

Willow Globe 2018 Session/pre-show report

TROYLUS & CRESSIDA

CAST:

ULYSSES.....	Bart van der Schaaf
CRESSIDA.....	Samara McLaren
ACHILLES.....	Jonathan Oliver
HECTOR.....	Madeleine Hyland
TROYLUS.....	Jack Whitam
DIOMEDES.....	Jethro Skinner
AENEAS.....	Helen Millar
PANDARUS/ONE IN SUMPTOUS ARMOUR...	Scott Brooksbank
AGAMEMNON.....	Nell Mooney
HELEN / THERSITES.....	Denise Stephenson
PARIS / MENELAUS.....	Blake Kubena
NESTOR.....	Tony Taylor
HELENUS/ALEXANDER/TRUMPETER.....	Felicity Davidson
PATROCLUS.....	Elena Michielin
PRIAM / ANTENOR.....	Robyn Rainsford
CASSANDRA.....	Rhys Meredith
PROLOGUE / AJAX.....	Lanna Joffrey
BOY/HELEN'S SERVANT/MARGARELON.....	Millie Binks
ANDROMACHE.....	Suzanne Ahmet
CALCHAS.....	Phil Bowen
Musicians, Myrmidons.....	EVERYONE

We didn't manage to blog any of the sessions during the intensive sessions so if anyone has anything they remember about them that seems useful, please do add things. A fun thing was that the availability of the squad led the process somewhat, often resulting in us having a Tony Day or a Denise Day or Nell evening for example, and tracing their particular journey through the play. Because of the time pressure, it wasn't always an everyone-in-the-room situation in terms of the floor work, there was usually a line-running-on-the-balcony contingent too. A thousand thanks to Denise for hosting us in your beautiful home. But for the most part it was back to basics, verse work, new thoughts, active thinking/barking (TC's four questions, When did you think of that (just now), Is it a good thing to say? (yes), Are those two things different? (yes), and What else could you have called him/her (eg, I could have called him Dad, but I'm going to call him Royal Priam...) repeating the line with whatever you've been barked on with actual thinking. We also started exploring ways in which to give the Trojans and the Greeks a different, possibly opposing rule (on Wednesday evening the Greeks were only allowed to move in straight lines on a grid, the Trojans only in curves/circles, which was very fruitful and played beautifully, and then more subtle, the Greeks worshipped the Earth and the Trojans worshipped the Sky. We also tried different ways of fighting, and one physical gesture (given by Jeremy Mortimer on the night he was there) seemed to be the most useful. We found it quite tough to figure out what Ajax beating Thersites

should look like though - in the end the most obvious solution was reached in the nick of time, but it was quite a journey!

We began work in Wales in the drawing room at 10am, we had a warm up that began with humming and thinking a speech, then soft palate closed, then singing. The we experimented with pulling the sound out of different parts of our body, then in pairs out of each other's body, then everyone out of everyone, though I realised that I also included the room and that muddled the exercise a bit, as you can't pull sound out of an object in the way you can out of a human, but I suppose I meant find a way of connecting your sound with the room and explore the room too. Total chaos but fun, would like to keep exploring in this direction more at some point...thanks to everyone for going with me on something so unstructured!

We discussed The Plan which at that point was for each actor depending on whether they were a 1 or a 2, to talk to the audience before the show and get a pair of things - (number 1's) or a visual change that we would be able to make quickly (number 2's) and that we would pick one of each. And also one physical gesture to be fighting would be asked for. So we decided that for the morning run in the house/grounds, the Greeks would value/prefer/worship the cold, and the Trojans, the hot. Visually, the Greeks would all be tucked in and buttoned up as much as possible, and the Trojans would always carry an item of clothing or have something draped on them. The physical fighting gesture was a sort of hand-on-the-nose wiggle. I also challenged the group to get armour when they needed it, and to pile in as chorus/extra people populating the scene. Jono showed us the trumpet that was the love-token he wooed his wife with and has been in his loft ever since, trumpetting trials were trialled, with Dissy as the clear winner, for which her prize was to do all the trumpetting and sound cues in the play which she executed with most excellent puff.

Sue and Phil arrived and we began in the drawing room for the Prologue (Ajax choosing an ash shovel from the fireplace for a weapon/armour) and 1.1, then Cressida and Alexander moved to the window to look out at the soldiers returning from the battlefield on the giant hill facing us. Pandarus surprised them through the window. The soldiers all went past the window and Cressida joined her uncle on the grass (with her cat), as did the audience. Agamemnon led his gang to the nearest patch of shade, some distance away from the house, looking up woefully at the indestructible stones of Troy/Doldowlod. She made me fan her with her script, which meant I was still fanning her on 'broad and powerful fan' which was one of those things that was ridiculously pleasing and I still have no idea whether she had planned ahead when she heard the task or whether it was a happy accident.

It began to get hot. Really really hot. In quite literally the heat of the moment, and you know, Art, hats and sunglasses began to get misplaced. In the midst of leading us in this play rife with warnings about the dangers of adrenaline and pride, of course I went and I let my own get in the way and wilfully led the Trojans up the stone steps amongst the roses, because imprinting an image of Priam in a hierarchy became suddenly so much more important than keeping an eye on whether we were all going to start burning our

corneas and getting sunstroke (and also wilfully ignoring the fact that Achilles had already established that area as his tent). For this I can only apologise and hope to do much better next time. The play is more important than the game. But keeping the players well and healthy is more important than the play. I'm wondering if we should maybe appoint a health and safety/care of the team person per performance? Because adrenaline does make us forget - or me at least, and after so much time in the heat with people valiantly playing the task, there were a lot of people really shattered.

That said though it did afford us some epically cool things that I will not forget in a hurry, Cassandra howling out unseen to the mountains and prophesying wild and wrong-shirted across the cricket lawn, and later, after a spell in the house, (skilfully led back inside by Scott for Helen, sponging herself on the cool dark staircase with Paris and the musicians, and Troylus

and Cressida meeting in the reception room, swearing using the light in the doorway, MT chatting to Ulysses from her car mid-scene), we had Ulysses revelling both in having the answers to everything, Achilles on his hook, the longest speeches in the play, and command of the pool all at once, the atmosphere of the pool in general with the kids and all, Thersites doing the pageant of Ajax using inflatable pool animals, Paris jumping up on a rock over the hedge to get Aeneas and Diomedes attention, and all them keeping a nice amount of distance, then Troylus and Cressida in the greenhouse later on, Cressida spraying Troylus with the hose for leaving her too early in the morning, then, being separated on the wide gravel driveway, which was both poetically and actually burningly painful both at once. Scott made the excellent interjection eventually to impose only indoor playing from that point. There was some very extensive warming up of facial muscles and fingers in preparing Ajax and Hector to fight. The commanders of both armies ended up crawling around drunk under the dining room table looking for Achilles' tent. The scene in Calchas' tent happened, quite pleasingly, on the stairway again, a beautifully weird juxtaposition to the Helen and Paris scene. Battling mostly happened in the drawing room, Paris and Menelaus fighting each other/himself up and down sing the window, Scott appearing for the epilogue with no arms, shoes strung around his neck.

So, definitely a case of training harder than we play, but arguably waaaaay too hard! We were all knackered, or at least I was. So we simplified for the show - decided that it would be only one task pulled out of the hat, instead of two, but we just wouldn't know whether it would be a purely visual thing (that might become poetic) or a pair of (possibly but not necessarily opposing) concepts, which might end up impacting in a visual way.

Also, after some articulate and expressive and patient group discussion, we got to the fighting being two things rather than just a physical gesture; a sound (I had in my muddled brain thought just a sound might work better) and a physical gesture together, both of which we would get from the audience - and that Ajax beating Thersites would just be a scaled down version of that, with Therisites (and anyone else who gets hit) selling the hits with their Acting. I was so grateful and so impressed with the collective

company brain for solving it and especial thanks to Lanna and Denise for being so patient with the thinking through of that particular aspect of the game. Then we sped ran some lines of the dodgier scenes in groups, then the battle.

Lanna came up with a lovely idea (WHICH I TOTALLY SOLD TO YOU GUYS LIKE IT WAS MY IDEA, I'M SO SORRY LANNA!!) to have everyone on stage for the Prologue, with the Greeks and the Trojans on two sides, filling in the missing beats respectively. We decided to make the missing beats the physical/vocal fighting thing.

We had a break then people started approaching audience members for chats about pairs of signifiers. Some that went into the hat included night or day, mortar or pestle, hats or not hats, past and future, flora and fauna, something wrapped around your arm or not, sunglasses or hats, willow or no willow, heaven or hell, men or women. It strikes me that this is both a nice way to meet the audience and it's fun to get them thinking isn't it, so that even if their suggestion doesn't get picked out, they might have another lens to watch the show with, a what if to palimpsest their viewing/hearing.

Then we kicked off. Martha picked out hats & something white, vs no hats. I ripped the paper in half and asked for another audience member to pick a hand and say Trojan or Greek, he said Greek, and it was hats & something white. Fighting was a claw hand scratch motion, with a hissing sound.

There was a quick scramble for hats and then the play happened, about which if you guys would like to email or Slack things over we can collate them into a big giant group report - the main impressions I had was that it was much much much easier than the morning, it was lovely to play contained in the Willow, the rules worked, we told the story and took at least twenty minutes off from the morning run (we started the show proper at about 7.10pm, were down before 10.30pm, with a twenty minute interval 8.37 to 8.57pm). Lyra and Martha got the biggest round of the night for their Factory debuts as Diomedes' horse and servant. Millie made a flower crown for Helen, and the girls and Isobel (MT's granddaughter) made one for Cressida to be woken up with the morning after by Pandarus, which she ripped to bits in her grief. Lanna's Cretan silver necklace for armour, given her by an audience member. Pandarus' song. Loads and loads of other glorious moments I will try and remember but the overriding thing being that you all smashed it outstandingly, and I was stupendously proud of you all and hugely grateful to be in such wonderful, courageous, kind, inventive, aware, alive, cheeky, charming, gracious company. What joy.

Madeleine xxx