reach potentially young people in schools all around the country and potentially around the world.

We have emerged with a stronger belief in the importance of our work in these times. Young people are facing deeper challenges than ever in their inner lives and in the external environment in which they are growing up. Society is evolving and changing fast and Eastside needs to be aware and ready to respond to these changes. We believe that the young people of today can build a better future, not just for themselves but for the whole planet. Their vision for the future is pure and positive. The world they are growing up in, is less so.

Eastside can and must provide its precious creative work to many more young people, giving them the encouragement, unique opportunities, the hope and skills to go on to lead lives that are full, expressive, powerful, creative and constructive.

To achieve this we need to find even more friends, partners, allies and supporters to help us along the way.”



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