

I met Edward Bond in 2001 when, on the initiative of the local Education Division, he came to Malta to lead some workshops in his plays and theatre ideology. I admit I had not heard about him before and so attended these workshops without knowing what to expect.

The first workshop I attended was held at the University of Malta for students and Drama teachers. I attended as one of a handful of Drama teachers employed with the Education Division of Malta. My colleagues found his ideas and methodology too radical, some said they were too negative and too violent. On the other hand, I was enthralled. It was in those days that I was toying with the idea of branching into Theatre Production but did not know exactly what kind of theatre I wanted to do. I remember though that I was tired of what was being staged in Malta at the time as I found it far too safe and commercial. Edward's work hit me like a thunderbolt. Here were plays that spoke about the truth of our times, that challenged the status quo and that engaged with the soul. I attended all his workshops in Malta.

I was then a member of a local amateur Drama club and I quickly asked them to direct *AT THE INLAND SEA* for them. However, the committee of the club, after reading the play, told me that I would not find an audience for the play and that it was too different from their style.

I ended up forming my own theatre company, Unifaun Theatre Productions in 2005. The effect of my productions was immediate as people flocked to my plays and thus changed the Theatre landscape in Malta. I introduced Malta to playwrights like Mark Ravenhill, Philip Ridley and Martin McDonagh, none of who were ever performed locally.

It took me until 2013 to garner courage to produce a Bond play. I met then Big Brum Artistic Director Chris Cooper, who was in Malta on invitation of the British Council to work in schools on Edward's methodology. On learning who he was I discussed with him the idea of producing a Bond play in Malta and we finally decided that the play should be *OLLY'S PRISON*.

*OLLY'S PRISON* was met with scepticism by the local reviewers. They described it as "violent" and not adapted to a Maltese audience. I had invited Edward to Malta to view the opening of the show. After the First Night we held a Q&A with Edward in the theatre. Someone in the audience challenged Edward that his plays were unlawful and that we were meant to observe the Law. I remember that an until then quiet Edward Bond suddenly sprang to life and shouted at his interlocutor, "Auschwitz was lawful! Does it make it Just?" A silence pervaded the room but those words continued to mark my admiration for him.

I kept in touch with Edward after that through email and finally convinced the local national theatre to commission him to write a new play for Malta. The result was THE PRICE OF ONE, a wonderful parable of Madness provoked by Violence and War. It was the first time that a playwright of Edward's calibre was commissioned in Malta and audiences flocked to the theatre. This time the reception was warmer and audiences understood the true greatness of the man.

Edward later commented on the play: "The play that you commissioned for your theatre. Inevitably I had forgotten parts of it and its total effect. Re-reading it from the advantage of distance, was a revelation. I think it is a play for our times. UNIFAUN Theatre puts the London West End and the New York Broadway to shame and I really mean that. Malta can be proud of its theatre."

I went on to produce CHAIR in 2023 with a female Billie. I asked Edward to have an autistic actor play the role and he agreed. The effect was tremendous. The actress playing Billie went on to win BEST YOUNG PERFORMER at the National Arts Awards for her portrayal of the character. We had people in the audience in tears at the ending of the play. I forwarded a video recording of the play to Edward and he replied positively, making me the proudest person alive.

Edward's work has influenced me immeasurably. His notes on Drama, his plays and his poems are a beacon in the darkness of our times. We live in time where we are teetering on WW3. In my country, most companies continue to produce farces that lead to nothing and that, in Edward's words, "leave the audience more confused and numb at the end."

Edward's work shines as a beacon of hope.

I appeal to everyone to read his notes, stage his plays and pass on his work to the younger generations. It is the least we can do. We owe him that much.