

**Artist Development and Training in the Royal Shakespeare  
Company**

***A Vision for Change in British Theatre Culture***

**Volume I**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts  
of Royal Holloway College, University of London  
for the degree of PhD**

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March 2013**

### **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Lyn Darnley, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

### **Artist Development and Training in the Royal Shakespeare Company A Vision for Change in British Theatre Culture**

The thesis provides a participant observer's perspective of an ensemble training programme within a subsidised professional classical theatre company. Wherever possible, that personal perspective is tested, interrogated and critiqued.

The study traces the RSC's history of artist training from its beginnings and considers the contribution made by directors and key practitioners and the major theatrical influences on training within the Company.

This provides a context for the specific focus which is placed on the first three years (2003/4-2006/7) of Artistic Director Michael Boyd's Artist Development Programme. This discussion occupies the main part of the thesis and is its *raison d'être*. Ongoing artist development for actors and other artists is examined as an essential element of Boyd's ensemble ethos and the RSC's degree of success in meeting the requirements of its Royal Charter and of the Arts Council Document (1996) to provide training for its artists, and to support the development of the wider profession is evaluated.

The discussion alludes to the current state of classical drama training in UK conservatoires with specific reference to the teaching of text and language before documenting the RSC's attempts to establish greater links with both training and professional bodies in order to support actor and director training and the professional development of other theatre practitioners.

Factors that have to date inhibited the Artist Development Programme including the impact of the redevelopment of its Stratford upon Avon theatres between 2007 and 2011 are reflected on and their impact debated.

An appendix bound as a separate document for ease of access and reference alongside the thesis, provides resource material for future researchers including schedules, artist feedback, company documents, archival material and photographs. It also allows the reader to take an empirical stance from which to assess the accuracy of the judgements offered.

Lyn Darnley  
March 2013

# **Artist Development and Training in the Royal Shakespeare Company A Vision for Change in British Theatre Culture**

## **Introduction**

***... our ambition at the RSC is for a place where artists can learn and make theatre at the same time.<sup>1</sup>***

The Royal Shakespeare Company (1960) evolved from the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (1879), which in turn grew out of the yearly Shakespeare Festivals held in Stratford-upon-Avon from the time of David Garrick's Jubilee in 1769. Throughout its history it has been associated with the development of outstanding actors and directors such as Olivier, Gielgud, Ashcroft, Dench, Rigg, Stewart, McKellen, Hall, Brook and Nunn. Training had been considered by the Company's artistic directors since 1875 when Charles Flower first published a prospectus for the new Stratford theatre:

...he proposed establishing along with it a 'Dramatic Training School and College', thereby beginning Stratford's lengthy association with the idea of training and professional development.<sup>2</sup>

The Company has had a reputation for training and developing actors throughout its history but despite several attempts, the establishment of a school has never been realised. This raises the question of whether formal training is the right system for Stratford or whether an ensemble training system is better suited to the personality of the RSC. When Michael Boyd was appointed Artistic Director in 2003 he took a decision to make fundamental changes to the delivery of training within the RSC with the introduction of the Artist Development Programme (ADP) funded by the Weston Foundation for its first three years<sup>3</sup>. How Boyd set out to achieve a

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Boyd, University of Warwick press release on the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) grant for Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning (CAPITAL), £4.5 Million Performance Partnership for Royal Shakespeare Company and University of Warwick, 27 January, 2005. <http://www.britishtheatreinfo/news/RSCwarwick.htm>.

See Appendix 6.(4).

<sup>2</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Routledge, London, 2000, p.140.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Garfield Weston Foundation was established in 1958 by Willard Garfield Weston, a Canadian businessman who arrived in the UK with his family in 1932. He was the creator of Associated British Foods and the Foundation was endowed with the donation of family-owned company shares. As a

training programme and how successfully he met the requirements of the *Royal Charter and Arts Council Document (1996)* is the focus of this study.

Artist Development and Training are terms now used frequently within the RSC. Artist Development is cumulative and takes many forms including casting, performance, understudying, exploratory workshops, readings, sustained performance, academic knowledge and other 'spiral learning' activities whereas training is a more formal, linear concept and refers to classes, warm-ups and skills instruction. Training is one of many ways in which an artist may be developed. In the context of the RSC's Artist Development Programme, training includes:

- Verse and prose speaking
- Voice training including the release of the voice and technical training in breath, muscularity, dexterity, modulation and singing
- Training in physical imagination and expressivity as well as stamina and alignment
- Vocal and physical flexibility within a variety of dramatic styles
- The development of ensemble skills and a sense of mutual support.

Each of these themes has an ongoing relevance to the thesis and at different stages of the argument some of these aspects will take precedence over the others.

The ethos of ensemble is inextricably linked to artist development within the Company. Although all directors commit to the ensemble principle, their individual interpretation of it differs slightly and this is reflected in their artist development choices.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The RSC describes itself as a subsidised company whose overriding aim is to provide world-class theatre. It also makes claims that it strives to develop new audiences and provide a training-ground for artists.

The prime purpose of this study is to test the claim that the RSC is 'providing an expert training environment for its actors, directors and theatre

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result, the Foundation is today the ultimate controller of the company.' Garfield Weston Foundation Web page, <http://www.garfieldweston.org/history/> 11 August 2011.

artists'<sup>4</sup> against evidence of work undertaken with specific focus on actor training during the years 2003/4–2006/7.

The second purpose is to consider the educational, cultural and historical precedents and pressures which brought about the need for change and to observe the way in which the Company worked to connect more fully to the theatrical community (specifically the training sector) in order to affect the industry with Boyd's vision of an ensemble ethic of continual development and training for all artists in the theatre.

Thirdly this study considers the development of actors in the context of changes in the wider profession and assesses to what degree the requirements of the *Royal Shakespeare Company Royal Charter* (see Appendix 1.(1)) and the *1996 Arts Council Policy for Drama* have been met. (Further details of the *Royal Charter* appear later in this chapter.)

It looks at the achievements that prove or disprove the level of success being currently attained. The degree of success or failure will be evaluated in the final chapter.

A final but significant purpose is the creation of an archival record of the work undertaken by the Artist Development Programme<sup>5</sup>. The RSC has a comprehensive archive but has prioritised administration and performance records. The lack of documentation specifically concerned with training suggests the work was not considered worthy of recording. The institution has its own anecdotal tradition and, while there is a mythology surrounding training and a reputation for development, there is limited concrete evidence of it. The appendix sets out to remedy the situation for the period of Michael Boyd's directorship by including a considerable amount of documentary and photographic evidence to support my thesis that Boyd has attempted and, to a degree, succeeded in establishing a culture of artist development and training within the acting ensemble.

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<sup>4</sup> RSC web page, Home page: [www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk), 18 November, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Programmes of work on offer to artists are cited but detailed explanation of the practice of each workshop or class is not given unless it is relevant.

## Further Aims

The study considers the different ways in which actors learn. It begins with a historical overview of the training offered actors since the Company's inception until Michael Boyd's appointment in 2003. The study does not examine or include the work of the RSC Education Department whose target audience is primary and secondary students and teachers, the Events Department which provides audience, community and family events, or the RSC's Human Resources Department which trains the administration and promotes internships and work placements in theatre skills, unless their work is in collaboration with the ADP. The work of the Education, Events and Human Resources departments does much to answer the requirements of the *RSC Royal Charter* but the concern of this thesis is the development of artists and, more specifically, actors. Reference is made to support offered to stage management, writers, directors, designers and voice and movement practitioners.<sup>6</sup>

The study looks at formal and informal teaching models undertaken in the past as well as looking to the future. It considers training opportunities under various artistic directors and particularly those in more recent history: Peter Hall (1960-1968), Trevor Nunn (1968-1986), Terry Hands (1978-1991), Adrian Noble (1991-2003) and Michael Boyd (2003-2012).

The thesis asks why a professional theatre company should offer training to its actors, most of whom are graduates of the British conservatoire theatre training system or of universities; illustrates the efforts made by the Company to collaborate with the training bodies and other significant theatre institutions in accordance with the requirements of the *RSC Royal Charter* and the *1996 Arts Council Policy for Drama*; looks at how the confluence of factors and personalities shaped the training and attempts to make a preliminary assessment of the programme's successes and failures; and mentions but does not elaborate on the work of other companies with similar objectives, namely the Stratford Ontario Shakespeare Festival Company and the Maly Theatre in Russia.

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<sup>6</sup> When appropriate the ADP is open to the wider organisation.



## Reasons for Undertaking the Research

Formal theatre training rather than apprenticeship is a relatively recent phenomenon, having developed in the late nineteenth century and grown in significance in the twentieth century. Training systems responded to the needs of directors and to developing theatre forms and 'each system or approach to actor training has quite different assumptions and ideas about the nature and purpose of theatre, and what the responsibility of the actor was within the process of making it.'<sup>7</sup> Ensembles such as the Moscow Arts, Berliner Ensemble, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Maly Theatre, Odin Teatret and Grotowski's Laboratory all developed significant systems of training. Although training in Britain is more eclectic and ensembles less fashionable than in Europe, training is nevertheless an essential aspect of British theatre. When a national company embarks on a programme of ensemble training, it is likely to impact on theatre artists, practitioners and productions and is therefore worthy of documentation.

Professional artist training is a neglected aspect of the British theatre tradition where historically most development was achieved through the repertory system. It is particularly important today as different skills are required for a variety of media and theatre styles. Aspirations to remedy and raise awareness of the importance of career-long maintenance and development are crucial if the training culture is to be changed.

In 2003 I was appointed Head of Voice and Artist Development<sup>8</sup> and therefore felt I had an opportunity to give a unique practitioner's account of the development of Michael Boyd's Artist Development Programme and of the ethos that drove it. Although the Company is the focus of a number of publications, none of them offers an in-depth insight into the way the Company approaches training or relates the training to the requirements of the *Royal Charter*. Only Colin Chambers has written from the standpoint of a former RSC dramaturge and with the insight that offers.<sup>9</sup> Participatory perspectives are valuable to researchers because of the personal experience

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<sup>7</sup> Alison Hodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> In 2008 the Voice Department was renamed the Text and Voice Department and my title was changed to Head of Text, Voice and Artist Development.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Chambers, author of *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2004, was RSC Literary Manager from 1981-1997.

they offer and I believe it is essential that practitioners, other than actors, directors, reviewers and critics, contribute to the body of knowledge in order to inform research into performance theory and practice.

The RSC has undergone a period of extreme change, both operationally and in the reconstruction of its theatres and at such time it is easy to lose sight of developments in areas such as training. I found it difficult to access factual information on earlier forms of RSC training, beyond anecdotal reminiscence. I therefore wanted to create a comprehensive review and archival record of the ADP with a separate volume of appendices that could be viewed while reading the study.

### **An Empirical Study**

My initial experience was in performance and then in actor training in the drama school sector. I joined the Company in 1992, first as a Voice Coach then as Senior Voice Coach and from 2003 as Head of Voice and Artist Development. Much of this study is drawn from my own experience and observation over a number of years. My role in the Company crosses the creative and administrative divide and therefore places me in the unusual position of working practically with actors in the rehearsal room and being an integral part of the creative process while, at the same time, needing to assess the training and consider its appropriateness, quality and trajectory. While such an intimate connection with the Company gives me a unique insight into the aims and objectives of the work and access to the process of rehearsal and training, I have been aware of the challenge to remain objective and critical. I have attempted to balance the inevitable subjectivity this raises with company documents, schedules, training programmes, actors' feedback and photographs, all of which are intended to offer a more objective perspective.

I have identified the difficulties, frustrations and failures of the programme as well as the successes and tested these against artist engagement and feedback, critical response from audiences and the press and internal de-briefing sessions with directors, members of the Casting Department and company managers.

It is important to clarify that the policy for training is determined by the Artistic Director and not by the Head of Text, Voice and Artist Development.<sup>10</sup> Directors make decisions about artist development for their productions. Skills workshops for all rehearsal periods and ongoing artist development not directly linked to a specific production are determined by the Head of Artist Development.

### **Methodology**

Although I am not responsible for policy decisions, my position as a practitioner and a departmental head has required me to review the work and write reports that sometimes influence, but do not determine, policy. I attend policy-making meetings and contribute to policy debate. I initiate RSC Artist Development projects with the ensemble and RSC outreach projects and work towards their realisation, specifically in terms of professional and student actors, young directors and amateurs, though these projects are often in collaboration with other departments.<sup>11</sup> This work has informed my understanding of the complexity and scale of the RSC operation. I have used this direct involvement as primary source material and have attempted to convey the interdependency existing within the organisation and to provide a sense of the diversity of its operation.

The study is essentially historical but that history is recent. It touches on theory and philosophy as well as dealing with practical organisational and pedagogical issues. This has meant that I have had to balance theory with practice and policy with ambition and pragmatism. The recent nature of the history means that what appears to be a positive outcome now may be considered differently in future.

The methodology involves participant observation, the use of primary sources including interviews, meeting minutes, Company documents and archival material. Many of the primary sources were derived through my personal involvement in the training and the study therefore requires a balance between academic objectivity and close personal involvement.

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<sup>10</sup> Because of the personal nature of the study I refer to myself in the first person, by my title and by name as and when appropriate.

<sup>11</sup> The administration of the ADP is done by Text, Voice, Movement and Artist Development Manager, Jane Hazell, who joined the Company in 2004.

Secondary sources include pamphlets and books, as well as magazine and newspaper articles.

Anecdotal evidence is used when appropriate and, where permission has been given, actors are named. Actors' anecdotes and reminiscences provide insight into artist development and learning but they are not wholly reliable, often arising out of emotional situations and expressing only one individual's response. They are not proven fact and are often embellished in order to create humour or their detail is vague. Nevertheless they are valued by actors and often used as a source of knowledge and inspiration. The anecdote 'purports to reveal the truths of the society, but not necessarily directly: its inner truth, its truth to some ineffable "essence" rather than to proven facts, is what matters most.'<sup>12</sup> Anecdotes are retrospective by nature and often result from reflection on outcomes of learning experiences rather than being an immediate response to exercises. The series entitled *Players of Shakespeare* edited by Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (and previously by Philip Brockbank) asks RSC actors to consider their approach to a role and commit it to paper. Actors' and directors' autobiographies and biographies are often reflective of their process and have therefore proved useful to actors and students.

Anonymous feedback forms were used to gather actors' responses. Anonymity was used because actors often feel uncomfortable when offering negative feedback as they do not wish to be perceived as contradicting the ensemble ethic. On a pragmatic level they feel their re-employment may be jeopardised if they are not seen to embrace training. For this reason I have not always named my sources. In *New Readings in Theatre History*, Jacky Bratton cites a woman who edited her late husband's material saying that she could, 'write more frankly than he could have done, inhibited as he was by friendship with the subjects of his reports.'<sup>13</sup> While anecdotal evidence from actors and directors is not uncommon, fewer examples of subjective remarks exist from other theatre practitioners. I have attempted to address

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<sup>12</sup> Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.96.

this with comments from voice coaches, movement practitioners, assistant directors and fight choreographers.

The informality of much of the learning encountered by artists means that recorded information is limited. It is these gaps in the documentation which this study hopes to help fill.

It is hoped that the study will constitute an important, indeed unique, contribution to the material presently available and offer a hitherto unexplored viewpoint of RSC practice. I have given insight into negotiations within the RSC as well as with external bodies so as to focus on the difficulties encountered.

The appendix includes photographs by the acclaimed Brazilian theatre photographer Ellie Kurtz<sup>14</sup> because through her artistry she is able to convey a visual sense of not just the content but also the energy and spirit of workshops and sessions. Some photographs were taken by amateur photographers with a digital camera. These photographs are acknowledged. While the study could be criticised for its personal nature, I wish to argue that its empirical character provides a valuable alternative body of work for further development or debate.

### **Weighting of Verse, Text and Movement in the Training**

My specific expertise is in the area of verse and text, which I believe has become a neglected area of the curriculum in training organisations. These are essential skills for naturalistically trained actors who wish to work in classic theatre. The history of RSC training is rich in Text, Verse and Voice classes and there is a more consistent approach to Voice and Text and an apparent weighting towards text training in the first three years of the Artist Development Programme. This arises out of concern from the press

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<sup>14</sup> Ellie Kurtz is originally from Brazil. In 1994 she enrolled for a degree in Audio Visual Production at London Guildhall University. She later studied Art Photography at Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design in 2002 and gained a distinction. As a freelance photographer she has published extensively in *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times*, *Time Out*, *The Guardian* and *Vogue* among others. She has photographed at the RSC since 2002 and documented the entire *Complete Works Festival 2006/2007*. 'The challenge was to create a unique body of work that captures the spirit of the festival, the variety of works presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company through the season and the diversity of people involved in making the festival happen both on the stage and behind the scenes. She was also an RSC artist-in-residence 2007/2008, during which time she photographed all the Histories Ensemble.' <http://www.rsc.org.uk/transformation/news-promos/1351.asp>

and theatre practitioners about what was perceived as a decline in heightened text and verse skills. Although all training is considered, the study of text and language is the major concern. The RSC has been associated with a struggle to preserve the essential craft skills required for the delivery of classical text while moving away from the worst practices of now out-dated styles of performance in excessively large auditoria, such as declamation, a 'sung' quality, and in women a high strident pitch.

During the time under review (2003/4–2006/7) the RSC did not have a Movement Department and attempts to establish one failed. This led to an imbalance between core voice and movement skills, with voice and text work being given greater emphasis. It was particularly noticeable that Voice Warm-ups were offered whereas Movement Warm-ups were not. Most physical classes were conducted by freelance movement practitioners whose work was often production-focused rather than prioritising core skills. Nevertheless movement workshops and classes were provided in consultation with movement specialists.<sup>15</sup>

### **Assessing the Training**

The training and development takes three forms; it can be taught by a practitioner or director, gleaned from observation and example or assimilated through personal engagement in a creative journey such as performance of a principal or understudy role, or participation in a workshop, class or project. Assessment was made by anonymous feedback forms and notes from debrief and Actors' Forum sessions. Some debrief sessions were cancelled due to rehearsal pressures and feedback forms were often not returned, making it difficult to fully evaluate the proportion of actors who, for example, were dissatisfied with specific programmes. Assessing learning was therefore complex. The principal measure of success was to what extent ambitions were realised. The evolving nature of the ensemble and the changing schedule did not allow exact year-to-year comparisons of the work. For many actors it was not possible to assess development immediately but only when a later challenge allowed their learning to be tested, or

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<sup>15</sup> The drive to establish a Movement Trainee in 2006 was an interim measure and an attempt to balance the training. In November 2008 Struan Leslie was appointed Head of Movement and he took up his position in January 2009.

subsequent experience enabled them to reflect on accumulated skills. In the short term it has been possible to assess the interest in and enjoyment of the work and to reflect upon levels of actor engagement with it. Actors were able to comment on whether or not they felt the work was appropriate for the project it was supporting or for building core skills. The longer contracts for some ensembles produced positive responses from audiences and the press about the progress of certain actors and the power of an established ensemble. In some cases it was possible to gauge success by the response of outside institutions, particularly when evaluating collaborations with outside bodies and training institutions.

The relatively short time-period means it was impossible to assess to what degree permanent cultural change was achieved, but levels of attendance at optional activities, particularly the pre-show warm-ups, were a useful indicator, as was the number of actors, who experienced the work, expressed a desire to return for future engagements.

Most chapters allude to the ensemble ethic that underpins the RSCs ambitions for training. The French word 'ensemble' comes from the Latin 'insimul' meaning 'at the same time', '[it] has been used in English to mean 'together' since mid C15. It would appear to have entered theatrical usage from music.'<sup>16</sup> Ensemble is difficult to define in a theatre setting because although it suggests collaborative working, it is an elastic and adaptable word which can fit a variety of models. The artistic directors who have aspired to 'ensemble' have had individual interpretations of the term. The RSC has used 'ensemble' to describe its acting company in documents and press releases at different times in its history. The word is often associated with long-term contracts, training and actor advancement and is seen as concomitant with an Artist Development Programme. It is a term that is often used loosely and is open to interpretation with ensemble theatre companies having widely differing versions of collaboration, ethos and structure. During the years under review and throughout Boyd's directorship the Company sought to define ensemble for itself.

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Harrison, *The Language of Theatre*, Manchester, Carcanet, 1993, p. 94.

## Review of Existing Literature

Among secondary sources are several books written on the RSC.<sup>17</sup> The most important of these are Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (1982); David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Theatre: The Peter Hall Years* (1974); Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces: New Theatre at the RSC* (1980) and *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company* (2004); and Steven Adler, *Rough Magic: Making Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company* (2001). These publications offer an insight into the operation of the Company and a historical overview of its development. While there are several references to training in these books, they are limited.

By far the most significant document is *Crucial Years*, an RSC pamphlet published in 1963. This contains a section entitled *Three Men Look Ahead* in which the Artistic Director Peter Hall, and co-authors and directors, Peter Brook and Michel Saint-Denis, each write articles suggesting a manifesto for the Company which remains relevant and has influenced subsequent practice. Other publications by the RSC which provide evidence of training projects are the *Annual Reports* and *RSC Updates*. References to the RSC's responsibility to provide training are found in Arts Council Policy Documents such as *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System, Section II: A Strategy For Drama* (1996) and the Company's *Royal Charter*. Articles and interviews often give an insight into training initiatives. For example *Twentieth Century Actor Training* edited by Alison Hodge contains an article on Peter Brook by Lorna Marshall and David Williams that refers to his time at the RSC.<sup>18</sup>

Several academic dissertations make reference to the workshops and classes undertaken at different periods of the Company's history but it is not their central theme. There is no evidence of a document dedicated wholly to *training* within the Company. What information exists concentrates mainly on 'voice' and the speaking of verse and refers to other workshops having taken place. The work of the Artist Development Programme is too fresh to have

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<sup>17</sup> All publications mentioned in the introduction are quoted and referenced in the main body of the text.

<sup>18</sup> Lorna Marshall and David Williams, 'Peter Brook: Transparency and the Invisible Network', *Twentieth Century Actor Training* Alison Hodge (ed), London, Routledge, 2000.



produced any published material and this study sets out to remedy this lacuna in current theatre practice research. The appendix includes RSC interim reports on the Artist Development Programme compiled for the sponsors, The Weston Foundation and, later, the Gatsby Foundation, prepared by the Development Department from information supplied by the Artist Development Department.

The contemporary nature of the study means that there are not yet any published critiques on Michael Boyd's directorship or the 2003/4 Artist Development initiative, so newspaper articles proved a valuable source of information. There was a response in the press to Adrian Noble's intention to create an Academy in 2003 and considerable press coverage was given to Michael Boyd's declared commitment to training on his appointment as Artistic Director. Plans for the ensemble and its training were outlined in the press but no follow up in media coverage was given apart from several articles on understudy policy in February 2004.<sup>19</sup>

Rehearsal and performance is by its nature a learning process so actors do not always recognise when they are actively learning unless questioned or prompted to write or speak of their personal journey from rehearsal to performance. With the development of interest in performance studies from academics there are a growing number of interviews in which actors describe their process and consider their craft. A number of eminent performance theorists make references to acting and training and some of these are quoted. Of particular interest is Richard Paul Knowles' provocative 'Shakespeare, Voice and Ideology'.<sup>20</sup>

### **Structure of the Study**

The study is divided into eight chapters, each offering a perspective on training in a different period. The first chapter considers the Company's relationship to training; the second provides an account of training during the creation of the Company, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company under the directorship of Hall, Nunn and Hands. The

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<sup>19</sup> Articles mentioning the understudy performances were featured in *The Guardian*, 'All hail underling, it's your chance to shine', Maev Kennedy, 30 January, 2004 and Lyn Gardner, 'We can all be terrified together', 9 February, 2004, and *The British Theatre Guide*, RSC News, 8 February, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Paul Knowles, 'Shakespeare, Voice and Ideology', *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance*, James C. Bulman, (ed.), London, Routledge, 1996, p. 92.

third examines the contribution of Cicely Berry and the fourth describes training under Adrian Noble. Chapters five, six and seven outline the training offered as part of Michael Boyd's Artist Development Programme during the period between the 2003/4 and 2006/7 seasons. The final chapter attempts to draw conclusions and speculates on how the Company might continue the Artist Development Programme in the future. The appendix gives detailed information of the training schedules, actor feedback, photographs of workshops and other pertinent material.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Royal Shakespeare Company and Training

Despite the growth from Festival theatre to international status, the values of the RSC today have changed very little since 1905: the RSC is still formed around an ensemble of actors and a core of associate actors who continue to give a distinctive approach to theatre. The RSC also continues to be a superb training ground for the artistic and technical talents of British and international theatre.<sup>21</sup>

The statement above was published on the Kennedy Center webpage as part of publicity for the May 2003 RSC Season in Washington. It states that the Company is 'a superb training ground' for theatre practitioners.

This study argues that a subsidised professional company like the RSC, with a commitment to training and the financial means by which to deliver a planned programme of artist development, is an excellent place in which to hone postgraduate skills. This presupposes a level of training or appropriate experience in theatre prior to joining the Company, although occasionally actors are employed without either and actively use the RSC as an initial training ground.

The research prompts a number of questions of the training institutions: Is a broad-based drama school training sufficient for a career in classical theatre? Are actors coming through the universities equally well equipped by courses in Drama and English or by developing their technical skills through drama societies such as OUDS (Oxford University Drama Society), Cambridge Societies such as the Marlowe, A.D.C (Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club) or Footlights and the many excellent drama societies in other universities? Should there be more specialised postgraduate courses in speaking classic text?<sup>22</sup> Whose responsibility is it to provide actor training and artist development and how is it best delivered?

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<sup>21</sup>[http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=offsiteDetails&entity\\_id=5162&source\\_type=O](http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=offsiteDetails&entity_id=5162&source_type=O) (Visited 12 January, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> The Central School of Speech and Drama runs an MA in Classical Acting. [http://www.cssd.ac.uk/data/files/Prospectus\\_2009/Prospectus\\_2009.pdf](http://www.cssd.ac.uk/data/files/Prospectus_2009/Prospectus_2009.pdf). Drama Centre runs an MA in European Classical Acting, <http://courses.csm.arts.ac.uk/drama/course.asp?level=2&CI=1425>.

In order to support the argument it is important to consider the undergraduate training most actors experience.

### **What is Available in the Training Institutions?**

British actor training has a long history that grew out of the early touring companies which offered training based on apprenticeships and became more structured with the introduction of the drama schools in the early 1900s.<sup>23</sup> These developed their own systems of training influenced by French traditions, but that did not reflect wider European and Eastern theatre training. Training was concerned with developing the individual actor rather than integrated ensemble skills.

It was not until the beginning of this century [20<sup>th</sup> century] that an explosion of interest in the power and potential of actor training took hold in the West. This was partly through a growing awareness of the rigorous training in Eastern traditions but also through the widening influence at the turn of the century of objective scientific research. Western European practitioners began to search for absolute, objective languages of acting that could offer models, systems and tested techniques to further the craft.<sup>24</sup>

Main stream British training had centred on skills classes in voice, movement, verse and scene study but in the late 1950s after the introduction of Method Acting and a subsequent move towards a more naturalistic performance style, changes occurred in acting and voice training. (Michel Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio was an exception and further details appear in Chapter 2.) Post World War II changes to funding had meant theatre was no longer a career choice for privileged classes only.<sup>25</sup> Traditional forms of training were challenged and resistance to the imposition of Received Pronunciation strengthened.

In 1963 the newly created Drama Centre (a break-away faction of tutors and students from Central School started by Yat Malmgren and Christopher Fettes) broadened the British approach by focusing on '...innovations in the training of actors emanating over the past century from

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<sup>23</sup> A detailed account of the development of drama training is given in *From Irving to Olivier, A Social History of the Acting Profession in England 1880-1983*, Michael Sanderson, London, Athlone Press, 1984.

<sup>24</sup> Alison Hodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.1-2.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed review of the role of voice work in the history of training see, Lyn Darnley, *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain*, unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1994.

Russia, Germany, France, the United States and, in Great Britain, the pioneering ensemble work of Joan Littlewood.<sup>26</sup>

Today the British Drama academies offer a broad array of three-year conservatoire practical courses validated by the National Conference for Drama Training (NCDT). This system provides the most traditional route to a career in theatre but each school has its own philosophy and system. Places at conservatoires are difficult to secure which has led to the growth of numerous smaller unaccredited Drama Schools offering a variety of part- and full-time courses<sup>27</sup>.

An alternative route for students is through the universities which offer varying degrees of practical and theoretical content in their Drama programmes. Some universities offer practically weighted Drama degrees and a few offer joint honours degree courses in English and Drama.<sup>28</sup> Students are able to join highly active and often well-funded theatre societies where they develop their practical skills through extra-curricular performances regardless of the subjects they are studying. Oxford and Cambridge do not offer courses in Drama but their extremely successful societies produce some notable performers. Some university graduates go on to specialised conservatoire training after graduating. One- and two-year courses are available at some drama schools. Many theatre practitioners are sceptical about the efficacy of one-year courses because bodies and voices require longer training. Some postgraduate one-year courses specialise in an aspect of performance such as physical, musical or classical theatre.<sup>29</sup> A number of actors work their way into the profession through the National Youth Theatre, the Edinburgh Festival, Pub Theatre and Theatre in Education companies.

With such a diversity of training possibilities there are no guarantees that actors will enter the profession prepared to undertake classical roles.

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<sup>26</sup> *Drama Centre Course Details*, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, 2007.  
<http://courses.csm.arts.ac.uk/drama/course.asp?level=2&CI=1425>.

<sup>27</sup> The Conference of Drama Schools (CDS) comprises the twenty one most significant schools.

<sup>28</sup> The most notable of these joint degrees are offered by the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Hull and Royal Holloway (University of London).

<sup>29</sup> These courses are very expensive for students who have already completed a three-year undergraduate training and courses often recruit international students.

## Concerns about Training in Classical Acting

There has been ongoing debate about training in verse-speaking. Some directors, actors and critics believe that many young actors lack the skills to speak classical text. Critic Jeremy Kingston, writing about a discussion entitled 'Verse Speaking Over The Last Thirty Years'<sup>30</sup>, raised the issue saying, '...the worry about verse-speaking – Why is it worse? Is it worse? – continues to agitate theatregoers and practitioners.'<sup>31</sup> Reporting on a public discussion he added:

Everyone agreed why actors felt mystified, not to say alarmed, when asked to speak Shakespeare. Until 30 years or so ago all actors had the Shakespeare tune in their heads, marinated in it from the start of their acting lives. Nowadays verse speaking is not emphasised at drama schools. Why should it be? Better to teach naturalistic acting because there will be more acting jobs in that.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly some practitioners feel that young actors are not given the opportunities they need during training. Neither are they supported by the industry because often actors with a passion to work in classical theatre are passed over in casting for those with better television profiles. This means that some young actors play leading classical roles without prior experience and training other than that needed for film, small spaces and contemporary language.

Alastair Macaulay, writing for the *Financial Times* in March 1999, commented on the ongoing preoccupation with verse speaking:

So what do people find 'good' about 'good' verse? [Quoting Tynan he continues] "What Shakespeare demands is not verse-speaking but verse acting. Edmund Kean, Irving, and Olivier, on whom our whole tradition of heroic acting rests, have one thing in common: they have all been repeatedly accused of lacking poetry"...Voice apart, speaking Shakespeare's verse involves several key issues – all of them involving more controversy than you might suppose. Metre; punctuation; sense; audibility; rhyme, caesuras; line-endings; length of sentences; alliteration; legato; melody; architecture; the principle of antithesis.<sup>33</sup>

The 'key issues' Macaulay mentions are essential for verse speaking and must be mastered. Macaulay touches on changing taste and fashion in the

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<sup>30</sup> The discussion was held in the Swan Theatre and chaired by Adrian Noble. Peter Hall, John Barton and Cicely Berry contributed to the debate.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Kingston, 'Is Verse Getting Worse?' *The Times Arts*, 20 August, 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'Verse Spoken as You Like it', *Financial Times*, 20 March, 1999.

delivery of verse. Each generation focuses on what they consider was lacking in the generation before.

...verse-speaking is one of the most striking symptoms in which today's Royal Shakespeare Company is in decline; and that the RSC, in the first 20 odd years after its creation in 1961, helped to establish a golden age we all enjoyed.<sup>34</sup>

The style that Macaulay refers to is described by Sally Beauman as reacting against an overly dry delivery, and becoming '...freer, more romantic, and more passionate;...' <sup>35</sup> It appears inevitable that each new generation of actors reacts to the style that precedes them.

Barton and Hall began with a response to the over emotional style of the time and encouraged actors to be 'cooler, drier, intensely rational, highly disciplined'<sup>36</sup>

Actress Jane Lapotaire argues positively for a 'living' theatre:

Classical theatre isn't a dead object; it moves and grows and changes with each generation's input, and with the way each generation handles the language<sup>37</sup>

The Company has been the focus of criticism about its verse-speaking style, which Michael Coveney referred to as 'average' in Adrian Noble's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* starring Alan Bates and Frances de La Tour in 2000.

...the action is clear and fluent, the comedy of Antony's mistimed suicide the best I have seen, and the verse-speaking well up to the current (only average) RSC standard.<sup>38</sup>

In the same year Rhoda Koenig contradicted Coveney's view :

All the actors speak the verse with clarity and intelligence. Only lack of space, not admiration, prevents my naming every one.<sup>39</sup>

Objective debate about verse-speaking is difficult because most critics make judgements based on what is familiar to them.

Few people claim we live in a golden age of verse speaking now; many people reckon that there was a golden age, two or more decades ago.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.269.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Carole Zucker, *In The Company of Actors*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.89-90.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Coveney, 'Naked power of a Tour de force', *Daily Mail*, 21 January, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Rhoda Koenig, 'A Truly Terrific History', *The Independent*, 15 December, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'Verse Spoken as You Like it', *The Financial Times*, 20 March, 1999.

Disagreement among professionals is rife. Actors have strong opinions on verse speaking and the degree of attention that should be paid to the form and rhythm. Claudie Blakley who worked extensively with John Barton when rehearsing Gregory Doran's *All's Well that Ends Well* in 2004.

[Claudie Blakley] thinks the combination of Doran's devotion to prolonged paraphrase work...and translating every line into contemporary prose before tackling the original verse – dozens of language tutorials with John Barton, now the RSC's advisory director, and close observation of Dench have propelled a giant leap in her Shakespearean acting.<sup>41</sup>

Dominic Cooke, currently the Artistic Director of the Royal Court was an assistant director at the RSC before directing in *The Swan* (2003) and *RST* (2004). He offered an opposing view when he spoke to Daniel Rosenthal of the need to break free from 'RSC traditions':

"there's an awful lot of bulls\*\*\* [sic] talked about how to do Shakespeare". He reckons he probably put too much faith in RSC traditions, particularly on verse-speaking, rather than his and his actors' instincts,<sup>42</sup>

Cooke's interest in the Meisner approach to acting and his desire to keep language spontaneous and subtle means that he avoids an over-structured approach to verse.

Generational differences in delivery have been documented by scholars in the field of Shakespeare as Performance. Ian McKellen (who appeared in 21 Marlowe Society productions as a Cambridge student) warned against formalising an RSC policy for verse-speaking, saying it could overstress the structure and thereby reduce actors' creativity.

The RSC must declare no policy, no classification or attitude, which might try to categorize and thereby limit Shakespeare's works. In rehearsing *Romeo and Macbeth* with him [Trevor Nunn] and *The Winter's Tale* with John Barton, I have been introduced to their disciplined examination of the poetry, its precision of feeling and its subtlety of device, which make demands on acting equivalent to those which Leavis, who taught Nunn at Cambridge, urges upon literary criticism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Daniel Rosenthal, 'Hearts broken here, Claudie Blakley can move the stoniest of audiences', *The Times*, 9 February, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Rosenthal, 'Much ado about something new', *The Times*, 4 October, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Ian McKellen, 'A Distant, Fabled Place, My Vision of Stratford's Past and Present', *The Times Saturday Review*, 9 October, 1976. <http://www.mckellen.com/writings/distant.htm>



Balance between structure and imagination must be maintained. McKellen suggests that actors need to explore ways of simultaneously using the structure of the verse while working instinctively and spontaneously.

The perceived decline in verse speaking has led to a number of short courses in classical text available through Actors' Centres, post-graduate courses and professional 'in-house' training in Shakespeare companies such as the RSC, The Globe, The National and the Shakespeare Festivals in Oregon and Stratford Ontario.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Case for 'Language Work'**

Although training at the RSC has not been confined to the speaking of text, language work is a prime focus.

There is concern amongst actors that undergraduate drama training does not include enough work on heightened and poetic language. In 2006 I attended the American Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference in Chicago and participated in a panel discussion on *Shakespeare in the Academies*. It became apparent that directors and practitioners in the United States supported the views of critics such as Kingston, Nightingale and Macaulay. The following ideas were expressed in my notes for the debate and later published in 2006 in *Essays in Voice and Speech, Voice and Gender*.<sup>45</sup> The full article appears in Appendix 1.(2).

With every generation we move further from the era that produced these plays. Our living language is evolving and in order to keep the plays accessible for audiences, actors must first be confident of accessing the language for themselves.

Many actors return to the stage after years working in film and television and want to reawaken their relationship with language that can be epic, lyrical, rhetorical and narrative, all within one text. Unless actors begin to develop a love and joy of words early on in their training, it is possible that they will never be given the roles that will allow them to be truly excited by the challenge that Shakespeare's language offers. If we do not have the actors who want to work with classic texts because they love the feel of the words in their mouths we will lose an essential part of the plays that goes beyond the story and touches us with the very sound of the language.

This raises a question about whether there are specific skills to teach. I believe there are. On the most basic level they are rhetoric, verbal expressivity, rhythm, an enjoyment of the textual 'soundscape', clarity and

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<sup>44</sup> Lyn Darnley, 'Starting With the Words', *Voice and Speech, A UK Perspective on Voice Training for Classical Performance*, *Essays in Voice and Speech, Voice and Gender*, VASTA, 2007, p.89.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* pp.91-92.

sight reading, all of which can be worked on through exposure to lyrical, narrative and dramatic prose and verse, both classical and contemporary. Without these skills actors wanting to work in classical theatre are disadvantaged. Understanding rhythms and language structure help actors engage the language and use it as an integral part of character. Once they can see how form and content work together classical text ceases to be intimidating. The ability to sight read heightened text with convoluted phrases is invaluable for actors and makes auditioning less stressful.

Although the repertory system allowed actors to be stretched, but much of the work was done under extreme pressure and when actors were tired. It could be accused of developing technique but not allowing for organic growth.

This does not mean that what was passed on was in any way definitive. It is just as possible for poor skills to be maintained and passed down the generations and fashion played a part in determining style. We know that the ever growing size of auditoria in London led to a declamatory style that amplified scale and emotion but did nothing for the quality of language speaking or of truth. In fact what still exists of the old wax recordings often sounded sung rather than spoken. There is a danger that in holding on to traditions we fail to reject what is truly outdated. The aim must be to take forward what is essential and excellent and feed it into a style appropriate to the period.<sup>46</sup>

In order to convey the myriad complexities of the text, it is essential that early training consolidates basic vocal and physical skills to effortlessly support interpretation of language and character. Essential skills include:

- sufficient breath to phrase long and complex thoughts;
- a connection of the breath to voice and verbal muscularity;
- the dexterity of articulation to convey the energy and precision of ideas through language;
- a connection with syllabic value, which because of the rhythms of Shakespeare are significant. In the vernacular syllables are collapsed and contracted;
- a feeling for the importance of the *unstressed* beat as well as the stressed beat otherwise the language cannot 'trip along'.

This also involves:

Recognising the neutral vowels and weak forms in the language, (without a sense of these in the body, the teaching of the iambic pentameter becomes an academic exercise.); an appreciation of the power and impact of muscular diction and the relationship between muscle and audibility; the ability to think on the line and on the word and to keep the words alive

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

through to the end of the thought; the ability to recognise the main or principal clause in an extended sentence and to be capable of keeping the thought alive while negotiating the subordinate clauses; an understanding of the need to take an audience through long, meandering thoughts, the ability to connect with the rhythms of verse and prose in order to allow the non-verbal aspects of language to emerge through the rhythm; an ease and familiarity with words and their textures and an enjoyment of the fabric and texture of words, beyond their literal meaning;....<sup>47</sup>

These skills are not easily come by and require a structured repetitive approach in order to develop a level of ease of delivery. A facility with language develops out of an oral culture very different from the visual and technological one in which we live. Young people today are far less likely to read out loud or speak verse than past generations. Much of the groundwork in verse and speech is no longer undertaken in the schoolroom. In drama schools the skills required for classic theatre are focused on in only two or perhaps three terms of a nine-term course. Most young actors questioned recalled performing at least one classic text during their training, but seldom encountered more than two.

Using the text as a starting point can feel very unsafe for young actors as their familiar 'building blocks' of *back story*<sup>48</sup> are removed. The journey towards the synergy of all these factors with the text is difficult and achieving both believable naturalism and epic language requires practice and experience.

### **Training Voice Coaches**

The training of suitably qualified directors, acting coaches and voice teachers to work in drama schools and theatres is important if the teaching of classic text and verse is to be maintained and improved because it is voice teachers who first nurture these skills in actors and student directors.

The Central School of Speech and Drama created the first course in Voice Studies in the United Kingdom in 1980 to train voice specialists for work in theatres, schools and training establishments. Initially the course admitted eight to 12 students but has grown and currently takes approximately 24. This growth has been due to pressure for courses to earn

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<sup>47</sup> Lyn Darnley, 'Starting With the Words, A UK Perspective on Voice Training for Classical Performance', *Essays in Voice and Speech, Voice and Gender*, VASTA, 2007, pp.91-92.

<sup>48</sup> The 'back story' is the result of the actor's research into the characters personal history and may be gleaned from the text or invented to support the actor's performance choices.

revenue and has led to changes in the focus of the work. The course specification states: 'The course provides a foundation in vocal and physical skills, related academic disciplines, vocal pedagogy and research methods'.<sup>49</sup> It has a strong reputation for offering a broad education in voice and dialect skills, and for preparing its graduates to work in drama schools and industry. It is however less focused on text and theatre-voice and as a result other courses have been developed. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama began an apprenticeship MA in 2006. The Guildhall MA distinguishes itself as a course in training actors and offers pathways in either Voice or Movement. It claims that it 'aims to develop a new generation of theatre craft teachers to work with actors in training and in the profession'.<sup>50</sup> In 2009 Guildford School of Acting launched an MA in Voice and Singing and Birmingham School of Acting (BSA) began an MA in Professional Voice Practice. The BSA course places the text work of Cicely Berry at its heart and was supported by an RSC student bursary in its first two years and by RSC workshops. In an attempt to assist post graduate voice teachers to develop careers in theatre the Artist Development Programme (ADP) initiated the Professional Development Placement in the RSC Voice Department in 2004. This paid internship introduces a voice studies graduate to theatre-voice and provides support and training 'on the job'.<sup>51</sup> Theatre Voice training is also offered at NIDA (*National Institute of Dramatic Art*) in Sydney Australia and on some courses in Canada and the United States.

### **Training Future Generations of Directors**

Similarly is it essential to ensure that the language skills of directors are nurtured. The RSC has a well established Assistant Director programme.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Central School of Speech and Drama prospectus, *MA Voice Studies, Course Specification*, p.1. November, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Guildhall School of Music and Drama, on-line postgraduate prospectus, *MA in Training Actors (Voice)*. <http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/acting/programmes/postgraduate.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Theatre-voice coaches teach advanced skills in voice and text and connect voice skills to the work of the rehearsal room.

<sup>52</sup> Each production is assigned an assistant director who is present throughout the rehearsal process, rehearses the understudy company, maintains and monitors the production and occasionally transfers the production to another space, taking responsibility for the technical and dress rehearsals. Assistant directors also contribute to the Education and Events Programmes by providing workshops on the productions and speaking about the context and process for school groups and at pre-show and post-show events.

Additional initiatives include Assistant Director projects and regular Cicely Berry text workshops for young directors. The profession has been aware of the need to foster director training and this resulted in the establishment of an MFA in Directing at Birkbeck College, University of London.<sup>53</sup> The prospectus illustrates concern from theatre practitioners and professional bodies for a recognised directing course:

The Course has been developed through close co-operation between Birkbeck College and the National Council for Drama Training, which is the body charged by the theatre industry with overseeing and safeguarding professional theatre training provision and standards for actors, stage managers and technicians in the UK. The Course, and NCDT's new responsibility for director training, has been developed in collaboration with a large number of professional theatre directors and other experienced professional practitioners.<sup>54</sup>

The National Theatre Studio has a strong programme for directors. It runs an annual three-week course for 14 young directors and hosts two resident directors on bursaries, one for six months and another for a year. Many young directors work in drama schools where they have a formative influence on young actors who often encounter their first classic text role during training. It is essential emerging directors receive language and text training so they can inspire and empower actors.

### **Professional Training**

The principal objective of a national theatre company is to produce theatre of the highest possible caliber but a by-product of this activity is the reinforcement and extension of the skills of all theatre practitioners. The RSC is not alone in the United Kingdom in its desire to train. The National Theatre Voice Department and Studio offer artists the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills. The studio, however, does not integrate the work into the rehearsal process.

The Studio is the National Theatre's engine room. It's also an irreplaceable resource for the whole of the British Theatre. Actors, directors, theatre-makers of all sorts – and above all writers – use it to dream, to work, to sweat over ideas that aren't ready and to hone stuff that is nearly there. It keeps us alive.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> A relationship between the RSC and the Directing MFA at Birkbeck College was first proposed by Adrian Noble and Clare Venables (for the RSC) and Peter Cheeseman (for Equity). This relationship was later formalised by the ADP. Details appear in Chapter 6.

<sup>54</sup> Birkbeck College, *Theatre Directing Prospectus*, London, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Nick Hytner quoted on the National Theatre web page 7, <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=11771>

The theatre whose classical ambitions most closely resemble those of the RSC is the Shakespeare Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, in Canada. The company offers a journeyman contract, rehearsal support and runs the Birmingham Conservatory<sup>56</sup> programme during the winter when the theatres are dark. The programme is described by the theatre's web page prospectus as:

Founded in 1998, the Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival offers a concentrated and comprehensive approach to artistic development for the most promising young actors in Canada today.

Operating from September into February, with a hiatus over the holiday period, the Conservatory consists of an intensive program by senior artists and teachers under the direction of Martha Henry. Candidates are usually graduates of a theatre training program. The Birmingham Conservatory is a paid program with no tuition fees. Following the winter Conservatory session, participants are offered places within the next Festival season.<sup>57</sup>

In November 2004 I visited the Birmingham Conservatory at the Shakespeare Festival Theatre and reported on their programme for their funding body:

In my short time with the Conservatory I concluded that the aim was to teach actors a process that allows them to access classical text with physical and vocal ease, while working with a specific acting methodology and to become self-sufficient in this process. The work looks at the structure and delivery of text, based on the 'particulars of language' and a detailed understanding of the function of rhetoric.<sup>58</sup>

Once actors have completed the training they join the Company for a year during which time they receive support and advice from a more experienced actor in the company, as part of a 'buddying system'.

### **Training in a Professional Theatre**

The responsibility of the Company as the greatest single employer of theatre practitioners in the United Kingdom is considerable and the pursuit of an ensemble ethic means it must challenge its own casting practice.

The Company employs actors straight out of drama school as well as highly experienced actors familiar with all the demands of classical texts and

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<sup>56</sup> There is no relationship between the Birmingham Conservatoire in Canada and the Birmingham Conservatoire of Music or the Birmingham School of Acting in the UK.

<sup>57</sup> Stratford Festival Theatre website:

<http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/education/professionals.aspx?id=1168>, 8 March 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Lyn Darnley, *Birmingham Conservatory, Report for Canadian Heritage*, November, 2004, p.1.

of performing in large theatre spaces. As well as these two professional extremes, the majority of Company members fit neither category; they may have played a number of television and theatre roles but may have little or possibly no classical experience. A contract with the RSC allows actors to develop their practice over a long period of guaranteed employment while performing in up to eight different theatres.

There can be no more natural a place to offer training for classical theatre than in a working professional classical theatre environment. Preliminary conservatoire training can only form a general foundation on which to build a specialist craft.

Post-graduate education now includes more work experience so that it is not purely theoretical but is directly linked to the profession. Whatever the skill area, learning 'on the job' offers an insight into any industry. The practice of arts administration, theatre carpentry, costume or property making is most successfully taught in a theatrical environment, experiencing the day-to-day operational process of rehearsal and performance and all the preparation required for productions. Classical performance skills are also best developed inside a working theatre environment. The growth of actors in the repertory system was legendary and can be seen in the development of actors in the long ensembles of 2006 and 2009. Accounts of this success can be found in Chapters 7 and 8.

Extended time and depth of exposure is necessary before skills can be properly assimilated and before craft can become integrated and habitual. Before 2003/4 the development of young RSC actors contracted as 'play as cast' was dependent on their understudy casting, but not guaranteed. In spite of long contracts it is possible for an actor's practice to remain static and become stale if opportunities for growth are not incorporated in the contract. This study hopes to demonstrate that since 2003/4, RSC artists have been given an unusual developmental opportunity. Not only do they undergo the rehearsal and performance process and perform in a number of plays in different theatres over a demanding and often protracted period, often playing both classical and contemporary texts, but they are also offered a formal programme of development alongside other theatre artists.

Artist development is implicit in an ensemble where actors are not only cast according to type but challenged and extended by their casting. As long ago as 1967 Gareth Lloyd Evans wrote of the unique quality of the Company: 'The Royal Shakespeare Theatre has a strong sense of community; mutual criticism and advice is both encouraged and given. In a very real sense this theatre is a world within a world.'<sup>59</sup> During a master class with John Barton during the launch of the *Complete Works Festival* on the 23rd April 2006, Patrick Stewart spoke of an experience he had during his second year with the RSC, when he found himself with free time after the cancellation of a production he had been contracted for. Barton asked him to join the pool of actors who performed *The Hollow Crown*. He spoke of how the involvement in the project in 1972 became an invaluable opportunity to learn about the speaking of classic text.

### **Traditional Theatre Crafts**

The RSC has always had a reputation for nurturing actors but not only actors need nurturing. The theatre industry is finding it harder to recruit adequately trained and experienced theatre carpenters, costume makers and other craftspeople. The need for the national theatres to be responsible for the maintenance and development of traditional classical theatre skills, as well as developing all theatre artists and technicians and while supporting the development and performance of new work, is acknowledged in paragraph 35 of the 1996, *Arts Council Policy for Drama*:

...the future health of drama can only be assured by adequate investment in all the artistic, craft, technical and administrative skills it requires;<sup>60</sup>

Paragraph 41 states:

The RNT and RSC should also demonstrate exemplary standards in all aspects of their work – which extend beyond the public presentation of productions. The organisations undertake the development of new work which is a resource for the whole industry; offer excellent education programmes, opportunities for co-productions and also opportunities for training; have an impressive history of attracting the best practitioners and of providing the environment in which their work can develop.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gareth Lloyd Evans, Shakespeare, The Twentieth Century and 'Behaviourism', *Shakespeare Survey*, 20, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p.133.

<sup>60</sup> The Arts Council of England, *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System*, 1996, p.7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.10.



Under the sub-heading, 'Employment and Training' (paragraph 106) the document states:

The live drama sector pays low wages, compared with television or film, and there are limited opportunities for artists to enhance their skills through training. Consequently there is a very serious threat to the skills base of the industry. People of calibre are disinclined to remain within the theatre industry. It is, therefore, crucial that strategies are developed to facilitate:

- the training of new practitioners;
- mid-career bursaries;
- a stronger training infrastructure;<sup>62</sup>

Although this last paragraph does not specifically refer to the responsibility of the national theatres, the potential of these companies to offer an apprenticeship model of training as well as professional development for experienced actors and directors is enormous.

Similarly the *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company* declares that 'The purposes for which the Corporation is established and incorporated' are:

To advance and improve the dramatic art in Our United Kingdom and throughout the world by developing, extending and refreshing the skills and experience of the Corporation's employees by the production and presentation of dramatic performances of all kinds and by teaching and training and other educational activities including the establishment and maintenance of a school of acting and by other means.<sup>63</sup>

This direct reference to a school of acting at Stratford implies a serious concern for a training programme linked to the theatre, but none of the plans came to fruition.<sup>64</sup> Other purposes listed that appertain to the training of actors and the wider educational objectives of the Company are:

To conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare and to keep alive his memory by the production and presentation of his works to the highest artistic standards.<sup>65</sup>  
To conserve, advance and disseminate Shakespearean drama literature and knowledge both in Our United Kingdom and throughout the world.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>63</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2, II.(3).

<sup>64</sup> Michael Sanderson, *From Irving To Olivier*, London, 1984, p.32, mentions that in 1879 and again in 1882 an acting academy was planned in Stratford-upon-Avon but neither venture came to fruition.

<sup>65</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2, II.(1).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.2, II.(2).

## A Reputation for Training

A 'stint at Stratford' has been seen by many as an opportunity to gain classical skill. RSC credits are thought to enhance career prospects and increase marketability.

The American film industry has drawn on the wealth of British talent for their young stars such as Richard Burton, Vanessa Redgrave, Judy Dench, Ian McKellen, Ben Kingsley, Patrick Stewart, David Bradley, Toby Stephens and Jude Law. In an article on British talent, Leslie Felperin is quoted as saying that the reason for this is training:

Young actors come up through the theatre schools, then cut their teeth on pub theatre, the comedy circuit and the Edinburgh festival. Hollywood directors increasingly respect the fact that British actors don't need to "access their emotions".

The article continues: 'the classic hard-working British acting training – a stint in Stratford here, a challenging role at the Donmar Warehouse there – could not be more in keeping with Hollywood's new mood.'<sup>67</sup>

In spite of this vote of confidence in the 'in-service training' offered by companies committed to the furtherance of the actor's craft, there are only so many young actors who can be accommodated and take advantage of the support on offer. The role of the classics in the development of the actor's craft is succinctly put by John Peter writing about the 11<sup>th</sup> Ian Charleson Award for promising young actors, (won by David Oyelowo for his performance of Henry VI):

Why classical actors? It is because we believe that the classics provide both the rock-solid foundations and the ultimate peaks of achievement in the art of acting. The classics extend the actor's range both emotionally and technically: they make him explore past ages when life made different demands on people's body and mind, loyalties and affections. The classics also use large canvasses and big casts: they have a special technical complexity, which means that actors are part of a complicated situation and have to react to, and interact with, large numbers of other actors. Even the smallest contributions are vital.<sup>68</sup>

John Peter openly criticised the RSC for abdicating 'its responsibility for nurturing young actors. Some, who are straight or not long out of drama school, have no interest in classical work and make no secret of the fact that

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<sup>67</sup> Hazel Minns (Researcher), 'Shooting Stars', *Elle*, UK Edition, June, 2000, p.72.

<sup>68</sup> John Peter, 'Crowning Glories', *The Sunday Times*, 25 March, 2001, p. 19.

they can't wait to get out of Stratford and into television.'<sup>69</sup> Peter claims that there no longer is the strong example of the classic tradition from the directors and senior actors that there was in the past. He states that young actors with a real interest in classical acting cannot even get auditions. There is some truth in this as the Company does not hold open auditions and actors from schools which stage London Showcases are more likely to be seen by casting directors, agents and the RSC, Globe and National Theatre casting departments.

Nevertheless, actors who have been recognised by the Ian Charleson Awards, either as winners or finalists, have almost all gone on to work at the RSC and of the 16 winning awards given between 1991 and 2005, four actors received awards for RSC performances. Winners who have gone on to work at the RSC, or worked with the Company prior to winning, are: Ian Hughes, Emma Fielding, Toby Stephens (awarded for 1994 RSC production of *Coriolanus*), Lucy Whybrow (awarded for Juliet in RSC *Romeo and Juliet*, 1995), Alexandra Gilbreath, Mark Bazeley, Claudie Blakley, Rupert Penry-Jones (awarded for RSC *Don Carlos*, 1999), David Oyelowo (RSC production of *Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 and 3*, 2000), Claire Price, Lisa Dillon, Nonso Anozie and Mariah Gale. Recognition by the Ian Charleson panel is a significant honour and is likely to enhance an actor's career. *The William Poel Competition* for drama students which has been superseded in popularity by the *Sam Wanamaker Competition* held at the Globe, both aim to develop an interest in, and raise the standards of, classic verse speaking. Certainly the opportunity to work on Shakespearean text to competition level is important, but does not guarantee subsequent opportunities.

The oldest and arguably the most effective way for actors to learn is through the apprenticeship system, a system that has been lost along with the repertory system. In a company with an ensemble the role the understudy plays is valued and the apprenticeship nature of such work is not overlooked. Most companies have emergency strategies, depending on company finances, but in most cases they do not constitute a learning experience because little support, or time, is allowed for preparation.

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<sup>69</sup> John Peter, 'Cry that we are come to this', *The Culture, The Sunday Times*, 3 January, 1999, pp.2-4.

## **The RSC Understudy System**

The RSC has taken the role of understudies very seriously because extended runs make it more likely that understudies will perform. Traditionally actors have been required to understudy at the RSC unless they were playing leading roles or their agents negotiated exclusion clauses in their contracts. Young actors might have found themselves understudying in all the productions in which they performed. While some companies employ 'walking understudies' who do not perform in the production, RSC actors have generally performed one role and understudied at least one other. In a 2001 understudy run of *Jubilee* by Peter Barnes, two actors performed all the roles in the first half-hour of the play. While this was unusual and placed an unacceptable load on the actors, it is not uncommon for actors to cover more than one role in a play. Understudy rehearsals are conducted by assistant directors and actors must be word perfect by the first preview. Preparation often begins early in rehearsal, if time allows, but the majority of rehearsal takes place once the production is in performance. Assistant directors are also expected to keep the understudy company fresh and ready to perform throughout the run with very little rehearsal.

The learning curve is steep if the actor is given an organic experience of the rehearsal process. The quality of the experience is dependent on the ability of the Assistant Director to engender a stimulating, actor-enriching environment. Debate continues over how much of the understudy's own creative input is acceptable and to what extent the actor needs only to 'be in the right place at the right time and know the words'.

For young actors who often have few lines, the opportunity to test and develop their skills with language, character and sustained performance demands can be invaluable. When the understudy has to perform at short notice, a situation akin to an opening night occurs, but without the experience of rehearsing or playing opposite the other actors in the play. They have rehearsed with the understudy company, not the principal company. Nevertheless they still have an advantage over a 'walking understudy' because as part of the ensemble they have assimilated the rhythms of the production.

A balance always needs to be found between the benefits of the 'stretch' offered young actors when attempting a role that is beyond their casting range and the negative effect such an expectation can place on such actors if they are not yet ready to play the role for an audience. Ultimately the understudy must be able to perform to a level commensurate with the rest of the Company, therefore the understudy role should be one that conceivably could be played by the actor.<sup>70</sup> A fuller account of the value of understudying is given in Appendix 1 (3).

### **Spiral Learning Versus Linear Learning**

Learning undoubtedly occurs as part of the rehearsal and performance process. How this 'spiral learning' differs from the learning that is offered by formal drama training is worthy of consideration. I define 'spiral learning' as experiential learning of the type that takes place over a period of time as an actor revisits a performance situation again and again. Each situation is self-led and provides the actor with the opportunity to use experience in order to test and reflect. This is the opposite of linear learning, which involves the accumulation of knowledge that is sequential and taught. Spiral learning<sup>71</sup> is a valuable way for the newly trained actor to test knowledge and build techniques while gaining experience. It requires opportunities for sustained periods of performances only possible with extended contracts. This spiral model is implicit in the work of an actor working within an ensemble and was described by the actor Kenneth Haigh:

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<sup>70</sup> Edward Bennett was an understudy who was truly tested when David Tennant was forced to take three weeks off because of a back injury. On 10 December, 2008, *The Telegraph* critic Charles Spencer wrote: *David Tennant's replacement Hamlet at Novello Theatre*, 'Edward Bennett is no great Dane, but takes a notably plucky shot at the impossible task of replacing David Tennant as Hamlet. What a stressful day it must have been for Edward Bennett, who only learnt late yesterday afternoon that he would be going on for Tennant last night. Admittedly he'd had a crack at the role on Monday night, but this time he was facing the critics. In the immortal words of *42nd Street*, from which director Gregory Doran quoted when he explained the change of cast before the show started, Bennett was going out there a youngster (29 actually) but he'd got to come back a star. Did he pull off a sensational coup? Was a new star born? Certainly the audience seemed to think so and gave Bennett a standing ovation. And for sheer nerve and self-confidence Bennett undoubtedly deserved the cheers. As Hamlet, he has to hold a glass of champagne during the opening scene. The understudy's hand betrayed not the faintest tremor of nerves.' Michael Billington, in his review, 'Hamlet,' *The Guardian*, 10 December, 2008, wrote: 'But this is a more robustly traditional reading of the part which marks Bennett down as an actor to watch.'

<sup>71</sup> Spiral Learning is a term that was used on the Community Theatre Arts Course at Rose Bruford College, in the 1980s; it refers to cumulative learning that values the opportunity for actors to revisit challenges of a similar nature in order to be able to test and extend their skills.

I began to see over a longish period that I had to tackle this by a re-examination of myself, of my own resources, my limitations, my equipment – to make myself an instrument and not an accident, not somebody who *happened* to be in a play, and the play *happened* to be bad or *happened* to be good. And I discovered from this something I'm still looking for, and I feel that the first glimmer of it is happening to me at the moment at the Royal Shakespeare Company – of an ensemble approach....<sup>72</sup>

Some young actors working for the RSC for the first time may be intimidated by the level of skill they see around them and unless they are well supported may fear failure. Others may not have played large theatres. The demands of the repertoire and the need to understudy provide learning opportunities but also create stress, tiredness and a hugely heavy creative workload. It is true that for some actors the experience, if not properly managed, can become negative. Actors may work with a number of directors and assistant directors who require different styles of performance.<sup>73</sup> Actors are often more able to fully appreciate their learning in retrospect. Simon Russell Beale reflected on the inexact nature of actor development and what can be learned from observation, assimilation and experience when he wrote:

The formal training of an actor is necessarily an inexact science. Unlike classical singers and dancers, there is no all-embracing method that an actor can use to construct a technique. I first became aware of the excitement and value of watching another actor work during rehearsals of my first professional Shakespeare production. I had left university with a fairly rigid and puritanical view of how Shakespeare should be done: clarity was all important, any hint of overt emotion was a sign of self-indulgence. I guess I am still a bit of a puritan but I remember being bowled over by one particular performance, which was, quite simply, operatic. Gillian Barge, playing *Paulina* in *The Winter's Tale*, showed me that an actor can be expansive and true, natural and rhetorical.<sup>74</sup>

Russell Beale articulated his experience at the RSC.

Over eight years at the RSC I learnt, even if it was only subconsciously, from many others – from watching Alec McCowen's cool precision or John Wood's intellectual excitement or Susan Fleetwood's rigorous lack of sentimentality. In consequence, I firmly believe that young actors must be

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<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Haigh in a discussion at the Royal Court Theatre, 'Who Alienated Konstantin Stanislavski?', *Encore*, vol. 10, May-June 1963, p.19.

<sup>73</sup> In 2008 actors in the Green Company worked with director Tim Carroll on *The Merchant of Venice* who required strict adherence to the iambic pentameter. They also worked on *The Taming of the Shrew* with Conall Morrison who required them to work very freely with the verse and to take on aspects of the commedia dell'arte style.

<sup>74</sup> Simon Russell Beale, 'A Good Investment', *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (eds.) Oxford, Amber Lane Press Ltd, 1999, p.40.

given the chance, if they wish, to develop slowly yet freely within the relatively safe environment of a secure yet experimental company.<sup>75</sup>

He went on to reinforce the need for actors to practise their craft and the difficulty of finding opportunities to do so now that the smaller companies cannot employ large casts. He stated that training is the responsibility of the national companies.

There *are* rules to be obeyed, although they are few and simple. One of the problems facing British actors who no longer enjoy a huge network of well-financed repertory theatres is how to learn those rules and where to practise. Repertory theatre can no longer afford to put on a good number of plays with large casts, and although useful work by groups like Cheek By Jowl provided younger actors with good experience under a great director like Declan Donnellan, the main burden of training has fallen on the two big national companies. This means, inevitably, that it is not easy for any actor to exercise their right to fail.<sup>76</sup>

While the *RSC's Royal Charter* requires the Company to provide training and 'to advance and improve the dramatic art'<sup>77</sup> of the country, it must also create a safe environment for actors to experiment, test themselves and occasionally fail and I believe that Boyd has attempted to create both a structure and an environment in which actors can learn the 'rules' Russell Beale refers to, and feel safe enough to stretch themselves and take risks. While it is not possible to replace the repertory system, an ensemble provides many similar challenges and developmental opportunities. *The Royal Charter* identifies the need for the Company 'To conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare and to keep alive his memory by the production and presentation of his works to the highest artistic standards at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre...'<sup>78</sup> In order to do so the Company must find ways of making the texts accessible to modern actors so that they in turn can interpret and communicate them to contemporary audiences.

Although the RSC has been historically associated with the drive to maintain and develop the art of verse speaking, training has extended beyond traditional skills and included improvisation and movement

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>77</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council, dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2, II.(3).

<sup>78</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2, II.(1).

disciplines. RSC actors have gone on to other companies and shared their skills with other actors. Many actively teach in training establishments in the UK and abroad.

When Michael Boyd assumed the mantle of Artistic Director in 2003 he announced his commitment to placing ensemble, training and artist development at the heart of the Company. In doing so he continued a long-held Company ambition for actor training in Stratford.

In order to give a context for Boyd's initiative the following chapters (2, 3 and 4) examine the evidence of a desire for training and a school from the beginning of the Company's history and of efforts to establish both formal and informal training. (A full and detailed history of the growth of the RSC is available in Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, 1982.)



## CHAPTER TWO

### Training and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre

Training has been a part of the work of the Company since its inception. The degree to which that training has been integrated into the life of the Company has varied. This chapter considers the major influences on training under different directors of the Company and provides a synthesis of the research already undertaken on the early development of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (SMT). It does not attempt to trace a chronological history of the Company. This has been done by several authors including David Addenbrooke, Sally Beauman and Colin Chambers, although none of them focus specifically on training in the Company. The history does not unfold in a simple linear manner; the individuals who contributed to it interpreted, in their own way, the ideas that inspired them, adding something of themselves and the individuality of their own generation.

#### **Theatre-Specific Learning**

The skills and theories learned as a student can be tested, re-worked and evaluated in the working environment. 'Theatre-specific learning' refers to learning that occurs during a professional engagement with a theatre company, in preparation for a role and while performing it, whether principal, minor or understudy. It includes learning that accrues organically while performing, that is gleaned from the relationship with an audience, other actors, directors, consultants or anyone involved in the production. It may be practical or academic, facilitated by others or a by-product of the work. This learning is sometimes apparent only on reflection.

All theatres have a training remit. It's crucial for theatres, like any other institution, to draw new people in to astonish and unsettle. We make the passing on of skills central to our thinking and planning – not just our own skills ...but those of the great directors who we are lucky enough to have working with us.<sup>79</sup>

David Lan speaks of the training of directors in a project launched by the Young Vic in 2000 but his words apply equally to the training of all theatre

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<sup>79</sup> David Lan, *New Directors in the Making*, *Arts Professional*, 28 July, 2003, p.6.

artists. Unless actors are constantly 'astonished and unsettled' and in ways that can also affect audiences, they can become complacent and comfortable. Faced with the need to please paying audiences by giving them what they are used to, and because resources are limited, most companies will forego exploration. Experimentation and active research should be the responsibility of subsidised theatres with the funding to push artistic boundaries. Ideally this requires an ensemble situation; a variety of theatre spaces; a company of mixed experience and generations; a repertoire of texts and prolonged periods of employment, all of which can only be offered by a subsidised company. It is desirable that actors develop fresh skills for the ever-evolving world of theatre. If they cease to respond to the theatre of the day they limit their own employment and fail to contribute to the lifeblood of the theatre. Modern actors working on classical texts are constantly challenged to produce naturalism in performance without diminishing the scale of the language.

The revolution in acting style occurs every twenty years or so with predictable regularity. The defining actor of the previous generation has by now influenced all his peers so that his particularities have become clichés. They are used by everybody. It is time for the next defining actor to arrive.<sup>80</sup>

Here Peter Hall describes the dilemma produced by an evolving theatre, where in spite of changing fashions and progressive ideas, there are fundamental skills that must be passed on. These techniques can be explored in the drama schools but only when actors perform can they ever fully test techniques and begin to take their performance to a new dimension. Ensembles offer ideal conditions for the growth of 'defining actors' who need both opportunity to take risks in a safe environment and time in which to develop the confidence needed to break boundaries. LAByrinth, a theatre company in New York with connections with the RSC, believes an ensemble approach can unlock creativity in actors beyond that possible in a linear learning situation<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, London, Oberon Books, 2003, p.191.

<sup>81</sup> David Deblinger, LAByrinth Theatre Company founding member, board member, in an email to Lyn Darnley dated 23 July, 2012: 'I truly believe that the concept of Ensemble building the way we have done it, has the capacity for empowerment. That is, when people spend time in a space of support and encouragement to trust enough to take the types of personal risks for themselves, ones only they themselves are aware of.... the result can be truly powerful. The training we do is less about the rigor of a conservatory or school, especially since our programs are fairly short....and primarily

The desire to link training to theatre establishments is not new and did not begin with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Training in theatres often develops when directors attempt to build an ensemble that reflects their chosen mode of working.

As well as demands created by directors and designers, the changing size and shapes of theatre spaces have presented new challenges to each generation of actors. Changing performance media, including radio, film and television, have had profound effects on the theory and practice of performance. Each new medium increases the need for actors to be flexible and multi-skilled.

In order to understand the desire to create a formal training school in Stratford and the failure of that ambition, it is useful to consider the history of training within the Company.

### **Nineteenth Century Theatre Training**

Concern with training in Shakespeare's time grew out of necessity.<sup>82</sup> Boy actors were needed to play female roles and so were apprenticed. No such apprenticeship existed after the Renaissance period. Imitation of admired actors and first-hand experience were the principal teachers. Formal training began with experienced actors becoming role models, masters and actor managers. Up until the late nineteenth century, many actors came from theatrical dynasties, who handed down skills to new generations, sometimes perpetuating entrenched habits. As greater numbers from non-theatrical backgrounds began to work in theatre, the desire for training grew. At this time it was relatively easy for amateur actors to turn professional. Some attended classes with elocutionists, or joined stock companies such as Sarah Thorn's Margate (1867) company or touring companies such as Ben Greet's (1886) or Benson's Shakespearean Company (1883). Trainee actors working in these companies trained during the day and performed small roles in the evening. They did not always receive payment and in some cases they paid fees. These companies held some values of ensemble such as training and apprenticeship.

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focused upon three tenets. The first is Ensemble Based, and the other two, which spring from the first, are Multi-disciplinary and Self Generating.'

<sup>82</sup> Lyn Darnley, *History of Voice Teaching in Britain*, unpublished M. Phil Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1994. Much of the information in this section is drawn from this thesis.

Elocutionists were responsible for training many British actors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although their work grew out of the popular tradition of 'drawing room entertainment'. In the late nineteenth century the acting profession required a 'proper system' of training for actors so that acting would be respected as a skilled profession. The Royal Dramatic College opened in 1882 with Charles Kean, Ben Webster, Charles Dickens and William Thackeray as trustees, but it closed three years later.<sup>83</sup> In 1890 B.W. Findon, who opposed a state-funded drama school, suggested an amateur dramatic club controlled by professionals as a recruiting ground which 'shall be to the stage what our great military schools are to the army'.<sup>84</sup> The formation of the Actor's Association in 1891<sup>85</sup> and the association's wish to found a drama school prepared the way for the development of the schools of today, some of which were linked to theatres. Tree's Academy of Dramatic Art (established in 1904 and which later became RADA) was originally housed in His Majesty's Theatre, London. In 1906 it was taken over by a council of influential individuals including seven actor-managers and two playwrights.<sup>86</sup>

In Germany resident court theatres flourished and many towns had permanent companies. The Meiningen Company which toured Europe between 1874 and 1890, influenced many including Stanislavski and Antoine as well as Benson and Charles Flower; it had established a reputation for a system that could be described as an early ensemble.<sup>87</sup> In Moscow the Arts Theatre had been established in 1898 and had its own school. The Paris Conservatoire was not connected to a specific theatre but had long had an excellent reputation. Elsie Fogerty, who later established Central School had been a student there.

None of the British schools could be seen as a national conservatoire such as the French had. In 1903 John Hare wrote that only by establishing a

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<sup>83</sup> Ronald Hayman, 'The Actor Prepares – for What?' *Theatre Quarterly*, vol.III, no.11, July-Sept. 1973, p.50.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, London, 1984, p.40.

<sup>87</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp.14-15.

national theatre and conservatory could the English stage 'be rescued from the abyss into which it is falling'.<sup>88</sup>

## **Learning and Ensemble at the SMT and RSC**

This section identifies the directors and chairmen who promoted ensemble and training.

### **Charles Flower**

The development of the Company began at a time when formal training for the theatre was becoming fashionable. In 1874 Charles Flower began to plan for a theatre company at Stratford. His interest went beyond the annual Shakespeare Festival and he had hoped to establish both a permanent theatre and training within the proposed company. That he had been inspired by the work of the Meiningen Company is evident from a speech he made at the Stratford Mayor's Banquet on the 2nd November 1876 in which he spoke of the company which had developed a reputation for its policy of ensemble, training and discipline.

The Actors are each of them thoroughly instructed, and the utmost attention is given not only to the principal parts, but also to the minor characters...The actors feel therefore that as long as they do their duty, their position is secured and permanent...they feel an *esprit de corps*, and work together as members of one body. In every representation the whole of the company is employed, and the actor who takes a leading role one evening may take a minor role the next, or even appear in those parts which, in England, are only filled by supernumeraries. The result is a production as near perfection as possible, and the prestige of the company is great...Well, what a Duke has done at Meiningen, the world at large may do at Stratford.<sup>89</sup>

Had Flower not had foresight and perceived a need for training, it is unlikely the Company would have developed beyond a provincial Festival company.

...Flower had ambitions that were far ahead of his time, which were concerned – not with pieties about the Bard and his birthplace – but with the business of theatre itself, with what kind of company of actors could work at Stratford, and what work they could do.<sup>90</sup>

In a drive to raise additional funds it was announced '...that the theatre would, they hoped, also contain a dramatic school for the training of actors, similar to those that already existed in Europe'.<sup>91</sup> A short statement of the

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<sup>88</sup> Alfred Emmet, *The Long Prehistory of the National Theatre*, *Theatre Quarterly*, 21, Vol.VI, Spring 1976, p.56.

<sup>89</sup> Verbatim Report, *Stratford Upon Avon Herald*, 10 November, 1876.

<sup>90</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.14.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid* p.13.

*Object of the Association, with List of Subscriptions* was published in 1877.

This statement declares the Association's intention to establish a school:

Any funds that may be subscribed beyond the amount necessary to complete and maintain the building and garden, will be applied to the Annual Celebration of Shakespeare's Birthday, the advancement and improvement of the Dramatic Art by the establishment of and maintenance of a School of Acting, the establishment of Prizes for Essays, and the relief and assistance of poor and deserving members of the theatrical profession, as set forth in the certificated Memorandum of Association.<sup>92</sup>

The plans for this school are not clear, nor is it clear if the teaching was to take place within the Company or independently. A school would have solved the difficult problem of attracting actors to Stratford. Whatever his idea was, Charles Flower obviously envisaged a company based on a strong ensemble ethic such as that of the Meiningen Company.

Frank Benson met Charles Flower in 1885 and perhaps their shared admiration for the Meiningen method was a factor in Flower inviting Benson to run the Festival. Benson advertised on posters that his company was run along the lines of the Meiningen Company, which he had seen when it toured to London in 1881. He brought his touring company to Stratford regularly, from 1886 until 1919, missing only five seasons. He encouraged his actors in the virtues of ensemble, and of playing smaller parts as well as leads. Benson, however, repeatedly cast himself in leading roles which is understandable if the company was young and inexperienced. Although Benson performed in Stratford regularly it was for the Festival season only, and it is unlikely that he would have wanted to establish a school in the provinces. In 1901 Benson formalised the teaching within his touring company providing an early example of what might be considered ensemble training, although the cost to the trainee actor was about £50 or £60 for a forty-week tour which contradicts an ensemble ethos. Classes were initially held on tour but later Benson prepared actors for the tour at a school in Hampstead.

In one sense, the company had always been a school: this was merely an official ratification, with formal classes instead of informal aid from seniors to juniors (though that would never cease and was probably more valuable than anything entirely academic). Constance Benson showed now her lively

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<sup>92</sup> Charles Lowndes, Secretary of the Shakespeare Memorial Association, Christmas 1877, published in appendix of *A History of the Shakespeare Memorial*, undated, London, p.66.

talent for teaching...<sup>93</sup>

Paul Berton, a graduate of the Paris Conservatoire was one of the elocution teachers. Norah Nicholson who toured and studied with Benson remembered her classes:

We travelled with the Company, spent our days in class (drama, diction, dancing and fencing) attended rehearsals, when needed, and walked on at night – usually seven plays per week.<sup>94</sup>

Charles Flower and Benson shared a common goal to establish a permanent 'learning ensemble' for the Memorial Theatre. Working at the Festivals over a period of more than thirty years, Benson helped Charles Flower in his attempt to achieve his dream and 'laid the foundations for what came after'.<sup>95</sup> Benson and Elsie Fogerty met at Stratford in April 1903 and together developed the idea of Fogerty providing training in text and voice for Benson's Hampstead school. The school was unsuccessful and closed, but the collaboration led to the establishment of the Central School in 1906 at the Royal Albert Hall where Benson's actors attended classes with Fogerty.

### **Archibald Flower**

Archibald Flower, nephew of Charles, became Chairman of the SMT in 1903 during a productive 'growth period' in British theatre during which there was a sudden interest and development in actor training.<sup>96</sup> Although no National Conservatoire existed, the focus on formal training and access to it was much greater than it had been in Charles Flower's time. Attracting actors to Stratford was still difficult, as it was perceived to be 'very far' from London geographically and artistically and the quality of the acting was not consistently high. In 1907 'stars' from outside Benson's company were invited to play leading roles. In 1910 Benson's company was taken over by a syndicate formed by Archie Flower and renamed The Stratford-upon-Avon Players Ltd. and in 1913 Flower organised two tours, first to the USA and a second to South Africa. This meant that the Company was employed for a

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<sup>93</sup> J.C.Trewin, *Benson and the Bensonians*, London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1960, p.132.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, London, The Athlone Press, 1984, p.34.

<sup>95</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.28.

<sup>96</sup> Earlier some music schools had introduced dramatic training into the curriculum, as had The London Academy of Music which had added 'Dramatic Art' to its title and became LAMDA in 1861. The Guildhall School of Music was formed in 1880 and offered Voice and Speech classes.

full year, and while this was not a permanent company, it would have allowed actors to develop skills, build a sense of ensemble and learn informally from each other.<sup>97</sup> Outside of the Company new ideas were emerging and Archie Flower stayed abreast of developments in actor training:

A major and enduring influence on the directors and actors of the day was William Poel. At least four SMT directors (Bridges-Adams, Iden Payne, Robert Atkins and Barry Jackson) were to be 'deeply influenced by his work'.<sup>98</sup>

Poel attempted to return to a style of performance closer to the Elizabethans.<sup>99</sup> In so doing he created a new movement by reverting to an old one. He sometimes used women to play male roles. In his work as a director and actor he influenced and impressed many who hoped to free the theatre from heavy stage sets and pedantic speech patterns. Poel was also to have an enduring influence through Oxford and Cambridge academics and directors. *The Poel Verse Speaking Competition* for drama students is still held annually, carrying his influence on to new generations of actors.

William Bridges-Adams took over from Benson in 1919 and remained until 1934. A sense of the fashion of delivery can be gleaned from his writing of 'rules that still prevailed in 1900: significant stillness: the gaze preceding the gesture and the gesture the word'.<sup>100</sup> It can be assumed that these principles were taught to the actors by example and through direction. The quality of the performances in Stratford were compared unfavourably to those at the Old Vic. It was noted that productions displayed 'a certain lack of finish and precision...which keeps it below the London standard of acting'. This was claimed by W.A. Darlington, who continued: '...for team-work and acting ability the Old Vic has it nine times out of ten.'<sup>101</sup> Bridges-Adam's work was seen by the *Spectator* as having a feeling for 'the shape and

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<sup>97</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.62.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p.59.

<sup>99</sup> 'William Poel, Harley Granville-Barker, William Bridges Adams and Nugent Monck all worked from the premise that historical fidelity to Elizabethan staging practices would permit the essence of the play to reveal itself', 'Shakespeare and Modernism', Shakespeare and Performance Research Team, McGill University, Concordia University, Dawson College, Universite de Montreal, Universite du Quebec a Montreal, 1997. <http://shakespeare.mcgill.ca/modernism.html>.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.



outline of a play – and – less developed – a feeling for verse'.<sup>102</sup>

The School of Acting had not been achieved, but Bridges-Adams had clear ideas on the demands of classical text which he stated in a letter to John Moore in 1963, long after he had left Stratford.

It has its ancient, proved frame of rules that must be obeyed...Indeed, what we demand of an actor is very much what we demand of a violinist: confident mastery of the way *how* perfect coordination of body and spirit – and the spirit a fine one. But of a *classical* actor we should demand much, much more: he must be spiritually, on a heroic scale, able to do huge things hugely without being absurd.<sup>103</sup>

By 1920 the University of London was offering a Diploma in conjunction with the major Drama Schools. The acknowledgement of 'performance' as worthy of accreditation by a University did much to raise the status of drama. So began the journey towards the study of theatre practice and plays in performance, which today is given serious academic consideration.

In 1923 an Endowment Scheme was started in order to establish a school in Stratford. See Appendix 2.(1). The ambition was for:

...The establishment and maintenance of a school of acting, the delivery of lectures, the establishment of prizes for essays, and other means for the advancement of the Dramatic Art.<sup>104</sup>

The document goes on to describe quite specific facilities:

The Memorial Theatre and Lecture Hall with its Shakespearean Library and various properties can easily be made to serve the purposes of a College of Dramatic Art and Literature of University standard – either a University in itself or affiliated to a University. ...The school of acting should have two chairs.

- (1) Dramatic Art.
- (2) Dramatic Literature.<sup>105</sup>

Students were to be fee paying or on bursaries which would be endowed by cities or towns. Once they had finished their academic course, students would go on to have 'practical training in a No 3 Company touring small towns etc.' then 'pass to a No 2 Company touring larger places, and ultimately those who make good should come into the No 1 or Festival

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> W. Bridges-Adams in a letter to John Moore, 25 June, 1963 in *A Bridges-Adams Letter Book*, Robert Speaight (editor), The Society for Theatre Research, 1971.

<sup>104</sup> Endowment Scheme document 21 February, 1923, SMT, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive. Stratford.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Company.<sup>106</sup> The desire to create a course worthy of accreditation would appear to be in response to the 1920 University of London's Drama Diploma. It would have been prudent to offer training on a par with the best available in London. There is no evidence that the scheme came to fruition but it demonstrates that the need, intention, motivation and vision existed.

The *Royal Charter*, which was granted late in 1925, reiterated the aims of the Memorial Theatre as laid down by Charles Flower and included the establishment of a school of acting.

Three years after the Endowment Scheme was established still no school existed. Archie Flower wrote, 'Tho [sic] I may not live to see it, I can picture the time when there will be a National Theatre in London, doing justice to other dramatists there while we're playing Shakespeare here, and using the perfectly trained Shakespearean Company from Stratford to carry out their winter programme in London. But I like to dream dreams.'<sup>107</sup>

Bridges-Adams commented on the need for the Company to keep working together, saying that touring would allow this to happen:

During the Winter months the theatre must, obviously, be closed. Tours or Seasons during these months therefore become a necessity if the Company is to be kept in permanent being. [...] Far better results are to be obtained by actors, not necessarily of the highest salary, who constantly play together. This, coupled with intelling [sic] and progressive direction, is the main factor in good Shakespearean performances.<sup>108</sup>

What Bridges-Adams expressed is the essence of ensemble playing and suggests he understood the value of informal training offered by touring and working repeatedly with the same group of actors.

In 1934 Elsie Fogerty wrote to Archie Flower: 'I have been thinking very much over your conversation on that day we lunched together. I do not know how things are progressing, but I have in mind a scheme which might enable us to provide you with what you want, without any additional financial responsibility to you.'<sup>109</sup> The letter included a 'Suggested Scheme' which outlined how selected students would be given three-year contracts with the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Archie Flower in a letter to Harley Granville-Barker, 11 August, 1926, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, Stratford.

<sup>108</sup> Bridges-Adams, Letter to Harley Granville-Barker, 26 July, 1926, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, Stratford.

<sup>109</sup> Elsie Fogerty in a letter to Archie Flower, dated 12 July, 1934, Archibald Flower Correspondence, SMT, 1928-1940, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, Stratford-Upon-Avon.

SMT. They would serve a planned 'apprenticeship' which included playing small roles, understudying, touring and even being hired out. They would continue to attend classes at the Central School including advanced work in Voice, Speech and Movement Text Study, Costume and Craft, Physics and Lighting. There is no evidence that this plan was ever implemented but Fogerty's conversation with Flower suggests an interest in collaborating with an established school either because of funding limitations or because Flower realised his long-held ambition for a school in Stratford was unlikely to be achieved. Fogerty's letter and full plan appears in the Appendix 2.(2).

Archie Flower appears to have appointed Iden Payne with actor training in mind possibly because his plans had been frustrated, yet Payne's experience seemed ill suited to the job of running a theatre. Payne, an academic with an interest in training became SMT Director between 1934 and 1943. General Manager, Bill Savery, anticipated problems in a letter to Bridges-Adams in September 1934 in which he applauded Payne's enthusiasm and energy but said:

'...but I hope he will not overdo the scholastic touch. At the moment I feel he thinks he can teach actors to speak Shakespeare. If he or anyone else had the available time it might be possible, but there is no time. For repertory the old Shakespearean actors have to be brought in, and I doubt if their way can be altered...the young members of the profession will not be taught...'<sup>110</sup>

It is possible that teaching was included in his job description but Payne did not appreciate the time constraints and pressures of managing a company. He spent a great deal of time coaching actors in verse speaking and posture, both those in the Company and those whom he auditioned: 'there were long sessions in the director's office with young actors parading back and forth with oranges on their heads to improve posture.'<sup>111</sup> It is evident that Payne had a passion to teach but his ideas were impractical and he was out of touch with theatre training.

During Iden Payne's directorship significant developments were occurring in the Drama school system which were to impact upon the SMT, and again the influence was from Europe. Stanislavski's work was beginning to filter through and influence British actor training.

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<sup>110</sup> Sally Beaman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.142.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

In 1936 the important London Theatre Studio (LTS) opened based upon the teachings of Michel Saint-Denis and inspired by Copeau's *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier*. The same year Michael Chekhov established the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington College. The French and Russian influences were to have a considerable effect on British actors and acting in the years that followed. Whereas earlier training was centred around the teaching of distinct solo skills such as fencing, voice and diction, the new schools were more concerned with the actor's imagination. Exercises were often improvised and included mask work. Saint-Denis' influence was Jacques Copeau who had been inspired by Stanislavsky, Molière and Antoine. Both Chekhov and Saint-Denis looked at emotional behaviour, but with an individual approach. Chekhov contradicted Stanislavsky's concern with the actor's memory and feelings, being more concerned with the feelings of the character. He drew on the work of Rudolf Steiner for voice and movement exercises. Rather than performing in the received manner, both systems fostered an actor's ability to engage the imagination creatively in performance and physicalise the inner experience.<sup>112</sup> There was greater concern with the actor as ensemble member rather than the actor as star solo performer. The voice work at the LTS was taught by Iris Warren and Bertie Scott. (In the late 1950s and early 1960s Iris Warren was to teach the actors at Stratford as part of Hall's actor development system, thereby continuing the connection with the ethos of the LTS.)<sup>113</sup>

In 1937 Randle Ayrton, an accomplished leading Stratford actor who had performed for 40 years, gave up the stage and opened a short-lived college of drama at nearby Alveston. His old home in Stratford had been bought by the Company before the war with the intention of developing a school, but the plan was never realised. In 1945 Barry Jackson became director of the SMT and brought a new 'energy' to the Company, taking it into another phase of artist development. Jackson considered the theatre as a workshop for artistic experiment rather than a museum for the preservation

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<sup>112</sup> Franc Chamberlain, 'Michael Chekov on the technique of acting', *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge, Routledge, 2000, p.80.

<sup>113</sup> Further information on training during the period can be found in Michael Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, London, 1984.

of tradition.<sup>114</sup> This new approach was much needed and seemed to associate Stratford with the more vibrant London theatre culture. Jackson's knowledge of running a successful company and his ability to change the SMT's vision paved the way for Quayle and Hall. He was successful in developing the talents of young actors, among them Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Paul Scofield, Margaret Leighton and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies.<sup>115</sup> His first company, made up largely of young actors, rehearsed each play for a month. His directors included Michael MacOwen (who later became head of LAMDA), Nugent Monck who followed Poel's principles, Dorothy Green who had acted for Benson, and Peter Brook. Brook returned to direct again in 1947 and complained about the quality of the acting and doubted the validity of Jackson's casting policy of 'bringing up' or 'bringing on' and presumably moulding actors through the Company's work, saying:

...the young actors were all in the RADA image, stiff, conventional, and boring, either genuinely upper class, or stilted working class. My Romeo, for instance, was born with a Cockney accent. Now he would have kept it; then he had to learn to talk like a gentleman, and so he could not speak from his heart.<sup>116</sup>

Quayle, who replaced Jackson in 1948 had been a director at the SMT before he became Artistic Director. He was a successful RADA trained actor and brought his practical approach to the SMT. His 'network' included many of the most influential practitioners of the period and he used them and their influence to attract actors of standing to work in Stratford, breaking the 'curse' of the provincial reputation of the SMT. Quayle, like both Charles and Archie Flower and Benson, had ambitions for a school to be attached to the Company but resisted a permanent ensemble, preferring to attract 'stars' to Stratford.

A wholly permanent company is neither desirable, nor with the English theatre system as it is, practicable. A certain degree of continuity is the aim, so that actors, perhaps after two or three years at Stratford, having developed as far as they can in one theatre, should then go out into the

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<sup>114</sup> Phyllis Hartnoll (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1983, p.431.

<sup>115</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.169.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p.184.

world to return later with a fuller experience, greater resource, and added laurels.<sup>117</sup>

The debate about the ideal length of contracts was to continue in the years that followed as actors differed in their preferences, some wanting a sense of permanence, others feeling short contracts allowed them to mix theatre with film and television. (Boyd, like Quayle, preferred contracts of two or three years rather than the ongoing ensembles favoured by Russian companies.)

Another opportunity to establish a school presented itself soon after Quayle joined the SMT. He was a friend of the director/teachers Michel Saint-Denis, George Byam Shaw and George Devine, three of the most influential people in theatre at the time. Devine and Byam Shaw had worked with Saint-Denis at the London Theatre Studio and believed implicitly in his system.<sup>118</sup> The three of them approached the management of the Old Vic (Olivier and Richardson) with an idea for an experimental initiative that would train actors able to respond to the ethos of the theatre:

It would be known as the Old Vic Theatre Centre, and as well as a children's theatre, and an experimental stage project, there was to be a school that would be a successor to the pre-war London Theatre Studio. The purpose of the school would be to supply the Old Vic with its actors, stage managers and designers. It would not be like the general run of schools; not like RADA for example, where young people were turned out to earn their livings in the many different ways beginning to be available to actors. [...] this was to be specifically intended for training students for work at the Old Vic, [with] acting classes which were devoted equally to improvisation and to interpretation.<sup>119</sup>

When the project encountered financial difficulties Quayle thought the situation could be salvaged. Stratford had a company but no school so an

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<sup>117</sup> Anthony Quayle, *Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1948-1950, A Photographic Record*, Reinhardt & Evans, London, 1951, p.14.

<sup>118</sup> Sophie Jump writes in 'The London Theatre Studio' 'Opening first in Diaghalev's old practice rooms in Beak Street the students rotated classes to share the limited space. The LTS was supported by many big names in the theatre world including John Gielgud, Tyrone Guthrie and Laurence Olivier, many of whom contributed financially to the Studio. Finally, with a generous financial help of a production student named Laura Dyas, they were able to purchase an old factory in Islington and bring in the architect Marcel Breuer to convert it into premises for the Studio. Although the LTS only survived for three years, being prematurely cut off by the outbreak of war in 1939, its spirit was carried on under a new name and form in the Old Vic Theatre School (1947-1952) and the influence of both schools is still felt. Saint-Denis was influential in bringing to mainstream British theatre improvisation, mask work and an emphasis on physical and vocal agility. The schools highlighted the importance of the text and a knowledge of the style of the period in which the text was written. It took theatre seriously.' This article is published on a web page devoted to Michel Saint-Denis: <http://michelsaintdenis.net/msd/content/view/47/52/lang,fr/>. 1 August, 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Anthony Quayle, *A Time to Speak*, London, 1990, p.461. The Old Vic Centre ran from 1945-1951 and was run by Saint-Denis.

amalgamation made sense: 'The first alternative was to try to link Stratford with the Old Vic, jointly financing the School.'<sup>120</sup> This was turned down emphatically by both parties, who refused any collaboration:

Yet it was a very good idea: we could have continued producing Shakespeare in Stratford, and the Old Vic could have done the same in London with any other play apart from Shakespeare during the same period. Then, in the autumn, we would change around with our productions coming to London, and the Old Vic's productions going to Stratford.<sup>121</sup>

Quayle also had plans to involve RADA:

At the same time, I also thought it would be a constructive act to incorporate RADA into this scheme of things. There was nothing particularly unique about RADA; no reason why it should be called Royal, and there was nothing different in its training from that of a lot of first-class schools – in fact, the same teachers frequently taught at the same schools. If RADA were to merge with us, then there would be some justification for having the title Royal. It would be serving what was virtually the Royal Theatre – or the National Theatre. To become a student at RADA would be to have a very definite purpose in life, and for the two great theatres, instead of having to fish around in the hodgepodge of actors who might or might not have some training, they would be able to call on students specifically trained for these sort of classic and modern plays they put on.<sup>122</sup>

Quayle could not raise support for this collaboration and his alternative was to offer either Byam Shaw or Devine a position in the Company, working alongside him as co-director. Byam Shaw joined him in 1951. Quayle may not have succeeded in establishing a school, or have believed in the feasibility or absolute benefits of the ensemble, however, with his own practical (rather than academic) RADA training, he understood the need to develop actors capable of meeting the demands of classic and contemporary theatre. Additionally his contacts with and exposure to the new and experimental forces of Saint-Denis, Shaw and Devine meant that the Company was to have an ongoing relationship with these influential minds for many years. His policy of 'bringing on' young actors through constructive casting meant his contribution to actor education during his directorship was considerable. He brought some of the most significant minds in theatre into the Memorial Theatre.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p.162.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.162.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p.163.

Though Quayle's considerable attempts to establish a school failed, he was nevertheless successful in promoting the reputation of the Company largely through his casting policy. By including George Byam Shaw as co-director Quayle connected the Company with the ethos of the LTS and the Old Vic School.

When Peter Hall took over in 1958 the problem of Stratford's provincial location continued and Hall addressed this by bringing leading London teachers to Stratford and created a cohesive programme of training with workshops led by theatre practitioners and experienced actors, and so began a significant period of actor training within the Company. He was joined by resident directors, Michel Saint-Denis and Peter Brook. Hall had a new approach to the long-term desire to have an academy of theatre in Stratford. Whereas Quayle had wanted to form links with the Old Vic Centre and RADA, Hall wanted training to be an integral part of the Stratford ensemble and he set about making the RSC a 'teaching and research institution in order to create a new type of actor, comfortable in both classical and contemporary drama.'<sup>123</sup> He intended to give the ad hoc training that had been offered over the years more structure and in so doing develop a greater sense of ensemble in the Company.

I have found that English actors accept the company principle readily, perhaps because we have, as a nation, elevated the team spirit to mythical heights. We have always leant on the team spirit in times of crisis and this we learnt at school.<sup>124</sup>

Hall introduced voice and movement teachers to develop the Company's skills and employed Michel Saint-Denis to run a studio training programme in Stratford, producing an appropriately integrated alternative to a school. His greatest achievement was to bring together a dynamic mix of talented personalities who were able to pool their diverse skills to create a uniquely inspired experiment.

Hall and his colleagues challenged the traditions of the previous era, replacing painted cloths with solid sets, pictorial fantasy with realism, stilted verse-speaking with a conversational style that, paradoxically, observed the iambic pentameter to the letter. Most importantly, they sought contemporary

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<sup>123</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2004, p.141.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Hall, *Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company 1960-1963*, 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', London, Max Reinhardt Ltd, 1964, p.44.



relevance in Shakespeare and introduced a repertory consisting of both classical and new work.<sup>125</sup>

The international and innovative group reversed the Company's previously isolated and provincial reputation and the ensemble quickly became known as somewhere actors could extend themselves and work with some of the finest theatre practitioners working in Britain.

John Barton was persuaded by Hall to leave Cambridge, where he was a don, and teach verse speaking in Stratford and become an associate director. In addition to the creation of the Studio, Hall wanted to address the radically different styles that the actors had of speaking verse. They were either reproducing the operatic and rhetorical style reminiscent of Benson or they were speaking the verse naturalistically. There was also a varied approach from directors with Glen Byam Shaw insisting on actors acknowledging the end of the line and Tony Richardson telling them to 'Just make it *real*, like any other speech'.<sup>126</sup> Hall felt that 'Shakespearean verse-speaking was *dying* of naturalism'.<sup>127</sup>

A more naturalistic style had been a necessary reaction to the dated style that still existed with some actors and it was also inevitable considering the influence of Stanislavski and Saint-Denis on training, but Hall felt the language and verse structure was being sacrificed for naturalism. He and John Barton developed a way of speaking that was perceived by critics as an RSC style.

...for Hall the theatrical approach to a play, and to verse, was similarly analytic, beginning always from the text and searching it for meaning, symbolism, structure, and ambiguity. To that analytic, textual approach was married the influence of Rylands, and his understanding of shape, form, and colour of verse. It was an approach that had, as Hall noted, a curious Cambridge ambivalence. 'Perhaps our ideal was to speak like Rylands, and think like Leavis.'<sup>128</sup>

Kenneth Rae wrote of the influence of the Cambridge academics on the style of speaking at the RSC in Hall's time:

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<sup>125</sup> Simon Trowbridge, *Stratfordians*, a Dictionary of the RSC, 2003 [www.stratfordians.co.uk](http://www.stratfordians.co.uk)

<sup>126</sup> Peter Hall in an interview with Sally Beauman, 1979, quoted in *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.268.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. The text moves between direct and reported speech which is why some sections appear in quotation marks.

The teachings of FR Leavis were highly influential, also strong was the presence of George Rylands who directed productions in one of the Cambridge University's drama clubs. Rylands had directed Gielgud and Ashcroft in the 1940s and he formed a vital link in a chain of Shakespearean productions that stretched back to William Poel and forward to the consolidating of the Royal Shakespeare Company. John Barton was also an influence at Cambridge. Apart from its literary stimulus, Cambridge had the advantage of several extremely active theatre clubs.<sup>129</sup>

John Barton, interviewed in 1971 by David Addenbrooke, spoke of the need for verse work in the 1960s. (What he said then is equally applicable today.)

It's very difficult for an actor to be at ease in Shakespeare - and on top of the verse - unless he has experience in playing it. Although actors in the fifties had come back for more than one year, the company was mainly formed ad hoc each season. Good actors, experienced in modern theatre or television or film work, are often out of their depth when confronted with a Shakespeare text. It takes time to become easy and proficient with Elizabethan verse, and can rarely be picked up in the course of rehearsing one particular play.<sup>130</sup>

Later in the interview with Addenbrooke, Barton spoke of how his work changed:

I've changed, grown, developed - and I've become more experienced. But the change is hard to put into words. It's a matter of many details. I'm probably more catholic in my tastes now. The main change is probably in how I put things to actors. It's not enough to have the right idea; unless one can find the right and helpful way of expressing it, then the idea is valueless. I've perhaps learnt how to help actors, and to be flexible in approach. The way in which I work on the text has, for instance, changed over the years. It, of course, also changes from play to play.<sup>131</sup>

Hall says that in 1960, 'there was still a gulf of suspicion between theatre people and academics. [...] I think both sides have learnt to appreciate the virtues of each other'.<sup>132</sup> This is mostly true today and can be seen by the now considerable academic interest in writing about 'drama in performance' and in the generally easy way in which academics contribute to the Artist Development Programme and the eagerness shown by actors in gaining access to any additional academic information that may help them in their process. John Barton is renowned no longer just as an academic, but is an acclaimed director and both young and experienced actors in the ensembles

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<sup>129</sup> Kenneth Rea, *A Better Direction*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London, 1989, p.41.

<sup>130</sup> David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Peter Hall Years*, London, McCauley Books, 1974, p.203.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p.209.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p.158.

are eager to work with him and find his approach practical and ‘actor friendly’. Hall and Barton agree that their particular styles have changed over the years with Hall becoming more ‘fundamental’ and Barton moving towards more freedom.<sup>133</sup>

The problem of an ensemble of actors training with directors and practitioners who work with seemingly contradictory approaches to verse-speaking persists and was evident in work between 2003/4 and 2006/7. It is an inevitable consequence of keeping the work innovative but can be confusing for actors, especially those who lack solid experience in the speaking of heightened language and poetry. (This subject is considered further in later chapters where the question, ‘Should the RSC have a policy on verse-speaking?’ arises.)

Hall was also responsible for bringing the two young directors Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands to the RSC. Both would later become Artistic Directors. Nunn wrote of his influence:

In 1965 I had a formative experience. I had been working for the RSC for a year. I had altogether lost my way and was suffering a crisis of confidence. John Barton proposed to me that he and I should collaborate on a re-working of *Henry V*, which had been part of the famous Stratford history cycle the previous year. [...] I learned more about unlocking a Shakespeare text than any scholarship could have taught me.<sup>134</sup>

Hall was inspired by the Moscow Arts Studio which was started in 1912 and aspired towards the European ethos of ensemble and training. He engaged the French director and teacher Michel Saint-Denis, whose role was general artistic advisor but whose principal responsibility was to give training to young actors. In his Studio, Saint-Denis continued the work which he had brought to England from Europe and which revolutionised British theatre training: the involvement of the imagination and the art of improvisation. Before Saint-Denis started the London Theatre Studio in 1935 most theatre training was ‘head bound’ and largely concerned with voice and speech, mime and dance. Unlike physically expressive and experimental European theatre, British theatre was perceived as being essentially concerned with the delivery of the text. Hall attempted to balance a

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<sup>133</sup> Hall and Barton in a discussion on Verse Speaking at Clapham Rehearsal Rooms at the December 2003 start of the 2004 Core Ensemble rehearsals, from notes made by Lyn Darnley.

<sup>134</sup> John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, Foreword by Trevor Nunn, London, Methuen, 1984.

structured approach to text with imaginative and physical work. Saint-Denis had a significant influence on Hall's company and his contribution is cited by Noble and Boyd. His ill health during his time at the RSC meant that his work for the Company was curtailed, but his ideals survived into Michael Boyd's ensemble.

Saint-Denis advocated permanent companies and in-house training, and taught a method of creating theatre that was essentially new on this side of the Channel. Insisting upon long rehearsal periods, the autocratic Saint-Denis looked for truth and meaning in improvisation; he believed that reality on the stage depended upon the discovery of a collective style, and expected his actors to bring to the work everything in their experience of life.<sup>135</sup>

In a manifesto for the Studio, which he wrote in 1962, Saint-Denis put cross-fertilisation between artists at the centre of his work.<sup>136</sup>

Cross-fertilisation was also to be given a central focus in Michael Boyd's 2003 ensemble plan. In the early days of his appointment Boyd frequently mentioned an article entitled 'Three Men Look Ahead' from *The Crucial Years*<sup>137</sup> by Hall, Brook and Saint-Denis and stated that he had been inspired by it. In it Saint-Denis writes:

The Royal Shakespeare's main line of action has, to my mind, the essentials for a theatrical enterprise of artistic ambition....But the Studio's work is more than that. It also includes further training of the actors' technical abilities, and of their creative imagination. Of these, the training of the imagination is by far the more important and the more complicated. [...] It goes from all forms of improvisation silent and spoken, tragic and comic, where the actor must have enough courage and talent to invent everything by himself [...]<sup>138</sup>

In a memo to Hall, Brook and Patrick Donnell, Saint-Denis writes:

We believe that there should be two sides to the Studio work: permanent basic training on voice and movement, verse-speaking and some kind of improvisation. This basic work should be permanent. That is that it should take place during the whole of the Stratford season and be suspended only during the most hectic periods of work from February to April.<sup>139</sup>

In addition to ongoing training, Saint-Denis wrote of a programme of 'Flare-ups':

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<sup>135</sup> Simon Trowbridge, *Stratfordians*, a Dictionary of the RSC, 2003. [www.stratfordians.co.uk](http://www.stratfordians.co.uk).

<sup>136</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2004, p.146.

<sup>137</sup> 'Three Men Look Ahead', from *The Crucial Years*, an RSC pamphlet, 1963, London, Max Reinhardt and the RSC. See Appendix 2.(3).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>139</sup> Michel Saint-Denis, Memo, 'Planning for The Studio and Difficulties to be Solved', 10 September, 1962, Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre Library.

On top of this permanent training, the Studio would flare up into more active and exciting experiments of a limited duration every time a producer is available to do work.

The Maurice Daniels Collection in the Shakespeare Centre contains a number of documents that list the scenes, duologues and monologues which were included in the Flare-Up Showings. An example of these is a 1965 programme of Greek scenes which included Tony Church, Estelle Kohler, Frances de la Tour, David Warner, Susan Engel and Brewster Mason among the participants.<sup>140</sup>

The Studio was for the use of all actors on a non-compulsory basis, except for specific Company calls. The programme included:

Saint-Denis and Suria Magito	Mask
Clifford Williams	Acrobatic and Acting Verse
Gillian Alford	Voice
Denne Gilkes	Singing
Molly Kenny	Movement
John Barton	Fencing, Sword Fighting, Prosody and Poetics
Maurice Jones	Fencing

Tony Church, Hugh Sullivan, Ian Holm and Clifford Rose took tutorials on topics from make-up to verse.<sup>141</sup>

Tutors wrote reports on the work and on each participating actor. Rose reported on verse-speaking classes:

I found generally a great interest and keenness, and a genuine desire for guidance – I think there is a very real need for “terms of reference” in this matter of speaking the verse both rhythmically and meaningfully – there seems to be much confusion about the way one should go about using the means at one’s disposal and also what the “end product” should be like. A few simple basic principles about scansion, stress, feminine endings, caesura, etc., such as were circulated via cyclostyled sheets at the beginning of the 1960 season by Peter Hall, would I feel be of the greatest help.<sup>142</sup>

This reference to Hall suggests a formality in the preferred style of verse.

Notes on actors were detailed and commented on attitude as well as skill

level.<sup>143</sup> Rose wrote of an actor: ‘[He] came to me a great deal and showed

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<sup>140</sup> Royal Shakespeare Studio, Flare-Up Showings, 15 November, 1965, Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre Library.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Three Men Look Ahead’, from *The Crucial Years*, an RSC pamphlet, 1963, London, Max Reinhardt and the RSC, p.147.

<sup>142</sup> Clifford Rose, Report on Verse Tutorials, September to November, 1963, p.1. Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library.

<sup>143</sup> According to a list of Attendances in ‘Studio Report May 6<sup>th</sup>-August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1963’ participating actors included John Corvin, Roy Dotrice, Charles Kay, Jeffrey Dench, Peter Geddis, David Hargreaves,

great enthusiasm and willingness to work on his weaknesses.’ Later in the same report he says, ‘He is best when working quietly, going for the meaning and truth of what he is saying [...] I found this [...] got him away from false rhetoric and generalised emotions’.<sup>144</sup> Geraldine Alford who taught Voice tutorials and who had also taught at the LTS, wrote that although she had full co-operation from those who attended, some benefited more than others. She said of the standard: ‘Generally, I have been struck by the lack of any sound basic training or understanding of the use of the voice, so that bad habits are early set up – (which could easily be removed) – that are due to wrong training (or no training) and therefore ignorance and misconceptions about such basic things as breathing, tone, articulation, etc. become more deeply ingrained as time goes on.’<sup>145</sup> Voice teachers today would encounter similar problems.

Saint-Denis applied his principles of training to the Studio. Interviewed about his approach he spoke of the need for modern actors to be exposed to the work of Brecht and Stanislavski but warned against excessive focus on one approach.

In the Royal Shakespeare Company I have taken charge of a studio, which means that we feel it absolutely necessary to work at the back, and not merely go through the rehearsals and do nothing else – it is necessary to have time to give to the actors all that they should receive for that company to deserve the name of permanent, and to be really up to the work, to the reality we expect they should get in Shakespeare through an allied respect for the form in the Beckett sense. I’m trying to disturb them by putting them into touch – oh, apart from a whole routine of training, we try all the technique of the verse and all that – but also to shake them by putting them into touch with the Brechtian, with the Stanislavskian, with the Absurd...<sup>146</sup>

In a Studio report director William Davis states that the aims of the Studio were:

1. Through classes and rehearsal projects, to assist the development of each actor in relation to both to himself and his fellow actor.

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John Normington, Kenneth Haigh, Roy Marsden, Donald Sinden, David Warner, Brian Jackson, Michael Murray, Cherry Morris, Janet Suzman, Penelope Keith, Susan Engel and Peggy Ashcroft (Movement only) whereas in that particular period Cyril Cusack, Diana Rigg, Ian Richardson, Alec McCowen, and Ian Holm did not participate. Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library.

<sup>144</sup> Clifford Rose, Report on Verse Tutorials, September to November, 1963, p.1. Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library.

<sup>145</sup> Geraldine Alford, Memo, ‘Studio Report – First Phase’ May 6<sup>th</sup>-August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library, p.2.

<sup>146</sup> Michel Saint-Denis, ‘Who Alienated Konstantin Stanislavski?’, *Encore*, vol. 10, no 3, May-June, 1963, pp.30-31.

2. To experiment with both means of releasing an actor's creative talents into theatrical expression.<sup>147</sup>

Colin Chambers (2004) notes that while the Studio was carefully planned the reality was that the demands of the rehearsal and performance schedules created obstacles to the implementation of the work. In a memo from Sandy Black to Studio staff members, some of these difficulties are outlined in the following points:

- 3) There is some feeling amongst some of the company against having directors from the acting members. This has led to some "slight" lack of co-operation.
- 5) The "voluntary" nature of Studio work is difficult to define – especially in understudy work. This has led to some slackness.
- 9) [...] It is difficult to maintain a discipline over a 'voluntary' activity if one cannot have it treated with the fullest respect.<sup>148</sup>

Another difficulty apparent in the Studio documentation was the lack of time allocated to training projects:

Time was obviously the greatest problem. [...] Although one is not working to a performance level, it is important to reach a point of achievement. To do this it is necessary to be able to predict at least roughly the total time one will have.<sup>149</sup>

(Similarly in Noble's The Other Place Projects and Boyd's Artist Development Programme (2003-2007) the ideal was often compromised because of the schedule, unpredictable re-rehearsals, and lack of space. Further allusions to these similarities appear in later chapters.)

Saint-Denis' studio training programme was severely affected by his poor health, but Hall said of the French director and teacher's contribution:

[Yet] Michel's influence on the British theatre directly touched and changed several generations to come. Four major theatres – the Royal Court, the National Theatre, the English National Opera, and the Royal Shakespeare Company – all owe part of their way of working and part of their aesthetic to his ideas.

What he gave the Royal Shakespeare Company and to me, its young founder, is incalculable. The company was callow, messy, bustling, adventurous, all over the place – and he, a man of great wisdom, decided to join the adventure. He gave me ballast and direction when it was critically needed. He spoke to a new ensemble of young actors about the European

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<sup>147</sup> William Davis, 'Royal Shakespeare Company Report, May 1964-March 1965', Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library, p.26.

<sup>148</sup> Sandy Black, Memo 'Understudy Development Scene and Duologues', 16 September, 1964, p.1. Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library.

<sup>149</sup> Un-signed document, 'Studio – Stratford, Nov 12<sup>th</sup> to Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> 1962, Notes and timetable', revised 6 November, 1962, Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre, Library, p.27.

heritage, about Stanislavsky, Copeau and Brecht. He has actually known these men and worked with them. But he did not give us cold theory.<sup>150</sup>

Hall gives an insight into Saint-Denis' approach at the studio in Stratford:

He was a superb teacher who loved the young. [...] He believed, of course, in craft, in technique, but only as a *means*. Acting was not a trick to be learnt and then performed as a mechanical repetition; it was not imitation, but rather revelation of the whole human personality. An actor had not to use acting to hide himself, but to reveal himself.<sup>151</sup>

Colin Chambers states that Saint-Denis 'became increasingly frustrated at the inability of the company to provide the promised support for the Studio. The practical problems of integrating the Studio into the Company's working life became more not less acute and, despite the rhetoric, it enjoyed only a low priority within the burgeoning RSC empire'.<sup>152</sup> The Studio was short-lived and ran from 1962 to 1966 when it was closed because of financial restraints, nevertheless its legacy is substantial.<sup>153</sup> Saint-Denis established five theatre schools during his lifetime including the London Theatre School (LTS) in 1936, The Old Vic Theatre School and the Julliard School in New York.

### **Hall's Legacy**

In the years that followed, Hall was also involved in a drive to establish the National Theatre and the politics and funding issues that surrounded it. This thesis is not concerned with these issues and they are well chronicled. His eventual move to the National and his interest in an RSC merger with the National led the RSC financial committee to believe he was 'empire building'.<sup>154</sup>

Among the many contributions Hall made to creating what is now termed a 'learning organisation' was the development of the RSC Club in 1964 which did much to generate a broader, less stereotypical middle-class audience, by the creation of a mobile unit in order to go out to audiences in the regions. From this grew the 'Actors Commando' which took theatre to factories and halls 'as part of a Human Trailer project which aimed to

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<sup>150</sup> Peter Hall, *Making an Exhibition of Myself*, London, Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993, pp.160-161.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p.161.

<sup>152</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp.150-151.

<sup>153</sup> Boyd's Artist Development Programme started in 2003 and has therefore survived longer than Hall's Studio.

<sup>154</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2004, p.65.



introduce the world of theatre to a non-traditional audience'.<sup>155</sup> This developed into Theatreground, which also offered young actors exciting developmental casting, which may not have been open to them in the main theatre.

Hall was responsible for bringing to the RSC a potent mix of personalities and approaches and creating an ensemble that brought a dynamic combination of the European approach, experimentation and academic thinking, which filtered into British theatre through actors and directors who had experienced it. He was also the first RSC director to employ voice, verse and movement teachers to work regularly with professional actors.

The ensemble ideal and desire for continuing development for artists that was originally instigated by Hall has remained at the heart of the RSC. It is this commitment to production-related and studio-style training and experimentation that has distinguished the RSC from the other large companies in the United Kingdom and abroad.

### **Peter Brook**

Hall considered Brook 'the consistent revolutionary'<sup>156</sup> and felt that he was important, not just for his directing skills, but because of his politics. While at the RSC Brook directed his groundbreaking productions of *King Lear* (1962), *The Marat/Sade* (1964) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970). With his *Theatre of Cruelty Season* (1964) he created his own Workshop Company of young actors and introduced them to the work of Artaud. It is significant that this work came at a time when drama training was undergoing dramatic change in breaking away from traditional British training methods, with the formation in 1961, of East 15 Acting School (inspired by the ensemble approach of Joan Littlewood) and the creation of Drama Centre in 1963, which grew out of the Copeau inspired work of John Blatchley, Yat Malmgren and Christopher Fettes.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Alysia Smith Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006, p.11.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* p.249.

<sup>157</sup> Clive Barker 'Tell Me When It Hurts: the 'Theatre of Cruelty' Season, Thirty Years On'. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 12, Cambridge, pp 130-135.

On Brook's eightieth birthday Charles Marowitz wrote a tribute to him, in which he recalled working with the 'RSC Experimental Group'. This article gives an insight into the way the RSC operated during the sixties and the dynamic created by the desire to bring European influences into the Company:

[Out of these talks] came an invitation to collaborate on the Jan Kott-inspired, Paul Scofield production of "*King Lear*" which Peter was readying for the Royal Shakespeare Company. I was duly taken on as Assistant Director and unofficial dramaturgist [sic] for a walloping twelve pounds a week and immediately entered the charmed circle which was then dominated by Brook, Peter Hall, Michel St. [sic] Denis, and John Barton. My main function in this venture was discussing with Peter the intellectual nuances of Shakespeare's play; ...What struck me most forcibly about Peter's work with the actors was that they were passionate about pleasing him. There was an enormous respect for this -- even then -- legendary theatre director, and all their offerings came out of a psychological context in which they would sooner impale themselves on naked spears than offer routine or sub-standard results to so demanding a director. I discovered that one of a director's most effective tools is the allegiance of a devoted company; but of course, to reap the artistic benefits of that allegiance, the director himself must first have accumulated a track record as impressive as Peter's. ...<sup>158</sup>

The commitment Marowitz describes is remarkable considering the following extract which illustrates the closed attitudes to experimental ideas among British actors of the time.

Improvisation was then something of a dirty word in the British theatre. The more stolid members of the RSC rejected it out of hand and when in 1963 William Gaskill tried to introduce it to members of The National Theatre Company in his production of Farquhar's "The Recruiting officer," one could feel the resistance, like a volt of electricity, shudder through the rehearsal room.<sup>159</sup>

Brook's thoughts on classical text and verse are expressed in his article *What About Real Life?* in *The Crucial Years*, in which he speaks of the dilemma facing young actors when dealing with Shakespeare:

We must wean the actor away from a false belief: that there is a heightened playing for the classics, a more real playing for the works of today. The problem for the actor is to find a way of dealing with verse: if he approaches it too emotionally, he can end up in empty bombast; if he approaches it too intellectually, he can lose the ever-present humanity; if he is too literal, he gains the commonplace and loses the true meaning.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Charles Marowitz, *Swans Commentary*, 'Peter Brook at Eighty', 6 June, 2005. [www.swans.com](http://www.swans.com)

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Peter Brook, 'What About Real Life?' in *Three Men Look Ahead*, from *The Crucial Years*, an RSC pamphlet, 1963, London, Max Reinhardt and the RSC.

Brook's awareness of the need to assist actors in the struggle to find a way to balance the commonplace with the scale of human emotion and heightened language in Shakespeare's texts continued to fuel training within the Company. His influence on Cicely Berry led to a freer approach to language within the RSC (see Chapter 3) but it was Hall and Barton who took on the challenge of verse speaking.

### **Hall's Continuing Influence on Verse**

Hall's influence on verse speaking is considerable and divides actors and directors, some of whom feel he is over rigid, but Hall stands by his ideals and insists that actors in his productions speak the text according to his principles.

Sir Peter told the cast how he himself had learned "to speak Shakespeare" from Edith Evans, who had learned it in turn from William Poel, who directed her as Cressida in 1912. It was a technique, he said, that could be traced back to Kean and Garrick, and it sounded awfully obvious – when to take breaths, what syllables to emphasize, how to give shape to the rhetorical structure of the verse. But, as the following weeks made clear, it is actually quite difficult and requires immense self-discipline. In the rehearsal room he is adamant that actors should do the work in his way. When he directed his 1995 RSC production of *Julius Caesar*, he made this clear to the actors saying 'If you are not prepared to do it my way, now is the time to leave.'<sup>161</sup>

Shakespearean academic and author, James Shapiro, observed Hall work in New York and his article in the *New York Times* in 2001 reports Hall saying:

'You will, please, all speak this the same way. And if you don't like it, don't be in it. It's not my method, it's the method and it works.' He added: 'Shakespeare tells you when to go fast, when to go slow. You can read it like a score. He doesn't tell you the 'why'. 'Why' is your problem.'<sup>162</sup>

This quotation expresses the positive outcome of all verse work: that attention to the language, as written, enhances the emotional life of the text in a way that initial attention simply to the emotions does not. Shapiro returned to the rehearsal room several days later and commented:

...a transformation had occurred. Mr. Kern was now speaking Shakespeare with great fluency. Except for the occasional stumble, so, too, was everyone else. What had been a jumble of words just a few days earlier had somehow sorted itself out. As character and motivation came into sharper

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<sup>161</sup> Peter Hall, during rehearsals for *Julius Caesar*, Stratford, 1995, from notes taken by Lyn Darnley.

<sup>162</sup> James Shapiro, 'Theater; Nurturing An English Flame in America', *New York Times*, 1 April, 2001.

focus through the language, the taut emotional energy of the play filled the rehearsal space<sup>163</sup>

Hall has remained a self-confessed 'Iambic Fundamentalist'. His approach is sometimes criticised as being too rigid for contemporary actors to embrace because he requires absolute adherence to his system. Dame Peggy Ashcroft, who was very much part of Hall's RSC, illustrates that his direction goes beyond the verse:

I would say two things about Peter. He had an academic's understanding of what Shakespearian verse is and he was anxious to have this verse spoken correctly and precisely. But he was also deeply concerned (and this is what distinguishes him from most other directors of Shakespeare) with what he believed was the overall conception of the play. Peter was very much interested in the political aspects of the plays, in *The Wars of the Roses* there was so much that was political. Peter had the ability to impress on his actors, that the chief interest in a production was the meaning of the play rather than a series of splendid individual performances.<sup>164</sup>

Hall's influence on Boyd's Artist Development Programme is marked. Michael Boyd, acknowledging the inspiration he drew from the pamphlet, *The Crucial Years*, at the introduction to the 2004 ensemble in December 2003, stated his desire was to generate a similar ethos of ensemble, training and development.

Hall, who was evidently aware of the need to keep questioning and reviewing the work and to avoid the Company's practice from becoming entrenched, said: 'My successor had to belong to the next generation. It had to be someone who would challenge what I and my colleagues had done.'<sup>165</sup>

### **Trevor Nunn**

In 1968 Trevor Nunn (Artistic Director 1968-1978) took on the mantle of Artistic Director and Brook continued to direct for the RSC until his celebrated 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Nunn had been a protégé of Hall's and as an assistant director had learned the value of a theatre apprenticeship. He was also an associate director before he went on to succeed Hall in 1968 at the age of 28.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Peter Hall Years*, London, McCauley Books, 1974, p.192.

<sup>165</sup> Sally Beaman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp.292-293.

Although Nunn had no experience of running a company he inherited a strong company of actors and directors. Colin Chambers said: ‘...the company under Nunn kept the social backdrop in sight but turned to a more private and personal scrutiny, a more romantic speaking style and a sharper, more intensive use of colour’.<sup>166</sup>

Of the many positive aspects of his leadership, the establishment of The Other Place (1973) and the Swan were perhaps the most notable. The Swan (1986) became the favourite Stratford theatre because of the warmth and flexibility of the space and its Elizabethan theatre atmosphere. When Nunn established The Other Place he introduced an era of experimentation that fuelled the development and training opportunities in the Company.

It is good for a company of our size to have a place in which to challenge itself and try different approaches. How else do we keep moving while remaining responsible to our paymasters and maintaining our standards? There has to be a tension inside a company like the RSC between the new and the established.<sup>167</sup>

As well as producing Shakespeare, Nunn developed the Company’s commitment to new writing at The Other Place and at the Warehouse in London. In 1969 Nunn instilled a work ethic reminiscent of the laboratory ideals of Hall’s studio, but with his personal imprint. His emphasis on small-scale productions and touring meant that actors were able to play roles they might not have done in larger-scale productions.

...Nunn placed small-scale work at the centre of the RSC’s activities, a permanent feature that changed the culture.<sup>168</sup>

Hall’s Actor’s Studio had operated outside the main Company but Nunn’s system of training, like Boyd’s many years later, was integrated across the Company and influenced the Company culture:

Nunn wanted to create a rehearsal room with a very different atmosphere, a room that might function as a chapel would within a monastery, a place of serenity in which notices requesting quiet would be superfluous, where actors would practise their art with a priestly dedication. The emphasis was to be on self-improvement: the actors were asked to come in early, in tracksuits, for exercise sessions. The old company learning ideals were re-emphasized, and the notice boards bristled with rosters for classes – singing

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<sup>166</sup> Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.61.

<sup>167</sup> Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces, New Theatre and the RSC*, London, A Methuen Theatrefile, 1980, pp.85-86.

<sup>168</sup> Simon Trowbridge, *Stratfordians*, a Dictionary of the RSC, 2003, [www.stratfordians.co.uk](http://www.stratfordians.co.uk).

classes, movement classes, sonnet classes. It was to be, literally, a clean sheet, a fresh start.<sup>169</sup>

Nunn took the Company to the regions and established the Newcastle Season, creating a relationship that has flourished beyond his directorship and over the last 30 years has grown to include workshops for local actors, drama students and schools and a relationship with the universities, Theatre Royal, Northern Stage and Live Theatre.

Nunn believed in the need to keep the Company together, working as an ensemble. He blamed financial restrictions for getting in the way of an ideal ensemble ethic: 'A mixed economy has meant that the RSC has never got beyond the appearance of 'ensemble' working.'<sup>170</sup> He echoed Saint-Denis in his desire for permanence, ensemble and training and although his move to shorten actor's contracts seems to contradict a sense of ensemble, he felt that 'The necessary work can only be done by permanence'.<sup>171</sup> Finding an ideal contract length has continued to be an issue for the RSC.<sup>172</sup> Nunn brought new actors and directors to the Company who were destined to shape its identity.<sup>173</sup>

When the RSC moved to the Barbican in 1982 there was an attempt to build a relationship with The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, which was also based in the Barbican Arts Centre:

With the RSC move to the Barbican, Tony Church, one of the company's leading actors, became director of drama. RSC personnel – directors, actors and members of the technical, voice and literary departments – took part in the school's teaching. With his departure in 1989, the links remained but gradually became more informal. The RSC Trust funded a Guildhall student bursary before the RSC left the Barbican.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Sally Beaman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company, A History of Ten Decades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.298.

<sup>170</sup> Trevor Nunn, in the Afterword, David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: The Peter Hall Years*, London, McCauley Books, p.183.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Some agents preferred shorter contracts as they allowed actors to do film and television. Noble wanted to offer various contract lengths and Boyd continued to work for longer contracts for the core ensemble and build the ensemble ethic within the short-term solo companies.

<sup>173</sup> Nunn introduced actors such as Janet Suzman, Ian McKellen, Ben Kingsley, Roger Rees, Francesca Annis, Patrick Stewart, Michael Pennington and Richard Johnson, and directors such as John Caird, Ron Daniels and Buzz Goodbody. He also engaged Cicely Berry to establish a Voice Department.

<sup>174</sup> David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: The Peter Hall Years*, London, McCauley Books, Note 9, p.240.

Although some students were able to appear as super-numeraries in RSC productions, the occasional contact did not constitute collaboration.<sup>175</sup> In 1978 Nunn became joint Chief Executive with Terry Hands in order to be able to work commercially.

### **Terry Hands**

After helping found the Liverpool Everyman Theatre in 1964, Hands<sup>176</sup> joined the RSC in 1966 to direct Theatregoround; in 1978 he became Joint Chief Executive with Nunn and in 1986 Hands took over the artistic leadership of the RSC. Hands continued to use talented actors including Ben Kingsley, Charles Dance, David Suchet and Helen Mirren. His work was considered exciting, stylish and original, but there is no evidence of formal training during Hand's directorship. His contribution to training was largely through the opportunities created by Theatregoround and the way in which he developed young actors of merit by giving them principal roles.

Although the formal structure of Hall's Studio was abandoned, Nunn and Hands must be credited for developing actors through casting and with the foresight they had in employing two women, Buzz Goodbody and Cicely Berry, and bringing them into the male stronghold of the early RSC. Nunn should be recognised for establishing the first Voice Department in a British theatre, creating the role of theatre-voice practitioner, providing a second career for trained actors and offering additional verse, text and voice support for actors and directors.

### **Buzz Goodbody**

In 1967 Buzz Goodbody joined the RSC as John Barton's assistant and in 1969 she became an assistant director. Her contribution to the Company was considerable, although cut short by her tragic suicide in 1975. In November 2005 an event entitled 'Remembering Buzz' was held in the Swan Theatre and attended by actors and directors who had worked with her. The programme notes describe her early career and how John Barton offered her a job at the RSC after seeing her production of *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoyevsky, which she had adapted from the novel.

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<sup>175</sup> An example of student super-numeraries is the 1993 production of *Tamburlaine* directed by Terry Hands after he had left the Company.

<sup>176</sup> Terry Hands was joint Chief Executive with Trevor Nunn from 1978-1987 and Chief Executive Artistic from 1987-1991.

Buzz's early work in Stratford was indicative of the kind of theatre she would come to be so closely identified with – shows that were small-scale, intimate, and most of all accessible. Her time was initially devoted to the company's experimental touring unit Theatregoround. It was here that she created her production of *King John*. The show provoked a mixed response; some of the national critics were quite savage in their assessment of the show, whilst the local papers were considerably more sympathetic. What was most unusual about the production was its political radicalism and its willingness to engage directly with the politics of the day.<sup>177</sup>

Colin Chambers says she felt the 'disadvantage of being a woman in an overwhelmingly male Company'.<sup>178</sup> Her politics were central to her work: 'Unless classical theatre becomes the property of the whole of society', she said, 'it will atrophy.'<sup>179</sup> A criticism of the RSC is that few women have directed in the large RST space.<sup>180</sup>

Goodbody had been inspired by Brook's work after seeing his *King Lear* at the Aldwych when she was 15: 'I emerged [from it] dazed – realising THAT [sic] was what it had been about all the time, simple but revelatory. Anyone who has experienced the immense emotional impact of Shakespeare when young knows that the plays can work for an audience who maybe won't follow the complexity of certain thematic ideas or even understand the language.'<sup>181</sup> Goodbody focused on creating meaningful theatre for young people and although she did not teach formally, her direction left a lasting impression on many who worked with her and is evidence of the powerful impact informal and spiral learning can have on actors.

Her open-minded, magpie approach, using anything that was useful, helped her create volatile rehearsals in which actors felt pushed, but able to look at themselves and to work closely on a text in a practical and precise way from their own experience rather than through analogy, whether they were playing sympathetic characters or not. Her way of freeing actors to find out for themselves, though along lines she had laid down, made a unique impact

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<sup>177</sup> Programme notes from 'Remembering Buzz', held in the Swan Theatre, November, 2005.

<sup>178</sup> Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces, New Theatre at the RSC*, London, 1980. p.12.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>180</sup> Although male directors working in the RST far outnumber women, the situation is improving. Since 2000 the following women have directed productions in the RST: in 2001 Rachel Kavanaugh directed *Alice in Wonderland*; Nancy Meckler directed *Romeo and Juliet* (2005), *A Comedy of Errors* (2006) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2011) and in 2012 Lucy Bailey directed *The Taming of The Shrew*. The 2013 season includes *The Winter's Tale* directed by Lucy Bailey, *As You Like It*, directed by Maria and *All's Well That Ends Well* directed by Nancy Meckler.

<sup>181</sup> Buzz Goodbody, *King Lear* programme, as quoted by Alycia Smith-Howard in *Studio Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place*, 2006, p.80.



(which they readily acknowledge) on many actors, including Sheila Allen, George Baker, Tony Church, Ben Kingsley, and Patrick Stewart.<sup>182</sup>

Goodbody increased the educational role of the Company and established greater contact between audience and actors by initiating post-show conversations which began in 1974 when Goodbody was determined that the actor-audience divide should be removed.<sup>183</sup> In a *King Lear* programme note Buzz Goodbody wrote:

Finally, after every performance, we also spent half-an-hour with the audience who were able to stay, discussing the play. Splitting up a company round the auditorium, we found, worked best and our aim was to allow them to talk rather than say it ourselves.<sup>184</sup>

Goodbody has left a legacy of experiment and development and clearly had an influence on actors, some of whom could be termed 'defining actors'. Fittingly a rehearsal studio in The Other Place was named after her.

From the foregoing we can determine that many of the early directors and chairmen believed that the company's future would be best served by the establishment of an ensemble rather than a series of freelance actors working in 'one-off companies'. The company records show evidence of a desire, not always successfully implemented, to establish both an ensemble and some form of regular training. Initiatives to train actors and create ensembles are recorded and though these have been sporadic; several showed considerable foresight in their planning.

Aspects of ensemble operation were encouraged from the start: Charles Flower and Frank Benson were inspired by the Saxe-Meiningen Company where teaching supported the work on stage and for a time Benson's company had a school attached to it; under Archie Flower, Benson's company was taken over in 1919 and renamed The Stratford Upon Avon Players, Ltd., creating a resident company with extended contracts and international touring. In 1923 an Endowment Scheme was started in order to establish a school as part of the Stratford company and the Royal Charter

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<sup>182</sup> Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces, New Theatre at the RSC*, London, 1980, p.13.

<sup>183</sup> Dympna Callaghan, *The Aesthetics of Marginality: The Theatre of Joan Littlewood and Buzz Goodbody*, 1995, p170. 'Across the road from the prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon is a small tin hut.' Goodbody argued: 'The theatre has got to become much more of an education centre than it is at the moment. There should be talk-ins and teach-ins with the actors and producers for anyone who wants to come'.

<sup>184</sup> Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces, New Theatre at the RSC*, London, Methuen, 1980, p.13.

(1925) stated this as an aim. In 1934 Elsie Fogerty and Archie Flower corresponded about a proposed collaboration between Central School and the Company which would have met ambitions for integrated ensemble teaching; again this project failed. In 1945 Barry Jackson focused on artistic experiment but there was no further attempt to create a school until Quayle's frustrated efforts with the Young Vic and RADA in 1948. Quayle was also reluctant to give up his star-system in favour of an ensemble, believing it that it was the only way to attract respected, skilled actors to Stratford. It was only in 1960, that Hall, with the support of chairman Fordham Flower, achieved the ensemble ideals of extended contracts, experimentation, cross-generational teaching, integrated and formal training and artistic excellence through the development of a semi-permanent ensemble, though even he preferred three year contracts to a permanent European-style ensemble. Under Nunn and Hands, the structure was modified again due to the high cost of maintaining an ensemble. Contracts became shorter and training less formal. Nunn created a Voice Department when he brought Cicely Berry into the Company to participate in the rehearsal process. Although classes were still offered, development for young actors relied more on rehearsal process, the benefits of touring with Theatreground and casting opportunities that promoted artistic growth.

The desire to create a suitable British ensemble illustrates a vision not only to emulate European ensemble values of companies such as the Comedie Francaise, Berliner Ensemble or Moscow Art Theatre, but to achieve an ensemble structure sympathetic to the theatre culture and training traditions of the United Kingdom. Attempts to link the company with training institutions suggest an awareness of the significance of drama training to the future of classical theatre. The achievement of Hall's ensemble and the establishment of a studio (albeit short lived), makes clear the company's commitment under his artistic leadership to integrated ensemble training and artist development.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Cicely Berry and RSC Voice Pedagogy

#### The Influence of Hall, Barton and Berry on Verse Speaking

It is noteworthy that the three leading influences on verse speaking developed their craft at the RSC. Each evolved their own system which has been instrumental in the training of actors. Hall and Barton have approached verse from a literary perspective, helping actors to access language and verse through structure and intellect. Berry has approached the same texts from a visceral, physical starting point that produces muscular commitment in the speaker. Hall has remained true to a defined set of rules while Barton has relaxed an originally rigid approach and now focuses on helping actors convey meaning through the language with fewer references to structure. All three avoid starting with emotion and begin with the language.

It is worth considering whether Berry's contribution to theatre would have been greater if she had concentrated on direction or whether her position as the world's leading voice teacher allowed her to reach an even wider 'audience' of actors, directors, writers and educationalists than would have been possible as a director. I believe the latter to be true, as she has achieved much through the world-wide distribution of her books, particularly *Voice and the Actor* and *The Actor and the Text*<sup>185</sup> and has travelled internationally to teach workshops. Whenever possible she has taught with the help of translators in order to work in the language of the host communities in Europe, China, Africa and Brazil.

Berry's contribution has been recognised by the British theatre industry and some academics. In 1999 the University of Birmingham awarded her an Honorary Doctorate and in her acceptance speech she said:

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<sup>185</sup> Cicely Berry, *Voice and the Actor*, London, Virgin (new edition) 2000 and *The Actor and the Text*, London, Virgin (new edition) 2000. The many editions of her books are proof of the breadth of their influence.

I feel it is a great honour – particularly so because for me it validates the work I have been able to pioneer and develop with the actors of the Royal Shakespeare Company over the past thirty years.<sup>186</sup>

She added that she had secretly felt the lack of a traditional university education, yet it is probably because of her unconventional mind-set and her non-conformist, tradition-challenging approach that her innovative work in the field of verse and text has caught the imagination of actors, directors and teachers. Had she been educated at Oxford or Cambridge like so many of the directors she worked with, she may not have had a practical understanding of an actor's need to *enter* the language physically and vocally as well as to understand it on a cerebral level. It is a combination of her practical training, her personal passion for verse, the individuals and circumstances she encountered in the theatre, which prepared the way for her to evolve a system whereby actors arrive at an understanding of text by physical and vocal engagement of breath and vibration, muscularity, sound and gesture.

### **Cicely Berry's Achievements**

Cicely Berry's contribution to actor and director training is on a par with John Barton's and merits in-depth consideration both in the context of the history of training in the RSC and in actor-training in general. Her books provide systematic evidence of her approach and her work has been critiqued by practitioners and academics and consequently raised awareness among theorists, of theatre-voice practice within the RSC, in training institutions and in the industry.

Berry has been both a text and voice teacher and a director.<sup>187</sup> She pioneered the role of the Theatre-Voice practitioner, who works specifically with performance-related vocal and textual needs of actors. She has done much to encourage the language skills of RSC artists through the establishment of the Voice Department, which provided the most structured and consistent offer of artist development under Nunn, Hands and Noble. In

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<sup>186</sup> Cicely Berry, Doctorate Acceptance Speech, University of Birmingham, 14 July, 1999. Other honours she has received are: 1997: Doctor Honoris, National Academy of Film and Theatre Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria; 1999: Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Birmingham University; 2000: The Sam Wanamaker Prize for Pioneering Work in Theatre; 2001: Honorary Doctorate of Literature from the Open University

<sup>187</sup> Cicely Berry directed *Hamlet* for the National Theatre Education Unit in 1986 and *King Lear* for the RSC in 1989.

order to more fully understand her approach it is necessary to look at some of her most powerful influences.

Her training was at Central School of Speech and Drama in the years when Gwynneth Thurburn was principal and Berry credits Thurburn with both inspiration and a sound training in voice, verse and language.<sup>188</sup>

Gwynneth was a most progressive and radical figure. What was so good from my point of view was the emphasis on text work in both the actor and the teacher-training. [...] what was important for me then was the time taken on the groundwork; groundwork in terms of metre, verse form, figures of speech etc., which opened the ear to the possibilities of formal language, and gave one the confidence to listen – and also to appreciate what was formal and what broke rules – in other words what was ‘other’, and therefore interesting in another way.<sup>189</sup>

This illustrates that Berry’s work to ‘free the text’ is built on a strong basic grounding of verse and language, a foundation which currently is under-resourced in many drama schools, although Berry’s work on freeing language has been adopted in most UK drama schools. Another influence was her late husband Harry Moore, an American actor who trained in, and taught, the Method.

[But] two things had a great bearing on the work I did: one was an interest in language and how it could be communicated, and the other was the effect of method work on the approach to acting and how that was interpreted here: I wanted to find out how these could interrelate. In this respect I was influenced by the work of my husband, Harry Moore, an American actor and teacher who had trained in the Method studio in New York: I began to seek ways of making language relate in different ways to motive and feeling without losing its music.<sup>190</sup>

Berry realised that the Method would strongly influence actor training in Britain but felt that there was a need to help actors trained in this way to communicate textual detail, character and perceived truth to large audiences by focusing on the language rather than volume and generalised emotion. Finding synergy between old and new traditions became crucial.

The result was that the actor’s position regarding the text shifted: because motive and inner feeling did not always coincide with structure and rhetoric, no longer was the way to speak classical text a clear-cut process.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> In September 2012 The Central School of Speech and Drama honoured Cicely Berry’s contribution as a teacher, author and director and appointed her an honorary Vice Chancellor. They also commissioned a portrait to be hung alongside portraits of Elsie Fogerty and Gwynneth Thurburn.

<sup>189</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, p.287. (The book was originally titled *The Actor and His Text*, London, Harrap, 1987.)

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p. 288.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

Berry, who joined the Company in 1970, was not the first voice teacher at the RSC. Iris Warren<sup>192</sup> had given classes on Saturday mornings, Dene Gilkes<sup>193</sup> had taught actors privately and Geraldine Alford had been on the staff of Saint-Denis' Studio, but Berry was the first to be fully integrated into the rehearsal process.

### **Working with University-Educated RSC Directors**

Berry arrived at the RSC to work with an all-male group of directors, most of whom were educated at Oxford or Cambridge. That they felt that the Company would benefit from someone used to training actors is evident, but whether they imagined her work would be concerned with anything other than clarity and well-produced vowel sounds is doubtful. Her approach to language differed from that of Poel-Rylands-Leavis-influenced directors, Peter Hall, John Barton, Terry Hands and Trevor Nunn, although she acknowledged that she learned much from the work of Hands, Nunn and especially Barton. As a result of a need to find a different but complementary approach, she formulated a dissident and non-conformist methodology, often challenging the status quo by disrupting 'smooth speech' through exploring the sound-scape, physicalising language and releasing the in-built rhythms of the text.

### **Evolving a Theatre-Based Approach**

Her approach evolved in rehearsal rooms where she sought for practical ways for actors to access the text without losing the integrity demanded by contemporary training, or disrupting the director's process. Her work is evidence of what can be generated in a creative environment and illustrates what a catalyst for creativity and innovation the Company can be. Trevor Nunn wrote in the foreword to *The Actor and The Text*:

[She has] an explorer's obsession, a radical's fervour and a philosopher's generosity; she is a voice teacher with a mission. Her uniqueness and authenticity have made her work a fundamental part of the RSC's achievement.<sup>194</sup>

These comments suggest that Berry's personality was as potent as her

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<sup>192</sup> Iris Warren had taught with Saint Denis at the London Theatre Studio and then at LAMDA. Her work inspired Kristin Linklater and her approach is developed in Linklater's work.

<sup>193</sup> Dene Gilkes was a local singing teacher who gave singing and voice classes to RSC actors for many years.

<sup>194</sup> Trevor Nunn, *The Actor and The Text*, by Cicely Berry, London, Virgin, 1992, Foreword, p.7.

practice but she had to work for recognition and status in a male-dominated environment. She recalled her early years at the RSC in an interview with *Plays and Players*:

'When Trevor Nunn took over, he thought there should be a voice director attached to the company. He went to somebody else first,' she laughed, 'and then came to me. I didn't know anyone with the RSC but I had taught a number of well-known actors like Sean Connery and Peter Finch at my private studio in the West End.'<sup>195</sup>

Initially Berry worked four days a week pioneering her work and forging relationships with actors:

To begin with, I only worked with people who knew of me, like Judi Dench who had worked with me at the Central School of Drama. But some actors, quite nicely, didn't want to know about it, which was fair enough. But there were these young ones like Roger Rees and Ben Kingsley and, as they came up, the whole thing gradually grew.<sup>196</sup>

She also had to work to win the trust of directors who at first were nervous about her intervention:

Directors were very suspicious. It took me seven or eight years before nobody questioned what I was going to do with them. Directors nurse their actors very carefully. You can do a lot of damage if you give insensitive criticism or stir it at all between the director and an actor.<sup>197</sup>

Although she valued her training highly, she was aware that some traditional voice exercises were not ideal for contemporary actors. The rigid breathing system, known as rib-reserve, was taught to everyone regardless of size and shape and created tension in many people, particularly women. While this system had been practiced by actors since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it began to meet with criticism and from the 1970s was considered 'held' and thought to restrict vocal spontaneity.

I taught this way for a while and then I began to think it was over-disciplined and over-controlled. Particularly since I've been with the RSC, I've developed a way of working that means finding the breath and centering the body but not being quite so over-controlled. The old way made one think that the voice was too much like an instrument we use, rather than a part of ourselves. For instance, we have to develop our breathing so that it is to do with what we want to say, deeply rooted in our emotions.<sup>198</sup>

Berry relaxed her approach to voice work and as a lone pioneer in the

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<sup>195</sup> Kate Parker 'Goodbye, Voice Beautiful', *Plays and Players*, Issue 382, July 1985, p.32.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

text field, she developed exercises that allowed the actor to form a more specific relationship to language.

Looking back on it, I think I always felt that what was being said was the most important thing, rather than what it actually sounded like, although I never consciously came to that decision. Young actors couldn't cope with the 'voice beautiful' attitude. It didn't mean anything to them. It had to change because of what was being said in the theatre. I didn't make any conscious decision about it, my methods just changed because I had to be alive to what was happening all around.<sup>199</sup>

Berry is an able verse speaker and understands the art from a performer's perspective.<sup>200</sup> She has a profound knowledge of poetry, poets and poetic style and brings this practical experience to her work with actors. Being in the rehearsal room rather than teaching in isolation required different exercises. The rehearsal process brought her into contact with Peter Brook, who became a major influence on her work.

### **Inspiration from Peter Brook**

Berry worked on Brook's production *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which J.L. Styan dubbed the 'Shakespeare Revolution'<sup>201</sup>. The production falls into the period that has become known as Brook's transitional or second phase.<sup>202</sup>

..the 1960s marked a period of significant development for Brook in terms of his conception of the training of actors. He used detailed exploration of improvisatory techniques to dislodge actors from reductive psychological behaviourism, and, as they began to tap other energies, Brook was able to recognise their creative primacy.<sup>203</sup>

Inspired by his ideals, Berry devised improvisational text exercises within strongly defined structures to 'dis-lodge' actors from a pre-conceived performance and allow them to work spontaneously with language. Brook's example allowed her to find routes into the 'actor's intelligence' physically, rather than them trying to understand the text through academic intelligence. Brook and Berry were like-minded with regard to what is perceived as 'good

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> I produced two poetry CDs, *Cicely Berry Reads* (2004) and *Cicely Berry's Favourite Poems* (2009), because I believed it was important to record Berry performing poetry for posterity and future research. The recordings illustrate her skills with language, her natural sense of rhythm as well as her generational influences.

<sup>201</sup> J.L.Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution, Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.6.

<sup>202</sup> Lorna Marshall and David Williams, 'Peter Brook: transparency and the invisible network', *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge (ed.), London, Routledge, 2000, p.175.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p.176.



speech'. Brook gave this advice to actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

All that you are doing [...] is getting the words out well. [...] The moment you go into pathos, you are playing the wrong line completely. If you cultivate emotional states [...] you cannot find anything. When your emotions swamp your sense of what is happening second-by-second, you are wrong! [...] It is the difference between generalized emotion and being with the intimate course of the unfolding words. In it, every word is an action.<sup>204</sup>

These allusions to 'correct speech' and generalised emotion illustrate a meeting point for Berry and Brook, as does a reference to the dangers of superficial intellect made by Yoshi Oida, who worked extensively with Brook:

You have to work at a deeper level than that of the intellect. As a result, each time you 'exchange', something inside you changes in reaction. From moment to moment you alter and respond. In this way, as the sounds and movements are exchanged, your inner being constantly shifts.<sup>205</sup>

Berry like Brook encourages actors to avoid getting 'fixed' in a pattern and both share a commitment to 'the ritual properties of language', particularly rhythm and breath, but Brook went on to develop his interest in the formulation of other 'languages' because of his dissatisfaction with 'the language of words'.<sup>206</sup> Berry has remained constant in her belief that words, when physically embodied and used with muscularity and commitment suffice, and that their sound-scape contributes to the multi-layered textures of meaning. Both focus on the power of the sound dynamics of words as well as their literal meaning and both believe that the actor must not over-colour words but that words should 'work on' and affect the speaker and audience:

'You must act as a medium for the words,' Brook told him. [John Kane] 'If you consciously colour them, you are wasting your time. The words must be able to colour you.'<sup>207</sup>

Both believe that a solid skill-base must be acquired by actors; the voice, like the body, must be 'open and free'.<sup>208</sup> Other specific similarities are their desire to *unsettle* the actor's habitual patterns; to develop dexterity in the individual and in the ensemble; and to encourage actors to articulate different

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<sup>204</sup> David Selbourne, *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream*, London, Methuen, 1982, p.79.

<sup>205</sup> Lorna Marshall and David Williams, 'Peter Brook: transparency and the invisible network' *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge (ed.), London, Routledge, 2000, p.182.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p.77.

<sup>207</sup> Peter Brook, *MSND at the Drama Desk*, a press conference held in New York on 25 January 1971, quoted in full by Glenn Loney in *Peter Brook's production of William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Chicago, Dramatic Publishing Co., 1974, p.26.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

impulses and exchange energies. Berry kept her focus on the language of the text and the politics (by politics I mean issues relating to relationships, power, status and society, rather than party political concerns) and does not share Brook's concern for actors to pursue a personal evolution, in keeping with his profound interest in the teachings of Gurdjieff, in which 'personal evolution stems from simultaneous work on the three core centres of body, thought and feelings'.<sup>209</sup> In the work of Brook, Berry found a strong commitment to the idea that 'To speak words should alter you'.<sup>210</sup> 'Words change people,' she states frequently, but the change she refers to is empowering, social and political change, rather than therapeutic, emotional catharsis. She is more concerned with the political narrative of the text than the personal emotions of actors. Her search is for a way for modern actors to access classical language and communicate narrative meaningfully to a modern audience. Her starting point is not the literal meaning of the words, but the non-cerebral, visceral and physical power of language. Berry does not share Brook's interest in the 'post-modern' vocal approach of The Roy Hart Theatre or Grotowski, although she has explored the verbal work of Rudolph Steiner to a limited degree.<sup>211</sup>

Although it is possible to see clearly Brook's acknowledged influence on Berry, both have developed their work individually. Once Brook began working with his international group in Paris in 1970, his emphasis became more focused upon the exploration of theatrical communication, whereas Cicely Berry continued to work with the RSC, remained focused on language, and extended her work beyond actors to include writers and directors

Although Brook was a graduate of Oxford University, he was committed to a non-intellectual starting point very different from Hall and Barton:

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<sup>209</sup> Lorna Marshall and David Williams, 'Peter Brook: transparency and the invisible network', *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge (ed.), London, Routledge, 2000 p.180.

<sup>210</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, p.289.

<sup>211</sup> In an interview for *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain* (Lyn Darnley, MPhil, Birmingham University, 1994) p.70 Cicely Berry discussed her awareness of the work of Steiner during her early years as a teacher.

It is always a mistake for actors to begin their work with intellectual discussion, as the rational mind is not nearly as potent an instrument of discovery as the more secret faculties of intuition.<sup>212</sup>

Berry, too, discourages initial intellectual analysis but encourages the sensation of muscularity of articulators and the vibrations of sound in the resonators. A connection with the human need to speak as a means of survival is of paramount concern and is connected to her personal attitudes to society and Socialism. Brecht was a major influence on both Brook and Berry. It is sometimes easier to see Brecht's influence on Berry than it is to make connections with Brook's current, somewhat aesthetic, approach. Echoes of her work to release the rhythm and 'conflict' within words can be heard in this quotation from Brecht. Speaking of versions of old translations he says:

How much better it expressed the tussle of thoughts in the great monologue! How much richer the structure of the verse! The problem was simple: I needed elevated language, but was brought up against the oily smoothness of the usual five-foot iambic metre. I needed rhythm, but not the usual jingle.<sup>213</sup>

Berry works with actors to release the *turmoil* and explores the rhythmic changes and contrapuntal points within the iambic line.

Brecht, like both Berry and Brook, wished to avoid a 'received sound'. He was committed to a move away from 'High German' in his quest for actors who could convey the text through 'a flexible voice and well-developed speech – not of the 'voice beautiful' type.'<sup>214</sup> Like Berry he advocated integrating acting exercises with technical exercises in order to avoid formulaic acting.

It can be said that Berry is the most direct link with the language aspects of Brook's RSC work and has maintained his influence within the Company through her work on text and language. James Bulman says that the 'influence of Berry on the RSC has been significantly more direct than that of Brook or, arguably any other single figure, though as a voice coach (gendered female) she has been less celebrated.'<sup>215</sup> This is the general

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<sup>212</sup>Lorna Marshall and David Williams, 'Peter Brook, Transparency and the invisible network', Alison Hodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.179.

<sup>213</sup> Quoted in Jacqueline Martin, *Voice and Modern Theatre*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 54.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. p.55.

<sup>215</sup> James C. Bulman, *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, Abingdon, Routledge, 1996, p. 95.

perception outside the Company but within it she is fully recognized and she and Barton are both Associates and given equal status.

### **Work in Schools**

Berry worked with teachers and youth groups as part of the embryonic RSC Education Department.

Over the years I have run countless workshops on Shakespeare in schools, in community groups, and also many weekend workshops for English and Drama teachers: this taught me a huge amount, and gave me a further perspective.<sup>216</sup>

Interaction with young people, many of whom were initially resistant to the work, prompted her to find ways of stimulating a desire and need to speak the language.

There is a wonderful quote from *Revenger's Tragedy* 'Where words prevail not, violence prevails', and I think that should be the bottom line of our work. We've got to provoke people into wanting to speak and having delight in speaking. I think that young people really want that but the danger is we make Shakespeare too nice in a way. It is violent and we've got to allow that violence to come through. I've learnt about language mainly through working with young people, and finding ways of getting them to find the physicality of language.<sup>217</sup>

Actors, too, needed to be provoked so as to be able to shed the restrictive *hold* that often results from a desire to be clear and correct. They had to give themselves permission to go with the rhythm or break out of it rather than be regularly paced and overly-respectful in their delivery. My experience is that when actors work on dialects which are unnatural to them, many remark on how this alienates them from the text. They need to become comfortable with the dialect before they can give full attention to the words. Some actors feel they must speak classical text in a style and accent unrelated to their own, which results in a sound 'once removed' from themselves. Berry encourages exploration of the sensation of shaping of words rather than listening to the quality of sound. Her work encourages sensate placement of consonants; spatial and emotional quality of vowels; physical vibration of the voice in the resonators and bony structures of the body.<sup>218</sup> By releasing the voice through the body and the words, the quintessential power of the language is

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<sup>216</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, p.288.

<sup>217</sup> Cicely Berry, speaking at the *Forum on Verse Speaking and Classical Text*, National Theatre Studio, 30 October, 1998.

<sup>218</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, pp.28-29.

unrestricted so meaning becomes apparent, and audibility and clarity are achieved, thereby reducing the need for intellectual analysis. While I was using Berry-influenced exercises with a group of young writers, one reflected, 'This is *physical* text analysis, you don't have to do any more.'<sup>219</sup> Berry's work proves that intellectual analysis is not the only route to understanding complex text. This is borne out by actor-feedback cited later in this chapter.

### **Creating Chaos out of Order**

For actors who become locked in a 'safe, well behaved,' and predictable pattern or become obsessed by the sound of the voice, the creation of a situation in which they can no longer hold the pattern often frees them to be spontaneous and able to 'invent' and newly mint the language. The relief that young actors often feel when they are enabled to explore the *chaos within the form*, is palpable. 'I thought it *had* to be *smooth*, that that was what we were aiming for' is a response typical of many young actors.<sup>220</sup> Berry's approach includes 'dis-association' exercises which often make actors physically and mentally uncomfortable and 'knocked off centre'. She creates circumstances that do not allow them to over-control, recite, declaim or emote. Her intention is to 'distract' the actor from the language in order to release a more natural sound and rhythm. This is vocal freedom produces spontaneous speech which does not lead to a loss of vocal focus but rather sharpens it.

### **Speaking and Listening**

The 'shift' from an oral to a visual culture has had a significant effect on the way we both listen and speak. Language is increasingly less shaped and formed and serves a cerebral and functional role, rather than emanating muscularly and expressively from the body. In Berry's work, voice, speech and word are re-connected with the body and the breath impulse.<sup>221</sup> This connection peels back layers of logic to find the primitive, primal and essential energy and vibration in the muscle and sound of the words. She is not alone in considering language to be a *gestalt*, an integrated and

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<sup>219</sup> Participant in a New Writers' Workshop, run by Simon Reade for the RSC Literary Department, 7 September, 2000.

<sup>220</sup> Aislin McGuckin, *Henry VI* company, Clapham, 2000, in conversation with Lyn Darnley after working on Berry text exercises.

<sup>221</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, p.26.

complete physical expression of the human condition. Voice teachers, like linguists, have long believed that ‘voice is movement’ because it involves breath energy, impetus and muscle action.<sup>222</sup>

Speech is more than sound: it is at once verbal and non verbal. Speech may be viewed as primarily expressive movement, “gestured meaning,” or in the most limited sense, mouth gesture....When speech is expressing ideas, we are content to accept it as symbolic, but when speech is understood as an expression of the *whole* personality, we must recognise the importance of the mimetic features that are essentially nonverbal.<sup>223</sup>

Berry’s work focuses on the ‘whole body’s involvement’ in language and how physical expression amplifies meaning. She talks of the differences between the impact of the written word and of the spoken word: ‘You don’t understand Shakespeare until you read it aloud.’<sup>224</sup>

In Cicely Berry’s work the importance of listening is paramount:

It is all about listening, isn’t it? Being able to listen to what is happening, not only the line or the modulation of the lines, but in the spaces between the words, and that is very important with modern writing. The spaces between the words take us into that imaginative world. I think we don’t have time to gather enough as a company to hear that collective voice, which is not to say people have to speak the same but they have to be aware of the kind of music in the text.<sup>225</sup>

Brenda Bruce described a session with Berry and Hands that involved the detailed listening that Berry speaks of:

These sessions were nerve-racking but gradually broke down the barriers between the actors. Generalisation was not allowed; we had to be specific; we had to learn to look each other in the eye and *tell* the sonnets to each other. Cicely Berry took speeches at random; we sat in a circle and, starting with the first word, spoke one each, in correct sequence, slowly, halting at first; but gradually one forgot oneself, picked up the word and passed it on to the next actor. We learned to *listen* to the actor on the left and *give* to the actor on the right. With practice it became like a near-perfect relay race; accepting and passing, we became one voice. We began to listen to each other, share with each other, keep Shakespeare’s rhythm without falling into meaningless rhetoric, choose words specific to the speech without chopping up the rhythm – difficult at first, but when carried into rehearsal most

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<sup>222</sup> Rose Bruford, Iris Warren and most contemporary voice teachers/coaches including Kristin Linklater and Patsy Rodenburg believe that the voice depends on the integration of the mind and body and that muscle-movement, breath, rhythm and impulse need to be developed in the actor, just as much as speech does.

<sup>223</sup> Bacon and Breen, *Literature as Experience*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1959, p.298.

<sup>224</sup> Berry, Cicely, speaking at an RSC company session, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 10 February, 2000.

<sup>225</sup> Cicely Berry, speaking at the *Forum on Verse Speaking and Classical Text*, National Theatre Studio, 30 October, 1998.

helpful.<sup>226</sup>

The additional benefit for directors is that when actors listen in this way the ensemble's rapport is enhanced and this carries over to all other aspects of the work. Berry also speaks about the need to allow the *spaces* between words. Through these spaces (not to be confused with pauses) actors begin to discover the non-verbal language of speech. Brook wrote of the innate ability people have to read the unspoken, para-linguistic signals of words and speech.

Long before he is out of school, he [the young child] is aware that his father's stolid silences may be concealing a volcanic flow of pent-up hates: that his sister's blithe chatter may be a counterpoint to an inner rumble of obsessive guilt.

So he will realize that the distinction between the realistic play and the poetic one, between the naturalistic and the stylized is artificial and very old-fashioned.<sup>227</sup>

Berry too describes language as *inclusive* in an attempt to convey the many levels on which language operates. Most of her exercises find ways to release and illustrate this complexity of language. It is possibly easiest to illustrate this concept by using examples of the practical application of the work.

### **Conveying Meaning**

Clarity is not just about diction but about communicating ideas to audiences. 'Cicely Berry knows where clarity lies.' This was said by a leading actor who had worked with her on the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'She knows this better than most directors'.<sup>228</sup> She has waged a battle for sense against sentiment. She demands that actors play situation not emotion and is committed to the need to make language uncomfortable. 'Language' she says 'should cost'. These are the passions which set her apart from her predecessors who focused on 'the voice beautiful'.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Brenda Bruce, in *Players of Shakespeare 1*, Philip Brockbank (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p.94.

<sup>227</sup> Peter Brook, 'What About Real Life?', *Crucial Years* RSC Pamphlet, London, Max Reinhardt Ltd, 1963, p.20.

<sup>228</sup> Nicholas Jones, Barbican Theatre, talking of work on Michael Boyd's 1999 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 18 February, 2000.

<sup>229</sup> The elocutionist including Thomas and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the actor-managers and early voice experts Gustave Garcia, Hermann Vezin Rosina Filippi, Paul Berton, Elsie Fogerty, W.Aikin, Clifford Turner, Ernest White, Edith Skinner and many others all focused on the production of a 'beautiful sound'.

## Company Sessions

When I joined the RSC in 1992 each new Company met for verse workshops once weekly during the early weeks of their rehearsals. These were run by Adrian Noble, John Barton, Cicely Berry and associate directors. The ambition was to make classical language accessible for today's actors and audiences. At a Company session during the rehearsals for the year 2000's summer season, Berry commented:

It's a difficult time for actors...because people have television in their ears. We have cast away the *sound* of the language. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries actors were declamatory. People came to the theatre to hear a wonderful sound. A sound that's not appropriate for now. That sound took them into another imaginary world. Although we don't declaim, we still have to make the audience pay attention to the words.<sup>230</sup>

The following paragraphs illustrate the practical application of this statement (notes are from a company session in February 2000).

She began her session by getting the entire group, (in this instance about fifty actors) reading Sonnet 129. After the reading the actors were asked to comment on the verse. 'It's jagged' responded one actor. 'Yes', she replied, 'The rhythm is jagged. If you get too easy with the rhythm, it doesn't have the same potency. The jagged rhythm is part of the whole'.<sup>231</sup>

Berry is opposed to smooth, 'easy', over-controlled speaking, preferring actors to connect to the visceral energy of language and rhythm. She encourages actors to go beyond the literal meaning of words and investigate the implications of assonance, internal rhyme and the rhythm.

We must find the way one thought leads to another, rather than playing the result of the whole thought. When we make up our minds about what a passage means, we lose sight of the possibilities, we find clumps of sense and stop discovering the way the language works underneath....it needs exploration.<sup>232</sup>

Exploration rather than instruction is central to Berry's work. When exploring an extract from *Hamlet*, she encouraged actors to look beyond the literal meaning.

Three members of the group read the opening scene of *Hamlet*. Afterwards the quality of the language was discussed. The first comments were about the questions asked by the soldiers and their military language. The actors then re-read the passage but this time they whispered. The comments

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<sup>230</sup> Cicely Berry, RSC, 2000 Summer Festival Company session, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 10 February, 2000. From notes made by Lyn Darnley.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



changed. The irrationality of the language became apparent, and 'we feel their fear' commented an actor. Berry agreed: 'The Elizabethans accepted the concept of ghosts. Someone remarked: 'The silences were tangible' at which point Berry responded, 'It's in the spaces...the space in time....the space in the vowels.' By giving the audience the space between the words, they hear something significant and necessary. 'We understand 'who's there', which is the centre of the play.'<sup>233</sup>

This work was valuable and elements of it became part of the production. In rehearsals when actors are concerned with their 'back-story' and their psychological journey, Berry brings them back to language as a starting-point.

### **Image**

I stated earlier in this chapter that Cicely Berry does not encourage actors to recreate verbal images through visualisation, as many teachers do. Instead she looks to the structures of the word, the quality of the vowels, the action of the consonants and physical gesture to invoke the image. Imagery therefore comes from the structure of the sound not from cerebral visual manifestation. This means the word remains in the body rather than shifting to the intellect. The sound remains concerned with real physical *vibration* not imagined beauty. Berry declares an interest in stimulating the right side of the brain. Cox and Theilgaard<sup>234</sup> say that the production of image in the brain 'depends upon the right hemisphere rather than the left, which is primarily concerned with linear informative communication.'<sup>235</sup> Many of Berry's exercises are more akin to creative acting exercises than formal voice exercises and stimulate the right side of the brain. These exercises are playful rather than structured, involve bold physical movement and often contain an element of improvisation.<sup>236</sup>

At least certain aspects of Cicely Berry's work were formulated in order to *balance* the academic approach within the Company. The directors she worked with when she joined the RSC in 1970 were using analytical approaches for 'unpacking of structures' concerned with meaning. These are all 'left-brain' activities that come easily to directors from academic

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> *Mutative Metaphors in Psychotherapy*, Murray Cox and Alice Theilgaard, London, Tavistock Publications, 1987.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. p.200.

<sup>236</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin, 1992, pp. 18-24.

backgrounds. It fell to her to help more practical and kinesthetic actors find ways of *connecting* with the language and she developed a series of exercises with which most actors have empathy, possibly because many of them have a natural preference for right-brained styles of operating.<sup>237</sup> Any system of training must offer exercises that answer the needs of all actors and those exercises should stimulate both hemispheres. It is likely that much of the rehearsal work of the directors was concerned with left-brain approaches. Certainly Berry's text work appears to favour the right hemisphere while her voice work is more formal. This is connected possibly with a concern that the muscularity must be *trained* not freed and that the mechanism of the voice requires repetition and patterning in order to be free and successfully support the text. Alongside her interest in right-brained thinking, Cicely Berry has an interest in working with people who do not fit the traditional educational mould.

Often in workshops I've realised that those that we have labelled as low-ability readers actually understand the images more quickly than the people who can read easily. They can enter an image because their imagination is perhaps sharper. We're a literal, linear society which doesn't enter into an imaginative world.<sup>238</sup>

The education system does not provide equally for all talents. The number of dyslexic actors is significant, although I know of no specific studies into their numbers. It has been suggested by some teachers that dyslexics become actors because they have always had to find alternative ways to deal with the uneven way they are treated in schools and this possibly makes them flexible, inventive people.

Voula Foscola, who lectures in Active Learning Styles to postgraduate trainee teachers, and who has attended workshops with Cicely Berry at the Prince of Wales Summer School, says:

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<sup>237</sup> *Right Brain Thought Characteristics*, states: The right brain is thought to be concerned with intuitive responses. Some characteristics associated with this hemisphere of the brain are: Open-ended random experiments; Problem solves with hunches, looking for patterns and configurations; Makes subjective judgements; Looks at similarities; Is fluid and spontaneous; Prefers elusive, uncertain information; Primary reliance on images in thinking and remembering; Prefers open-ended questions; Prefers collegial (participative) authority structures; Free with feelings; Essentially self-acting; Simultaneous; Is a lumper, connectedness important; Is analogic, sees correspondences, resemblances; Draws on unbounded qualitative patterns that are not organised into sequences, but that cluster around images of crystallised feelings. [http://www.web-us.com/brain/right\\_left\\_brain\\_characteristics.htm](http://www.web-us.com/brain/right_left_brain_characteristics.htm).

<sup>238</sup> Cicely Berry speaking at the Forum on Verse Speaking and Classical Text, National Theatre Studio, 30 October, 1998.

The assumption of academics is that there is only one way of learning and that is through the didactic method. You can't *tell* anyone. By telling you still hold the knowledge, you have to give it over. They have to take it and make it their own. We have to find different routes – primitive routes we all are part of, ritual and rites. We are all part of the ancient primitive communication that we all understand. Sound and movement, rhetoric comes later. Cicely Berry is so good at opening up the sensuality of sound and language – getting the breathing right to make it sensual, finding the heartbeat, the character's bio-rhythms.<sup>239</sup>

Undoubtedly Cicely Berry's work does this. She does not give technical information, but rather allows actors to make the language their own and has brought to voice and text work a human dimension that addresses the needs of actors by connecting text to physical energy, energy to breath and breath to body. Educational knowledge now includes a notion of many-faceted intelligences rather than a single linear intelligence. With research into learning styles and multiple intelligences we now know that 'all of us learn differently, some kinaesthetically; some linguistically; some audibly through sound and the rhythms of sound and others by imprinting visual images in the mind.'<sup>240</sup> The education of actors needs to take the full spectrum of learning styles into consideration and offer a variety of learning options to actors. Drama schools, and directors, can be as guilty of a 'one system fits all' approach as other educational bodies.<sup>241</sup> Howard Gardner states:

[But] I will also consider other individuals in whom use of the body proves central, such as inventors or actors. It is important to stress that, in these latter occupations, other intelligences ordinarily play an important role. For instance, in the case of the actor or the performer, skill in personal intelligences – and also in many cases in musical or linguist intelligence – is part and parcel of successful performance. Nearly all cultural roles exploit more than one intelligence; at the same time, no performance can come about simply through the exercise of a single intelligence. In fact, even Marcel Marceau's capacity to use his body with such precision may well involve contributions from several intellectual domains.<sup>242</sup>

These observations might seem obvious to teachers of theatre arts. They throw light on the reasons why Cicely Berry's approach has found

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<sup>239</sup> Interview with Voula Foscola, Lecturer in Education at the University of Newcastle, 8 November, 1999.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Her work has given an added dimension to verse and text teaching in many theatres, drama schools, schools and some universities in Britain and in many countries including Croatia, Namibia, Columbia, Argentina, Korea as well as the major English-speaking countries. Berry's contribution has also been recognised by the award of an OBE (1985) and CBE (2008). At 85 she is still teaching internationally.

<sup>242</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, London, Fontana Press, 1993, p.207.

success with many actors. In *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* Augusto Boal sums up the way that all aspects of thinking and being come together and ultimately cannot be separated:

We start from the principle that the human being is a unity, an indivisible whole. Scientists have demonstrated that one's physical and psychic apparatuses are completely inseparable. Stanislavski's [sic] work on physical actions also tends to the same conclusion, i.e. that ideas, emotions and sensations are all indissolubly interwoven. A bodily movement 'is' a thought and a thought expresses itself in a corporeal form.<sup>243</sup>

This sums up Berry's practice which does not seek to separate the speech and language from the body, instead she encourages integration of breath, speech thought and action. Promoting these ideas she challenged traditional values and through her seminal texts succeeded in changing the focus of language-teaching for actors.

### **Theatre-Voice Work and Performance: Theory Criticism**

Voice work traditionally has been viewed as upholding middle-class values. Some consider it 'politically' elitist and restrictive because of its association with elocution and with speech 'standardisation' as a way of improving social status. The early imposition of Received Pronunciation (RP) in drama schools and on many programmes on the BBC through its Advisory Committee on Spoken English (1926) reinforced this opinion.<sup>244</sup> Theatre voice work has evolved beyond accent correction to include interpretation, delivery and character work but traditionally has received little recognition from writers of performance history.

Berry raised the profile of theatre-voice to a level that captured the interest of academic critics, which is a mark of her contribution. The interest has resulted in both positive and negative responses focused on three practitioners: Berry, Rodenburg and Linklater, all of whom have published influential training manuals and have a connection with the RSC. Patsy Rodenburg worked for the Company in a part-time capacity over a nine-year period and Kristin Linklater was employed for a period of six months in 1976 when Cicely Berry was ill. The work of all three developed out of practical professional theatre experience and each has eclectic elements that

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<sup>243</sup> Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.61.

<sup>244</sup> John Honey, *Does Accent Matter*, London, Faber and Faber, 1989, p.31.

assimilate their varied experiences and backgrounds resulting in individual ideologies. Linklater, whose work is more influential in the United States than in England, was influenced by Iris Warren,<sup>245</sup> who in turn was influenced by a Freudian psychologist. There are no such influences on Berry.<sup>246</sup>

The interest of academics is much needed and welcomed by voice coaches but the resulting critiques expose several misconceptions about voice practice concerned with gender politics, vocal freedom, and voice work as emotional therapy. The portrayal of Cicely Berry's work does not match my experience of working at the RSC and in the training sector.

### **Gender Politics**

An article that triggered debate was written in 1996 by Richard Paul Knowles.<sup>247</sup> While Knowles raises important questions about voice training, his argument is influenced by his belief that Berry was undervalued by the RSC because she was a woman. This theme was developed by feminist, Sarah Werner<sup>248</sup> whose concern is with the Company's gender politics and sees voice work in theatres as a largely female domain and directing as a male pursuit. This was traditionally the case but Company politics changed under Noble and Boyd. During my time as Head of Text, Voice and Artist Development I have worked to correct the gender balance within the department.<sup>249</sup> It will take time and action to change what was once a traditionally white, female occupation. Werner also sees the voice coach's

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<sup>245</sup> Iris Warren was employed as a freelance voice teacher during Peter Hall's directorship and taught at London Theatre Studio and LAMDA.

<sup>246</sup> There was a trend in the 1980s and 1990s towards a more psychological approach, influenced by Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart and, to some extent, Iris Warren through the writings of Kristin Linklater. Voice-work as a means of 'finding oneself' is more popular in the USA and Australia than it is in the UK, though there is an understanding of the psycho-physical nature of voice work.

<sup>247</sup> Richard Paul Knowles, Shakespeare, Voice and Ideology', *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, James C. Bulman (Ed.), London, Routledge, 1996.

<sup>248</sup> Sarah Werner is Undergraduate Program Director at the Folger Shakespeare Library and Associate Editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*. She edits *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies* (2010) and is the author of *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (2001). *New Theatre Quarterly* 47: Volume 12. 'Performing Shakespeare: voice training and the feminist actor'

<sup>249</sup> Currently there are four full-time voice coaches on the team; two male, two female. Current freelancers are equally gender-balanced: two male, two female. Since initiating the Voice Placement in 2004 we have employed eight newly qualified teachers, four have been female and four male. An RSC Bursary for Birmingham School of Acting's MA in Professional Voice Practice was awarded for 2009/10 and 2010/11 and both recipients were men: Wing Hong, from the London Chinese community and the second, Qasim Shah, a British Asian.

role inside the rehearsal room being 'at the male director's behest'.<sup>250</sup> In today's RSC the voice coach is a member of the ensemble as is any other member of the creative team: they collaborate with directors and actors and contribute ideas and opinions that support the production.

In her book *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance – Ideology on Stage*<sup>251</sup> Sarah Werner focuses on the lack of female leadership at the RSC under Terry Hands. She names Berry as one of the women who were given only limited power and denigrates Berry's 1988 production of *King Lear* (which transferred to London's Almeida Theatre in 1989 and was nominated for an Evening Standard award) saying 'but this was an educational project designed primarily for school groups'.<sup>252</sup> I would argue that educational audiences allow greater freedom to focus on the social and political themes and Berry's *King Lear* undoubtedly embraced aspects of family dynamics, responsibility, justice and need for a significant audience. Voice work may remain, at large, a predominantly female occupation, but the RSC situation has improved since the 1970s and 80s, for example Roxana Silbert, Maria Edberg, Nancy Meckler and Lucy Bailey all directed in January 2012 and Silbert and Edberg worked with a male voice coach, Stephen Kemble.<sup>253</sup>

There is a suggestion from Werner that Barton offers the same training as Berry. This confusion arises because 'Many of the methods [...] have the same philosophy and practice as those put forward by Berry'.<sup>254</sup> I believe it is essential that both agree on fundamental verse and language principles, otherwise confusion would result. Nevertheless each has their own way of helping actors perform text: Barton is a director and an academic text teacher, Berry is a practical text enabler. Berry acknowledges that her approach was influenced by Brook and Barton. Exercises may be similar but a simple distinction is that Berry will have a room full of actors moving and speaking simultaneously whereas Barton will teach a seated group of actors

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<sup>250</sup> Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance – Ideology on Stage*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.46.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> Under Michael Boyd and Vikki Heywood the following departments were among those headed by women: Communications; Development; Press; Casting; Finance; Producers; Literary; Voice, Text and Artist Development; Wigs and Makeup; Events; Education; Enterprise; Estates; Development; Human Resources and Health and Safety.

<sup>254</sup> *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance*, p. 48.

with whom he will work individually. They will both work on rhythm, structure and meaning but the journey for the actor will be different. One system may suit a given actor more than the other.

Such confusion does not exist within the RSC ensemble. Any Company actor could clearly define Berry and Barton's respective roles. Werner suggests that Barton's role is the same as Berry's but that he, as a male, is valued more highly.

Barton's public face as the interpreter of the universal Shakespeare, takes precedence over Berry's more local, private coaching of actors.<sup>255</sup>

Their work overlaps, they have a common objective which is to help actors access the text, but each offers actors a different way to achieve their goal. Both in actuality are respected and valued.

Werner states: 'As the tension between male academics and female voice specialists shaped the practice of voice work, so it has diminished its reception outside the studio and rehearsal room'.<sup>256</sup> She does not acknowledge the political achievement of Berry in creating a new and influential theatre role in spite of the male dominance of the RSC in the early 1970s. Nor does she acknowledge as positive that female voice coaches head up departments at theatres such as the RSC, The National Theatre, the Sidney Theatre Company, The Festival Theatre in Stratford Ontario, where they continue to influence and enable actors, support both male and female directors and influence policy. This is significant when one considers the gender division of classic plays: on average a cast of 25 will consist of 20 men and 5 women.

Sarah Werner correctly points out that in Sally Beaman's *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* there is no mention of Berry at all. This is true and astounding, because the book is otherwise well researched. However Beaman was not a company member and not party to the training and rehearsal process.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>257</sup> It seems to me that only Colin Chambers has written about the Company with first-hand experience of its practice., and he does not focus on training. For this reason I felt the need to give a Company perspective in my writing.

Academic criticism of the above practitioners shows a lack of understanding of their background influences, their individual ideologies and the distinct differences between them. The major critics, Worthen, Bulman, Knowles and Werner cite 'therapy' as a major objective of voice work. While there can be therapeutic aspects to any work on the voice, Berry clearly differentiates between therapy and empowerment, which is her aim.

Knowles stated:

Voice training is only one of many ideologically coded theatrical practices that shape meaning in contemporary Shakespeare production, and it is clear that voice work is contained by, and only capable of functioning within institutional and professional contexts that limit any potential it might have for invention, intervention or dissidence.<sup>258</sup>

While poorly delivered voice work can be limiting, it need not be and this thesis gives many examples of it as a liberating process. Voice practitioners and voice practices should be challenged and assessed, but critics have clearly failed to comprehend Berry's work in practice. Knowles acknowledges his issue is with the popular texts from Berry, Linklater and Rodenburg,<sup>259</sup> and the ideological message he feels they convey, rather than with the practice. This is a valid criticism, because Berry's, Rodenburg's and Linklater's books are 'instruction manuals' not intellectual texts. They are written by practitioners for actors, not academics, and use non-scientific imagery, metaphor and theatre terminology rather than attempting to offer researched evidence and statistics. The exercises need to be experienced rather than read. Practitioners are found guilty by such critics of using 'jargon' which is not part of academic discourse or vocabulary resulting in confusion.<sup>260</sup> Werner mentions language differences between academics and practitioners as a cause of difficulty in understanding each other's perspective. Additionally, practical exercises imitated by practitioners other than the authors tend to 'mutate' and lose both integrity and specificity over

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<sup>258</sup> Richard Paul Knowles, 'Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology', *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman, London, Routledge, 1996, p.99.

<sup>259</sup> Significant popular texts mentioned by Knowles are: Berry: *Voice and the Actor*, London, Harrap, 1974 and *The Actor and the Text*, New York, Applause Books, 1992 and Linklater: *Freeing the Natural Voice*, New York, Drama Publishers, 1976 and Rodenburg: *The Right to Speak*, London, Methuen Drama, 1992 and *The Need for Words*, London, Methuen Drama, 1993.

<sup>260</sup> Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance – Ideology on Stage*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.110, note 10.



time. More experiential research by academics involving theatre-voice coaches might have offered greater depth of understanding.

Theatre voice coaching is a relatively new career that is carving a niche and is still regarded as intrusive by some directors and actors, therefore it is not surprising that academics have difficulty in assessing its value. Still considered a 'luxury', voice work other than dialect coaching is generally offered only in subsidised theatres.

### **Freeing the Voice rather than Voice Work as Emotional Therapy**

Critics developed their opinions in response to Berry's texts (particularly *The Actor and The Text*): that their study produces such a negative perception suggests a fault in Berry's writing, but it is essentially a problem of interpretation. I had personal experience of how easy it is to make assumptions in 1994 while researching *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain*.<sup>261</sup> I was able to obtain examples of lesson plans of the teacher, Iris Warren, the Freudian-influenced voice teacher who taught at the RSC during Peter Hall's time. Actors who had worked with her maintained that her approach was uniquely different. I was surprised to find that the lesson plans 'on the page' were typical of the period. Had I made assumptions based on what I read rather than from what I discovered about the experience of actors who had worked with her, I would not have understood the evolution of her work. Exercises are important but not the only element to be considered. I deduced from this and from observing teachers and teachers in training that what distinguishes one teacher from another has less to do with content and more to do with personality, teaching style and personal politics. I have been able to observe Cicely Berry working on the rehearsal floor, and feel confident in stating that both Werner and Knowles are incorrect in thinking that Berry's work is in some way concerned with the freeing of the voice in a therapeutic way. Their error is to assign a single approach to Berry, Linklater and Rodenburg who are three very different practitioners, each of whom has developed her own methodology according to her own politics: Berry remained focused on voice as an agent for social empowerment, while Rodenburg and Linklater embrace personal growth through vocal freedom.

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<sup>261</sup> Lyn Darnley, *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain*, M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1994.

Linklater describes her approach as ‘psycho-physical’<sup>262</sup> while Rodenburg speaks of voice work as creating a path to speaking in ‘your own way with your own God-given voice.’<sup>263</sup> Berry, while understanding the link between the voice and the persona, has renounced as inappropriate any conscious link between theatre-voice and emotionally therapeutic voice work, stating that actors need to be ‘objective’ about the voice as a professional skill.<sup>264</sup> It is true that some practitioners focus on emotionally freeing voice work, particularly with student actors, but at the RSC the focus is on professional actors and production-related issues.

Berry’s work is ‘freeing’ because she enables actors to feel comfortable with the text and empowers them to ‘own’ the language.<sup>265</sup> Developing the desire to speak words does not necessarily suggest a psycho-logicistic approach. It is the character’s need to survive, not the actor’s need to find catharsis, which interests Berry. Watching an actor’s personal emotional state limits the audience’s ability to hear and engage with the character in the context of a dramatic narrative. Knowles expresses understandable frustration at the frequent use of the word ‘freedom’ in the popular texts. He suggests that:

What ‘freedom’ will do for the actors is to restore a ‘natural’, ‘childlike’ access to ‘self’, a psychological ‘depth’ that puts them in touch with something that is at once their true (individual) selves, our common (universal) humanity, and Shakespeare.<sup>266</sup>

Knowles identifies a lack of consistency about the presumed meaning of the word. ‘freedom’ but he uses it in a way more associated with acting exercises, rather than voice exercises that ‘release the voice’ from habitually held patterns or lack of breath. There are various ways of releasing the tensions that impede an actor’s voice. Some of these are by using technical breath and placement exercises, others may involve the use of image, ‘dis-association’ work, physical work or pharyngeal release. Knowles

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<sup>262</sup> Linklater: *Freeing the Natural Voice*, New York, Drama Publishers, 1976, p.7.

<sup>263</sup> Rodenburg: *The Right to Speak*, London, Methuen Drama, 1992, p.16.

<sup>264</sup> *The Actor and the Text*, New York, Applause Books, 1992, p.16.

<sup>265</sup> Although Berry acknowledges the connection between the persona and the voice, her starting point is the language of the text. More details of the different approaches to voice teaching can be found in Lyn Darnley, *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain*, M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1994.

<sup>266</sup> Richard Paul Knowles, ‘Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology: Interrogating the Natural Voice’, *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James.C. Bulman, London, Routledge, 1996, p.99.

interpretation of 'freedom' suggests a lack of in-depth understanding of vocal techniques. He does not seem to comprehend the transformative impact that freeing the voice can have on actors' ability to interpret and transform.

Berry's work is concerned with the character's text, not the actor's own words, and so connects directly with the politics within the text. An actor whose voice is 'trapped' limits the text by overlaying it with a personal tension. In these circumstances any chance of the audience receiving the 'political action or sense of history' is lost as they listen to generalised sound rather than the specific ideas. This concern demonstrates a lack of understanding of Berry's goal, which is always to clarify the narrative and the central politics of the play. 'When you get the politics right, the rest falls into place.'<sup>267</sup> (A further move to strengthen the bond between the voice coach and the director, in connecting the politics and the 'world' of the play began in 2004 when a sole voice coach was assigned to each production rather than several having a more tenuous link. This has proved successful and popular with directors and voice coaches.)

Training begins with 'release work' for the body and voice. Once release is achieved, technique can be built, not before. Trained actors are more likely to attain vocal freedom and freedom with language than untrained actors.

A more valid criticism would be that Berry's work can be incorrectly interpreted and taught. Like any system it is dependent on the skills of those practitioners applying her process. It is important for practitioners to attend workshops by authors rather than simply teaching from a book. Perhaps it is for this reason that American systems require a teacher to become certificated. Berry's approach does not have 'rules' or a format that can be easily applied by an inexperienced voice coach. It relies on an innate understanding of rhythm and poetry in the teacher. In the right hands it does what it sets out to do: to make text accessible. It could also be argued that Berry and Barton, both of whom have moved away from a more structured approach, are in danger at times of forgetting that young and inexperienced actors might find more tangible, guiding principles (rather than rules) helpful.

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<sup>267</sup> Cicely Berry, talking to Lyn Darnley about Michael Boyd's 2000 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Other Place*, August, 2000.

It is my belief that best results are achieved by a combination of work on release, exploration, rhetoric and verse structure: a synergy of the Barton and Berry approaches.

Berry's desire to find the 'organic and primitive' voice grew out of her work with Brook, a reaction against the rigid system of 'elocution' and a desire for language to be seen as a means of expressing the human condition and not, as suggested by Werner, to 'focus on private, transcendent emotions'.<sup>268</sup> Emotion and feelings are of little interest to Berry, whereas common human need and survival are paramount. W.B. Worthen states correctly, that this 'primitivising gesture is common in voice training'.<sup>269</sup> Common it may be, but the focus of it differs. Berry is concerned with words and language, whereas Rodenburg and Linklater include personal emotional release through freeing the voice.

Werner suggests Berry fosters a mystification of the link between voice work and Shakespeare<sup>270</sup>. Obviously performance is an art form that requires quantifiable craft skills but there are also indefinable qualities that cannot be explained. I have witnessed Berry's work and know that her aim is to de-mystify the text. Werner quotes the actor, Juliet Stevenson, as saying: 'With Shakespeare, you begin with the words, and you build from there'.<sup>271</sup> Stevenson, having worked closely with Berry, suggests a practical, even logical process. Werner sees *play* being linked to therapy; but acting is concerned with improvisation and transformation, which are both elements of play. While acting involves discussion and analysis, it also investigates ideas through random, improvised and illogical activities, which to Werner may appear playful, but are essential work for the actor. Playful exercises often clarify the text for actors more than explanation or analysis.

Berry is a charismatic teacher who, like actors, trusts instinct and intuition and although she is a prolific writer, she does not generally deconstruct or justify her work. The negative academic criticism has both

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<sup>268</sup> Sarah Werner, 'Performing Shakespeare: Voice Training and the Feminist Actor', *NTQ*, 47, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.250.

<sup>269</sup> W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.106.

<sup>270</sup> Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance – Ideology on Stage*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.27 - 28.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

acknowledged her role and influence in theatre history and prompted her to respond eloquently. It is understandable that with its roots in elocution, voice work should be perceived from the academic stand-point as limiting actors' choices. Contemporary voice work in Britain has moved a long way from the elocutionists and deals as much with language dynamics and structure as with voice and speech. Voice coaches do not give line readings or direct but are concerned with extending vocal boundaries and connecting mind and body with language, thereby encouraging rather than stifling invention and subversion.

Berry's approach suits the British style of actor training because it adapts to both Method and Brechtian principles as well as addressing the action of the text very directly, taking into consideration the many layers of language. Berry is a woman of her time and holds strong views that reflect her generation. She expresses her politics through her actions, working with groups such as the Brazilian favelas theatre project 'Nos Do Morro', whose efforts to fashion change she admires.

Berry's work, like Barton's and Hall's has evolved. It is simplistic and naive to presume that work begun thirty years ago should remain unchanged. Similar assumptions have been made, in the past, about the work of other theatre practitioners including Stanislavski. All practitioners allow their work to evolve as new challenges are met. Cicely Berry has evolved her work through contact with actors and directors and through extensive international work. Werner and Knowles do not appreciate that, although the work grew out of the collaboration with Brook, Berry's work has developed its own life, shaped by her pragmatic personality and influenced by her own training which had a theatre bias, strong verse influences and an aversion for elocutionary styles. They presume that, because the work was influenced by Brook in a period that became known as 'the Dream-Revolution',<sup>272</sup> and because Brook went on to develop the esoteric elements of his work, it follows that Berry shares these attitudes. This assumption is false. Berry does not share Brook's spiritual quest but is a communist whose work owes much to the pragmatic need to help actors develop their craft.

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<sup>272</sup> J.L.Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution; Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.6.

The practical success of her methods is proved by the comments of the many successful working actors, including Antony Sher, Brenda Bruce and Juliet Stevenson, and directors Michael Attenborough, Trevor Nunn, Adrian Noble and Gregory Doran, who advocate her approach.

Berry's method became a strong influence on text teaching in many drama schools in the United Kingdom and abroad in the 1980s and 1990s. When asked how her methodology came about, Berry said that she has never lost sight of where the work must begin:

Actors come with ideas about feelings and emotions. But I don't think you can understand Shakespeare completely until you start to speak it aloud. You can understand it at all levels when you read it, but until you speak it, until you get round the muscularity of that language you don't totally understand it, it doesn't alter you. Language should alter you as it comes through you. [Edward] Bond would say words are like the top of an earth shift. We have got to allow that to happen, to make it rough, and to make young people want to speak. So it's into the classroom.<sup>273</sup>

Standards of eloquence have diminished and some of today's actors were not even offered Shakespeare at school. Until the schools find an egalitarian way of empowering all young people so that they re-discover a physical satisfaction and joy in the formation and communication of language, the drama schools will struggle to produce actors who can take on the challenges of classic text. Cicely Berry has campaigned to raise language skills in schools through her role in the establishment of the RSC Education Department and her books. Her dedication to empowerment of the young through language is I believe, a political act. It is an attempt to enfranchise those who otherwise might be limited by the class into which they were born. The ability to use language rather than violence to challenge social inequality is close to her heart. She often quotes Thomas Kyd, 'Where words prevail not, violence prevails.'<sup>274</sup> Her actions have been recognized by the award of an OBE and CBE<sup>275</sup>. Jane Boston, the current leader of Central School's MA in Voice Studies states, 'Cis Berry has created a new social text through the work she has initiated'.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Cicely Berry speaking at the Forum on Verse Speaking and Classical Text, 30 October, 1998. The book she refers to was eventually entitled *The Voice in Action*, 2000.

<sup>274</sup> Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Act II.1.

<sup>275</sup> Cicely Berry was awarded the OBE in 1985 and CBE in 2008.

<sup>276</sup> Jane Boston, Hampstead Theatre, 23 June, 2011.

Berry herself answered the criticism from Werner by saying that on first reading she thought the article was so 'unfounded in the reality of practical voice work that it was not worth the time needed to respond'.<sup>277</sup> She states that 'we must never forget that the people with the language have the power' and that 'it is up to the actor to use that power in the way he/she wants'.<sup>278</sup> The work I have seen Berry do over a period of twenty years supports this statement and I believe that while never venturing into 'therapeutic voice work', Berry encourages actors to use language to liberate the voice of the character. This I believe to be a political action.

Werner felt she had been misunderstood and that she did not mean to suggest that voice teachers do not empower actors: 'Rather I point out that the tools voice trainers provide are not neutral, and that the assumptions about character and voice that circulate in voice training work do disallow considerations of dramaturgical strategies'.<sup>279</sup> Significant actors who would disagree and would confirm that Berry's work releases and empowers actors, are:

Emily Watson: 'Cicely Berry connects people with who they are, and allows the sound that comes out of your voice to reveal everything.'

Sam West: 'She gives the power and freedom back to the actor without any sense of being imposed upon. She works on trying to help you find the voice of the part you are playing.'

Greg Hicks: 'She has a blisteringly truthful eye and can see what is true and what is false within the voice and the acting itself. She strips you away until you get to your authentic voice.'<sup>280</sup>

Werner states, 'There is indeed a split between academics and theatre practitioners, but I am not interested in claiming that academia is the right side to be on.'<sup>281</sup> While Werner acknowledges the divide, she is less informed about voice practice than many British academics. Some responsibility for this perception must be borne by voice practitioners who have not succeeded in writing a practical book that speaks clearly to academics. There has been reluctance from practice-based Voice teachers

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<sup>277</sup> Cicely Berry, Patsy Rodenburg, Kristin Linklater, Shakespeare, Feminism, and Voice: Responses to Sarah Werner, NTQ 1997 - Volume 13, Issue 49, p. 48.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Sarah Werner, NTQ, Volume 13, Issue 50, 1997, p. 183.

<sup>280</sup> Quotes are taken from *Where Words Prevail*. Documentary video directed by Steven Budlong, Salvatore Rasa, Egon Kirinic for Sojourner Media [US], 2005.

<sup>281</sup> Sarah Werner, NTQ, Volume 13, Issue 50, 1997, p.183.

to conceptualise their work socially. Misunderstandings that have arisen about the work of voice practitioners are the result of a lack of articulation of their practice in a readable theoretical form. This does not diminish the achievements, but the neglect has furthered a sense of division and resulted in controversial papers such as that by Sarah Werner. It is crucial that a dialogue begins so that theorists can fully appreciate that an interface exists, that social interaction is a conscious part of Berry's (and other practitioners') practice and a concrete expression of her politics, although she does not articulate it in her texts. Examples of this interaction are her work in the favelas of Brazil, her work in prisons and her educational intervention into groups which have led to raised social awareness of the power of language to change or improve limiting circumstances. The criticism appears to lack understanding of the history of British voice training and contemporary practice of current British actor-training and its broad, politicised nature. There are differences in the training of actors in the United States and Britain, the most significant of these being that British actors are offered a foundation in the fundamentals of voice and then a plethora of acting and voice skill options, working from both 'outside in' (starting with the perspective of the political world of the play and working toward the emotion of the character) and 'inside out' (starting with the inner life and emotion of the character and working towards their response to the world of the play), whereas in the United States university and conservatoire courses usually offer a specific system of training such as the *Linklater*, *Lessac*<sup>282</sup> or *Fitzmaurice*<sup>283</sup> methods and students do not integrate opposing methodologies into their training. When Werner describes RADA-trained Stevenson as being 'trained by Berry' (presumably when she was working at the RSC),<sup>284</sup> or describes actors as being 'voice trained actors',<sup>285</sup> she discounts the many influences that allow actors to make choices. Actor training is a cumulative process. British student actors are offered a smorgasbord of methods, so they are able to use the approaches that best

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<sup>282</sup> Arthur Lessac's method is based on sensory awareness and kinaesthetic experience. Lessac (1909) is still teaching at 101 years of age.

<sup>283</sup> Catherine Fitzmaurice's method focuses on muscle tension (Tremor) and on *Destructuring* and *Restructuring*.

<sup>284</sup> Sarah Werner, 'Performing Shakespeare: Voice Training and the Feminist Actor,' *NTQ*, 47, p.255.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* p.253.



suit them. The *voice-trained actor* that Werner speaks of was a phenomenon of the first half of the twentieth century when voice was the principal component in training.

In *The Actor and The Text* Cicely Berry advocates an actor-centred approach that encourages actors to find the 'need to speak':

Each actor has his own way of working, and therefore of finding the reason for the words he has to speak, of relating them both to his own experience and to the motive of the character, in order to make them authentic. The way he does this will vary according to the text he is speaking, but he is continually probing and asking himself: 'why these words'. When he has come as near as he can to the answer, he is ready to say them in performance. But somehow he very often stays with the reasons in his head, without quite springing the energy of the thought into the words. In a sense, the words are by-passed, and they become slightly less important than the thought, instead of being the thought in action.<sup>286</sup>

This extract illustrates some of the difficulties academics have with the three authors who write for actors not academics. Berry refers to the inability of an actor to express vocal impulses when 'over thinking' and rationalising words. Theatre-voice teachers aim to assist actors to balance the formality of language with spontaneity and 'vocal freedom'. The title 'voice teacher' or 'voice coach' is misleading and 'text and voice coach' better reflects the training done with actors in the rehearsal room as well as in solus calls.<sup>287</sup>

How political a teacher is depends not on exercises but on personal ethos. It is how you teach, how you question and how you enable that determines politics. Voice practitioners do not determine the concept of a production or its values. They attempt to help actors understand, assimilate and access the language so that they can delve into it and deliver a more textured, performance, thereby allowing the political nature of the language and rhetoric to be heard. If Werner had spent a week in an RSC rehearsal room, or at a drama school, she could have better understood the process of research into the socio/political language and background of plays. Some actors resist what they feel is an 'academic' approach to learning but are open to intellectual discussion, debate and practical research when applied to productions. There is a difference of approach in theatre, not a lack of

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<sup>286</sup> Cicely Berry, *The Actor and The Text*, London, Virgin Press, 1992, p.18.

<sup>287</sup> In 2009 the RSC Voice Department became the Text and Voice Department in order to reflect the nature of the work.

enquiry. Although the worlds of academia and theatre practice are beginning to meet, each has its own vocabulary which can cause confusion.

Regardless of the mis-perceptions and lack of practical insight into the work, the attention paid Berry by academics has raised the profile of voice work and prompted practitioners to express their ideology and enter the academic debate.

Her contribution to the training of actors and directors both within the RSC and in the wider international theatre community merits her achievements being placed on a par with Hall, Barton, Saint Denis and Brook.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Training and Ensemble under Adrian Noble**

This chapter strives to review the training offered under Adrian Noble and puts into context organisational changes between 2001 and 2003 that led to his resignation, the appointment of Boyd and the subsequent establishment of the Artist Development Programme.

#### **Adrian Noble**

Adrian Noble was Artistic Director of the Company from 1991–2003. I joined the Voice Department in 1992, the second year of Adrian Noble's directorship. As I was involved in the delivery of the training offered and so was able to observe, and at times participate in, the developmental work that took place at The Other Place, I am able to give more detailed primary source information about training from 1992 onwards and to make comparisons between the delivery of training during Noble's directorship and that provided under Michael Boyd's. The ongoing debate about the speaking of Shakespearean verse had begun long before Adrian Noble was appointed as Artistic Director in 1991 and continued throughout his directorship.

Following a degree at the University of Bristol, Noble studied directing at The London Drama Centre, he worked in Community Theatre in Birmingham before becoming an Assistant Director at the RSC in 1980, working alongside experienced classical directors. He quickly rose to become an Associate Director and, after an award-winning commercial career, he returned to the RSC as Artistic Director of the Stratford Season 1988 and of the London Season in 1989.

Noble was the first Artistic Director with a practical postgraduate training in direction which is likely to have raised his awareness of the need for ongoing training for actors and directors. In 1989 he was part of the Gulbenkian Enquiry into the Training of Directors. During his time at the RSC he supported young directors and developed the Assistant Director's project at The Other Place, which allowed them to direct small budget productions with actors from the ensemble. Some of the directors who benefited from this project were Jonathan Mumby, Heather Davies, David

Hunt, Rebecca Gatward and Dominic Cooke, who later became an RSC Associate Director and was appointed the Artistic Director of the Royal Court in 2006. Noble brought in accomplished associate directors Michael Attenborough, Steven Pimlott, Katie Mitchell, Michael Boyd and Gregory Doran.<sup>288</sup> Mitchell, Attenborough and Pimlott became directors of The Other Place and in that capacity provided the artist development (other than Voice work) offered by Noble.

Noble re-energized the RSC focus on verse speaking and language that Hall had begun and that had diminished under Hands. This was most evident in his support of Cicely Berry and the Voice Department<sup>289</sup> and his belief in the importance of John Barton's text sessions. In a draft document in September 1996 he raised the need to focus on language:

We are at a point which is unique in the history of the world. Not only has the eye overtaken the ear and the visual image superseded the word, but there is a danger of the one being swamped by the other. Hamlet says at one point; "we'll hear a play tomorrow". Today we go and see plays. Our entire perception has changed. Yet words are a source of power, because they permit the ownership of ideas. If I have no words, I have no ideas. If we do not encourage children at school to revel in words, to love making sentences with words, to enjoy being articulate with words, to find that playful way with words that Shakespeare exemplifies, we are diminishing their potential.<sup>290</sup>

Noble was vocal about his commitment to language work and his statement implies the need for the theatre to make a significant contribution to education as well as to actor development. It was my experience that in rehearsal Noble also repeatedly encouraged actors to strive towards text centred performance. His desire to encourage actors to investigate language structures and prosody was evident in his 2009 book *How to do Shakespeare* which was published by Routledge. He also raised the profile of the Education Department by appointing Clare Venables, who had been at the Brit School, as director.

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<sup>288</sup> Doran eventually went on to become Chief Associate Director under Boyd and in 2012 succeeded him as Artistic Director.

<sup>289</sup> The department operated with the same ethos under Noble as under Boyd, although Boyd encouraged the introduction of daily warm-ups and pre-rehearsal limbers and allowed the department to broaden the scale of activity and develop initiatives which reached out to the profession and training institutions. It went on to have a more direct relationship with text and in 2008 the department was renamed the Text and Voice Department.

<sup>290</sup> RSC Campaign Document, Adrian Noble Statement, draft document dated 6 September, 1996.

Also important to Noble was the ensemble principle. In the same draft document he spoke of the ensemble repertoire system being 'hugely nourishing' and that it 'gives us our particular character'. He said, 'These plays were written for an ensemble, and we are continuing a tradition which goes right back to 1598 and the beginning of the Globe Theatre in Southwark – a wonderful arc of theatrical history'.<sup>291</sup>

In an undated paper entitled *Why We Do What We Do*, see Appendix 4.(1), Noble said this about the value of training and a sense of 'company':

We are, above all, a company. Our health, and unity as a company is very important; in order to achieve and maintain the above aims, [for excellence in classical performance] we must provide the means whereby all of us, management, artists, craftspeople etc are properly trained, regenerated and refreshed.<sup>292</sup>

Steven Adler writing about the attraction the Company held for young graduates acknowledged the training offered:

Some of the younger company members are cast in a number of smaller roles, occasionally with no lines. These members may be contracted 'as cast' for the entire season, with no guarantee of any specific casting when they sign on. For these journeymen, the chance to join the RSC far outweighs the opportunity to play better parts at other theatres. The company provides what is essentially a second, professional phase in their training [...]<sup>293</sup>

Adler interviewed Alison Chard (Head of Casting under Noble) about the value of extending skills early in a career. She said:

This is the next logical phase in their development. We're very eager to develop our own, home-grown talent, and this is the logical place to begin. The work on the plays, plus the classes we offer, form a very effective, advanced professional training ground.<sup>294</sup>

Adler does not acknowledge Noble's attempts to revive more formal training structures such as those in place under Hall. During Noble's directorship the artist training was delivered through voice classes and a series of projects at The Other Place, including visits from Augusto Boal, the Polish company Gardzienice and one-off skills sessions (including Alexander Technique and choral singing classes), and compulsory ensemble wide

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Adrian Noble, RSC internal document entitled, *Why We Do What We Do*, undated.

<sup>293</sup> Steven Adler, *Rough Magic, Making Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2001, p.164.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

Company sessions in text. Informal development occurred through the Fringe Festival and Video Projects. In 1995 a production of *The Lord of the Flies*<sup>295</sup> was staged at The Other Place with an all child cast. The boys aged 11-13 were supported by classes in movement, voice and yoga. Out of this project developed the first summer 'young alumni' workshops.<sup>296</sup> The RSC Academy was Noble's initiative, although it did not come into being until after his departure. During his administration the Company hosted two Theatre Voice Conferences in collaboration with the British Council and he encouraged debate about verse speaking and contemporary actor training.

Noble brought significant classical actors to the Company including Robert Stephens, Antony Sher, Ralph Fiennes, Kenneth Branagh, David Troughton, David Calder, Philip Voss, Samantha Bond, Harriet Walter and Penny Downie, while developing younger talent such as Toby Stephens, Jude Law, David Tennant, Damien Lewis, Jeremy Northam, Joseph Fiennes, Ray Fearon, William Houston, Emma Fielding, Alexandra Gilbreath, Emily Watson, Olivia Williams and Sophie Okonedo<sup>297</sup>. He also continued to cast established RSC actors such as Cherry Morris, John Normington, John Kane and Clifford Rose who had worked with Hall, Brook and Saint-Denis. These actors passed on their wisdom and experience through example and anecdotes.

### **Company Sessions**

Company sessions created opportunities to share common concerns and to develop skills with heightened text. It was in these sessions that actors discussed and practically worked on verse and prose. They worked with John Barton and with directors such as Adrian Noble, Steven Pimlott, Gregory Doran, Michael Attenborough, Michael Boyd and also with Cicely

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<sup>295</sup> *Lord of the Flies* was directed by Elijah Moshinsky at The Other Place in 1995 with an all-boy cast. Five of the cast, Daniel Brocklebank, Marc Elliot, Edmund Kingsley, Tom McKay and Monroe Robertson went on to work professionally as adults. The play was by Nigel Williams, adapted from the novel by William Golding.

<sup>296</sup> Young alumni workshops are held every summer for children who have appeared in RSC productions. The workshops offer the children the opportunity to re-establish friendships and work on voice, movement and language skills.

<sup>297</sup> Most of the young actors listed became leading actors of their generation working on stage, film and television.

Berry. At the beginning of the 2001 Summer Season, Max Atkinson,<sup>298</sup> a rhetoric specialist, gave a workshop on the way in which politicians use language structures. Barton and Berry worked with full companies during rehearsals. John Barton regularly gave master classes on verse to up to 80 actors. The structure of Berry's sessions differed from Barton's because she worked with the entire group while Barton worked with one actor at a time while the rest of the group observed. The Company sessions afforded an opportunity for members of the acting Company (often rehearsing in different spaces in Clapham) to meet and work together. These sessions attempted to de-mystify the 'rules of verse speaking' and were enjoyed enormously by many actors but some found them exposing and intimidating. No matter how supportive and safe the Company session might have seemed to confident, experienced actors, the pressure of having to perform in front of peers was enormous. Exposing gaps in an actor's craft in public can be damaging, regardless of how well meant the exercise may be. For very inexperienced actors occasional Company sessions could only plant ideas which could be further developed in voice classes or in rehearsals.

Additionally, young actors assimilated ideas informally and picked up knowledge in random ways from other actors. Many appreciated being exposed to invaluable spiral learning opportunities and the added benefits of being able to discuss and reflect on practice.

Noble stated on a number of occasions that the delivery of the text was not the responsibility of the Voice Department, but the responsibility of directors. Voice coaches, he believed, could help actors achieve the text objectives of the directors. He likened the work of voice coaches to that of guerrilla soldiers because the work was often unseen and subtle.<sup>299</sup> Noble supported Cicely Berry's work and made her an Associate Artist. When asked what he thought the unique environment was that provided the catalyst for Berry's practice and why her work had provoked criticism from academics he answered:

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<sup>298</sup> Max Atkinson's books are: *Our Masters' Voices: Language and Body Language of Politics* published by Routledge, 1984 and *Lend Me Your Ears: All You Need to Know About Making Speeches*, Vermilion, 2004.

<sup>299</sup> This information was given by Adrian Noble in conversations with Lyn Darnley on a number of separate occasions between 1992 and 2000.

It's [the RSC] actually much less middle-class than most people think. It's always harboured within it a whole number of quite radical elements including the very foundations it is built on, Peter Hall and Saint-Denis, or just the politics of most of the directors who work here. It has harboured a quite rigorous, I suppose, kind of Leavis-ite classical tradition. That classical tradition has intrinsic values. That classical tradition has knowledge that can be passed on from generation to generation. That classic tradition is analyzable with reference to its past and notions of what the future can be, deducted and conducted from it. And within that, someone like Cicely, who works on the one hand quite empirically, quite instinctively, almost intuitively but at the same time is a bit of an academic. She works in a similar way and with a similar methodology, to the directors, who also are often quite well educated and analytic but on the rehearsal floor tend to be quite intuitive, empirical, opportunistic, organic, as you have to be to put a show on. And I think she has flourished in this particular camp, it doesn't surprise me at all that a particular group of academics could attack her.<sup>300</sup>

### **Voice Classes**

During Adrian Noble's directorship Cicely Berry reduced her input and became Associate Voice Director and the Head of Voice from 1990 to 2003 was Andrew Wade.<sup>301</sup>

Pre-performance warm-ups were held three times a week, usually on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays though more frequently during previews and additional warm-ups were offered to productions that came back into the repertoire after a break. The system did not provide regular daily warm-ups and the implication was they were not an essential part of performance preparation. Saturday warm-ups were only given during previews. Some leading actors challenged this saying they needed the work even more before matinees and on days when they may be performing twice.

Often productions were supported by a number of voice coaches including Wade and Berry who worked with leading actors. During the late 1990s some directors expressed a preference to working with a single dedicated voice coach so as to focus the creative input. This resulted in a greater sense of involvement and acceptance as part of the creative team. The Voice Department employed freelance dialect coaches to help actors to adopt a particular accent when required. Voice sessions were also offered to directors of Fringe productions.

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<sup>300</sup> Adrian Noble interviewed at the RSC on 14 August, 2000.

<sup>301</sup> Detailed information about Andrew Wade can be found in *A History of Voice Teaching in Britain*, unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Birmingham, 1994, pp.182-185.



## Rehearsals

The most obvious and powerful cumulative learning opportunity existed within the rehearsal room. The rehearsal period during Noble's directorship could be between seven and ten weeks depending on the position of a production within the schedule and how many productions were rehearsed simultaneously. Even in Noble's time the rehearsal period was much more generous than in commercial theatre and the rehearsal process had time to develop organically but directors remarked that the priority system used when rehearsing two productions with one company of actors, meant they did not have as much time as actors may have believed.

The intellectual power of the Company had always been strong. Associate directors had the opportunity to contribute to the choice of plays and considerable advance knowledge of projects was given, so their preparation was insightful and thorough. Among specialists who were brought in to inform and guide actors during Noble's directorship was Murray Cox, a psychotherapist from Broadmoor Hospital who spoke about the connection between language and character. Experts were brought in to offer background information for productions on an *ad hoc* basis but there was no formalised system for the provision of speakers.

Then, as now, productions had a period of about a week of previews but sometimes this could be extended to up to two weeks, which meant that the rehearsal process could continue beyond the first public performance which allowed actors to develop, build and adapt by 'listening' to the audience. Actors used to commercial theatre remarked that they felt privileged to be able to keep working on their process during previews.

## Projects at The Other Place (TOP)

The Other Place offered a variety of short, voluntary projects for actors throughout Noble's directorship and traditionally it hosted the actors' Fringe Festival. Suzanne Harris<sup>302</sup> spoke of the role of the studio theatre:

The projects organised by The Other Place are intended to 'Sustain and Renew' the creative energies of the actors and often extend to other theatre practitioners. The Other Place has consistently offered a wide programme of workshops and projects intended to allow actors to extend their skills. These projects have been optional and voluntary. Those actors who have found the work they are involved in fulfilling have not needed to participate. Actors who have a period out of rehearsal or who feel they are not challenged sufficiently by the demands of their roles, or those who simply wish to become involved in a previously unexplored area of theatre, are at liberty to participate. The projects often produce synergy between disciplines. Actors, writers, directors and technicians all sharing skills and often creating such as workshop readings of new work, video programmes.<sup>303</sup>

While exciting projects were offered, the voluntary nature of the projects meant that time was not allocated for the work so actor participation had to be negotiated around scheduled rehearsals. The work had a wide remit and was not only focused on actors. When Katie Mitchell was the Director of The Other Place (1996-1998), she issued a memorandum on the project work. It stated that:

The Other Place is a resource centre for everyone working at the RSC and I [Katie Mitchell] would welcome proposals for projects from any department in London and Stratford. In order to clarify the word 'projects' I have drawn up the following guidelines:

1. To develop work with living writers nationally, but particularly targeting those living and working in the West Midlands.
2. To explore work with and for the visually impaired, the hard of hearing and people with learning difficulties and special needs.
3. To expand dialogue with the local Stratford community and urban and rural areas in the West Midlands with a view to (a) increased accessibility and involvement and (b) creating a new and younger audience.
4. To explore the possibility of creating meeting grounds between theatre practitioners and other mediums (art/film/video/internet/mime/dance).
5. To offer a comprehensive and consistent physical training for the actors at the RSC throughout the season.
6. To offer practitioners in all fields at the RSC the opportunity to explore different working methods from the UK and abroad.
7. To set up a series of explorative workshops which challenge our working methods and push the boundaries of the form.

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<sup>302</sup> Suzanne Harris, assistant to the manager of The Other Place, Bronwyn Robertson, until the announcement of Project Fleet in 2001. She was also a producer at The Other Place.

<sup>303</sup> Interview with Lyn Darnley at The Other Place in September, 2001.

8. To establish training initiatives and workshops for young directors, actors, technicians, designers etc. Wherever possible we hope to ensure that the project work is open to as many members of the RSC as possible – in London and Stratford.<sup>304</sup>

This work focused on new audience development, community, international exchange, skills development, multi-media and encouraged a relationship with new writers and the Literary Department. There were one-off and longer workshops in acting styles and methodology, play readings and video projects. Workshop leaders included Mike Alfreds, Ken Campbell, Philip Voss, Peter Gill, Declan Donnellan, Suzuki and Augusto Boal.

The two regular contributors to the projects at TOP were Alexander Technique teacher Sue Laurie and ethno-musicologist and singing teacher, Helen Chadwick, both of whom also worked at the National Theatre Studio. Chadwick's work in a cappella offered actors the opportunity to develop ensemble skills through singing folk music from around the world, communally. Her style was relaxed and enabling. The sessions were not singing 'lessons' yet they were demanding and extending. Laurie gave individual attention to posture and physical performance needs.

Feedback from actors demonstrated their value. Commenting on a two-week long project directed by the Russian Kama Ginkas, an actor wrote,

Kama Ginkas was totally inspirational. The kind of director/teacher who is so totally different to the British style – shakes actors up and forces them to re-assess aspects of their working method they take for granted.<sup>305</sup>

Actors working with Shakespeare over a prolonged period value exposure to other methods and find them enriching. Working with Kama Ginkas and the Grotowski-influenced Gardzienice company allowed actors to re-energise their performance without altering its essence. Responding to the question, 'Did the Project inform your work on stage?' the same actor wrote: 'Yes. Not specifically, but more in the sense of spring-cleaning the mind so the work on stage could be approached fresh.'

Another actor wrote of the same project: 'Hard work but inspiring – especially when heading to the end of [the season in] Stratford. Also refreshing to have a completely different approach to work.' While another

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<sup>304</sup> Katie Mitchell, from memorandum, *The Other Place/Project Work*, 7 March, 1996. The full document can be found in Appendix 4.(2).

<sup>305</sup> Quotations taken from TOP feedback forms compiled by Suzanne Harris, 1998.

felt that the project had directly informed her work on stage and had been 'exciting if unsettling. He didn't encourage us to apply a technique, he'd say it was a life's work, not a week's.'

Another actor said, 'I loved having the opportunity to take part in workshops outside of the season. I think it's very important to keep exercising different muscles.' A member of stage-management wrote after participating in a video project:

Good to work with actors in a different medium. You see different aspects of their work – which is good for your relationship with them. The project work, and the fringe festival was for many of us the most artistically satisfying part of our time in Stratford. It was an extremely important boost to the morale of the Company.<sup>306</sup>

An important insight into the actor's experience was given by a young leading actor, Scott Handy, in his response to questions in the feedback questionnaire:

I was one of the few with the mark of blood on our foreheads, who were in plays only in the main house. Yet in spite of this the times that I will remember during the Stratford season (Karma Ginkas, The Fringe Festival, education workshops, Gardzienice slideshow, Burns Night, Jazz dance)...all happened at The Other Place. Thank you for letting us feel included and welcome there. I feel (and I have been open about this to Adrian) that there is a missed opportunity for the 'company' among the actors at the RSC. The Other Place seems to be the exception. It has the practical combination of working rehearsal rooms and communal spaces combined with an attitude that is forward looking. This questionnaire testifies to the same spirit of enquiry.<sup>307</sup>

Scott Handy revealed not just the need for the work at The Other Place, but also some of the frustrations endured by young actors playing roles for (in his case) up to 18 months.

Set against this was the experience of rehearsing and playing large Shakespearean roles on a 'large Shakespearean stage'. While there were many things that I have learnt and many pleasures derived from working on the main stage, the action of repeating plays for over a year in a similar space became a problem to be surmounted rather than an opportunity to be mined. This had all to do with the ongoing attitude towards acting inherent in the scheduling. The text and then those decisions blocked and staged. The resulting rehearsals were not re-worked. *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* did not go into the rehearsal room again. The prevailing and unspoken inference being that good 'technique' and some invisible spirit of inspiration would keep the performance fresh. The end result was (most usually) an intelligent and slick demonstration of a *reading*

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Scott Handy responding to TOP Project Questionnaire compiled by Suzanne Harris, 1998.

of a play rather than a true and violently dramatic event. This is no doubt a perennial problem for every classical repertory company yet the answer must lie in the process itself. If one of the primary reasons for the existence of the company is the investigation into the art of acting and a constant inquiry into the process and processes of that art, then the results will *always* be moving (in the physical and emotional sense of the word). The work at The Other Place was always moving. Often, however, the frustration was twofold: that the work was concluded too quickly; and that once concluded, the work then proved impossible to apply to main house productions. If I were a doctor I would say that the diagnosis for the main house RSC was simple and agonising: classic(al) Schizophrenia.<sup>308</sup>

Scott Handy's comments reveal flaws in the ensemble at the time. The fractures he identifies limit the development of productions and quash the theory of ensemble growth through repetition. Handy's response is significant in the light of the changes made by Michael Boyd in 2003 and his encouragement to revisit and rework productions. It also illustrates the worst kind of frustration for actors. At the same time it is not a typical response in that most actors played more than one space and some productions were re-worked, sometimes, as far as actors were concerned, too often. Nevertheless it suggests that Adrian Noble listened and responded to actors' feedback and tried to make working for the RSC more artistically creative.

Steven Pimlott was Artistic Director of The Other Place from 1998-2001. The final programme of projects offered by TOP during the summer of 2001 included:

- Alexander Technique: solo sessions with Sue Laurie.
- A singing workshop with Helen Chadwick.
- A ten-day exploration of manners and movement through the medium of Renaissance Dance, with Sue Lefton and Timberlake Wertenbaker.
- A five-day writers' workshop with RSC writer-in-residence Zinnie Harris and Director and writer Craig Higginson and six young writers and actors, developing new writing in response to the 2001 season.
- A five-day Directors' Project with Cicely Berry (exploring Shakespeare with a group of actors and directors).
- Assistant Director Projects: two assistant directors each directed a project.
- Director Clarissa Brown and writer John Oram worked with a group of actors and local people exploring themes of belonging in an urban/rural world.
- Video Projects: Actors used the video production and editing suite in order to write, direct, produce or act in a video.

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

- Introduction to Butoh<sup>309</sup> – a practical workshop introduced the Japanese discipline and the system of physical training developed by Marie-Gabrielle Rotie who conducted the session.

Community programmes and young actors' projects were held at, and sponsored by, The Other Place. Most significant of these were the classic theatre Boot Camps produced by Fiona Lindsay of the Education Department during which local volunteers rehearsed and staged a production over five days.<sup>310</sup>

Bronwyn Robertson, The Other Place manager, said that the difficulties were that the projects were dependent on rehearsals and planned work was often cancelled because actors were not free to participate. Actors commented that offering work that could not be undertaken by all made it seem unimportant and additional. Unless projects are seen to be essential to the creative life-blood of the Company they are devalued. (These same problems persisted well into Boyd's Artist Development Programme.)

When attending projects at TOP I observed effective work of high quality that was appreciated by the actors who participated. Some companies were able to take advantage of exciting and extending work while others found they were rehearsing on days when projects were planned. Without being linked to rehearsal process, co-ordination with the schedule was difficult and the work only reached enthusiastic actors who happened to be free, rather than the full Company. The optional nature of the projects meant that they did not create a culture of ongoing career development for all actors and therefore did not reflect a true ensemble ethic.

### **The Fringe**

The Fringe Festival was a popular and unifying event that involved actors, stage-managers and members of the administration who raised funds, and offered practical support. Performances were scheduled throughout the day and after the main repertoire and were popular with local and visiting audiences. (It ceased to be a regular feature of the season in 2001 although this festival was repeated in London in 2002. In 2005, under

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<sup>309</sup> Butoh is a movement/dance system that developed out of the social and political climate in post-war Japan. Further information can be found on <http://www.butohuk.com/>.

<sup>310</sup> Middleton's *The Witch*, *The Swan*; directed by Heather Davies (2002), Seneca's *Thyestes*, *The Other Place*, directed by Rebecca Gatward (2003), were Boot Camp productions.

Boyd, the Winter Season Company staged a small ten-production event festival in January.) Actors felt that the Fringe should have had more support from management and that Noble's decision to close TOP in May 2001 finally made further festivals impossible. The Fringe became part of the culture of the Company in Stratford, Newcastle and London. Records show a Festival in Newcastle in 1977, a London Festival in 1979 and regular annual festivals from then until 2001.<sup>311</sup> The Fringe offered actors opportunities to explore areas of performance and develop aspects of their creative selves. Actors are often in situations that can be dis-empowering. They can feel that creative decisions are taken from them by directors. The Fringe offered them the opportunity to take charge of their own ideas and see them materialise. Some discovered an ability to organise, negotiate, fund-raise or direct. Many developed entrepreneurial skills that stayed with them. The energy and creativity that went into the Fringe could only feed back into the artistic work in the theatres. For those actors whose roles were unrewarding, the Fringe become an artistic life-line. It was a social, unifying festival which celebrated theatre and offered a feast of performances for audiences and Company alike. Support staff also found themselves working in more extending roles. As a voice coach I was asked for more directorial input and helped with editing and shaping texts.

When Katie Mitchell was the Director of TOP, scheduling meant the Fringe had to be staged at Stratford College. This was unsuccessful due to the distance from the theatres and because the actors lost control of the content by opening the festival to local amateur groups which compromised the standard. The Stratford audience saw the Fringe as an exciting and integral part of the RSC. In the Spring of 2001, it was suggested by management that the Fringe be staged in a large events tent known as the Summerhouse, but the actors resisted this move.

In 2000 Sam West directed a full-length production of *Hamlet* in two weeks. He did not want to follow the trend for small cast productions and

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<sup>311</sup> Under Boyd the 2004 and 2005 New Work Festivals replaced the Fringe Festival. The New Work Festival was an RSC production and casting favoured experienced members of the Company.

stage an hour-long play or heavily edited version.<sup>312</sup> The production captured the imagination of the audience and was talked about as if it had been an RSC production. The variety and quality of many of the productions staged in the Fringe showcased actors' talents not evident in their 'official' casting in Company productions.

Michael Mears performed his one-man show, *A Slight Tilt to the Left* in the RSC Fringe, and won an Edinburgh First; the play was later broadcast by BBC Radio Four, proving that The Fringe created career opportunities. Occasionally highlights of the Fringe were performances at the Live Theatre in Newcastle and the Bridewell and Latchmere Theatres in London. Actor Susannah Elliot-Knight went on to produce professionally after honing her skills on the RSC Fringe. She also promoted the work of Barbican Stage Door Keeper Julian Fox who wrote and performed a successful one-man show on the Edinburgh Fringe, in *The Pit* and on the comedy circuit.

The Fringe illustrated the value of unstructured creative opportunities. As participation was voluntary, sufficiently challenged or exhausted actors did not participate. The Fringe was an example of an important informal learning opportunity that was abandoned without being replaced by an equivalent programme. Its loss was felt by most members of the Company.

### **The James Sargant Award 2001**

Noble had expressed concern about the way drama schools were training actors primarily for film and television. Two important examples of formal training projects designed to address this were the James Sargant Awards and the RSC Academy. I believe both initiatives indicated Noble's determination to go beyond Company sessions and rehearsal support and make a statement about encouraging young ensemble members to work on verse, language and poetry in order to become better classical actors. It acknowledged the Company's responsibility to provide training as required by the *Royal Charter*.

On his retirement Sargant had donated a sum of money for the specific purpose of training young actors, new to the Company, in verse-speaking. In 2000-2001 twelve young actors were selected by the Casting

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<sup>312</sup> West went on to direct professionally and became Artistic Director of Sheffield Theatres from 2005 to 2007. He has continued to act and direct.



Department, which made the award prestigious rather than 'remedial'. Other actors were encouraged to use the Voice Department to gain similar experience which resulted in an increased number of actors voluntarily attending verse sessions. The work, delivered by the Voice Department, was additional to rehearsal voice calls. The actors, four women and eight men, came from a variety of training backgrounds.<sup>313</sup>

The project was valuable because the 12 actors were given the opportunity to develop language and verse skills in solus sessions without the risk of criticism and 'exposure'. The work did not merely problem-solve but went back to the basics of poetry and prose speaking and did not assume knowledge or experience. The sessions explored formal structures as well as engaging imagination so that actors connected the formal and the improvisational aspects of the actor's art. Narrative verse, soliloquy, chorus, duologue and rhetorical language formed the basis for this practical inquiry. They were given the freedom to ask questions about verse form, rhythm, metre and to clarify any confusion created by the sometimes seemingly contradictory information from other actors and even from directors. They were encouraged to explore styles of text and to develop a sense of the synergy between language, verse and acting and develop an understanding of terms such as caesura, iambic pentameter, line form, line endings, rhetoric and other text related vocabulary.

Some of the actors went on to play leading classical roles at the RSC and elsewhere. One of the participants, Chuk Iwuji, worked with Peter Hall

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<sup>313</sup> Ten of the 12 had practical theatre training in the United Kingdom. Six had attended drama school for three years. Two of the six had attended RADA, others attended Central, Guildhall, Webber Douglas and Mountview Theatre School. Two were Cambridge University graduates. One studied a two-year course at Bristol Old Vic School and the other joined the Company soon after graduating. Of the remaining two UK graduate actors, one trained at Manchester Metropolitan University then joined the RSC to play a leading role in a new play at The Other Place, and a small role in a Shakespeare play. The other studied English and Drama at Goldsmith's College and then did a postgraduate year at Webber Douglas. One actor had an MFA from Yale University. The twelfth actor had studied speech and drama at school and taken graded examinations but had not attended drama school. At 19 years old she had previously worked in film but had no stage experience although she was cast in a major Shakespearean role. Ten actors had heavy understudy responsibilities. They were divided into three groups of four and each group was assigned a voice coach. A programme of classes was initiated beginning with sonnets and developing into verse in dramatic and lyric text. The groups approached a variety of texts so as to explore practically the delivery of verse and its connection to character. The work was conducted in group and in solo sessions so that they were able to learn on their own and from watching and commenting on the work of others.

after leaving the RSC and then returned to the Company to play Aufidius in David Farr's production of *Coriolanus* in 2002 and between 2006 and 2008 he played *King Henry VI* in Boyd's *Histories*. He has also worked on several National Theatre productions. Hattie Morahan went on to work extensively on stage and television including working at the National Theatre.

### **A Significant Announcement**

In May 2001 Adrian Noble took the decision to reduce the scale of the Company by taking it down a route that became known as 'Project Fleet'. Dramatic changes were announced which were to have far-reaching consequences and ultimately change the focus on training. The main ensemble was to be discontinued and in future actors would be offered shorter contracts and work in one of nine or ten small touring companies. The Other Place theatre was to be closed and an academy of acting would operate from the building. Noble announced that in order to guarantee the operation of the Company it had to be more agile and 'fleet'. He said the work should cease to be 'buildings-led'<sup>314</sup> and, instead, be 'ideas'-led. The shape of the acting company would change with more 'projects' such as the 2000/2001 *Henry VI* and *Richard III* productions in conjunction with universities, and national and international collaborations would become the norm. His decision had been prompted by the 'stabilisation'<sup>315</sup> programme and the redevelopment of the Stratford site. Noble spoke of the need to strengthen the Company's London profile and expand work in the regions. A major ambition was to attract high profile actors to the Company in order to attract younger and more diverse audiences; another was the development of artists. 'We will position ourselves so that we are a Mecca for artists...the Company will have learning at its heart...the development of the artist is

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<sup>314</sup> This was a reference to scheduling designed to fill all three theatres in Stratford for the entire season.

<sup>315</sup> David Benedict wrote of the Arts Council's role in the new plans and explains the stabilisation programme: 'The Arts Council, meanwhile, not without its critics in the handling of all this, is holding fire. To be precise, they are holding back £4.5m earmarked for the company while it sorts out its future. That money stems from a 'stabilisation' award granted to the RSC in 1999 to clear debts and set up a strong future. As Noble told Paxman, stabilisation amounted to a total audit of artistic and business practices which is where Project Fleet, which represents the future of the RSC, was born, more than two years in the planning.' (*Is the RSC safe in his hands?*, David Benedict, *Observer*, Sunday March 31, 2002).

central.<sup>316</sup> Noble undoubtedly had an ambition to implement a system that would enhance training for artists and had he instigated the programme earlier he would possibly have succeeded.

The changes announced were met with scepticism from Company employees, actors and the press reaction was mixed. The RSC press release read:

Underpinning the proposals is a commitment to make the RSC a more attractive place to work for actors and directors. The current RSC structure is a deterrent to many actors, largely due to the length of contract, which can be as long as two years.<sup>317</sup>

The idea of scaling down the Company and the incumbent artistic support teams was met with outrage from some members of the press and members of the Company. RSC alumni including Judi Dench and Donald Sinden were vocal in their opposition. The redundancies that resulted across most departments created fear that the tradition of handing down theatre crafts from parent to child over a significant number of generations would be destroyed, affecting the Stratford skills base.

The local community were passionately concerned about the effect on the economy of Stratford.<sup>318</sup> The closure of The Other Place and the idea of dismantling the ensemble were met with equal fervour. Noble defended his position claiming that those in opposition did not fully understand his intentions. He believed he was deepening and extending the ensemble experience, not reducing it:

Most people's fears have focused on two things: a mistaken belief that the repertoire ensemble is being dismantled, and the future of The Other Place in Stratford, which since 1974 has been the home of experimentation, innovation and new writing at the RSC. The truth is, we have no intention of abandoning either. After the artistic high of last year's Histories project, it seemed the perfect opportunity to transform the way in which the RSC operates.<sup>319</sup>

Noble developed the idea of themed ensembles, where a company worked intensively on plays from a specific period or with a common theme:

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<sup>316</sup> RSC Press Release, 25 May, 2001.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Many staff members and residents believed that the unique relationship between the theatre and the town would be lost if the Shakespeare Institute and the Birthplace Trust were affected. Bed and Breakfast establishments and other tourist industries were also likely to be adversely affected by changes in the structure of the Company, which would impact on visiting education groups.

<sup>319</sup> Adrian Noble, 'All's Well', *The Guardian*, 3 October, 2001.

Next year, three companies of actors will each present very different, but equally authentic versions of the repertoire ensemble. One company will tackle two Shakespeare plays, another will explore three of his late plays by performing them in promenade, and the third company will examine the principles of Elizabethan and Jacobean acting by performing six plays of the period in repertoire.

This is certainly not abandoning the repertoire ensemble. Crucially, it creates an ensemble of actors working on a specific idea. There is a lot of nostalgia for the way the current ensemble operates at the RSC.

My excitement about the future is that we can take the ensemble one step further, working with a company of actors, exploring an idea in the kind of detail that pays artistic dividends. What made last year's *Henry VI/Richard III* company so special was the fact that they had such an intense and extended period working to a shared agenda as one intimate artistic team.<sup>320</sup>

Noble's belief that 'themed ensembles' develop further and 'dig deeper' was borne out, after his departure, by the *Tragedies* and *Comedies* seasons of 2003/4 and 2005 and the Swan *Jacobean* (2002), *Spanish Golden Age* (2004) and *Gunpowder* (2005) seasons. He spoke of the need to redevelop the Stratford Theatres in order to maintain traditions and break new ground:

We need to develop a main house in Stratford that is fit for the next 50 years, and retain and enhance the much-loved Swan theatre. But it seems to me we also need a new experimental third space, with the adaptability to be anything we want it to be, including, crucially, a home for our main house Shakespeare productions while redeveloping the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. The Other Place is a symbol of excitement and innovation in UK theatre, and there's no way I want to lose those values in the future. But to stay at the cutting edge, The Other Place also needs to change.<sup>321</sup>

Within the Company it was rumoured that the cost of subsidising performances in TOP was the principal reason for its closure. The intimate theatre space was adaptable and used in a variety of conformations. Audience proximity allowed actors and directors to explore performance styles that contrasted dramatically from that of the RST and Swan. This variety challenged and stimulated artists and exercised their skills requiring them to make conscious performance choices. When ensembles played the studio space as well as the RST, they had to consider their changed relationship with the audience and adjust their physicality and vocal use to the smaller space.

Noble had ambitions for the future use of TOP including the establishment of a school:

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

Experimentation, development and new writing will always be at the heart of the RSC vision. That's why we have no intention of closing down The Other Place for good. It's gone through countless transformations since it started life as a tin hut. Over the next year it will continue to house workshops, play readings and developmental projects, and next summer will be the initial home of the RSC Academy.<sup>322</sup>

## Press Response

Most of the broadsheet newspapers saw both the positive and negative aspects of the proposed plans. Theatre critic Benedict Nightingale commented:

Noble may be justified in his claim that long, rigid contracts can be inhibiting to actors, since those who join as spear-carriers usually end as spear-carriers. He may have a point when he says that some of the shorter-lived companies the RSC has recently assembled – for Michael Boyd's gloriously feisty *Henry VI* plays, for instance – have achieved a togetherness that could be defined as ensemble acting.<sup>323</sup>

Having been responsible for voice work on these plays, I observed that the young actors in these productions, which were commissioned by Noble, grew artistically over the period of the run and left with an enhanced understanding of what it means to play Shakespeare.<sup>324</sup> The ensemble was a microcosm of the RSC operating at its best, working under a gifted director who established an ensemble ethic. Musicians were present in the rehearsal room, experimenting with sound effects and atmospheric underscoring so that the eventual score was the result of an organic response to the rehearsal process. Voice and movement work was integrated into rehearsals. All actors were expected to understudy and many were asked to do more understudying than is usual. Some said the contained contract (ten months) made the intense level of work possible but that it would have been unsustainable for longer. Noble was the architect of this ensemble approach within the Company and should be credited with this achievement. The

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Benedict Nightingale 'All the World's a New Stage,' *The Times*, 30 May, 2001, p.18.

<sup>324</sup> It was apparent that the actors benefited greatly from the ensemble approach to the work, which embodied exploration and experiment for a significant period before blocking was set. They were encouraged to contribute ideas freely to the process and were made to feel secure enough to disagree and question. The musicians were present in the room, experimenting with sound effects and atmospheric underscoring throughout the rehearsal period and the eventual score was a result of the organic growth of the work. Movement and voice exercises encouraged an ensemble ethic. Some actors were required to do more understudying than is generally considered reasonable, yet they generally embraced the challenge. Some said that the contained contract (ten months) made the level of work possible but that it would have been unsustainable for a longer period, particularly as they often performed three shows in one day.

experience of some touring companies working on one show only over an extended period has not been as positive.

Nightingale raised possible negative effects of the loss of the larger Company:

[...] the RSC may become so little a company, let alone an ensemble, that it will end up with no distinct identity at all. [...] "RSC" could become a mere trademark, one that will sporadically appear on the front of the Young Vic, The Roundhouse, a West End theatre, or even the Barbican, giving spurious credibility to what may be little more than an ad-hoc cast or summer-stock touring troupe.<sup>325</sup>

John Peter saw the changes ringing in a new era and wrote of the loss of a 'golden half-century' of the British theatre. He saw Peter Hall's son Edward, who was directing for the RSC at the time, as being associated with the end of this era:

This [era] began in the late 1950's, when Peter Hall, then in his twenties, joined the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and turned it, in 1960, into the RSC. Now it falls to his son, Edward, directing *Julius Caesar*, to be one of those who presides over the ending of this great era and ushers in a new, more dangerous and more brutal age.<sup>326</sup>

Peter went on to discuss the consequences of reducing the number of plays in the repertory, acknowledging that actors grow and thrive in a repertory system.

The serious reduction of repertory work may not strike outsiders as important, but it was one of the company's founding principles and the main reason for its success over the years. It is economical: given good planning, most actors work most nights. Artistically, it is vital: the actors do not get stale playing the same role night after night. You get quality. The RSC's huge subsidy (£13.3m) is meant to ensure precisely that quality. The more widely scattered the company, the less viable the repertory principle, upon which its excellence and claim for a large subsidy mainly rest.<sup>327</sup>

Peter's reference to the limitations of one-show ensembles is valid, but Noble was also championing ensembles that would work on two or more themed productions, thereby creating a repertory-style company. RSC alumnus Sam Dastor expressed concerns about commercial partnerships and fragmentation of the Company, in a letter to *The Sunday Times*:

The RSC proposals make it clear that commercial partnerships will be the pattern of the future. [...] The RSC's most valuable and saleable commodity – its world-famous name – will be used to market productions which do not

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<sup>325</sup> Benedict Nightingale 'All the World's a New Stage,' *The Times*, 30 May, 2001, p.18.

<sup>326</sup> John Peter, *See the Feathers Fly*, *The Culture*, *The Sunday Times*, 22 July, 2001, pp.18-19.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

necessarily originate in Stratford, and may well contain no actors that have worked in Stratford...

The way forward for the RSC is surely to create once again a strong company which stays together for several seasons. That would justify its subsidy. To dismantle its excellent technical and creative departments, leaving intact only its administrative structure, makes no sense at all and destroys the argument for subsidy.<sup>328</sup>

Dastor reiterates the belief of Archie Flower and Benson that companies that stay together and build ensembles are worth investing in as they 'grow actors' and produce higher standards.

### **Plans for an Academy**

Of all the changes planned, the announcement of the proposed Academy seemed to have made the most positive impact in the press. In a letter to staff, Adrian Noble stated:

We are planning that the Academy will be very much like a theatrical apprenticeship, with a programme of intensive study complemented by performance of a Shakespeare production at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre as part of the Summer Festival Season.<sup>329</sup>

Although the exact structure of it was not given, the press release stated:

As part of the package of proposals for artists, the RSC is planning the launch of a new Academy in Stratford-upon-Avon, training for the next generation of classical actors. The Academy – which will launch in embryo at The Other Place during the 2002 Summer Festival Season in Stratford – will recruit actors at the start of their careers and expose them to the very best talent in classical theatre. A programme of intense training will end in a Shakespeare production as part of the Festival Season.<sup>330</sup>

It appeared that the long-held ambition for an RSC Academy in Stratford would finally be realised. Noble announced to staff that the proposed RSC Academy would offer 16 places in 2002. Classes were to be held in the morning and rehearsals in the afternoon and evening, allowing postgraduate students to delve into formal language. The pilot programme with director Declan Donnellan in charge of the programme would run for 16 weeks culminating in a Shakespeare production.<sup>331</sup> Actors on the programme were to be paid the Equity minimum.

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<sup>328</sup> Sam Dastor, writing to the editor of *The Sunday Times*, 29 July, 2001.

<sup>329</sup> Adrian Noble, letter to staff outlining changes in the Company, 25 May, 2001, p.2. The production of *King Lear* was eventually staged in the Swan not the RST.

<sup>330</sup> RSC Press Release, 25 May, 2001, p1.

<sup>331</sup> Adrian Noble speaking to RSC staff in the Union Club on 6 June, 2001.

The inference was that such an Academy would become permanent and, probably, this was Adrian Noble's intention. As it happened the Academy was run in 2002 only, for 12 weeks. After an internal and external review, Michael Boyd chose to develop artists in a different way. Many actors felt that the system operating at the time, which allowed all actors to learn through rehearsal and performance, voluntary classes and projects at The Other Place, could not be improved upon by what was seen as 'a drama school' catering for a small group of young actors. Some felt the Academy was being offered as a poor substitute for the loss of the ensemble and repertory system.

...this very system [repertory and ensemble] not only creates artistic vitality but was the rich garden for so many of the top actors today: Judi Dench, Harriet Walter, Juliet Stevenson, Kenneth Branagh, Ralph Fiennes, Simon Russell Beale, Alex Jennings, Antony Sher, to name just a few. These actors developed at the RSC, and with the demise of a classical repertory system, one wonders where the next generation will come from. In destroying the only leading ensemble company left in the United Kingdom – both actors onstage and technicians offstage – the RSC's new plans raise the ugly spectre of the RSC existing only as a brand name, a shadow without real substance.<sup>332</sup>

John Peter's support of the Academy was not surprising as he had expressed concern about actor training in the skills necessary for classic theatre. The major companies, including the RSC, had not fully taken up the challenge of classic training and Noble's Academy seemed to address this.

The importance of this project for the future of the British theatre cannot be too strongly emphasised. Noble has asked Declan Donnellan, the internationally renowned director, teacher and founder of Cheek by Jowl, to head the academy initially for a year. This is an inspired choice. Donnellan is an artist of wisdom, intelligence and generosity. He is also an outsider, a brilliant, non-institutionalised iconoclast of the kind that all large institutions need, if they only knew it.<sup>333</sup>

Donnellan was also seen by the profession as an appropriate choice; he challenged and inspired the young graduates with his rigour and passion and offered a system and skills set that they could implement and rely on. Some of the students went on to work with Donnellan's Company Cheek by Jowl.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Miriam Gilbert, writing in a letter to the editor, *The Sunday Times*, 29 July, 2001.

<sup>333</sup> John Peter, 'See the Feathers Fly', *The Sunday Times*, The Culture, 22 July, 2001, pp.18-19.

<sup>334</sup> Nonso Anozie who played Lear in the Academy production went on to play Othello for Cheek by Jowl in 2004.



## The Case for an Academy

Apart from the obvious benefits for student actors working with an exceptional director such as Declan Donnellan, the establishment of an Academy in Stratford created a more focused environment of learning and creativity. Unfortunately the Academy was seen as replacing the system of training rather than supplementing it and this soured the attitudes of many towards the project. The fact that it operated outside the main ensemble was an issue for actors.

Adrian Noble had always supported the training objectives of the Company; he said in an interview with the *Shakespeare Bulletin*:

At this moment, we are redefining the role and purpose of the RSC. Imagine, if you will, an RSC in five to ten years as a center [sic] of high quality performance; overlay upon that its becoming a major educational provider for schools and, in particular, the fields of higher education [...]<sup>335</sup>

This quotation alludes to plans for the proposed permanent Academy to provide postgraduate actor training at MA level. Speculation was rife as to which university would eventually become the accrediting body for the Academy. It seemed likely that this would, for financial reasons, be an American university not a British one. Many believed the established links with Warwick and Birmingham Universities should be developed or that at least a partnership should be forged between the RSC and both an American and a British university. There was conjecture that the Academy would be an umbrella for all the educational pursuits of the RSC.

For some actors, the idea of an Academy was unacceptable because Britain's drama schools have an excellent undergraduate reputation but some directors, including Adrian Noble, believed that drama schools were teaching 'behaviourism'. This was partly due to the demands of the marketplace. Most newly graduated actors find themselves more likely to be offered television work than theatre and consequently many schools choose to prioritise television and naturalism because that is where the work is, so schools that offer such training are popular and therefore deemed successful. The way in which a drama school prioritises training determines the experience of the actor. All acting students are given a firm foundation in

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<sup>335</sup> Margaret Varnell in 'On the Move with the RSC: An Interview with Adrian Noble', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Easton, USA, Spring 2001, p.39.

the rudiments of Stanislavski training. Most institutions offer basic training in classic text. Actors from Oxford and Cambridge, where there are not any practical Drama departments, usually have performance experience with drama societies, but require training in physical skills. Universities with drama departments teach some practical skills and actors choosing this route generally have wide-ranging levels of physical and vocal skills.

A frequent question was, 'What becomes of the training of those actors not involved in the Academy?' They would after all, make up the majority of the Company.

### **Could an Academy Model Offer More than the Ensemble Learning Model?**

The system operating within the RSC before the 2001/2 Academy had a variety of teaching models, both formal and informal, offering intellectual, kinaesthetic and organic learning. The combination of all these styles and the fact that most actors rehearsed at least three or four productions each season meant the system offered actors a spiral learning opportunity. Many young actors felt that they had been given an invaluable 'training' working within the system as it stood. For many the chance to work within the ensemble with the opportunity to perform in more than one production and to learn from the process was preferable to any formal training. The loss of what was seen as the last remaining *true* apprenticeship was considered by many to be lamentable. Actors, who had chosen to become involved in projects at The Other Place, spoke of the value they derived from the work. Others, who had worked with the Education Department or with The Shakespeare Institute and the Shakespeare Centre, valued the opportunities for reflection on their process through contact with postgraduate students and academic audience members.

Shorter contracts would mean less time for repetition, multiple understudy opportunities and for playing a variety of roles in repertoire. Longer contracts had allowed actors to work in a safe environment, learning from their peers and from more experienced actors, and building their careers in an organic manner.

The Academy offered a planned developmental programme rather than a random or spiral model. It would also, possibly, have attracted young

actors with a serious interest in developing the necessary skills for classical theatre and it could have been run alongside other training options for the ensemble. Although not an identical programme, the Academy shared many of the ambitions and values of the Birmingham Conservatoire at Stratford Ontario. See Appendix 4.(3) for further benefits of a permanent academy.

### **Attracting Film and Television Actors through Shorter Contracts**

A prime intention of Project Fleet was to encourage well-known actors with film and television profiles to join the Company and attract new audiences. While many gifted television film actors are accomplished classical actors and honed their skills in theatre, exposing television actors with little or no classical stage experience in leading roles makes them vulnerable to criticism and lowers standards. It is important to encourage actors and agents to acknowledge that accumulative apprenticeship experience allows actors to build their skills gradually. Casting less experienced but high profile actors in leading roles also undermines the ensemble ethic. The right to fail is important but it is irresponsible for a company to cast young actors, or television actors, in roles that make them vulnerable to critics and that over-extend them too early. The desire for 'stars' to draw a new audience needs to be balanced with a responsibility to the artist and the wider ensemble. Shorter contracts were seen as being naturally attractive to actors who wished to add classical theatre and an RSC credit to a thriving television or film career.

### **Actors' Responses to the Planned Changes**

Noble's desire to attract 'stars' insulted some actors who had been with the Company for many years. They were offended by the idea that the Company needed to change the system in order to attract actors of merit. Many actors acknowledged that the system was in need of re-shaping but some felt the Company was behaving like a commercial theatre by enticing audiences with well-known television and film personalities rather than operating an ensemble principle. Some believed that television and film 'stars' might only result in compromising the standards productions had achieved in recent years. Most welcomed the idea of engaging stars with valid experience.

Some of the reaction could be associated with a fear of change. Others doubted the authenticity of a process of consultation that concluded that actors do not want to commit to long contracts. They agreed that the relatively low pay for theatre work meant that actors with financial and family commitments found the protracted time away from London, and the possibilities of television, a financial strain. Nevertheless there were many younger actors, and a considerable number of older ones too, who were eager to accept 12-24 month contracts, developing their skills while submerged in Shakespeare's texts and gaining invaluable experience. The problem for Noble was ultimately financial. Michael Billington understood Noble's dilemma and in an article in *The Guardian* remarked:

Adrian Noble's radical restructuring of the RSC is born of pragmatic necessity: if star actors are often reluctant to commit to a two-year contract, then it makes absolute sense to offer them straight runs and shorter engagements. But there is a certain historical irony in the fact that the RSC was created in 1960 by Peter Hall to offset the inherent short-termism of the British theatre. A three-year contract, security and permanence were seen as fulfilments of actors' dreams; and players of the calibre of Peggy Ashcroft and Eric Porter signed up immediately while others, such as Ian Holm and Diana Rigg, emerged from within the ranks. Now, however, we live in an impatient, freelance, celebrity worshipping culture where actors crave instant stardom, film is seen as the ultimate goal and people often have to be coaxed into working at Stratford.<sup>336</sup>

Billington acknowledged the quandary Noble faced and understood the historical need and desire for sustained contracts cited in earlier chapters. The current necessity for actors to prove themselves on television and screen before they will be cast in leading roles creates a dilemma for many actors and, coupled with agents' reluctance for their clients to commit to time away from London, presents a seemingly insurmountable problem for artistic directors, casting directors and actors alike.

### **Concerns Over the Loss of the Stratford Ensemble**

Sonja Dosanjh worked with the RSC as Company Manager for twenty years. In an interview she expressed her wholehearted belief in the developmental value of the Stratford ensemble and sadness at the decision to change the system.

I've just been talking to Tim Piggot-Smith about apprenticeships and the home-grown actors who learned their craft through what I believe is the most extraordinary apprenticeship that exists for an actor, now that you don't have

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<sup>336</sup> Michael Billington, 'In a world of dazzle, beware a lost identity', *The Guardian*, 25 May, 2001.

the rep system. I know it's very demanding and I know there must be a way of balancing the work-load a little bit because when you look at some people who are in 3 or 4 plays and who are carrying 12 understudies and it's quite relentless. But it is an extraordinary learning curve.<sup>337</sup>

Dosanjh recognised that some actors take advantage of learning opportunities while others may choose not to:

It just always amazes me... they're in that room with hopefully some of the best directors, some of the best leading actors, some of the best theatre practitioners around and the skills that they are being given are just phenomenal. Some actors will choose to see this and some will not but if they just open their eyes to it there are a phenomenal amount of things open to them. Learning is part of the life, it's not set up, it is a way of life here, you come in and it's all around you.<sup>338</sup>

She spoke about the operation of spiral learning within the Company (a process of informal and accumulative learning that comes from repeated performance and exposure to, and observance of, the work of more experienced actors):

You've [the actor] seen it, learned it and then you move on and then when you come round to it again you've learned a lot more since you were last there, so you've got something to give to it.<sup>339</sup>

She expressed her fears about the formalisation of training and of how an academy might be at the cost of social interaction:

There could be a danger that the Academy may become isolated. The one thing that makes this whole system work for me is the ensemble, and it's what you get from people living together that actually almost feeds the learning - what goes on in the evenings, the pasta that's made in the cottages, the lines that are learnt, the lines that are heard, the discussion about the video that's being watched and the work that was done in the day. They tumble out of here at 11 o'clock at night and they are thrown together socially as well – all ages, all varieties of actors and theatre practitioners – it's not exclusively actor-led, you've got stage-management you've got voice, design, movement, fight direction, and there's a part of that that develops the learning.<sup>340</sup>

She also commented on the differences between companies that do not experience working in Stratford compared with those who do:

It's very different when you have a company that plays in London without playing in Stratford. It teaches me about the importance of the geography; if your rehearsal rooms are in Clapham and your performances are in the Barbican, when the curtain comes down of course everyone leaves and

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<sup>337</sup> Sonja Dosanjh, interviewed by Lyn Darnley at the RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon, August, 2001.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

goes to their corner of London, to their own support systems and friends and restaurants, so there isn't the same dialogue.<sup>341</sup>

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the Stratford ensemble rehearsed for most of the year, meaning that young actors who did the bulk of the understudying, could find their lives being totally immersed in the life of the theatre. This resulted in a very steep learning curve and an understanding of what it means to be part of an ensemble. Dosanjh felt that rather than dampen their enthusiasm, it seemed to fire creativity and involvement in the Fringe.

Dosanjh was particularly concerned about the loss of the RSC Fringe, which she felt had a re-energising effect upon the Company.

There is a point at which the tiredness sets in, particularly with the 'play as cast actors', that can isolate them sometimes. They've got so much work up and running and they just want to draw away from it all. The Fringe Festival is phenomenal – one minute they are all exhausted and literally the week after the understudy run is done, they're planning some major production for the festival – rushing around getting costumes.<sup>342</sup>

Dosanjh understood the positive informal development opportunity created by the Fringe and how it re-energised the ensemble. The RSC Fringe had thrived under Noble but he was also seen as being responsible for its demise.

### **The Stratford Community**

The RSC has always had a strong relationship with the academic community in Stratford. There is a large and ever changing community of local and international Shakespeare scholars, students and enthusiasts, all of whom are passionately interested in Shakespeare and often pursue research in subjects related to the performance of classical theatre, have interacted with actors as members of the audience, participated in pre-show and post-show sessions, in workshops at the Shakespeare Institute or the Shakespeare Centre and as members of the Friends of the RSC. Some work as Tour Guides and ushers. Students pursuing postgraduate studies in Shakespeare and Performance Studies frequently interview actors or directors for dissertations resulting in documentation of process that would not happen otherwise. The mutual co-operation between academics and

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

actors has done much to develop the dynamic interface between the practitioners and theorists in this unique community. The same level of exchange does not happen in London or on the tours, although efforts are made by the Education Department to involve actors in educational events.<sup>343</sup> What is particular to Stratford is the ongoing relationship between academics and the regular informal exchanges that occur.

### **The Significance of the Academic/Practical Meeting Point**

The Stratford academic community forms a loyal but discerning and challenging audience, who feel very connected to the Company, it could even be said many feel a sense of ownership or partnership. (Many non-academic audience members regularly attend the annual RSC Summer School, which has been held for over 60 years.)

The exchange of ideas in Stratford between academics and actors, directors and numerous other theatre practitioners has gone a long way to narrow the gap in understanding between performance theory and practice. It can be said that over many years the RSC has satisfied the requirements of aspects of the *Royal Charter* through a relationship with the academic community.

The beginnings of this alliance date back to 1947 when a conference of scholars was organised under the directorship of Allardyce Nicoll. A year later came the first publication of the annual *Shakespeare Survey*, which was dedicated to writings and criticism on the performance of Shakespeare world-wide. This first conference began a dialogue between academics and theatre practitioners which was to have a profound effect on literary criticism by focusing on the plays in performance and opening up debate on their value beyond their literary and academic merits.

The Shakespeare Centre brought actors and academic audiences together so that an understanding of each other's perspective could mutually inform and enrich. Robert Smallwood (who was then Deputy Director and Head of Education) organised these meetings through the Company Manager.

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<sup>343</sup> At the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, during the 2000, 2003 and 2006 residencies, a full programme of education work was undertaken over a period of a month. Similar residencies have taken place at Davidson College in 2002, 2005 and 2008 and a further partnership occurred in 2009 and 2010 with Ohio State University.

I started organising these sessions through Maurice Daniels<sup>344</sup> and subsequently for the next 20 years with Sonja Dosanjh. They seem to know which actors like to talk about their work and who is good at it. I have often asked for specific people and they have usually come. Many actors find that talking about the role they're playing, puts them in a position where they find the words for decisions that were instinctive not conscious and the process of articulating is often stimulating and thought provoking.<sup>345</sup>

An example of the content of a *Talk-Back* post-show is a discussion in The Swan on 24 August, 2001 in which the subject was *Shakespeare's Women*. The Chairperson was Dr Margaret Reynolds, Reader in English at Queen Mary, University of London. She has a specific interest in this subject and is the author of *The Sappho Companion* and *The Sappho History*. The actors on the panel were Marty Cruickshank (Gertrude), Kelly Hunter (Constance) and Zoe Waites (Viola). The discussion covered aspects of the characters and plays, ranging from disguise, public and private persona, politics, the status of women in the plays and the challenges the actors are faced with when playing leading roles who say relatively little. When the character has a limited voice, the character's presence becomes hugely significant. Marty Cruickshank said that she felt it was crucial to keep her energy as high as every man's on the stage. Kelly Hunter spoke of the significance of silences. Zoe Waites said that *not speaking* was as active as speaking. They discussed the generalised and preconceived ideas that actors and audiences have of the great female roles and how much of the detail in the text is not heard. The discussion remained practical at all times and was rooted in their performances. The audience was given an insight into the process of each actor and able to ask questions.<sup>346</sup>

Leading academics were often invited to chair these actor/audience discussions, which were generally well attended. The possibility of sharing in these and similar post- and pre-show events allowed participants to experience another actor/audience dynamic.

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<sup>344</sup> For information on Maurice Daniels see Appendix 4.(4).

<sup>345</sup> Interview with Robert Smallwood, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon Avon, 11 August, 2001.

<sup>346</sup> Many theatres offer audiences insight into production and performance process. The National Theatre, The Young Vic Theatre, The Globe, The Haymarket Theatre, London, The Theatre Royal Bath, Newcastle Theatre Royal, The Sheffield Crucible and Plymouth Theatre Royal are example of theatres that offer education and enriching opportunities for audiences.



When Project Fleet was announced there was concern that the changes would cause considerable problems for the Shakespeare Centre and Shakespeare Institute who based their courses around the theatre's repertoire. Robert Smallwood expressed his concerns about what appeared to be a contraction of the scale of work in Stratford. Although changes had to be made to Shakespeare Centre programmes in 2002 and 2003, with the appointment of Michael Boyd a sense of continuity re-emerged. It would have been a retrograde move if the long-standing and productive alliances with two important British academic institutions had been permanently jeopardised.

The efforts of the Shakespeare Centre, Shakespeare Institute, the RSC and other theatre companies to close the gap between the worlds of academia and performance have been successful to some degree. This can be seen clearly in the growing number of courses that study Shakespeare not just as literature but as performance. Sonja Dosanjh remarked on the relationship between the Shakespeare Centre and the Company, specifically focusing on what the actors gain from the collaboration:

When Robert Smallwood moved from the [Shakespeare] Institute to the Shakespeare Centre, he actually re-titled the whole course and called it '*Page to Stage*' to actively encourage all the participants to remember that in Stratford the work leads from the page to the stage, and that the stage is important. Under Stanley Wells the course at the Institute became '*Shakespeare in Performance*'. Almost everybody, junior and senior actors alike, said they valued the feedback from students.<sup>347</sup>

Many students use the RSC archive at the Shakespeare Centre and regularly attend events related to performance in which actors speak of their preparation and process. There have been changes in published texts resulting from this new culture of integration between disciplines. Robert Smallwood spoke of these changes:

You can see it in the editions – you can look at an Oxford or a Cambridge edition or a new, New Arden. The editions I used to use as an undergraduate – the footnotes were all verbal – philological really, now they talk about staging issues and ways of saying the line in performance. Nobody publishes a Shakespeare now without a serious sense of the

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<sup>347</sup> Interview with Sonja Dosanjh at the RSC, 4 August, 2001.

theatrical dimension. Cambridge is publishing actors talking about working on Shakespeare – that’s jolly important.<sup>348</sup>

Cambridge also published Robert Smallwood’s own series *Players of Shakespeare*<sup>349</sup> in which actors reflect on roles they have played and commit their journey, with its struggles and successes, to paper. Such reflection allows actors to take stock and then make their intangible process understandable to a reader. The struggle to rationalise an intuitive process and to find a suitable lexicon and mode of discussion is crucial if others are to understand it. This is a valuable intellectual exercise for what is seen as a very instinctive, intuitive and practical activity. These books, read by students of theatre and literature, are an invaluable resource, not just for students, but for academics and other theatre practitioners who are able to read about an actor’s process in relation to a specific Shakespearean character.

If there is a common RSC approach to text, it is that the language is central to the performance and this approach is supported by the academic influences on the Company. Actors leave the Company with knowledge acquired by formal and informal contact with academics as well as theatre practitioners. While many mature directors are English graduates, younger directors are likely to have more diverse backgrounds and so contact with theatre and literary academics is valuable. It is important to the RSC and to British theatre in general that the interface between theory and practice continues to flourish.

The study of Shakespearean performance does not merely produce better informed actors and audiences, it reinforces the power and significance of performance to society by proving it is worthy of serious consideration and documentation. The RSC’s role in creating opportunities for primary, original research was valued by the Stratford academic

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<sup>348</sup> Interview with Robert Smallwood, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon Avon, 11 August, 2001.

<sup>349</sup> *Players of Shakespeare*; Essays in Shakespearean Performance, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. *Players of Shakespeare* 1 edited by Philip Brockbank, *Players of Shakespeare* 2 and 3 edited by Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood, *Players of Shakespeare* 4 and 5 edited by Robert Smallwood.

community and Project Fleet prompted concerns about possible fractures in that relationship.<sup>350</sup>

### **The Value of Change**

When Adrian Noble re-structured the Company, it was feared that The Fringe,<sup>351</sup> The Other Place Projects and valuable academic collaboration would be lost. It was felt that the wide variety of productions from different periods would diminish, resulting in actors experiencing less material and fewer opportunities to play all three Stratford theatres.<sup>352</sup> There was also concern about the consequences for the Stratford academic community.

Undoubtedly change was necessary for both financial and pedagogical reasons. The crucial question is whether disbanding the ensemble and TOP, a place that for many actors in terms of training was a creative oasis, was the best way to do it.

On the evidence of his past practice it seems that Noble believed that the closure of TOP would be temporary and that the Academy would provide a much needed classical training for graduate actors.

In spite of adverse reaction to Project Fleet changes, Noble's actions instigated an essential re-assessment of the delivery of training and development within the Company and he should be credited for this and for instigating the Academy in an attempt to formalise training and achieve the long-held ambition for a school that the *Royal Charter* requires. His successor was able to build on his inspiration although his vision differed. (See Chapters 5 onwards.)

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<sup>350</sup> See Appendix 4.(5) for additional material on the relationship between the RSC and the academic community.

<sup>351</sup> Michael Boyd replaced the Fringe with an experimental New Work Festival in 2004 which included a devised project entitled *Pilate* and another in 2005 which included *Postcards from America* (A double bill about America which included *Eric La Rue* by Brett Neveu and *Elective Affinities* by David Adjmi), *Breakfast with Mugabe* by Fraser Grace, a number of adaptations and a movement project. Unlike the Fringe, The New Work Festivals were fully funded by the RSC and directors were employed by the Company. The 2005 New Work Festival had a further life when it became the Soho Season in London 2006. Many RSC actors hoped that eventually the Fringe would be handed back to the artists.

<sup>352</sup> In 2005 and during the 2006 Complete Works Festival, actors were able to play in two of Stratford's three theatres. The 2005 ensemble played Shakespeare in the RST and new writing in The Other Place and the 2006 Complete Works ensemble played in the RST and the Swan Theatre. The 2006 Histories Ensemble played in the Courtyard Theatre. Before Noble's decision to close The Other Place, actors were able to play all three theatres and both classic and contemporary texts simultaneously, allowing each to feed and challenge their skills.

The system that operated under Adrian Noble may be considered haphazard and sporadic but it offered the Company's artists opportunities for learning not provided anywhere else at the time. When the system appeared to be under threat many actors and creative staff defended it and declared that it embodied the best possible developmental structures.

During Noble's directorship the RSC offered some guaranteed structures, which allowed actors to develop but some of the training was random and did not reach all actors. For this reason, although it can be said that at this time the RSC was partially addressing the requirements of *The Royal Charter*, its demands were not fully addressed.

Noble ran an ensemble, and many actors such as Simon Russell Beale, Guy Henry, Toby Stephen, Alex Gilbreath, Philip Voss, Penny Downie, and Cherry Morris returned for further contracts. For actors whose casting allowed it, learning was accumulative and actors grew through their roles and understudy commitments. This is an established RSC practice that has continued under Michael Boyd.

It would be unfortunate if Noble was remembered principally for the loss of a permanent London base with the closure of the Barbican, the closure of The Other Place and the redundancies that followed Project Fleet. His many achievements on stage and in the area of artist development deserve better recognition. It is also important to acknowledge that some changes were necessary and they ultimately prompted a new era of training within the Company. Noble's final year was turbulent but artistically successful:

Despite the turmoil within the RSC, the work produced by the changes was of a high quality. The shows at the Roundhouse were fascinatingly diverse, and Gregory Doran's Jacobean season was unforgettable. However, poor attendances in London exposed the recklessness of a policy that depended upon box office hits. [...] Criticism, much of it personal and vitriolic, snowballed, and in March 2002 Noble announced that he would step down at the end of his contract in March 2003. With hindsight the resignation looks inevitable, but the feeling persists that Michael Boyd will benefit from Noble's decision to break the mould at the RSC.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Simon Trowbridge, *Stratfordians*, a Dictionary of the RSC, 2003. [www.stratfordians.co.uk](http://www.stratfordians.co.uk). (Also published by Albert Creed in 2008.)

## Michael Boyd

Michael Boyd had been an Associate Director since 1996 and very involved in the Company at the end of Adrian Noble's leadership. He was therefore aware of the difficulties he would inherit as Artistic Director. When Boyd was appointed as Noble's successor, Noble said:

Michael Boyd is one of the most distinctive and original Shakespearean directors in the country. He has flair, intellectual rigour, and real powers of leadership. I wholeheartedly congratulate him and wish him great good fortune in his new post.<sup>354</sup>

In an article on the 2006 *Complete Works Festival* the academic Jonathan Bate wrote of the unexpected choice of Michael Boyd as Noble's successor. He commented, 'The favourite had been Gregory Doran, widely regarded as a safe pair of directorial hands. It was an external member of the appointments committee, Sir Richard Eyre, former artistic director of the National Theatre, who pushed hardest for the riskier appointment, arguing that theatre must take risks or die'.<sup>355</sup>

Although Boyd was known to push boundaries and take risks, he had a proven record as a popular and dynamic director with a passion for ensemble. That the issue of ensemble was a concern for the British theatre community at the time, is apparent; in November 2004, a year into Boyd's directorship, Equity and the Directors' Guild of Great Britain held a conference on Ensemble<sup>356</sup> which investigated current ensemble working practices in the UK and internationally, and discussed their artistic merits. (For further information on the Equity Conference see Appendix 4.(6).)

In an effort to define the wide parameters of ensemble in the UK, the conference printed a number of statements in its programme including a quotation from actress Nichola McAuliffe:

As far as [British] theatre is concerned, I have been shocked at how unexcellent we have become... If only there was an opportunity to create a company of actors and directors whose working conditions meant they didn't have to continually be chasing television work and fame, who could stay together and work on texts not for three to nine weeks but for years – as

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<sup>354</sup> Staff and agencies, *Guardian Unlimited*, 25 July, 2002,

<sup>355</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'The RSC Complete Works Festival: An introduction and Retrospective', *Shakespeare, Volume 3, Numbers 1-3*, (April-December 2007), London, Routledge, p.184.

<sup>356</sup> Ensemble Theatre Conference, 23 November 2004, Pit Theatre, The Barbican, London.

continental companies do – we may be able to establish a new era of great classical theatre in Britain.<sup>357</sup>

McAuliffe does not mention the significance of training although Mikhaïl Stronin<sup>358</sup> representing ensemble theatre outside the UK, gave training central importance.

The conference deliberated the different approaches to ensemble theatre. Frances Rifkin, a member of the Equity Small Scale Theatre Committee, asked Boyd, ‘What kind of approach are you going to use?’<sup>359</sup> Boyd’s response was that ‘any new movement in Britain that’s going to succeed is going to be eclectic.’<sup>360</sup> Boyd justified his acceptance of the post by saying:

The reason I took on the job at the RSC was because of the opportunity it seemed to offer for me to really take the Ensemble idea seriously. When I took over, it seemed a good opportunity for the company to reassert its faith in what was possible in terms of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>361</sup>

Although Boyd had proved his ability to create a successful ensemble with his 2000 *Histories* project, he began his directorship with high expectations from many and considerable scepticism from some.

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<sup>357</sup> Nichola McAuliffe, ‘Ensemble Theatre Conference, 23rd November 2004, The Pit, The Barbican, London’ p.9, <http://www.dggb.org/files/EnsembleTheatreConf.pdf>, 7 November, 2009.

<sup>358</sup> Mikhaïl Stronin is a former member of the Maly Drama Theatre, Russia.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.,pp.21-22.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Pilot Programme December 2003

Michael Boyd was born in Belfast and after graduating from Edinburgh University with an MA in English, trained in Russia on a British Council fellowship with the Malaya Bronnaya in Moscow. Before working at the RSC he directed at the Belgrade, Coventry, the Sheffield Crucible (where he was Associate Director) and then became the founding Artistic Director of Glasgow's Tron Theatre from 1985 to 1989. He worked frequently at the RSC from 1994 and won the Olivier Award for Best Director for his 2001/02 productions of *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3* and *Richard III*.<sup>362</sup>

The ensemble training programme established by Michael Boyd during his first year as Artistic Director differed from the more loosely structured informal work undertaken during the period of Adrian Noble's leadership. Boyd believed that actors should work and train together over a sustained period in order to build skills and a common practice, and he placed the need for continual development at the heart of his ensemble ethic.

After the formal review of the Academy in May 2003, Boyd chose not to pursue a satellite training company, but to fully integrate training inside the ensemble. A press release announced:

The Ensemble acting company will rehearse, train and perform together over a period that is twice the rehearsal time that is usual in the UK. Creating and nurturing the Ensemble will inject a spirit of experimentation and enquiry into the fabric of the company. Longer rehearsal periods create a freedom for directors and actors to test ideas and take risks, providing the opportunity to develop the best possible performances. Actors from this year's Ensemble will also form part of our acting company for 2005, so that over time, audiences can follow their work as they perform in many, varied roles for the RSC.<sup>363</sup>

Michael Boyd gave the key-note speech at the Equity Conference on Ensemble in November 2004<sup>364</sup>; he recalled the RSC history and said that the ensemble:

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<sup>362</sup> Staff and agencies, *Guardian Unlimited*, July 25, 2002.

<sup>363</sup> RSC Press Release, on Michael Boyd's appointment, 25 July, 2002.

<sup>364</sup> For further information on, and quotations from the Equity Conference, see Appendix 4.(6).

[...] enables the Royal Shakespeare Company to develop a deeper and longer engagement with artists which means the actors can access a deep voodoo, as opposed to a shallow magic. The RSC was founded on the principles of ensemble, borne out of Peter Hall's love affair with Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, but those ideals of developing artists within an artistic community, over years lost their courage through the 80's and 90's at the RSC, when the idea of ensemble was honoured as much in the breach as in the observance. One year into my artistic directorship, we are making the first steps towards returning the RSC to its founding principles, re-emphasising idealism over pragmatism, and trying to turn that idealism into reality.<sup>365</sup>

Boyd also drew attention to the focus that Hall had placed on training and his reference to the 'courage lost' from the 1980s onwards suggests he had reviewed the evidence and believed it was time to return to the Company's roots.

On several occasions, when addressing the Company, he referred to Hall, Saint-Denis and Brook's pamphlet *The Crucial Years*. British theatre culture does not traditionally embrace a notion of ongoing development of actors within an ensemble company: the tendency has been for actors to complete a three-year drama school training and then hone their craft through work in theatre, film and television. Boyd acknowledged the current culture in Britain, saying that it did not embrace the ensemble ethic, seeing it as an 'un-English promotion of the whole at the expense of the parts of the individual artists. It is seen, and indeed it can actually be, an imposition of a beige and worthy homogeneity on a group of talents that would be better celebrated in their vivid individuality.'<sup>366</sup> He gave credit to British directors who had worked to create ensembles, including Hamish Glen who founded Dundee Rep Ensemble and funded three-year contracts for actors and apprentices using lottery money.

Understanding the possible pit-falls of an ensemble as well as its many benefits, Michael Boyd began developing the Artist Development Programme immediately and the first training sessions were scheduled for the *Tragedies* ensemble in December 2003.

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<sup>365</sup> *Equity Magazine*, Ensemble Theatre Conference, 23 November, 2004, The Pit, The Barbican, Equity and the Directors' Guild of Great Britain, Spring 2005, p.1.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*



## The Tragedies Ensemble

In December 2003 the first Core Company Artist Development Training Programme was co-ordinated by Boyd and the Lead Producer, Denise Wood. Boyd was clear about the need for preparation for a classical repertoire:

We will also take more time to prepare the artist. There is a perceived and real diminution of the teaching of classical theatre skills in drama schools. Naturalism has contaminated teaching. We can give the boldness that Shakespeare requires. Big and ambitious is scary but if you can't do it at the RSC then where can you do it?<sup>367</sup>

The programme, designed for actors<sup>368</sup> of the 2003/4 *Tragedies* Company (*Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*), required them to attend classes, workshops and lectures conducted over a full week, followed by daily pre-rehearsal warm-ups and one half-day of training in each of the subsequent nine weeks. The training was facilitated by longer periods of rehearsal. Additional expenses incurred by extended rehearsals meant that the training was costly and supported by funds raised independently by the Development Department.<sup>369</sup> The Weston Foundation committed to fund the programme for three years. The full annual cost of the Artist Development Programme was in the region of £500,000 per annum. Only £50,000 of this amount was dedicated to classes and workshops, the remainder was used to enable longer rehearsal periods. Actors working on the Swan Theatre's *Spanish Golden Age* season, were not included in the pilot training period for financial reasons. In an interview with Michael Billington, Michael Boyd gave the reasons for this:

We can't afford to do everything I want to do, so I've focused resources on the main house. The four directors of the tragedies will get together for a workshop in early December. Then we'll bring the entire company together for a week of physical and vocal training, text work led by John Barton and Peter Hall, and seminars from Jonathan Bate on Shakespeare's world and Ralph Williams who'll be talking about tragedy and the Old Testament. I find actors are thirsty for all that. The ensemble will then divide into the *Macbeth* and *Romeo* strands, each with 11 weeks' rehearsal.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> A. K. Bennett-Hunter, *The Stage*, 17 June, 2004.

<http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/feature.php?sid=2686>

<sup>368</sup> Assistant directors were also expected to attend all training sessions.

<sup>369</sup> The RSC Development Department raises funds from corporate and individual donors.

<sup>370</sup> Michael Billington, 'Bold Plans Signal New Era for Stratford', *Guardian Unlimited*, *Arts News*, 30 September, 2003.

In an interview in *The Stage*, Boyd affirmed his belief in the ensemble principle:

It is what we were built for. It was the founding ambition of the RSC to engage with actors for a longer period and at a deeper level of enquiry.<sup>371</sup>

Boyd referred to Hall's 'founding ambition' for a training ensemble based on the Russian theatrical tradition. Boyd possibly anticipated some scepticism or resistance and commented: 'Even this earlier initiative by Peter Hall was considered controversial and condemned as a lot of foreign nonsense'.<sup>372</sup>

The practice of longer-term engagements for actors was undermined in the 1980s by a preference from agents for short-term contracts. The RSC responded by changing the shape of the season and it became impossible for actors to continue from one engagement to another without a break.

Now, this attitude was being challenged:

It is beginning to be understood again that you are only at your most ambitious with commitment. The more you put in the more you get out, whether as a company or an individual...We are moving forward. We will be less patrician and more modern with less emphasis on hierarchy.<sup>373</sup>

### **Training and Rehearsals 2003/4**

Michael Boyd's 2004 ensemble started work in the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms in December 2003. The training was designed to be an integral part of the entire contract. Activities were delivered as workshops and classes in large or small groups, lectures for the entire group or production-related research work for each production. The work was conducted by RSC directors and practitioners, directors with historical links with the Company and professionals from outside the organisation with specialist skills and knowledge. Those leading the work were: Michael Boyd, Peter Hall, John Barton, Cicely Berry, Ralph Williams, Peter Gill, Dominic Cooke, Jonathan Bate, Alex De Silva, Liz Ranken, Lyn Darnley, Max Atkinson, John Burgess, Sue Laurie, Richard Cave and Rob Clare.

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<sup>371</sup> A. K. Bennett-Hunter, *The Stage*, 17 June, 2004.  
<http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/feature.php?sid=2686>

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

Subjects addressed were verse and rhetoric, the language of the tragedies, the history of tragedy, Capoeira<sup>374</sup>, Yoga, voice and movement, and basic physical and vocal techniques including work on rhythm and Laban energies.<sup>375</sup> Later in the rehearsal period the physical techniques of Alexander<sup>376</sup> and Feldenkrais<sup>377</sup> were introduced.

### **Training Background of the Actors**

A breakdown of the training background of the 36 actors who began work in December 2003 can be found in Appendix 5.(1). The percentage of un-trained actors was small but significant and there was a wide variety of experience within the ensemble. Some actors had worked with the Company many times, some occasionally, others had extensive or limited experience elsewhere, while for a few it was their first work in theatre.<sup>378</sup>

A frequently asked question was how older, more experienced actors could be encouraged to work within an ensemble with actors less experienced than themselves. In response Michael Boyd commented:

Another notion I'm encouraged to flout is that actors of brilliance are no longer interested in sustained commitment. Yet all the actors I know yearn to be part of something of real substance that takes them beyond themselves.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Capoeira is a Brazilian martial art/dance form that originated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was developed by the African slave population. It is now a popular competitive activity demanding a high level of physical agility and strength.

<sup>375</sup> Rudolf Laban was an Austro-Hungarian dance teacher and choreographer who revolutionised dance education. His 'Efforts' divided movement into categories of weight, space, time and flow. He also distinguished between movements that were sustained or sudden, bound or free, and direct or indirect.

<sup>376</sup> The Alexander Technique is taught in most drama schools and is a useful system of physical alignment that is helpful for posture and performance, and also beneficial to the voice. Alexander was an Australian actor born in 1869 who experienced vocal problems and in an attempt to find a solution to them observed his own posture in mirrors and developed his technique.

<sup>377</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) was a Russian physicist who developed a form of physical education that uses gentle movement to increase the function of the human body. This system is found to be particularly useful to many actors.

<sup>378</sup> Of the nine women in the Company only two had previously been employed by the RSC. For one this was a first job and another was in the early stages of a career with limited experience. Another was an experienced National Theatre performer, yet another had West End and television experience. The others had limited classical theatre experience. A greater proportion of the 30 men had been previously employed by the Company. Three of the four leading actors had prior RSC experience. The fourth had considerable professional experience elsewhere. A further 12 actors had experience with the Company. Six of these had major roles in the 2004 season. The other six had minor roles and large understudy roles. Five other actors playing significant roles were working for the RSC for the first time but had considerable experience in other companies. A group of nine less experienced actors played smaller roles. One of these actors had worked for the Company playing small roles on a previous occasion.

<sup>379</sup> Michael Boyd, 'Brush up your Shakespeare', *The Independent*, Monday 14 April, 2003.

In an interview for *The Stage* Boyd was asked about how the cross-experiential mix would work. His response was that the Company would 'learn to marry great leading performances into an ensemble'.<sup>380</sup>

### **The Initial One-Week Programme**

Because of the importance of the initial programme and the similarities with subsequent training periods, I am giving a detailed account of the 2003/4 training.

The programme which appears in Appendix 5.(2), ran for a week with workshops and classes throughout the day and some evenings. At the 'Meet and Greet'<sup>381</sup> on 8 December 2003, Michael Boyd welcomed the ensemble to a 'new and historic phase in the life of the RSC'. As well as the actors and creative team, Peter Hall, John Barton and Cicely Berry were present. Boyd spoke about the training they would undertake and of the place that Shakespeare's tragedies held in the contemporary world: 'The Greeks and Shakespeare invite an audience to explore pain very profoundly, sending them away better equipped to deal with the world.'<sup>382</sup> He spoke of the challenges the language presents for actors and of the 'connectedness' the plays have with the family, political structures and social conditions in our time.

The heightened language of the classics and Shakespeare and the direct language of the contemporary world are separated at your peril. Character, narrative and metaphysical ideas need not be separated and contemporary work at its best should aspire to this.<sup>383</sup>

He went on to say the ensemble should work to make connections between these two languages. He spoke of the experimental nature of the new ensemble; and, referring to Peter Hall's 1960s company, talked of the 'links through people in the room with the previous experiment in ensemble'. Two members of the 2003/4 ensemble, actor John Normington and director Peter Gill, had experienced the training offered by Michel Saint-Denis' Studio, under Hall's direction.

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<sup>380</sup> A. K. Bennett-Hunter, *The Stage*, June 17, 2004.

<http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/feature.php?sid=2686>

<sup>381</sup> The Meet and Greet is the term used to describe the initial gathering of the actors, producers, creative team, company managers and other significant departments involved in the production, as well as the Education, Marketing and Press Departments.

<sup>382</sup> Michael Boyd, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 8 December, 2003.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

Michael Boyd added that all those in the room were ‘guinea pigs’ but that there would be an opportunity for a percentage of this original group to return for a second season in 2005 and a further percentage for a third season in 2006. ‘Continuity is an ambition [in order to be able] to enrich our repertoire and deepen our relationship with each other. The work and the purpose of the ensemble is to prevent ‘artistic sclerosis’.<sup>384</sup> When Cicely Berry asked what the cure for this condition was, he replied:

Keeping the tubes open by exploring the life and music of the language; getting fitter and discovering rhythms that have eluded you.<sup>385</sup>

He ended his introduction by thanking Peter Hall for founding the Company and saying that Hall remained the living connection between the RSC’s ensemble origins and Boyd’s own vision to re-establish those principles. Hall’s response was to wish everyone luck ‘at the beginning of a great journey’.

It was clearly stated by both Boyd and Hall that verse and language must remain at the heart of the training. Their concern reinforced the belief among Company voice coaches that, while a broad training for actors is desirable, the consequence has been a reduction in time dedicated to practical spoken work on poetry, prose and dramatic verse.

### **Approaches to the Verse**

In the afternoon a discussion on language and verse was held between Hall, Barton and Berry. Although all three approached the work from their own perspective, they shared a mutual aim to focus on language and to build performance starting from the words. What differed was the degree of formality. Hall was the most inflexible with strong opinions about metre, pace and avoiding breathing mid-line. Barton claimed that originally he had been more formal in his approach than Hall, who had since moved towards a more ‘rigid approach’, whereas Barton had become more open, allowing actors more choice and freedom. Cicely Berry’s approach was the most free and flexible, focusing on releasing language spontaneously. Essentially all three advocated a language-centred approach where words come before emotion.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

## Peter Hall: Verse Principles not Rules<sup>386</sup>

Hall outlined his approach to language and verse. He began by saying he wished to speak of general principles, not rules, intended to help actors speak the text. He said that great jazz musicians are unique. 'They observe the rhythms. They play the tune but the tune is *theirs*.' He commented that there were 'a million ways not to speak a line and a million ways to do it.'<sup>387</sup> The line could be spoken with care and yet interpretation could be as personal as jazz. Shakespeare made certain rhythmical demands on the actor. It was, he said, like song or dance. 'You have to make it your own but unless you are aware of the underlying rhythm it won't work.' He went on to speak of the clues given by the text. 'Shakespeare tells you when to breathe, pause and accelerate. He says when but not why.'<sup>388</sup> Hall added that 'for contemporary actors schooled in the acting techniques of "inner" motivation, speaking comes last. Starting with the language has become unfashionable.' His advice to the ensemble was: 'What you say must come first.' Most of Shakespeare's verse is not poetic but pragmatic and ordinary. (In discussing metre, Hall spoke of the five-foot pattern in a line of iambic pentameter simulating ordinary speech.) Hall suggested that when Shakespeare is lyrical, one must always ask why. 'The reason will be that it is deliberate and is there to show his indulgence.'<sup>389</sup> (Qualifying his use of the word 'indulgence' Hall claimed it was Shakespeare's deliberate choice to couch a phrase or line lyrically in order to embellish a thought. The lyricism is not without meaning or wit and is always significant and should be treated as such by the actor.) He stressed the need for actors to learn the 'shape' of the line and to know where the line ends. His belief in the power of the verse structure to add to the meaning is expressed in his publications:

Shakespeare's form is based on the sanctity of the line. Whatever else is jettisoned, the rhythm of the line must be preserved – kept smooth. To put in pauses and breaks:

'In sooth (*Big pause*.) I know not why I am so (*Pause*.) sad.' ruins the form,

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<sup>386</sup> Peter Hall, speaking at the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 8 December, 2003.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

and so deprives the audience of the meaning.<sup>390</sup>

Hall suggested actors should scan each line and note irregularities, because inversion of the metre brings energy to the line. It is important to identify the rhythm and to use it. He reiterated that clues in the text give the actor choices. Hall stated that Elizabethan language was more vowel-weighted than modern English: it contains a 'riot of mixed metaphor and vocabulary which must be minted by actors so as to engage the audience'.

Shakespeare's characters live in words. He spoke of the need for the speech to be witty and quick so that 'The audience runs after you',<sup>391</sup> meaning that the audience should be actively listening and intellectually engaged in the performance rather than sitting back and allowing it to 'wash over' them.

Over the subsequent nine weeks Hall gave two sessions to all actors in small groups. During these classes he re-iterated these principles and gave actors the opportunity to experiment with them, although they were not heavily directed. Due to Hall's intense schedule, the exposure to his work was limited and one group had a gap of several weeks between the first and second sessions.

### **John Barton: Clues in the Verse and Text**

Peter Hall and John Barton shared a Cambridge education and experience of working with the Company over an extended period so, although they differ in minutiae, they share many of the same concerns.<sup>392</sup> Barton spoke of his work, and his passion to 'equip the actors...to make them feel at home with the demands Shakespeare makes.'<sup>393</sup> The work he did with the core ensemble was the same as he had done with other companies within the RSC; it was the frequency of the work with Michael Boyd's first ensemble, rather than the content or essence, which differed.

Barton worked with actors in three small groups of 12 and in two larger groups of approximately 18. Actors spoke sonnets chosen from a

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<sup>390</sup> Peter Hall, *Exposed by the Mask*, London, Oberon Books, 2000, p.50. (I have added the quotation marks.)

<sup>391</sup> Peter Hall, speaking at the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 8 December, 2003.

<sup>392</sup> John Barton has maintained a 40-year link with the RSC through all of its incarnations in his role as Advisory Director and continued teaching verse to the actors throughout most of this period. From 1960 to 1991 he was an Associate Director. Barton also has a strong academic profile, having lectured at Berkeley and been formally a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge (1954).

<sup>393</sup> John Barton, speaking at the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 8 December, 2003.

prescribed list and Barton coached them, often suggesting they perform again within an improvised dramatic context. Group discussion was encouraged and Barton built a vocabulary and offered strategies to apply to any classic texts, saying that identifying antithetical thinking within the text was the single most important clue to the argument. Like Hall Barton encouraged actors to look at the quality of the verse, asking if it was poetic or anti-poetic and noticing when verse or prose moved from rational to heightened language. They were encouraged to consider metaphor and imagery and what 'emotional need' or 'intense emotional state' produced heightened text. There was little discussion of metre but Barton encouraged actors to notice when the 'behaviour of the verse line changed' and if so, to ask the question 'why'. He stressed the need to ask any questions embodied in the text actively, rather than to make them rhetorical. Above all Barton urged actors to make the language accessible for the audience. In his seminal 1984 publication, *Playing Shakespeare*, he stressed the need for audience engagement:

As ever, the audience is quite as important in all this as the actors. If we don't reach our audience we fail. We must make them listen and share and follow the story. But above all, listen. It's so easy for an audience not to listen, particularly with a knotty and difficult text. I may be cynical but I don't believe most people really listen to Shakespeare in the theatre unless the actors make them do so. I certainly don't. I know that it's too easy for me to get the general gist and feeling of a speech, but just because I get the gist I often don't listen to the lines in detail. Not unless the actors make me.<sup>394</sup>

Above all he encouraged frequent practice in speaking classic texts. In the second week actors were asked by Barton what useful clues and short cuts they would take away from the classes. The responses were:

- To note when the language changes from rational language to language rich in metaphor and imagery, and to consider why this change has occurred.
- To remember that Shakespeare's habit of mind was antithetical.
- To always find the 'need to speak' and the desire to share the words.
- To drive the thought through to the end of a line and/or thought.
- To know that even when using pace you can still allow words space.
- To trust the words to 'release the character'.

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<sup>394</sup> John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*, Methuen, London, 1984, p.7.



- To be always present and specific and never generalised.
- To trust that the meaning reveals itself.
- Never to make a judgement based on the first line of the sonnet, but to allow the 'gear changes' to become apparent, allowing the full intended meaning to emerge.

The group discussed the Elizabethan actor's ability to read and interpret text quickly in a way similar to a musician reading music. The Elizabethan use of the word 'character' (meaning a symbol for writing rather than the contemporary use meaning *personality*), was discussed; Barton commented that Adrian Noble had said 'The text is the character'. Actor Clive Wood, elaborating on this, said that he felt it was important 'to find the voice', 'the imperative' early in the rehearsal process, before searching for the character. (Wood referred to the relationship characters have to the words they speak rather than the physical voice.) Greg Hicks commented that he had sometimes fallen into the trap of playing the physical and emotional 'state' rather than the language, which works upon the actor. (Hicks raised a common problem for young actors which is compounded by contemporary systems of training. It is only with experience that it becomes easier to marry naturalistic acting styles with heightened language. Most acting methodologies focus on the character's psycho-physical and emotional journey rather than focusing on building character directly from the text.)

Observation of the language sessions revealed considerable variation in the ease with which actors handled the language. Both age and experience contributed to this disparity. Actors who had worked regularly with the Company displayed a greater willingness to play, explore and risk. This was possibly because of greater familiarity with the process. The technical ability of actors varied with younger actors less able to phrase and instantly interpret than their more experienced colleagues. A number of leading actors, with classical experience, displayed impressive vocal and interpretative 'muscle' not required for a naturalistic or behavioural style. Among these were Clive Wood, David Hargreaves, Corin Redgrave, Greg Hicks and Sian Thomas; some younger actors expressed their joy at being

able to work alongside such skilled artists and learn from them by observing their working methods.

The essential difference between Hall and Barton was one of approach rather than content. Hall was more rigid in his demands regarding verse speaking while Barton allowed more flexibility, eventually achieving the result he required. Hall seemed more concerned with the need to give actors a structured methodology they could rely on, while Barton assumed they would assimilate the technicalities of structure. Their contrasting styles gave actors an element of choice but ultimately Hall's approach was more intimidating to younger actors, some of whom struggled to meet his demands. Actors, while nervous about performing in front of their peers, were more relaxed with Barton, who focused on communication rather than technique and allowed more individual variety in delivery.

### **Cicely Berry: The Physical Approach to Verse**

Cicely Berry's approach contrasted with that of Hall and Barton. She had all the actors working actively on their feet rather than sitting. They were asked to connect breath and sound to the energy of the language and to physically explore the rhythms. Her sessions, in groups of 18, worked to transform written words on the page into active, visceral spoken language. She quoted Edward Bond saying, 'Language begins in the body'.<sup>395</sup> One exercise, which required actors to walk and speak and change direction at punctuation marks, highlighted the fact that although classic text punctuation may be unreliable, it generally suggests a change of energy or impetus, and so helps with meaning. Some of the younger actors who had been confused by the academic discussion, found the practical, physical release of these sessions accessible and empowering. Berry encouraged actors to speak about the various verse sessions they had experienced and make sense of different approaches. All three teachers had re-enforced the same principles, although each approached the work from their own view-point.

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<sup>395</sup> Cicely Berry, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 8 December, 2003.

## **Other Work on Verse**

Further work on verse was included in Voice and Movement sessions, led and team-taught by Lyn Darnley (Text and Voice) and Liz Ranken (Movement and Yoga). The work was similar in approach, but not in content, to the work of Cicely Berry. Contemporary poetry was used to generate rhythm and imagery, which was explored physically and vocally. Rob Clare<sup>396</sup> conducted small group classes and continued the 'clues in the text' work initiated by both Barton and Hall. The focus on language in the first week raised awareness in the rehearsal room about the need to use text as a starting point.

## **Physical Skills**

Movement skills ranged from group work in Yoga, Capoeira and Feldenkrais work to solo sessions in the Alexander Technique. The Yoga-based classes offered actors a programme of exercises they could integrate with their personal warm-up. The voice and movement work focused on establishing alignment, a low breathing pattern, releasing habitually held tension, and creating strength, stamina and flexibility in body and voice. Rhythms, physical and spatial 'levels' and 'energies' and Laban Efforts were explored, and where possible, applied to the speaking of text. There was also an emphasis upon maximising physical and vocal communication, and imaginative expressiveness. Verse was used as a starting point for work on rhythm, breath, vowels and consonants and vocal weight, effort and energy.

The regular, and often repetitive, physical work aimed to minimise injury and maintain performances, as well as adding an enhanced physical and vocal dimension to productions. Liz Ranken and Lyn Darnley worked with actors as part of the creative rehearsal team and conducted solo classes building physical, vocal and text skills to enhance the production process. Alex Silva taught the Brazilian martial art, Capoeira, which is powerfully rhythmical and builds stamina and group-dynamic. This was enjoyed by many of the younger, fitter members of the ensemble but some found it over-strenuous and stressful on knee joints. Sue Laurie<sup>397</sup> gave

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<sup>396</sup> Rob Clare is a freelance Text teacher. His biography and those of other practitioners appear in the appendix to Chapter 6.

<sup>397</sup> Sue Laurie had taught the technique at the RSC and the National Theatre Studio for over twenty

individual classes in Alexander Technique, to improve alignment and relieve stress. The one-to-one attention was appreciated and actors developed greater physical awareness. Alexander Technique can be applied directly to the rehearsal process and help relieve production-specific problems, such as the repeated emotional and physical demands some roles make on the voice and body. Many actors had been introduced to the technique in drama school and were able to remind themselves of the principles and build on their knowledge. The teacher/actor relationship is paramount and often determines the actor's response. Those actors who enjoyed the work wanted more but some found the system too passive.

Richard Cave offered solo and group classes in Feldenkrais technique, which addresses tension and muscular pain, promotes deeper, freer breath control and has benefits for the voice. It also promotes greater skeletal awareness, integration of the body and is also a useful tool in physical interpretation. Feldenkrais work was new to many actors and received a very favourable reaction especially among actors with specific identifiable areas of tension. Like the Alexander Technique, it supports the work done in voice classes. The *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* companies were given a Feldenkrais class as part of their rehearsal call. This allowed them to decide if the work was useful to them. The general response was very positive, particularly from those who found Capoeira too demanding. Many actors signed up for ongoing voluntary sessions. Feldenkrais work can be done in large groups and solo sessions can be used to target actors' specific movement or vocal issues.<sup>398</sup> A drill sergeant from Chelsea Barracks gave regular training to those playing soldiers.

### **Intellectual Work and Research**

A variety of lectures focused on the language of the plays in rehearsal. Talks were entitled: Shakespeare's Tragedies (Ralph Williams), the Tragedy Genre (Jonathan Bate) and the History of Tragedy (John Burgess). There was also a session on Rhetoric led by Max Atkinson. The

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years, so some actors had worked with her previously.

<sup>398</sup> Feldenkrais was first introduced to actors at the RSC earlier in 2003 as a workshop funded by the Research and Experiment budget. Where possible the work was applied to the demands of the rehearsals.

*Macbeth* company had additional speakers on two central themes of the play: witchcraft and murder. Sessions were conducted by a white witch and a psychologist who had worked with violent offenders.

Further production-specific research work and intellectual investigation of aspects of the texts was undertaken by actors. The *Macbeth* company, led by director Dominic Cooke, focused on witchcraft, serial murder, post-traumatic syndrome, the rule of the historical King Duncan and the character of the historical Macbeth. *Romeo and Juliet* actors considered the different writing styles of early translations of the Bible (specifically extracts from the Tyndale text of 1525-6 and the Coverdale Version of 1535) in order to understand, more completely, the development of Shakespearean language. Director Peter Gill also gave his company a talk on the performance history of *Romeo and Juliet*. This historical and anecdotal information had a profound effect on the young company who respected Gill's knowledge.

Dominic Cooke, worked very differently, improvising in order to create the 'world' of *Macbeth*. Some of the older actors resisted this process, feeling it took them away from the text. The very different dynamic in each company was responsible for the contrast in their responses to the rehearsal and training process.

Older, more experienced actors, when asked, gave information, support or advice generously, thereby validating Boyd's preference for cross-generational ensemble training over an academy system.

### **Production-Specific Training**

Fight Director Terry King preferred to keep stage-fighting within the rehearsal framework rather than offering it as part of the training. Although there were principles to be taught, he felt sessions should have an immediate purpose and be directly linked to the production, so preferred to teach the specific moves to the actors who needed them, rather than to the full Company.

Similarly, production-related dialect and text work was addressed in rehearsal calls. The only accent taught for the *Tragedies* was Received Pronunciation, which was required for *Romeo and Juliet*. Singing for the productions was coached by John Woolf, Head of Music. Limited time

prevented further group singing work, though more was requested.

### **Summary of Workshop Provision in the First Phase of Training<sup>399</sup>**

An important function of the first period of the training was to build an ensemble ethos, create a common vocabulary for the verse and text work, and create vocal and physical flexibility and strength. Above all it was intended to allow a deeper enquiry and to place text at the heart of rehearsals.

The work of the First Phase provided all members of the ensemble with:

- a full ensemble session on verse with Peter Hall and further smaller group sessions
- a full ensemble session with John Barton and further smaller group sessions
- two smaller group sessions with Cicely Berry on verse
- two smaller group sessions on verse with Rob Clare
- a full ensemble session on rhetoric with Max Atkinson
- a half-group session with Peter Gill and a further smaller group session
- a full-group lecture session from Jonathan Bate on Tragedy
- two full ensemble sessions with Ralph Williams and a further smaller group session on the language of Shakespeare's tragedies
- an ensemble session on the History of Theatre and Tragedy with John Burgess
- two full ensemble sessions of Capoeira with Alex Silva and three further smaller group sessions
- three half-group sessions with Liz Ranken and Lyn Darnley on movement and voice
- twenty-three pre-rehearsal training sessions with Liz Ranken and Lyn Darnley in movement and voice
- a half-group session in Feldenkrais and further small group optional sessions for those who were free to attend

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<sup>399</sup> The first phase of training refers to the work done at the beginning of the rehearsal process in order to support the work of rehearsals, build vocal and physical stamina and flexibility and to bond the Company. Second Phase or Phase Two training refers to training offered during subsequent rehearsal periods undertaken by the Company or to the optional work offered to the Company once their period of rehearsal is over.

- optional individual Alexander sessions
- production-specific workshops and lectures.

### **Some General Observations on the First Week of Training<sup>400</sup>**

The first week exposed a number of issues that were considered during the planning of subsequent training programmes. Capoeira classes were not appropriate for older actors whose health did not allow them to enter fully into the work. Classes were valuable to the majority but appropriate alternative sessions should have been offered. A small group of actors, by prior arrangement with casting and management, did not attend all sessions. This created a schism in the concept of ensemble. The distance between rehearsal spaces meant actors in *Macbeth* had a considerable walk to their rehearsal room after training sessions. This consumed time, meant actors arrived tense, and created a hiatus between training and the start of rehearsals.

### **Reduction in Pre-rehearsal Training**

After the second week, pre-rehearsal training was only compulsory if actors were rehearsing during the morning. This was welcomed and perceived as considerate of actors' needs. Three 45-minute sessions were offered each week for eight weeks. From week three onwards the size of the training group varied depending on who was required for the morning rehearsal call. The smaller classes made it possible to be responsive to individual needs and allowed for more specific 'postural alignment' and breathing work. Certain actors seldom attended the pre-rehearsal training sessions, either because they were not called for rehearsal in the morning or because they opted out. A lack of discipline about attendance developed with some actors. This made continuity difficult and inhibited progress because opportunities to solve fundamental physical and vocal problems were lost. Several senior actors consistently attended and participated fully, providing a welcome example of good practice. Some actors chose to attend even when not required to do so, but most, knowing they were going to be away from home and families for a year, valued their time off. Transport delays due to bad weather also made it difficult for some actors to attend

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<sup>400</sup> These observations were made at the end of December, 2003, by Lyn Darnley.

early morning sessions.

### **Solus Voice Calls**

In addition to group training actors were given solo voice sessions as part of the rehearsal process. These addressed character and textual demands of the plays: they were an opportunity for actors to use private time in any way they felt was beneficial. Classes, which were scheduled by stage-management, sometimes responded to specific requests from the director, but they frequently provided a space for actors to receive one-to-one coaching or guidance in order to solve a specific problem or challenge that had arisen in the rehearsal room. Prime focus was on verse and text but specific challenges included the vocal qualities required by the witches and a plot-informing messenger speech delivered while the actor was slumped and injured. Concerns about metre, rhythm and textual analysis often arose when working on principal or understudy roles. Work with actors with few lines focused on their understudy roles or on text not currently in the repertoire.

### **Feedback from the Actors**

Michael Boyd held a meeting with actors on Wednesday 21 January 2004 in order to discuss the training and hear feedback. At this formal debriefing the actors were encouraged to offer comments and give individual responses to the work. The session was closed to those teaching so that honesty could be encouraged. Action was later taken in an attempt to respond to actors' suggestions.

Many concerns related to casting and not directly to the Artist Development Programme. Some actors complained about the extended rehearsal period saying the length 'took the edge' off the rehearsal energy,<sup>401</sup> challenging Boyd's desire for longer periods of rehearsal in order to deepen and enhance the process. The majority was very positive and valued the opportunity to extend their skills, particularly in verse. A small minority of mature and experienced actors felt they were sacrificing rehearsal time for training and would rather have focused on the needs of the production from the first day of rehearsals. The younger *Romeo and Juliet* company did not

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<sup>401</sup> The concern over the length of the extended rehearsal period was repeated in the 2005 Comedies Ensemble, when actors felt they needed to have an audience in order to develop the comedy.



share this opinion.

Three-hour classes and workshops were considered too long. There were questions about the appropriateness and content of some sessions, specifically about work that required physical improvisation, which was daunting for some of the ensemble. Many felt the evening lectures were poorly placed at the end of a long and tiring day.

One young actor who had trained as a dancer valued the opportunity to work on voice and text skills but was intimidated by the level some of the sessions. He felt fearful of the initial academic 'circle' (lecture and discussion groups were conducted in a circle) and was afraid to speak or ask questions, but Cicely Berry's practical and physical approach released his tensions and allowed him to relate to text work.<sup>402</sup>

### **Morning Training Sessions**

There was some confusion about the aims and objectives of the regular morning sessions. This could have been avoided with better communication. Liz Ranken and Lyn Darnley felt that, as well as encouraging ensemble working, this training was concerned with building muscle, strength and power in body and voice and preparing the body to take on character work and the vocal demands of the texts. This requires repetition and in many ways reflects the training of athletes, dancers and singers rather than the training culture of contemporary British actors. A rigorous programme of stretching, and muscle patterning, was repeated and established. In terms of the voice, lower costal diaphragmatic breathing was encouraged in order to support the development of tone and provide the foundation for clear and muscular diction. Some actors anticipated a more diverse series of classes but the intention was never to introduce new 'body' work into the short sessions, although the breath work was developmental and worked towards more advanced muscle isolation and control. It was felt by Ranken and Darnley that the objectives were fulfilled to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the starting point of individual actors and considering fluctuations in attendance. Informal feedback was encouraged and received,

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<sup>402</sup> Actor, Matt Cross, returned to the Company in 2006/2007 in *Merry Wives, The Musical*, where he was able to work to his strengths, in being given a further opportunity to continue developing the text work he began in 2004.

but possibly a more structured approach to feedback would have been beneficial earlier in the schedule, as some actors expressed a desire for more variety in the warm-ups while others valued developing a routine. This raised the question of whether practitioners should offer what they believe to be best practice or whether actors should determine what constitutes the training. Ideally once practitioners had assessed the needs of the group, and after strength and agility was gained, actors could have requested favourite ways of furthering skills.

### **Clarifying the Ensemble Principle for Actors**

Although they had been made aware of the Company's ensemble training ambitions, for many actors it was first and foremost another job. A clearer outline of the aims of the ensemble and the need to commit to an ensemble ethic could have been given at the casting stage, although few were likely to have refused the work whatever the training requirements had been.

### **The Teaching Challenge**

The 2003/4 pilot programme created a series of challenges for both actors and trainers. For Voice and Movement practitioners, the teaching challenge was to extend the ensemble's stamina and disparate skills by doing technical work both in isolation and in response to the creative needs of the productions. It was important to find creative ways of achieving technical expertise at a higher level than could be provided in the drama schools by connecting training to the specific demands of professional theatre.

In an ensemble with mixed age, ability and experience, it was important to attempt to meet the needs and expectations of everyone while developing the skills of the least and most able, and offering some level of extension for senior actors, some of whom resented having to attend sessions or felt they had their own established systems of preparation which they would rather have done privately. A leading actor had requested the inclusion of Capoeira in the training programme. These sessions were popular with younger actors but when older members of the Company resisted the work, and in some cases openly resented it, the group dynamic suffered, resulting in a division between those who were embracing the work and the few who rejected it. The situation was difficult for those who

genuinely were unable to participate for health reasons. It was perceived that those who chose to absent themselves from the training considered themselves to be superior, and it was felt that, if everyone was not involved, the ensemble ethos was diminished. In subsequent years efforts were made to ensure the work was possible for all age groups or a choice of activities was provided. In 2005 and 2006 a wider range of physical work was offered.

The teaching challenges were intrinsically linked to prevailing British theatre traditions and difficulties in establishing an ensemble culture.

### **Opposition to the Work**

A degree of opposition was detected early on in the programme from not only actors, but directors. Compared to the ensembles of 2005 and 2006, the 2004 ensemble proved most resistant overall and this seemed to be related to the unfamiliarity with the newly imposed formal structure rather than to the idea of training *per se*. The reasons for this resistance were not clearly identified and were difficult to separate from morale, casting issues and general ensemble dynamics. Nevertheless the training offered by the Artist Development Programme must be considered to be a significant factor. It is possible that underlying resistance from one of the directors was sensed by actors and contributed to their dissatisfaction.<sup>403</sup>

Resistance to training from mature actors was understandable but could not be allowed to inhibit the work on text for young actors, nor could the reluctance of a minority of actors be allowed to undermine the experience of the majority. Not all senior actors were negative and similarly not all young actors were completely open to the work. Age was not a defining issue as some actors felt at ease working on text, yoga and technical aspects of voice and movement but not on imaginative or improvisational exercises, regardless of age. A newly graduated actor found physical improvisation uncomfortable in spite of training at a highly regarded conservatoire. Many experienced actors teach in drama schools and on educational projects, and for most their commitment to theatre training meant they entered into the programme with enthusiasm. A small number felt they did not need to train but showed an interest in teaching others. Some actors

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<sup>403</sup> Dominic Cooke questioned the interruption of rehearsals by training and the loss of focus on the play as a result of unrelated workshops. Specific details appear later in this chapter.

were happier to engage with work that reflected their strengths and less happy to work out of their comfort zones. The majority of younger actors took on new challenges and pushed their personal boundaries.

Reluctance from some is inevitable and needs to be creatively managed. Casting actors who are committed to an ensemble ethic would reduce the levels of resistance. This is difficult to achieve but a worthwhile goal.<sup>404</sup>

### **Appropriate Training**

It became clear that more consideration should be given to the individual needs of actors. At the feedback session, it was suggested that an element of choice should be introduced so that actors could commit to a course of training appropriate to their own physical abilities and career trajectory. If training was independent of the production process more electives would be easier to achieve, but that in turn would negate the principal premise, which was to offer ensemble training that was wholly integrated into the rehearsal process.

It was important that actors spent time working together in order to promote opportunities for cross-generational and experiential learning, and prevent generational and hierarchical sub-groups within the ensemble, which might have become divisive. If, perhaps, all actors were required to undergo physical training, but the choice of that training was theirs, division could be avoided.<sup>405</sup>

### **Tensions and Anxieties**

Some young actors found text sessions alongside more established actors intimidating and some expressed anxiety about the need to be 'up to standard'. Two of the actors were only 22 and in their first job, having graduated in July 2003. In the early weeks it was possible to see tension manifest in the muscular-skeletal structure of some actors. Older actors acknowledged that they, too, felt greater anxiety when performing in front of their peers than in rehearsal, or when in character in front of an audience. Although no solution was found, actors seemed pleased to have discussed it.

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<sup>404</sup> In subsequent years there was always some resistance to training. This varied according to the dynamic of the ensemble and was dependent on the example set by the leading actor.

<sup>405</sup> Actors who worked in Saint-Denis' Studio said they were able to select activities but were only compelled to attend rehearsal-related workshops.

I had observed similar inevitable tensions in Company verse sessions held during Noble's directorship, but at that time there was no forum for this to be voiced. It was agreed that additional tension was centred around the understudy runs which were being performed publicly for the first time in 2004 and remained unknown territory. (Details of the understudy work and runs appear later in this chapter.)

**The *Tragedies* Trainers' and Directors' De-Brief  
(Stratford-Upon-Avon, 8 April 2004)<sup>406</sup>**

The directors' and practitioners' de-brief of the first phase of the training was held in the Union Club offices and was attended by the Artistic Director, Michael Boyd, his assistant Thea Jones and Directors of the first two productions, Peter Gill (*Romeo and Juliet*) and Dominic Cooke, (*Macbeth*). Others attending were Head of Casting, John Cannon, as well as teachers of Voice (Lyn Darnley) and Movement (Liz Ranken) and Consultant Director John Barton, Voice Director Cicely Berry and the Company Manager, Michael Dembowicz. Actors were not invited to this de-brief.

**Feedback from Peter Gill**

Peter Gill reported that his company generally enjoyed the training and were positive about it. He felt that the pre-rehearsal training and weekly workshop sessions were redundant once rehearsals had started in earnest. The short Christmas break with a return before New Year also created a hiatus in the work whereas a proper holiday break would have been beneficial to actors and considerate of their personal lives.

Gill spoke of the positive influence older actors had on younger cast members in terms of attitude and work ethic. He believed mutual support and bonding was instrumental in the group's willingness to take on the training. He remarked on the 'pick and mix' rather arbitrary sequencing of some of the sessions, which he felt could have been better scheduled to provide a more strongly developmental journey. He, like Cooke, felt the rehearsal room ceased to be the domain of the director because of input from so many other influences and that it was essential that the training served the rehearsal process. He questioned the appropriateness of

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<sup>406</sup> Taken from notes made by Lyn Darnley, Union Club, Stratford-Upon-Avon on 8 April, 2004. (The Union Club was later redeveloped and re-named the Chapel Lane offices.)

Capoeira for some of the mature actors but said that generally the physical work was appreciated and all actors who took advantage of the elective Feldenkrais and Alexander sessions enjoyed them.

### **Feedback from Dominic Cooke**

Dominic Cooke had specific concerns about the way in which the individual 'director culture' of the rehearsal room was undermined because all the actors were exposed to the same influences outside the rehearsal room. This he believed made it harder, not easier, for actors to take risks in rehearsals. They had been 'pushing boundaries' in the workshops, but in the rehearsal room, instead of exploring the text creatively, they wanted to 'get down to work'. Cooke wanted to do more specific text-related, integrated experimentation as part of the rehearsal process, but actors felt that time spent on further exploration was wasted as they were anxious about running out of rehearsal time. Some actors assigned experimental work to the workshops and felt that rehearsals should not be wasted on improvisation.

Cooke said that he usually chose to begin work with a warm-up that led into physical exploration of the text, but when his cast came to rehearsals they had already limbered. This meant that a sense of 'playfulness' was missing. Cooke's remarks highlighted the dangers of arbitrary training, without consultation with directors and questioned the value of combined work with an ensemble that then divides in order to work with two very different directors.

Liz Ranken commented that she felt that the many levels of physical ability within the ensemble led to 'working to the lowest common denominator', which limited the work she wanted to do and made it impossible to 'stretch' the more physically skilled members of the Company. While the joint voice and movement sessions were popular, Ranken felt her work was compromised by the need to allow time for the voice element of the sessions. The value of separate sessions in addition to the combined skills work was discussed.

Boyd commented that actors' feedback suggested that afternoon workshops in verse and Capoeira were over long and pre-rehearsal voice and movement training sessions were too short. Evening lectures were also considered too long, as concentration was difficult at the end of a long day.

He added that many actors remarked that the lectures had meant 'sitting down and taking in knowledge in an abstract way.'<sup>407</sup> As actors are more used to 'doing', some found this difficult, even though the subject matter was invariably interesting.

### **Scheduling and Planning**

Lyn Darnley said that although valuable skills were being learned, there was not a cohesive educational trajectory to the work. The negative reaction from some actors might not have been so strong if intensive physical classes had not been scheduled until they had developed some physical stamina. Capoeira classes were scheduled in the first week and often late in the day or evening, when actors were tired. More benefit would have been gained if actors had worked on 'freeing the text' physically before embarking on cerebral text analysis. Greater consideration of how individuals learn should be given so that actors, intimidated by an academic approach to verse, could gain confidence through kinaesthetically experiencing it.

Michael Boyd responded that many of these issues had been raised in the actors' feedback session. The 'rhythm of the training' would be addressed by a decision in future not to begin before the New Year,<sup>408</sup> thereby building the momentum and greater connections between the training and the rehearsal room would be made. A major concern was the need to change the training culture within the Company. It was acknowledged that more thought should be given to finding ways in which to work with senior company members in an empowering way.

### **The Purpose of the Training**

Dominic Cooke suggested that it was important to ask the question: 'What do we want from the training? Is it about a "Shakespearean Tradition" or is it about giving actors skills?' He felt that, although the intention had been to move away from conservatism, the process had resulted in conservatism. His response was possibly related to his personal frustration

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<sup>407</sup> Michael Boyd, Stratford-upon-Avon, 8 April, 2004.

<sup>408</sup> In the subsequent four years the rehearsals and Artist Development Training did not straddle the Christmas and New Year period, avoiding the problems of momentum experienced in 2004. In 2009/10 and 2011/12, rehearsals once again began in December.

concerning the limited time for his own exploration and improvisation of the text.

Boyd agreed that it was crucial to preserve the director's right for 'absolute control of choice' in how a company is influenced, and to avoid interfering with the director's interpretation. 'We have to buy into the ambition to provide the training but allow for interpretation.'

Peter Gill said that young actors should be given the opportunity for familiarisation with the verse, so as not to be intimidated by the iambic pentameter and Latinate words, saying 'that acting and speaking are the same thing',<sup>409</sup> and spoke of how young actors had little sense of the history of theatre and the great actors of other generations. He said that his generation was able to perform in the style of Brando and Gielgud but today 'actors performed like De Niro'.<sup>410</sup> His work was verbally specific and he 'demanded consonants' from actors and insisted on clarity in their delivery of text. Comments were made about the need to acknowledge and promote the RSC as a 'language' company, while young actors were submerged in psychology and naturalistic acting. Training, therefore, should work to balance the prevailing naturalistic learning culture.

Cicely Berry felt that there had not been enough time for organic exploration, saying 'Actors need to feel the language move through them'.<sup>411</sup> She echoed Peter Hall's comment made on the first day of rehearsal, observing that Peter Brook had said that there are 'a million ways to say a line' and that she believed in exploring exercises to 'release language' and make it accessible for actors. Gill said that he had the opposite view; that there was one way to say the line but that it sounded different from each actor. There is an essential integrity in the line and Gill seeks to 'unlock' the thought in the line for the actor. Berry then said that the integrity was to be found in the rhythm of the line. She went on to say that what was needed was a focused meeting about verse and language and 'How we take it into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'.

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<sup>409</sup> Peter Gill, Stratford-upon-Avon, 8 April, 2004.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Cicely Berry, Stratford-upon-Avon, 8 April, 2004.



John Cannon, Head of Casting, responded to a comment that some actors were cynical about the introduction of training, saying that all had been made aware of the policy changes and that he had not been conscious of any cynicism when actors were contracted.

Barton observed that the first ensemble training had been an experiment and that there were things that could be done better in future. He noted that though Michael Boyd had launched the project, he had not been able to be present at the workshops because of other demands on his time. He suggested that during the next training period Boyd's presence would be welcome at more sessions.

### **Planning**

The general feeling was that more time for planning and discussion between directors and practitioners would be useful.

Lyn Darnley suggested that when the 2005 ensemble was formed the aims and objectives of classes should be negotiated with directors and the work should be reviewed with the acting company halfway through the initial block of work. This strategy was implemented in 2005.

In comparison with subsequent years there was more intellectual work and less practical training in 2003/4, talks were limited to an hour and scheduled in the day, and practical sessions were reduced to an hour and a half.

### **The Second Phase of Rehearsals 2004**

The period in which *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* were in repertory in Stratford, and *Hamlet* and *King Lear* were in rehearsal, will be referred to as the second phase of rehearsals and Stratford-based training as phase two training. The second phase of rehearsals brought a change to the Artist Development programme and placed considerable restrictions on training time. These limitations were the result of a number of pertinent issues.

1. As well as evening performances, there were matinees on Thursdays and Saturdays.
2. Not all actors rehearsing *King Lear* and *Hamlet* were performing in the same productions, which meant that some actors had matinees and others did not. This restricted rehearsals as actors with matinee performances had to be released from rehearsal at 11.30am in order

to allow for required breaks.

3. Rehearsal day had to end at 5.30pm<sup>412</sup> in order to allow for evening supper breaks, warm-ups, and wig and fight calls.
4. The rehearsal periods were shorter than those for the first phase. *King Lear* had eight weeks' rehearsal and *Hamlet* had ten weeks.
5. There were additional calls on actors' time such as pre- and post-show Education Department discussions and press-related events, which resulted in lost rehearsal time.

### **Training/Artists' Development During the Second Rehearsal Phase 2004**

The ADP work in this phase was more like the *ad hoc* training offered under Noble. There was no formal training period and development work took the form of rehearsal text, voice and movement calls, and sign-up sessions. Solo voice and, to a lesser degree, movement work continued to be offered, and some joint voice and movement sessions were given to individual actors when rehearsal room demands arose and focused on solving performance challenges, particularly in relation to exploring emotional states and the effect of this upon the body and voice. Optional Alexander and Feldenkrais were available but, as rehearsals were the first priority, only those actors not called for rehearsal could take advantage of these sessions.

Working with a second and third director provided enriching new perspectives and dynamics. Bill Alexander, who directed *King Lear*, had a word-specific approach. In an interview on the RSC Website he spoke about 'using language to think':

To improvise the thoughts in your own words is destructive and dangerous, because if you are encouraged to speak words that *roughly* convey the thoughts, you're liable to start thinking like that. Take for example the phrase 'Light thickens, and the crow makes wing toward the rooky woods': it means precisely that. It doesn't mean that it gets darker and a large black bird of the raven family is flying through the air towards the wooded area. If you're to understand how to play Shakespeare you have to understand that the fabric of the language is the total and elaborate thought of the individuals. To try to think about it in a more modern way only alienates you from it further. In order to dress yourself in the fabric of the language you have to become completely at ease with it. Obviously you have to sit down from time to time and work out what your character means but it's no good having pretty much

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<sup>412</sup> The time was later changed to 5.00pm when compulsory warm-ups were imposed. Further details appear later in this chapter.

roughly the right thoughts and then saying the language: you should only be thinking exactly what you're saying.<sup>413</sup>

Alexander seems to contradict other directors, many of whom encourage actors to translate text into contemporary speech, but Gregory Doran, who uses this system insists on an accurate and specific translation and does not allow approximation. Alexander's requirement that actors should be completely at ease with the text supports both Barton and Berry's work and the RSC language approach.

Actors working with Michael Boyd on *Hamlet* were able to explore clear, muscular storytelling combined with Russian-influenced naturalism. Boyd allowed actors to keep exploring and inventing throughout rehearsals and encouraged them to connect with the rhythmic energy of the language.

### **Voice**

Work continued on voice and verse, and on the relationship between voice and character. In May 2004 Lyn Darnley was joined by Tess Dignan.<sup>414</sup> The pre-rehearsal voice and movement warm-ups were not repeated. Darnley and Dignan attended rehearsals of *Hamlet* and worked with members of both the *Hamlet* and *King Lear* companies. The *King Lear* rehearsals were closed, but Cicely Berry attended some of the runs. Alexander liaised with voice coaches on specific work with actors but did not want support in the rehearsal room. All voice calls were secondary in priority to the main rehearsal, meaning that when actors requested a voice call they did not get one immediately. On-stage voice calls were even harder to guarantee. Such a call was requested by a *King Lear* actor three weeks before the first preview and yet it was never scheduled. Progress was obvious in some actors and was directly related to the demands made upon them by either their principal and/or understudy roles. Some actors spoke of the way in which the early work was now 'making sense and paying off'<sup>415</sup> as they found themselves able to take on new challenges with greater command of breath and vocal skills, and greater ease with the text.

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<sup>413</sup> The Director, 'Using the Language to Think', <http://www.rsc.org.uk/lear/current/director.html>.

<sup>414</sup> Tess Dignan is currently Head of Voice at Rose Bruford College and has continued to work with the RSC on a freelance basis. She worked on Neil Bartlett's production of *Twelfth Night* in 2007 and Anthony Neilson's *The Drunks* in 2009.

<sup>415</sup> John McKay and Forbes Mason speaking to Lyn Darnley, Stratford, July, 2004.

## Dream Work

The only completely new element at this stage was 'Dreamwork', which was introduced into the *Hamlet* rehearsal process. This work was also a new venture in British theatre. The work was pioneered by Janet Sonenberg, a theatre professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who had developed her process through working with Jungian analyst, Robert Bosnak. The work engaged the imagination and was empathetic with Stanislavsky-based processes. In the introduction to her book *Dreamwork for Actors*, Sonenberg writes:

The constructive imagination makes use of the actor's connection to the text via his conscious observations, memories, thoughts, and feelings. The actor matches the pattern of his experiences against those of the character. Most people create by making use of the constructive imagination.<sup>416</sup>

Dreamwork divided actors. Some felt the work was similar to 'hot seating'.<sup>417</sup> The work began with an introductory period called 'incubation', which took place after the actor had studied the text. Sonenberg states: 'Developing the incubation image places the actor, the character, and the world of the play in the same sphere.'<sup>418</sup> Actors were asked to think about a scene before going to sleep. They then had a further session where they visualised the scene and recounted their dreams and were asked to recall the part of the body where they experienced feelings of fear or anxiety. This was marked on a drawn outline of the body, which the actor used to recall the sensations.

Our ultimate goal is to collapse out the narrative to unearth the many stories that compromise it. We accomplish this in two steps. The first is to work as many elements of the unfolding scene as it is revealed by the actor's imagination during the session into the actor's body. You explore the images and couple them to embodied sensation and to any emotion that arises.<sup>419</sup>

Some felt the benefits quite dramatically while others found it unhelpful, feeling pressure to say something significant and interesting about their dreams even when they could not recall them. Regardless of reservations,

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<sup>416</sup> Janet Sonenberg, *Dreamwork for Actors*, London, Routledge, 2003, p.2.

<sup>417</sup> 'Hot-seating' is a way of creating a character. While an actor is in-role they are questioned by the rest of the cast about the background of the character, building up a life history and environment that supports the text and fills in the missing areas of the narrative.

<sup>418</sup> Janet Sonenberg, *Dreamwork for Actors*, London, Routledge, 2003, p.185.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. p.190.

many felt the internal life of the character was enriched by the work, which developed the background and the physical world of the character.

Some enjoyed the visualisation exercise enormously as it allowed them to create an environment and to focus inwardly in a deep way. They also felt it allowed an emotional connection with the character's situation. Others felt the 'dream' element less useful as they could not connect the dream with the play or the character. Sonenberg states that the dream belongs to the character and not the actor.

The incubation image belongs to the actor, and the dreams belong to the character. Pay attention to the relationship between the two, the similarities of themes and actions.<sup>420</sup>

This statement is questionable and cannot be proved. The work obviously connects the actor with the subconscious and all actors felt it stimulated their imagination. The usefulness of the exercise was strongly debated in 2004 and when it was repeated in 2005 the reaction was similarly mixed. In 2006 Dreamwork was not included. There is evidence that at least one drama school, Rose Bruford College, has since employed Dream Work for directing students as part of a research project. Students found the work very useful and the practitioners, director Colin Ellwood and psychotherapist Laurie Slade, modified the work and called it Dream Matrix.

What we've developed has been very successful here and is significantly different (and more collegiate - and in our view more open and useful in the rehearsal process in a number of ways) than the American model.<sup>421</sup>

The American model referred to is Sonenberg's method used by Boyd, which works with actors on a one-to-one basis rather than in a group. Dream Matrix work is communal and does not involve the incubation stage. The fact that at least one drama school was inspired to explore the new system suggests that the RSC has an impact on the wider world of actor training. It is also evidence that while maintaining classical theatre traditions, it is exploring work at the leading edge of training at the same time.

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid. p.185.

<sup>421</sup> Colin Ellwood, Director, BA Hons Directing Course at Rose Bruford College, writing in an email, 11 June, 2008. Ellwood also stated that accounts of social dreaming can be found in Gordon W. Lawrence, *Social Dreaming at Work*, (London, Karnac, 1998) and Gordon W. Lawrence, *Infinite Possibilities of Social Dreaming*, (London, Karnac, 2007).

## **Verse**

Cicely Berry and John Barton continued to see actors in groups or on an individual basis, either working on rehearsal roles or exploring other texts. Some young actors remarked that they enjoyed this work more in the second phase because they had the experience of having played their first tragedy and more understanding about putting the work into practice. Again there was an individual response to the work with some actors preferring Barton's approach to Berry's or vice versa. Those who responded more positively to Berry were often those with a predilection for physical exploration of the text and those who preferred Barton enjoyed his precision, attention to detail and the personal attention. Generally speaking, most actors saw the value of working with both methods. Solo voice calls with Darnley and Dignan used aspects of both approaches and focused on the actor's principal character or on the understudy role.

The challenge for young actors was to combine text-specific work with playing character. It became evident that, when emotion took over, the young or less experienced actors often disregarded the language and form. Other common problems were over-stressing, not engaging with the rhythm, difficulty in negotiating long phrases and ignoring the active properties of verbs. When reminded that structure aids the work on character and emotion, and actually reveals it, actors were more willing to trust the language to convey the emotion. For many young 'play as cast' actors with little to say, the rehearsal period interrupted their learning rather than putting their developing text skills to the test. Understudy roles therefore became the major teaching and learning vehicle for many. For this fact alone it was important that the work was not rushed and that the Assistant Director demanded that the actor paid attention to the text and verse as well as to the emotion and blocking.

## **Stratford Informal Training Opportunities**

### **Poetry**

Poetry Day celebrations provided a further, informal development opportunity. A performance of poetry written by local schoolchildren (based on the themes of family and feuding in the plays) was presented in the Swan Theatre by four young actors. A second public poetry programme for adults

was staged in the RST using four other actors. Immersion in verse allowed actors to assimilate and explore rhythm, imagery, metaphor and sound dynamics.

### **Yoga**

Voluntary Yoga was offered by Liz Ranken three times a week before rehearsals. Because of the advanced nature of the work a small group of dedicated actors attended. The shortage of appropriate space meant that in the summer months the group met in the theatre gardens. In 2005 and 2006 the yoga work became more entrenched and was offered to almost all companies as part of morning warm-ups.<sup>422</sup>

### **Capoeira**

Alex Silva offered several optional sessions. The intention was to allow those actors who enjoyed the initial classes to develop their skills. Numbers were small due to time pressures. The actor understudying Edgar in *King Lear* (Jack Whitam) used the sessions to explore the physical demands of the role, allowing him to confront difficult rhythmic and weight demands encountered when creating a contrasting physicality for his 'Mad Tom' characterisation. He was able to feed the results positively into the process. This was the only evidence of opportunities to connect Capoeira work with the acting process, but if there had been time for further exploration, other productive outcomes may have occurred. Not enough consideration was given to ways of connecting Capoeira with the acting demands. Greg Hicks who played Macbeth and the Ghost in *Hamlet* drew on his training in the martial art to develop his characters, but this was possible only because of his high level of attainment.

### **Pre-show Warm-ups in Stratford**

The practicalities of life in Stratford with performances in the evenings and rehearsals during the day impacted on warm-ups. The working day started at 10am and finished at 5.30pm, which meant that the optional warm-up scheduled at 6.00pm in order to allow for wig and fight calls, was attended erratically. Many actors regretted missing the pre-show warm-up but understandably elected to have a meal and rest. The stamina work

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<sup>422</sup> Yoga classes have been offered as sign-up sessions to most ensembles since 2006 and were a regular feature in the 2009/10 ensemble.

undertaken during the initial rehearsal period meant that many felt physically and vocally well prepared particularly after a full-day's rehearsal. The purpose of the warm-up goes beyond muscle-preparedness and focuses and prepares actors mentally as well as physically. Warming-up releases and engages the breath, reduces the likelihood of injury by increasing the blood-flow, warms and stretches the muscles, heightens awareness and re-establishes a sense of ensemble.

### **Changing a Culture**

Asking actors to prepare for performance together challenges a theatre culture more used to the promotion of the individual than the ensemble. Formal group warm-ups are always undertaken by dancers, singers and musicians but not by actors. Preparation for performance is a training issue but it is important to acknowledge that actors have different personal needs before a performance.

The attendance at warm-ups differed from production to production, depending on the example of the leading actor, rehearsal process, performance demands and daily workload. Actors from the *Romeo and Juliet* company attended more frequently than those from the *Macbeth* company, which reflected the dynamic of the two groups. The former company were more united, younger and more motivated, and led by committed and experienced mature actors. While not everyone attended the formal warm-up, some actors worked quietly in a corner of the Ashcroft Room,<sup>423</sup> while others warmed up on stage or in their dressing rooms. Toby Stephens led the *Hamlet* company and attended warm-ups each night. This example had a significant effect, and attendance from the company was consistently good and noticeably better than the *King Lear* or *Macbeth* companies.<sup>424</sup>

The drive to change the warm-up culture was a significant training challenge and continued throughout the years under review and beyond.

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<sup>423</sup> The Ashcroft Room is a rehearsal room above the Swan Theatre that has magnificent views over the Avon River and countryside. It is used for pre-performance warm-ups and classes when not being used for rehearsal.

<sup>424</sup> The warm-ups were well attended by members of the *Spanish Golden Age Company*. The Swan Ensemble had received no training other than production-related work from their voice coach, some singing for those who required it and fight instruction if needed. They were exceptionally busy and this predictably led to a sense of them being deprived of the opportunities given to the ensemble.



When examples of good practice from respected artists were evident, younger actors followed suit. It was noticeable that companies that received the training programme and did daily pre-rehearsal warm-ups maintained a better pre-performance warm-up regime. In 2004 the Winter Season and touring companies did not start the day with pre-rehearsal sessions and subsequent attendance at warm-ups was negatively affected.<sup>425</sup>

Michael Boyd decided to end the rehearsal day at 5.00pm in order to allow actors to attend a compulsory warm-up at 6.00pm.<sup>426</sup> The attempt to make the warm-up obligatory proved inflammatory as many actors resented losing their limited free time. As a result those actors who had attended warm-ups by choice continued to do so and others simply dropped out over time. It became apparent that the imposition of a compulsory warm-up was impractical so actors were asked to take responsibility for their performance preparation by attending either the official warm-up or by working on their own.

The earlier start of both *King Lear* and *Hamlet* (7.00pm) created difficulties for actors who wanted to attend warm-ups but who had 6.00pm wig calls. In order to accommodate them an additional earlier warm-up was instated.

Half-hour evening warm-ups were primarily concerned with the voice because the Company did not have a movement department and movement directors left the production after press night. The sessions, however, retained some of the stretches and exercises developed in the first phrase. Singing was introduced into the warm-up twice a week when the Music Department was available and these proved popular. The ensemble and the *Spanish Golden Age* company attended open warm-ups, exposing them to a variety of approaches and allowing them contact with each other.

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<sup>425</sup> There are other reasons why actors choose to attend warm-ups. It has been noted that more actors attend warm-ups after a break in the repertoire and at the beginning of a run. It is also evident that actors who regularly attend warm-ups are less likely to suffer from vocal tiredness or be noted on audibility issues.

<sup>426</sup> In the past some directors such as Declan Donnellan have required a compulsory warm-up. This is easier for companies who work with a single director on one production.

## **Space**

Lack of adequate space forced pre-matinee warm-ups to be scheduled in the Dress Circle Bar. This perturbed actors who felt that the stage should be made available to actors as a priority rather than to the production departments (Sound, Lighting and Stage) or to public tours of the theatre. The need for appropriate training spaces had limited Hall's training programme. Even in 2004 space proved to be a restricting factor. Many aspects of rehearsal work needed to happen simultaneously such as fight sessions, voice or verse work, understudy work, singing sessions, the Dream Workshop, dance calls or second rehearsal calls such as the Dumb Show in *Hamlet*. Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais and Capoeira sessions, although less regular, further increased demand on space. Space which is warm and of an adequate size for classes is essential to the satisfactory delivery of the ADP. The provision of suitable space can be seen as an indication of the value placed on training by the Company and inadequate provision suggests a lack of commitment to training and ensemble.

## **Rehearsing Understudy Roles**

It is in working with the developing actor that the most effective and 'company improving' work can occur, because the ensemble is improved by the strengthening of its component artists: the actor improves and so does his or her contribution to the ensemble. Understudy work is an intrinsic part of training and is the place where focused teaching can occur and the work can be seen to bear fruit. It is significant that during the years of Michel Saint-Denis' Studio, the understudy work fell under its auspices (see Chapter 2). Understudy work has always been a priority at the RSC and all roles are understudied. Whenever possible the Company has avoided the use of walking understudies (actors who understudy but who are not part of the onstage acting company). Assistant directors and voice coaches began work with all understudies as soon as they were cast. As well as active direction or coaching, understudies draw less tangible support, and training, from the actor usually cast in the role. They use the skills of observation in order to inform their craft and develop their critical instincts.

A unique benefit of a large classical ensemble is that, due to the number of roles the younger actors cover, they understudy older and larger

parts with complex text and verse, many years before they would in commercial theatre. They are more likely to have to move away from casting type as it is not always possible to cast an understudy of a similar physical type to the principal or with a similar performance style. More experienced understudies may choose to experiment with the way they play a role, deliberately extending their playing 'boundaries'. Many young understudies discover greater range in their voice and physicality than they were previously aware of. In some cases this develops out of an unconscious mirroring of the performance of the principal. Understudy work that allows an actor simply to imitate does not provide a learning opportunity.

It is particularly valuable for actors who are continuing their training to be able to put theory into practice and sustain concentrated performance that requires complex intellectual energy rather than simple emotional exuberance. This applies particularly to young actors with small supportive roles.

Assistant directors have to develop their own skills in order to assist understudies to move into a role seamlessly. They join the Company with varied levels of directing experience and for many the exercise is demanding and stressful. The success of the understudy run is dependent not only on their directing skills but on the relationships they build with actors, stage management and support staff and the use they make of the Artist Development opportunities. Understudy casting is achieved through collaboration between the Assistant Director, the Director and the Casting Department. The need to provide greater opportunities for assistant directors to learn about verse and classic text must remain a high priority for the Company in its quest to maintain and advance classical performance.<sup>427</sup>

### **The First Public Understudy Runs**

The Core Ensemble 2004 introduced a unique and innovative

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<sup>427</sup> Directing courses do not focus on language and verse, neither do they teach students how to work with understudies. Later chapters will discuss the efforts made by the Artist Development Programme to influence the training of young directors by contributing to the curriculum of the MFA in Directing at Birkbeck College (University of London), and by inviting student directors to attend understudy runs and providing them with the opportunity to converse with RSC assistant directors responsible for staging the runs. From 2005 assistant directors were given training in verse from Cicely Berry and John Barton. Young directors' courses led by Cicely Berry were held in 2006 and from 2008 two workshops were planned annually.

approach to the conventional understudy run. This initiative, which captured the imagination of audiences and the press, set out to give all understudies the opportunity to perform to a paying audience rather than just a few fellow actors, the Casting Department and production staff. Although initial response to the idea was mixed, the Public Understudy Run was seen by many actors as the most significant training opportunity they experienced.

Tickets cost £5 and the audience was aware that all roles would be performed by understudies, many of whom would play more than one character. Some actors questioned the staging of the public understudy run, asking if the aim was to play the role as they would if stepping into a regular performance or to create a performance to entertain a paying audience. The question, 'Is this for the benefit of us as actors or for the audience?' was asked by some actors. Others felt that an audience would compromise the integrity of the exercise, as they would be working to tell the story in a different way in order to maintain the narrative. A specific dilemma was how to handle having to 'talk to themselves' when playing more than one character. The decision of how to best stage each public understudy run was left to the assistant director in consultation with the director, taking into consideration the particular circumstances and requirements of the piece.

During the early stages of rehearsals the press ran several articles on the public understudy runs. Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian* interviewed both the principal actors and understudies for Romeo, Malcolm and Gertrude in an article entitled 'We can all be terrified together'.

Trystan Granville (22) said:

I can't believe my luck. This is my first stage job straight out of RADA and I am going to play Romeo and Hamlet for the RSC....The fact that it was written into my contract that I'd not only understudy Romeo and Hamlet, but actually get to play them, made signing up to the RSC much more attractive.<sup>428</sup>

Neil Madden (25), who had previously understudied and played in the *Henry VI* history plays and who was understudying Malcolm, said:

Knowing that you really are going to get a chance to play the roles in public, not just that you might, makes all the difference. You don't mind the work because you know that you are going to do a real show in front of a real paying audience, and because the company knows you are going to be out

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<sup>428</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'We can all be terrified together', *The Guardian*, 9 February, 2004.

there representing them, they make sure that you are better prepared....This season, I feel as if I am learning and being taken seriously.<sup>429</sup>

Anita Booth, a mature actor working for the RSC for the first time, and understudying Lady Capulet, the Nurse and Gertrude, had understudied extensively as a way into the profession, and was encouraged by the prospect of guaranteed performances.

The hard part to being an understudy is that you have to put in as much work as if you were going to be playing every night, but you never get an opening night. If you do go on, it is often with the groans of the audience ringing in your ears, as they are told that the star they have come to see won't be appearing. I don't think the audience will feel short-changed. When they book they'll be told exactly what they are getting, and a lot of the RSC audience are pretty informed; they are interested in the process. Some people will be intrigued by the chance to see the same production with different actors in the role and discover what difference it makes. It is an interesting experiment.<sup>430</sup>

She spoke of her need to create her own characterisation, saying 'I have to give my own performance. I can't be Sian [Thomas]'. The principals all commented on the levelling effect when understudies actually perform. Sian Thomas commented that 'It treats us all as equals and takes the whole company seriously as artists, not just the chosen few.'<sup>431</sup> In *The Times* Michael Boyd confirmed his belief in the new system:

It gives actors a confidence in a range of abilities that doesn't grow in television or film. Part of me is taking a risk of playing a long game at the RSC. If we can't play the long game, I don't know who can. It's an investment in their future and our future. This new move will celebrate the RSC's established role in developing new talent.<sup>432</sup>

Boyd continued:

I want the RSC to be a real magnet for actors who want to develop their career and continue their learning. These understudy performances are an important part of a much bigger movement I want to establish at the RSC, which really concentrates on developing actors' talents.<sup>433</sup>

Some more experienced actors felt that understudying was frustrating and would not advance their careers. My experience was that once actors became involved in the process and felt they were being challenged and

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'We can all be terrified together', *The Guardian*, 9 February, 2004.

<sup>432</sup> Dalya Alberge, 'Young Players take centre stage as RSC looks to future glory', *The Times*, 30 January, 2004.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

stretched, they generally became enthusiastic.<sup>434</sup>

### **A New Opportunity**

When the RSC opened the understudy run to the public, it created a unique opportunity for both actors and audience. Audiences were given access to a process they never before were party to. For many actors taking on an understudy is a chore rather than an opportunity to extend their playing range. Many understudies feel that knowing the words and moves is adequate and that investing too much in a role that 'is not yours' is pointless. Some believe that the understudy is there simply to allow the performance to continue. The public understudy performances produced a new dynamic and challenged this belief. Gavin Marshall, the Assistant Director on *Romeo and Juliet*, commented:

The understudy run is a rather strange part of the company's work here, existing as a ghost show underneath the main production that haunts the stage only once before receding back into the shadows. This is an attempt to bring it out into the light a bit and allow the general public a greater understanding of the work that goes on to support and maintain the running of the principal production.<sup>435</sup>

As well as being an opportunity for audiences I believe that public showing of understudy work gives it a status and significance it deserves, both as an invaluable mechanism for keeping the production 'up and running' but also as a training opportunity that allows actors to bring together their growing technical and acting skills and test them in the most meaningful way possible in performance.

### **Public Understudy Runs: *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet***

The first public understudy performances took place in the RST on 27 April 2004 (*Macbeth*) and on 4 May 2004 (*Romeo and Juliet*). Both performances were virtually sold out and the audience included school parties enticed by the reduced-price ticket. The audience was made fully aware of the unique concept of the performance when they booked and by an onstage announcement.

Each company performed an internal run of the play before the public performance. After consideration and debate between actors, the Assistant

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<sup>434</sup> Public Understudy Performance programmes appear in Appendix 5.(3).

<sup>435</sup> Gavin Marshall, Public Understudy Performance programme for *Romeo and Juliet*, 4 May, 2004, Assistant Director's note.

Director and Director, the *Macbeth* principals were asked to play non-speaking or smaller roles, in order to allow understudies to focus on one or two roles<sup>436</sup> and also to remove any sense of hierarchy and create a feeling of support from the principal actors. A free cast list was produced which included those actors who usually played the leading roles appearing as 'Gentlewoman' or 'Guard'. In *Macbeth* both Sian Thomas (Lady Macbeth) and Greg Hicks (Macbeth) played non-speaking roles and Greg Hicks literally became a spear-carrier for the performance. This gesture was seen by some of the younger actors as confirmation of the leading actors' commitment to the ensemble ethic. The programme also included a message from Michael Boyd, which outlined the thinking behind the performance. He expressed a desire to create a unique experience:

Theatre's single most distinctive attribute as an art form is the sense of felt presence, of involvement. Today we are inviting you to be involved, to glimpse behind the scenes at a process which is usually hidden.<sup>437</sup>

He wrote of the role of the public understudy runs in relation to training and the RSC's Artist Development Programme, acknowledging that the performance would, by its very nature, produce some 'slightly mad inventiveness'.

Our understudies will learn more about the journey of a principal role if they have to take a large audience with them on that journey. We want to increase the opportunities for all our actors to shine and to progress through the company, and we're hoping that these public understudy runs will make that easier.<sup>438</sup>

Other programme notes were written by John Cannon, the Director of Casting, and the Assistant Directors, and included an interview with a leading understudy actor outlining her process. Jessica Tomchak, a recent graduate, understudying both Juliet and Ophelia, wrote of the sense of isolation experienced by understudies: 'There are obviously times when it feels as though all you do is work hard with none of the rewards. There is always the danger that an understudy with little to do in the main show might

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<sup>436</sup> Understudy companies are always smaller than a principal company and as the RSC does not generally employ 'walking understudies', the smaller number of actors is often required to cover more than one role. Only those understudies playing protagonists play one role, while others may play up to five.

<sup>437</sup> Michael Boyd, Public Understudy Performance programme for *Romeo and Juliet*, 4 May, 2004.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

feel like an outsider; listening in on the fringes of the group, dying for a chance to perform but never knowing when that moment will come.’ She also referred to the training programme and its unifying role within the ensemble: ‘...the recent changes at the RSC which have included lessons in voice training, movement and verse speaking have not only provided opportunities on an individual level, but have also allowed understudies in particular to feel welcomed into the body of the company.’ John Mackay, understudying *Macbeth*, wrote:

To be honest, I worried that understudying might be a frustrating and relatively uncreative process where we would have to follow the choices made by the principal actors rather than our own instincts.... However, the simple fact of having a public performance to work towards has changed everything about what it means to understudy at the RSC. Because we are guinea pigs for this new scheme, we have made up our own rules about how to work in the rehearsal room. While we have had to keep one eye on our duty to the integrity of the main production should we have to ‘cover’ an actor, the other eye has been on today’s performance. Our director, Emma Stuart, created an atmosphere of experimentation...<sup>439</sup>

Emma Stuart, (*Macbeth* Assistant Director), commented on the restrictions faced by an assistant director and understudy actors: ‘The bulk of the understudy rehearsals happen when the main show is up and running so a firm eye has to be kept on how it is developing and changing. Our work has to be within the parameters of the main show so that we are not straying from the original vision of the production.’<sup>440</sup> The challenges created by the ‘context’ and time pressures involved are valuable for young actors requiring flexibility and imagination.

Understudying in 2003/4 was done by most but not all actors and this diminished the Company’s standing as a true ensemble where all members have equal status. There was an unequal load with some actors being asked to carry several roles while others did not understudy. This created concerns about how certain actors managed to negotiate contracts that freed them from understudying while others, less experienced and therefore often less able, shouldered an unreasonable proportion of the work. Overloading actors can turn a potentially rewarding opportunity into a negative, even

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<sup>439</sup> John Mackay, Public Understudy Performance programme for *Macbeth*, 27 April, 2004.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid. Note by Emma Stuart.



detrimental chore.<sup>441</sup>

Traditionally, many actors resist understudy work because their agents feel it lowers their status. This short-sighted view robs actors of the opportunity to explore 'the next level of casting' in a safe and less exposing manner. During long contracts young actors can become bored or complacent and a challenging understudy role helps to keep their practice fresh and alive.

### **Appropriate Understudy Casting**

The public understudy performance with its greater need for honed performances proved to be an opportunity for actors to show skills that the Casting Department and directors had not yet witnessed. Casting young or less experienced actors in leading understudy roles undoubtedly stretches them, provides training and ensures the ensemble is strengthened, except when actors are cast beyond their abilities. When this happens actors inevitably fail, often because they force a 'performance' rather than developing an organic process, which starts from the language.<sup>442</sup> The ensemble should aim to stretch actors by promoting them to the next natural level, yet at times younger actors of great promise are catapulted way beyond this 'next level' and risk failure. Technical skills may not be fully integrated in performance and therefore, although actors may have undoubted gifts and instincts, their lack of experience prevents their full realisation. By giving inexperienced actors roles that require advanced technical skills, unacceptable pressures can be placed on them, creating tensions and anxieties rather than opportunities to build freely and naturally on what has already been achieved.

Two newly graduated actors were particularly stretched and it can be argued that to cast a young actor of 22, just out of drama school and in his

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<sup>441</sup> An aim of the Company was for all actors to share the understudy load, where it was practical for them to do so. In the 2006 long ensemble, all actors took a share of the understudy load. While greater involvement in the understudy process was encouraged, not all actors in the smaller ensembles and solo productions carried understudy responsibilities. The Histories Ensemble 2006-2008 had a more equal system; in many of the smaller companies within the RSC, the inequality of the load seriously undermined the sense of ensemble.

<sup>442</sup> During Shakespeare's time actors based their interpretation on the language of the text, without help of the post-Freudian concept of character and motivation. Placing trust in the language is often difficult for actors inexperienced with classical text.

first theatre job, in two virtuoso roles is to place undue pressure on him. While the actor in question was undaunted by the scale of the challenge, some resentment was felt by other actors who felt they too should have been given the opportunity to understudy a leading role. Additionally, in *Romeo and Juliet* a young woman straight from drama school and in her first job was cast opposite him meaning that two inexperienced actors were expected to carry the play without the support of experienced co-performers. Fortunately both actors had a positive experience. If the aim is to stretch actors, experienced mid-career actors should also be encouraged to explore leading roles that would take them to another level. In recent years casting levels have often mirrored those of the previous season unless actors have gone elsewhere and played a lead or achieved television exposure. This makes it difficult for talented but untested actors to rise through the ranks and to be cast in larger roles. Occasionally agents agree contracts only on condition that a specific understudy role is granted. In order to attract actors to the RSC more consideration should be given to each actor's journey and experience within the ensemble.

### **Public Understudy Runs: *King Lear* and *Hamlet***

The *Hamlet* and *King Lear* understudy companies involved actors from the *Macbeth* and the *Romeo and Juliet* companies, so their original experiences were not wholly common. Decisions were made by assistant directors about the way each performance was staged. Again actors wanted a clear policy governing the aim and style of the performance. Some felt that they wanted to show their abilities by playing all their understudy roles in the same performance. In *King Lear*, one female actor (Louise Bangay) was required to cover all of Lear's daughters. She not only had to find the essence of each character but had to find ways of distinguishing all three voices. She used easily identifiable vocal qualities to help the audience distinguish which sister was speaking. She said she felt like a member of the 'B team' because everyone kept asking her how she was going to achieve this obviously impossible task, and so she felt she must be failing. Other actors were concerned about the need to make an instant transition between one character and another. By not 'following one character through' certain actors felt the whole exercise was compromised. One actor said, 'I want to

do my job, but I am not sure what it is. Should I be concerned with the truth of roles I am playing, or with making the story clear for the audience?’

Generally, understudy actors playing two or more characters who ‘speak to each other’ did so in the internal understudy run but were not expected to do so for the public performance, unless it was deemed theatrically effective to do so. Where necessary principal actors played sizeable roles in order to prevent an understudy actor from having to play two roles in one scene. Neil Maddon who understudied all three witches in *Macbeth*, chose to play them all at the public performance, in a stylised manner, using a mask and three distinct physical and vocal qualities in order to differentiate between them and create a viable scene.

Support for the understudy actors was palpable and audience response was positive in all instances. The public performances produced a heightened atmosphere not usually present at matinees. At post-show discussions members of the audience expressed their excitement at getting closer to the actors’ process.

### **Feedback on Public Understudy Runs**

The majority of actors found the exercise to be an important learning opportunity. For some experienced actors the public understudy run was a far cry from the usual approach and they felt this created additional stress. The time lapse between internal and public runs meant that impetus was lost and there was not sufficient time to re-rehearse.

A point of discussion was whether the public run was simply a public performance of the play performed by the understudy company or if the public were paying to see the working processes of understudies.

There was some feeling that playing multiple roles in one scene changed drama to comedy, breaking the prevailing mood. While this was amusing for other members of the cast and the audience, it changed the essence of the text.

Actors’ feedback tended to be centred on issues of their casting in understudy roles, rather than the developmental journey they had undertaken. This may have been due to the impact of the perceived significance of the public understudy run. Feedback, although largely positive, varied enormously. A young actor (Caolan Byrne) who was

disappointed with his unchallenging principal casting was later required to play his understudy roles in both of his productions and during the run of *King Lear* he was able to perform Albany repeatedly, which he found creatively satisfying. Such examples prove the value of sufficient in depth preparation.

One mature actor felt that the internal understudy run was sufficient preparation and he found the additional work needed for the public performance excessive and tiring. It is possible that others had similar feelings which they were reluctant to express in case they were perceived as unsupportive of the initiative.

The general consensus was that the additional rehearsal required for the public runs prepared actors more fully and resulted in greater confidence when principals were indisposed. By the end of the season most of the actors had played some of their understudy roles and it was possible to observe a greater ownership of the roles than usual. This may simply be due to the fact that they had performed twice and that the public performance had a full orchestra, lighting and a formality that more closely resembled a normal performance. Undoubtedly, understudies were also able to learn from the response of a full house.

Peter Bygott, who had worked for the Company several times and had understudied each time, felt resistant towards the newly introduced public understudy performance. He felt that the exercise was 'not real – and terrifying'.<sup>443</sup> He believed the pressure would be great and there would be little to be gained from it. He wanted to understudy a role he had previously covered in *Romeo and Juliet* rather than undertake a new one. Eventually he played his understudies in *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear* when John Normington left the cast due to serious ill health and his roles were played by understudies for the Newcastle and London seasons.

Although Bygott began the year with a negative attitude to the public runs, he enjoyed the experience, acquitted himself well and returned in 2005 to play more substantial roles.

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<sup>443</sup> Peter Bygott in discussion with Lyn Darnley, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, February, 2004.

The public understudy run was maintained for the 2005 ensemble but abandoned for 2006 because of the demands of the *Complete Works Festival* schedule. It was re-introduced at various points in subsequent years.<sup>444</sup>

### **Young Person's Shakespeare**

The Young Person's Shakespeare (YPS) project was an Education Department initiative that toured an abridged Shakespeare production to local Warwickshire primary schools. The first of these was produced in 2004 using younger actors from the ensemble. Some actors performed in the RST production of *Macbeth* as well as the YPS production, playing different roles.<sup>445</sup> The YPS has continued annually and has provided valuable training and development opportunities for actors who are inexperienced, under-used or cannot be sufficiently challenged in other productions. In subsequent years YPS actors were offered the opportunity to gain workshop skills with certification from Warwick University. This qualification offered the possibility of post-contractual income generation for actors. (See Chapter 7.)

### **New Work in 2004**

The *New Work Festival* provided the only opportunity for actors to explore new work. The productions were part of the RSC programme and could have been used to balance casting across the ensemble but many actors who had hoped for new challenges were disappointed and others who had been loaded with weighty roles in the main season found themselves playing leading roles again. Only a minority were stretched by the casting process. This valuable ensemble opportunity was lost, because the Casting Department needed to offer certain high status actors a more attractive line of parts. This was perceived as perpetuating a casting hierarchy rather than creating more equal opportunities. Toby Stephens, for example, who joined the Company in the second rehearsal period in order to play Hamlet, played

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<sup>444</sup> In 2007 public understudy runs were again abandoned due to pressure on the Courtyard Theatre, which was the only performance space. In 2008 public understudy runs were held for three of the five Summer Season productions (*The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*) and in 2009 for *As You Like it* and *The Winter's Tale*. In 2010 there were public understudy runs of *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. There were no public understudy runs in 2011 or the Summer Season of 2012 due to space and scheduling limitations connected to the redevelopment of the RST.

<sup>445</sup> Actors in the YPS *Macbeth* were: Caolan Byrne, Edward Clarke, Samuel Clemens, Matt Cross, Meg Fraser, Trystan Gravelle, John Killoran, Neil Madden, Tam Mutu, Matthew Rhys, Sion Tudor Owen and Anatol Yusef.

Jesus in Michael Boyd's devised production of *Pilate*. This situation made apparent the dilemma facing a company that strives for ensemble and artist development on the one hand and endeavours to attract well known actors with film and television exposure who draw audiences, on the other.

Full Voice and Movement support was given to all *New Work* projects as well as specific singing workshops by the ethno-musicologist and singer, Helen Chadwick. Although, in *Pilate*, actors used other languages including Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Ancient Greek, these were explored in rehearsals rather than as an aspect of the training programme.

Some actors who had previously participated in *Fringe Festivals* had expectations of greater creative involvement that were not met. They said they missed the creative responsibility for generating new work themselves and that although the plays were very different from the mainstream productions, the creative input was fully controlled by directors. The collaborative devising potential of *Pilate* could have been more fully explored and the process entrusted to the ensemble, but the director, Boyd, and the writer, Helen Edmundson, were wholly responsible for devising the piece. The company might have enjoyed and benefitted by being involved in the devising process. Time was undoubtedly a limiting factor but of all the projects in 2004 this one offered the potential for the ensemble to work, not just in a collaborative way, but as a true collective, therefore it could be considered as a missed ensemble opportunity. No similar devised ensemble projects have been undertaken since 2004.<sup>446</sup>

### **Review of the 2003/4 Artist Development Programme**

In planning the 2005 Artist Development Programme, consideration was given to the feedback from those who participated in the pilot programme. Consultation with artists and workshop leaders on the pilot programme produced three key points for future deliberation: production responsive training, scheduling and content.

### **Production Responsive Training**

Training should serve the productions and relate to the rehearsal process.

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<sup>446</sup> Information about residencies and Studio projects that supported script-development appears in later chapters.

The form that training takes should be dictated by the director and the needs of the production.

### **Scheduling**

Training should not start before New Year so as to avoid interruption caused by bank holidays.

Planning time for discussions between directors, teachers and practitioners should be scheduled.

### **Content**

Classes that develop physical stamina and concentration should form part of a cohesive educational trajectory. Actors should have the opportunity to become familiar and relaxed with verse speaking. Language work should focus on both 'freeing the text' by working physically and on textual clues and language structure. Actors should have some choice in, and therefore some control over, physical training and classes should provide for each individual's approach to learning. Different levels of physical ability should also be catered for. Appropriate classes should be provided for those who learn kinaesthetically as well as those with a more academic predisposition, regardless of the discipline.

### **Training as an Investment in the Future**

The investment made in actors in 2003/4 was not fully reaped because the majority of actors were not re-employed in 2005. This raised the question of the value of working with untrained actors who are given the opportunity to embark upon training, but are not employed long enough for that training to produce concrete, tangible results.

At the end of the 2003/4 Artist Development Pilot Programme a number of questions were informally debated among practitioners with some believing that a classical ensemble such as the RSC was better placed to develop those actors with a foundation training such as that offered by the established schools within the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS). An opposing view was that the Company should embrace untrained or physical-theatre trained actors whose specific individual talents and skills brought them into the ensemble to enrich it with their diversity. While agreeing with this sentiment my personal response was that the ADP should offer a programme of training and extension that enriched without having a

predetermined level of achievement as its goal. This would not limit the casting and would allow for training to be production-led and be responsive to the needs of each project and each ensemble without prejudice.

### **Moving Forward into 2005**

In the 2003/2004 RSC Annual Report and Accounts, Michael Boyd reflected on Company history and its influence on his ambitions for ensemble training:

In the RSC Governors report for 1962, Peter Hall and his co-directors Peter Brook and Michel St Denis set out their vision for a new cutting-edge theatre company based around three simple ideas: an environment where artists can learn and make theatre at the same time; a socially engaged and outward looking artistic community; and a pledge to investigate a new dramaturgy – of new plays and new ideas.

This early articulation of the RSC's founding principles has been a touchstone for me over the year. After a year leading the same Company 40 years on, it is a vision that strikes me as even more urgent.<sup>447</sup>

With the completion of the first year of the ADP, he spoke of the scope of the work and its connection with the ensemble ethic:

Training is at the heart of our ambition – to develop our role as the foremost developmental home for British theatre makers. We want to establish a breakthrough learning experience for theatre artists that can transform their abilities and reinvigorate the ensemble tradition, stretching the possibilities of collective theatre making.

Training is not only an ambition for actors, designers and directors. We want to encourage the RSC's central role in the development of theatre makers across a broad range of skills.<sup>448</sup>

### **Artist Development Opportunities for the Wider Profession**

It became evident in 2004 that the ADP was capable of reaching beyond the acting company and providing opportunities for the wider profession. There were more training possibilities to be explored.<sup>449</sup>

A Voice Department initiative introduced a Professional Voice Placement Scheme that would allow a recently trained and suitably experienced teacher to join the Company for a year with the intention of introducing them to theatre-voice practice. It is difficult for voice and movement practitioners to bridge the gap between working with students and

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<sup>447</sup> Michael Boyd, *2003/2004 RSC Annual Report and Accounts*, p.6.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.* p.4.

<sup>449</sup> As well as the Assistant Directors Scheme a number of training schemes and apprenticeships already existed in the Workshops, Costume and Design Departments. A survey of training opportunities within the Company which outlines apprenticeships and trainee placements appears in Appendix 5.(4).



working with professionals and yet it is essential that those teachers training actors should have a first-hand understanding of the profession's needs. The placement was intended for a teacher who had completed a postgraduate qualification in Voice Studies and had two to five years' relevant experience and a specific interest in text. It was also hoped that some suitable placements might be offered further contracts with the Company. The first Professional Voice Placement, Alison Bomber, a Cambridge English graduate and experienced actor, singer and workshop leader, joined the Company in October 2004 and was able to benefit from the Artist Development Programme for 2005.<sup>450</sup>

The 2003/4 Artist Development pilot programme allowed Michael Boyd's vision of a community of theatre artists who worked and learned together to be realised. Actor John Mackay expressed his experience of this significant development in the RSC's history:

I have great faith in Michael Boyd's philosophy for the Company; it breaks down the hierarchy that often exists in the rehearsal room and promotes a more egalitarian approach to creating theatre. One of the great things I've experienced as part of the longer rehearsals and training process is that some people might be good at one thing and not another, but that doesn't matter. It's a great leveler which creates a balance in the rehearsal room and fosters a respect amongst artists. In this environment both younger and more experienced actors can stretch themselves and create some of their best work. Some of the bravest and most interesting people to watch in the rehearsal room and on stage are those that have the confidence to push themselves, to take risks and to move away from what feels comfortable – the ensemble creates the perfect place to do this.<sup>451</sup>

In 2003/4 Boyd succeeded in creating an ensemble environment that allowed this degree of risk and bravery and the subsequent expansion of artists' skills which is perhaps what at heart an ensemble ideally should be. The RSC undoubtedly started to change the culture of the Company through a declared commitment to ensemble and ongoing development for artists and the creation of an Artist Development Programme. Learning and development also occurred by virtue of the Young Persons' Shakespeare

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<sup>450</sup> Alison Bomber stayed with the RSC for over 7 years, leaving in March 2012. She started as a Placement became a Practitioner and later was Senior Voice Coach. She then continued to work for the company as a freelance practitioner. During her time at the RSC she successfully directed a production of *Othello* with post graduate students at Ohio State University in February 2011 and worked extensively on productions, RSC/Conference of Drama School workshops, RSC/Birkbeck College young director workshops and with the Education, Events and Music Departments.

<sup>451</sup> John Makay, *2004/2005 RSC Annual Report and Accounts*, p.15.

(YPS) tour, understudy work and public understudy runs. In 2003/4 there was no dialogue between the Casting Department and those involved in delivering the training. Neither was there any policy or manifesto for training in existence at the time. What drove the training was Michael Boyd's commitment to the concept of ensemble and of training for all actors regardless of background, experience or age. In the subsequent two years under review there was greater communication between the Casting Department, directors and the Artist Development Department about the development of individual actors, other theatre artists and the wider ensemble.<sup>452</sup>

The programme for 2005 was developed in late 2004, once the schedule for the new 2005 season had been announced; it was developed in response to the 2003/4 outcomes and in consultation with directors and producers. I was appointed Head of Artist Development in July 2004 and was therefore responsible for delivering the training for 2005. My personal experience of working on the 2003/4 pilot programme as a practitioner provided invaluable insight and allowed me to reflect on its successes and failures and, in collaboration with directors and practitioners, to compile a programme for 2005.

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<sup>452</sup> This became more evident when Sam Jones was appointed Head of Casting at the end of 2005 as she considered it necessary to develop a relationship with the Artist Development Department: she created and participated in a dialogue about how the needs of actors could best be served.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Training for the *Comedies* Ensemble – 2005

#### The Rolling Ensemble

The previous chapter outlined the Artist Development Programme (ADP) for the 2003/4 pilot programme in detail. Much of the programme was repeated in a similar form in 2005. This chapter focuses on changes to the programme and new elements introduced in 2005. Specific focus is given to text practitioners because their work is central to classical performance.

When the *Tragedies* ensemble first gathered in December 2003 Michael Boyd expressed the hope for about 30% of the actors to return to work on the *Comedies* in 2005. Only seven actors continued (approximately 18%). There were various reasons for this under-achieved goal:

- The directors of the *Comedies* season were Gregory Doran, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Michael Boyd, *Twelfth Night*; Nancy Meckler, *The Comedy of Errors* and Dominic Cooke, *As You Like It*. The plays offered fewer roles for younger actors than *The Tragedies* had done and two of the four *Comedies* directors<sup>453</sup> had not worked with the *Tragedies* ensemble and so chose to cast from outside the ensemble.
- Rehearsals for the *Comedies* began on 4 January 2005 so for many continuing into the new ensemble was not feasible. The 2003/4 *Tragedies* ensemble was involved in the London Season at the Albery and Soho Theatres until March 2005.
- Some actors and their agents considered commitment to a further ensemble too long a period away from London and opportunities for television and film and so refused the offer to return.
- Actors who transferred were often performing at night while rehearsing the *Comedies* during the day. Additionally it was

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<sup>453</sup> Michael Boyd (*Twelfth Night*) and Dominic Cooke (*As You Like It*) had directed for the *Tragedies* Season and Gregory Doran (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Nancy Meckler (*The Comedy of Errors*) had not.

necessary to re-rehearse two of the *Tragedies* before they opened in London after which London understudy rehearsals and performances were held, further interrupting the *Comedies* rehearsals for those in both ensembles.

The 2003/4 ensemble had built a strong artistic community and their expectations for re-employment were high, possibly unreasonably so considering the 2005 repertoire. Nevertheless disappointment was inevitable. Some actors chose not to transfer but the general feeling among the majority was one of disappointment at not being asked to continue. A mature actor who had understudied leading roles for the RSC over several contracts said, 'After playing King Lear in the public understudy run I wondered what it had all been for. I have learned so much and just as I feel I am getting there, it is all over. I thought I'd done my bit and then there is nothing [no offer of further employment].'<sup>454</sup> This response was the result of a general misunderstanding among many about the likelihood of immediate re-employment. Other actors from the 2005 ensemble were re-engaged in subsequent years.

Dedicated work does not guarantee further contracts particularly as gender and age had to be taken into consideration in casting the *Comedies*, in addition to the casting preferences of directors. As early as June 2004 there were rumours and speculation within the ensemble about which plays had been selected for 2005 and how the selection would impact on their re-employment.

Although the number of returnees was under target, the 2005 ensemble included 15 actors who had worked with the RSC previously, some of whom had worked with the Company regularly. Including actors from an existing ensemble in a newly created one proved challenging: new members did not share the vocabulary developed over the previous year and even the youngest and least experienced members of the 2004 ensemble had gained confidence, developed their skills and felt loyalty to *The Tragedies*. Had a greater number of 2003/4 actors continued into the

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<sup>454</sup> Michael G. Jones, interview with Lyn Darnley, Albery Theatre, London, January, 2005.

*Comedies* ensemble there might have been a lack of common identity as any new group needs to generate its own personality.

### **Problems Encountered by Actors Rolling from One Contract to Another**

Those actors who transferred from the *Tragedies* into the *Comedies* not only suffered from tiredness but some felt that they were not fully present in the new season's rehearsals. This was because they were forced to leave early before the end of rehearsals, for understudy rehearsals, evening performances and matinees. The additional demands on their time meant they were often absent from the training work and less involved with the ensemble-building activities than other members of the ensemble.

This suggests that while the desire for a rolling ensemble is strong, the practicalities are limiting.<sup>455</sup> Possibly the most satisfactory way to develop an ensemble is to contract artists over a longer period with a clear commitment from the Company to ensure their employment. (This was achieved in 2006 with Michael Boyd's 2006-2008 *Histories* ensemble. An even longer ensemble was developed in 2009-2011 but was less united because it lacked a common theme and employed ten directors in all, some of whom had not been involved in the casting process.)

### **Planning for 2005**

#### **Aims for the 2005 Artist Development Programme**

Actor and director feedback from 2004 helped to expose aspects of the pilot programme that needed consideration.<sup>456</sup> Actor development sessions would once again include workshops on rhetoric, verse, language, singing and movement skills as well as production-specific workshops and lectures on aspects of history, politics, style and other subject matter arising out of the texts and each director's production vision. All actors, assistant directors and the Voice Placement were required to attend the training

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<sup>455</sup> The numbers of the ensemble going from the *Comedies* into Gregory Doran's 2006 Orange Company or Nancy Meckler's 2006 Green Company were even smaller. Only two actors transferred from the *Comedies* into Nancy Meckler's company, neither of whom performed in the *Tragedies*. Three actors transferred from the Swan *Gunpowder* company into the 2006 ensemble.

<sup>456</sup> The following goals were identified by actor and director feedback: to promote daily pre-performance warm-ups and raise levels of physical and vocal stamina and flexibility; to give specific focus to text and language work; to offer appropriate physical training to all actors, regardless of age; to offer greater variety than had been offered in 2003/4; to extend the training beyond the rehearsal period to include the entire contract by adapting the form of delivery to suit the schedules.

unless they were involved in the 2003/4 London *Tragedies Season* rehearsals and performances.

### **ADP for January 2005**

In October 2004, work began to design a programme for the *Comedies* company. As well as the *Comedies* there was to be a programme of *New Work*<sup>457</sup> which would be rehearsed in Stratford in the summer.

The *Comedies* theme was a powerfully determining factor in the design of the programme. More than any of the other years under review, the comedy training programme was able to feed creatively into the rehearsal period as some of the skills were new to actors and helped to build their comedic performances.

The initial planning was done in conversation with the directors in order to identify their production and creative needs. The directors wanted workshops that stimulated the actors' imaginative powers, built a sense of ensemble and supported the production values. Their interest was in work that would enrich the world of the plays with lectures that would inform the cast of the historical context, the background to and influences on the text, and that would focus on verse, prose and witty language. Several specialists invited to speak and conduct workshops had particular expertise in comedy and comic physical skills. The skills of the RSC Music Department were more fully utilised in 2005 with greater emphasis on singing and percussion.

### **Changes in the Structure of the Programme**

In response to the 2003/4 directors' concerns about the disruption of rehearsals it was agreed to schedule the training in the mornings over two weeks rather than follow the previous year's pattern of all-day workshops over a single week. Rehearsals were scheduled in the afternoons. This was followed by full-time rehearsals from the third week onwards with a workshop each Wednesday afternoon for the subsequent seven weeks and daily pre-rehearsal warm-up sessions for actors attending the morning call. An

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<sup>457</sup> The programme of new writing included *Speaking Like Magpies* by Frank McGuinness, commissioned as part of the *Gunpowder Season* and was inspired by the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot. Other productions were *Solstice*, written and directed by Zinnie Harris and *The American Pilot* by David Greig, directed by Anthony Nielson, (both were performed at The Other Place) and a *New Writing Festival* in the summer included *Breakfast with Mugabe* by Fraser Grace, directed by Antony Sher, *Eric La Rue* by Brett Neveu and *Elective Affinities* by David Adjmi, directed by Dominic Cooke and performed in Cox's Yard.

important aim was to achieve a balance in the individual programme for each group. If, for example, the first session was a movement skill, the second would be a vocal or verse skill and the third activity would either be musical or improvisational.

### **Programme of Core Work**

By the time the early planning meetings got under way some directors had decided on their creative teams. This meant that in some cases creative team members could contribute to the training programme, particularly in the areas of movement, voice and music.

Dominic Cooke requested the Meisner Technique in order to extend the skills of the Company with naturalistic acting exercises, which would benefit the rehearsal process of *As You Like It*. This contrasted with the overtly theatrical workshops concerned with comic routines. The Meisner Acting classes allowed actors to revisit acting methodology and to keep alive the notion that today's actor must continually struggle with the synthesis of naturalism and classic text, and the scale of performance demanded by the plays. (Although these were popular sessions some actors found the work too 'behavioural' and felt this to be unrelated to the heightened quality of the texts.) As well as 'core skills' areas of language and movement, and production-specific skills in comedy styles, workshops were requested in puppetry, dance and specific workshops in 'shoal' work which focused on the whole Company moving simultaneously like a shoal of fish or flight of birds. As well as providing excellent ensemble building activities all this work was later used in productions. The *Twelfth Night* company explored the body's chemical responses to physical attraction and falling in love.<sup>458</sup> Nancy Meckler was open to suggestions for Lazzi work in order to support the 'commedia dell'arte' influence in *The Comedy of Errors*. Commedia, Lazzi, puppetry and mask work addressed comic demands of physical detail and precise comic timing. Mask work allowed the actors to inhabit a character physically and to play with the idea that 'less is more', a concept that some directors wanted to focus on.

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<sup>458</sup> Liz Dawson conducted a workshop entitled 'Love and Madness'.

Michael Boyd wanted classes in ‘Dream Work for Actors’ (conducted by Janet Sonenberg and Robbie Bosnack) for his actors in *Twelfth Night*. Boyd had previously worked with Sonenberg and Bosnack in 2004 on the *Pilate* project and *Hamlet*.<sup>459</sup>

Weekly voluntary Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais sessions were scheduled as were occasional optional ‘tumbling’ classes.

Some directors were unable to plan ahead and chose to wait until rehearsals produced the need for a workshop. Where possible, these were scheduled into rehearsals as and when they arose.

### **Time Pressures**

Training time continued to be limited and has been the most enduring problem faced by the ADP. Jane Gibson, a highly experienced and respected practitioner in the field of Historical Movement and Courtly Conventions, was approached about participating in the training but was unable to commit to the programme as she felt the time allowed was inadequate and therefore the work could not be sufficiently in-depth. She felt that the limited time available made the work seem tokenistic. The lack of extended time for in-depth work, due to rehearsal demands, was an issue raised by freelance and in-house practitioners during the years under review.

Workshops cancelled due to practitioner unavailability were rescheduled or covered by in-house practitioners, allowing a full programme to be offered and training to be maximised. Only ‘Performing Cross Gender’ a workshop by Kathryn Hunter was cancelled and replaced.<sup>460</sup> There was a late request for a session from a stand-up comic; but those approached were interested but unavailable. A discussion with a comedian could have provided a unique debate, as some said they had never had to articulate their practice and were unsure whether what they could say would be useful. The final schedule for the ADP and biographies of practitioners can be found

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<sup>459</sup> Responses to ‘Dream Work for Actors’ were mixed and similar to those expressed in the previous year.

<sup>460</sup> Katherine Hunter was working on a film and had to cancel. She was replaced by Mitch Mitchelson who taught a class in physical comedy using work on the commedia discipline of Lazzi. Although the classes were not about performing cross gender, they were well received and directly related to the rehearsals. Some actors from *The Comedy of Errors* felt they would have liked more. The Lazzi work was demanding but not as exhausting as some other sessions.



in Appendixes 6.(1.i) and 6.(1.ii). See footnote for list of workshops and lectures.<sup>461</sup>

### **Michael Boyd's Welcome**

Rehearsals started on 4 January 2005 with a welcome and introduction to the ensemble from Boyd, who re-iterated the Company's commitment to training and development for artists, longer rehearsal periods and opportunities for risk-taking. Speaking from experience of the previous year, he said that exercises could be exposing and that it was often the youngest and most mature actors who felt able to enter wholeheartedly into the training, but that middle-aged actors sometimes felt a 'loss of dignity and status' when asked to train. 'Asking you to train suggests we think you aren't trained.' He spoke about career-long development and of the responsibility of members of the ensemble to 'feed' and support each other's learning.

### **A More Diverse Approach to Text**

In 2005 text-related work was offered by a number of practitioners with different viewpoints allowing actors a diverse experience. Rather than contradicting each other, a broad perspective on the subject was offered and

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<sup>461</sup> The programme included the following classes, lectures and workshops:

John Woolf: Singing, which included madrigals, song rounds and patter.

Alison Bomber: Group a capella singing, which aimed to encourage under confident individuals to explore song in a non-technical way.

Richard Brown and Martin Allen: Practical music classes using percussion instruments.

Cicely Berry: Large and small groups language workshops, which focused on freeing the text for the actor.

John Barton: Regular sessions with small groups of seven actors, working on sonnets. He also gave a talk about his approach to classic language. Barton concentrated on helping actors deliver complex text.

Gregory Doran: Exploration of the verse and de-mystifying the rhythms used in Shakespeare's texts.

Rob Clare: Small group sessions in approaching verse and prose based on the Peter Hall approach.

John Wright: Physical expressivity through mask and physical play.

Ralph Williams: Lecture on 'Petrarch and his influence on the Elizabethans' and spoke and worked practically on 'The language of the plays'.

Jonathan Bate: Lecture on the season's plays in production.

Carrol Rutter: Women in the comedies.

Lyn Darnley: Solo and group voice sessions.

Liz Ranken: Ensemble movement exploration and improvisation using colour, weight and effort.

Liz Ranken and Lyn Darnley: Voice and movement classes using Laban exercises as a starting point and exploring the dynamics of time, weight and effort in voice, body and poetry.

Heather Hubbens: Dance classes working on Mediterranean/Greek dance styles.

Nancy Meckler: Sessions on ensemble work inspired by her work with the Shared Experience Theatre Company; this work was physical and improvisational.

Clive Mendes: Ensemble work through 'shoal' exercises.

Marcello Magni: Commedia workshop.

Max Atkinson: Rhetoric.

Steve Tiplady: Puppetry.

Mitch Mitchelson: Lazzi.

possibilities were explored. Common concerns from actors were about having choice rather than following a rigid set of rules and accessing rhythm, structure and spontaneity. The greater inter-connectedness of the skills in 2005 was made obvious by the different disciplines which focused on rhythm. Work on rhythm began in Gregory Doran's text class and was reinforced by Richard Brown's percussion class. With the help of percussionist Martin Allen, groups were encouraged to play a variety of drums, shakers, triangles and other instruments and to explore various rhythms, patterns and styles including swing, syncopation and jazz. The class was wholly practical and, for many, surprisingly demanding as it involved each group playing as an orchestra. Rhythm was further developed by sessions in singing, text and dance. The need for actors to listen, feel and respond to rhythm is fundamental to performance and all workshops challenged actors to 'feel impulses', be 'in the moment', and respond to new and unexpected stimuli. Most actors were able to recognise connections between rhythm and text work.

Because Verse and Classical Language was at the heart of the training, John Barton addressed the ensemble on the second training day, giving his view of verse and language work in the RSC over the 45 years he had been connected with the Company.<sup>462</sup> He urged actors to excite the audience into listening, engaging and questioning, which is not always easy for modern audiences who come from the visual not oral culture. His discussion included many of the points he had discussed in 2003/4 but he also spoke of his dissatisfaction with his reputation as a teacher of verse, saying that about half of Shakespeare's texts were written in prose. He said he felt 'sound' better described his focus, because he was concerned with the 'sound' of the text and all three meanings of the word - *sound* as in 'noise'; *to sound* - as in to explore; and *sound* as in health, all appertain to the speaking of Shakespeare. Writers, actors and audiences of the time were familiar with the rhythms and the 'sound' of the language in a way that actors and audiences today are not. Both Michael Boyd and Cicely Berry

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<sup>462</sup> John Barton speaking at the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 5 January, 2005.

agreed that actors need to develop a connection with the sound of the language.

Barton said, 'the language is strange and alien to our tradition' and spoke of words that we use today that, he believed, had a different meaning in Shakespeare's time, such as 'interpret' which before 1880 did not have a creative meaning but referred only to 'explanation'. An actor asked about punctuation and Barton commented on the unreliability of punctuation, which was 'settled on' at a later date by an editor. He suggested, however, that full-stops were useful and that the actor should also look for the question marks. Gregory Doran commented that 'Punctuation is for readers to read, not for actors to act.' Barton's knowledge of actors enabled him to provoke discussion around the subjects that concern them. When an actor asked about 'iambic pentameter', John Barton commented that he no longer focused on metre and 'feels it [the word iambic] should be banned.' While it is understandable why Cambridge-educated Barton does not focus on iambic pentameter, young drama school trained actors often feel disenfranchised if they do not fully understand it and are therefore not in command of the metre. On the other hand, university trained actors sometimes do not have the rhythms 'in their blood' and although they have a theoretical understanding of metre, have difficulty releasing rhythms when speaking. Even experienced actors who have not studied university-level English sometimes feel disadvantaged when working with heightened text. The RSC has a responsibility to ensure actors are provided with the information and practical experience they need.

### **Gregory Doran**

In the afternoon Gregory Doran<sup>463</sup> ran a workshop that offered actors the opportunity to explore both rhythm and metre. He explained that as a young actor in the Company he had felt that there was a body of 'secret knowledge' that others were party to and he was ignorant of. He said that if an actor did not find 'iambic pentameter' useful they could ignore it.

Doran's class began with practical clapping exercises, which set up the six rhythms most commonly found in the classical texts. He offered

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<sup>463</sup> Gregory Doran workshop with the *Comedies Ensemble*, at Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 5 January, 2005.

examples of the rhythms in words from the plays such as *Macbeth* (iamb), *Hamlet* (trochee) etc. He spoke of the common use of iambic pentameter in English verse and in natural speech, where its length is similar to the natural breath. This led to discussion about rhythms created by the use of pentameter, tetrameter and alexandrine and the primitive need audiences have to hear the patterns completed. The links between metre and rhyme and their ability to create 'otherness and another world' in the fairy kingdom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was alluded to.

### **The Lectures**

Late afternoon lectures were conducted by academics with strong connections with the Company including Ralph Williams of Michigan University, Max Atkinson,<sup>464</sup> and Jonathan Bate and Carol Rutter of Warwick University. All spoke on matters appertaining to the productions and lectures lasted no longer than 50 minutes.

### **Provision of Training for Assistant Directors and Voice Placement Training**

In 2005 the assistant directors and the Professional Voice Placement were expected to attend all training. As well as attending the ensemble group training sessions outlined in the previous paragraphs, they were also offered their own small group sessions with Cicely Berry and John Barton. This work was valued by the first Voice Placement, Alison Bomber:

The training period for the *Comedies* season was an extraordinary opportunity for me to stretch existing skills, and to discover and explore new ones. The sheer variety of experiences on offer was highly stimulating: from the physical comedy of Lazzi and freeing capacity of the mask work to intensive, rigorous text work with John Barton, and deeply centring, exploratory text work with Cicely Berry. It was extraordinary to receive all this input, and I was particularly delighted to be able to make connections between the different strands: the intense focus required for puppetry can also have a beneficial impact on approaches to text; the physical awareness developed in Marcello's [Magni] work feeds the awareness of the physical nature of language moving through the body in Cis' [Cicely Berry] work; the submission of ego in assuming a mask informs the need to allow the language to speak freely in the actor's body rather than have the actor try to control it intellectually. Apart from the joy of working with John [Barton] and Cis, practitioners from "my area" of voice and text, the work of both of whom had been fundamental in bringing me towards voice and text professionally in the first place, that forging of connections was, for me, one of the main

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<sup>464</sup> Max Atkinson is author of *Our Masters' Voices*, London, Methuen 1984 and *Lend me Your Ears*, London, Vermilion, 2004.

benefits of the training period – affirming the possibilities for interconnectedness between disciplines.<sup>465</sup>

The interconnectedness between the text skills in 2005 was successful in building on existing knowledge while at the same time strengthening the ensemble by shared training . Bomber remarked:

It was also a really strong way to forge connections between people within the ensemble. As each individual has different strengths and weaknesses, we were able to encounter one another with great equality; barriers between actors/practitioners/assistant directors were broken down, and status issues between younger and more experienced actors became blurred. It was a powerful programme of experiential opportunities, and I still draw on things discovered during that time.<sup>466</sup>

Alison Bomber’s biography appears in Appendix 6.(2).

### **Late Starters**

Five actors had joined the ensemble in the latter part of the second week, which meant they missed the bulk of the training. This late-cast group were mainly understudies who, because of their lack of experience, needed verse support. This was addressed in part by prioritising them in one-to-one text and voice sessions.

### **Limited Training for The *Gunpowder* Company in the Swan Theatre**

Once again the Swan Company operated as a separate entity and rehearsed five plays in rapid succession with one group of actors.<sup>467</sup> The artist development potential for the Swan ensemble was enormous because of the challenges provided by the number of productions, but development was essentially informal. Again actors had access to a full- time voice coach. A policy change was implemented that gave a single voice coach control of each production. This was done in order to consolidate the work and prevent confusion for actors. It also meant the director had only to negotiate with one individual rather than a number as had previously been the case. It provided the voice coach with a sense of ownership and responsibility as their work was credited.

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<sup>465</sup> Alison Bomber in interview with Lyn Darnley, Stratford, October, 2007.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> The five plays in the *Gunpowder* Season were: *A New Way To Please You*, written by Thomas Middleton and Philip Rowley, directed by Sean Holmes; *Believe What You Will*, written by Philip Massinger, directed by Josie Rourke; *Thomas More*, written by Anthony Munday, William Shakespeare and others, directed by Robert Delamere; *Sejanus*, written by Ben Jonson, directed by Gregory Doran; *Speaking Like Magpies*, written by Frank McGuinness, directed by Rupert Goold.

A major difference from 2003/4 was that in 2005 the Swan company was offered a limited training programme, which included several talks on historical and textual issues and once weekly classes in text with Cicely Berry and John Barton. These were planned for six weeks but were curtailed after four weeks because directors felt the pressure of time was too great as they did not have the same extended rehearsal period as the RST ensemble.

There was an inevitably disgruntled reaction from some of the younger members of the Swan Company who felt they were not being offered the same opportunities as the RST ensemble. Nevertheless the benefits from the intensity of the work were evident. William Houston said, 'One of the best things about being in the RSC for over a year is you can take many more risks than you normally would. You get over the rows and just get on with it all and work much more closely as a result of being together for all that time.'<sup>468</sup> When asked about working on so many plays Jonjo O'Neill, who appeared in four of the *Gunpowder* plays, said:

You really take a lot of risks and expose yourself. We've all seen each other's ugly faces and seen each other try and not succeed and you accomplish more that way. After a while, you're not afraid of being crap in front of people you want to impress. [...] There was an eight-month period where, for quite a lot of it, we were rehearsing during the day and playing in the evening. Your life is all about either being in the rehearsal room or on stage, so you become very economical with your energy. You don't have energy to waste on being neurotic on stage and thinking "oh that was bad", you just work very hard and relax more in the space. You learn to not care about the small things.<sup>469</sup>

Both of these actors give credence to the developmental value of extended contracts and how the comfortable familiarity and intense focus of an ensemble impacts upon rehearsals and performance by removing any sense of self-consciousness. The Swan Companies of 2003 to 2005 included a number of actors who returned to the Company in the years 2006 to 2009.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> William Houston in conversation with Lyn Darnley, Stratford, September, 2006.

<sup>469</sup> Caroline Ansdell, 'RSC Cast Discuss Gunpowder & Iraq at WOS Outing', *What's on Stage*, 3 February, 2006, <http://www.whatsonstage.com/index.php?pg=207&story=E8821138980785>

<sup>470</sup> The following Swan Company actors returned to the RSC during the years 2006-2009: Julius D'Silva, Joseph Millson, Vinta Morgan, Oscar Pearce, Matt Ryan, Simon Trinder, Ewen Cummins, Peter De Jersey, Geoffrey Freshwater, William Houston, Jonjo O'Neill, Keith Osborn, Nigel Cooke and Joseph Chance. Jonjo O'Neill was part of the 2009 -2011 Long Ensemble and he and Oscar Pearce were part of the Nations of War ensemble in 2012.

## **The Rehearsal Period Debrief**

### **The 2005 Debrief**

At the debrief after the initial two weeks of the 2005 training programme, Michael Boyd discussed his involvement in, response to, and experience of the work. He had been more personally engaged in the training in 2005 than in the previous year and spoke of how hard it is to bridge the gap between what one can do 'in the mind' and what the body does in reality. The experience had made him more aware of the gulf between his skills and the skills of 'good actors'. He went on to say:

...demands are high and the struggle to find truth in the Meisner class, make John Barton wide-eyed at your ability with sonnets or satisfy Marcello [Magni] in the Commedia class are all difficult ambitions to achieve; but then William Shakespeare too, is a hard taskmaster, 'a bastard who demands both mind and body.'<sup>471</sup>

It was, he pointed out, too soon to fully appraise the work as, although the first and most intensive part of the training had been completed, there were still seven weeks of Wednesday afternoon sessions ahead and the real connection with the rehearsal process was still to be felt.

### **Positive and Negative Feedback**

Positive feedback was given on the variety of work, the organisation, the links actors were able to make between the disciplines, the level of ensemble bonding, the intensity of the focus and the fun. The comedic nature of the work was bound to generate a greater level of play and enjoyment than the work that supported the tragic themes of 2003/4. The playfulness undoubtedly produced a positive energy within the group.

Generally actors were able to see the relationship between the training they were undertaking and the work in rehearsals particularly when there was a direct link to the productions. The puppetry class was applicable for the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* actors, as the production used a Japanese Bunraku puppet for the Little Indian Boy and hand puppets for the fairies, but had less direct relevance for those in the other plays although the bonding and skills benefits were acknowledged. John Wright's mask work

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<sup>471</sup> Michael Boyd, speaking at the 2005 Training Debrief, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 14 January, 2005.

was considered valuable by everyone (despite masks not being used in either show), because of the connections between mask work and the acting process. The dance routines were seen as both enjoyable and providing valuable skills.

Verse and language work was well received. For those who had worked for the Company in previous years, when whole-company sessions were the norm, the more intimate groups were considered preferable. Actor Gurpreet Singh, new to the Company, with no experience in verse speaking, said he had expected to be terrified in the verse classes, but had not been. This suggests that if actors without experience of verse drama are supported, they quickly gain confidence and extend their skill base.

Singing and Percussion classes were enjoyed by most. 'Options' were welcomed and more acrobatics and Tai Chi classes were requested. Certain physical classes were considered to be too long although all were shorter than they had been in 2003/4.<sup>472</sup> Generally, movement work was thought demanding, not just on the body but the imagination. Predictably the Dance class, which set achievable goals and worked towards a final product, was enormously popular. More difficult for many was Liz Ranken's challenging and, for some, exposing physical work on 'Internal Focus' and response.

Although they had only been working for two weeks, when Boyd asked the question 'who feels more coordinated?', more than half the Company responded positively yet when the question 'who feels fitter?', was asked, not even half the Company responded positively. Of those who identified a physical difference one remarked, 'My stomach feels stronger.'<sup>473</sup> As predicted by Michael Boyd in his initial welcome, some of the more mature and established actors found the work most difficult. This group already had the most expertise, and so had more to lose in terms of dignity and therefore were most easily taken 'out of their comfort zone'. They were also the least familiar with ensemble building exercises. Responses ranged

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<sup>472</sup> Some movement classes were two hours long and the Dance and Puppetry classes were two-and-a-half hours at the request of the practitioners. The Dance class was felt to be the right length but the Puppetry was considered too long by a significant number of actors.

<sup>473</sup> At this point the Company had only had nine early morning limbers, one session of Yoga and Voice and one Stretch and Voice class so any expectation of real muscle development was unrealistic. Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais work had been scheduled but had not yet begun.



from those completely energised and excited by the work to the few who felt dis-empowered and exhausted by it. Others enjoyed some sessions and not others. The Meisner work was appreciated by most young actors and some of the older actors. A minority felt it was 'simply being' and 'wasn't acting' and therefore could not see its purpose.

Untrained actors who had learned their craft 'on the shop floor' were sometimes unused to putting themselves in vulnerable positions. Most senior actors had received traditional training that was largely voice- and text-based and had not included improvisational skills, whereas all the young actors had encountered improvisation to some degree although some from more conventional schools had done very little. Some experienced actors, who did not want to be identified, were suspicious of the work and felt exposed in front of younger and less experienced members of the Company. A senior actor in his fifties, with previous experience with the RSC, said that he had 'started looking at what had always been instinctive'. He felt this was unnecessary and detrimental. Speaking of the 'actor's journey of discovery', one leading actor said, 'For some people the journey is a private one'.<sup>474</sup> This opinion was reiterated by two other senior actors, neither of whom had trained but who felt secure with heightened text. Michael Boyd agreed that privacy was important, 'Any notion of ensemble that does not allow privacy is in danger of being fascist'.<sup>475</sup> The work made actors consider their process and for some this was not necessarily a positive experience. A female actor remarked that instead of feeling more centred and able, she felt de-stabilised and less empowered. Another senior member of the Company, of a similar age, said that she had found the work 'fun' and was 'able to take what she needed' from it. This may be because she was experienced and knew how to 'use' the work to her benefit. Boyd spoke about the need to keep examining and challenging 'process as a prerequisite for growth'<sup>476</sup> but acknowledged this was not part of the British theatrical tradition or culture. It

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<sup>474</sup> In order to preserve anonymity, I have not identified actors who made casual or contentious remarks. Feedback forms are anonymous and although it is possible to identify actors through comments, I have avoided naming individuals unless they were formally interviewed.

<sup>475</sup> Michael Boyd, speaking at the 2005 Training Debrief, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 14 January, 2005.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

was a balancing act, he said, between 'scepticism and risk-taking'. 'Destabilisation can be re-stabilised'<sup>477</sup>, he said, suggesting that exposure and vulnerability can be enriching rather than undermining. Everyone admitted having moments of vulnerability. This is the natural consequence of moving 'out of the comfort zone' into the dangerous but creative place where risks are taken. Positive remarks were made by younger actors who had been unaware of the discomfort of some of the mature actors. They had been inspired by the older actors' uncomplaining involvement in all the work and voiced their gratitude for the example that had been set. Certainly the senior actors in the 2005 company were much more willing to involve themselves than those in the 2003/4 company, in spite of their reservations. This may be because they were more aware of the RSC commitment to ensemble training at the point of contract than those in the previous ensemble company. The theatrical community was becoming more aware of the changes in the RSC rehearsal process and contracts contained a clause that outlined the commitment to ongoing development.

A middle-aged actor, embracing the spirit of the work remarked that 'the difference between Italian and British footballers is that British footballers practice what they are *good* at, and Italians practice what they are *not good* at.' Additional comments from young actors included, 'Wonderful and terrifying'; 'Great to see everyone in the same boat'; 'Comforting for the new boys'; 'This is such a bonus - to be paid to develop your skills'. The positive attitude of young inexperienced actors may have been due partly to the RSC's reputation as a place where you went to 'learn your craft'.

When Michael Boyd asked if formal use should be made of the older actors' experience, most felt that an informal relationship was the most beneficial. A young actor suggested an 'anecdotal class' with experienced actors talking about their work. This met with resistance from older actors who felt that informal discussions that developed in the Green Room, and relaxed sharing of information and experience, were more valuable. This style of non-linear learning can be observed in rehearsal rooms, during tea

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

breaks and social events and provides actors with valuable insight into craft skills and often helps younger actor solve performance problems.

### **Actors' Requests**

When asked what element of the work was missing one actor responded, 'Work on physical status of the period.'<sup>478</sup> The demands of the texts require an often unfamiliar muscularity of speech but equally demand a far less 'contemporary and casual' use of the body. More acrobatics was requested by younger actors who enjoyed the few classes they were able to attend. As well as wanting to repeat favourite sessions there was a desire to try skills they were unable to choose at the first opportunity. Some felt that acrobatic skills could have been incorporated in the productions if there had been time to develop greater proficiency.

### **Building a Community**

An actor remarked that working with different groups over the two weeks had allowed him to literally 'rub thighs' with actors with whom he might not work again that season. Another commented that working together so intensely had accelerated the bonding process and broken down barriers. Having to play instruments together, work in pairs and groups, and risk making fools of themselves together, had built a sense of ensemble in a very short time and allowed them to work more freely and productively in the remaining rehearsals.

### **Difficulties Arising from the Needs of the London Season**

Actors involved in the London *Tragedies* season, which had continued into 2005, complained that they had missed some significant *Comedy* season workshops. It was apparent that the additional performance burden limited the benefits of the training weeks for both actors and creative practitioners:

Several changes needed to be made to the plan because of London Season rehearsal demands on actors and the creative team. As well as actors who were unavailable due to *Hamlet* filming, Liz Ranken and Richard Brown [Musical Director] were needed for *Macbeth* rehearsals. Their sessions were rescheduled.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Jane Gibson, who had decided against participating in the programme because of time limitations for the work, had been approached about period movement and status.

<sup>479</sup> Notes made by Lyn Darnley during the second week of training in January, 2005.

Although tiredness and the heavy workload for actors in the 2003/4 London Season was discussed, these problems persisted for actors in 2005 and 'rolled over' into the 2006 ensembles.

### **Reviewing the 2005 Clapham Training Programme**

Having been involved in the 2003/4 pilot programme, I found the second year more productive possibly because some of the actors and directors had been through the training process the year before and knew what to expect. Adjustments had been made to the pilot programme based on feedback, and practitioners were briefed more fully. There was also a greater sense of the potential of the work and how it could support the rehearsals and production goals rather than simply being 'additional training'.

The feedback session allowed actors to report honestly on their experiences. Although the 2005 debriefing articulated some negative responses, the tone of the meeting was more open and positive than that of 2003/4. The feedback was taken into consideration when planning the 2006 ADP for the *Complete Works Festival* and the Stratford Phase Two Training.

### **Stratford Training Offered in 2005**

Apart from rehearsal-related training for *The New Work Festival*, all the training in Stratford was optional apart from rehearsal voice-calls. The exception to this was the Lev Dodin lecture (discussed later), which was compulsory for all actors.

### **Casting Opportunities for Young Actors**

Casting of the Young Persons' Shakespeare (YPS),<sup>480</sup> a local schools' tour of *The Taming of the Shrew* ultimately offered many of the younger actors the chance to extend their skills, but the original intention of the director, Sarah Esdale, was to cast more experienced actors in the production. Younger actors believed this contradicted the ensemble ethic and compromised what should have been a valuable learning opportunity. When the leading actors declined the roles, they were offered subsequently to less experienced actors who embraced the challenge of playing more demanding characters. In the spirit of ensemble, a policy to use this project actively for developing the career trajectories of young and middle ranking

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<sup>480</sup> The Young Persons' Shakespeare is an RSC Education project that performs in schools.

actors could have been declared. Greater consultation between the Director and the Casting and Artist Development departments could have supported such a policy.<sup>481</sup> Casting resulted in discernible levels of frustration as ‘play as cast actors’ often felt overlooked and sometimes felt they did not have a voice. Some who did not express their dissatisfaction became unmotivated and negative about their place in the ensemble and this limited their development and was harmful to the ensemble. In the years that followed the YPS came to be seen as an excellent opportunity to stretch young actors.<sup>482</sup>

### **Public Understudy Runs**

Like the *Tragedies* ensemble, the *Comedies* ensemble performed public understudy runs that were well received by audiences and found to be rewarding for the actors. The public understudy was particularly useful for *Twelfth Night* as Kananu Kirimi (Viola) became ill and the understudy, Sally Tatum, took over the role for the remainder of the run. (The pressure on space during 2006 and 2007 caused by the redevelopment of the RST meant that public understudy performances were not held again until 2008.)

### **Lost Opportunities through Over Programming**

Several valuable opportunities for development were lost because of clashes in the schedule. The most obvious of these was the *Comedy Festival* in September 2005. The ensemble had been working on the *Comedies* since January 2005 and would continue to perform in and explore comedy until March 2006. The *Comedy Festival*,<sup>483</sup> which brought together comedians and academics to debate and speak about their work and comic structures, was an ideal opportunity for actors to refresh their thinking, remind themselves of the training workshops and inspire them to keep

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<sup>481</sup> This was remedied in 2006 when Sam Jones was appointed Head of Casting and expressed her intention of collaborating closely with the Artist Development Department. Members of staff involved in Artist Development had built relationships with actors and understood their skill levels, ambitions and performance strengths, therefore closer communication between Casting and Artist Development might have been beneficial.

<sup>482</sup> By the end of 2006 the communication between all the creative departments and Casting had improved enormously with production debriefs between casting and directors, producers, company managers and voice practitioners involved in Artist Development. This pro-active approach resulted in more discussion about the creative needs of younger and mid-career actors and allowed actors more opportunities to express their ambitions.

<sup>483</sup> *The Comedy Festival* was produced by Fiona Lindsay of the RSC Events Department. Lindsay now works as a freelance theatre and literary events producer who still undertakes work for the RSC.

inventing and challenging their process. Some actors were able to participate in the events but most were too busy with rehearsals for other projects. Their presence would have added to the debate and provided another 'loop' in the spiral of learning they had embarked upon earlier in the year. It would also have increased the influence of the ensemble to impact upon wider RSC events and have given audiences a fuller more 'integrated' experience.

### **ADP Support for New Writing**

Rehearsals for the new writing productions were supported by the ADP. The plays offered rewarding roles for young actors. Some found themselves more challenged in the contemporary language plays than they had been in the Shakespeare texts and were encouraged to apply the classic strategies explored, to the new writing. The similarities and differences were identified and the value of investigating the sound-scape, structures and rhythms, was proven, whatever the text. Several actors joined the ensemble for the New Writing Festival causing some misgivings over the integrity of the ensemble. There was concern that roles should have been offered to existing ensemble members rather than bringing in additional actors. This they believed would validate the RSC's claim as an ensemble. As well as the *New Work Festival* texts, there were music and dance development projects that also received support from the ADP.

### **The Winter Season 2005**

When the *Comedies Season* transferred first to Newcastle and then to London, it was replaced in Stratford by the *Winter Season*, which was divided into four smaller solus companies. The first two productions were *Great Expectations* directed by Declan Donnellan, in the RST, and *The Canterbury Tales* directed by Gregory Doran, in The Swan. Both productions played from the beginning of December until early February 2006.<sup>484</sup> These were followed by Lawrence Boswell's production of Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* in the Swan and Dominic Cooke's production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in the RST.

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<sup>484</sup> *The Canterbury Tales* (directed by Gregory Doran) was performed in two parts, which played in rep. After its Swan Theatre season, *The Canterbury Tales* did a small-scale tour of the UK and then transferred to the Kennedy Center in Washington before moving to the Gielgud Theatre in London.

## **Limited Artists' Development Work for the Winter Season 2005/6**

The rehearsal process did not allow for training but classes and workshops were scheduled in Stratford after the completion of the understudy runs. The short runs of *The Crucible* and *Women Beware Women* meant that it was difficult to offer any training beyond core voice, text and core physical skills.

None of the companies performed a Shakespeare text but by popular demand, the training offered focused on Shakespeare. Actors were able to participate in a Young Directors' Project led by Cicely Berry, which provided a two-week intensive workshop on Shakespearean text. The format of the workshop allowed them to work alongside young directors and eventually work on scenes directed by them. The project was open to 21 actors and to seven young directors, including one from Theatre for a New Audience in New York.

Small group or individual classes on the delivery of classical verse were given by John Barton. Actors were offered the opportunity to study speeches or scenes from Shakespeare in small groups or individually with Rob Clare and voice coaches Jeannette Nelson and Lyn Darnley.

In addition to core skills classes,<sup>485</sup> Lorna Marshall led workshops on the Japanese system of Butoh. The *Winter Season* programme completed the work of the Artist Development Programme for 2005.

### **Compulsory and Voluntary Training**

Most of the training at the start of the *Comedies* was compulsory. There was, however, no compulsory programme for the *Winter Season* companies beyond production-related text, voice and dialect calls, and fight calls. Although there was no feedback session, I became aware of the less satisfactory nature of optional work that did not include all actors or any element of ensemble building, and did not re-enforce the work in the rehearsal room. There was undoubtedly less of an 'ensemble' feel to the *Winter Season* companies suggesting that initial compulsory training creates a stronger collaborative and collective dynamic.

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<sup>485</sup> Core skills included voice, verse, text, singing, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais work.

Optional sporadic training, unconnected to the process of rehearsals, was seen as additional and peripheral. It was perceived, by some, as something to fill empty days in Stratford and keep actors occupied and entertained once the understudy rehearsals were over. The work did not reach the broad range of need within the ensemble and consequently did nothing to raise standards. Although this work was valued by those who participated, its impact was limited as it benefited individuals rather than the group. I felt that there was a clearer understanding of the function and purpose of rehearsal-related training for the core ensemble than there was for the more dislocated, random companies in the *Winter Season*. It was nevertheless important that opportunities for skills development existed throughout the year and particularly at times when more actors could take advantage of classes. (In response to this, changes were made, and by 2007 all companies had training programmes at the start of rehearsals as well as optional work after the productions opened.) A distinct benefit of the Winter Training was that it brought together actors from the solo companies.

### **Challenges Arising in 2005**

The major challenges of the initial training period of 2005 were similar to those of 2003/4. Additional challenges were:

- The difficulty in getting speakers and practitioners to commit to dates
- The provision of what practitioners considered sufficient time for their subject
- The limited efficacy of the *Winter Season* training programme as it was unrelated to the work on stage
- 'Play as cast' actors' frustration with casting procedures.

### **Continuing Pressures on Actors**

A significant continuing challenge was the volume of work for actors, particularly those transferring from one ensemble to the next. Actors believed there would be an easing of the schedule after the understudy runs for *As You Like it* and *The Comedy of Errors*, however most actors found themselves also cast in the *New Work Festival*, leaving little time to participate in optional workshops, no matter how potentially fulfilling they may have been. Involvement in Education and Events Department workshops,



National Poetry Day readings and the *Primary Schools Poetry Project*<sup>486</sup> were optional.

### **Guest Lecture by Lev Dodin**

In June 2005 the Russian director Lev Dodin spoke to the full Company on the ensemble principles of the Maly Drama Theatre in Moscow. This was a significant event because it raised issues about the concept of ensemble and triggered a productive and honest debate within the Company, exposing concerns not previously aired. It provided a touchstone for the future structure of the ensemble and proved the need for an acceptable British alternative. I have included a detailed account of the lecture because it focused on training and commitment to the ensemble principles of the Maly and so was pertinent to the developing RSC ensemble ethos. The timing of the discussion meant that for many there was a limited experience of the RSC approach to ensemble to use as a comparison. In a foreword to Maria Shevtsova's book on the Maly Theatre, Simon Callow spoke of their ensemble philosophy and compared it to the training-shy British theatre culture:

By the time I saw the Maly, I had come to believe that this was not so much an ideal as a myth. Even the great companies I had seen – the Moscow Art Theatre, the Berliner Ensemble, the Schaubuhne – had either ossified or disbanded, and the noble British attempts in the 1960s, by Peter Hall at the RSC and Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre, had by the mid-1970s moved towards the model of the repertory theatre with a group of players hired for a season or two to perform specific plays. It must be said, too, that the notion of an unending training is deeply inimical to most British actors who feel that three years at drama school is quite enough of a good thing, thank you very much.<sup>487</sup>

Callow went on to write of the Maly ensemble:

It is the actors who hold you absolutely, not simply as performers, nor even as individuals, but as some kind of collective conduit for the life-force. A Maly production is contained within the actors' bodies, brains, hearts and souls: it is the sum total of their work, their relationship with each other, their relationship to the world.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> An annual RSC Primary Schools Poetry Project operates in Stratford-Upon-Avon schools and encourages children to speak verse chorally and to write their own poetry. This project culminates in a performance of poetry written by children and performed by members of the ensemble. The performance element forms part of the informal development of actors offered by the ADP.

<sup>487</sup> Maria Shevtsova, *Dodin and the Maly Theatre, Process to Performance*, (Simon Callow, Foreword), London, Routledge, 2004, p.xii.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.* p.xiii.

All members of the acting ensemble and many other employees attended Dodin's discussion which was conducted in Russian and translated. Dodin then answered questions from actors and directors. There was a genuine interest in how the Maly was able to produce the quality of artists Callow describes, but an even greater curiosity (and some scepticism) about the day to day demands made on actors, the level of collaboration and the experience of working as a collective.

Dodin spoke of long rehearsal periods, the extended life of the Maly productions and of total immersion in the ensemble. Differences in the culture of the 2005 RSC ensemble and the Maly's ensemble were immediately evident and later sparked discussion about what constituted an appropriate ensemble for a British company. Dodin's views divided the actors with some being hugely inspired by the Russian company's ethic and others being alarmed by the excessively long hours of work, lack of personal and family time, and the limits it placed on the variety of experience and opportunity artists encountered in the British system. More positively, much of what Dodin said reinforced the fundamentals of Boyd's vision of extended collaborative work and ongoing training. He spoke of the intangible essence of ensemble:

Theatre is a high flown word. We should not be afraid to be too high flown, but rather 'look for beauty, search for beauty'. A writer writes with his soul, a painter paints with soul. Every theatre should have its soul. In theatre the idea of soul is much more difficult [and complex]. The soul of theatre is in all the souls of all the people who come to do a performance, not just the actors but the whole company. It is miraculous when multiple souls are unanimously united - from these united souls you get the communal soul of the theatre. The communal soul of theatre is *ensemble*. This ensemble is also created by all the people who contribute to the production - those who work in props, electrics, sound etc.<sup>489</sup>

While actors were able to accept this image of a collective, they were less happy with the idea of life-long commitment to one company and to keeping productions in the repertory for extended periods of five to ten years or even longer. Some were concerned about the number of hours worked and Dodin's disparaging remarks about trade unions.

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<sup>489</sup> Lev Dodin speaking in the Swan Theatre 10 June, 2005 (from notes taken by Lyn Darnley and Jane Hazell).

When everything is decided by trade unions - I firmly believe when everything is compartmentalised into jobs, working hours, - it [ensemble] becomes devalued.<sup>490</sup>

Dodin does not cast the play initially and all actors explore all the roles.

Any part written by a great playwright will always be richer than me, myself. Actors need to grow up into a part - by communicating with fellow actors. Wardrobe, props, and technicians all sit in rehearsal. This is the pathway to ensemble. The whole rehearsal period is a way of giving birth to an ensemble. If a performance comes to life, then it is successful and this generally means ensemble has happened.<sup>491</sup>

Actors were again divided over Dodin's casting policy and there was curiosity about process and the relationship between actors and director. Richard Cordery asked: 'Are you an authoritarian director in the rehearsal room?'

Dodin responded:

I am authoritarian but everyone who comes into a rehearsal has a right to participate. All rehearsals are a dialogue, a communication process. My task is as an authoritarian boss which is to facilitate, to demand everyone to wake up ... require them to take the initiative. Thought can only become a thought when it's spoken. The more diverse the initiative the more actively we come up with the 'living broth' of a rehearsal. The more ingredients there are, the more interesting the broth will be. The director is also obliged to trust his judgement - if he doesn't like the taste of the broth he must start re-cooking it. The endless search is the starting point of rehearsal.<sup>492</sup>

For most British actors the suggestion of an authoritarian director contradicts their image of an ensemble, where ideas are freely offered and tested.

Later, however, when speaking about the Maly's luxury of extended rehearsal, Dodin affirmed his process was collective:

You can rehearse the first scene for five months. Then it finally clicks. After five months actors who have come up with so much hatred, so much love - can finally show emotions together - not separately. Process is endless. Ensemble is a completely collective process. What is wanted is an atmosphere of working together/living together...friendship...but without competition. An actor has only done his job when he has become the veritable co-author of the performance he is in ... come up with everything he is doing on stage himself.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

Oscar Pearce, who was part of the *Gunpowder* company and therefore rehearsing plays in five weeks, asked if there were any problems associated with prolonged rehearsal periods and Lev Dodin answered:

Sometimes you forget which stage you are at - but the same can be said if you rehearse for a short period. I can speak only [of] our experience, [of] what we have found useful. What is important is not to ask how, but what for? The length of the rehearsal period depends on what you're looking for in a play. Some actors are happy to work for only two weeks - same for directors.<sup>494</sup>

Peter de Jersey, (*Gunpowder* company) asked, 'For how many years would you expect to work with an actor? How important is it to remember a child's sense of play?' Dodin's answer to these two questions was:

Until I die. In the *Uncle Vanya* company, some actors have worked with the Maly for 30 years. We change ourselves, set different tasks for each other. An actor only stays an actor as long as he has something of a child in him.<sup>495</sup>

Giving a clear impression of the Maly's emphasis on training, Dodin referred to the 'school' (Academy of Theatre Arts), which has a strong connection with the Maly and at which Dodin teaches.

Work in the rehearsal room is based on continuous training. Most actors are former students [of the Academy] who have known each other for years - they are agreed on the basic principles that unite us. They are incredibly well trained, intellectually and artistically. An actor has to be very knowledgeable. Intellectually they study a University course of humanities and history of mythology, history of religion. They study artistic disciplines - basic composition of space and music and literary composition. Psycho-physical training is very important. The whole organism should be sharply trained, psychologically. Emotion comes from feeling things. Train the sensory system - actors should be like the most talented painter. The five senses relay [ideas, sensation, emotion] to the world. Looking and seeing are different things. We do endless exercises - targeted to batter the five senses. Only then can your imagination juggle these feelings. We work on the development of imagination. Endless sessions of training for all our professional lives. From experiencing emotions we go on to expressing emotions. Finally we exercise to make the body supple.<sup>496</sup>

Dodin described the skills training saying that it included dance work based on classical training and acrobatics but the intention was to create bodies that responded to sound and music rather than to train dancers. He talked of voice and speech training being physical in nature and focused on the development of a natural voice. He said their musical training enabled actors

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

to follow the laws of melody and 'feel music unfolding'. A vocal, musical and movement warm-up was given before every performance. Dodin expressed an ideal, shared with the RSC, that actors should train as athletes do. 'It is unimaginable to think of ballet dancers beginning a dance without a professional warm up. The same applies to opera singers. They can do two-hour warm ups. Drama actors should invest more energy in what they do. It is only actors who warm up with a cigarette'.<sup>497</sup> Dodin also said that actors need to develop courage as part of their training:

Stanislavski said if there is a cold lake and you begin by touching the lake with your toes or hand you'll never go into the lake - the more you try the water out - the colder it seems. The only way to go into the lake is to plunge in. You must have courage to take the plunge now. Training develops courage.<sup>498</sup>

The desire to build confidence and courage in actors, and the essence of the voice and movement training Dodin describes are similar to work undertaken in the RSC. What differs is the depth of exploration and degree of intensity allowed by the sheer length of time the actors at the Maly work together and the 'shared language', experience and history they develop from a common training. Dodin outlined a typical day for the Maly Theatre saying that skills classes started at 9.00am and from 4.00pm until midnight actors worked on acting. Responding to an audible reaction from actors, Dodin acknowledged that the Maly system was not for everyone and that changes were occurring in European theatre and training.

European theatre schools have become lax in making demands of students. This is partly due to a more democratic approach. Some students leave [the Academy] because the rhythm of work is wrong for them. The ones who stay are encouraged by seeing known actors carrying on with daily training.<sup>499</sup>

Some actors were vocal about what they believed was the inappropriate nature of Dodin's ensemble for British actors, although they supported Michael Boyd's desire for a greater ensemble ethos within the RSC. The demands made by Shakespeare mean that British actors face specific challenges, different from those encountered by Russian actors working with Shakespeare in translation. The often physical nature of Maly's productions

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

mean that they require intense training, and a mode of operation that could not be easily imposed upon a company like the RSC and upon actors trained in the British system. The timely address by Dodin reminded the company of the essential need for training within the ensemble and the commitment required in order successfully to achieve the highest levels of collaboration. By the middle of 2005 Michael Boyd was considering ways in which the RSC ensemble should develop and so this lecture was timely. It raised pertinent concerns about extended contracts, working hours, the collective process and the authority of the director. Further information on Dodin's discussion appears in Appendix 6.( 3). The level of debate following this discussion inevitably must have impacted on Boyd's emerging thinking about shaping a suitable and acceptable ensemble operation for British artists.

### **Building an Appropriate Ensemble**

As planning of the 2006 *Complete Works Festival* progressed, it seemed that Boyd's vision for the future of ensemble began to concretise.

The visit from Lev Dodin and his address to the artists had sparked discussion about the ideal length of commitment to an ensemble, the variety of work required and a better balance between professional and family life. The debate that followed Dodin's conversation had been lively and provocative and was obviously significant for Boyd's vision of the RSC ensemble. It became apparent that although there was faith in the concept of ensemble, a suitable RSC style of ensemble was still being sought.

2005 was the middle year of the three years under review and as such produced both retrospective assessment and forward conjecture. The redevelopment of the Stratford theatres meant it was imperative that thought was given to the way in which the Company would operate throughout the transition and this allowed for serious consideration to be given to the years 2006-2010. The plans for the 2006/7 *Complete Works Festival* and the exposure of the ensemble to a wider variety of production styles and ensemble systems began to invigorate the thinking about the future of the Company during the years which would not only require, but demand, new ways of working. Discussion at Steering Group meetings and Artistic

Planning meetings was frequently concerned with the ensemble and the way it would operate in the years of transition.<sup>500</sup>

2005 was the only year in the period under review in which the delivery of the ADP followed a similar (though extended) pattern to the previous year, thereby providing a valuable measure of comparison. This allowed for reflection on the first two years of the programme and consideration about the way in which it should progress. The way forward was to some degree also determined by the redevelopment of the Stratford site, which impacted on every department and demanded a new strategy for the delivery of the performance programme. These combined factors made 2005 a year of both stability and transition.

### **Redevelopment**

The redevelopment of the Stratford theatres, which had been planned before Adrian Noble's departure, became a reality in 2005 when permission was granted by the relevant government bodies. The Other Place was closed in May 2005 in order for work to begin on the Courtyard Theatre. The construction of the temporary 1000-seater theatre on The Other Place site heralded the beginning of an extended period of disruption for the RSC resulting in restricted working spaces for administration and rehearsals which impacted on all aspects of the Company's work.<sup>501</sup>

### ***The Complete Works Festival***<sup>502</sup>

The imagination and initiative required to continue the RSC Stratford operation was largely responsible for the innovation of the international *Complete Works Festival* in 2006. Planning for ways in which the ADP could support visiting companies began in 2005 and it was hoped that international artists would contribute to the work of the ADP.

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<sup>500</sup> Steering Group is a monthly meeting of Departmental Heads and Managers. Artistic Planning Group and Committee meetings are smaller and involve those who work directly on the programme and productions, such as the Artistic Director, Executive Director, Producers, Associate Directors, Literary, Music and Voice heads of department and Directors of Marketing, Education and Finance.

<sup>501</sup> Rehearsal and performance spaces in Cox's Yard at the Bridge Street end of Bancroft Gardens were secured for *The New Work Festival* in September and October 2005 in order to alleviate pressure on the theatre spaces caused by the closure of TOP and to provide a performance space for small projects and some new writing projects.

<sup>502</sup> During 2005 planning for the 2006/2007 *Complete Works Festival* was under way. The staging of an international festival including all the plays and other works of Shakespeare was designed not only to let it be known that the RSC in Stratford was not going to close during redevelopment, but to bring an international energy and cultural perspective to the plays and appeal to a new and wider audience.

## Moving Forward

At a Steering Group meeting on 22 July 2005 Michael Boyd expressed his thoughts on the changing shape of the RSC ensemble. Unlike his statements in the press at the time of his appointment, he spoke with two years' experience of running the RSC. The concepts of ensemble and training were, he said, a distinctive, unique selling point for the Company both to actors and audiences. Both were fundamental to the RSC's success and the only way for the RSC to survive. He referred to the ensemble history, saying:

In the 1980s and 1990s it became awkward and difficult and old-fashioned to think about a serious commitment to a theatre company but these were the basic founding principles of the RSC from the time of Benson's visiting summer festival company to the longer commitment made by Byam Shaw and Quayle. Peter Hall made a leap in the 1960s and looked across the channel towards the Berliner ensemble, but looking at training in Europe today and at our skills levels, they leave us for dust.

Boyd re-iterated his concerns about current British theatre practice; small achievements; and his continuing aspirations for the future:

Our British way of making theatre is charismatic and shambolic. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a desire to be more nimble which led to shorter contracts. It was a time when shorter plays with stars looking for shorter contracts and smaller spaces thrived. There was a loss of will on the part of the RSC to ask for a sustained commitment and the culture of the celebrity and the studio theatre made the RSC seem bloated and oversized. The wheel has turned - the cult of celebrity and its limitations have been spotted. It is something we are offering British theatre. Why should the ambition of ensemble for theatre be a surprise?<sup>503</sup>

In an attempt to define ensemble as it applies to the RSC and British theatre culture Michael Boyd formulated the following ideas and goals drawn from the experience of ensemble so far. What follows is a summary of the ideas expressed, not a verbatim report.

Ensemble can be used to describe any company of actors, whether they are assembled for an extended period, for a single show, or for touring. Ensembles share the same defining core values/philosophies: They channel creativity into work that results from deep enquiry. The generation of the unexpected is born out of trust, which grows with the amount of time a company spends together. Ensembles are intolerant of egotism and support the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This does not preclude what one part or individual offers but embraces it. An ensemble can be created on a short contract or solo

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<sup>503</sup> Michael Boyd speaking on 22 July, 2005 at Steering Group Meeting, RST, Stratford, from notes taken by Lyn Darnley.



production, but demands an understanding and a buy-in to the ethic. Ensembles work in the belief that there is a body of tradition, of knowledge of an actor's craft that can be passed on. RSC ensembles should keep the best of what the RSC has achieved, and at the same time provide progressive, rigorous, integral training towards a new means of expression.<sup>504</sup>

A shift in Boyd's thinking was evident when he commented that the single show companies were also ensembles and were attractive to actors unable to commit to longer contracts:

One-off ensembles are not a contradiction. It is because of the recommitment to ensemble that Judi Dench and Ian McKellen agreed to return.<sup>505</sup>

He said that a spirit of ensemble could be created in a 'one-off company' and need not be defined solely by the period of time the group spent together. He added that training together was essential as it accelerated bonding and built the quality of performance.

*All's Well*<sup>506</sup> was a true ensemble with its investment in company and in younger actors. Ensemble is also about putting a certain type of ego in its place. It is an honourable tradition to promote actors from within the company. The understudy and public understudy runs is a way of doing it. Actors in one-off shows also need to be given the opportunity to train.

He spoke of the Company having the critical mass, the resources and the practitioners to make training and ensemble work, and said that there is no destination or role for the RSC other than ensemble.

It is what marks us out from other regional and national companies in terms of our commitment to larger engagement, and to the aspiration for a community that can do work that no other can. We should aspire to risk-taking that is safe. That means there's somebody to catch you when you fall. Fourteen million pounds of subsidy says we have this duty.<sup>507</sup>

The Company being in Stratford placed the RSC in a unique but isolated situation, which demanded an investment in people.

We're not about a freelance culture and we cannot just pick up the phone in Stratford and get hold of an actor - there isn't that depth of talent - we have to create it here. We have to have an investment in people and keep them throughout the slack periods.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> *All's Well That Ends Well* was a solo company that played in London and Stratford in 2003. It was directed by Gregory Doran and the cast included Judi Dench as the Countess Rossillion.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. The 'slack' periods Boyd anticipated during the redevelopment never occurred.

The reference to investing in people applied to the broader Company, not just the actors. The news of redevelopment had re-awakened concerns in those who had feared the loss of their jobs in Operation Fleet in 2002. Boyd went on to discuss the benefits of longer but not excessively long contracts:

There is strength in our long-term relations with actors. This doesn't mean that like the five year Soviet plan actors must commit too much of their lives to us. - It is not dignified for anyone to do one thing for 25-60 years. That's a bit sad - you must grow as you go. I am glad that we will be experimenting with the two year cycle [2006-08 *Histories* Project] in order to explore the fabric [vision] of the 60s and 70s and see what they can achieve.<sup>509</sup>

Boyd acknowledged that the benefits of an ensemble approach were now becoming evident.

The blossoms are appearing on our young tree. The feedback shows that actors are getting a lot out of it.<sup>510</sup>

He spoke also of the significance of the *Complete Works Festival* and how contact with international companies would develop curiosity for and engagement with best practices from other cultures and disciplines to create 'something more beautiful and less predictable'. There would also be opportunities for the RSC to learn from smaller ensembles such as Knee High and Theatre Complicite. Opportunities for inter-cultural exchange and exposure are obvious advantages of any festival and desirable objectives for a programme of artistic development. Boyd re-stated the need to embrace the RSC's duty to experiment with new work. 'The tension line between the Renaissance and *now* is a lifeline for the company and we can't let it go'.<sup>511</sup>

### **Learning from Experience**

In reviewing the previous two years, Michael Boyd made comparisons between the Swan and RST ensembles. 'The RST ensemble companies also need to learn from the Swan [actors/company].<sup>512</sup> We have worked the

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> It was an unplanned coincidence that the RSC ran two contrasting but equally valid ensembles simultaneously for 2003/4 and 2005. The Swan Company were smaller (20 actors) and their work was achieved rapidly with little additional training other than that offered by a system that closely reflected a rep system. The Company worked on five plays moving from production to production with five weeks' rehearsal and heavy understudy commitments. They were perceived as a tight ensemble separate from the Core ensemble and some actors expressed a feeling of being undervalued as a company. This was associated with the fact that they were not being given the training or the publicity as the 'Core' company. There were actors in the Core ensemble who felt they would have preferred to have been part of the Swan Company with a wholly organic learning experience and

Swan [*Gunpowder*] company too hard and exhausted them but this has brought cohesion and a speed of learning. An easier establishment of ensemble is achievable on a smaller scale.<sup>513</sup> Responding to Swan questions about why the Swan ensemble had not had training he said, 'There *is* an inequality but there is a value in both [Swan and RST systems of working]. We have to try and get that through to them and rid the Swan [company] of the 'us and them' feeling. There needs to be more cross-theatre fertilisation.<sup>514</sup> By this Boyd meant more cross-over between RSC companies and a greater use of both theatres by actors.<sup>515</sup> In 2005 a problem arose in the *Gunpowder* company (Swan Theatre) over the understudy runs because so many of the actors had negotiated contracts that released them from understudying. This meant the small group of actors required to take on the responsibility was overworked and they became disgruntled. This incident did much to strengthen the Company's resolve that when possible all actors should share the understudy load.<sup>516</sup> Although there was dissatisfaction about the lack of formal training and the workload, the Swan ensemble actors felt extended and developed by the experience.

### **Movement Department**

Boyd expressed the need for a movement department but the establishment of one proved a complex challenge. Historically directors employ movement directors whose work complements their vision. Boyd believed that a Movement Department as an integral part of the ensemble would balance the support offered actors. 'The appointment of a permanent Movement Department will make us not just the *beautiful voice* company'.<sup>517</sup> A Head of Movement was not appointed until 2009, although trainee

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without the formal training. In spite of this the standard of the work was high, the Company was accomplished and the development of skills was apparent. Many of the members of the Swan Ensembles of 2003, 2004 and 2005 were to return in subsequent years – some of these were Jonjo O'Neill, Peter De Jersey, William Houston, Geoffrey Freshwater, Joseph Chance and Keith Osborne. This is evidence that there are many ways to create an atmosphere in which artist development occurs, whether supported with formal training or not.

<sup>513</sup> Michael Boyd speaking on 22 July, 2005 at Steering Group Meeting, RST, Stratford, from notes taken by Lyn Darnley.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> In 2006 there was equal training for all and instead of companies playing in either the RST or the Swan Theatre, both Core ensembles played both theatres, satisfying the need for cross-theatre fertilisation.

<sup>516</sup> The 2006 *Histories* Company had a far fairer understudy system whereby all actors understudied if it was practical to do so.

<sup>517</sup> Michael Boyd, speaking at Steering Group Meeting, 22 July, 2005, RST, Stratford.

Movement Practitioners were appointed in 2006 and 2008 as part of the ADP. Details appear in Chapter 7.

### **A Long-term Strategy**

Boyd concluded his thoughts on ensemble by acknowledging that, although a positive start had been made, the culture still needed changing and that some actors were still resistant and needed to learn ‘to rehearse more deeply for a longer time.’<sup>518</sup> (A minority had complained that 11 weeks was too long to rehearse comedy, which they felt, needed an audience.)

What we learned from Lev Dodin is that it’s us who are out of step with our 11 weeks rehearsal! We are on a different plane. We are working to produce something that has a year’s life on a stage - 11 weeks is not a long time. The Maly [theatre] has shows that have survived for ten years. Two to three years [in the repertoire] would revolutionise what we could achieve.<sup>519</sup>

Although Boyd had spoken about his ambitions for the ensemble in press releases when he became Artistic Director and on the initial training days in 2003/4 and 2005, on this occasion he expressed more specific ambitions for adequate pay, better housing and childcare provision, more thoughtful scheduling and consideration of actors’ need for their work to be seen in London. Such action indicates he had listened to the opinions of actors in de-briefing sessions, end-of-season interviews and the informal debate that followed the Lev Dodin discussion. He confirmed his belief in developing artists of the future, acknowledging that training and culture-change was a long-term strategy and investment. He committed to getting directors to support the core principles of the ADP and the ensemble. He spoke of the need to develop writers<sup>520</sup> in order to inspire them to write heightened text for bigger casts and work for a sense of scale for the large stage. There was a need for further training opportunities for assistant directors and the creation of a culture that encouraged training for all RSC staff. Using the minutes of the meeting, Head of Communications Roger Mortlock summarised the discussion in the following way:<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> The development of new and mid-career writers was the remit of Jeannie O’Hare, Head of the Literary Department.

<sup>521</sup> Notes made by Roger Mortlock, Director of Communications, Steering Group, 22 July, 2005.

### **Aspirations for the ensemble:**

- To find the funds to extend training, and time [for exploration and experiment] to every company of actors.
- That actors should be changed by their engagement with us.
- To retain artists and to work towards a rolling ensemble that ultimately has the ability to retain repertoire.
- To produce great artists for the future.
- Work towards the time when it is an ensemble that is an attraction for an audience not the star-led vehicle<sup>522</sup>.
- If we aspire to be an international company, we must have a presence in London. [There is a] Need to address the organisational stretch and financial issues that mean we struggle to take the work we choose to London.
- Similarly, we need to cut our cloth accordingly in terms of planning the body of work in Stratford and beyond, in order to practise the values of the ensemble model, being mindful of the critical mass of work that the audience expect in an extended visit to Stratford.

### **The Ensemble Model outside of the acting companies:**

- About building a body of directors who buy in to the core values, and are committed to developing and retaining ensemble actors.
- Training and developing opportunities for assistant directors.
- Uniting and employing the in-house skills in the LX [electrics], Sound and Craft departments.
- Training and development for all staff.
- In terms of writers, RSC has a responsibility to inspire with the rampant carnage<sup>523</sup> of Shakespeare's language, the complex deep imaginative rhythm and the scale of voice.
- A key aspiration must be a sustained collaboration with a community of actors and writers to evolve new work. To retain it in the core repertoire.

Mortlock also reported discussion of ways in which to make contracts more viable for actors by increasing pastoral support in Stratford and career trajectories by performances in London.<sup>524</sup>

The expression of his ambitions for the acting ensemble and the wider organisation signalled a new and energised drive to develop the ethos of ensemble and widen its influence. It also reinforced the connection between training and ensemble. (There is evidence of some goals having been

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<sup>522</sup> This reference suggests changing the attitudes of audiences so that they are drawn by the ensemble not by the 'star' actor.

<sup>523</sup> This reference is to bold, vibrant and visceral language, big issues and theatrical scale. The Literary Department wished to inspire new writers to write for large spaces and to embrace epic styles. The phrase was used by Boyd.

<sup>524</sup> Roger Mortlock, Director of Communications, Steering Group, 22 July, 2005.

How to make the proposition more viable for actors: Continue to review actors' salaries and subsistence; Schedule work into London; Schedule work break and holiday periods into performance schedule; Ease pressure on Stratford accommodation; Review standards of accommodation; Extend public understudy performances to every ensemble; Make it easier for actors with families to come to Stratford – nursery/child care support and greater pastoral care.

partially achieved; a regular London season, a percentage of retained actors, and actors expressing that they had grown artistically while with the Company. There is also substantiation of the development of new writing, training opportunities for staff and encouragement of associate directors to 'buy in' to the core values.) At this seminal meeting Boyd had reviewed progress to this point and set aims for the future. One of the targets was broadening the scope of training.

### **Connections with Other Bodies with Shared Objectives and Concerns**

In order to fulfil the requirements of the *Royal Charter II.(3)*<sup>525</sup> the work of the Artist Development Programme could not remain purely within the RSC. It was essential that it responded to the needs of the industry and the broader creative and educational community in conjunction with other initiatives. Informal conversations were held with the Creative and Cultural Skills Council and the Royal Opera House in order to understand the concerns of other bodies and assess the way forward. Before 2005 there was no significant contact with the actor training institutions and a stronger and more direct link with the drama schools was desirable. An initiative to develop greater connection was begun in 2006 and is discussed in Chapter 7.

A first attempt to create connections with alumni was made through a workshop that took place at The Actors' Centre in London in November 2005.<sup>526</sup> Although this pilot was successful and well received, concerns were raised by the Casting Department about the way actors might perceive their relationship with the Company and be falsely encouraged about possibilities of future work.

There was a collaboration and reciprocal agreement between the RSC and Warwick University's CAPITAL Centre (supported by HEFCE) which enabled the University to make use of the Artist Development

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<sup>525</sup> *Royal Charter of The Royal Shakespeare Company*, as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively.

<sup>526</sup> The invitation to the Alumni Day read: 'We would be very pleased if you would join us for the first RSC Alumni Day scheduled to take place on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November at the Actor's Centre in London. We are inviting actors from past RSC productions to participate in a day of workshops on voice, verse, movement and singing which will run from 10.00am until 4.30pm. We have space for approximately 25 participants and these places will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. There is no charge for the day and we will provide a full schedule closer to the time.'

Programme for workshops and for the ADP to use lecturers from the University in order to support training.<sup>527</sup> See Appendix 6.( 4) for information on the collaboration.

### **Culture Change within the Wider Industry**

It cannot be said that the RSC had impacted on the training culture within the wider profession, although changes had begun within the Company. It is only through an extended programme and greater connection with drama schools that the RSC would be able to establish a belief that life-long training for artists should be the norm and that successful actors should commit themselves to theatre for extended periods of time.

### **2005 Reflections**

Elements of the 2005 work can be reflected upon, if not measured. There was a noticeable lack of physical injury in the core company that received the training. Because of the public understudy runs actors seemed better prepared and able to take on principal roles with greater skill.<sup>528</sup> This was most noticeable when the Company moved to Newcastle and during the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* tour to Japan when several of the Company were victims of a stomach virus resulting in a number of understudies taking on principal roles. On these occasions the value of the training became evident. Bettrys Jones who had only small roles and had been working to develop her vocal stamina and volume was called upon to play both Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and the Courtesan (*The Comedy of Errors*). She performed both successfully and proved she had achieved her goals. Many other actors were also required to step into understudy roles over the period of the contract. It is impossible to know if they were more successful than they would have been because of the additional support they were given, but their ability to move confidently into challenging situations was undoubtedly helped by the additional preparation they had had for the public understudy run and by exposure to the size of the audience it had provided.

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<sup>527</sup> The collaboration began in 2005 and flourished during the *2006 Complete Works Festival*.

<sup>528</sup> This claim was proven when in 2008 Ed Bennett took over as Hamlet when David Tennant developed back problems and in 2009 when Mariah Gale took on the role of Rosalind in *As You Like It* when Katy Stephens injured her leg. The public understudy run undoubtedly has more value to actors understudying leading roles than supporting roles as it allows them to test the arc of their performance with an audience.

When the *Winter* company productions of *The Canterbury Tales* (directed by Gregory Doran) and *Great Expectations* (directed by Declan Donnellan), which did not have training at the start of rehearsals, performed in Stratford, the difference in ensemble cohesion was noticeable. Regular training sessions at the start of rehearsal help build an ensemble and set a standard of preparation that tends to continue throughout the life of a company. Fewer actors attended voluntary warm-ups<sup>529</sup> and, although it can be argued that because they were not playing in repertory their need for daily work was not as great, they had not had the experience of daily work together so the desire to come together as a group in order to prepare was not as strong.

An understanding of how to warm up together was noticeable with the core ensemble who shared a common vocabulary that allowed them to move into an exercise immediately without the need for explanation and to work together spontaneously and creatively.

Undoubtedly a great deal was achieved in the first two years of the Ensemble and the Artist Development Programme. Boyd and the Steering Group debated, reviewed and assessed the work and the working environment and strove to improve the lot of artists. A review of all theatre skills apprenticeships and placements was undertaken by the Artist Development Department in order to clarify the current RSC levels of theatre-skills training. See Appendix 6.(5) for details of apprenticeships and other training initiatives.

There was no formal review of the progress of the ADP, although the programme itself was reported on and discussed frequently but without enough time being given for in-depth review. I suggested an external reviewer might provide an objective opinion. The question needing to be asked was: Is the RSC achieving its goal? The answer in 2005 was that the work had begun in earnest and feedback suggested a degree of success. The RSC Development Department had raised the money necessary for the ADP (The Weston Foundation had committed to a three-year funding period 2003/4 to 2006) and the Company under Michael Boyd had made a more

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<sup>529</sup> Declan Donnellan required all his actors to warm up on stage for ten minutes at the end of the voluntary voice warm-up. There was a degree of resistance to this requirement.



concerted effort to achieve consistency in the offer of training than under any other Artistic Director. It was my observation that the Company had:

- Declared its intention seriously to support and encourage artists to continue training and development;
- Informed artists joining the Company of the training programme;
- Established a department dedicated to the development of its artists;
- Acknowledged the variety of individual training backgrounds and respected the diversity of the company;
- Considered the artists' different attitudes to the work;
- Connected more formally with other companies that offer training and with drama schools and leading academic institutions with theatre departments;
- Created an open culture of ensemble which allowed a number of different training possibilities and contract lengths;
- Established a record of the current practices in areas other than acting;<sup>530</sup>
- Attempted to address the way in which the work in rehearsal connected with training and the role that understudying plays in career development;
- Attempted to change the cultural attitude towards life-long development in British theatre in a small way by changing it within the RSC;
- Successfully provided two years of a rehearsal-based training programme.

### **A Future Policy for Artists' Development**

By late 2005 it was evident that already the beginnings of a future policy were emerging through internal documents such as the 2005 Annual Plan, which stated that the objectives for the Artist Development Programme were to:

...offer actors and other theatre artists the means by which they can continue to develop and hone their skills within the professional structure of the company. It is the professional model that offers the most effective opportunity to develop meaningfully so that the work is not theoretical but directly related to the artistic demands of the product.<sup>531</sup>

Several drafts of a policy for training were circulated as part of forward planning and a *Policy for Artist Development* was drafted in 2005, but it was decided in 2006 not to formulate a final policy until, at the earliest, the spring of 2008; later it became clear that the Artist Development Programme would go through a number of incarnations during the years of transition between

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<sup>530</sup> A survey of apprenticeships and placements in departments across the RSC was made in 2005.

<sup>531</sup> Lyn Darnley, 'Artist Development Training Objectives 2005', internal RSC document for 2005 Annual Plan, December, 2004.

2006 and 2010 as it responded to the changes in schedules and the restricted Stratford theatre spaces.<sup>532</sup>

### **Five Reasons for the Artist Development Programme**

In the interim, instead of a policy, I was asked to produce a document listing five reasons for doing the work. After two years of teaching on the programme and 18 months of co-ordinating it, I believed the principal reason for the programme was to train the actors in the Company while supporting and improving the work on stage. The second reason was that training establishments were not providing actors with the specific text skills needed by the Company so it was important that it provided for its own needs. Thirdly it was the responsibility of the RSC (and a requirement of the *Royal Charter*) to offer a training programme. The fourth reason was that it was necessary to offer training in the wider theatre crafts and skills, and support young artists making the transition into professional theatre. The fifth crucial reason was to change the RSC culture to one of development and life-long learning for artists.

I also believed that an ensemble that offers training and development to actors and other artists cannot help but challenge its own thinking and push its boundaries in a way that prevents atrophy and stagnation.<sup>533</sup> The document which reflected the thinking of the Artistic Planning Group appears in full in Appendix 6.(6).

### **A Departmental Policy**

As a result of this exercise I felt prompted to create a series of personal aims and objectives for the work and developed a provisional departmental philosophy for training in January 2006 entitled *A Philosophy for Artist Development*, which I used as a guide when planning and structuring the work. The document summed up the current aims of the programme, which were to create an environment in which risk is encouraged, failure

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<sup>532</sup> With the Courtyard becoming the main house once the RST and Swan closed in April and August 2007, the Company was less Stratford-based and undertook more touring until the new Stratford campus was completed. This meant the ADP continued to evolve and deliver work that responded to the changing shape and programming of the Company.

<sup>533</sup> Lyn Darnley, from 'Five Reasons for the Artist Development Programme', October 2005, paper prepared for Artistic Planning Meeting.

permissible and tradition is used as a starting point for innovation. Extracts from the document appear in Appendix 6.(7).

### **Beyond 2005**

As the second of the three years under review drew to a close, clarity emerged about operational changes necessary before planning for 2006 began. I requested, and was granted, greater involvement in meetings that discussed future planning in order to be able to understand, more clearly, the Company's artist development needs and schedule workshops around demands made upon the actors' time. Integration of the ADP would avoid frustration when actors signed up for workshops but were unable to attend due to other scheduling or compulsory calls. This required access to draft plans.

Among the many lessons learned from the 2005 season was that communication between the Artist Development Department and other crucial departments, particularly Casting, Producers and Planning, as well as those responsible for the allocation of space, needed to be improved. This was addressed to some degree by the Company's general drive to improve all channels of communication. Greater communication between Casting and Artist Development was deliberately sought and achieved while communication over booking and allocation of space continued to be a problem. Earlier access to planning schedules was given and although these were useful, ADP scheduling continued to be hampered by the demand on actors' time.

In the Annual Report and Accounts for 2004/2005 Michael Boyd summarised the first two years of his Ensemble and Artist Development Programme by saying:

Training and development of artists is key, and this year we have made great strides in cementing actor training in the building blocks of the ensemble. We want the experience of coming to the RSC to be an education for all actors, at whatever stage of their career. For emerging actors, the public understudy runs we have developed celebrate and nurture their talents and skills and are now part of our everyday life. We have the critical mass, the resources and the skilled practitioners to make ensemble work. In the UK it is what marks us out from other regional and national companies. It reflects our commitment to larger engagement, and to the aspiration for a community that can do work that no other can. There was a time when the fear of being old fashioned and a desire to be nimble led to

short contracts, shorter plays, stars who were looking for short runs and under-investment in our actors. We are more confident now.<sup>534</sup>

The interface between the ADP and the ensemble principle underpinned Boyd's vision for the RSC and his remarks suggest that at the end of 2005 he believed some level of success had been achieved but that the Company had to keep striving to create an appropriate and adaptable ensemble suited to British actor culture that would extend training and encourage collaborative theatre making, while allowing individuals to pursue personal career goals and maintain balanced family life-styles while working in Stratford.

The next chapter considers the opportunities lost and those taken during the *Complete Works Festival*.

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<sup>534</sup> Michael Boyd, RSC Annual Report and Accounts, 2004/2005, p.4.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *The Complete Works Festival 2006-2007*

#### **The Third and Final Year under Review**

The final period under review is the *Complete Works Festival (CWF)* of 2006. This chapter indicates the major themes of 2006 and elements that differed from the previous two years.

In January 2006 the Artist Development Programme (ADP) entered its final year under the sole patronage of the Weston Foundation.<sup>535</sup> Although the first funding period was coming to an end, the programme was still in its infancy. In its third year, the criteria of the ADP reflected wider company changes resulting from the redevelopment programme: the construction of the Courtyard Theatre and resulting pressures on space, the complex scheduling of the *CWF* and further changes within the structure of the acting ensemble.

#### **An Alternative to a Rolling Ensemble**

It had become obvious in 2005 that transferring actors from a company still in performance to another in rehearsal was problematic as it left actors exhausted and unable to take full advantage of training and rehearsals. The same scheduling problems existed in 2005/06. This meant that the ambition of a rolling ensemble was compromised to a degree as only five actors continued from the *Comedies* season.<sup>536</sup> Nevertheless 46 of the 86 actors in the combined 2006/07 companies had worked for the RSC in previous seasons, many in the previous ten years. Of the 29 actors in Michael Boyd's *Histories* 2006 ensemble, only seven had not previously been employed by the RSC.

The decision to host the *CWF* in order to inject a new internationalism into the Company and to make the theatre-going public aware that the RSC

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<sup>535</sup> From 2007 the Artist Development Programme was funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Weston Foundation.

<sup>536</sup> The five actors who continued from the *Comedies* season were Clive Wood, Richard Cordery, Forbes Masson, John McKay and Jonathan Slinger. All five transferred into the 2006 *Histories* ensemble.

would not just operate a full programme throughout the redevelopment project, but thrive, had a profound effect on the ADP in three ways. It introduced the opportunity for members of the Company to engage with actors and ensembles from other cultures and theatrical traditions, it widened the remit of the ADP, extending training to visiting companies and provided new opportunities to work with the Education, Projects and Events Departments. The *CWF* answered the requirement of the *Royal Charter II.(1)* in a number of ways: by reaching out to performers internationally and offering them support and artist development opportunities and by ‘conserving, advancing and disseminating the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare’ in Stratford, London and across the world.

### **The 2006/07 Complete Works Festival<sup>537</sup>**

The *CWF* was co-ordinated by Deborah Shaw, who joined the RSC in 2004<sup>538</sup>. Michael Boyd said of the international festival:

The Festival looks set to be the most extensive celebration of Shakespeare’s genius – at once a national knees-up for the RSC’s house playwright and a survey of the different approaches to his work from around the world. Our ambition is to stage one of the most significant cultural festivals of the year in Stratford-upon-Avon...[with] a great team working to transform our Stratford home, we can now stage a programme that meets our ambitions for an outward-looking RSC that’s truly engaged with the world. We want to do much more than pay lip service to Shakespeare’s internationalism as we prepare the ground for artistic collaborations that will continue beyond the life of the Festival.<sup>539</sup>

This statement offers Boyd’s perspective on the Company’s ability and desire to include and support international artists and widen audience access.

During the *CWF* the Swan and RST would remain open and the temporary Courtyard Theatre would be operational. The festival would expand into spaces around Stratford such as The Dell outdoor theatre for community and educational events and performances; Holy Trinity Church for a production directed by Gregory Thompson (A and BC Company) of *Henry VIII*; The Shakespeare Birthplace Centre for a production of *Timon of Athens* by Cardboard Citizens, and the creation of The Cube, a temporary 100-seater theatre on the RST stage, for small scale and new work.

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<sup>537</sup> Full details of the *CWF* programme appear in Appendix 7.(1).

<sup>538</sup> Deborah Shaw had previously worked at the Bath Shakespeare Festival, the Chester Gateway Theatre and the Watford Palace Theatre.

<sup>539</sup> RSC web page, Complete Works Festival: <http://www.rsccompleteworks.co.uk/> 15 April, 2008.

## New Work Programme Inspired by Shakespeare<sup>540</sup>

As well as the complete Shakespeare canon the CWF New Work Programme offered plays inspired by Shakespeare's texts. These were described in the press release as:

*The Indian Boy*: a new play by Rona Munro written in response to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Set in an ancient forest, nature defies the property developers; *Days of Significance*: a new play by Roy Williams written in response to *Much Ado About Nothing*. Set in market-town England and the deserts of Iraq; *One of These Days*: a rehearsed reading of Leo Butler's dark response to *The Tempest*, set in occupied Ireland in 1775; *Regime Change*: Peter Straughan's new play is produced in collaboration with BBC Radio 3. Set in Istanbul, the play is a response to *Julius Caesar*. A single reading by the RSC will take place in October before the play is recorded for broadcast on BBC Radio 3.<sup>541</sup>

There was anticipation and excitement among actors and company over the plays and events that would make up the CWF. Interest in the visiting international companies and the variety of the programme led to unprecedented ticket sales. The response was national and international but also regional. A by-product of the festival was the development of new audience members, many of whom were first-time visitors to Stratford and younger than the average attendee. During the CWF 37,000 audience members saw a Shakespeare play for the first time with 40,000 schoolchildren attending productions at a reduced rate of £10 per student. Thirty-two writers were commissioned to write new plays and 4,245 young people performed on the RSC stages as part of the Education Department's programme which was supported by the Artist Development programme. All in all 527,186 tickets were sold for the Festival.<sup>542</sup> The development of new audiences clearly answers the Royal Charter's requirement to: 'conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare'.<sup>543</sup> Peter Hall has commented on the need for exciting, stimulating and diverse theatre events such as the CWF in order to attract new and younger audiences as well as to develop and inspire artists. Hall wrote in 1999:

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<sup>540</sup> All these productions were offered Artist Development workshops. *Days of Significance* and *The Indian Boy* were given full rehearsal support; *Regime Change* was given dialect support.

<sup>541</sup> CWF New Work Programme, [http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420\\_3601.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420_3601.aspx)

<sup>542</sup> RSC Annual Report and Accounts 2006-2007, pp. 8-9.

<sup>543</sup> Conformed Copy of *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, II.(1).

Over the last twenty years, many British regional theatres have closed or have had to reduce their output. As the amount of drama shrinks, the importance of the two major companies – the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company – becomes greater. Without them (and how very nearly we didn't get either) our theatre would now be in a sorry state. Not only do they train tomorrow's technicians, actors, dramatists and directors; they develop tomorrow's audiences. The habit of going to the theatre is made and sustained by having a theatre to go to.<sup>544</sup>

Early exposure to live classical theatre makes audiences and artists aware of career possibilities and the choices they have beyond film and television.

### **Space and Ensemble Working**

#### **The Courtyard Theatre**

In 2006 the problems of space and scheduling were exacerbated by the demands of the *CWF*. Changes to the Stratford-Upon-Avon campus had an effect on the way in which the ensembles had operated to this point. To facilitate the redevelopment of the RST and Swan Theatre between 2007 and 2010 it was necessary to create a 1,000-seat temporary auditorium, known as The Courtyard Theatre. A steel structure attached to The Other Place became the shell in which the auditorium was constructed. The former rehearsal studios and theatre space were used as the front of house, dressing rooms and back stage area. Once the RST and The Swan were closed for renovation in 2007, The Courtyard allowed for an increased total number of seats in Stratford of 2,800 a night during the *CWF*. It became the main auditorium during the years of redevelopment. It was designed to be a prototype for the new RST building and the thrust stage offered insight into the staging and acoustic challenges for the new RST auditorium.

#### **Space for Artist Development in the new RSC complex**

During 2006 bids were made by departments for space in the new building that would be completed by 2010/2011. Once it was clear that the footprint of the existing building would have to be maintained it became evident that space would be limited. The proposed on-site space for Artist Development was minimal, amounting to only a small shared 'physical room' where individual voice and massage sessions could take place. Use of the large Ashcroft Room, above the Swan Theatre, would be possible for warm-

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<sup>544</sup> Peter Hall, *The Necessary Theatre*, Nick Hern Books Limited, London, 1999, p.28.



ups but demands on the room would be high as rehearsals would take priority.<sup>545</sup>

### **The Impact of the Arden Street Rehearsal Rooms on Training**

In May 2006 the Arden Street Rehearsal Rooms were used for the first time and, although initially acoustically poor, the generous size of the studios replaced the space lost with the transformation of TOP into The Courtyard. In addition to three studios the space provided a voice room, music room, stage management spaces, generous greenroom and fitting rooms. The distance between the studios and the theatres (12-15 minutes) meant that walking time had to be considered and the rehearsal day was cut by 30 minutes. When actors were rehearsing in Arden Street it was easy to provide on-site artist development but, when they were not in rehearsals, the effort involved in walking to Arden Street and the time it took for the journey made voluntary classes less appealing. After the closure of TOP rehearsal rooms, it became much easier to deliver work in Clapham than in Stratford.<sup>546</sup> This highlighted the relationship between adequate space and successful delivery of training. It also clarified the need for the ADP to be accommodated close to the performance spaces in the new development. I raised the issues of space for text and voice work and the ADP at meetings with the Redevelopment Project Department and Artistic Planning Group.<sup>547</sup> I also asked that thought be given to the needs of a future Movement Department which would require a sprung floor space for dance, rope and

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<sup>545</sup> Procurement of the Waterside Studios in 2009 allowed for greater facilities for both the Education and Events Departments and limited bookable space for other departments. Frustrations arose at the lack of sufficient space allocated for performance preparation. Solutions were considered but the situation was not resolved. Space for notes, rehearsals and warm-ups was occasionally limited by priority being given to commercial ventures. At the time of writing these difficulties continue but solutions are being sought. Currently warm-ups need to go onto the stage when corporate events require the Ashcroft Room. It is hoped that with the return of The Other Place in 2013, this will be remedied. The Ruinart Bar is also being used as a possible warm-up space.

<sup>546</sup> Useful additional spaces in the RST such as the Dress Circle Bar, Balcony Bar, Swan Reading Room, Swan Gallery and Ashcroft Room were lost in August 2007 when the RST and Swan theatres closed for redevelopment.

<sup>547</sup> An additional space issue was caused by block booking. Company managers and stage management sometimes block-booked spaces that were then not always used. The knock-on effect was that it appeared that there was no space when in reality there was. The Education Department negotiated a priority booking system for a third Arden Street studio that further limited its use for actors.

trapeze work. When it became evident that no such space was possible, I requested that space be provided once TOP was re-established.<sup>548</sup>

### **The Shape and Format of the 2006/07 Ensemble**

Instead of the themed programmes of the previous two years the RSC contribution to the *CWF* took the form of 13 Shakespeare plays performed by three *Summer Season* ensembles, two *Winter Season* ensembles, a touring ensemble and smaller companies for readings and new work. There was no separate Summer Season Swan Company as there had been in the two previous years and it was not until the *Winter Season* when two late plays (*A Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*) were staged in the Swan and a musical version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was staged in the RST that there were separate ensembles in these theatres.

The three *CWF* ensembles that made up the 2006 *Summer Season* were known as the Green, Orange and Purple Companies. The Green and Orange ensembles reverted to the pre-2004 practice of playing both the Swan and the RST.

The Green Company was directed by three women: Nancy Meckler (*Romeo and Juliet*), Marianne Elliott (*Much Ado About Nothing*) and Josie Rourke (*King John*). The Orange Company was directed by three men: Gregory Doran directed *Antony and Cleopatra*, Sean Holmes *Julius Caesar* and Rupert Goold *The Tempest*. Nancy Meckler was lead director on the Green Company and Gregory Doran led the Orange Company.

The Purple Company (directed by Michael Boyd) was formed to present the *History Plays* over an extended period of two years. They worked initially on the *Henry VI Trilogy* and *Richard III* but ultimately on all eight of the *Histories Cycle*, which was performed in the new Courtyard Theatre in 2006/7 and in 2007/8 at the Roundhouse in London. The move towards a longer contract for artists aimed to allow a stronger, deeper commitment to ensemble and proved to be successful in achieving this ambition.

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<sup>548</sup> Other departments interested in the possible space in TOP included the Education, Events and Wardrobe Departments.

The 2007 touring ensemble directed by Trevor Nunn played the Courtyard before embarking on an extensive UK and international tour of *King Lear* (the final CWF production) and *The Seagull*.

### **2006 Rehearsal ADP Training**

Another departure from the previous two years was the staggered start of rehearsals. All three ensembles began work in different weeks in January and February. Schedules of the training weeks for all three 2006 ensembles appear in Appendix 7.(2). They were correct at the start of the training though they were adapted slightly when necessary. The unusual CWF circumstances in 2006 produced three contrasting programmes but the essential aims and concerns remained the same and were central to them all. All ensembles worked with John Barton, Cicely Berry, a voice coach and a movement director. Only significant changes worthy of mention will be focused upon in this chapter.

### **The Green Company**

Work on the programme began on 16 January 2006 with the start of rehearsals for Meckler's *Romeo and Juliet* and Elliott's *Much Ado About Nothing*. The training was carried out over two weeks of morning workshops and daily pre-rehearsal warm-ups, and addressed the particular needs of the team of women directors (although Josie Rourke's production of *King John* began rehearsing in Stratford in May, she was present at some of the initial training sessions); a departure from the previous year was that the emphasis was on a style of ensemble building associated with Meckler's company 'Shared Experience'. Much of the training was carried out by the directors themselves and this company prioritised improvisation alongside text.

Josie Rourke requested rhetoric classes conducted by barrister and former student world champion public speaker, Bennet Brandreth.<sup>549</sup> His session was in addition to a rhetoric workshop conducted by Max Atkinson, and he approached rhetoric by working on debating skills and focusing on argument from a legal standpoint rather than from a public speaking perspective. In addition to work done by Liz Ranken and other movement practitioners, a movement specialist, Suzanne Broughton, was brought in to

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<sup>549</sup> In subsequent years Brandreth's work was developed and applied more directly to Shakespearean argument in the texts.

address actors' ongoing physical needs that were not necessarily rehearsal related such as long term postural issues, stamina and addressing old injuries.

### **The Orange Company**

The Orange Company started rehearsals of two plays a week later on 23 January 2006. Holmes and Doran had different training requirements in rehearsal, meaning the training needed to cover the requirements of both directors equally and that the same group of actors benefited from both programmes of work.

Sean Holmes (*Julius Caesar*) was resistant to suggestions for verse work but required work on ritual, some of which he conducted himself. Gregory Doran (*Antony and Cleopatra*) taught the Orange ensemble verse, rhythm and language. He requested work on physical rhythm and earth-bound movement which was encouraged through social dance, African dance and drumming. Additional verse workshops were given by actors Patrick Stewart (playing Antony and Prospero) and Janet Suzman. The fundamental work maintained traditional verse speaking values, which remained useful to a new generation of actors and at the same time ensured that the language was focused upon and accessible for today's actors and audiences. The Orange Company cancelled their feedback session on training due to rehearsal pressures and consequently there is no formal evidence of their experience. The dynamic of the groups was different and their performance styles reflected the casting and production values of the directors. The Company's decision to engage directors with different artistic backgrounds and approaches meant that the RSC could offer a rich, eclectic and diverse theatrical experience to audiences and that actors were exposed to and interacted with a variety of performance styles which informed their practice and widened their options. Rupert Goold did not participate in the initial training and his ADP workshops occurred during rehearsals for *The Tempest* in Stratford and included Mongolian Throat Singing which featured in the masque.

## The First Long Ensemble

### The Purple Company (also Known as the *Histories* Ensemble)

All the actors who had been involved in the 2000/2001 *Henry VI* and *Richard III* season were offered contracts for the 2006-2008 *Histories* project. Many were involved in other ventures at the time and some felt that to repeat work already undertaken over an extended period of time would not present them with the challenges they wanted. For many younger actors and their agents, a two-year contract was seen as daunting, removing them from the possibility of film and television for a prolonged period of time. This comes from a perception that it is necessary for actors to become established television or film actors because of the better rates of pay, the wider audience and the growing trend from theatre companies, including the RSC and the National Theatre, to cast experienced television and film actors in leading stage roles.

Some of the returning actors were given larger, more demanding roles than those they had played in 2000. Geoffrey Streatfield, for example, played Young Clifford in 2000 and Suffolk, Hal and Henry V in 2006-2008. Streatfield's casting is an example of career development through returning to the ensemble after a period away. James Tucker also improved his casting, returning to play Clarence. Four other actors, Nick Asbury, Richard Cordery, Keith Bartlett, and Clive Wood had performed in the original 2000/1 *Henry VI Trilogy*.

Only Richard Cordery transferred from the *Tragedies* to the *Comedies* and then back into his original roles in the *Histories*. Clive Wood transferred from the *Comedies* into his original roles in the *Histories*. John McKay and Forbes Masson remained with the RSC continuously from December 2003 until May 2008 (*Tragedies, Comedies, Histories*)<sup>550</sup> and Jonathan Slinger was contracted from January 2005 to May 2008 (*Comedies, Histories*).

For most actors the 'line of parts' flowed from production to production as characters appeared in several plays. Each actor played in seven of the eight productions, allowing them one play out. All actors understudied and

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<sup>550</sup> Forbes Masson and John McKay finished the *Histories* extended contract in May 2008 and then joined the New Long Ensemble in January 2009 for a further two-and-a-half years. Other actors from the *Histories* ensemble who transferred in to the New Ensemble were Geoffrey Freshwater and James Tucker.

were given roles that varied in size. Those who played leading roles in some productions had smaller roles in others.

The training undertaken by the *Histories* ensemble was closest to the spiral learning style outlined in Chapter 1 with a strong interface between formal and experiential learning. The through-line of characters from one play to the next created a unique and organic developmental situation. Artists encountered challenges through exposure to new and varied principal and understudy roles and met them either partially or fully and were able to apply their learning and experience to each new obstacle and in so doing built skills and confidence.

The form of the training differed in that there were fewer formal classes and visiting practitioners, and most of the work was delivered by the creative team, principally Movement Director, Liz Ranken; Text and Voice Coach, Alison Bomber<sup>551</sup>, Matt Costain (Rope Work) and Terry King (Fights). Apart from work on Rhetoric (Benet Brandreth), approaches to Shakespeare from Patrick Tucker<sup>552</sup> and lectures on the social and historical background from Clare Asquith and Jonathan Bate; the training was directly related to the work of the rehearsal room. Some actors were required to learn rope skills and most needed to sword fight, including the women. Although women learn stage-fighting as drama students, they are seldom required to fight on stage. The long contract allowed them an opportunity to develop their skills through the extended rehearsal and performance period, and to create a remarkable ensemble synergy that produced work of an exceptional standard with many of the reviews mentioning the strength of the ensemble. For example, Michael Billington's review stated:

But this is an ensemble achievement, filled with fine performances: Chuck Iwuji's impotently virtuous king, Richard Cordery's gravely avuncular Humphrey, Clive Wood's York and Katy Stephens's French double of Joan la Pucelle and Margaret of Anjou. Special mention must also be made of the

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<sup>551</sup> Alison Bomber had joined the Company as the Voice Placement in 2004 and stayed to work on the *Histories* and the *New Ensemble* of 2009-2011. She is currently Senior Voice Coach.

<sup>552</sup> Director and author Patrick Tucker was an assistant director to John Barton. He founded the Original Shakespeare Company in the 1990s with Christine Ozanne and has presented Folio Cue Script productions at Shakespeare's Globe and the du Maurier World Stage Festival in Toronto and the Jerash Festival in Jordan. He has also directed in the United States. He regularly holds workshops on the First Folio.

score by James Jones and John Woolf, which adds its own percussive violence.<sup>553</sup>

The score was developed in the rehearsal room as musicians were fully integrated into the ensemble and present throughout the rehearsal process. Alan Riding of the *New York Times* interviewed Michael Boyd and Gregory Doran who spoke about the value of a long contract over shorter periods of engagement:

"I think we're beginning to vindicate this approach," he [Boyd] said. "We've seen actors approaching the text with a comfort not seen before. It also provides actors with a continuing education. And we're beginning to get calls from agents, rather than us making the calls. This season, we'll have an interesting combination of old R.S.C. hands coming back and younger actors coming for the first time." Gregory Doran, the company's chief associate director, added that the ensemble approach was crucial to maintaining "a sense of occasion" when a play is performed 100 or more times. "You can't cast an ensemble," he said shortly before the first night of his production of "*Antony and Cleopatra*." "You can only grow it. You have to create a shared community of ideas."<sup>554</sup>

Actors in the *Histories* ensemble undoubtedly had more developmental opportunities than those in the Orange and Green ensembles partly due to the longer contract and partly due to the extraordinary challenges they faced in terms of sustained performance, number of roles and continued rehearsal. They worked with only one director until 2007, when Richard Twyman, the Associate Director, who had been an assistant director with the RSC previously, directed *Henry IV Part 2*. This meant that they understood Boyd's methods and mastered his process, which allowed them a sense of security and the confidence to experiment. (Both Richard Twyman and Assistant Director Donnacadh O'Brian were involved in the training opportunities.) Boyd is also the most collaborative RSC director, allowing the actors and creative team to offer opinions and suggestions freely. It can be said that this style of ensemble most closely followed the convention of the European ensemble but what made it exceptional was that it performed eight themed plays by one author in a relatively short period of time. It is more common for the Russian and Polish companies to work on one play only for an extended period and then to add it to their repertoire. It is unlikely that the

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<sup>553</sup> Michael Billington, 'Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3', *The Guardian*, 11 August, 2006.

<sup>554</sup> Alan Riding, 'Royal Shakespeare Company Has Much Ado in Stratford', *The New York Times*, 22 April, 2006.

RSC will be able to offer another such experience in the foreseeable future because the eight *History* plays uniquely allowed a group of actors to follow a line of parts sequentially through a developing narrative.<sup>555</sup>

At the beginning of 2007 five new actors were added, bringing a new dynamic to the ensemble, and more training work was scheduled in order to respond to the new plays as they were added to the cycle. Training sessions included a talk on Civil Liberties from Shami Chakrabati from the human rights organisation Liberty, to support research into *Richard III* and a second lecture by author Clare Asquith on Catholicism in Elizabethan England.

Alison Bomber provided the principal Voice and Text work and gave specific help with textual challenges for the entire period of rehearsal and performance. John Barton also contributed to the verse training and additional occasional support was given by Rob Clare. This concerted work on verse meant that skills were built and honed. Jan Haydn Rowles offered dialect work to support the productions and Annie Morrison, a Speech Therapist, gave articulation support to actors who required it. The nature of the extended rehearsals and performance meant that young actors learned by performing, understudying, observing and from cross-generational working. Two of the five new actors who joined the ensemble in 2007 (Luke Neal and Rob Carroll) had been in the Orange Company in 2006 and so were familiar with the project, its ethos and ambitions and carried with them experience of the training they had undergone in the preceding year. Other actors who joined the ensemble for *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* were David Warner, Anthony Shuster and Sandy Nielson. The difficulties of adding new individuals to an established ensemble cannot be ignored and impacted on the established ensemble as well as the new members, some of whom found the transition difficult.

Actors from the *Histories* were invited to participate in the joint RSC Education Department/Warwick University Award in teaching Shakespeare in schools. Eight committed to the project and workshop skills were taught over

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<sup>555</sup> Although the extended contract of two to three years was repeated in 2009, at least eight directors were involved and the plays were not themed. In January 2009 the ensemble rehearsed four plays but actors performed in only two of them. Two Russian plays were rehearsed in June and a new play in September. A further four plays were rehearsed between November and May 09/10 with further rehearsals of new work planned over the remaining contract.



a number of weekends. See Appendix 7.(3) for details. The Artist Development work they had undertaken was acknowledged and credited towards the award. (The intention was to offer this opportunity to actors from other ensembles in the future and a second cohort of eight actors began training in 2008 with further participation in 2009 and 2010.) Actors from the *Histories* ensemble also participated in a series of four public John Barton Workshops at The Venue, Leicester Square, in London, in November and December 2006. (Further details appear later in this chapter.) Nick Asbury from the *Histories* ensemble wrote an on-line rehearsal blog which was later published by Oberon Books.<sup>556</sup> The ADP filmed actors from the *Histories* speaking about their approach to text for inclusion in the RSC web pages. The variety opportunities expanded their skills and those who received the Award in Teaching Shakespeare, were able to supplement their income by running workshops for the Education Department after they had left the company. The web-pages, blog, Barton's workshops and the RSC/Warwick University Award were all ways in which Shakespeare was promoted through teaching, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the Royal Charter to 'conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare..<sup>557</sup>.

### **The Touring Ensemble**

The last production of the CWF was *King Lear*. Trevor Nunn directed a world tour of *King Lear* and *The Seagull* and trained his ensemble by conducting a workshop on text each afternoon for two weeks, tracing the development of dramatic language from the Middle Ages through to Shakespeare's late plays while considering the socio-political reasons for the changes in form and style. He was happy for voice and text work to be scheduled alongside rehearsals and allowed strength and stamina to be built in daily pre-rehearsal sessions. Improvisation was used as a rehearsal tool and for ensemble building. Nunn also introduced a larger than usual number

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<sup>556</sup> Nick Asbury, *Exit, Pursued by a Badger: One Actor's Journey Through History at the RSC*, London, Oberon Books, 2009. Extracts appear in Appendix 7 (Additional Material). In 2008/09 Keith Osborne blogged his experience of Gregory Doran's ensemble (*Hamlet*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), in 2009 Richard Katz blogged the work of the New Ensemble 2009-2011.

<sup>557</sup> Conformed Copy of *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, II.(2).

of actors who had not previously worked for the RSC. The schedule in Stratford and the extensive touring programme meant that there was virtually no time for Artist Development after the openings.<sup>558</sup>

### **2006 Stratford Artist Development Programme**

In addition to the informal development that was offered by the *CWF*, a full Artist Development Programme was offered in Stratford in support of rehearsals for *King John* (Rourke) and *The Tempest* (Goold), and for the new writing rehearsals. Details of the programme and Phase II training can be found in Appendix 7.(4).

It had become clear towards the end of 2005 that the initial weeks of training at the beginning of an ensemble's life in London were the easiest and most effective programmes to deliver because they focused on rehearsals and were instrumental in building an ensemble. Most importantly the work was compulsory and the time for it was scheduled into the rehearsal call. Although Stratford rehearsals had compulsory, scheduled training, performances including matinees limited the scope of the ADP. The Stratford voluntary programmes (also referred to as Phase 2 training) were more difficult to programme and deliver because of space restrictions and performance priorities. Actors who had been away from home for a considerable time returned to London whenever they were able, in order to deal with family commitments, meaning that some missed out on voluntary workshops.

### **Actor Feedback**

In 2006 there were still pockets of resistance to training in both the Orange and Purple Companies, though none appeared to exist within the Green Company, possibly because many had previously worked with Meckler at Shared Experience (where Nancy Meckler is joint artistic director) and therefore had experienced her ensemble approach.

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<sup>558</sup> As the Text and Voice Coach I travelled with the Company and was available for technical rehearsals and the first few performances in order to help actors understand the acoustic and playing dynamic of each new venue, and to give workshops on text and voice to local professionals and drama students. (There was no Education Department programme for the tour.) The Company was offered physical work such as massage, Feldenkrais and Alexander classes and regular Voice and Movement warm-ups. Other ADP work was aimed at specific actors who needed support for their understudy roles. This included specific articulation work for certain actors and singing and continuing one-to-one voice and text sessions. The Poetry Project became a way of reaching the younger and less experienced members of the cast and offering them performance opportunities.

The Orange Company did not have a feedback forum due to time pressures so formal feedback is unavailable. There was however, considerable feedback from the Purple *Histories* Company.

Chuk Iwuji, who played Henry VI, had worked for the Company on two previous occasions in 2001 and 2003 and had been one of the actors involved in the James Sargant Awards<sup>559</sup> so he had experienced training within the Company. He wrote of his 2006 experience:

When you leave formal training there are certain things that you have to maintain, such as your voice. The RSC provides you with a fantastic opportunity where you are constantly training the body. There's no excuse not to be in prime condition to do the work. It's a luxury that other actor friends of mine would have to pay a lot of money for and for me it's a real gift to take advantage of the training opportunities. Acting is something I love but I've had to work hard at it. It's not just about doing the work but preparing for it. The beauty of the RSC is that it has always nurtured people. The longer rehearsal period and training opportunities allow you to really get to know the rest of the acting company. It gets rid of the insecurities of working in a room with strangers, creating a non-hierarchical setting before beginning to rehearse the play. You are all on a level playing field. The growth that will happen to all of us in the acting company during this time, both personally and as actors, will no doubt be substantial and probably surprising. To come to the RSC you have to want to work with a group of actors and grow with them. I remember when I first met Michael Boyd about the job back in December last year he said that he didn't know what lay ahead but he did know that this experience would change our lives. He's right – it already has.<sup>560</sup>

As an experienced actor, Iwuji understands 'spiral growth' within an ensemble through both performance and formal training and the importance of time for this to occur. Geoffrey Streatfield, (who was also in Boyd's original 2000 *History Quartet*), observed the synergy that developed:

There is already an almost telepathic understanding between us on stage, and our ever growing trust enables us to experiment, improvise and rework on the floor with an astonishing freedom and confidence. This ensemble is a secure environment without ever being a comfort zone. All of us are continually challenging ourselves and being inspired by those around us to reach new levels in all aspects of our work.<sup>561</sup>

Streatfield spoke of collaboration and the dynamics and rigours of the ensemble:

We are an eclectic bunch with strong and hugely differing opinions and we disagree, sometimes violently. The squad rotation is tough and requires

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<sup>559</sup> See Chapter 4 for details on the James Sargant Awards.

<sup>560</sup> Chuk Iwuji, RSC Report and Accounts, 2005/2006, pp.24-25.

<sup>561</sup> Geoffrey Streatfield, 'Acting in the Histories Ensemble' from the *King Lear* Programme, May 2007.

patience, while work itself is intense and exhausting.<sup>562</sup>

Ann Ogbomo referred to the length of time it took for benefits of the extended contract to be felt and of the collaborative nature of the work:

Although we began *The Histories* during the Festival year, for me the benefits of the ensemble are coming to fruition one year on. Being together for a long period of time and getting to know how different people work creates an incredibly supportive environment, where we collectively engage in the work and are more than happy to learn from others. The input from the Director, Actors, the Voice Department and the Design Team are a real benefit.<sup>563</sup>

Nicholas Asbury spoke of the value of working on skills through performance:

Acting is a craft like music or painting, which requires constant and vigilant practice. A musician or artist can get up every morning when they're not being paid and still practise. Actors can't. But over the past two years, we've had the privilege of getting up every morning and practising our craft. You can't but get better.<sup>564</sup>

Asbury described the training period saying:

We were given lectures as a company on English medieval history, Shakespeare and Catholicism, and the History Plays themselves, by visiting professors and experts. On verse speaking. We even had a tutorial on Rhetoric by the [student] world public speaking champion Bennet Brandreth. Later on, during *Richard III*, Shami Chakrabati, the head of the human rights activist group Liberty, spoke to us about the nature of tyranny. Each one of the lectures was accompanied by an excited visit to the pub afterwards and the increasingly flowing mix of chatter, debate and interest that brings.<sup>565</sup>

The discussions that continued outside the rehearsal room are evidence of their impact and value. Chris McGill who joined the RSC for the *Comedies* season in 2005 and continued into the *Histories* ensemble remarked that he realised how much he had learned when he became involved in an Education project at The Globe in 2008.

What I was able to bring to the rehearsal room was so much more than I was capable of before my time at the RSC. I realised just how much I now had to offer.<sup>566</sup>

James Tucker, who had worked with the RSC over a number of seasons including the 2000/1 *Histories*, commented on how the cumulative work over

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ann Ogbomo, *RSC Annual Report and Accounts, 2006-2007*, p.23.

<sup>564</sup> Nicholas Asbury, 'RSC Ensemble and Artist Development Programme', Feedback Report 2008, p.10.

<sup>565</sup> Nick Asbury, *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, London, Oberon Books, 2009, p.20.

<sup>566</sup> Chris McGill in conversation with Lyn Darnley in London, 28 October, 2008.

the rehearsal period resulted in a shorter time needed to rehearse *Henry VI*

*Part III:*

The extended rehearsal period works incredibly well. For *Henry VI* it allowed us six weeks on each of the first two parts, and four weeks on the third. Less time was spent on the latter, as by this stage we had a short-hand to the characters.

Tucker referred to understudy support and rehearsal work on voice and language:

As part of the Artists Development Programme the RSC are also truly committed to the work of the understudy, ensuring that no one is expected to go on without spending a certain amount of time working on the role. The vocal work on these productions has been tremendously helpful too, not only in terms of the physical benefits, but also in the work that has been done on verse, text and language. Having a dedicated voice coach attached to the productions is a very real bonus; helping to keep the work fresh, alive and focused.<sup>567</sup>

Tucker suggested more contact with non-RSC companies:

I would, though, like to see, as an extension to the Company's commitment to cross-company non-linear training, the provision of more workshops that are inclusive of other performing companies. In this way training could become cross institutional as well.<sup>568</sup>

His wish to see other institutions being involved in running workshops materialised in 2008 when the *Creative Projects* were introduced. Details of these projects appear in Chapter 8.

The *Histories* project became the RSC ensemble flagship and was seen as such by actors in other ensembles. This led to a sense of 'ensemble hierarchy' that was not altogether useful as it separated them from the other ensembles in the minds of actors. This highly successful project firmly established the reputation of the RSC as an ensemble and in March 2009 the *Histories* won the Olivier Award for the 2008 Best Company Performance, confirming this opinion.

The *Histories* company was the first to be offered a contract for more than 14 months since Michael Boyd took over as Artistic Director. Under Adrian Noble the contract had varied between 14 and 18 months. The *Histories* ensemble began work on 27 February 2006 and their contract finished in May 2008, producing a contract period of 27 months.

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<sup>567</sup> James Tucker in *RSC Ensemble and Artists' Development Programme*, The Garfield Weston Foundation, Final Report, April 2007, p.16.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

### Three Ensembles, Three Training Experiences

For the first time there was a distinct difference in the experiences of all three ensembles. The Orange and Green Companies, both of which had intense two-week training programmes followed by weekly sessions for the first nine weeks of rehearsal, repeated a pattern similar to that of the 2005 programme. In Stratford they, unlike the *Histories*, were able to avail themselves of phase two training including verse, voice and physical skills and they benefited from working in two theatres rather than just the RST, as the 2004 and 2005 ensembles had done. They were able to participate in New Writing productions, Poetry readings and projects organised by the Education and Events Department. Both the Orange and Green Companies had a wide variety of training opportunities whereas the Purple Company's training grew directly out of the demands and themes of the *Histories*. Where possible the Orange and Green Companies worked together but opportunities were limited as they shared only one of the two training weeks. More shared classes were possible in the weekly sessions from week three onwards. The assistant directors from all ensembles were able to work together in John Barton and Cicely Berry's sessions. None of the 2006/7 ensembles were able to perform public understudy runs because of the added pressure on space created by visiting CWF companies.

The variety in the programmes of the three ensembles produced different production-specific training which provided positive but diverse outcomes.

Patrick Stewart<sup>569</sup> and in the latter part of the CWF, Ian McKellen (both of whom had worked with the RSC early in their careers), embraced the training. Stewart's response was respected by younger actors who were encouraged by his attitude. Stewart, who had worked with the RSC in 1966, said in an interview in the *Stage*:

Going back to the RSC is the culmination of a dream that I've had for years and for a long time I thought it would not happen. I'm going to play Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Prospero in *The Tempest* and anything else they throw my way in the next 16 months. We are doing the entire canon of 37

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<sup>569</sup> RSC Honorary Associate Artist Patrick Stewart conducted a workshop on text during the training period for the Orange Company in 2006. On 28 October, 2008 he spoke at a fundraising gala for the Artist Development Programme, commending the ensemble ethic and saying that the support the Company gave actors was not available when he first worked for the RSC in 1966.

plays, so as a member of the audience you could hear every single line that Shakespeare may have written in the next year or so in Stratford.<sup>570</sup>

Surprisingly one of the most resistant actors had been part of the 2003/4 and 2005 ensembles, and yet had returned knowing he would be required to participate again. It was ironic that actors who were ambivalent about the need for training chose to return to a company with a strongly declared intention to pursue an ensemble approach. Certain older and more experienced actors will continue to find ensemble practices such as continuing development and training, difficult because of their traditional work patterns, but nevertheless, will accept contracts out of a need to work. In spite of personal resistance most saw the value for younger artists if not for themselves. While it seems imperative to persevere with the ensemble training ethos, the challenge is to find a way to meet the needs of all actors so that they feel respected, valued and able to take on further personal training and development. Supporting ensemble principles is not enough, it is necessary for actors to commit to those principles actively and therefore identifying actors who fully embrace ensemble values is crucial.<sup>571</sup>

### **Clarifying the Commitment to Training for Actors**

Greater clarity about the ADP was given in amendments made to the pre-contractual casting letter for 2006, the contents of which were agreed by the out-going Casting Director, John Cannon, producers and the Artist Development Department. These were designed to prevent actors committing to contracts without fully understanding what was expected of them. It was not possible to alert actors to the content of each ensemble's training programme as these had not yet been decided upon when the Casting Letter was issued. The content of the training for the Green and Orange Companies was fundamentally different in style and some actors would possibly have found one programme more challenging or more to their taste than another. A small number of actors said that they were apprehensive about the training, but were pleasantly surprised by the

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<sup>570</sup> Liz Thomas, 'Home truths - Patrick Stewart', the *Stage*, 1 February, 2006.

<sup>571</sup> The RSC does not have open auditions so actors are dependent on a director knowing their work, being seen in a play by a member of the Casting Department or having a strong television or film profile. Many actors profess a passion for ensemble but feel they cannot get auditions.

experience in spite of their initial reluctance. Only a very small minority resisted the work throughout the contract.

### **Benefits of the CWF**

The Festival stimulated new energy in the Company and created a vibrant and exciting environment. For artists and administrators alike, the new ideas and approaches brought by visiting companies evoked discussion and debate. As well as the productions, a full programme of community projects and events was held as part of the Festival and co-ordinated by Fiona Lindsay of the Events Department. These projects met the requirements of the *Royal Charter* (II.I.) to reach beyond the RSC and to develop the skills of actors nationally and internationally, and to inform audiences. One notable community project was staged in August when Nós do Morro (a theatre school and company from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro) and Birmingham City Council's Gallery 37 project, which uses the arts to help young people at risk, collaborated on a production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in The Courtyard Theatre. Cicely Berry had worked with Nós do Morro in Brazil and continued to work with them throughout the period of rehearsal in Stratford.

The mere presence of an international Shakespeare festival in Stratford-upon-Avon offered invaluable learning opportunities to RSC artists and audiences who were able to see Shakespearean texts performed in other languages by actors from other countries and cultural traditions. Although this learning was informal and unstructured it added to actors' knowledge and widened their experience. The context in which the productions were placed often added political and cultural insights into the plays not always evident in British productions. Examples of these were Luc Percival's German *Othello*, an Arabic *Richard III*, the Indian *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Tim Supple and Dash Arts) and a Polish *Macbeth* by Teatr Piesn Kozla (Song of the Goat). *Macbeth* was the only production that was still in development and the performance in the Swan Theatre took the form of a 'work in progress'; the showing illustrated the process of exploration undertaken by the Polish ensemble, allowing actors and audiences insight into their distinctive rehearsal methodology.



All the companies that participated in the *CWF* were offered training that they were able to negotiate according to their needs, providing a unique opportunity for participants in a theatre festival. In some cases they were unable to take advantage of the training on offer because of their rehearsal schedules and time restraints. In addition to specific workshops all visiting companies were invited to attend RSC warm-ups and any Artist Development workshops that were taking place. A number of productions were also assigned a voice coach in rehearsal. London-based Chinese company, Yellow Earth, which collaborated with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre to produce *King Lear*, directed by David Tse Ka-Shing and London-based theatre for the homeless, Cardboard Citizens, whose production of *Timon of Athens* was directed by Adrian Jackson, were given voice, text and movement support throughout their London rehearsals. The 'Song of the Goat' company explored the *Macbeth* text during a week of workshops with Lyn Darnley at their base in Poland; and a student production from Warwick University received voice, text and movement support for its production in The Dell of Lope de Vega's *Capulets and Montagues*. Details of training undertaken by visiting companies appear in Appendix 7.(5).

Contact with other companies proved that there was much for RSC actors to learn from other approaches and methodologies. Greater formal sharing was envisaged but the need to hone work and resolve technical difficulties meant that little time was left for structured visitor-led workshops. Attempts to set up formal workshops were often frustrated due to tight scheduling. The multitude of skills brought by the visiting ensembles could have enriched the growing learning culture more fully than it did. Missed opportunities occurred, such as the cancellation of a planned work-share with the Arabic *Richard III*, directed by Sulayman Al-Bassam. This was because media interest resulted in additional filming for Middle Eastern news programmes. Nevertheless a great deal was gained from informal social contact, 'meet and greet' sessions, press night parties and at public events such as post-show discussions and pre-performance talks. Possibly the only way to have guaranteed the formal transferring of skill sets would have been to stipulate a contractual requirement for creative and cultural exchange workshops. This, however, would not necessarily have guaranteed that RSC

actors would have been free to attend them. Some actors complained that the pressure of work limited the number of visiting productions they were able to see. There were no formal debriefs but many visiting artists were positive in their informal responses and companies were enthusiastic about the support they had received.

### **Film, Post- and Pre-Show Events**

A variety of events allowed artists, staff members and audiences to gain insight into diverse issues related to the productions. These ranged from political perspectives to production-specific creative concepts. Events took the form of on-stage interviews with directors, artists and creative teams and Sunday morning celebrity brunches and although these were not organised by the ADP, the content was edifying and actors who were able to attend or who participated valued the experience. RSC staff also reported unusually exciting contact with artists:

Most powerful and moving was the opportunity to work almost every performance of *Richard III – An Arab Tragedy*: performances which had an even greater impact on those who had heard Sulayman Al-Bassam, the writer and director, talk so openly and eloquently about the pressures of censorship under which he had worked to bring this powerful piece of political theatre to the stage. Such events allowed audiences and staff alike to deepen their understanding of the continuing relevance of Shakespeare's works in our modern world and I was immensely privileged to speak to Sulayman personally afterwards and discuss in more detail the similarities between his experiences under censorship and those of Renaissance dramatists.<sup>572</sup>

Certainly the level of production debate was greater than normal and led to RSC members examining their own work with a more critical eye. An MA student from Warwick University wrote in his on-line blog:

Although my project is mainly concerned with the main performances of the Complete Works Festival, it's impossible to ignore the fact that there's a lot more going on in Stratford than what's in the theatres. While no-one could possibly go to all of the talks, discussions, workshops and sideshows that

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<sup>572</sup> Kathleen Bradley, a graduate of the Shakespeare Institute who worked as an usher in all the theatres during the CWF, expressed her memories in an email to Lyn Darnley on 29 July, 2009. In addition to her response to *Richard III*, she wrote, 'Working the all-male Propeller Company's production of *The Taming of the Shrew* was also fascinating. The friendliness of the acting company meant that warm-ups became an opportunity to talk about directorial decisions, such as the feeling that an all-male company could present the violence inherent in the play more strongly. These are just two of the many learning opportunities which naturally arose from working this most joyous of Festivals.'

are happening, it's really interesting to get to some of them and see what's going on around the main Festival.<sup>573</sup>

The number of blogs that appeared on the internet were testament to the positive public interest. The *CVF* brought together artists from all over the world, all with a common goal to perform a Shakespearean text in a way that reflected its relationship to their culture. Sir Christopher Bland, Chairman of the RSC Board<sup>574</sup> wrote in his blog, *I Completed the Works*:

In the last twelve months Stratford has had Shakespeare in Japanese, Russian, Italian, German, Chinese, Portuguese, several South African languages, Arabic, seven Indian dialects, Shakespeare performed by Bunraku puppets, and by Tiny Ninjas bought from an Oregon vending machine, Shakespeare sung and Shakespeare danced. The cumulative effect has been an extraordinary reminder of the timeless and international appeal of the Heart of All England's Elizabethan man, a reminder, in Hazlitt's words, of "*the sweetness, thought, gravity, grace, wit, artless nature, copiousness, ease, pathos, and sublime conceptions of Shakespeare's Muse.*"<sup>575</sup>

Sir Christopher Bland's blog is evidence of the broad educational nature of the *CVF* for audiences and artists alike. Nick Asbury's description of the summer of 2006 gives a sense of the additional benefits actors gained from the *CVF*:

In the summer of 2006, when we arrived, it was jumping. The Complete Works Festival was in full swing: as well as two companies of RSC actors [...] there were actors and performers from all over the world putting on their own version of a particular Shakespeare play. That summer alone there were South Africans performing Hamlet, Americans doing Henry IV, Brazilians with Two Gentlemen of Verona, Japanese staging Titus Andronicus and many more theatre companies from all over Britain putting on their plays. It truly was a festival and the back garden of the Dirty Duck would thrum in turn to samba drumming from the Brazilians, or South Africans singing songs of freedom. The atmosphere was electric.<sup>576</sup>

### **Building on the *CVF***

The focus and commitment of the actors from many of the visiting companies was noticeable. They worked longer hours than British actors and displayed a co-dependency typical of a strong ensemble. Such

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<sup>573</sup> Peter Kirwan, [http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/daily/110806/August 16, 2006](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/daily/110806/August%2016,%202006).

<sup>574</sup> Chairman of BT since May 2001, and a former BBC Board of Governors chairman, Sir Christopher Bland succeeded Lord Alexander of Weedon as Chairman of the RSC Board of Governors in April 2004.

<sup>575</sup> 'I Completed the Works, Sunday, April 22, 2007' posted by Christopher Bland. <http://www.cbrsc.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>576</sup> RSC Blog: <http://www.rsc.org.uk/content/5895.aspx>. This blog was later published as *Exit, Pursued by a Badger: An Actor's Journey Through History with Shakespeare*, London, Oberon Books Ltd, 2009.

teamwork is not possible in either subsidised or commercial theatre in a country with strong Equity rules on working time.

While RSC actors have specialist skills, each participating company had something unique to offer whether it was a cultural perspective as in the Arabic *Richard III*<sup>577</sup> and the Indian *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Propeller's all-male ensemble production of *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by Ed Hall, Ninagawa's visually stunning Japanese *Titus Andronicus* or the beautifully detailed observation of Cheek by Jowl's Russian *Twelfth Night* directed by Declan Donnellan.

The international perspective and cultural mix offered by the CWF proved that while the RSC can teach its traditions, it has much to learn from the traditions of others from the UK and beyond, and that festivals such as the CWF enrich all who participate. Several of the visiting companies maintained and developed their relationship with the RSC.<sup>578</sup> Michael Boyd said of the CWF:

It saw the great international theatre companies and artists joining the RSC, other UK theatre companies, drama colleges, schools and amateur groups on the same stages, with the same purpose. It saw them sharing and exchanging cultures and skills, inspiring and learning from each other, and jamming with each other in the Dirty Duck.<sup>579</sup>

The social activity generated by the festival events, strengthened the sense of involvement for many of the members of the wider RSC ensemble.

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<sup>577</sup> *Richard III* was directed by Sulayman Al-Bassam.

<sup>578</sup> *Othello* director, Luk Perceval from Munchner Kammerspiele returned in 2008 to direct a Creative Project. Details of Creative Projects appear in Chapter 8. In July 2008 Alison Bomber (Text and Voice Dept.) went to Poland to work with *Song of the Goat* in a skills exchange that allowed her to develop her understanding of the ensemble and enrich her own practice. Kneehigh Theatre and the RSC developed a joint initiative, with Kneehigh's *Don John* playing in the Courtyard in December 2008. Little Angel contributed to the 2007 Winter season with *Fantastic Mr Fox* and lead a Creative Project on *The Tempest* with the 2008 Green Company. The Baxter Company went on to collaborate with the RSC in a production of *The Tempest* rehearsing and performing in Cape Town in December 2008/January 2009 and performing in Stratford and on a UK regional tour from February to May. The Brett Goldin award, which was established in 2007, allowed young South African actors the opportunity to train in Stratford for a month. (More details about the Brett Goldin bursary appear later in the chapter.)

<sup>579</sup> Michael Boyd in *RSC Annual Report and Accounts 2006-2007*, p.4. The Dirty Duck is a public house close to the theatres, frequented by actors.

## **2007: A Year of Transition**

### **Alternative styles of Ensemble Training**

Although 2007 is not the major focus of this study, the longer *CWF* season continued into April of that year and during that time some notable visiting directors brought their own brand of ensemble training to the Company and are therefore worthy of mention. Neil Bartlett, who directed *Twelfth Night*, also chose to provide his own training during rehearsals. He worked with voice coach Tess Dignan but she was only required to undertake voice sessions while Bartlett took full responsibility for text work. He allowed voluntary Artist Development sessions once the ensemble was in performance.<sup>580</sup>

Bartlett and Nunn (*King Lear*) were the first directors to do all their own training rather than employ specialist workshop leaders. This demonstrated that all training programmes need not follow the same pattern and that as long as regular vocal and physical training was included, it was possible to be flexible and facilitate a range of training options designed to suit specific groups.

Another director with a strong teaching approach was Romanian director, Silviu Purcarete, whose Swan Company production of *Macbeth* by Eugene Ionesco played alongside Connall Morrison's inventive production of *Macbeth*. Purcarete encouraged his actors to work in his unique visual and theatrical way and did not require further development work beyond his own exercises, whereas Morrison took full advantage of the ADP. All three productions illustrated the enrichment possible from directors with strong personal styles or from different theatre cultures. Exposure to new ways of working creates exciting and often challenging opportunities for development that may or may not be embraced by actors. An added benefit for the 2007 Swan Company was that they did not only work with Silviu Purcarete but encountered the dynamics of the rehearsal processes of Connall Morrison and later Josette Bushell-Mingo who directed *The Penelopiad*, a new play by

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<sup>580</sup> He returned in 2008 to direct *Romeo and Juliet* and negotiated a similar training programme delivered only by himself and the Text and Voice Coach, Alison Bomber.

Margaret Atwood.<sup>581</sup> *The Penelopiad* was staged in association with Canada's National Arts Centre and included seven Canadian actresses. As well as playing in Stratford it transferred to Ottawa. Extracts from the blog of Kate Hennig, one of the Canadian actors, can be found in Appendix 7.(8). It gives insight into the value and complexities of such collaborations for artists.

### **Developing RSC Training within the Industry**

#### **Drama Schools Project and Conference of Drama School Workshops**

Out of the *CWF* grew a significant training initiative that provided a previously absent conversation between the RSC and the drama school sector. Between 4 and 15 September 2006 a *CWF* drama schools project was organised by the RSC's Education Department and supported by the ADP. The schools involved were the Bristol Old Vic School, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Each student company performed a cut Shakespeare text in the Swan Theatre and then toured local Warwickshire schools. The texts were edited by young writers commissioned by the RSC Literary Department.

The schools were offered two days of voice and verse support during their rehearsal period in their schools and while in Stratford received voice sessions in the theatre space. The Education Department provided workshop techniques and workshops on voice, text and movement were provided by the ADP. These allowed all participating students to integrate. Out of the success of this project grew a shared concern between the RSC and the drama schools to collaborate further. Representatives of the schools suggested that making contact with Alistair Pearce, the newly appointed chairman of the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS), would be the best way forward. At subsequent meetings links were forged resulting in the establishment of RSC/CDS workshops in classical text for third-year students in Stratford once each term.

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<sup>581</sup> Connall Morrison requested workshops on the Roy Hart method of extreme vocal range and quality exploration for the women playing the witches and Roth Five Rhythms work, again for the witches. The women in the ensemble performed *The Penelopiad* written by Margaret Atwood and directed by Josette Bushell-Mingo who nurtured a strong sense of ensemble in her actors. *The Penelopiad* was not a part of the *CWF*. Voice Coach Charmian Gradwell supported the 2007 Swan Company.

Contact was made by the Artist Development Department in 2006 and in February 2007 the CDS Project was decided on as an acceptable way forward. It was agreed to offer 3 two-day workshops each year for 22 students [66 students each year]. The CDS felt that the RSC could also support their work through Knowledge Trading, by attendance at the CDS Summer Conference and by participating in the annual Conference.<sup>582</sup> The first of the free workshops was held in January 2007. They addressed the challenges of Shakespeare's language, including iambic pentameter, verse structure, clues in the text and working on extracts from the production the students attended. As teaching was undertaken by staff in the Text and Voice Department and RSC freelancers, workshop costs for a total of 66 drama student each year were minimal. Drama schools paid travel and accommodation for their students or the students were self-financing. Costs were minimal as accommodation was for one night only. Theatre tickets and hospitality were free of charge and provided by the ADP. The success of the initiative was such that in October 2008 Lyn Darnley and the Artist Development Department were awarded the President's Medal for Services to Drama Training, which proved that the RSC had made a significant and recognised contribution to drama training in Britain while at the same time meeting the Royal Charter requirement for supporting the development of classical theatre.<sup>583</sup> (Workshops for Voice Teachers working in the drama schools were requested by the CDS in 2008 and a pilot workshop for 25 teachers took place in April 2009.)<sup>584</sup> Members of the ensemble and the Casting Department are invited to contribute to all student workshops, allowing them to share their career experiences, reflect on their performance practice and answer students' questions about working within the ensemble. An attempt is made to reflect diversity of age, gender, experience and cultural background in all workshop panels. The workshops also fulfilled the Royal Charter's requirement for support for Shakespeare performance standards by nurturing ambitions to perform Shakespearean roles and work

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<sup>582</sup> Notes of a meeting between Alistair Pearce (Chairman of the Conference of Drama Schools and Principal of Rose Bruford College), Lyn Darnley and Jane Hazell (notes), 12 February, 2007.

<sup>583</sup> In August 2008 a three-week Language Intensive Workshop leading to performances in the Courtyard Theatre was offered to four graduate actors who had attended the CDS workshops in 2007/8.

<sup>584</sup> It was anticipated that Teachers' Workshops would not be held annually but only when appropriate and in order to reach new generations of teachers, possible every three to four years.

for the RSC.<sup>585</sup> Schedules of the CDS projects, feedback and photographs appear in Appendix 7.(6).

### **Birmingham School of Acting**

Stratford Upon Avon's local Midlands drama school is Birmingham School of Acting (BSA). In 2006 Second-year students from the school were given opportunities to visit the RSC and work in the theatres, prior to beginning their Shakespeare projects. They were also able to talk to actors Julius Da Silva and Kieron Hill, graduates of BSA, who were in the *Histories* ensemble, about their careers and experiences. In response to the session Alex Taylor, Head of Voice, wrote thanking the RSC for the workshops:

And many thanks for also organising for the two actors to talk with the students. It was a really wonderful experience for the students and they were totally buzzing from the experience when they returned to the school. What a fantastic way for our Second Year to start off their Shakespeare project.<sup>586</sup>

The BSA visits have continued on an annual basis.

### **Voice Placement, Movement Trainee and Training for Young Directors**

Following the pattern of the previous year, the Voice Placement and Assistant Directors were required to attend all the training including classes with John Barton and Cicely Berry, in order to add to their skill base and gain insight into the experience of actors. Their attendance also promoted greater understanding of the Company's training ethos, allowing them to take their experience, skills and knowledge into future work with drama students, amateurs and professional actors.

Charmian Gradwell became the second Voice Placement and worked on the 2006 *CWF* season and then stayed on as a Voice Coach working with the 2007 Swan Ensemble until March 2008. Her background as an experienced performer, workshop leader and teacher allowed her to maximise the opportunities offered by the placement. Recently qualified as a Voice Teacher, but using a physical approach inspired by her experience in sports coaching, she made a valuable contribution to the ensemble. Her feedback stated that the placement surpassed her expectations in terms of training, support, extension of skills and experience gained:

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<sup>585</sup> Conformed Copy of *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, II.(3).

<sup>586</sup> Alex Taylor (Head of Voice, Birmingham School of Acting) in an email on 10 November, 2006.



A placement with the RSC is an opportunity that could not happen in any other theatre company. It gives you exposure on so many different levels, allowing you to benefit from a free exchange of ideas in which you are both practitioner and student. This is a marvellous collaborative experience – a true opportunity for growth. For example, recently the Company brought in an external voice practitioner, allowing staff the chance to refocus on their own instrument, in order to better carry out their individual practice.<sup>587</sup>

During her time with the Company she toured to Washington, Canada and Spain. In 2008 she took up an appointment as Voice Coach with the Sydney Theatre Company in Australia, working with Cate Blanchett. It is unlikely she would have received this offer without the experience she gained on the RSC Placement.

The development of Voice practitioners illustrates the Company's commitment to young and mid-career theatre artists. A further illustration of this commitment is the extension of the placement programme to include movement practitioners.

### **The Appointment of a Movement Trainee<sup>588</sup>**

It was Boyd's ambition to balance the ensemble training by creating a permanent Movement Department. Greater focus on movement beyond the initial training period would enhance stage-craft and maintain actors' flexibility and stamina beyond the training periods. Regular freelance Movement Directors Liz Rankin and Mike Ashcroft were asked to create a joint proposal for a Movement Department, but it became clear that their strongly contrasting approaches and their wish to continue their freelance careers meant they were unable to form a department together so the initiative was temporarily suspended. This left a void in the provision of physical work for actors because, although much of the initial production-related training was physical, it was taught by freelance practitioners and there was no sustained movement work throughout the year. Creating a position for a newly qualified Movement Practitioner was an interim solution initiated by the ADP. The job description required the trainee:

- To observe the work of movement directors in rehearsal, when it is deemed appropriate.

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<sup>587</sup> Charmian Gradwell, in *RSC Ensemble and Artists' Development Programme, The Garfield Weston Foundation Final Report*, April, 2007, p.11.

<sup>588</sup> The Movement Trainee was more frequently referred to as the Movement Placement.

- To work with artists to enhance and maintain their movement skills.
- To work with understudies to enhance their performances.
- To assist the Artist Development Co-ordinator in the organisation of physical aspects of the programme when necessary and to carry out other office-based tasks as required.
- To undertake an area of research that is relevant to either the work with the Artist Development programme or RSC Learning.<sup>589</sup>

Anna Morrissey was appointed in July 2006. She provided a much needed physical backup for the ensemble once their movement director had moved on to other productions; for example, she offered additional help with building physical strength and stamina for Jonathan Slinger (playing Richard III). The post allowed for joint movement and voice warm-ups and early morning limber sessions as well as supporting Artist Development work with alumni, the directing course at Birkbeck College and the CAPITAL project at Warwick University. Her work supported the ensemble, the Education Department and Events Department and highlighted the need for more consistent movement input into the Company and for schools and teachers' workshops. Anna Morrissey valued the experience, though without a consistent role model or mentor, it was limited in terms of developing the necessary skills for becoming a movement director. It offered instead an insight into the physical needs of actors and how a movement practitioner could work within a classical theatre company and offered an important opportunity to focus on movement in Shakespearean performance. The benefits of this to the ensemble were considerable, especially in giving understudies access to creative physical ways of approaching character and establishing a greater link between voice and the body.

On completion of her contract, Anna Morrissey summarised her experiences, which included two RSC residencies in American Universities (University of Michigan and Davidson College):

I have worked closely with the Artist Development Programme where necessary, on workshops for actors, directors at Birkbeck, Capital Centre and drama schools. I have had creative control over the workshops for which I am responsible and have felt supported and encouraged to develop new ideas, particularly by Lyn Darnley and have enjoyed creating workshops in

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<sup>589</sup> Lyn Darnley, Job Description for Movement Placement/Trainee, May 2006.

collaboration with Alison Bomber. I have worked closely with RSC Learning [Education]<sup>590</sup> in order to provide school or higher education workshops in physical skills. This year has given me the opportunity to work with a wide range of age-groups. I have also initiated two workshops for RSC Learning practitioners that have focused on providing a space to play, encouraging new ideas from a movement perspective. This has offered me a great opportunity to extend my teaching skills and to gain confidence with a wide range of client groups. I have had full creative input into the design and delivery of these workshops.

While she clearly acknowledged the breadth of work she was able to engage in, Morrissey identified the limitations of a Movement Placement in a company which only employed freelance movement directors:

I have had the opportunity to observe the work of Mike Ashcroft (*The Tempest*) and Liz Rankin (*Richard III*). I have had the freedom to drop into the *Histories* rehearsals. There has been no opportunity to assist the movement directors in their work and I do not feel that I have developed a significantly greater understanding of the relationship between physical and textual performance over the placement. However, I have had many learning opportunities through workshops with outside movement practitioners; including Mask, Lazzi, Viewpoints<sup>591</sup>, ballroom dancing. I also assisted Linda Dobell on *Timon of Athens* and worked on *The Capulets and Montagues* for the Capital Centre. I feel that it has been predominantly an RSC, rather than a movement placement. I have had a busy year that has given me a great insight into the company in all its venues and had the chance to work on two residencies and connect with a wide range of departments.<sup>592</sup>

Anna Morrissey makes a valid comment about the lack of support from movement directors for her specialist skill area, but as freelancers there was no reason for them to offer their time in order to support an RSC trainee. Lorna Marshall<sup>593</sup> worked with Morrissey over several sessions, focusing on the mind-body relationship.<sup>594</sup>

In August 2007 Anna Morrissey rejoined the RSC on a one-year contract as Company Movement Practitioner. This new position allowed her

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<sup>590</sup> The RSC Education Department changed its name to RSC Learning for a short time in 2006/07.

<sup>591</sup> Viewpoints, a technique used to develop actors' awareness of elements of performance, such as tempo, duration, gesture, spatial relationships, was developed by Anne Bogart from the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI), which was founded in 1992 by Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki.

<sup>592</sup> Feedback provided by Anna Morrissey in 2007 on completion of her contract.

<sup>593</sup> Lorna Marshall is a movement director, researcher and author of *The Body Speaks* and with Yoshi Oida has co-authored *An Actor Adrift* (1995) and *The Invisible Actor* (1997). With David Williams she wrote 'Peter Brook, Transparency and the invisible network', published in *Twentieth Century Actor Training* by Alison Hodge (1999). She is also known for her work on the mind-body relationship.

<sup>594</sup> In 2008 Morrissey and the second Movement Trainee, Lucy Cullingford, organised a workshop with Marshall on the mind-body connection and its relationship to performance for directors, producers and Text and Voice staff.

to develop freelance creative physical projects outside the company so as to be able to build her profile as a Movement Director. In 2009 Anna Morrissey returned as a Movement Director on *The Drunks* and *The Grain Store* and in 2010 on *Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>595</sup> A second Movement Trainee, Lucy Cullingford, joined in December 2007 and became a Movement Practitioner in 2008.<sup>596</sup>

### **Support for the Birkbeck MFA in Theatre Directing**

A significant development in 2006 was the relationship with the Birkbeck College Directors' Course. High quality training for directors is essential not only because they are theatre artists in their own right but because young and newly qualified directors develop their skills in the drama schools and inevitably have a powerful influence on actors in training. Due to costs of funding large casts the opportunities for young directors to direct Shakespeare are limited; it is therefore an RSC priority to support director training and offer young directors opportunities to learn from experienced directors and practitioners.

There was a history of meetings between members of the Directors Guild, Equity and the RSC during the establishment of the Birkbeck College MFA in Directing. Plans made at these meetings either had not been recorded or notes had been mis-placed. It was therefore not known what was agreed by Peter Cheeseman (Equity)<sup>597</sup> and Adrian Noble and Clare

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<sup>595</sup> *The Grain Store* by Natal'ia Vorozhbit, directed by Michael Boyd, and *The Drunks* by Mikhail and Vyacheslav Durnenkov, directed by RSC Literary Associate Anthony Neilson, played in the Courtyard Theatre in August, 2009. *Antony and Cleopatra*, was directed by Michael Boyd and played in the Courtyard in May 2010.

<sup>596</sup> Lucy Cullingford became the second Movement Placement in order to undertake work at Davidson College, North Carolina, USA, as part of an RSC new writing project working on a reading of Rona Munro's, *Little Eagles*. The ongoing development of the traineeship is important for both the RSC and as an access into the industry for promising young movement directors. It is essential, however, that a way is found to make the role more connected to the creative process. She became Company Movement Practitioner on a six-month contract after completing the Movement Placement position in December, 2008. During her time as Movement Trainee she worked at Davidson College in the USA on a workshop production of *Little Eagles* by Rona Munro. In 2009 she was the Movement Director on *A Tender Thing*, written by Ben Power and directed by Helena Kaut-Howson. Cullingford also worked as a Movement Assistant on *Matilda* in 2010 and completed a Warwick University Creative Fellowship with the CAPITAL project on *The Renaissance Body*. This was performed in the Waterside Studios in July, 2010 and included 16 student actors from ALRA. When Straun Leslie was appointed Head of Movement in 2009 he chose to suspend the Movement Traineeship.

<sup>597</sup> Peter Cheeseman was a director and Chair of the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) in 2000. He was instrumental in the development of The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Directing which was established in 2003 at Birkbeck (University of London) established in conjunction with the NCDT and on behalf of the industry. Cheeseman was Artistic Director of the Victoria Theatre in

Venables (RSC)<sup>598</sup>, so it was easier to begin again and work within the current climate and constraints. In February 2006 Cheeseman suggested that Lyn Darnley meet with Rob Swain, the Course Director of the MFA in Directing at Birkbeck College, University of London. Cheeseman's assumption, based on discussions that took place with Clare Venables shortly before her death, was that the RSC, in line with many other theatres, would host a student director for six months. This was not deemed possible as the RSC had its own Assistant Director programme. An alternative system of support was agreed to, involving RSC practitioners teaching workshops on the course. In 2006 skills support for the course included the following:

- A voice session together with a discussion about the role of the voice teacher, language work, rhetoric and structure of the verse (a three-hour session on 2 March 2006 at Birkbeck) conducted by Lyn Darnley.
- A three-hour class with Cicely Berry.
- Contact with the producers and a discussion about opportunities for young directors within the RSC.
- The possibilities of a similar collaboration with the Literary Department would be explored.<sup>599</sup>

A meeting between Lead Producer Denise Wood and Rob Swain was planned to discuss the building of a relationship that included interviewing students for the Company's Assistant Director Scheme.<sup>600</sup>

In 2007 the contact with the Birkbeck MFA was extended to include movement classes and an invitation to students to watch understudy runs, meet assistant directors and discuss their work with understudy casts and the challenges of staging understudy performances.<sup>601</sup> In 2008 CDS

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Stoke on Trent for 35 years and then director of the New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle under Lyme. Cheeseman died in 2010.

<sup>598</sup> Clare Venables was Director of RSC Education until her death on 17 October, 2003. Prior to her appointment in 1999 she was Principal at the Brit School. She had been artistic director of the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield (1981-1992).

<sup>599</sup> Notes from meeting between Lyn Darnley and Rob Swain, Course Director, Birkbeck College MFA Directing Course, Birkbeck, 26 February, 2006.

<sup>600</sup> Producer Jeremy Adams also spoke to students about opportunities with the RSC.

<sup>601</sup> From 2007 onwards the support was widened to include five Voice and Movement classes taught annually by RSC staff and in 2009 a tour to the Stratford Workshops and a talk by Tom Piper and producers was given to 17 students on 17 June. The first ex-students from the course were employed as assistant directors in 2008 and 2009. Vik Sivalingam was Neil Bartlett's Assistant Director on *Romeo and Juliet* in 2008 and he and Justin Audibert worked on the New Ensemble 2009-2011. Producer Jeremy Adams also spoke to students about the RSC Assistant Director scheme. From 2010 two places on the RSC/CDS Student Director Workshop were offered to students on the course.

workshops for directing students from other colleges were initiated. See Appendix 7.(7). for details.

### **Training with Directors and Writers**

The 2005 Cicely Berry Young Directors' workshops were repeated in January 2006 when Berry worked with six young directors and 18 actors from *The Canterbury Tales* and in 2007 she worked with actors from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Company and a further six directors.<sup>602</sup> A workshop for six mid-career writers was offered in 2006 and led by Jeannie O'Hare (Head of the Literary Department) and Dominic Cooke and supported by the ADP. Max Atkinson, Cicely Berry, Lyn Darnley and Liz Ranken were among the practitioners who contributed to the workshop, which focused on writing for the epic stage.<sup>603</sup>

### **Collaborating with Academics to create an RSC CWF Edition**

In addition to the productions and events, Jonathan Bate and *Eric Rasmussen* edited a new version of the Complete Works, based on the First Folio (published April 2007). It cemented the collaboration between the ensemble and academics and marked a forging of links between theory and practice. It was the 'first and only Complete Works edition to be commissioned by The Royal Shakespeare Company.'<sup>604</sup> Boyd wrote in the foreword:

The endurance of Shakespeare depends not only on the felt experience of good, vivid theatre, but also on dynamic scholarship that reveals his living text. So we have pursued a long-held ambition: the creation of the first RSC Complete Works edition. Editing Shakespeare, like staging his plays, is a constantly evolving process. We're delighted to be working with Macmillan on this new edition with a team led by Jonathan Bate - one of the foremost Shakespeare scholars of his generation and a valued presence in the RSC rehearsal room.<sup>605</sup>

The collaboration with a leading Shakespearean scholar in the production of a new RSC acting edition of the plays illustrates the Company's commitment

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<sup>602</sup> In 2008 the Young Directors project was staged with RSC alumni as no actors from the ensembles were free. In January 2009 actors from Neil Bartlett's *Romeo and Juliet* Company worked with the young directors.

<sup>603</sup> This workshop was offered again in 2010 and focused on epic scenes, rhetoric and chorus. Practitioners involved were Bennet Brandreth, Alison Bomber, Stephen Kemble, Charlie Hughes-D'Eath, Lyn Darnley and Struan Leslie.

<sup>604</sup> RSC web page publicising *The RSC Shakespeare: The Complete Works, Edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen*. Macmillan 2007. <http://www.rscshakespeare.co.uk/about.html>

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

to Shakespeare studies, thereby fulfilling section II (2) of the RSC *Royal Charter*, which states a commitment:

To conserve, advance and disseminate Shakespearean drama literature and knowledge both in Our United Kingdom and throughout the world.<sup>606</sup>

It also furthers greater interaction and collaboration between the RSC and academic institutions. An example of this collaboration is the 2006 University of Michigan Residency.

In October 2006 the RSC visited the University of Michigan for its third residency, which consisted of the Orange Company repertoire.<sup>607</sup> The residency provided a comprehensive Education package and Artist Development training for artists connected with the University's Musical Society. Other participants included MFA and undergraduate students, local professionals, Wayne State and East Michigan University students and community, youth and teachers' groups Voice, Text and Movement sessions were led by Lyn Darnley and Anna Morrissey and actors were also involved in the community and education work. The residency allowed students and local professionals to learn from exposure to specific rehearsal room techniques and to widen their experience of the productions they attended. It also gave RSC actors and practitioners the opportunity to refresh and extend teaching methodologies by working with different the groups with a variety of approaches, needs and objectives. This residency at Ann Arbor concluded the five-year relationship that had been initiated by Clare Venables during her time as Director of Education at the RSC.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Conformed Copy of *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, II.(2), p.2.

<sup>607</sup> The three productions that played in Michigan were *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*.

<sup>608</sup> Virginia Grainger managed the RSC Education Programme in Ann Arbor and Education Practitioner and Assistant Director Gemma Fairlie provided the Education sessions. Gemma Fairlie was also the Assistant Director on *King Lear* and *The Seagull* in 2007. Earlier residencies had been in 2001 (*Henry VI parts 1, 2 and 3* and *Richard III*) and in 2003 with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Coriolanus*.

## **A Drive to Achieve More Verse Work in 2006/2007**

During 2006 and 2007 meetings were held between directors Michael Boyd, Gregory Doran and the Casting and Voice Departments in order to discuss the ongoing need to further the work on verse. Attempts were made to put in place scheduled classes throughout the rehearsal process that would guarantee more work on verse as an ensemble and not just in solo classes. The benefits of actors working together are significant. Group work:

- helps actors to *hear* language and understand how words and rhythms impact upon the listener
- develops the level of *listening* between characters
- works to develop the ‘common voice’ of the Company
- allows the Company to explore, equally and together, the muscularity of the language
- avoids a superficial approach to the text that can result from actors working for the correct literal meaning and takes the language to a deeper, more visceral level
- develops a sense of ensemble as the most experienced actors work alongside those with little experience.<sup>609</sup>

Because of the difficulties encountered in delivering training to actors on shorter contracts I asked the Artistic Planning Group to consider a week long, Summer Academy Project. This would not attempt to replicate Declan Donnellan’s Academy of 2002 and would not necessarily be attached to a full-scale production but be used to integrate new graduates from the drama schools into the Company and prepare them for work on a classic text, in collaboration with an interested outside body such as CAPITAL.<sup>610</sup> The proposal stated:

- The project should be directed by an experienced director but could offer a training place for a young director, a young composer and young designer.
- A new piece of writing could be commissioned for the project.

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<sup>609</sup> In 2008 weekly sessions were scheduled after the initial two-week training period. They ran for six to eight weeks of the rehearsal period depending on the period of rehearsal.

<sup>610</sup> Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning (CAPITAL) is an RSC/Warwick University partnership funded by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Details of the project can be found in Appendix 7.(4).



- The actors need not only be new graduates but could include experienced actors who need a greater challenge. The age and experience range could be wide.
- There is a need from the industry for young and developing actors of all ages to be offered more training in verse and text. A short Summer Academy aimed at the right group of actors could offer an insight into classic theatre. Targeting talented actors who are not naturally attracted to long term theatre contracts could introduce them to the benefits of working in an ensemble.<sup>611</sup>

Although the Summer Academy proposal was endorsed by the Casting Department it was rejected by the Artistic Planning Group because some members of the group felt it would be associated with the Academy run by Declan Donnellan. Nevertheless it produced a positive outcome by raising the need for greater preparation and the Artistic Planning Group subsequently agreed to offer the pre-rehearsal training to every company in 2007, regardless of the length of rehearsal and to add training to the solo productions and tours. In 2008 a three week long version of the proposed Summer Academy project was realised as a development of the Conference of Drama Schools workshops and called the Language Intensive Workshop. Details appear later in this chapter.

### **The Poetry Project**

A number of solutions to the ongoing issue of training in verse and text for young actors were suggested and it was finally agreed to introduce Poetry Projects for each ensemble in 2007.

The aims of the Poetry Project were to offer young and developing actors an opportunity to explore verse and language in a safe and supportive environment and to work towards a small-scale performance. Where possible, experienced actors would work alongside younger, less experienced ones, providing both support and example of best practice.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Lyn Darnley, proposal to Artistic Planning Group: *The Case for an Academy*, 2006.

<sup>612</sup> The brief for 'The Poetry Project', January 2007 stated: 'Each company within the Ensemble would be offered the opportunity to participate providing the rehearsal and playing schedules allow sufficient time for the project. Performance gives the work a focus and provides the need for in depth work. The project will follow a loose structure that will help the actor develop a closer relationship with language and the power of words, and includes working on a variety of verse and prose styles that address the questions that usually concern actors, including rhythm, imagery and metaphor, the sound value of vowels and consonants, alliteration, antithesis and structure. Each company will be informed of the project and inclusion will be on a voluntary basis. A maximum of 6 actors will be included in the project at any one time. A minimum of 10 sessions will be offered during the project but there is no maximum number. Sessions may be solo or group. The work will include lyric and narrative verse; political speeches, prose, reported speech and soliloquy. The way that these forms

Actors were credited for their time but not paid additionally. Although the project was agreed by Michael Boyd in 2006, the *King Lear* ensemble in 2007 was the first company to introduce this. The outcomes of the 2007 project appear later in this chapter.

Discussions about the needs of actors resulting from changes in the training establishments continued to take place throughout 2006. Meetings between the directors, producers and Voice Department focused on the need to create time for more 'play and exploration' of language. In August 2006 I attended the American Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference in Chicago and participated in a panel on 'Shakespeare in the Academies.'<sup>613</sup> The concerns of American directors and academics about the loss of oral culture and the need for student actors to develop a relish of language reflected the concerns voiced within the RSC and those of drama school voice teachers in the United Kingdom.

The Casting Department had become an active participant in the drive to generate language skills in actors they wished to cast, some of whom had little or no training. Discussions in 2006 produced three objectives which were explored in 2007:

1. Allocating additional time in the schedule for regular language sessions for the actors throughout their contracts.
2. Developing a programme of work which would alert young actors to the power and possibilities of the sound and imagery of language.
3. Finding ways to feed into the training of teachers of voice and text and young directors who work in the drama schools so that they were able to influence young actors in training.

The ongoing issue of additional time in the schedule once again proved difficult because of the pressure of rehearsals. Important work with voice teachers did not happen until April 2009 when 20 teachers attended an RSC/CDS workshop in Stratford and in-house training sessions in 2010

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occur in classic text will be explored. The Performance will consist of a themed reading (30-45 min.) and will be staged to a non-paying audience. The rehearsals will form part of the project.' In later years the project had to be adapted to the schedules and in 2009 most of the 10 volunteers were experienced verse speakers.

<sup>613</sup> 'Starting With The Words', an article written by Lyn Darnley in response to the ATHE Conference appears in the Appendix. It was published in the VASTA journal, *Voice and Gender, Voice and Speech*, p.88, 2007, published by Voice And Speech Trainers Association, Inc. (VASTA).

included freelance voice coaches who supported the Text, Voice and Artist Development Departments in a variety of ways. CDS workshops and the Poetry Project successfully met the second objective. The work with Birkbeck College and the Voice Placement partially met the third objective, though further new initiatives were needed. Ironically the most difficult ambition to achieve was the first, which was the only wholly in-house objective.

### **John Barton Public Workshops**

Four free public master classes were held in London on 12, 19 and 26 of November and 3 December 2006 and were aimed at members of the profession. Barton worked on sonnets as he felt that they encompass many of the challenges faced by actors. The audience was targeted through the RSC website, leafleting the National Studio and the Young Vic Theatre and by contacting Drama Schools and RSC alumni. The three-hour, Sunday evening workshops were held in The Venue in Leicester Square. All 300 available seats were fully booked and there was a waiting list.<sup>614</sup> The ADP had the sessions filmed for archival purposes and in order to make them available to professional actors and students through the internet. (At this time the RSC began seriously to investigate the role of the website for educational and audience-building potential.) RSC alumni actors participated and where possible the actors were contracted for all four sessions. Ian McKellen and Timothy West performed a scene from *Henry IV Part II* (Silence and Shallow) in the second workshop. Barton focused on the significance of the names in the scene and how they shaped and built the energy by creating a springboard for new information from Shallow. Other esteemed visiting professionals included Janet Suzman, Prunella Scales, Ian Richardson and Jane Lapotaire.

After the second session questions were offered from the audience allowing the guest actors to give anecdotal evidence and advice, which was appreciated by the many student actors in the audience. The project fulfilled the RSC commitment to sharing expertise and connecting with the broader

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<sup>614</sup> This Artist Development project was developed in conjunction with the London office and co-ordinated by Corinne Beaver. As well as reaching professionals and alumni it also created an excellent opportunity for more of the London office staff to be involved. Members of London Operations and the Literary Department attended the sessions and helped in their organisation.

British theatre community. Actors felt they not only learned from working with Barton, but also from watching others work. Ariyon Bakare commented that he found working with John Barton completely liberating and that he gained great confidence from Barton's positive approach. Although it was not possible to get direct written feedback from the audience, anecdotal feedback was very positive and all four sessions were oversubscribed, indicating the level of interest.<sup>615</sup> In June 2007 a weekend of workshops by Cicely Berry and John Barton was hosted by the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) for students and professional Scottish actors. It provided an opportunity to connect with the Scottish National Theatre and continued the relationship with the RSAMD. After these workshops the Academy's Principal wrote expressing his gratitude for:

...the inspiration and sheer pleasure we have all experienced over the past two days in the company of two remarkable people. Students and staff, as well as our friends and colleagues in the Scottish profession, have gained hugely from this brief encounter.<sup>616</sup>

The hope was to develop the London sessions further by offering a similar programme of work led by Cicely Berry. Unfortunately due to an injury in December 2006 Cicely Berry's mobility was limited but she managed to visit Scotland to deliver the workshops mentioned above. During her incapacity she continued to lobby for more time to be devoted to the development of language work and full company verse sessions.

### **Other Significant Initiatives Language Intensive Poetry Workshop**

It had been agreed in Artistic Planning meetings in 2007 that an intensive verse and language workshop for four actors should go ahead. (This workshop grew out of the proposal for a Summer Academy.) Actors were selected by audition from 66 students who attended the CDS workshops in 2007/08, and in August 2008 4 actors were engaged for three weeks, during which time they worked intensively on verse including Shakespeare, the Metaphysical Poets, the Romantics, Victorians and Contemporary poets. The workshop culminated in a small-scale performance

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<sup>615</sup> Ill health prevented John Barton from running a similar series of workshops in 2007 and 2008 but he gave a public workshop with Patrick Stewart in the Courtyard Theatre on 2 November, 2008 to an audience of 400 drama students from schools in Oxford, Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff and members of the public.

<sup>616</sup> Hugh Hodgart in an email to Lyn Darnley on 17 June, 2007.

of a verse programme in which the newly graduated actors were exposed to a multiplicity of poets and styles which revealed the power of poetry and its associations with classic text. As well as extending the language skills of the actors the workshop actively researched new ways of teaching language and rhetoric, looking at movement and music as ways of releasing rhythms. The group had classes during the mornings and rehearsed during the afternoons. The project was led by Alison Bomber and supported by Cicely Berry, Lyn Darnley and Lucy Cullingford. It culminated in two performances in the Courtyard Theatre and performances in the Shakespeare Hospice, in the Courtyard Theatre Foyer and the RSC Chapel Lane offices.

### **Brett Goldin Bursary**

An unexpected development of the *CWF* was the establishment of a bursary, set up after the tragic death of actor Brett Goldin only days before the Baxter Theatre Company of Cape Town was due to arrive in Stratford with its production of *Hamlet*. The bursary was set up in his memory and is awarded to South African actors under the age of 30. It allows award-winners to spend a month in Stratford experiencing the work of the Company and exploring the speaking of classic text. The teaching programme is designed and co-ordinated by the ADP and the fund, sponsored by individual donors, some of whom are actors, is used for accommodation, travel, theatre visits and subsistence. A contribution was made by the Artist Development Fund for the year 2007 in order to launch the bursary.<sup>617</sup> (In 2008 it was decided to offer the bursary biennially to two actors, rather than annually to one in order for winners to have companionship during their time in Stratford.)

In June 2007 Omphile Molusi, the first recipient of the Brett Goldin Bursary, spent a month in Stratford-upon-Avon. He had auditioned in Johannesburg where he had studied at the Market Theatre and worked as an actor and writer. During his time with the RSC he saw all the in-house productions, sat in on rehearsals and technical rehearsals, joined Education workshops, took classes with members of the Text and Voice department and with John Barton and Cicely Berry; attended workshops on rhetoric from

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<sup>617</sup> In 2009 the RSC donated R75,000 to the Brett Goldin Bursary Fund from the box office profits of *The Tempest*.

Bennet Brandreth and joined students at the Shakespeare Centre for Text workshops from Lyn Darnley and Jane Lapotaire. Theatre excursions to the Globe and the Royal Court were organised as well as visits to the Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, and London offices and the Oxford Playhouse. In his final week with the Company he performed his one-man show *Itoseng*<sup>618</sup> in the Swan Theatre. He had previously performed the play at the Grahamstown Festival and the Market Theatre in South Africa. Gregory Doran offered him some direction and he was given full stage management support. Students from Stratford College drama department were invited to the performance, which was also open to members of the organisation. Sustained applause indicated that Omphile Molusi's skilled performance was well received. As a result of this performance he was invited to appear at the Edinburgh Festival in July and August 2008 (where he was awarded a Fringe First) and later transferred to the Soho Theatre, London, and the Everyman Palace Theatre in Cork, Ireland and Upstairs at Chicago Shakespeare Theater<sup>619</sup>. He and the two 2008 winners, Thami Mbongo and Nick Pauling, were cast members in the 2009 Baxter Theatre/RSC production of *The Tempest*<sup>620</sup> and played leading roles in the Young Persons' Shakespeare (YPS) version of the play that toured England alongside the full production. The cast of *The Tempest* also included a number of Brett Goldin Bursary finalists. The training programme and information about the 2008 winners of the bursary appear in Appendix 7.(9).<sup>621</sup> Photographs and programme details appear in Appendix 7 Additional Material (b).

The Bursary demonstrates the RSC's commitment to actor-development beyond the British Isles and meets the *Royal Charter's* aim that Shakespearean performance is encouraged and fostered. Contact with

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<sup>618</sup> Playscript Series No. 4: *Itoseng* and *For the Right Reasons*, Cape Town, Junkets Publisher, 2008. *Itoseng* was recorded for the BBC World Service in 2009 and in 2010 toured to Chicago.

<sup>619</sup> *Itoseng* by Omphile Molusi played in Chicago in 2010.

<sup>620</sup> *The Tempest* was directed by Janice Honeyman and Prospero was played by Sir Anthony Sher. The production was given full ADP support. Lyn Darnley worked with the Company in Cape Town throughout the rehearsal period and Gregory Doran gave two workshops on text to the full Company. The production played at the Baxter for a month in January 2009 and then transferred to Stratford for a month before touring the UK.

<sup>621</sup> In 2011 Thato Maraka and Josette Eales became the fourth and fifth winners and in 2012 Tim Redpath and Nkosinathi Gaaf were awarded the Bursary.

actors from other cultures also enriches the life and work of the wider Company.

### **Training Achievements in 2006/7**

In 2006/7 the *CWF* meant that the training reached many more artists than in 2004 and 2005. The programming of the *CWF* and the limitations on space meant that the learning was often less formal and linear and more experiential. The focus of the work broadened with the relationship with Birkbeck College MFA in Theatre Directing, professional community workshops and the extension of the programme to the visiting companies participating in the *CWF*. The *CWF* Drama School project led to an important collaboration with the Conference of Drama Schools.

There were many positive responses from artists who experienced the training and it was possible to observe development in the actors in the *Histories* ensemble and those who returned for subsequent contracts. Undoubtedly the presence of the *CWF* enriched the educational environment of the RSC and the experience of the audience, both directly and indirectly. It also unified the wider company and concretised the spirit of ensemble.

The first two years under review entailed themed programmes performed by one ensemble of mainly British actors. The focus was of necessity, contained and insular. In contrast the Complete Works Festival provided the opportunity to widen the concept of ensemble to include three separate companies within the *CWF*. This was a major shift which was to shape future thinking.

The next chapter looks at directions in which the work could move forward, building on what has been achieved and pushing existing boundaries.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Achievements, Challenges and Moving Forward

At a Planning Meeting on 12 May 2003, Michael Boyd spoke about considering, 'How we make the time that actors spend at the RSC, a time when you really do grow.' Boyd continued: 'Successful periods in the RSC have always coincided with periods of actor development, which have allowed the company and artists to go further than they could go in a smaller company, or with shorter contracts as part of a truly sustained collective.'<sup>622</sup>

This study set out to test the claim that the RSC provides 'an expert training environment for its actors, directors and theatre artists'<sup>623</sup> with specific focus on actor training during the years 2003/4–2006/7 and to consider the educational, cultural and historical precedents and pressures which brought about changes in the delivery of training. It also aimed to observe the way in which the Company works to connect more fully to the theatrical community (specifically the training sector) in order to affect the industry with Boyd's vision of an ensemble ethic of continual training for all artists in the theatre. Consideration has been given to the development of actors in the context of changes in the wider profession. A further aim has been to assess to what degree the requirements of the *Royal Shakespeare Company Royal Charter* and the *1996 Arts Council Policy for Drama* have been met. The final ambition was to create an appendix to serve as an archival record of the work of Boyd's Artist Development Programme (ADP).

In the process of reviewing training at the RSC and determining to what degree Boyd's vision has been achieved, it became evident that, after the formation of the RSC and the awarding of the *Royal Charter*, Hall, Nunn, Noble, Berry and Barton all made significant contributions to training within the Company. In reviewing the Artist Development Programme from its inception to the end of the *Complete Works Festival (CWF)*, there is concrete

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<sup>622</sup> Michael Boyd speaking at a review of the Declan Donnellan RSC Academy, Earlham Street, London, 12 May, 2003.

<sup>623</sup> RSC web page, Home page: [www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk), 18 November, 2005.



evidence that historically the RSC has created an environment in which artists can grow, and that under Boyd's leadership the programme of training intensified and became more structured. It is also apparent that some problems have continued to limit the extent and efficacy of the training. These difficulties are related to busy schedules that restrict post-rehearsal training and a lack of adequate spaces in which to offer development sessions. Both factors worsened after the closure of two theatres for redevelopment and did not lessen after re-opening due to performance pressures on artists and the need to generate more income.

### **Director Involvement**

It became obvious that in order to respond to the productions, artist development had to emanate from and to support each individual director's vision. In 2003/4 the training was devised without consultation with all the directors. This changed in 2005 and currently rehearsal training is dependent on the involvement and goodwill of each director, who has to give up rehearsal time in order to allow regular pre-rehearsal vocal and physical sessions, workshops and talks. Some directors use the ADP to provide exciting and innovative work that complements the process; others, even those who support the principles of training, consider it an imposition and would rather spend the time rehearsing.

A strength of the programme is that work ranges from the conventional to the extraordinary.<sup>624</sup> Occasionally directors requested that programmes began after press night, not during rehearsals, because of time restraints but this decreased the impact of core language work and physical skills upon productions. In recent years some productions have added a pre-rehearsal workshop week and this has allowed greater focus on training and development.<sup>625</sup> Ideally, directors new to the RSC, should be fully informed about the Company's commitment to training prior to beginning work and should agree to support it. There is greater clarity of information given to

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<sup>624</sup> Training for the April 2007 production of *Macbeth* included an exorcist, a brain surgeon, a Roy Hart Theatre voice trainer and a class in Roth movement as well as core training in voice, verse and physical skills.

<sup>625</sup> In 2012 Iqbal Khan had a workshop week in March for his production of *Much Ado About Nothing* which did not begin rehearsals until May. This allowed for intensive work on language and movement and exploration of the concept of the production. Lucy Bailey's 2013 production of *A Winter's Tale* has a scheduled pre-rehearsal training week before rehearsals start in December, 2012.

directors now than ever before.<sup>626</sup>

### **In-house Training**

While the Text and Voice Department provides the majority of text teaching, the work is also undertaken by directors. An unavoidable fracture in the powerful in-house resource provided by the Senior Advisory Director John Barton and Voice Director Cicely Berry occurred when, in recent years, both suffered periods of ill health. The need to encourage other 'in-house' and associate directors and practitioners to provide teaching and coaching has been acknowledged. Most directors are inherently coaches though not all are happy to conduct formal classes. In 2008 it was decided that a Text Manifesto would help to focus text training. This was debated over a number of meetings between Michael Boyd, Gregory Doran, John Barton, Cicely Berry, Lyn Darnley and Alison Bomber. The principles were eventually agreed upon in November 2008 and include the right to be free to 'play within fully explored verse structures' and 'to recognise that the voice is the most physically intimate of human activities and that the whole body needs to be prepared and free to perform.' It also considers specifics of text such as antithesis, rhetoric and consideration of the shape of the line. The manifesto appears in Appendix 8.(1).

Gregory Doran is an example of a director who is a natural and gifted teacher who regularly provides detailed verse and language training for his own companies as well as contributing to the ADP training for ensembles. He is respected by actors because his training and experience as an actor and his directorial ability give him insight into both the actor's perspective and the world of the play. Since 2004 he has been involved in working with CDS workshops for actors, teachers and student directors. As the newly appointed Artistic Director it is likely his personal involvement in teaching will give added weight and importance to the training programme and reinforce its place at the heart of the company.

It has been important to build a pool of professionals with sympathetic practices, who are able to make classical theatre meaningful for contemporary audiences and who, in Boyd's words, make theatre where 'the

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<sup>626</sup> From 2009 each associate director was given specific time with their voice coach for in-depth discussion and practical examples of how to work together in order to establish best practice.

past speaks to the present'.<sup>627</sup> Visiting directors and Associate Artists, including Declan Donnellan, Patrick Stewart and Janet Suzman are among those who occasionally provide verse and text training and so pass their skills onto younger actors.<sup>628</sup>

### **The Pattern of Delivery**

The review shows that there was constant change to the pattern of delivery in response to production needs. Only the programme of 2005 repeated the shape of the previous year. In 2006 and 2007 the pattern of the programme was determined by the *Complete Works Festival (CWF)* and in 2008 and 2009 the structure of the ensemble changed yet again.<sup>629</sup>

It was important that as well as core work a certain amount of self selection was offered and that actors were allowed some choice in their preferred method of training.<sup>630</sup> It became evident that when actors felt a need for specific training and were inspired by workshops, they volunteered.<sup>631</sup> It was also acknowledged that the role of leading actors was fundamental in creating a culture of ongoing-training in the ensembles.

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<sup>627</sup> Michael Boyd, ensemble meeting, Clapham Rehearsal Rooms, 18 November, 2009.

<sup>628</sup> The Placement programme in Voice and the later in Movement has also added to the pool of practitioners who work regularly with the company. Alison Bomber, Charmian Gradwell, Charlie Hughes-Daeth and Michael Corbidge became full time Voice practitioners for sustained periods of time and Anna Morrissey and Lucy Cullingford have been contracted as freelance Movement practitioners on various projects. These practitioners work not only on productions but for the Events, Education and Development Departments.

<sup>629</sup> In January 2008 the Green Company consisting of 25 actors rehearsed two productions with two directors. Connall Morrison directed *The Taming of the Shrew* and Tim Carroll directed *The Merchant of Venice*. Both directors had their own ideas for training and the time available was split equally between them. Tim Carroll used his allocated time on verse work taught by an American teacher Louis Scheeder whereas Connall Morrison requested a variety of physical, mask, commedia dell'arte, rhetoric and verse workshops. Core work in Voice, Movement and Verse continued well into rehearsals. In March Gregory Doran's Blue Company began rehearsing a revival of his 2005 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Union Chapel in Islington. The Blue Company training was centred on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although they went on to rehearse *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost* in Stratford. The training included workshops in singing, puppetry, verse, rhetoric, mask, voice and movement, and strongly supported the rehearsal work. Gregory Doran gave workshops in verse and rhythm. A lack of space at the Union Chapel in Islington meant that during the initial period of training the entire group worked together as there was no opportunity to split into smaller groups. This created a strong communal atmosphere. The programmes for both the Green and the Blue training programmes appear in the appendix for Chapter 7. In 2009 the second long ensemble began work on a two-and-a-half-year contract working on a variety of productions including two new Russian plays.

<sup>630</sup> As well as the self-selection options in phase 2 training, a voluntary programme of physical work was offered in 2005 and 2006, and again in 2010.

<sup>631</sup> In March, 2007 out of a possible 25 members of the *Coriolanus* Company 17 attended optional John Barton workshops and a Lazzi workshop conducted by Mitch Mitchelson.

When observing examples of openness and willingness to train, other actors were encouraged to follow suit.

### **Ongoing Challenges**

It became evident with the introduction of *Winter Season* training in 2005 that it was easier to deliver a coherent training programme to an ensemble with a single director. When two or more directors were involved with one ensemble, working in different styles, there was a risk of dissipated focus and confusion. Positively, however, this provided variety and created debate. It became apparent that a fixed system of Artist Development was neither practical nor appropriate and a flexible approach that responded to varying rehearsal, production and ensemble needs was preferable.<sup>632</sup>

No programme of development will ever inspire all ensemble members because artists learn when they are ready to do so and usually at apposite times in their careers. A degree of resistance was found in most ensembles. In spite of this the Company strove to make the ADP as accessible and consistent, yet varied, as possible.

### **Space**

The importance of space for developing a dynamic and consistent training programme has been emphasised. Appropriate studio accommodation near the theatre is essential and the lack of adequate space is currently a considerable obstacle<sup>633</sup> making it easier to deliver training in the Clapham rehearsal rooms than it is in Stratford.<sup>634</sup> The restricted training

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<sup>632</sup> There are an increasing number of joint ventures between the RSC and other companies. In 2008 there were projects with The Baxter Theatre from Cape Town and Kneehigh Theatre. Training for these required an individual approach as actors do not share common training or even a cultural background with the Company and their needs are both diverse and specific.

<sup>633</sup> In Stratford Artist Development sometimes requires more than one space simultaneously. A workshop may be running alongside individual sessions such as massage, voice, Alexander or Feldenkrais. Workshops often run alongside other work. During rehearsal there is only one priority use space available in Arden Street. The loss of useful spaces in the RST such as the Dress Circle Bar, Balcony Bar, Swan Reading Room and Ashcroft Room created even greater pressure and the plans for the new RST only include The Ashcroft Room, a small voice studio and smaller space for massage, physiotherapy sessions and work on Alexander Technique or Feldenkrais. There will also be exhibition spaces and other communal space that will be useful.

<sup>634</sup> Clapham Rehearsal Rooms have a voice room, which is large enough for John Barton or Cicely Berry's small group sessions, small movement classes, Feldenkrais classes, small group voice work, verse sessions and understudy work. This room also has bookshelves and storage and is used by Casting and Music on a regular basis when not in use. ADP also has access to a small but useful massage space. This space is also used for dialect and voice work when necessary. It is possible to book the rehearsal spaces when necessary for large workshop sessions. There are sometimes as many

facilities in the new theatre limit the work and a bid has been made for ADP accommodation in The Other Place once it is restored in what is now the Courtyard Theatre. It is likely that shared space will be allocated to departments involved in all aspects of production and Artist Development including Text and Voice<sup>635</sup>, Movement, Music and creative research and development projects undertaken by David Farr's Studio. See Appendix 8.(2). Permission to re-create a studio theatre within the Courtyard Theatre was granted in September 2012.

### **Time**

The lack of time in which to fully realise Boyd's vision has been a re-occurring theme throughout this review. It would be wise to learn from history and address this issue. Evidence exists of similar problems encountered by Saint-Denis' Studio:

The extremely heavy 1964 season forced the Studio into a very difficult position. Because of the frantic pressure of work and the general lack of time, it was practically impossible to plan any co-ordinated work or to consolidate the substantial gains we had made with the Company during 1963.<sup>636</sup>

The ADP could be in danger of a similar fate unless time restraints are resolved and scheduling takes account of the needs of the programme. Actors who are not given the time to resolve problems simply perpetuate bad habits, turning positive benefits of regular and repeated performance into negative reinforcement.

Scheduling issues have been expanded upon in this study but the limitations they placed on the delivery of the ADP continued in spite of efforts to resolve them. Problems were exacerbated by the need to balance the vision for artist development with production needs and box office revenue.

Most importantly, not enough time could be dedicated to reviewing the work. Without adequate reflection and consideration training cannot be properly processed by actors. Reviewing the programme is equally important but detailed de-briefing by directors and practitioners only

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as three voice sessions happening simultaneously as well as dialect calls, so when costume fittings are not taking place it is necessary to use the fitting rooms. Equivalent Stratford provision is needed.

<sup>635</sup> In 2008 the Voice Department became the Text and Voice Department as the title better represented the work of the department.

<sup>636</sup> Sandy Black, *Royal Shakespeare Company, Studio Report, May 1964-March 1965*, 4 March, 1965, Shakespeare Centre, RSC Archive, Maurice Daniels Collection.

happened after the pilot programme meaning that valuable opportunities to assess the work were lost.

### **Consultation**

Although the Company was responsive to requests for revision and change there was an inevitable time-lag between discussion of changes and their implementation. Delays were inevitable, because as a large organisation, the interdependence of departments meant that in order to effect change a great number of subsequent negotiations were needed. (While informal discussions happen easily the formal structures of the Company can seem cumbersome and slow.) Further complications occurred because key decision-makers were often absent due to off-site work on productions, and cancelled meetings were a frequent occurrence.

Over-scheduling resulted in artists experiencing chronic tiredness and a number of ensembles expressed concerns about the effects of an excessive workload.<sup>637</sup> Again Saint-Denis' Studio had suffered similarly: 'Most people were so tired that we found that only about 30 minutes out of each hour could be used for concentrated work.'<sup>638</sup> Working artists to the point of exhaustion can only be counter-productive.

### **Communication**

Attempts at improving communication included altering the 2006 Casting Department's contract side-letter to more fully outline and update the Company's training ethos. Side-letters are now amended for each new ensemble. More frequent staff-meetings with the Artistic Director and Executive Director were held in order to bring together the wider ensemble and disseminate information. The Actors' Forum meets regularly to discuss artists' issues and give a voice to the acting ensemble. Feedback on training often came via this route.<sup>639</sup> A private meeting with the Artistic Director was offered to each actor. Other communication routes for artists are via Company Managers, Producers and Stage Managers.

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<sup>637</sup> The 2006-2008 *Histories* schedule was extremely taxing and the 2009 long ensemble schedule placed a far heavier work-load on the half of the ensemble cast in *A Winter's Tale* and *Julius Caesar* than on those cast in *As You Like It* and *A Comedy of Errors*.

<sup>638</sup> John Hales report in *Royal Shakespeare Company, Studio Report, May 1964-March 1965*, 4 March, 1965, Shakespeare Centre, RSC Archive, Maurice Daniels Collection, p.28.

<sup>639</sup> The acting ensemble votes for Actors' Forum and Health and Safety representatives at the same time as voting for Equity Deputies. Voting happens within the first week of rehearsals.

## Achievements

Boyd's greatest achievement has been in maintaining an inclusive ensemble approach throughout a difficult period of change and upheaval that included renovation of the buildings and the promotion of festivals. In the years 2003 – 2012 he remained flexible and constantly reviewed the structure of the ensembles searching for a shape that worked best in a British theatre culture.

## Movement Department

In order to assess the work so far it is necessary to reflect on the key aims and objectives of the early years. Many of these aspirations were only achieved after 2006/7. Michael Boyd's long-term ambition that the RSC should not be just about 'beautiful voices' was realised when in January 2009 Struan Leslie joined the Company as Head of Movement and began to develop the new department while working with the 2009-2011 *New Ensemble*. Leslie expressed his ambitions for the new department in the programme for Michael Boyd's *As You Like It*:

The actor's body is as much a part of their communicating and performing tool kit as their voice. So we need to prepare it in the same way as we do the voice to speak. Like the mechanism or movement of a watch, every joint and muscle needs to be well connected and functioning in order that it runs smoothly and accurately. So with daily physical preparation we can ensure the efficiency and sustainability of the body and increase our knowledge of this machine. For this long ensemble that is essential. Two-and-a-half years of daily rehearsing and performance will tell in a weak or under-maintained body. So strength and structural fitness are part of that short but essential daily routine which we share with the voice department, emphasizing that voice and the body are inextricably linked.

Leslie referred to the power of movement to strengthen ensemble connections:

Also these actors need to make interpersonal physical connections that we take for granted – a kind of morphic resonance, the flocking or shoaling together like birds or fish. This needs to be developed with every new ensemble in order that they behave and move as if related like a family, a tribe or members of the same court, depending on the needs of any particular play.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> Struan Leslie, *As You Like It* programme, director Michael Boyd, 2009.

The establishment of the Movement Department realised a long-term aim to provide more balanced support to artists.<sup>641</sup> In the first year it was necessary for Leslie to carve out a role for the new department in a company with a strong history of in-house voice-work but more used to freelance movement direction and choreography than to a Movement Department delivering an ongoing programme of training. Challenges included resistance from a significant number of actors to the imposition of ongoing pre-rehearsal preparation in movement and voice, and a preference among some actors for 'game-style' warm-ups over detailed, repetitive 'class-based' physical training. Freelance movement directors and choreographers were engaged by directors and Leslie needed to support their work without limiting their creativity while helping actors to build strength and flexibility. Leslie continued to offer the Movement Placement position initiated by the Voice Department and contributed positively to the Education, Development, Events and Literary Departments and outreach programmes in the UK and USA.

Collaboration between the voice and movement departments developed over 2009 with Leslie contributing to CDS workshops for actors, directors and voice teachers and there is potential to build a powerful and more integrated physical skills training programme taught by two in-house departments that share common goals. Ultimately joint campaigns for adequate training time, spaces and reflection are more likely to prove successful.

### **Warm-ups and Pre-rehearsal Training**

Daily pre-performance Voice Warm-ups became the norm from 2003, promoting the belief that preparation is essential and valued. Movement pre-show warm-ups are not yet provided on a daily basis though dance captions are appointed they conduct pre-show stretch and rehearsal calls.

### **Connections with Training Institutions**

Other achievements have included developing important connections

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<sup>641</sup> Lucy Cullingford, who had been the second Movement Trainee, stayed on as Movement Practitioner until September 2009. She was Movement Director on *A Tender Thing* (written by Ben Power and directed by Helena Kaut-Howson). Anna Morrissey returned in 2009 as Movement Director on *The Grain Store* (written by Natal'ia Vorozhbit and directed by Michael Boyd) and *The Drunks* (written by Mikhail and Vyacheslav Durnenkov, and directed by Anthony Nielson).



with drama schools, which began when casting Declan Donnellan's 'Noble-inspired' Academy:

The casting process which established the first Academy established a positive connection with the drama colleges. This [connection] will be kept.<sup>642</sup>

Relationships with the Conference of Drama Schools<sup>643</sup> have been well established and strengthened over the years since 2003, delivering classical text programmes to all 22 members of the Conference of Drama Schools.<sup>644</sup> The Company's Assistant Director programme is successful and links with Birkbeck College's MFA in Directing have grown. In 2010 an annual RSC/CDS workshop programme for student directors was launched offering tours of workshops, tickets for a performance and contact with RSC directors, actors, producers, designers, members of technical departments as well as practical sessions on text, movement and directing for a thrust stage. Students were also able to observe an understudy run.

New links were established with the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT). Head of Casting Hannah Miller, Lyn Darnley and Struan Leslie served on NCDT accreditation panels for a number of drama schools.

A relationship was built with the National Student Drama Festival (NSDF) in 2009 and workshops were offered from 2010 in order to reach beyond the drama school sector to the universities and the wider student community.<sup>645</sup> In 2012 the ADP offered 13 free workshops to the International Student Drama Festival in Sheffield. Ten of which were text related and three were movement related. In April 2010-2012 the ADP supported the Actors' Centre's 'Acting the Classics' initiative by providing a day-long workshop for 20 actors under the age of 35. See Appendix 8.(3).

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<sup>642</sup> Michael Boyd, Academy Debrief, Earlham Street, London, 12 May, 2003.

<sup>643</sup> In 2011 it was decided to amalgamate the Conference of Drama Schools and National Council for Drama Training under the name Drama UK.

<sup>644</sup> Feedback suggests students attending these workshops benefit from the work on classic texts but also leave with a positive impression of the RSC. An anonymous feedback form in October 2012, stated, 'The RSC came across as a caring organisation with dedicated and passionate teachers.'

<sup>645</sup> The ADP will offer workshops to The National Student Drama Festival (NSDF) from 2010. The NSDF offers students from universities and drama schools the opportunity to participate in a week-long celebration of theatre, live performance, discussion and special events in Scarborough. It also runs the NSDF and Methuen Drama Emerging Artists' Competition at the Edinburgh Festival, which is supported by The Pleasance and Spotlight. Throughout the year it offers free workshops in direction, performance and technical skills at venues countrywide. See web page: <http://www.nsdf.org.uk/>.

The Actors' Centre project is supported by Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Peter Hall, Thelma Holt, Michael Billington, David Lan, Jonathan Kent, Nicholas Hytner and Michael Attenborough, proving that significant members of the profession are concerned about encouraging classical skills in young actors.

In September 2011 a conference focusing on training for classical text was held in Stratford and attended by 70 delegates from UK and international training institutions. Feedback suggested that teachers valued the level of debate and the need for continuing discussion and more collaboration between the professional and training institutions.<sup>646</sup> The conference also served to connect the Company with drama departments in more UK universities and develop a broader international theatre training net-work. A practical illustration of this is that two of the Universities represented at the conference (Texas State University and Nanyang Institute, Singapore) brought student groups to perform in *The Dell* in the summer of 2012.

Although it cannot be said categorically that attitudes to training in the wider theatre culture have been influenced by RSC initiatives, the training culture within the Company has increased and the RSC is now, undoubtedly, a more visible and pro-active training force within the industry.

### **Connections with the Academic Community**

As well as greater links with UK universities, workshops with international university groups at the Shakespeare Birthplace have continued, as have American residencies with the University of Michigan, Davidson College, and a residency with Ohio State University, which began in 2008. The Ohio residency is run by the RSC Education Department and aimed at teachers, but Senior Voice Coach Alison Bomber offered Artist Development work to teachers, undergraduate and postgraduate students in

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<sup>646</sup> Cicely Berry reported on the Classical Training Conference saying: 'We had a gathering of around 70 teachers from drama schools and university theatre departments: they came not only from the UK, but also from South Africa, Singapore, the US, Australia etc. – it was a truly global event. We had workshops/talks from Greg Doran, Benet Brandreth, among others, plus panel discussions with distinguished teachers and practitioners covering all aspects of text work in a truly in-depth way. It was a tremendously successful weekend, drawing people together from all over the globe, and giving them time and room to discuss issues that concern them.' Cicely Berry, *RSC Omnibus*, 21 September, 2011.

November 2009 and returned to Ohio State University in 2011 to direct a student production of *Othello*, thereby extending her own skills while enhancing those of students. New-work residencies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2010 and 2012 were focused on developing newly commissioned plays. The residency included actors from the RSC and Labyrinth Theatre, New York. Voice and Movement practitioners Lyn Darnley and Struan Leslie provided a full programme of student classes. Gregory Doran, Antony Sher, David Edgar and participating actors took part in university readings and discussions in 2010, while in 2012 Michael Boyd, Gregory Doran and poet James Fenton, participated in public events. The university's drama department provided students for the workshops and the Confucius Institute and Russian Department contributed to the development of the new plays by knowledge sharing. Plays developed in 2010 were *Written on the Heart* by David Edgar and *Cardenio* (re-imagined by Greg Doran) and *Boris Godunov* (by Pushkin and adapted by Adrian Mitchell) and *The Orphan of Zhao* (adapted by James Fenton) in 2012.

Academics from Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Royal Holloway and Warwick, Michigan and Columbia Universities have continued to contribute to ADP rehearsal-research and as part of study groups and events. Shakespearean academic and author, James Shapiro,<sup>647</sup> contributed to the long-ensemble of 2009-2011 in the rehearsal periods in January and November 2009 as a text consultant. He wrote of the benefits of academic and practical collaboration to scholars and his comments validate the *Royal Charter's* purpose to 'conserve, advance and disseminate Shakespearean drama literature and knowledge both in Our United Kingdom and throughout the world.'<sup>648</sup> Reflecting on a *King Lear* rehearsal, Shapiro states:

Watching Greg Hicks and the rest of the cast navigate the opening scenes of *Lear* under David Farr's quiet and good-humoured direction - going from text to exploring possible ways of handling the opening Act and culminating in a terrifying and brilliant go at the scene in which Goneril and Lear wildly confront each other - allowed me to understand, in a way that all the

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<sup>647</sup> James Shapiro is a professor at Columbia University, New York and author of *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare, Rival Playwrights: Shakespeare and the Jews* and was winner of the 2005 Theatre Book Prize and the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction 2006.

<sup>648</sup> *RSC Royal Charter*, II,(2). Conformed copy of Royal Charter as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively.

research for 1599<sup>649</sup> and other books could not, how the King's Men might have approached the same playscript 400 years ago, how Shakespeare's company moved from the first reading into discovering its secrets and challenges in rehearsal. I've taught *Lear* for over a quarter century, and have read pretty much everything intelligent that's been written about it, but I learned more from watching part of Friday's rehearsal than from any seminar discussion or seminal article. It was one of those 'so that's what it's really about' moments—one that disproves the arguments made by critics from Charles Lamb to Harold Bloom that *Lear* is more fully realized on the page than on the stage.

He writes of the value of watching the rehearsal process:

There's only so far reading Shakespeare scholarship can take you. I've probably gotten that far, or close to it. So the thrill of watching actors carrying me further than that is hard to describe. And the rewards of witnessing rehearsals, especially early ones, prove to be far greater than those of highly polished finished performances, for one of the things that I've learned from watching actors at work is that paid performances tend to be homogenized, if not pasteurized: some of the most exciting work takes place in rehearsal, and ends up being scaled back, or can never quite be recaptured.<sup>650</sup>

This response from Shapiro places value on rehearsal exploration beyond its prime objective and proves that interaction between academics, which has been fostered by the RSC throughout its history and increased by Boyd, is of benefit to both artists and scholars, and that such collaboration nurtures greater understanding between practitioners and theorists.

### **The RSC as a Learning Organisation**

Although the focus of the study is the ADP, it became evident that there are other ways in which the RSC offers training. The ADP is the major and most formal way of providing training for artists, but other departments within the Company provide valuable opportunities for training and development. Among these are the Education Department, which offers training to teachers and schools.<sup>651</sup> Since 2006 over 30 actors have participated in the Education Department's Postgraduate Certificate in

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<sup>649</sup> *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* by James Shapiro, London, Faber and Faber, 2005.

<sup>650</sup> James Shapiro in an email to Lyn Darnley, dated 30 November, 2009.

<sup>651</sup> The Youth Ensemble was an Education Department project with teenage school pupils, which was run in 2008 and 2009. Scholars worked with a professional director and members of the Text and Voice and Movement departments over a period of two weeks, culminating in a performance in the Courtyard Theatre. In 2008 they performed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in 2009 *A Winter's Tale*. Aileen Gonslaves, an ex assistant director and actor with the Company, directed both projects. She is the founder and creative director of C Company, a City of London based ensemble producing lunch time Shakespeare for City Workers. The Youth Ensemble was supported by a Text and Voice Coach, and a Movement Practitioner.

Teaching Shakespeare accredited by Warwick University, and many have gone on to work for the Department as freelance education practitioners after they leave, providing them with an additional means of creating income.

The Human Resources' Training Department offers courses in administrative skills but also oversees apprenticeships and internships for scholars and students, and co-ordinates an internal Learning Week. The Events and Exhibitions Department organises post-show talks with actors, directors and production practitioners, open days and events for amateur, family and other audience groups. The Production Department is responsible for the Assistant Director programme and for Cicely Berry's Young Directors' Workshop in collaboration with the ADP. The Design Department runs a successful Trainee Designer programme; Company Managers co-ordinate drama school Stage-Management Placements and the Literary Department nurtures the skills of emerging and established writers. Literary manager, Jeanie O'Hare, stated: 'Our long-term ambition is to generate plays which can earn a place in our repertoire and also earn a decent living for the writer. Writers are actively encouraged to plunder Shakespearean dramaturgy and to take a leading role within the contemporary Royal Shakespeare Company.'<sup>652</sup> Interaction between the ADP and these departments has been fostered and developed since 2003.

Wardrobe, Costume, Lighting, Design, Props, Paint-shop and Workshops have run apprenticeship, bursary and placement schemes. There is a need to develop further access for crafts people and technicians to share in the expertise offered by members of the technical and theatre craft departments. Short-term placements are currently being offered in the Marketing, Stage and Props Departments, and the Press Department runs

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<sup>652</sup> The full quotation by Jeanie O'Hare states: 'We initiate and nurture the work of writers who want to write epic plays, who are keen to re-establish the creative relationship between writer and actor, who want to devise new work, and spend time in the rehearsal room engaging with our classical productions. When we began we thought this would be a slow-burn project, but results are already emerging. Writers are desperate to flex their muscles and write for big stages. Our long-term ambition is to generate plays which can earn a place in our repertoire and also earn a decent living for the writer. Writers are actively encouraged to plunder Shakespearean dramaturgy and to take a leading role within the contemporary Royal Shakespeare Company.' RSC web page: [http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420\\_5736.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420_5736.aspx).

an Arts Journalist Bursary Scheme.<sup>653</sup> As part of a Human Resources initiative an informal 'shadowing' programme successfully operates between departments. An annual Learning Week focuses on skills sharing and formal workshops on a variety of subjects from Information Technology to relaxation strategies. Whenever possible ADP staff offer training sessions in voice, movement, text and rhetoric which are open to all members of the wider Company and used to develop communication, presentation and public speaking skills. The Music Department runs a Company Choir.

The very existence of the ensemble is perhaps the most powerful means of delivering informal training and with extended contracts the ensemble is at its most effective. There has been active encouragement to blur the divisions between the administrative and creative departments giving administrative staff a greater association with the work on stage.

The gains have been considerable: Company-wide focus on training has done much to create an open 'learning' mind-set among artists and employees in the wider Company complementing its core values of inquiry, ambition, engagement and collaboration. See Appendix 8.( 4).

### **A Unique British Theatre Training Programme**

The volume and variety of training is not available elsewhere in any theatre in the United Kingdom. Quality artist support exists in some British theatres: the National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe both have Voice Departments, although neither set out to train an ensemble but aim to support productions. The National Studio does excellent work and offers developmental opportunities to writers, directors and actors but it is not directly connected to an extended ensemble.

The only programme of any similarity is that offered by Stratford Ontario in Canada which operates a production support programme during the season and a Conservatoire Programme for a small selected group in their closed winter season. It, too, has placed verse and language at its

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<sup>653</sup> The Bursary is advertised on the RSC web page: 'For the fourth year running, we want to recruit a new band of up-coming news and features writers to our Arts Journalist Bursary scheme who can help us get into a more diverse range of media - whether print, broadcast or online. In return, we can offer a unique professional development opportunity by giving you special access to our work for a year. We'll pay your travel expenses, provide free tickets and also pair you up with a leading arts journalist as your personal mentor for the duration of the scheme.' RSC web page: Arts Journalist Bursary Scheme <http://www.rsc.org.uk/content/8337.aspx>

heart and given a considerable number of artists (including writers and directors) a deeper sense of those skills necessary for performing classical texts.

### **An Evolving Artist Development Programme**

The Artist Development Programme evolved considerably in the period under review: in 2003/04 the programme started formally with classes and workshops in the Core Ensemble rehearsal period. The pattern was repeated and the programme grew to include optional work in Stratford and limited training for the *Swan* and *Winter* ensembles in 2005. By 2006 full training support was given to the three ensembles and the creative power of the long ensemble was unleashed within the 2006 *Histories* company. The added dimension of the international mix generated by the *Complete Works Festival* produced informal learning through contact with other performance cultures.

Throughout the three years (and beyond), it became apparent that development was generated on a number of levels as linear and spiral opportunities were presented. The understudy system allowed specific skills to be gained and actors learned from each other, from directors and from exposure to repetitive and continuous performance, by participation in Education projects and Events workshops, and by interacting with audiences, students and external practitioners. Since 2004 the repertoire has included a Young Persons' Shakespeare project in conjunction with the Education Department. Actors are drawn from the main ensemble and in 2010 the production of *Hamlet* also served as an ADP project, with the generally less experienced actors being supported by dedicated voice and text coaching, and physical training.

### **Creative Projects and The Studio**

The ADP is rehearsal, artist-and practitioner-focused and is geared toward training artists rather than breaking creative performance boundaries. It could be argued that the vast majority of the work follows pre-existing methods of actor-training which could be accessed in drama institutions, actors' centres and on workshops and courses. What is unique in the United Kingdom is the ADP's professional rehearsal and production setting, the creative environment and the practical performance-linked objectives of the

programme. Rehearsals create a challenging environment in which training boundaries and new teaching methods are likely to be explored, rather than experimenting with new performance styles. The training is undertaken by already competent artists further developing their skills and is offered, free of charge, to members of a professional theatre company. Time spent training is added to rehearsal and performance time sheets. If training takes actors into overtime, they are paid additionally for undertaking the work.

It became clear that there were greater experimental and creative possibilities to explore beyond the remit of the ADP and consequently *Creative Projects* were introduced in 2008.<sup>654</sup> See Appendix 8.(5). The establishment of *Creative Projects* signalled a commitment to explore theatre styles outside those usually associated with the RSC. In 2009, in order to develop new work and create an environment of risk and experiment beyond that possible or desirable within the ADP, *Creative Projects* were renamed as *The Studio* and placed under the direction of Associate Director, David Farr.<sup>655</sup> Farr outlined his ambitions:

The RSC's "Creative Projects" arm is to be developed and redefined. We will be working closely with the Literary Department on a new "RSC Studio", inspired by the original Michel St [sic] Denis conception, dedicated to the research and development of work, giving ideas air to breathe and room to fail safely, exploring the potential of projects and pushing the boundaries of the form.

The Studio has three bases: Stratford, Newcastle and the rehearsal rooms in London. Farr intends to maintain the principles of ensemble and international enquiry, and says, 'We will be aiming to research and develop projects that stand a chance of becoming in some way part of the RSC repertoire.'<sup>656</sup> (The full document appears in Appendix 8.(6).)

The ADP and The Studio complement each other as they focus on different but connected elements of development. Farr said that he saw the difference between the ADP and the Studio being that the ADP's focus was the artist, whereas the focus of the Studio was the product, although the

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<sup>654</sup> Creative Projects were laboratory explorations of different performance styles which actors in the 2008 *The Merchant of Venice* (directed by Tim Carroll) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (directed by Connall Morrison) ensemble were assigned to as part of their contracts. These were co-ordinated initially by Associate Director Deborah Shaw and then by Producer Jeremy Adams.

<sup>655</sup> The first Studio projects began in April, 2010 and performances were held in September/October 2010.

<sup>656</sup> David Farr, 'The RSC Studio', a paper for the Artistic Planning Group, 20 May, 2009.



work would inevitably also develop the artist<sup>657</sup> and where possible Studio projects are supported by the ADP. Farr states that the Studio is inspired by Saint-Denis' concept, reinforcing the historic link with the 1960s. Associate Director, Roxana Silbert, whose remit is '[to work] with the Literary Department in commissioning plays, developing plays for production, directing plays and running seasons of new work',<sup>658</sup> has worked with The Studio toward the generation of new writing workshops and readings. Projects are undertaken by members of the ensemble as well as freelance artists. Ensemble members engaged in Studio projects are currently experiencing the same time and space restraints encountered by the ADP.

### **Ongoing Projects**

#### **Supporting Amateur Theatre**

The RSC has traditionally connected with the amateur community through first the Education programme, and more latterly, the Events and Exhibitions Departments.

In 2008 it became apparent that greater skills-sharing between professional and amateur companies was both desirable and feasible when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England commissioned a paper 'Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England' which highlighted the changing relationship between the amateur and professional sectors and the role that technology will play in disseminating knowledge.

The relationship between the amateur and professional sectors is of vital importance and the two sectors are mutually supportive. Groups spend £125m employing professional artists, either on a long term or ad hoc basis. Professional artists benefit not only in terms of employment but also developing their creative practice, experiencing new ways of working and deepening their understanding of audience development.<sup>659</sup>

The RSC has much to offer the voluntary sector and has begun to widen the ADP to include training for actors and practitioners to promote higher levels of skill in the amateur sector. The ADP first offered classic text

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<sup>657</sup> David Farr, discussion with Lyn Darnley, Courtyard Theatre, Stratford, 15 July, 2009.

<sup>658</sup> Interview with Roxana Silbert, RSC web page, 'Why does the RSC have a new writing programme?' <http://www.rsc.org.uk/content/9075.aspx>

<sup>659</sup> *Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England*, prepared for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England, June, 2008, p.11. <http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/VoluntaryArtsreport.pdf>

workshops for amateurs in 2009 when an initial two-day text workshop was offered in collaboration with the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain. It was conducted by text and voice coaches and assistant directors for 25 adult members of the Guild (see Appendix 8.(7) for the programme). From 2010 the RSC Events Department offered a programme in collaboration with the Voluntary Arts Network (VAN) which provided workshops for members of the amateur sector, delivered by the ADP and other departments including Marketing and Press.

The Company has developed stronger links with local amateur companies through the The Bear Pit (the umbrella organisation for Stratford-upon-Avon voluntary arts). For a positive response to workshops conducted by Michael Corbidge indicating the value of such involvement, see Appendix 8.(8).

Since 2006 The Dell outdoor performance space has offered amateur, youth and student groups the opportunity to perform in Stratford during the summer. All groups were offered voice or movement pre-performance sessions.<sup>660</sup> The ADP has plans to establish refresher courses for drama school graduates who are currently involved in amateur companies with the aim of supporting trained actors within the amateur sector to work with others in their locality and in that way to nurture the skills of amateurs.

### **World Shakespeare Festival 2012**

The festival, part of the Cultural Olympiad, led by the RSC will extend the remit of the ADP by reaching local and international companies, youth groups, and amateurs:

The World Shakespeare Festival is an unprecedented celebration of Shakespeare in performance, led by the Royal Shakespeare Company. It celebrates Shakespeare as international property and the British as an international people and will focus on the relationship between the many communities of the world's diaspora represented in the UK. [...] It will be in three main hubs; Stratford-upon-Avon, Newcastle and London, where it will culminate just before the Games. Major UK partners already include the National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe.<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> As well as youth theatre groups such as Belt Up, Leamington Spa Theatre, Stagecoach, Full Tilt, Playbox Theatre and the Brit School, university groups from Warwick, Exeter and Oxford Universities regularly perform in The Dell.

<sup>661</sup> 'World Shakespeare Festival', <http://www.london2012.com/get-involved/cultural-olympiad/projects/world-shakespeare-festival.php>

The Festival will target the wider voluntary arts audience that the RSC strives to reach:

...UK-wide participatory projects for amateur and community groups, young people and schools, which will develop from late this year [2009], with regional celebrations leading to performances in Stratford in spring-summer 2012.<sup>662</sup>

Deborah Shaw, who also produced the 2006/7 *CWF*, articulated the aims of the project as being:

To promote learning and skills exchanges through an egalitarian partnership between non-professional and professional performing arts practitioners in the UK.<sup>663</sup>

Shaw states that 'The RSC hopes to lead the way for professional arts organisations in connecting and creating with the UK's non-professional performing-arts community; to feed and be fed by the talent, skills and energy of this vibrant, massive sector.'<sup>664</sup> The project is in collaboration with the Voluntary Arts Network and reflects the thinking expressed in the DCMS *Taking Part* Survey and the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills' (DIUS) *Learning Revolution*.<sup>665</sup>

There is no precedent for this project, which demonstrates a ground breaking level of commitment from a major arts organisation to engage with voluntary arts groups over a sustained period.<sup>666</sup>

As part of the Festival, *Open Stages* offers amateur companies the chance to engage in training in order to raise the standards of their productions, culminating in local competitions. Winners will perform in the Courtyard Theatre in July 2012. There will also be a production of *Pericles*, performed by amateurs, directed by two Assistant Directors and with training provided by voice coach Michael Corbidge. Boyd commented: 'The RSC wants to lead a step change in the relationship with the amateur sector; to celebrate its rich traditions, open our doors to its work and collaborate with partners

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<sup>662</sup> Preston Witts, *Midweek Herald*, (published by *Stratford Herald*), 21 July, 2009.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>665</sup> Voluntary Arts Network: <http://www.voluntaryarts.org/>  
The DCMS *Taking Part* Survey and the DIUS *Learning Revolution*:  
[http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging\\_learners/informal\\_adult\\_learning/~media/publications/L/learning\\_revolution](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_learners/informal_adult_learning/~media/publications/L/learning_revolution)

<sup>666</sup> Deborah Shaw, 'World Shakespeare Festival Nationwide PRO/AM Project' Update, internal document, 4 August, 2009.

nationally to leave a significant legacy.<sup>667</sup>

The involvement of the Company in projects that promote community learning, the sharing of skills which work to create better connections between amateur and professional theatre makers suggests a serious and deep commitment to education and artist development in the broadest sense and to using the resources of the RSC for the benefit of the wider community. Shaw sees the legacy of the project being to 'Change perceptions of what constitutes informal learning.'<sup>668</sup> Engagement with the voluntary sector also satisfies the requirements of the *RSC Royal Charter, The Arts Council Policy for Drama 1996* as well as the *McMaster Report*, 2008, (described later in this chapter) and *The Arts Council Document, 2009*, and proves the RSC's commitment to take Shakespeare to wider audiences nationally and internationally, and extend the skill-base of artists and technicians whether they be professional or amateur.

### **McMaster and Hytner Reports**

Since beginning this research two significant documents have been published that validate the RSC's efforts to promote training. These are the McMaster Report (for the DCMS)<sup>669</sup> and Nicholas Hytner's contribution to The Government's Higher Education Debate.

### **Brian McMaster Report**

Culture Secretary James Purnell commissioned Sir Brian McMaster to write a report on excellence in the arts, for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

McMaster focuses on many of the aspects of Boyd's vision and states:

As well as developing the cultural education of young people and allowing them to reach their potential, cultural organisations need to embrace continuing professional development for their staff. A more strategic approach to mentoring and networking for all practitioners is required, with young practitioners given the opportunity to better experience the work of others and artists and practitioners able to continue to develop their practice throughout their careers.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> *RSC Artistic Director Michael Boyd*, <http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/projects/open-stages/>, 1 June 2012.

<sup>668</sup> Deborah Shaw, 'World Shakespeare Festival Nationwide PRO/AM Project' Update, internal document, 4 August, 2009.

<sup>669</sup> Full *McMaster Review: Supporting excellence in the Arts - from measurement to judgement* can be found on the DCMS website [http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/3577.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3577.aspx)

<sup>670</sup> *Supporting Excellence in the Arts, From Measurement to Judgement*, Sir Brian McMaster, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, January, 2008, p.7.

McMaster's review authenticates Boyd's vision of ongoing professional development and the creation of an artist development programme. It corroborates the projects discussed in this study: the Voice Placement, Movement Trainee, Assistant Directors' Programme and the support offered to the CDS, Birkbeck College MFA in Directing, Central School's MA in Voice Studies, Birmingham School of Acting's MA in Voice Practice. The Company also promotes internal staff development, shadowing of other departments and mentoring. There is significant movement of staff from one department to another suggesting that there are opportunities to develop interests and change career paths. McMaster recommended:

...that, since cultural organisations have a vested interest in and responsibility for supporting and developing talent, they should be providing free or discounted tickets to aspiring practitioners.<sup>671</sup>

The RSC currently fulfils all McMaster's recommendations including the offer of reduced price tickets for 16-25 year olds.<sup>672</sup>

I recommend that funding bodies, organisations and practitioners prioritise opportunities for continuing professional development throughout careers. I recommend that practitioners take responsibility for the cultural ecology and actively engage with the development of their peers and the next generation.<sup>673</sup>

McMaster's also urges international exchange:

...that the Arts Council, the British Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport work together to investigate and implement an international strategy that stimulates greater international exchange, brings the best of world culture here and takes the best of our culture to the world<sup>674</sup>.

The Brett Goldin Bursary for young South African artists and national and international university partnerships answer these requirements in a small way and there are plans for more similar intensive classical training programmes. In 2012 the ADP delivered 13 free workshops in text, voice and movement to the International Student Drama Festival in Sheffield, reaching some 400 students.

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<sup>671</sup> Sir Brian McMaster, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts, From Measurement to Judgement*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, January, 2008, p.7.

<sup>672</sup> In 2007 over 32,000 children benefited from the RSC £10 school ticket offer and 6,000 16-25 year olds bought £5 tickets as part of the scheme to encourage a new audience.

<sup>673</sup> Sir Brian McMaster, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts, From Measurement to Judgement*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, January, 2008, p.8.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

## Nicholas Hytner Report

Nicholas Hytner expressed his opinions on training for the theatre in an article for the Government's review of Higher Education.<sup>675</sup> His report was interpreted by some in the press<sup>676</sup> as criticism of current drama training but in it he states clearly that the schools system no longer offers students grounding in the rudiments of text and that funding has driven the drama schools to seek degree status resulting in the need for more theoretical components. He stressed the need for practical skills and a solid arts and literary education for classic theatre. In spite of this many in the drama schools felt censured and some lecturers in the universities also responded negatively.<sup>677</sup>

Hytner states:

The most important element of an actor's training is vocational craft training: voice, movement and acting technique. This process is slow and repetitious and has therefore occupied the greater part of the traditional syllabus in drama schools.

Under current arrangements for the funding of students in higher education, it has been necessary for drama schools to adopt degree status. They since seem to have been under pressure to reduce this practical training in order to accommodate a larger element of academic training.

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<sup>675</sup> Nicholas Hytner, *A Contribution To The Government's HE Debate*, Dept. for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009.

<sup>676</sup> Alexandra Frean, Education Editor, 'Nicholas Hytner Attacks Drama Schools Producing Theorists', 'Nicholas Hytner, the director of the National Theatre, said the failure to concentrate on the craft of acting would leave actors unequipped to rise to the challenges of the stage', *The Times*, 16 February, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5741733.ece>.

<sup>677</sup> Dr. Joshua Abrams, Roehampton University, London responded, 'In many ways, what is being articulated here is a somewhat dated view of "actor training". For the National and some repertory houses, or the work of Robert Wilson, perhaps some think that an actor is best off as an open vessel, trained, but not a "Renaissance man". [...] Contemporary performance is a much richer world and one that depends on actors who think not merely as trained vocational performing monkeys, but whose knowledge of the "total art of the theatre" does not produce simply theatre under a stale model of directorial control. Without such multiple focuses and varied knowledges, where does Hytner think that work he himself has produced, such as that of *Shunt*, *DV8*, *Complicite*, as well as other powerful work will continue to come from? Certainly there is a difference between Drama School and University, but the idea of writing one off as not a valid way of producing practitioners for the theatre is short-sighted. Few universities seek (or claim) to produce actors ready to tread the boards in the West End, but certainly there continues to be a system in place of fringe houses and smaller venues where "apprenticeships" can be continued, not to mention an incredible number of postgraduate training courses. There's a difference between the kind of training that Hytner and Simkins seem to lament and an education, but if the real desire is to find somewhere to lay blame for actors who "can't be heard beyond Row C", perhaps it's in the fact that cinematic acting doesn't demand it and that is where many students are aiming. If we want to maintain an active theatre culture, we need to instill love of the theatre. [...] So while training is necessary and crucial, the fuller picture requires a fuller investment in the broader boundaries of the theatre. The work will be that much richer.'  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/users/jabrams>, 17 February, 2009.

As Hytner points out, there is now less time available for training in basic physical and vocal skills and the subjects that support classical training such as sight reading, differing styles of poetry and prose and their delivery and the study of modern verse drama have also diminished. The teaching of literature and the structures of language, grammar and Standard English, thorough practical voice and text classes, have also suffered. Hytner mentions the worth of the specifics of language for actors, if taught practically, but questions their value if only approached theoretically.

In principle, a fully rounded education, particularly in literature and the related arts, is of crucial benefit to a young actor, but there is no doubt that acting requires a practical training as detailed and rigorous as a training in design and the plastic arts. ...Young actors are not as well equipped as they were twenty years ago to rise to the challenges of the stage, particularly of the classical stage.<sup>678</sup>

This final statement supports the need for professional programmes like the ADP and the Birmingham Conservatoire in Stratford Ontario. While this situation prevails and student actors lack opportunities to gain necessary skills, the work of the ADP and other professional development programmes is crucial in order to supplement and increase the practice and knowledge of actors, particularly in the area of language and textual skills, rhetoric, the politics of language, Greek and Roman mythology and the Bible as literature. Hytner speaks from his experience as a director when he says:

Actors need a deep familiarity with a wide range of literary texts, which they can speak with ease and understanding. They need to know the basics of how language works, a familiarity with grammar and rhetoric.

He identifies problems resulting from changes in State education.

Drama schools could once depend on students arriving with this basic familiarity. Now, primary and secondary teaching in literacy, language and literature often leaves a gap that must be filled during a young actor's training. Classical acting, in particular, is undermined by a lack of familiarity with the context from which classical theatre springs, and with the mechanics of the language in which it is written.<sup>679</sup>

Hytner expresses the same concerns as many directors and voice practitioners in the UK, the USA and elsewhere. (A possible solution is to

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<sup>678</sup> Nicholas Hytner, *A Contribution To The Government's HE Debate*, Dept. for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009, p 1. [www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/HE-Nicholas-Hytner.doc](http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/HE-Nicholas-Hytner.doc)

<sup>679</sup> Ibid. p 2.

assess whether A Level Drama and B.Tech Performing Arts courses properly prepare students for a career in theatre.) He deliberated the ideal training path and advocated a combination of university and practical drama training as a possible solution.

I am drawn to a contradictory conclusion. On the one hand, there is a need to recognise that practical training in the actor's craft should not be undermined by the academic requirements of a degree course. On the other hand, young actors who arrive at drama school straight from secondary education in the state sector are often ill equipped to understand fully the context from which drama emerges.<sup>680</sup>

It is not unexpected that he, as a graduate of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, values an academic education alongside practical vocational training.

It is noticeable that young actors who have undergone a university education before they embark on drama school training are very often better equipped to deal with complex texts than those who have not. These actors are usually those who have parents who can support them through post-graduate training.<sup>681</sup>

Hytner acknowledges the way in which financial background divides those who can afford postgraduate training from those who cannot. Actors arrive at the RSC from a variety of training backgrounds and bring to the ensemble their own unique talents and experience. Experience of the ADP to date suggests it is important to balance all artists' skills with new experiences, both the intellectual and practical aspects of performance should be nurtured.

I should stress that many young actors thrive without university education, and that for many it would be a distraction. But for those who would benefit from both a degree course and vocational training, the current obligation to choose between the two is intolerable.<sup>682</sup>

Hytner suggests the possibility of training that begins in a university and becomes vocational at postgraduate level,<sup>683</sup> but the costs involved mean it

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> Nicholas Hytner, *A Contribution To The Government's HE Debate*, Dept. for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009, pp.2-3. <http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/he-debate.html>

<sup>683</sup> 'There may be a case for a funded higher education (on the current model) that starts in a university and continues with vocational training. Is there a pattern in the way that some undergraduates can, after two years, opt to change subject for a further two years? I recommend that consideration be given to a way of incorporating vocational training into a higher education that starts in university, particularly to the arts practitioners who would benefit from further academic training after secondary school before they embark on practical training.' (Hytner Report, *A Contribution To The Government's HE Debate*, Dept. for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009)



is not a choice open to many. His report therefore validates the work of the RSC's ADP, which allows university-educated actors to undergo practical training and drama school graduates to develop an intellectual perspective on texts. Untrained actors are presented with opportunities to experience practical and intellectual training.

The ADP provides vocational postgraduate support for actors regardless of their previous training and education. Not all actors who wish to work for the RSC can be contracted but the Company employs between 100 and 150 artists each year and therefore reaches some of those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to train. He also gives credibility to the work of the Education and Events Department and the RSC/CDS workshop programme when he states:

... the demands of the curriculum in secondary education leave less time for extra-curricular cultural activity. There are fewer visits to the National Theatre by state schools than there were ten years ago, although ticket prices for school groups have not increased in real terms. The result is that young acting students arrive at drama school often with little or no experience of live theatre. (And there must be concern too about the narrowing of the potential audience of the future.)<sup>684</sup>

Students who attend RSC/CDS workshops are also provided with free theatre tickets for a Shakespeare production and encouraged to see more theatre as a way of developing enjoyment and understanding as well as their skills.

Both reports by Hytner and McMaster express concerns about training and the need for ongoing development for actors. This confirms the apposite nature of Boyd's initiatives. Another document that examines the current situation and gives authority to the ADP is the Arts Council's *Theatre Assessment 2009*, which states:

There was a strong consensus of opinion that there had been a major growth in support for young artists, including writers, directors and designers. As a result we noted the emergence of an increasingly diverse range of practitioners.

Key developments included:

- mentoring opportunities for young directors
- fewer associate directors but more opportunities for assistant directors<sup>685</sup>

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<http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/he-debate.html>

<sup>684</sup> Nicholas Hytner, *A Contribution To The Government's HE Debate*, Dept. for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009.

<sup>685</sup> *Theatre Assessment 2009*, The Arts Council, 3.3.7 'Supporting the work: young/emerging artists', p.50.

The paper raises the concern that the focus on young artists means that mid-career artists are given fewer opportunities for growth.<sup>686</sup> The RSC's programme supports the development of all artists regardless of age and experience and the Voice Placement generally supports actors over 35 who have re-trained as teachers.<sup>687</sup>

The assessment applauds the 'investment in the Cultural Leadership Programme' (CLP)<sup>688</sup> which has been promoted within the Company and members of staff from many departments have undertaken the programme including Casting, Events, Education, Press, Marketing, Production, Audience Care, Text, Voice and Artist Development, Wardrobe, Costume, Producers, London Operations and Properties.

The growth of digital information is mentioned in the paper<sup>689</sup> and the RSC's web pages<sup>690</sup> have become a powerful way of reaching audiences, student actors and academics. Digital learning through actors' blogs, production-related interviews and insight articles are an exciting and burgeoning way of knowledge sharing. Blogs and interviews have proved invaluable in my research as they offer actors the opportunity to reflect and review their experience and process.

### **Forging New Links**

Since 2009 new links have been forged with the wider student body through the National Student Drama Festival (NSDF). Discussions with the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) about actor and director training and with the Actors' Centre text training are ongoing. Other plans include further development of the RSC's Racial Equality Action Plan (REAP)<sup>691</sup>,

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<sup>686</sup> *Theatre Assessment 2009*, The Arts Council, 3.3.8 'Supporting the work: mid career/emerged artists' p.50.

<sup>687</sup> In 2011 an award for young British actors, similar to the Brett Goldin Bursary will be offered.

<sup>688</sup> 'The Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) is a Government-funded investment in excellence in leadership across the creative and cultural industries. By supporting an ambitious range of activities and opportunities, the programme aims to nurture and develop world class, dynamic and diverse leaders for the 21st Century.' <http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/default.aspx>

<sup>689</sup> *Theatre Assessment 2009*, The Arts Council, 3.3.8 'Supporting the work: mid career/emerged artists', p.30.

<sup>690</sup> RSC web pages: <http://www.rsc.org.uk/home/default.aspx>

<sup>691</sup> Identity Drama School has been provided with three full-day workshops in classic text annually. Each workshop involved three or four RSC practitioners. A British Chinese actor, Wing Hong Li, was awarded an RSC Bursary for fees for the Birmingham School of Acting MA in Professional Voice Practice, for the year 2009/2010. A second RSC bursary has been secured for 2010/2011. Support in the form of classic text workshops has also been given to three RSC alumni to develop significant projects. These include workshops for ex RSC Assistant Director Rae McKen's classic

which has included support for the UK's only black drama school (Identity Drama School) from 2008-2011. The theatre training environment has changed since 2003 with training institutions now urging greater involvement with the profession. This is, I believe, due at least in part to the RSC's recent active engagement with the schools. Similarly the voluntary sector has expressed a desire for greater engagement with professional bodies. The RSC Open Stages programme supported by the ADP has given thousands of amateur artists opportunities for training and support.

The ADP began during the first year of Michael Boyd's directorship and has continued to mutate and grow in successive years. Changes have been responsive to the schedule, the redevelopment programme, events in the wider industry and have been driven by the Company's artistic vision. The future of the ADP is intrinsically linked to whatever form the RSC performance programme takes. Boyd's desire for ensemble training has been the central focus for the work but, when Gregory Doran succeeds him in September 2012, it is possible that he may have a very different vision for the Company. Doran, a gifted teacher and director with an actor's experience and sensibility, believes in empowering artists with skills and knowledge, but he may wish to structure the work differently. Whatever the future shape of the ADP, its longevity will be the ultimate proof of its success.

### **A Personal Perspective**

Research on this study required me to widen my perspective from what is a practical micro-teaching, problem-solving focus to a broader, longer-term perspective that considered not just the immediate issues, but future outcomes. I needed to draw on my experience as a teacher in drama schools, and to make greater links between the cumulative effects of different skills upon an individual actor's development. I was able to capitalise on my multidisciplinary skills background in a professional environment which values specialism.

There are complexities involved in assessing recent history and I became aware of how a different conclusion might be reached retrospectively and with greater knowledge of the ADP's future trajectory. A

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text project, actor Emilyne Mondo's London poetry project entitled '*I think I'm here Darling*' and workshops for performance poets' group Apples and Snakes.

particular difficulty was the unpredictability of the programme during the research period and the organisational flux within the RSC. It was, paradoxically, a particularly creative period in which new initiatives were continually presented that needed to be responded to. This resulted in the generation of additional projects that could not be ignored, thereby extending the range of my enquiry. Containing the focus of the research became a challenge.

I came to understand both the value and capriciousness of anecdotal evidence and how deeply subjective artists are about their process. In order to distinguish between reliable and unreliable comments, I questioned actors at varying intervals, which allowed them to be more objective and consider their comments in the light of new experiences. This was useful, particularly with responses to the public understudy runs, as some actors revised their initially negative reaction in the light of the success of the performances. The study demonstrated how easy it would be to make erroneous conclusions based on an individual's immediate response to the work, and because of this I attempted to speak to a wide cross-section of artists in order to gain a balanced viewpoint. Some artists were wary of being identified or perceived as being critical and this presented limitations when wishing to cite individuals. My professional position requires confidentiality, which needs must be honoured. It was also apparent that actors who had negative student experiences were more likely to be resistant to the ADP than those who enjoyed their training.

I gained deeper understanding of Hall's training initiative and of Saint-Denis's Studio. In particular I learned that it was subject to the same frustrations as Boyd's and that not all actors embraced it. This was contrary to the popular perception.

The research required me to identify institutionalised operational systems that inhibited the ADP's work. Once problems were identified I was able to attempt to effect change. I gained a greater sense of departmental inter-dependence and of the scale of difficulty involved in changing behaviour and learning cultures for artists. In this way I believe that by engaging with the study and undertaking the level of review and analysis it required, my work within the RSC was enhanced, although I was not able to create all the

changes that I wanted. Inevitably this led to a degree of frustration. Nevertheless, my greater awareness of the complexities of achieving change has proved to be invaluable. An unexpected outcome of the study was the growing awareness that actively researching a project as it develops can inform, shape and augment it.

As a practitioner, I found the act of documenting activities that are experiential and ephemeral (and can therefore be considered mystical) both challenging and rewarding; and I believe that creating a document that focuses on a single project over a limited but significant period of time has provided future researchers with a useful body of work.

## **Conclusion**

### **Realised Ambitions**

Although it is difficult to make concrete evaluations of recent history in that it is inevitable that with more distanced hindsight opinion may alter to some degree, it is possible to gauge success, at least in part, by measuring ambition against achievement. Boyd had committed to the following aims:

- Creating an ensemble ethos
- Offering longer contracts that allowed development to be a realistic objective
- Establishing a programme that offered career-long learning for artists
- Reaching theatre artists other than actors
- Reaching out to drama students and the wider professional community
- Changing the perception of ensemble training within the theatre culture.

Using these aims as a measure of achievement it can be attested that:

- An ensemble ethos has been promoted in each company regardless of the length of the contract
- Longer contracts have been secured allowing more time for development and greater depth of engagement while providing job security

- The Artist Development Programme has been established for over eight years and has extended its remit from training the core ensemble to include all ensembles within the RSC
- Through the involvement of a number of departments, development for directors, voice and movement coaches, writers, arts journalists and the whole spectrum of technical and administrative theatre skills has grown over the last eight years
- The ADP reached members of the RSC administration, the wider profession, international artists, RSC alumni, drama students, university students and amateur actors
- An ensemble ethic was promoted within the wider RSC and greater connections made between creative and administrative departments.

The RSC's reputation as an ensemble with a training ethos has increased and the profession is more aware of its ambitions. As a leading national company it is likely to have had an influence on the wider theatre culture. In 2012 the RSC is enjoying a popularity and success which is a far cry from the negative press it received at the time of Boyd's appointment. How much of that success is related to his belief that 'Successful periods in the RSC have always coincided with periods of actor development'<sup>692</sup> can only be speculated on but is unlikely to be mere coincidence and evidence exists that some influential critics believe in the efficacy of the ensemble and its ability to train. Dominic Cavendish interviewed Boyd in April 2009, six years after his appointment, and wrote:

It's a measure of how greatly Michael Boyd has transformed the Royal Shakespeare Company's fortunes since he took over as artistic director in April 2003 that it's only at the end of an hour's conversation, just as various assistants materialise to summon him back to rehearsals, that the question of the RSC's troubled past arises, almost as an afterthought. There was a time, in the chaotic, unhappy wake of Adrian Noble's abrupt departure in 2002, with commentators rushing to heap doubt on the company's survival chances, when 'the problem' of the RSC would have been the first, second and third item on the agenda. Nowadays, it's an empty formality to dredge up a question about his onerous inheritance.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>692</sup> Michael Boyd speaking at a review of the Declan Donnellan RSC Academy in Earlam Street on 12 May, 2003.

<sup>693</sup> Dominic Cavendish, 'Michael Boyd interview: transforming the RSC', *The Telegraph*, 21 April, 2009.

Michael Billington wrote of the 2009 ensemble's ability to progress the work of artists. In a critique of *The Grain Store* by Natal'ia Vorozhbit, Billington says the production 'demonstrates the growing power of the new RSC ensemble. Tunji Kasim and Samantha Young (Florizel and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*) impress as the young lovers.'<sup>694</sup> Their development since the first production of the season was obvious and acknowledgement of this progress from the press is clear evidence of the formal and spiral learning offered by an ensemble.

While it is not possible categorically to correlate success with the increased focus on training, it is possible to establish that the Company has achieved many of its goals to provide ensemble development. The study set out to investigate the validity of the Company's claim that:

The RSC also continues to be a superb training ground for the artistic and technical talents of British and international theatre.<sup>695</sup>

The review gives examples of training that substantiate this claim. Similarly it can be concluded that the RSC meets the demands of The Arts Council's *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* (1996) by attempting to increase the skills-base of the industry and investing in 'the artistic, craft, technical and administrative skills it requires'.<sup>696</sup> The Company extends its work beyond 'the public presentation of productions' and undertakes 'the development of new work which is a resource for the whole industry'; it creates 'opportunities for co-productions and also opportunities for training'; it, like the RNT, has an 'impressive history of attracting the best practitioners and of providing the environment in which their work can develop.'<sup>697</sup> Paragraph 41 states:

there is a very serious threat to the skills base of the industry. People of calibre are disinclined to remain within the theatre industry. It is, therefore, crucial that strategies are developed to facilitate: the training of new practitioners; mid-career bursaries; a stronger training infrastructure;<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> Michael Billington, critique on *The Grain Store*, *The Guardian*, 25 September, 2009.

<sup>695</sup> [www.rsc.org.uk/press/2774.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/2774.aspx) - 15k, also published on the web page of the Kennedy Center, Washington.

<sup>696</sup> The Arts Council of England, *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System*, 1996, paragraph 35, p.7.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.* p.10.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.* p.20.

There is irrefutable evidence in this study that the RSC has attracted high profile actors to the Company; supported the training of new practitioners; offered bursary and bursary-equivalent opportunities to artists at all stages of their careers and has done much since 2003/4 to build a stronger training infrastructure.

Although the programme is still in its relative infancy, there is sufficient evidence to state categorically that the RSC historically has succeeded in meeting the requirements of the *Royal Charter* by improving dramatic art in the United Kingdom and abroad by festivals, residencies, collaborations and bursaries as well as 'extending and refreshing the skills and experience of the Corporation's employees'<sup>699</sup> through the ADP, its understudy policy, touring, and other formal and informal training opportunities in a variety of departments.<sup>700</sup> In spite of a number of attempts, including the RSC Academy 2002, it has not established a permanent school of acting, although by the establishment of the Artist Development Programme it has provided a less conventional means by which it can offer career-related training and development to all actors and many other artists, whether they are new to the profession, mid-career or highly experienced. It can be argued that the ADP is a more appropriate and flexible model than a traditional school and is therefore a more suitable alternative. The ensemble model is able to adapt to the changing profile of the Company and respond to the varying needs of productions and the individual nature and dynamic of each ensemble. The ADP can work alongside and in collaboration with the RSC Studio, reach out to the training establishments through the CDS, NCDT and NSDF and work with the Events and Education Departments to support their work with schools, audiences and the amateur sector. The Literary, Education, Lighting, Design, Producers, Stage Management, Press, Music and Workshops are all departments that run schemes that allow artist and career development. It is possible to substantiate that the RSC has been able 'To advance and improve the dramatic art in Our United Kingdom and

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<sup>699</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2,II.(3).

<sup>700</sup> In the five years under Michael Boyd's leadership the Company has made advances in its journey towards becoming a successful learning organisation. A developing strength of the Company is the improved internal communication and greater interdependency of its operation.



throughout the world...’ through its festivals, bursaries, collaborations, partnerships, and student and professional outreach projects. The RSC has managed to keep abreast of pertinent pedagogic and governmental concerns and to provide practical support to the training institutions with the provision of workshops, interaction with theatre professionals and audience access and to quickly adapt in order to provide support for new initiatives such as the Voluntary Arts Initiative as part of the Cultural Olympiad in 2012.

In June 2012 Michael Boyd received a Knighthood for Services to Drama and Vikki Hayward was awarded a CBE. This is clear evidence of the success of their tenure and the public perception of their contribution to British theatre. The South Bank Show recorded a programme about the Company’s 2009 Russian productions and Melvyn Bragg asked Boyd ‘how far down the track’ he was to achieving the goals he had set for the RSC when he took over as Artistic Director. Boyd replied:

We’ve done some good work, that’s the most important thing. That’s the *most important* thing. We have done some things that have never been done before like the *Histories* – to be done by one company of actors all the way through; like doing all of Shakespeare’s plays in one year – most of them from abroad. I think we are taking our art and craft more seriously and I think that’s beginning to show: in terms of our practice – in terms of our skills base; the rigour of the way we go about things and we, as a main-stream arts establishment organisation are actually being quite revolutionary.<sup>701</sup>

Bragg ended the programme by saying that the RSC had been set up to develop untried new-writing alongside classical theatre: ‘It’s good to see that in 2009 this brave work is continuing, keeping this now well established British institution full of new life as it moves into the future.’<sup>702</sup>

It has not been possible to divorce the work of the ADP from the notion of ensemble as Boyd’s vision of one is fully dependent on the other. In a society that is, in Boyd’s words, ‘suffering from runaway individualism,

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<sup>701</sup> *The South Bank Show*, 28 December, 2009, ITV. The press release stated: ‘Bringing to life artistic director Michael Boyd’s bold vision for an ensemble company, a concept almost alien in today’s celebrity led climate; the South Bank Show goes backstage, revealing the everyday reality of one of the country’s biggest and most dynamic theatre companies. For the actors involved this means taking the brave step of signing up to a three year contract, agreeing to play a range of parts as and when they are needed across the programme.’

<http://www.itv.com/presscentre/southbankshow/wk52rsc/default.html>

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

cult of celebrity and a lack of a sense of cohesion socially<sup>703</sup> maintaining an ensemble ethic is going to be an ongoing challenge.

Sustaining a training ensemble is costly and Gregory Doran will be faced with ongoing funding issues. In 2011 the RSC America webpage described the RSC as having, 'resident acting companies – groups of twenty to forty actors working together on a variety of projects over a longer period of time than is customary for theater – sometimes up to two or three years.'<sup>704</sup> This description truthfully reflects the current ensemble structure and differs from Boyd's 2003 ambition for the gradual building of a semi-permanent ensemble. Just as Boyd experimented with a changing ensemble model, so Doran will have to explore his own ideas of company structure and ethos. Boyd's ensembles worked best when lead by a single director and less well when a number of directors were expected to work with an ensemble they had not cast. Doran may wish to avoid repetition of this occurrence.

The critic Michael Coveney acknowledged the success of Boyd's ensemble but also criticised his casting policy: 'His permanent ensemble is shaping up well, though there are too few outstanding actors...'<sup>705</sup> Doran's style of casting differs from Boyd's in that he tends to employ more actors with proven text experience, many of whom have worked with the company in the past. It is Doran who has been responsible for casting 'high profile' actors, such as Patrick Stewart, Judy Dench, David Tennant and Richard Wilson. This practice has proved popular with audiences and may lead to significant differences in his ensemble structure.

The ADP has already outlived the Saint-Denis' Studio but its future will have to be managed circumspectly, and its ambitions awarded value and significance if it is to flourish. The vision of Gregory Doran will be crucial. He a gifted teacher and has taken over much of John Barton's teaching load. His commitment to verse and text teaching and his interest in developing a new generation of classical actors suggests the ADP is in safe hands.

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> RSC America webpage: [www.rsc.org.uk/support-us/rsc-america/meet-the-ensemble.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/support-us/rsc-america/meet-the-ensemble.aspx) ,1 August 2012.

<sup>705</sup> Michael Coveney, 'The RSC at 50: The highs and lows of the world's greatest Shakespeare ensemble', *The Independent*, 15 April, 2011.

Although the current model of training at the RSC is still embryonic, and the challenge of creating a culture of continuing developmental training for artists is ongoing, it is my conclusion that, in the period under review Boyd at least partially succeeded in meeting the requirements of the RSC *Royal Charter* and the Arts Council's 1996 *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* through achieving his vision for the RSC to be a place where 'artists can learn and make theatre at the same time.'<sup>706</sup> Based on the positive response to the ADP by the majority of actors, I believe the Artist Development Programme provides a valid and suitable alternative to a formalised school or academy and meets the *Royal Charter's* requirement to provide 'teaching and training' and to 'advance and improve the dramatic art' in the United Kingdom and internationally.<sup>707</sup> My conclusion therefore is that the claim that 'The RSC [also] continues to be a superb training ground for the artistic [and technical] talents of British and international theatre,' is valid.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> University of Warwick press release on the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) grant for Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning (CAPITAL), £4.5 Million *Performance Partnership for Royal Shakespeare Company and University of Warwick*, 27 January, 2005. <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/news/RSCwarwick.htm>

<sup>707</sup> *Royal Charter of the Royal Shakespeare Company*, Conformed copy as amended by Orders of the Privy Council dated 11 October, 2000 and 6 March, 2007 respectively, p.2,II.(3).

<sup>708</sup> Published on the web page of the Kennedy Center, Washington: [http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=offsiteDetails&entity\\_id=5162&source\\_type=O](http://www.kennedy-center.org/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=offsiteDetails&entity_id=5162&source_type=O)

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