

***Hamlet* Director's Notes.**

I don't really approve of directors writing production notes, I think that rather than stimulate thought they make readers sit back and think "Oh, that's what it was all about" and give up thinking for themselves. There have been, and there will be, so many interpretations, as many as there are pairs of eyes watching any given performance. This is mine and the audience will have theirs, we all have one and someone else's vision will never be as satisfying as the one inside our own heads. However, I have put some thoughts on paper. I started writing this at 3.00am about a month into rehearsals (that's the effect of directing *Hamlet*, it won't let you go!) so it might not be very coherent or useful and I don't want to give too much away about the production but here it is.

This production is my interpretation of what I regard as not only Shakespeare's greatest play but also the greatest play ever written. Right from the start I saw *Hamlet* as "a ripping good yarn". Oh, to join David Tennant in his TARDIS and travel back four hundred years and be there in the cockpit at the first performance and not know where I was being taken by the plot and fall victim to its Hitchcockian McGuffins. Did they get carried along by the imagery and religious philosophising or was it the story? I know where I would put my money.

The problem is that we know it too well. The director Phyllida Lloyd said if people were whisked off and dropped into theatre seats and saw a man in black with a white collar and a skull in his hand and then sat back comfortably in their seats saying "Ah, yes, good, *Hamlet*" then that production has got it wrong. Three cheers Phyllida!

Then, of course there is the length. Four and a half hours uncut! Performance regulations of the period would not have allowed such a Behemoth. Plays could only start at 2.30pm and had to be over by 5.00pm and include a jig or a song to send the audience home happy at the end. So, it seems even in his day Shakespeare had no intention that *Hamlet* would be performed intact. But where to make the cuts? Thank goodness for Michael Boyd (director of the 2004 RSC production with Toby Stephens as Hamlet) who recognised that cuts had to be made and in doing so beautiful things had to be lost. If not, by 10 o'clock, a beautiful audience would be lost. It takes away a lot of the guilt.

There are so many themes in *Hamlet* it is impossible to focus on all of them but you find some slip in without you being aware of it happening. From the outset I homed in on the themes of life and death, particularly death, and in our production I hope that the audience will be aware of its presence from the start. The dead are never far away. Light and dark, relationships, appearance and reality are also there.

We are performing the play in a black void with no recognisable architecture, period or location. Just a performance space with places to enter and exit and no furniture. The period (1930s) will be suggested by detailed costume, hair styles, makeup and props.

That's all I'm prepared to say about the production. If people want to know more then see it. I don't automatically expect audiences to like what has been done, but I do hope they react and think and question.

Alan K Marshall (director)
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* 13-20 MARCH 2010
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