



IMMORTAL LONGINGS

A Resource Extra for students and teachers studying **ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA**, **ELECTRA** and **ANTIGONE**

Cleopatra, Electra and Antigone are among the greatest and most enduring female characters ever created. Here, three directors give us an insight into their approaches to these extraordinary women.

Full versions of all three interviews are available to download from the Royal Exchange website www.royalexchange.co.uk

Pre-Rehearsal Interview with **ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA** director **Braham Murray**



Braham Murray is a founding artistic director of the Royal Exchange Theatre Company. He has directed sixty productions for the Royal Exchange including WAITING FOR GODOT, HAMLET, HEDDA GABLER, OTHELLO, HOBSON'S CHOICE, THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE and THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA opens at the Royal Exchange Theatre on 23 February 2005.

1. Why have you chosen to direct ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA?

I played Antony when I was sixteen at school, and I fell in love with the play completely. Antony dies well before the end of the play, and I used to stand in the wings after I was dead just to hear the lines because they seemed to me to be absolutely wonderful. The play has always moved me enormously. It's Shakespeare's play about the possible triumph of love over everything and I quite like that. I've always wanted to do it ever since.

2. Why our enduring fascination with the figure of Cleopatra?

Queen Elizabeth I used her as a sort of role model because it was very unusual for there to be a lady monarch. Queen Elizabeth used her own sexual favours very cleverly in order to maintain power, in exactly the same way that Cleopatra has had to. Before Antony, all her conquests seem to have been politically motivated, and from the age of sixteen when she captivated Caesar she was clearly adept at using her obvious female charms to captivate and entice men. She evidently must have had a

very masculine side as well, because this was all in order to rule. In ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA of course, by the end of the play she recognises that actually her love for Antony is more important than any of those things, just as he realises his love for her is more important than any of those things. But I mean for any woman nowadays she remains one of the prototype feminists I suppose, who knew and could rule over men.

3. What qualities did you look for when casting an actress to play Cleopatra?

The actress who is playing her, Josette Bushell Mingo is very remarkable indeed. She is in her own life both a sensational mother and wife but also the founder of PUSH – the black theatre company which has had an extraordinary impact in the last few years. She's a brilliant director, she's got a show in the west end, and now she's coming to play the lead in ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA so it could be said that in the theatre she's a kind of Cleopatra of her own. She's got boundless energy, huge charisma, terrific intelligence, and is very attractive. The idea of doing ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA with her is very exciting.



Pre-Workshop Interview with director Jacob Murray

Jacob Murray is an Associate Artistic Director at The Royal Exchange Theatre. His productions include DOG BOY, THE SANCTUARY LAMP, SHOOT THE CROW and THE DEAD WAIT in the studio and GREAT EXPECTATIONS on the main stage.

The ANTIGONE Directing Masterclass takes place at the Royal Exchange Theatre on 1 February 2005. This will feature Gemma Paige-North (ANTIGONE), David Fleeshman (CREON) and Joe Docherty (HAEMON).

1. What made you choose ANTIGONE as the focus for this workshop?

ANTIGONE was the first Greek Tragedy to really excite me and remains to this day one of my favorite plays of all time. For sheer power, compression of thought, emotion, action and drama it cannot be beaten. It dramatises one of the perennial conflicts of the human race - private need and morality against the public need and morality of the state. At the same time, it takes in almost every major theme you can think of - love, families, the power and place of spirituality in life, destiny, human folly. And it does so in the most focussed, economical and dramatically thrilling way. It is a fantastic play to use to explore directing, the Royal Exchange space and the challenges of Greek drama in a workshop environment.

2. How does directing in the round affect the ways we might view the character of Antigone?

It shouldn't have any effect on the fundamental ways in which we see Antigone. She is who she is on any stage. What it will do is make her more vulnerable than on a proscenium stage as she will be surrounded and exposed in a way which does not happen in conventional theatres. She, Creon and the other characters in the play will be clashing with each other as real people do, not as figureheads on a raised stage standing before us. We will then be able to judge them as we would judge real people we know rather than as distant figures in a different world.

3. As a director, what qualities would you look for in casting Antigone?

Antigone has to be able to look young and vulnerable against the power and bulk of

Creon. She has to be able to draw upon huge reserves of anger, righteous indignation, love and suffering. She is an extraordinary woman. Her life has been one of exceptional suffering which has forged a half-despairing but utterly uncompromising spirit that will not be destroyed. It is one of the greatest roles for an actress that world drama has ever produced.

4. How does Antigone compare to the characters Electra and Cleopatra?

Along with Medea and Lady Macbeth they are among the greatest female characters in the canon. All three are members of a royal family whose intense powers of feeling and independence make them forces to be reckoned with. Antigone shares with Electra the status of daughters whose lives have been blighted by the actions of their parents and who have to work out their own existence in relation to that. Neither will give up without a fight. Both struggle hard against injustice. Electra is a more ambiguous figure than Antigone in that for her the whole aim of her life is to achieve vengeance through blood while Antigone's aim is to honour the dead. One's sympathies for Electra shift and alter while for Antigone we perhaps feel more consistent sympathy. Both are obsessive, driven by an almost religious desire for what they want. Cleopatra is different. She is older and far more sexual in the way she wields power. She is a queen, and so closer to Clytemnestra than the Greek daughters. Cleopatra is one of Shakespeare's greatest creations - she is woman in all her different guises: a queen, a warrior, a lover, a manipulator, a priestess. One thing she does share with Electra and Antigone is her sense of destiny, of the validity of her own existence, her regal power and her transcendent qualities of feeling and life.

Pre-Rehearsal Interview with **ELECTRA** director Jo Combes

Jo Combes is an Associate Director at the Royal Exchange Theatre. She has adapted her own version of ELECTRA which will be set in Ireland in the 1950's. Last year Jo directed the highly acclaimed Royal Exchange Theatre production of KNIVES IN HENS.



ELECTRA opens at the Royal Exchange Theatre on 23 March 2005.

1. What made you want to adapt and direct ELECTRA?

Last year I did some teaching in secondary school and I had to direct a group of girls for their AS Level performance of a scene from ELECTRA. I hadn't read the play for a long time, and I was struck by its power. Its depth of characterisation, intricacy of relationships and strong roles for women all immediately grabbed me by the throat and shouted "Direct me". But I think the most important thing about the play was its relevance; the way the characters appropriate religion in order to justify their violence seemed to resonate hugely with contemporary affairs.

2. What do you think it is about ELECTRA's story that gives it an enduring quality?

ELECTRA before anything is the story of a family. In it, sisters fight, mother and daughter have a huge row, a step-parent asserts authority and a daughter mourns the death of her father. This could be a twenty-first century family. To my mind, it is also a great classic because it illuminates the questions of the contemporary world – is there a God in the face of atrocity, is there a life after death, should one human being be sacrificed for the greater good of a nation's future? More than that, the play deals with a trauma that most of us must face at some point in life – the loss of a parent, which is surely one of the most universal and personal of tragedies.

3. How do you feel the intimate studio space will affect the ways we might view the character of Electra?

We are trying to create a sense that the audience is part of Electra's world, so hopefully when watching we will be able to empathise

with her situation deeply. However, I also feel that we should see the perspective of the people around her – she is a frustrating, often terrifying heroine – and I think it's important that we see her flaws. The size of the studio will also allow a very naturalistic playing style that differs to the epic traditional style. I want to use this to undermine the sense of inevitability so we can think at any point that the tragedy might be averted if the characters make the right choice.

4. What qualities would you look for in an actress to play Electra?

It's all in her name. She has to have this huge electric charisma that can motor the play. Passionate and fiery, I think we should both pity and fear her at times. Equally though, in order not to alienate an audience she should have tremendous vulnerability, almost childlike in its quality. It's a tough call for any actress.

5. How does Electra compare to Cleopatra and Antigone?

I think they are all united in their enormous passion. Electra is similar to Antigone in terms of her relationship with her sister, while I think Electra and Cleopatra are similar in their complexity; you can only play them precisely from moment to moment to achieve their "infinite variety." If you try and play them all at once you may well confuse yourself. But while Antigone goes into the tomb, and Cleopatra applies the asp, Electra runs out of the house. In the moment of need, her courage fails her, and she is unable to kill her mother as she had planned. I LOVE her for that. It makes her human.

Antigone, Electra and Cleopatra: tragic heroines for modern times

Actress and writer Clarissa Young explores the links that unite the three characters

Antigone, Electra and Cleopatra are united in fact and fiction. It is not often explained that Cleopatra was in fact a Greek, distantly related to Alexander the Great. Upon Alexander's death his empire was divided amongst his generals; one, who is believed to be a cousin, was General Ptolemy who inherited Egypt becoming Ptolemy I. The Ptolemaic dynasty ended with Cleopatra's death (she was in fact Cleopatra VII).

Throughout their 300 year rule the Ptolemies strove to integrate Greek and Egyptian cultures, merging Greek and Egyptian gods (i.e. Isis and Aphrodite) and deifying themselves to suggest they had god-given rights to rule. It is these parallel Greek and Egyptian cultures that created the Rosetta Stone (made under the rule of Ptolemy IV and now in the British Museum in London) which in turn enabled us to 'break the code' to decipher hieroglyphics.

Cleopatra had strong female figures to draw from in Greek myth and drama. Shakespeare's portrayal of her places her into the same female archetype as Antigone and Electra; they are all women who challenge the male status quo but have to pay a price (Antigone and Cleopatra commit suicide, Electra knows that she will never marry and have children). Yet in paying that price they push the boundaries of what their cultures can be.

Perhaps this is why they appear to be so 'modern' and resonate so strongly with today's audiences. They are all born princesses, refuse to compromise in order to 'keep the peace' (which is what was expected of them), and value making their names glorious above life itself. Tragic figures that we can identify with all too well.

IMMORTAL LONGINGS EDUCATION EVENTS AND RESOURCES

ANTIGONE

Directing Masterclass – Tuesday 1 February 2005, 1.30 to 3.30pm

Based on Sophocles' ANTIGONE, this session will explore approaches to acting and directing in the round

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Introducing ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA – Wednesday 9 & 16 March 2005, 10 to 12 noon

A 2 hour talk-based introduction to the play and the production

ANTONY & CLEOPATRA and ELECTRA Practitioner Day – Friday 8 April 2005

A practitioner day exploring the world of both productions with two of the UK's leading female directors

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA Teacher Drop In – Tuesday 8 March, 6 to 7.15pm

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA Teachers' Resource Pack

Rehearsal Diary with actor Everal Walsh

ELECTRA

Introducing ELECTRA – Thursday 7 April 2005, 10.30am to 12.30pm

A 2 hour talk-based introduction to the play and the production

Further details on all of the above can be obtained from the Royal Exchange website www.royalexchange.co.uk or on telephone 0161 615 6721

Contributions by: Braham Murray, Jacob Murray, Jo Combes and Clarissa Young

Edited and produced by Exchange Education, Royal Exchange Theatre, St. Ann's Square M2 7DH

Tel: 0161 615 6721; Box Office/Group Bookings: 0161 833 0483

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