

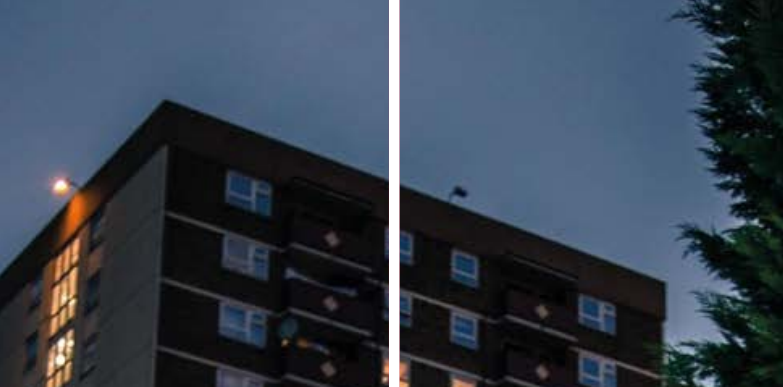


Revoluton Arts

Revoluton Case Study Riots to Revoluton

"The vision for me would be to go into areas that have had riots or could potentially have them and show that, rather than expending the energy on rioting, which was like a trap that they'd set for us, for the poor and excluded people to come out and throw bricks and then get evicted....it's a big opportunity to go out into communities and say "Don't fall for that. We had that, and we didn't fall for that. we stopped it, redirected the energy and rebuilt."

Glenn Jenkins



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About Riots to Revoluton

Marsh Farm Estate, Luton. 1995. Where youth unemployment seeped like a poisonous chemical through its foundations. Where petrol got poured on a spark and reason turned to riot.

In Summer 1995, on-going tensions between local youths and the police exploded into violence on the Marsh Farm estate on the outskirts of Luton, when rumours began to circulate that a local 13 year old had been beaten up by the

police. Three nights of fire bombing, joy riding and looting came to an end when the Exodus Collective drew 1500 young people away from the estate to their nearby rave.

'Riots to Revoluton' used real life testimonies of those who experienced the riots and the rave to tell an alternative story of this notorious incident in Luton's history. The performance took place as part of Paines Plough's Roundabout pop up theatre space, on the Marsh Farm estate in autumn 2016.

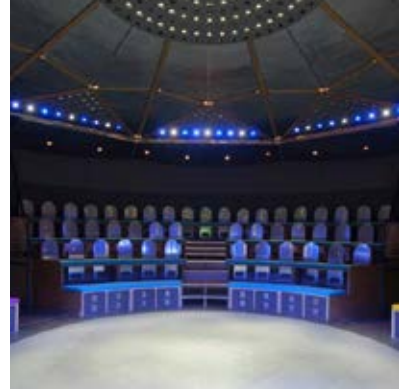
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The process

The idea for 'Riots to Revoluton' first came up when Glenn Jenkins from Marsh Farm Outreach (a grassroots community action project based on the Marsh Farm estate) met the Revoluton Arts Director and suggested the incident as potential material for a play. Glenn was a member of the Exodus Collective, a movement for collective action, involved in squatting, community development and raves around Bedfordshire throughout the 1990s.

Revoluton's Community Activist worked alongside Glenn to collect testimonies from local people who had been involved or witnessed the riots, and two local scriptwriters developed a script based on these interviews. Freelance director Zephyryn Taitte and dramaturg and scriptwriter Toby Clarke were commissioned to bring the material together. Actors were recruited locally through Revoluton's networks, and included both professionals and non professionals. The whole process took just sixteen weeks and was presented in the style of a 'scratch' performance, with the intention to further develop the piece and hopefully tour it to other communities that had been through similar experiences.

Success factors

A supportive, generous and facilitative way of working

"I think the way Revoluton do it is crucial to that. They believe like I do in ownpowerment, not empowerment, It's a difference. Empowerment it's something you do to somebody else. Ownpowerment is what you do by yourself and for yourself.... 'this is your story, right, we're here to scaffold you and facilitate you, but you've got to walk it'. That's what they told us.... it was the whole way that they gave us the story and then gave us tools and resources to get on with it. And that was quite precious" **Glenn Jenkins**

Telling an authentic local story

"I learnt that with a bit of innovation and a good story that's locally relevant... igniting interest in working-class communities for art and theatre and things like that is very much fertile soil really."

Glenn Jenkins

"It was really good because it was very intimate, the audience was right there, close to the stage, there was no separation. The fact it was youngsters and they were dynamic and they were talking normally and it wasn't a thespian type thing, it was very real". **Audience member**

Supporting local talent

"Revoluton were keen to use local where they could, and it was a mixture of local and national people, but generally they were keen to dig in the local mine if they could." **Glenn Jenkins**

"Great access to local stories, passions and talents through the arts. Space excellent and good opportunity to have a discussion afterwards, well done and thank you."

Audience member

"Since doing Riots to Revoluton I feel like I'm in their network now which I wasn't before, because prior to that I didn't know anything that was going on in Luton, drama related, performance related. I have got the information coming through now and I could see the things that were happening and that gave me more opportunity to get involved."

Actor

The impacts

Created a sense of community

"I haven't seen so many Marsh Farmers in the same vicinity in a long time, maybe at fireworks but even then they just watch it and leave, but with the Q and A as well, that was the first time I've heard so many people speak so passionately about this thing."

Actor

Reclaimed and celebrated people's history

"Because it's not celebrated, owned or talked about it's almost like it never happened and I think that's really common in history. And seeing 'Riots to Revoluton' it definitely brought out celebrating that bit of history that is ours and should be owned by everyone in Luton, especially the young kids as it's even worse now"

Audience member

"As a young person I think I vaguely knew about a riot at some point but no-one really talked about it, so coming into the play and finding out about it was a strange one... because it was talking about a place where I lived but its not a place I know, its really weird."

Actor

Created a sense of pride

"It felt like a bit of an honour to have been a part of it, it felt like wow, you're actually celebrating a bit of history that we have been part of. To have it played back to you is bizarre and really special."

Audience member

"After the play the Q and A session hearing everybody's view about what happened I felt so proud, because people are really passionate and the way they spoke about Marsh Farm and the things that they did and how they just clubbed together and had that community element, I felt proud to be a part of that."

Actor

Challenged stereotypes

"I love Marsh Farm, I grew up in Marsh Farm and it's got a bad stigma attached to it but I love my Marsh Farm, I feel that I had a really good childhood and it was more of a community."

Actor

"This was an excellent way to show the younger generation a real insight into the community. Also to show a true reflection on community spirit always wins."

Audience member

"It was very educational and effective. I learnt a lot about Marsh Farm. Stuff that I didn't know about."

Audience member

The Legacy

In 2017 a Revoluton residency in Marsh Farm community culminated in the creation of a new mural by a local artist on the side of Marsh House entitled 'United We Stand, Together We Rise', and a launch event which included a long table debate, spoken word performances and DJ/jam session, attracted a wide range of people from Luton's diverse communities.

Riots to Revoluton provided a springboard for local talent, facilitated creative connections and led to further creative work on the estate.