

Anne Wood

Ragdolly Anna. Teletubbies. Rosie and Jim. Brum. In the Night Garden. Twirlywoos. By hearing these names, are you instantly transported back to your childhoods, or back to the childhoods of your children or grandchildren? These television programmes tell us about the world we live in; about how to play and how through play we might learn; about how to think creatively; about the importance of stories and about how to interact with the people around us; what care means, what friendship is, and how to deal with conflict. Our honorary grandaunt produced these programmes and many more, and is one of the most successful producers of children's television of all time. Her philosophy is a simple one: that children matter, and that therefore their culture should matter too. It is a philosophy, however, that has inspired the admirable career of Anne Wood CBE.

Anne was born in County Durham and began her career working as a secondary school teacher in the late fifties. She later became an early pioneer of Scholastic's children's book club schemes for schools. She founded the quarterly magazine *Books for Your Children*, which she continued to edit for thirty years. She also established the Federation of Children's Book Groups. In 1969, in recognition of her contribution to the promotion of children's books, Anne Wood was awarded the Eleanor Farjeon Award. It is clear, therefore, that even in the pre-television stage of her career, Anne was a champion of children's culture.

Into the 1970s, Anne moved into children's television production, first as an award-winning producer for Yorkshire TV on series such as *The Book Tower* and *Ragdolly Anna*, a show inspired by her daughter's much-loved ragdoll. As Head of Children's Television at TV-am she produced *Roland Rat*, widely acknowledged as transforming the fortunes of the struggling broadcaster). The shows' success gave Anne an understanding of the gap between children's needs and the provision of good television for them, and prompted her to establish Ragdoll Productions in 1984. Since that time, Anne has devised and created innovative and pioneering programmes for younger children. From the much-loved *Pob* to the triumphs of *Teletubbies* and *In the Night Garden*, Ragdoll has shown how powerful and universally appealing outstanding children's programming can be. *Teletubbies*, for example, became BBC Worldwide's biggest export and has been translated into 45 languages.

Anne has said "Work with young children and you're really very lucky.... They have a way of going to the heart of things - in a naive way, perhaps, but it makes you realise all of us have more in common than we think." Perhaps this last point is the reason for the phenomenal worldwide success of her programmes. We shouldn't ignore the local aspect to her achievements either, given that nearby Stratford-Upon-Avon has been the company's home since 1992.

Anne, whose son Christopher is now Company Director at Ragdoll, continues to provide visionary leadership for her team who spend time listening to their audience and paying close attention to their forms of creativity and communication. Ragdoll excels at producing work that's funny, reassuring - and, thus, empowering - for a young audience. Their work focuses on the underlying educational concepts behind the sparkly fun of their programming. For their most recent broadcasting success for the very young, *Twirlywoos*, Anne collaborated with Professor Cathy Nutbrown at Sheffield University. Cathy praised Anne for her "total respect for her viewing audience" and said "Anne doesn't compromise on quality and I think this is because she believes that young children deserve the very best." Here at Warwick, the Department of Film and Television Studies was extremely grateful to have the support of Anne and Ragdoll for our exhibition, the *Story of Children's Television, 1946 to Now*, curated in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and still touring the UK today. Ragdoll's programming was, quite rightly, at the heart of the story of this important genre of television programming.

In 2000, Anne and her husband Barrie established The Ragdoll Foundation, a philanthropic organisation dedicated to supporting imaginative and innovative projects that reflect the world from a child's point of view. As Anne said, "The foundation's aim is to work with children in deprived circumstances... to help unlock their creativity and allow them a safe space to develop their voice and be heard."

Reading out all of Anne's awards would mean us being here for a very, very long time. Highlights include a Fellowship of the Royal Television Society and The Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year Award in 1998. In 2000, she received a Special BAFTA for her outstanding contribution to Children's Television and received her CBE for services to Children's Broadcasting. By 2007, she'd also received the Harvey Lee Award for outstanding contribution from the Broadcasting Press Guild. She's also been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Birmingham in 2013 and from the University of Sheffield in 2015.

The acclaim and longevity as a producer of children's television of our esteemed guest comes not only through a shrewd business eye, but also from a firmly held belief that the quality of children's television should compare with a good children's book. It should transport us, lift us. It should make us happy. There is no doubt the work of today's honorary graduand will make children happy for many generations to come.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, in the name of the Council, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, Anne Wood.