

## THEATRE CENTRE – one big family

Carole Woddis

‘Unless people are commissioning them, in 20 years time writers won’t know how to write original plays for children,’ says Natalie Wilson. Wilson is the current artistic director of Theatre Centre in London, the company for young people founded in 1953 by Brian Way and Margaret Faulkes. Such dire warnings about the future are not typical of Wilson’s general outlook which combines being both upbeat and shrewdly far-seeing.

In the programme note to *Punk Rock*, Simon Stephens’ bleak account of teenage behaviour in a north of England school, however, he writes ‘Young people’s theatre in the UK is marginalised. It is often considered an inferior part of an adult art form.’ On the face of it, this might seem unduly negative. Notwithstanding Theatre Centre and the Unicorn – another half century still going strong – the National Theatre’s New Connections scheme has, for two decades, commissioned plays specifically for young people from some of the brightest and best UK playwrights. Then there are companies such as Oily Cart, Fevered Sleep, Theatre Rites, Big Brum in Birmingham, not to mention all the outreach programmes throughout the country feeding into schools and youth groups.

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