

York Shakespeare Project Newsletter



July 2009

“What, Trebonius”

Julius Caesar

Well done everyone who was involved in Julius Caesar, it was a fantastic production and everybody can be proud of their contribution. A few members of the cast share their favourite memories, which may not make sense to *anyone else...*

The teapot and the backstage in-jokes, such as the Clitus/Dardanius love scene, and Caesar saying, “What, Trebonius?”

Gareth failing to make any entrance in the storm scene on Wednesday

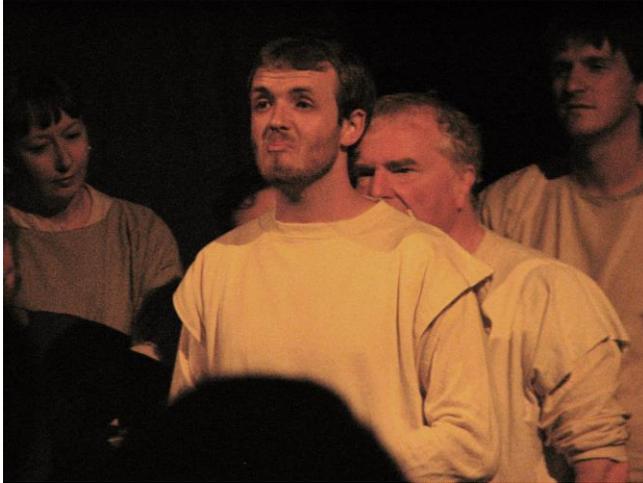


Brutus’s line, “Touch thy instrument”, and seeing everyone silently laughing.

At 11pm on the night of the tech rehearsal, playing Zip, Zap, Boing with the only five or so others who were left, all of us so tired we were slightly hysterical, and coming up with new rules to incorporate Clitus/Dardanius and 'What, Trebonius?' into the game.

Me (Robbie), in rehearsal, standing on a table and saying "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar..." and nothing else.





Waiting for about ten seconds looking and feeling confused, seeing Mark S turn a strange shade of yellow/purple, and hearing Matt Simpson - from the front row of Plebeians - saying in a half whisper "Not to praise him!".

Getting some shivers down the ol' spine when Mark B said "He lies not like the living" in rehearsal for the first time.

The 'guide book to coarse acting'. By the time I had read it, I started dropping swords, bursting into laughter at inappropriate moments etc.

Seeing how much 'blood' we could smear on our arms and drip onto the floor after the assassination.

The number of cast folks that laughed when I put my trousers on under the leggings before the curtain call... and then were all doing by the end of the run! Typical ysp - get out asap.

The abiding highlight was the sight of Krystal striding on to "tool up" before the great Battle Scene. She entered stage left striding on to centre stage arms beating back and forth with a look of concentrated Grim Determination crossed with venom on her face. Centre stage, without missing a beat she seized her sword and strode, even faster, off stage right. Within minutes she returned to beat the bejaspers out of Josh, finally disembowelling him.



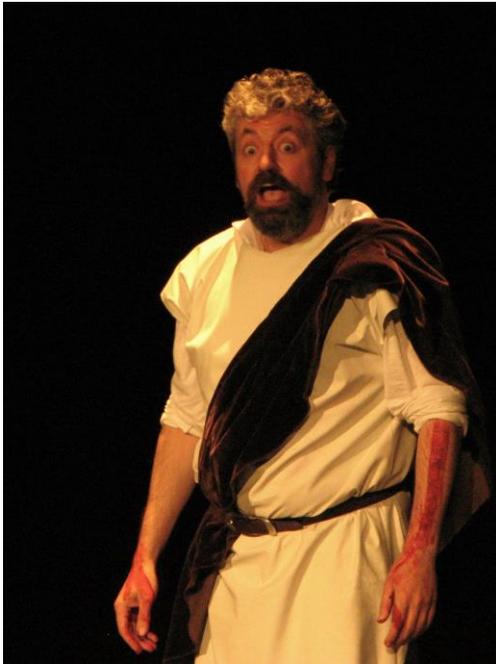
With women like Krystal and Jenny no wonder we Romans ruled half the known world!

Three loud and Hearty Cheers for The Ladies

Not having to share my sword; feeling like putting my arm around Metellus Cimber in 3.1 such was the pathos of his quaking at the feet of Caesar, O Brian!; the way Ged meticulously broke into his blood pack in the foyer some 115 lines ahead of schedule; Caesar's perfectly Roman fringe and besandled ankles, O Robin!; Dermot's masterful switch of focus to the daggered hand at 'Will you be pricked in number of our friends'; Jenny saying 'No my



Brutus you have some sick offence within your mind' and feeling every time that I needed psychiatric help; Antony's smile both brilliant and somehow Machiavellian, O Robbie!; the sticky-curtain-pole-Josh-with-lube-to-the-rescue crisis, O Josh!; digging out a squashed letter from the depths of my belted toga at



the end of 2.1 and receiving each time some helpful dietary advice from Ros; teetering on tiptoes on the small block in the dark while teasing a toggle of elastic over an invisible screw trying to avoid an untimely entrance in 4.1 astride a big screen at ‘*And now Octavius, listen great things...What Brutus!*’; the ‘surprise’ arrival of Jen-the-impaler in 5.2 and fighting for my life while trying not to be aroused by her increasingly animated Sharapovan grunting; on stage drinking at 4.3 (but alas no custard creams); the night Publius shed one beautiful tear. O Neil, I’ll be T-H-I-N-E thine; Sally fussing over my hood. O Mother!; not having to listen to Antony’s forum speech; the multifarious uses of Tippex; the ever present and beloved sword photo diagram; Ben Lund’s composure as I mangled the text of the ghost scene in slightly different ways at each performance; that it was the very fellow of a good respect who I first met in Rowntree Park just before my audition who as Strato finished me off each night. O Alan!

Thank you every one. I really enjoyed doing the show with you all.

For ever and forever farewell Julius Caesar.

If we do meet again, why, we shall smile.

Many thanks to John, Robbie, Mark B, Robin Sanger, Maurice and Dermot for their memories

And from Mark Smith, the super-talented director

Julius Caesar has been a truly thrilling, massive undertaking. At times I rued my decision to cast as many people as possible and call on minimal doubling: in the early days, one cast member warned me that directing the show would be like “herding cats”. But what a cast! From the feedback I’ve heard, it seems that audience members all had their own favourite characters and moments. Personally, there were bits in the show which really sent a chill down my spine night after night, even at the 10th time of asking, as I struggled with mp3-player, lighting desk or PC. The crowd emerging from the shadows to lynch an innocent (if slightly annoying) poet, Robbie’s shout of “butchers!” (which made audience members jump on more than one occasion), the storm, the plebs, and Brutus’ seeming mastery of them, fickle masters all. The sword fights (especially our special gay bar warm-up fight on the last night). The actors are to thank for so many of these moments, but time and again it was the brilliance of the writing, combined with that of the delivery, that made me tingle. Often it was the smaller moments, not the big set-piece speeches, that had that effect. Mark Anthony declaring “I am no orator, as Brutus is”...? Genius.

The process was not without set-backs – getting 25 cast members together for rehearsals seemed like an impossible task at times – but I remained upbeat about the production pretty much throughout, as I could see people working extremely hard on making their part of it come together. And the feeling of a team at

work was really great, especially during the run, as two dozen individuals from very different walks of life all united in the cause of “buying teapots” and the universal language of zip zap boing.

And I’m really missing that cast. In particular, I miss the thrice-weekly opportunity really to pick apart the language and the characters of the play, with some highly astute, dedicated and passionate individuals. I hope they’ve enjoyed the experience as much as I have. That this work reaped rewards was borne out by an email correspondence which Sally shared with me. In it a potential audience member wrote, before the performance dates, worried that she’d be unable to understand the language of the play, not having enjoyed the recent Theatre Royal *Twelfth Night*. Sally reassured her and pointed her in the direction of a number of Spark notes-style books on *JC*, following which she plucked up the courage to attend, and wrote back afterwards saying that she’d “thoroughly enjoyed” our production. On a similar note, my brother was heard to comment “It was Shakespeare, but I understood it!” Thank you, cast and crew, for putting in so much time, energy and teamwork, both in and out of the rehearsal room, in order to create a production of which I feel very proud.



Richard II

But as one book reaches its index, another is just beginning the, er, introduction. And so it is with YSP, as we have a director and a cast for Richard II. This, by Gail Holsnuh.

York Shakespeare Project's is to be putting on **Richard II** from Tuesday 17th November until Saturday 21st November in 41 Monkgate where YSP's **Julius Caesar** was so admirably performed earlier this year. Performances start at 7.30pm, with an additional show at 2pm on the Saturday.

The play, which was written in 1595, and based on events occurring between 1398 and 1400, is to be set in June 2007.

The condensing of two years worth of history into one month doesn't concern director Hugh Allison. It is a fast paced play, after all, and as he points out: "The actual time scheme of Shakespeare's text is unrealistic. For example in the time it takes Richard & co to get from Coventry to Ely House, (which would take a day at most) to see the death of Gaunt, Bolingbroke has left the country, found out about this illness, has made plans to get back and has already informed Northumberland about this. We're just expanding on this theme. Whether or not the audience even pick up on what dates we're setting the piece in is another matter. The parallels between the events of this story and Blair's ousting as prime minister are manifold, but none are going to be made too explicit, with accents, impressions of mannerisms or directly representative costume etc. The story is too strong to need this, and the audience too clever".

According to Jeremy Muldowny who plays Lord Marshal, Duke of Surrey, and (along with Julia Atkinson is working as the production's dramaturg) it is surprising how few people, "even compared to twenty years ago" know the story of **Richard II** or even see it as one of the greatest plays in his canon.

Whilst Allison agrees with Muldowny's sentiment that this is "disappointing", it also gives the YSP a lot more license to experiment with the piece.

The cast are not being encouraged not to research the historical versions of their characters, as Shakespeare changed so many acknowledged facts about geographical locations and character age differences. Likewise, this interpretation will change them further, such as by gender (eg John of Gaunt is to become Joan of Gaunt) and by combining more than one "person" into a single role. Also, Allison feels there is no need to reference cut or unmentioned scenes; he claims that the cast he is using is strong enough to get the story across with the least amount of fuss, letting only their own lives influence their interpretation.

Allison also wishes to present the story as neutrally as possible, leaving the audience to make up their own minds regarding issues such as what qualities make up a good leader (and which characters have it), what really happened with the Duke of Gloucester. "After all", says Allison, "neither Richard nor Bolingbroke ever get to the bottom of what happened - assuming both tell the truth at all times - so who are we, as an acting company, to decide which of the other characters are lying, and which are not".

With everything left so "in the air", it could be asked what the point of doing this play is. However, Allison is quick to respond that the whole point of theatre is to make the audience think. "And with this play in particular", he summarises, "the old cliché is truer than ever. Nothing really ever changes and nothing ever will".

Henry VIII, from Jeremy Muldowny

In 1964, at the age of 10, I was prevented from taking part in a pageant in Reading Abbey to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, because I had the wrong kind of plimsolls. Only those with

elasticated tops were permitted, on the grounds that you can't sew Tudor rosettes onto lace-ups. Mine were lace-ups, naturally. It's a wonder I wasn't put off Shakespeare for life as a result of this most arbitrary of rejections, but, accepting the indignity with as much grace as I could muster, I kept quiet for six years before re-joining the same company as a stropky adolescent in time for Richard III and Macbeth.

It is therefore with some sense of vindication that I seized the opportunity to direct a cut-down version of Henry VIII in York Minster. So cap that ... Berkshire Shakespeare Players! A functioning cathedral no less; not a redundant abbey! And after FIVE centuries; not four!

Even so, I have to admit that I was more nervous about this than about any other production I've ever been involved with. After all, I had to come back in to work on Monday and the face the music had it all gone pear-shaped! I wasn't really worried about the theatrical side of things; I had every confidence in my cast as always and knew they would give of their best. It was the practicalities of "working round" and "fitting in" that gave me the sleepless nights. It was a little intimidating having two much-more-experienced directors (Mark Smith and Hugh Allison) in the cast, but they did what they were told and made genuinely helpful suggestions! Thanks, also, to Sally Mitcham who functioned admirably as Assistant Director as well as playing the Queen. It was good to have Howard (Romeo) Mosley back as Henry ... a role he carried all day in connection with some of the other events.

In the end, it all went very well, considering the competition from other surrounding events. The Tudor music emanating from the Lady Chapel was certainly appropriate if a touch loud ... until I found the volume control. But I couldn't do anything (short of physical violence!) about the piano in the North Transept or the 40 or so Spanish students who (almost appropriately) followed Katherine of Aragon up the sanctuary steps.

Most remarkably, the out-door show (which I really thought we would have to cancel), went ahead in a brief window of sunshine. Also, the wind dropped and the actors were perfectly audible. We even had an audience!

Inside, the acoustics were certainly problematic but it looked stunning - especially the Queen's trial and the scene where Norfolk, Suffolk and the Lord Chamberlain gang up on Cardinal Wolsey. Audiences grew with each performance - possibly pushing 100 for the last one. (Note to Committee: How to get big audiences - don't charge!)

All in all, a good day was had by all, and I've had some great feedback. Well done everyone, and thanks to those YSP members who came to watch.

TakeOver Festival – including some brilliant Shakespeare! By Robbie Swale

Hello all, Robbie here. Having been involved in the last two YSP productions, you may or may not have noticed a lack of me at the auditions for Richard II. This is partly to ensure I spend some time at home at some point during my time in York, and partly because I am rather busy working on 'TakeOver 09' at York Theatre Royal.

Right, now I'm going to write some stuff in a Q&A format because it means I don't need to make the paragraphs "flow"...

What is TakeOver 09? It's a three week festival where the theatre royal gives total control of the theatre to 'young people' aged under 26. We (the young people, including me) programme the main house, studio, and everything else and run the theatre during the festival alongside the theatre royal staff. The festival is partly funded by the Arts Council's A Night Less Ordinary scheme, so **anyone under 26 can get a free ticket to any of the events and shows during TakeOver**. How good is that?

When is it? The end of September this year: 19th September, 2009-10th October, 2009.

Can old(er) people come? Yes, and you must. The programme is looking really great (see below) and if you don't come not only will you miss out, but the theatre will probably go bust as we'll be giving tickets away to any U26s that show up. And it'll be my fault, and I'll probably have a breakdown.

What are you doing in it, Robbie? No, I am in fact Festival Producer. This means I'm doing interesting things like budgeting the festival, negotiating with the external companies who are coming to the theatre during the festival, and generally trying to help everyone else who is involved do what they want to do.

Why are you telling us all this? Mainly because the programme for the festival was launched recently and I wanted to draw your attention to it. All the details are on the festival web site (www.takeoverfestival.co.uk) and the Theatre Royal web site. But there are a couple of things in particular which I thought might interest you lot given, well, you know...

First, we've got The Factory Theatre in York for the first time, doing their amazing version of *Hamlet*. Each member of the company can play any one of three or four parts, and before each show the exact make-up of the cast is chosen in front of the audience, so you can go several times and see different permutations (good word that, eh?). Second, they have no set or props except what the audience brings. So you're invited to bring along anything you like – previous experiences in London have included use of Ewan McGregor's accordion and a living breathing baby (I can only imagine it replaced the skull)! It'll be different every night, and should be something great to see. You only have to Google it to start finding great reviews.

Secondly, Headlong and Schtanhaus are bringing their production of *The Winter's Tale* to York. Directed by Simon Godwin and produced by Schtanhaus, a company run by Tom Morris and Emma Stenning who are taking over Bristol Old Vic this September. This doesn't have the gimmick element of The Factory, but it is more great Shakespeare which I hope will get you excited.

The rest of the programme is full of stuff that I can't wait to see, too: *A Five-Star Werewolf* is a new play, a comedy "horror"; Young Actor's Company are doing *Equus* featuring YSP's very own Chris Laishley; there's comedy, dance and music/comedy from - respectively - stand-ups (including both Hollys from Red Dwarf), Drywrite and Pluck; and then there's *The Man Who Planted Trees*, an amazing piece of story-telling/puppetry which totally bewitched me when I saw it in Pocklington. It may be 'children's theatre', but everyone should book their tickets before they sell out (which they will, and probably soon).

So, really, I want to make sure you guys don't miss any of this stuff. The festival is going to be an eclectic mixture. The idea is that there is something for everyone, but in reality, there is loads of stuff here that you will all enjoy.

Young people can get free tickets if they register for a pass at the Theatre Royal, although you can't book the freebies online. If you're under 26 and don't have a pass, then you'll be forced to pay an extortionate £5. How terrible. And it's cheaper than normal for everyone else, too. In fact, you can see five shows for £50 (or £40 if you're a concession).

Right, there's a lot of information there. Click [here](#) for the web site and [here](#) for the Facebook group. And get in touch with me if you want to know anything else.

If the festival is a success, it will happen again next year, and might even become a regular part of the YTR programme... so go on, at least come and see *Hamlet*... It'll help you learn it for when you're auditioning for Fortinbras in a couple of years...

See you all soon, Robbie robbie.swale@gmail.com

York Minster Night Fever

Following the success of our abridged "Henry VIII", we have been invited to take part in the Minster's "Night Fever" event (when the Minster's open until midnight!) on the Bank Holiday evening of August 30th. A stage will be erected just inside the far West End for performances of any kind. Obviously there isn't much chance of getting people together for rehearsals during August, so I've suggested to Howard ("Henry") Mosley that we do this on a "Do Your Favourite Shakespeare Speech" basis ... or any one of several York-related bits: plenty to choose from ... R2; H4; H6; R3 etc etc!

If any one's interested, they can get in touch with me on j.e.muldowney@dsl.pipex.com or jeremym@yorkminster.org.

I'm happy to act as co-ordinator for this, though I am away for a week mid-August. Please get in touch ASAP!

YSP AGM

Your chance to get involved with the exciting work of guiding and coordinating the project! As usual all committee members will be standing down, and many key members are not planning on re-standing. So if you've ever fancied trying at your hand at Treasurer, Membership or other roles, then come along to the Oak Room (on the left as you come in the main door), Black Swan, Peasholme Green 16th September. Main business starts at 8pm, but we'll be there from 7.30 onwards for drinks and socialising.

I shall roar from the stalls

Well, ta v much everyone for your contributions, it's a whacking newsletter, and I've barely put a word in edgeways. Keep it coming for the August one, enjoy summer and send stuff to mr.alistair@talk21.com.

The setting sun, and music at the close.