



door is to work with new companies that are themselves at the bottom of the theatrical ladder, even if the pay is little or nothing, says Maltby.

"When we were doing Courtenay we gave a girl a job as stage manager. She was 17 or 18 and had never done it before but really wanted to get into it so we gave her an opportunity. I bumped into her the other day and she's now the sound mixer on Jersey Boys."

Another of Maltby's tips to fledgling companies is to enlist a big name for promotional purposes. DrumChasers features a recorded narration by Maltby's childhood hero Stephen Fry.

"It's helped a lot because DrumChasers is essentially an unknown show full of unknown people and at the moment if you're not a musical based on a book, a film or a band and you don't have someone from X-Factor in the cast then it's very hard to get noticed.

"I remember a friend of mine was in a show based on the Wizard of Oz with four or five celebrities, from children's BBC presenters through to Bobby Davro, and I realised if you were looking through a theatre programme deciding where to take your family and you thought, 'Right, I've heard of five of these people and the name of this show here

versus I've never heard of anything to do with that show and what does DrumChasers mean anyway...' you're going to choose the thing you know. So being able to say 'Narrated by Stephen Fry' means maybe people will look twice at it instead of skipping over it."

As to how Fry was persuaded to come on board, Maltby admits: "We got lucky. We must have called his agent on a good day. We said we're a small company, we haven't got a lot of money, it will only take him 15 minutes. He liked the text and, bless him, he came and did it."

In hindsight, Maltby also recommends casting celebrity names early enough to get publicity from them. Fry's recording was made just a week before the first DrumChasers tour in March, which meant it was too late to include his name on posters and in theatre programmes.

With plans for a further UK tour next year and a tour of Holland under discussion, Maltby sees DrumChasers as another self-made step on the ladder to West End stardom.

Currently writing a new musical, he says, "The plan is that if DrumChasers becomes well enough known it will become a calling card, so I can approach some of the bigger producers and say, 'How about taking a chance on this?'"

showpeople



Timothy Richey

Once a budding archaeologist Timothy Richey turned to acting after convincing his teachers, at Balcarras School in Cheltenham, to start an after-school GCSE Drama Class. He went on to train at Bretton Hall. He is a member of the North of Watford actors' agency, which is a cooperative. London audiences can see Richey in the Tall Stories company's production of *The Gruffalo* over Christmas and then the show goes out on a UK tour

What was it that stirred your interest in acting?

Jobs in archaeology are even harder to get than jobs in acting. I always remember being taken to pantomimes and as the actors went off I was thinking, 'where are they going, what's happening behind there?' Now I know.

Why did you choose Bretton Hall?

I was instantly attracted to Bretton Hall on an open day – the surroundings, the students, the facilities. I wasn't ready for a big city. So sad that it closed. It was a unique place.

My parents had wanted me to do a degree as it seemed the more stable option for the future and I wanted to do an acting course, so an acting degree satisfied all of us.

It was a wonderful experience at Bretton Hall, especially as the third year had both directed and self-directed elements, such as self-devised monologues. It meant I could pursue my interests from previous years.

How does the North of Watford cooperative work?

I joined North of Watford in

2003 after leaving Bretton Hall. It is run by actors, for actors, so it offers a greater sense of what goes on in the industry, particularly behind the scenes. We each take a turn in the office answering the phones. For the agency to be a success it is in our interests for everybody to know everybody inside out and be able to provide accurate recommendations to casting professionals for each other. It was through North of Watford that I got the part of Cary Grant in the ITV Yorkshire drama, *Royal Today*.

*You have played Woody Guthrie in *This Land*. Didn't that start as a children's show?*

It had the same feel as *The Gruffalo*, as it was originally devised by Interplay Theatre as a children's show, with a high sensory element to make it accessible to all abilities. However, following its success with teachers as well as children *This Land* was reworked for adult audiences. That enabled the darker aspects of Guthrie's life to be brought in, especially the deterioration of Guthrie's mother as she became consumed by illness, the same illness that would kill him. Being a show where the actors are also the musicians we benefited a lot. I learned to play the ukulele and pennywhistle.

*Where have you been with *The Gruffalo* so far?*

We toured to Singapore and Hong Kong in January and February this year. I've been in the show since this time last year when we were at the Edinburgh Pleasance, that was the first time they had had a children's show for Christmas.

Emily Boneham

The Gruffalo is at the Lyric Theatre in London, from November 23–January 15