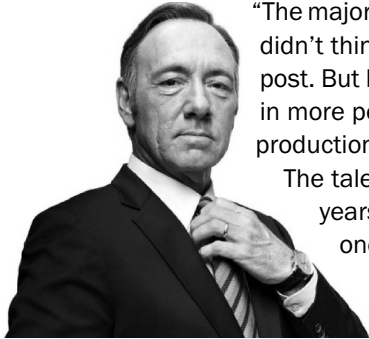


OLD VIC NEW VOICES

Patrick Kelly talks to Kevin Spacey

Since taking over the Old Vic Theatre in 2004 Kevin Spacey has transformed its relationship with its local community, creating one of the most extensive and successful outreach programmes in the UK. Spacey developed the *Old Vic New Voices* scheme, which not only aims at building local audiences, but spotting and developing emerging young actors, directors, writers and producers.



“The majority of people living around the Old Vic had never been inside this theatre. They didn’t think it was for them”, says Spacey, who is stepping down after 10 years in his post. But he also knew that his 1,200 seat theatre could not survive unless it brought in more people. *Old Vic New Voices* gives schools free theatre tickets to every Old Vic production, organises workshops for schools and trains teachers in drama techniques.

The talent spotting scheme means young hopefuls stay with the company for three years and enjoy a range of experiences including ‘24-hour plays’, where a team of one writer, one director, one producer and 4-5 actors create, produce, rehearse and perform a 10 minute play in front of a public audience.

“The most wonderful thing is to observe how they become part of a company”, says Spacey. “Instead of being alone and trying to build up a career on their own, they work together. They get a foundation that most people don’t get a chance to have”. All of this costs money - and the Old Vic gets no subsidy. Instead, Spacey has unashamedly used his status as a Hollywood A-lister to persuade major companies like Morgan Stanley and PWC to back these programmes. He says it is because his own career was built on similar lines. “I went to an endless number of seminars and workshops where I was exposed to learning how to work, how to collaborate and get self-confidence”. Spacey adds, “I was lucky to meet Jack Lemmon, who encouraged me to become an actor. He believed that if you’ve been successful in your chosen path and been able to realise your ambition, there’s an obligation to send the elevator back down”.