

Matchbox Magazine

01.07.07-30.07.07

By

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Of

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**A Project Funded by
The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate
Research.**

Abstract

Research:

The project allows students to develop individual research interests on the topic of contemporary poetry and to present their findings in journalistic format within a magazine which extends the skills received in Writing Seminars by translating the theory of the literary marketplace into practice whilst creating a forum for review, critical debate and personal expression.

Experience:

The magazine provides six students with hands-on experience of the publishing industry, (editing copy, fact-checking, commissioning etc.) and many more with knowledge of critical writing, review skills, and marketable creative writing. Full understanding of the scale, impact and responsibilities involved in such a project were also ascertained, as well as the art of co-ordination and teamwork.

Confidence:

Student writers are given full support and encouragement by the magazine, urging more diverse, experimental writing of a higher standard to proliferate at the University. As an outlet for new writing, the magazine has raised the profile of the University Writing Programme and promised perfect-bound publication space to five outstanding Warwick student poets and inspired others to continue writing in the future.

Summary

Matchbox Magazine, established in October 2006, is a poetry review publication designed to feature experimental and original new poetry and review features from the student community at Warwick and further afield, to the professional arena of published poets. An editorial team of six students, with the help of The English Department, Heaventree Press, Worple Press, professional designer David Fordham and the Reinvention Centre, created the space for a poetic conversation based on individual research projects in the spread of a 20 page colour magazine featuring journalistic writing, reviews, columnists, regular features, a 'News and Events Overview', cartoons and illustrations, and of course poetry.

Aim of the project:

The major aim of the magazine was to create an alternative (though not a competitive) outlet for new writing at the University, focussing on poetry, which is often overlooked as being inaccessible, highbrow, difficult and a largely private discourse. By emphasising poetry as our major medium for expression, both as a pure art form in itself, and as a motivation for prose writing, we hoped to attract a network of talented new writers keen to publicise their work, engage in a journalistic discussion with other writers, and to develop and share their research interests (whether it be research into the publishing industry, the state of the contemporary poetry scene, the validity of poetry in the modern world, or merely a running commentary on an individual poet, their life and works etc.) in an encouraging, professional, public arena. In pooling a variety of different research voices, and a

number of different creative standpoints, we hoped to form a solid forum for a broad yet focussed commentary on the the contemporary poetry scene, both internationally and locally. Although the University had a variety of different poetry publications in the form of pamphlets or leaflets (see *The Poetaster*, for example), we felt it lacked a complete and comprehensive poetry publication that engaged with the problems and delights of poetic expression in all forms. Our aim was to see if we could fill the gap, educating our team, and ourselves, in the perks and the troughs of the publishing world, encouraging new student writing in to a direct discourse with that world.

Since it began in October 2006, *Matchbox Magazine*, we believe, has stood as an effective earpiece to the individual research projects of aspiring poets and new writers resulting in five handsome and intelligent issues that take the concept of poetry in all directions and push the boundaries of conventional thought.

The following report seeks to document the project from start to finish:

Methodology

Execution of the project:

Stage One: Matchbox Magazine before the Reinvention Centre:

Before receiving financial assistance from the Reinvention Centre, *Matchbox Magazine* had printed the first issue of the magazine, which consisted of 20 pages of black and white paper, folded down the middle and stapled. Funded entirely off the editors own backs, the publication was designed to gauge student and staff interest, seek out possible retailers, engage a team of approximately six for the editorial and receive criticism and feedback from students, and perhaps most importantly, from tutors in the department. Following an excellent reception of the magazine and substantial encouragement from the department, namely Michael Hulse, David Morley, Zoe Brigley and Thomas Doherty, *Matchbox* drew up a business plan and organised a launch party in the newly renovated Reinvention Centre Space (Westwood Campus), with wine and food provided by Thomas Doherty and the English Department. Over fifty students and two tutors (David Morley and George Ttoouli) attended the event, which, with the help of the up-and-coming experimental funk-jazz band 'Bang Bang One Dollar' and our headline performer, dub-poet Deepak Shukla, was an outstanding success. With the magazine substantially publicised, celebrated and explicated, our next move was to seek financial help from the Reinvention Centre.

Stage Two: developing the magazine, with the support of the SSGF:

1. Funding: After a successful application was processed by Cath Lambert and the Reinvention Centre staff, *Matchbox* set about to put its objectives into action, and to use the £1,000 research grant to full effect.

Business Plan:

- w Motion, Les Murray and Blake Morrison publish work in the magazine alongside the aspiring poets of the University.
- The Warwick Arts Centre Bookshop has been our major stockholder, selling the

magazine through their till system at a generous £1. We are quick to shift the first 50, and with the assistance of advertising and publicity, we are then capable of selling on the rest.

- An editorial team of 6 students has enabled those individuals to work in a formal capacity for a semi-professional publication, teaching them the skills of sub-editing, fact checking and commissioning copy.
- Regular writers have had the opportunity to develop their journalistic and critical skills in a publication that is not *The Warwick Boar*.
- Tutors from the Creative Writing Department have looked to Matchbox as a commendable and energetic outlet for poetic expression and debate, inviting the Editorial Team and the magazine's regular writers to formal poetry readings in and around the campus.
- We have hosted an hour of poetry at the opening of *The Capital Centre*, which was a huge success.
- We have written, produced and directed a piece of performance poetry, called *Kinship and Miscalculation* which was performed in The Arts Centre Studio as part of WSAF 07.
- To leave this report on a personal note, I wrote my 5,000 word Assessed Practice of Poetry essay on the small independent press, using Matchbox as a springboard to talk about the prospects of 'new poetry' today, receiving a high mark for my discussion.

The Future of Matchbox Magazine:

- We are yet to hear the results of *The Student Media Guardian Awards*, to which Matchbox submitted 3 of the 4 issues under the category of 'Student Magazine'
- We are looking to take *Kinship and Miscalculation* to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, to be performed alongside an acoustic poetry reading in the Cabaret Bar in August.
- We have been invited by *The Poetry Café* in London to host an evening of poetry.
- We are looking to continue the magazine and to set up an independent press in London, to maintain strong links in Warwick via our Review editor James Brookes (3rd year), and in Cambridge via our News and Events Coordinator Vicky Mason. (Co-editorship is changing hands, as Tim Leach steps down and Thom Hutchinson steps up).
- We are looking to publish our first collection of poetry *The Matchbox Retrospect*, featuring six-eight pages of four outstanding Warwick poets, three accompanying essays by Warwick graduates, and new poetry open to all. (tbc)
- Matchbox Magazine is currently looking to The Arts Council for further funding to assist our future projects.

2. Design: Although we had called upon the assistance of Professional Designer, David Fordham for the first issue, we weren't sure if he would help us out again for the potential five issues we hoped to produce. A good design, we felt, was fundamental to the personality, style, standard and sellability of the magazine. It had to be elegant, approachable, eye-catching. Our first step therefore was to secure David as an official designer for the magazine. He agreed to work for free,

thus allowing us greater possibilities as regards the quality of the publication (colour/paper/print-run). Together, we agreed to maintain the print-run at 200, to introduce a colour front and back page, and to increase the paper to 180gsm on the jacket and 120gsm in the inside pages. The magazine would stand at 20 pages of A4, and would come out twice termly, keeping us on our toes, and our regular readers expectant and keen. This way our name would never become old news. The grant was processed just in time for Issue 3, and we held off the colour for a spectacular issue 4, though the previous issues had been rising considerably in standard of their content.

3. Setting the standard: Poetry submissions were advertised on and around campus, and by email to all English Literature students and postgraduates. Tim and I liaised with David Morley, who offered us a list of contacts of poets, both national and international - names that would set a standard, and names that would sell. I wrote to most of them, enclosing complimentary evidence of what we had achieved thus far, and waited for replies. To our surprise, the first to donate was the poet laureate, Andrew Motion, shortly followed by acclaimed Australian poet Les Murray, and the novelist and poet Blake Morrison. Peter Carpenter, editor of The Worple Press in Tonbridge had offered to write us an introduction, Birmingham performance poet Julie Boden had written us a feature on 'Translating Poetry', and Michael Hulse, David Morley and lecturer Nick Lawrence had all supported the magazine by offering us poetry, introductions and questionnaires. Where we had had to cultivate an interest before, the magazine now seemed to be self-sufficient, generating its own appeal and high standard. And yet, The University was and always will be our priority and focus. For students to have their work published on the same spread as Andrew Motion suddenly gave the magazine an air of priority, and of professionalism. The number of submissions awaiting us in the inbox had tripled, but the quality of the work had tripled also.

4. Thinking professionally: Then, the Warwick Arts Centre Bookshop agreed to stock the magazine, for £1. With an expert design, professional input, a colour front cover and an established retailer, the magazine was promoting itself as a student magazine with a professional edge, and thus encouraging students to keep writing, keep submitting, keep improving. Matchbox began to establish regular writers, and regular poets whose work characterised and improved the quality of the publication. Five poets, all of which have appeared in at least four out of the five publications have been invited to publish 6-8 pages of original poetry in our future publication 'The Matchbox Retrospect', which will also feature three lengthy essays by Warwick Students, and will be perfect-bound in A5 book format and, we hope, available in The Arts Centre Bookshop as from the beginning of the upcoming academic year.

5. Maintaining diversity: And yet, Matchbox is always looking for new poets and we have done our best to publish new names in every publication, to create a discourse within the publication, and to provoke debate amongst our readers. The polyphonic nature of the magazine is best represented by the launch night for Issue 3 in Leamington Spa, that featured guest readings from tutor, Nick Lawrence and local poet Sean Kelly, amongst student poets, acoustic music, word games and quizzes. Spending money, we felt, on a launch party was not mere decadence. To celebrate the publication is, of course, important, but such events help to maintain a lively community around the magazine, to publicise forthcoming issues and to network

with promoters, poets, new writers and publishers. Launch parties were, we felt, essential to the success of the magazine, and could not have been done without the received funding.

6. Keeping consistent: Maintaining our credibility as a magazine, whilst continuing to print, was a hard job. It took great commitment from the Editorial Team, all of which were hugely dedicated to the project, both in terms of their personal research into the publishing industry, and their group devotion to the magazine itself. Learning to work at great pressure, to deadlines, under the authority of a co-editorship required patience, co-operation and responsibility. Throughout the course of the year, we have learned, perhaps more than anything, the hardships of publishing, and of course, that a research project as simultaneously diverse and honed as this one, is worth it more than anything else in the world. It can make things happen.

Evaluation

Stage Three: Wrapping up the year, and the future of Matchbox

Matchbox Magazine has come a considerable way since it was founded in October 2006, and the help and support it has received from the SSGF has set it in good stead to continue its research into the world of the contemporary poetry industry and to pass down knowledge and experience to an altered and expanded editorial team. In the future, we hope to extend outwards from our base at The University of Warwick into a professional sphere but to stay committed to our core of future student poets at Warwick by creating space for further research projects in, for example, performance poetry or installation poetry. Matchbox's founding year was celebrated by a free publication: 'Matchbox Miniature'. Printed in A5, in full colour, and standing at 32 pages, it contained only poetry from the magazine's top poets, and was distributed for free at Matchbox's first performance evening, a show called 'Kinship and Miscalculation' (a play consisting of only poetry, performed by four actors for part of WSAF (Warwick Student Arts Festival)). The show was so successful that it was taken to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this summer (07), and performed alongside readers from Warwick and professionals promoting their poetry shows at the fringe. Generating interest outside of The Midlands is our first move for the future, and yet the research concerns of the students at The University of Warwick is our focus. Issue 6 is due to be printed in October, alongside our first perfect-bound publication featuring up-and-coming poets Claire Trevian, Beth Shedden, Ruth Larbey, Emily Hasler and Sam Kinchin-Smith, and essayists Thom Hutchinson, Victoria Mason and James Brookes, all of which are Warwick undergraduates or graduates. With thanks to the SSGF, Matchbox has sold over 100 of each issue, whilst a further 50 of each were sent to publishers, poets, contributors and awards. Matchbox is currently awaiting news from The Student Media Guardian Awards, due to be announced in October.

What the critics said:

"Being involved with the Matchbox team was an incredibly educational experience for me, as it is important for anybody who hopes to be involved in the field of journalism not just to write for an established publication, but to witness the conception of one. By being involved with Matchbox magazine I was able to gain a knowledge of the cogwork behind certain aspects of publishing and journalism that

simply weren't apparent when dealing with the longer-established more bureaucratic student publications I have written for. As somebody who hopes to be involved in the poetry industry later in life, I have taken an interest over the past few years in the seemingly endless list of independent poetry magazines that appear to orbit academia as well as poetry-slam venues and similar outlets. By introducing me to the magazine, Tim and Chloe gave me a valuable insight into how these releases come to be.

The execution of Matchbox magazine was undeniably first rate, as stylistically and content-wise, the issues that were brought to press this year easily stand toe to toe with the majority of longer running independent poetry magazines I have encountered (Pen-Pusher, Brittle Stars, etc.) As a student of creative-writing, I also found the live events organised by the Matchbox team to be highly valuable both from the angle that it gave me somewhere to test an audience's reaction to my work, and gave me an opportunity to see the work produced by my peers out of a 'workshop' environment. These events were all carried out very successfully."

Features Editor, Phil Brown

"Hello. Just a few words on Matchbox's presence at Warwick University throughout the past academic year. It's important to point out from the outset that Matchbox isn't just a magazine, although the print publication has usually been at the centre of all the editorial board's activities. But on top of the four issues (and the arrestingly cute Matchbox Miniature), Matchbox has been a series of regular poetry (in fact, multimedia) events, a theatre company (albeit very briefly), a gang of word-evangelists, and a guerrilla movement on campus. The important point, uniting all this activity, is that Matchbox has helped to make poetry a very real and present thing, not just in the lives of its editors and contributors, but also in its many readers and maybe even those students and academics who came across P.B. Shelley's Ozymandias chalked up behind the bins near the library, or found an Ode to the Tomato lodged behind said fruit in Costcutters. This is good and difficult - even the most ardent student in the Department for English and Comparative Literary Studies has to have the social equivalent of fingers being snapped in front of their face once a day, every day, to be reminded that poetry doesn't exist purely for study, and isn't just written by the dead. Matchbox is those fingers snapping, and it will be a bit of a loss for the university if it isn't operating next year. I hope it is."

News Editor, Thom Hutchinson

"Recently I was taking myself to degree shows at West Midlands art schools, and it occurred to me there is no parallel internal and public show of poetry in English departments. Testing one's work to one's peers and publicly is important, and Matchbox has begin to make that a reality for some students, those who will risk it, as they need to if they have aspirations to continue to develop as writers. There has been a notable lack of such opportunities, and Matchbox having made a very good start, it matters a lot that it continues."

West Midlands Poet, David Hart

“I am a PhD researcher in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, and the founder-editor of The Heaventree Press, a poetry publishing house based in Coventry which has strong links with the Warwick Writing Programme (two employees are graduates of the MA in Creative Writing, and we regularly publish students' work). The support MATCHBOX has given to Heaventree through its events listings pages, which have showcased both our regular open mic events and the inaugural Coventry Literature Festival, has been helpful to our audience development: getting word out to both students and staff that events were taking place. MATCHBOX is a sophisticated "little review", and a credit to both the English Department and the University.”

Jonathan Morley
PhD researcher, CTCCS
Editorial Director, The Heaventree Press