

Imagineering: Students Imagine a World Without Mobiles and MP3s In New Touring Play

Posted on Thursday 6th March 2008

A play devised by University of Birmingham drama students will be performed at secondary schools in the region in a bid to get pupils interested in taking up science as a career.

The piece takes place in a world where certain products and materials do not exist, like the mobile phone, the MP3 player, MSN and even plastic.

Through a lack of everyday items in the central character's life, the audience are encouraged to imagine a world where anything is possible – they are shown that the imagined can be made real through scientific innovation and development.

Pupils will have the opportunity to participate in a post-performance discussion, to get involved in practical sessions and to think about what the innovations of the future might be and what will become of everyday objects such as the light bulb?

Touching on environmental applications and drawing on the research applications of superconductivity at the University of Birmingham's Schools of Physics and Engineering, the play brings together the worlds of science and human experience.

The play has been devised by students in the University's Drama and Theatre Arts Department. 'Devising' is a theatrical technique where actors and directors create a new work that evolves through improvisation and by collaborating on the generation of a script.

Professor Kate Newey from the University's Department of Drama says, 'The final work will be assessed as part of the Drama and Theatre Arts degree programme. The students have had to research and understand the scientific subject matter and have interpreted it in a way that a lay audience will understand and that will engage school pupils.'

Alison Morey, superconductivity outreach manager from the University's Department of Electronic, Electrical and Computer Engineering says, 'It is important that we do what we can to support the next generation of UK scientists. We need to encourage pupils of school age to develop an understanding of scientific principles, to appreciate the practical application of scientific innovation in our society and to pursue further study in science.'

Alison continues, 'We hope that we can take the play to other regions so that we can enthuse more school pupils about what it's like to study science and engineering at University level.'

Ends

Notes to Editors

Matt Turner, Director

The play is directed by professional theatre director Matt Turner. Matt has been involved in direction and facilitation of theatre and drama for and with young people including work at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, community theatres and arts organisations across the West Midlands. He has directed for Women and Theatre, Theatre Alias, the Playbox Theatre, the Library Theatre Manchester and Watford Palace.

Performance Schedule as follows:

Friday 7 March Bishop Walsh, Sutton Coldfield, 11am – 12.30pm and 1.30pm – 3pm

Tuesday 11 March Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, Selly Oak, 9.30am – 11am and 11.30am – 1pm

Wednesday 12 March King Edwards Five Ways, 11.10am – 12.50pm and 1.55pm – 3.35pm

Thursday 13 March Bishop Walsh, Sutton Coldfield, 11am – 12.30pm and 1.30pm – 3pm

The University of Birmingham's superconductivity research

When cooled to around 200 degrees below room temperature superconductors have zero resistance and virtually no energy loss when an electric current is passed through them. These highly efficient materials could have a dramatic effect on mobile phone networks in that we could see some of the familiar mobile phone masts disappear from our landscape. Enormous magnetic fields can be generated (10,000 times larger than the Earth's magnetic field) that are needed for body scanners by passing large electric currents through a superconducting coil. The currents required would destroy a coil made from copper, the usual material from which wires and cables are made. Superconductors also have amazing magnetic properties. There are superconducting sensors capable of detecting the magnetic fields generated by the human brain (a billion times smaller than the Earth's magnetic field), for measuring brain activity. The most visibly impressive magnetic property is levitation - this offers exciting possibilities for transport.

The Birmingham team has developed a small, inexpensive superconducting filter which when plugged in to the world's biggest telescopes could lead to the discovery of new galaxies. The use of a superconducting filter in astronomy is a world first. The filter cuts out atmospheric noise, eg signals from satellites, television and enables more distant targets with weaker signals to be detected. As well as researching applications of devices the team invents new superconducting microelectronic devices about a thousandth of a millimetre in size. These devices are made of thin films of superconducting material only a few hundred nanometres thick. The aim is to introduce a new generation of electronic devices which do not rely on conventional silicon chip technology.

For further information

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