

## **ON THE SHORE OF THE WIDE WORLD: Pre-rehearsal interview with Writer Simon Stephens**

*Simon was writer in residence at the Royal Exchange Theatre in 1999. His play PORT was awarded the Pearson Award for Best New Play in 2001/2 and was premiered by the Royal Exchange Theatre in 2002. Simon's other plays include BRING ME SUNSHINE which was staged at the 1997 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and HERONS (Royal Court 2001).*

### **To what extent are your plays autobiographical?**

I think it's a common misconception to think that all plays in some way MUST be autobiographical. It simply isn't true. On one simple level NOTHING in the play is autobiographical – all of it is made up. But of course the choices I make about the stories I want to tell and where I want to tell them and who I want to put in them are deeply informed by my own personal circumstances as well as my political perspective and my aesthetic interest. There is a lot of me in ALL of the characters in some way. They are all drawn from different parts of my life and my soul and my experiences. I think this is particularly true of Peter. Like him, I'm a father of two boys. Like him, my father was an alcoholic. I lived in Stockport too. But I was always terrible at woodwork.

### **What are your feelings about Stockport now that you've moved away from the area?**

I have come to see the place in a different light since writing PORT. I think to a small extent Stockport has changed. The cultural expansion of Manchester has pushed into the place. There are now much trendier bars, cafes and shops than when I was growing up there. But, more than that, I think my perspective has changed. I've come to notice its beauty in a way I never did before. And I'm very keen to make that clear because I'm in print an awful lot slagging the place off. I realise now it wasn't the place that was bad – it was me. I was a typical angst ridden teenager who couldn't get a girlfriend and listened to too much Smiths. If I'd grown up in f\*\*king New York City I would probably have complained about that and all.

### **How would you describe the structure of ON THE SHORE OF THE WIDE WORLD?**

There are four chapters to this play. For reasons, at the moment, I don't really understand myself, I think of them as chapters or parts rather than acts. Each chapter is made up of about 9 scenes. Each chapter looks at a brief 2 or 3 day period and tells the story of a family over about 9 months. To a small extent each chapter is told from the perspective of one of the 4 members of the Holmes family.

### **In the play Peter says: "I'm tired all the time but my dreams scare the shit out of me." Does this statement apply to other characters in the play?**

God! Maybe Alice. Maybe Charlie. Maybe Ellen. Maybe Alex. It's a horrible frame of mind. He's speaking from a position of real despair. There's a level of despair in this play that I don't think I've properly explored in other plays. But at least he's finding the courage to talk about it. In that courage I guess there is something hopeful.

### **What is the role of the characters in the play who are outside of the Holmes family?**

It's odd thinking of the characters in terms of their 'roles.' They have an organic, intuitive life to me. I guess you could argue that all of the characters outside the family in some way fall in love with the characters inside the family (I WOULD include Paul Danziger in this, I think he falls in love with Alex). In doing so they show elements of those characters to THEMSELVES that nobody had ever been able to show them before. They introduce aspirations that nobody had ever afforded them before. They make the return to the family a choice rather than an instinct.

### **Stockport County or Manchester United?**

When I was growing up County used to play on Friday nights so that City and United fans in Stockport could go together and watch County. Now that I'm too skint to watch football anywhere but in the pub for my sins it's Manchester United.