

MORAL MADNESS

ARTHUR MILLER'S STORY OF CORRUPTION, HYSTERIA AND MORAL PANIC DURING THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS OF 1692, MADE THE CRUCIBLE AN INSTANT MODERN CLASSIC. HAILED AS AN ASTOUNDING EXAMINATION OF HUMANITY, RELIGION, JUSTICE AND HONOUR, THE CRUCIBLE WILL OPEN IN MAY AT WHARF 2. DIRECTOR TANYA GOLDBERG TALKS TO BACK STAGE ABOUT RE-VISITING THIS POWERFUL DRAMA.



Tanya Goldberg

What attracted you to directing *The Crucible*?

Why wouldn't you want to direct *The Crucible*?! It's an icon of 20th century theatre. It casts a spectre all the way back to America's puritanical origins and documents some of the darkest hours of its modern history. However, I don't see the play as limited by its history. It really is just as pertinent now as it would have been in the 50's. I think it is a treat for anyone who likes making theatre.

Despite being deemed a 'classic', *The Crucible* has a very contemporary feel. Why do you think it is important to re-visit this play?

The world *The Crucible* depicts is like any community, a community that has reasons to bond together, has reasons to protect itself from outside forces; from the threat of what's beyond. Even though we live in a global village and the world is smaller and more

accessible, fundamentally we are still living in versions of these small communities. There is, as a fact of contemporary life, a sense of belonging and a sense of exclusion, of being inside and outside, of knowing what is right and what is wrong. This play is about a world that deals with that in the extreme, where the rules are particularly strict and the sense of right and wrong is particularly black and white and the sense of order is particularly bleak.

The Crucible asks fundamental questions about morality, about human rights and how we all have to take a personal point of view on them. We think in society that there are these monolithic structures like law, religion and order that will keep everything in place. However, the more you deny other elements of being human, the transgressive elements of being human, then the bigger those transgressions are and the more unstable the world is.

Theatre is about imagination and provocation and this play sets up provocations about what it is to be fundamentally human within a society. And at the end of the day it is a great play!

Can you tell us about your vision for this production?

The history of the world of the play is so inherent and implicit in the play itself, that I've never read it as needing to be a period piece. So, perhaps that is the most obvious point - that this won't be a period piece, there won't be period costumes or period accents.

The language is immediate, visceral and real. It has a theatrical style that Miller basically invented himself, based on court reports that he read. I'm excited by the actors using their voices to find their way through that and not to rely on an accent or an idea of what something might have been. We don't know so we may as well dispense with trying to find out and just engage

with the actual transactions between the characters on stage and between the characters and the audience. That's the starting point for the vision.

Can you tell us about the design/visual concept?

The design is in keeping with the vision. We are really looking at how we can create a multi-functional space that can help the audience engage with the idea of what a society on the vanguard is facing - immense hard work, the threat of the unknown, the necessity to bunker down, the heaviness and the weight of making what little you have secure. The design is about trying to be secure in a completely insecure environment. We have ended up with textures in the design that are really inherent in the play.

You've directed the *The Merchant of Venice* and have just finished being the Assistant Director on *The War of the Roses*.

What attracts you to these classics?

I like great material. This stuff is great material. I've directed lots of contemporary stuff as well. I find something in me that I just respond to organically when I read a script. I have a pretty clear gut reaction to it, even if it is just a curiosity. I've always had a real interest in classics, the work of Shakespeare and other writers. I like the language and I like the stories. I like the imaginative provocation of those plays. You develop relationships with this work over time, and there is something wonderful about going back to a piece of work and re-examining it, with the life experience you have accumulated since you last engaged with it.

What do you hope audiences will experience when they see this production?

When I go to the theatre I want to have an experience. I want to feel that I have been engaged with.

I think theatre has a capacity to transform, sometime in really subtle ways. I think good theatre gives you an experience - an experience of time, as well as of language, as well as of space and physicality. I hope that in any piece of work, the audience gets that. I hope they feel provoked by the questions raised by the piece and take the ideas with them.

Interview by Laura Scrivano
The Crucible plays from 1 May in Wharf 2. Selected evening performances available.
Visit sydneytheatre.com.au for further details



The CALEDONIA
Foundation

THE GONSKI FOUNDATION