That’s the way to do it!

27/01/2012

Timed to coincide with the 350th anniversary of Mr Punch and the forthcoming 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded £240,000 for an exciting new project that will tour the UK this summer.

To be led by one of the UK’s leading puppetry organisations PuppetLink Ltd. in partnership with the V&A Museum of Childhood, the project, called The Big Grin - aims to show how Punch & Judy developed into a form of popular entertainment still thriving in 2012 – the 350th anniversary of Mr. Punch. Featuring a Punch and Judy Heritage Trail in thirteen towns and cities UK-wide the project will work with a wide network of volunteer groups, museums, local authorities, schools and colleges. It will explore Punch’s European roots, the popular role the Punch and Judy Show has since played in millions of childhood memories, and create a new media archive of the 350 year old art form and its place in UK culture to be publicly accessible for the first time.

Arguably the most famous traditional puppets in the Western World, the Punch and Judy Show – synonymous with British seaside holidays of yesteryear – has come a long way since an Italian puppet called Pulcinella was first recorded in the 1662 diary of Samuel Pepys after a Covent Garden show. Indeed, so popular was the new artform of puppet entertainment that British showmen and women quickly took up the novel foreign import, travelling the length and breadth of the country with regional variations that first became anglicised to Punchinello and finally the Mr Punch we know today.

Anne Jenkins, Deputy Director of Operations for the Heritage Lottery Fund explained further what the project will offer: “Featuring a staggering 242 events and 258 activities involving 108,000 young people and 60,000 adults across the UK, this exciting project has it all. Bringing some welcome fun to our towns and cities this summer it offers a multitude of community benefits with opportunities for a UK-wide network of over 200 volunteers to get involved in marketing, putting on events and leading heritage tours, 55 heritage and archiving training paces, and media placements for students. A further 6,000 young people and their families will get involved at local schools and museums across the UK meaning that this exciting project will benefit people of all ages.”

Glyn Edwards, master Punch and Judy puppeteer and Artistic Director for PuppetLink Ltd. said: “Mr. Punch and his wooden co-stars have been entertaining the public for so long that their origins and true story have been lost in the mists of time and obscured by urban myth. We are delighted that this project will enable so many people to get involved in learning about the longest-lived and most vigorous form of folk puppetry Europe has ever known: one which tickled the funnybone of Samuel Pepys and still has the power to make people laugh in the 21st Century.”

Punch and Judy special exhibits are planned this year for London, Brighton, Worthing, Weymouth, Buxton, Norwich, Aberystwyth, Morecambe, Cannock, Wolverhampton, Lincoln, Glasgow and Newtonards. Further learning activity programmes, (focussing on schools) will include:

London: The V&A Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green will deliver an educational programme of high quality, historically accurate , fun and interactive experiences encouraging children and families to learn together about the heritage of Punch & Judy and other folk puppet traditions to include a series of drop-in art activities, story trails and workshops targeted at families and schools.

South East: The Brighton Fishing Museum will open a permanent Punch and Judy display on the site where shows have been given since the 1830s accompanied by an education programme. A schools roadshow will give local children opportunities to handle the puppets and see them in performance. Family fun days will also allow access to all to 'go backstage' in a traditional Punch & Judy theatre, have a go themselves and ask questions from the performers. Worthing Museum and Art Gallery will host a display of 'Punch and Judy at the Seaside' alongside their own collection of puppets and historic costumes from many centuries. An education programme modelled on that of the Museum of Childhood will take place together with a schools roadshow featuring classes on the beach.

Morecambe: Morecambe Town Council will involve all local schools in an art competition based round a Punch & Judy theme and a schools roadshow plus an outdoor event on the Prom.

Buxton: Local performers and schools will create a town heritage walk based on a native son and 'Victorian Superstar' of Punch & Judy: Henry Bailey, whose appearance in a film of 1901 is the first known moving image of the show.

Notes to editors

PuppetLink Ltd
PuppetLink is a puppetry organisation from the West Midlands with a significant national profile within the sector. It promotes the art form of puppetry, mounts puppet festivals and exhibitions and carries out educational and training activities relevant to puppetry. It has long established relationships with local authority arts, library and museum services as well as with theatres, schools and higher education establishments. For further information please see:

The Big Grin - list of partner organisations
V&A Museum of Childhood
V&A Dept of Theatre and Performance
Alternative Arts
Little Angel Theatre
Punch & Judy College of Professors
Punch & Judy Fellowship
Royal Holloway, University of London
Central School of Speech & Drama
Ceredigion County Museum, Aberystwyth
Buxton Opera House
Buxton Museum
Brighton & Hove City Council
Brighton West Pier Trust
Morecambe Town Council
Weymouth & Portland Town Council
Scottish Mask & Puppet Centre
Funny Wonders Community Group
Web Theatre, Newtonards
The Fedora Group
Hastings Museum & Art Gallery
Staffordshire County Museum Service
Brighton Fishing Museum Trust
Museum of Cannock Chase

Littlehampton Museum

For information

Interviews and image requests:
HLF Press Office: Vicky Wilford, HLF press office; 020 7591 6046, email vickyw@hlf.org.uk
Puppetlink Ltd: Glyn Edwards, Artistic Director; 01903 200 364, email glyn@puppetlink.org