**Billingham theatre boss avoids jail after filming 'perverted' activities**

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Lawrence Robert Love - who was banned from working with children - directed sadomasochistic films, the court heard

The owner of a children’s theatre school made films of two teenage boys urinating and spitting on a willing “client”, a court was told.

Lawrence Robert Love, artistic director and founder of Cleveland Theatre School in Billingham avoided going to jail following his “perverted” activities.

Love - who was banned from working with children - directed sadomasochistic films, the court heard.

The two teenage boys - who cannot be named for legal reasons - were paid between £30 and £60 each as well as being given vodka for their part in the “humiliation”.

Prosecutor Christopher Attwooll said: “They were videoed as they carried out a number of sadomasochistic, derogatory acts on another man. Urinating on him, spitting on him and kicking him to the genitals.

“The defendant can be heard in the background giving directions.”

Following his arrest, officers found a “large number of extreme pornographic images” on his computer, which did not feature children.

The images, which involved suffocation and plastic bags, portrayed in a realistic way an act which threatened another person’s life.

Love, of Constable Gardens, Billingham, pleaded guilty to two counts of causing a child to engage in sexual activity and 18 counts of possessing extreme pornography.

Tina Dempster, defending, said the teenagers were not coerced into taking part in the films.  She added that her client accepted responsibility but that he didn’t realise at the time that what he was doing was criminal.

A large number of references were supplied to the court as part of mitigation.  Miss Dempster added: “They are glowing and speak of him in highly positive terms.

“He is clearly a man who has contributed greatly to society in the past and there are many who speak of the very positive influence he has had on their lives.”

There were gasps of relief in the packed public gallery yesterdaywed when Judge Peter Armstrong told Love, his sentence would be suspended, so that he could access a treatment programme and have his “extreme and perverted interests modified”.

Judge Armstrong said the bundle of references he had received gave him the impression that Love had a “worthy” side.

He said: “A good deal of those testimonials tell of an inspirational teacher who has changed their lives for the better.

“Unfortunately there is another side of you because you have a sexual interest of an extreme and perverted kind in that you get sexual gratification from either being involved in or observing extreme sadomasochistic activity.”

Love was given a nine-month prison sentence suspended for two years, with a treatment programme and banned from working with children.

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