

Ben Haggarty – Biography (short)

Ben is a world-class performance storyteller, whose work delights and subverts audiences across the English-speaking world. Having been trained in mime and theatre direction, and apprenticed as an ‘image-maker’ with Welfare State, Ben Haggarty became a central figure in the re-visioning of storytelling as a contemporary performing art in the UK. A master of improvised text; he is internationally respected for his playful and lively performances, for his knowledge of stories and diverse narrative traditions.

Press

‘This is real storytelling’ **The Guardian Hay Festival (for Frankenstein)**

‘I was spell-bound – I don’t use the word lightly’ **The Times**

‘... and what a story this one was – it unravelled itself mischievously in Haggarty’s quietly skilful telling.’
The New Statesman

‘Haggarty tells his stories with enormous relish and gusto.’ **The Independent**

‘Haggarty’s telling is an adroit mixture of the imposingly epic and the reassuringly rhythmic, tempered by a twinkle that admits to the story’s heightened nature, without mocking it’ **The Times**

‘He knows how to harness the audience’s imagination offering up the story’s epic twists and turns in a way that animates them without over selling them’ **The Times**

Ben Haggarty – General Biography

Ben Haggarty is a world-class performance storyteller renowned for his playful and dynamic performances of traditional narratives ranging from 3-minute fables to 3-hour epics. His extensive international repertoire includes performances based on Indo-European wondertales, the Fionn MacCumhiall cycle, The epic of Gilgamesh and modern myths such as Frankenstein and Mr Sandmann: Bringer of Dreams and Nightmares. He has been a guest artist in over one hundred International Storytelling Festivals in 25 countries.

Ben trained with Welfare State International Theatre as their first apprentice ‘Image Maker’ in 1978 and as a Theatre Director, at East 15 acting school in 1979. He counts the writers Alan Garner and PL Travers and the Theatre Director, Peter Brook among his mentors.

In 1981 he founded Britain’s first professional storytelling organisation, The West London Storytelling Unit, which pioneered multicultural storytelling work, mainly in educational contexts, until 1985. In 1985, WLSTU was disbanded and, along with colleagues Hugh Lupton and Sally Pomme Clayton, Ben formed The Company of Storytellers which pioneered the touring of storytelling for adult audiences in Arts Centres and Theatres for 15 years. He organised, directed and curated, Britain’s first storytelling festival at Battersea Arts Centre in 1985. This week long event was followed in 1987 by a further 7 day festival at Waterman’s Arts Centre, and a 15 day festival at the South Bank Centre in 1989. These groundbreaking festivals were highly successful and international in their scope.

In 1987 Ben Haggarty founded the Crick Crack Club – a peripatetic venue that creates events to showcase and develop performance storytelling. As well as working with dozens of regional arts centres and festivals, it programmed regular events at the South Bank Centre from 1989 – 2000 and at the Barbican Pit Theatre from 2002 – 2010. The Crick Crack Club currently programmes monthly events at the Soho Theatre, an annual three-week family season at the Unicorn Children’s Theatre, themed events

at Rich Mix, and programmes events in a national circuit of regional theatres, arts centres and literature & arts festivals.

In 1993 Ben Haggarty co-founded and co-directed the annual Beyond the Border Wales International Storytelling festival in Wales - programming the storytelling there until 2005. In 1997 he set up an experimental research studio and school of performance storytelling at his home in Worcestershire, where, each year, selected students and groups of emerging artists gather to study performance storytelling in depth.

In 1985 he was involved with the selection of stories for Jim Henson & Anthony Minghella's children's television series 'The Storyteller'. From 1987 – 1992 he was a consultant for the SCDC National Oracy Project. During the 1990's he made research trips to India and Central Asia to study Epic Singing traditions. From 1995 until its restructuring in 2008, Ben Haggarty was the British Council Literature Department's specialist advisor on Storytelling. In 1999 he was one of four featured storytellers in a 90 minute television documentary about the world wide storytelling revival made by ARTE in France. Since 2001, Ben Haggarty has been the official storyteller with Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble in the USA. In 2007 he was appointed Honorary Professor of Storytelling at the Arts University of Berlin (UDK). Ben's graphic novel, 'MeZolith', was published by Random House in 2010. This exploration of the archaeology of the imagination was selected as The Times' 'Graphic Novel of the Year 2010'.

Professional Training

British Theatre Association, London – Directing Course, **1980**

East 15 Acting School, Essex – Directing Course, **1978**

Welfare State International, Burnley –1 year 'Image Making' Apprenticeship, **1977**

Ladislav Fialka, Loughborough – Mime Course, **1976**

Current Roles

Freelance storyteller (**since 1981**).

Founder and Artistic Director, The Crick Crack Club, London (**since 1987**).

Principal Storyteller, The Silk Road Project, New York (**since 2002**)

Honorary Professor of Storytelling Arts University of Berlin (UDK) (**since 2007**)

Former Roles

Founder and Co-Director, Annual Beyond the Border Wales International Festival of Storytelling, St Donat's Castle, Wales (**1993 - 2005**).

Notable Highlights 1981 - 2010

2010

- National & Canadian tour of Frankenstein, with Sianed Jones. National tour of Gilgamesh, with Manya Maratou. NE & NW tour of Beauty & the Beast with Sherry Robinson.
- Lead mentor for Crick Crack Club's Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded mentoring programme for emerging artists.
- Published The Crick Crack Club's assessment criteria for performance storytelling (ACE funded)
- MeZolith published by Random House

2009

- Created and toured 'Mr Sandmann: Bringer of Dreams and Nightmares', Arts Council commission for Cambridge Storytelling Festival

- Created 'Mantel Tales: Stories of Staffordshire Figurines', commission for the Potteries Museum Stoke on Trent
- Launch of 'Ben Haggarty's School of Performance Storytelling'

2008

- Devised 'Tales for the Days of the Dead' with TUUP for the Unicorn Children's Theatre
- Programmed Winter's Tales season at Shakespeare's Globe for the Crick Crack Club
- Wrote *MeZolith* and *Will Skoggin's Skull* for The DFC – a new weekly children's comic
- Silk Road Project Residency at Rhode Island school of Design – focus on Picture Storytelling

2007

- Programmed the Crick Crack Club's three week season at the new Unicorn Children's Theatre
- Appointed Honorary Professor of Storytelling at Arts University of Berlin (UDK)
- Artistic Director of Beyond the Border North, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds.
- Performed 'Frankenstein's Dialogues' at Lyjre, Denmark
- Secured Crick Crack Club residency at The Barbican Pit Theatre - extended for three years.
- Devised and performed 'The Stone Horse' - a one hour spectacular in Chicago's Millennium Park, featuring Yo Yo Ma, 8 Silk Road Ensemble musicians, The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and 600 10/11 year old state school children for an audience of 14,000
- Silk Road Project Residencies at The Art Institute of Chicago and Zurich Reitberg Museum.
- Launched & programmed the Crick Crack Club's three week season at the new Unicorn Children's Theatre (to run annually)

2006

- Consultant to Princes Foundation for Children & the Arts (formally Arts & Kids), Storyquest Project
- Taught storytelling modules at Kunst Universitat, Berlin
- Devised & taught Arts Lab at Fairytale House, Norway
- Silk Road Project Residencies in Harvard and Chicago
- Launched Crick Crack Club website: www.crickcrackclub.com

2005

- Devised and performed: 'Le Silence Existe' with Abbi Patrix, Maison du Conte, Paris
- Commissioned to create, 'The Iron Man Khavad' (a picture storytelling performance), an Arts Council funded commission or Festival at The Edge.
- Silk Road Project Residency at Rhode Island school of Design

2004

- Formed new charity 'The London Centre for International Storytelling' (umbrella body for The Crick Crack Club)
- Developed a multimedia piece 'Manas - Stories and Music' for Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Project (live and pre-recorded video, a Kyrgyz epic singer, 5 musicians) performed at The British Library, London and The Carnegie Hall, New York.
- Featured in British Council's 'Words on Words' Festival, Argentina
- Programmed the Crick Crack Club residency at The Barbican Pit Theatre - extended for three years.
- Completed 'Memories and Breath' - an informal statistical survey of professional storytelling activity in England and Wales.
- Performed a 15 day residency with Yo Yo Ma and The Silk Road Project, Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, USA.

2003

- Devised and performed 'The Laboratory of Time' – experimental pan-European storytelling piece for Utrecht Festival, Holland with Matts Rehnman (Sweden) & Jeorg Baesecke (Germany).

- Commissioned to create, 'The Bull Ring – The Story of Wem' for Mythstories Museum, Wem, Shropshire.
- Artistic Director of Crick Crack Club & Hay Festival partnership national tour 'Gods and Monsters.'
- Artistic Director of Crick Crack Club's storytelling and music programme for the British Museum's 250th anniversary birthday event.

2002

- Commissioned by Hay Festival to create 'Frankenstein's Dialogues' with Sioned Jones on electric violins, voice, bass and samples.
- Devised and performed family concerts for Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Concerts in USA and Europe.
- Launch Crick Crack Club's residency at the Barbican Pit Theatre, 3 x 3day adult mini-festivals per year.

2001

- Programmed monthly Crick Crack Club events at Hoxton Hall, London. Season included conference celebrating 20 years of performance storytelling revival.

2000

- Appointed as City Storyteller for Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. 2-year lottery funded post.
- Delivered lecture: 'The Alchemy of Storytelling', for the Royal Society of Arts, London

1999

- Featured in 90min Television documentary on international storytelling made by ARTE and broadcast in France & Germany.
- Addressed OFSTED English and Drama Inspectorate at national conference.

1998

- Undertook research Trip to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic to study Epic Singers

1997

- Created Arts Lab/Studio 'The Centre for the Research and Development of Traditional Storytelling' (CRDTS) and inaugurated a 3-year programme of 5-week long training/research projects, involving 30 students from Britain and abroad.

1996

- Devised and toured 'I Become Part of It' – a Mesolithic funerary rite, with The Company of Storytellers (colleagues Hugh Lupton & Sally Pomme Clayton)

1995

- Teaching at University of Oslo, Drama Department

1993

- Commissioned by South Bank Centre Literature Dept to devise 'The Three Snake Leaves – Tales from the Grimm Forest' with The Company of Storytellers. Over ten years, this profoundly influential piece had over 100 performances in the UK and internationally.
- Undertook Arts Council funded research trip to India to study Rajasthani and Central Indian Epic Singers.
- Co-Directed and launched first 'Beyond the Border Wales International Storytelling Festival, St Donat's Castle, Wales'. Festival continues to the present, attracting 2,500 people.
- One of the six founding Directors of The Society for Storytelling.

1991

- Secured Arts Council funding for The Crick Crack Club to set up a national touring circuit, promoting 120 adult events in 12 months.

1989

- Directed 3rd UK International Storytelling Festival, 15 days at South Bank Centre, London, touring to 12 other venues in England and Wales.

1988

- Consultant to The Schools Curriculum Development Council 'National Oracy Project,' devising projects nationwide.

1987

- Directed 2nd UK International Storytelling Festival, 8 days at Waterman's Arts Centre, London.
- Founded The Crick Crack Club, London (26 weekly events per year from 1987 – 1994).

1986

- Consultant to Jim Henson and Anthony Minghella for 'The Storyteller' series starring John Hurt.
- Founded The Company of Storytellers with Hugh Lupton and Pomme Clayton.

1985

- Directed 1st UK International Storytelling Festival, 7 days at Battersea Arts Centre, London.
- Instigate the commissioning of 'A Thorn in the King's Foot' by Duncan Williamson.
- Undertook Arts Council funded trip to United States and Canada to research the North American Storytelling Revival.

1981 – 1984

- Became a professional storyteller. Founded West London Storytelling Unit with TUUP and Daisy Keable. Pioneered work in schools nationally and with adults ('ClubNights') in London.