



Artistic Director Justin Audibert on *Hamlet*

Hamlet must be one of the most performed plays in the world. Rarely a season goes by without a theatre somewhere in the UK announcing a new production. Some avid theatregoers pride themselves on the number of *Hamlets* they have 'collected' over time. But for our Artistic Director Justin Audibert, who is currently in rehearsals for his production of the play (the first ever produced here at CFT, can you believe it?) this is not a surprise.

'*Hamlet* is a piece that can be infinitely reinterpreted, and it feels like a play that talks particularly to each moment that you're living through as a person, and that the world at large is going through. And I would say that is down to the sheer breadth of it thematically and all of the things that are in it: ranging from how you deal with grief, to what is the nature of being and the purpose of existence and life. Is there anything above or below us? These are such enormous questions and we as people just want to come back to exploring them over and over again.

'Olivier Award-winner Giles Terera is tackling the part of Shakespeare's tragic hero in this production and when you embark on a new version of *Hamlet*, so much of it is about the particular actor that is going to take on the lead role. It's like the decathlon of acting. It stretches any actor because of the range of emotional tribulation he goes through. And just when you think 'what more could there be', he's got to finish the play with the most almighty sword fight! So, it really is the Mount Olympus of acting challenges. No pressure, Giles!'



'The action that takes place in this play feels to me like it should be a thriller. When I imagine being in the audience, you should be sitting there with a knot in your stomach that just keeps getting tighter and tighter. It never lulls; in every scene the events just crank up and crank up. And that's part of the appeal of doing the show in the Minerva; you are seeing the whites of the actors' eyes and you're feeling how they're feeling in that exact moment. That to me is incredibly exciting.

'When I think about directing Shakespeare, I'm really thinking about a 14-year-old who has never seen any Shakespeare before. If you'd never been to the theatre before, at whatever age, and came across a really good production of *Hamlet*, I think it would blow your mind. There is something that is so powerful, spooky, supernatural, divine, whatever you want to call it – I think that could be really special.'



How have you approached the themes in the play and your interpretation of them?

I have been fascinated by all the spying and surveillance that occurs in *Hamlet*. Polonius sends someone to spy on his son whilst at university in France. Claudius and Polonius spy on Hamlet and Ophelia having a private conversation in the palace corridors. Polonius spies on Hamlet and Gertrude talking in her Chamber. This led me to ask what kind of society would it be with everyone keeping tabs on each other? And then from that question I built the world of the play. Clearly it's a paranoid, uneasy. Closed world. Why is everyone spying on each other? There must be a lack of trust and a fear of revolt.

What context are you representing/focussing on with your version of *Hamlet*?

We have not set the play in a specific time or location but all the physical rules of the world are the same as in late 16th century England when Shakespeare was writing the play so people fight with swords, there are no electrical devices and so on. We have modelled our Court on the court of Elizabeth I - which by now was a very suspicious, uncertain place with lots of factions jostling for power and influence and a sense of uncertainty hanging over it because of an unclear plan of succession. We have in the set design and colour palette been influenced by Scandinavian materials – natural wood and fabric – and by a dark colour palette of grey and black. Our chequered floor pattern is taken from the pattern at Helsingor Castle where the play is set. There is the continual sound of the sea in our production because Helsingor Castle sits on a promontory looking out to sea and there is lots of threat of invasion in the play so we wanted to bring that to life.