

**ALMEIDA
THEATRE**



**THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH -
RESOURCE**



INTERVIEW WITH ASSISTANT DIRECTOR YASMIN HAFESJI

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

How was this rehearsal process different to other rehearsals you've experienced?

I learnt a huge amount from this experience. I'd not worked on a production with a cast size like this, and I'd never worked with children on a show before either. The role of movement and composition was also much more embedded in this production than on shows I'd previously worked on. So, it really opened my eyes to the ways in which production elements can be used in a rigorous way to create a world on stage that is incredibly robust. I would say we were working a lot more with movement and creating the world of play rather than focusing solely on text work, which I found quite unusual at the time but as the rehearsals unfolded, I could see how this kind of work opened up the text in a really exciting way. One thing in particular which was very different about this process was how quickly Yaël [Farber, the director] was staging scenes and finding the imagery of the piece and exploring transitions, which felt just as important as the scenes. A lot of this was due to a COVID setback which delayed the beginning of our rehearsals, but trying to get work up on the floor sooner rather than later is something I definitely want to do more of in my own work.

What was challenging about the rehearsal process?

It's a different way of working which doesn't suit everyone and there are some elements of Yaël's process which I know I personally can't emulate in my work. In particular, the role of movement in rehearsals was huge and Yaël has a great command of the language of movement which isn't something that comes as naturally to everyone. In many ways, the process felt very different from much of the work I've seen in the U.K. It felt more influenced by various international models of theatre making that came together through Yaël's unique lens.

The scope of the production also felt challenging at times, particularly in the rehearsal room. We were working with two sets of child actors and a cellist. Therefore, there were lots of key elements to bring together in the rehearsal room which did at times feel overwhelming, and it can be hard to see how it will come together on stage. But once we were on stage at the Almeida the work felt much richer because of all of these elements which came together pretty seamlessly in the end.

STAGING THE WATER

How did that work in the rehearsal room? What challenges were faced in the room?

The water was a huge challenge, because it was such a central part of the design and is a tricky and expensive element. A key challenge was that we couldn't test the water until we were on stage and in technical rehearsals – which is a stressful period of any rehearsal process. One of my jobs quite early on was to keep a water plot which charted when the tap would be used and when the flooding of the stage would begin, and how this tied together to what we wanted to convey to the audience at those moments.

The fight scenes were choreographed with the water in mind as two of the fights used water, and we made sure there was time scheduled on stage to use the water and ensure the fights were safe for the actors.

TEXT CHANGES

How was this element explored with the actors?

The changes to the text were made before I came on board as Yaël had been working on her edit of for quite some time. Her edit created a more dynamic role for Lady Macbeth, particularly in the second half of the play. Some of Macbeth's lines have been reassigned to Lady Macbeth, and she witnesses a lot more in the second half before her death. This was a central part of Yaël's vision, particularly given the importance of all of the female characters throughout the piece. For example, the character of Lady MacDuff is brought on much earlier in this version and we see her as central to the community presented on stage. This is in contrast to the original text where she only appears in the play at the point at which she dies. Lady MacDuff's character is on stage a lot of the time witnessing the action and violence that unfolds, and she punctuates lots of the pivotal moments with singing. Similarly, the three Wyrd Sisters in this version of the play do not simply appear and disappear but they witness the story and are on stage for almost the entirety of the play.

All of these changes are critical when staging classic texts. Sometimes productions of classic texts attempt to update them for the present day without really interrogating what they are trying to present and challenge. Yaël's edit was extremely rigorous in its dramaturgy and encompassed more than just textual changes but also kept in mind how she envisaged the characters on stage, and the power of bodies in space.



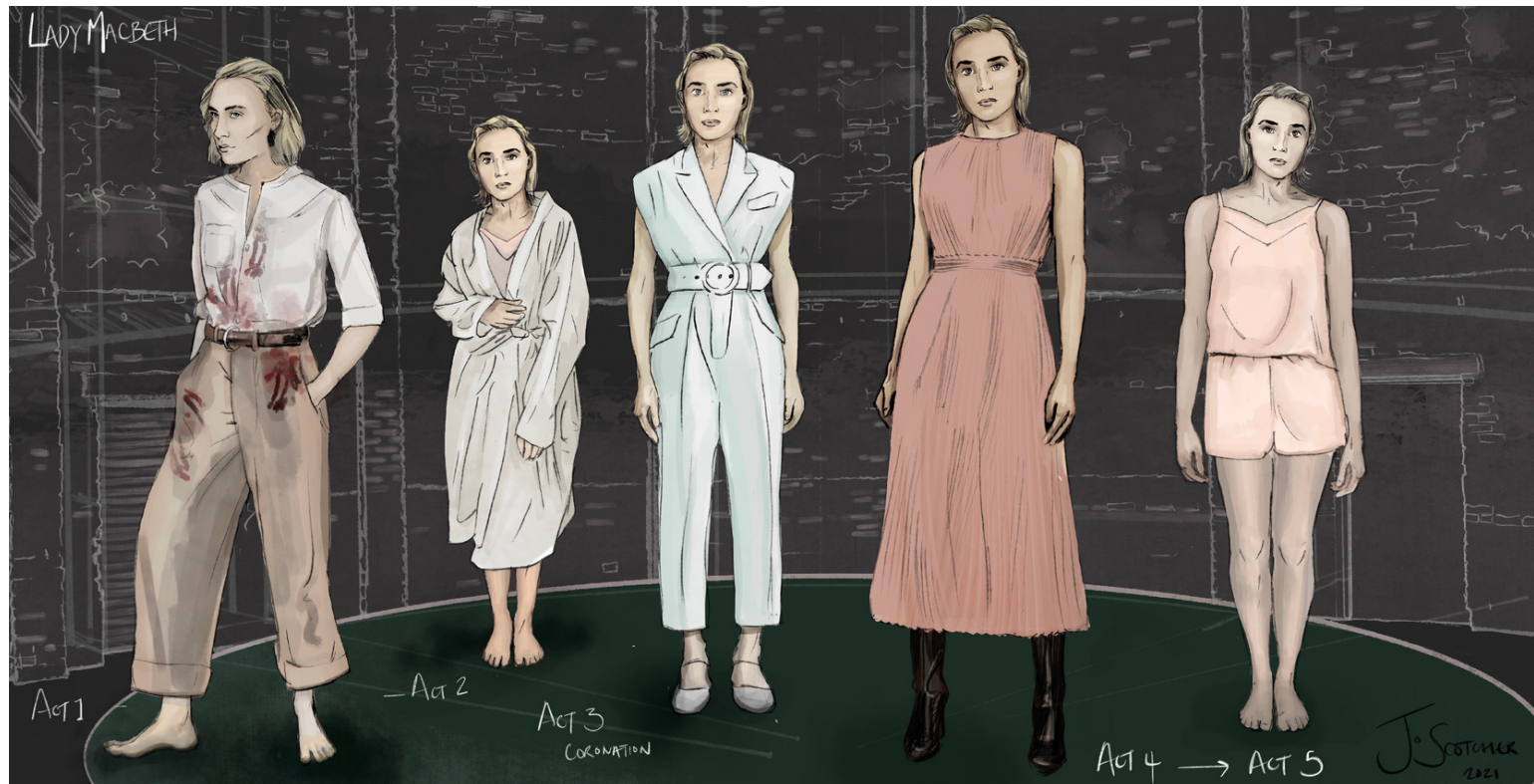


COSTUME NOTES

Olivier Award-winning Costume Designer Joanna Scotcher gives an insight into her process for creating the costumes for this production and shares her original design images

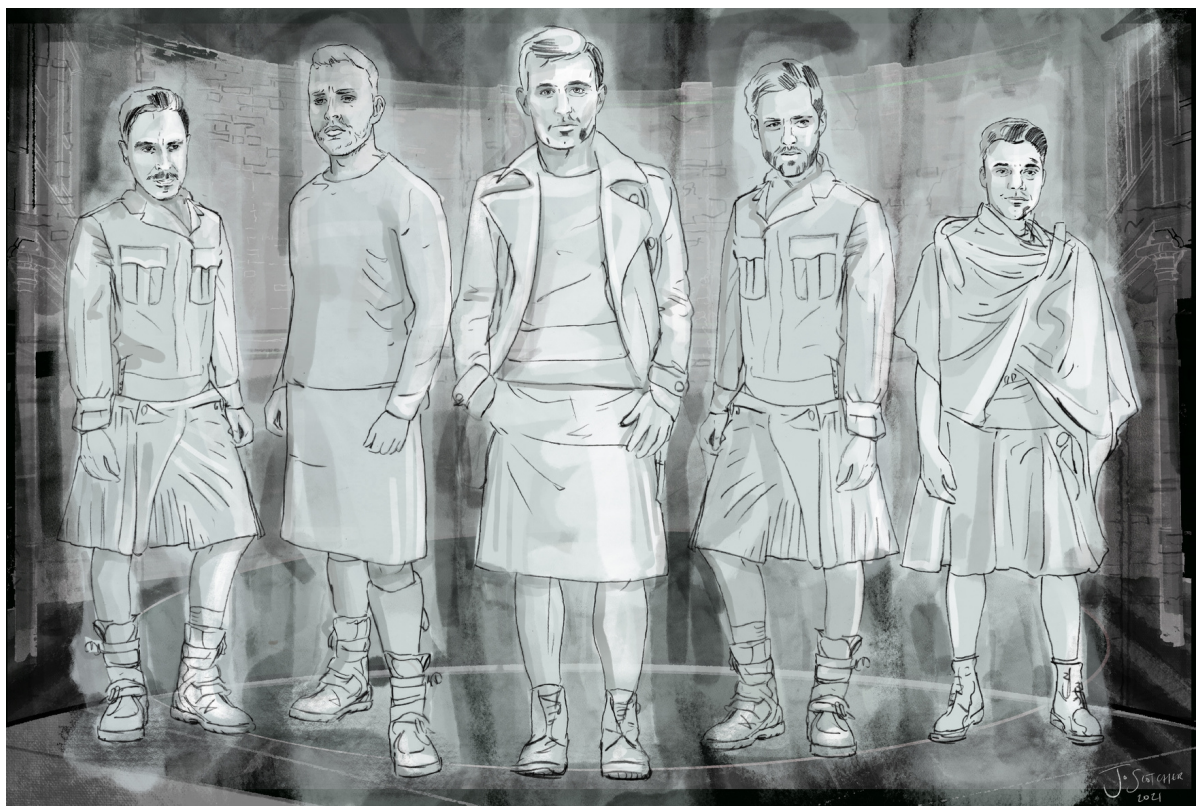
STARTING POINT

We came to this production in a world that felt in flux – a time of disorienting reframing, post a seismic change to the known order. With our Macbeth, we find a society in the throes of a destabilising shift in power. It's vital that there is a liminal, transient quality to both the playing space and the way that we see the characters on the stage. So aesthetically it has a timeless quality and is stripped back to its essential, core elements – those at war; those together as a clan; those plotting through power; re-emergent societies. We should collectively recognise an uneasy sense of a society on the threshold of an impending upheaval.



INFLUENCES

You could describe the costume settings as near-modern. But as a creative team, we've chosen to pull away from signalling specific social or militaristic insignias. We've placed our characters into a neutral canvas where we're investing in their ritualised performance and the dynamics of power between the characters rather than comfortably setting them in a recognisable world. In removing specific identifiers, we're allowing for symbolism to emerge, instead of prescribing it.



COLLABORATION

What has guided both me and Soutra [Gilmour, Set Designer] are the early conversations that we shared with Yaël, back in the depths of the last lockdown. I remember specifically there was a quote from Yaël [Farber, Director] about us shifting between brutal primitivism and razor-sharp modernism. And how, by navigating those two very defined but contradictory ideas, we can find the liminal space which sits in the heart of our condition now.

You'll see within both the set and costume that there are elements of contemporary architecture and materials, sitting alongside old worn, world-weary fabrics or furniture to give us this feeling of churning, ever-evolving, re-occurring tragedy.





Photography: Marc Brenner



Photography: Marc Brenner

MAKING THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH: FIGHT DIRECTION

In the video below, Kombat Kate discusses her processes on the fight direction for the production as well as giving an insight into how she got into a stage combat career.



REHEARSAL ROOM EXERCISES

From Assistant Director Yasmin Hafesji:

1/ FIRST DAY READ-THROUGH

On our first day as a full company, rather than have a traditional table read we had a more dynamic and active read through. The company had been asked to come to rehearsals and be off book, so most of them already knew all or most of their lines. Yaël began by placing Saoirse (playing Lady Macbeth) and James (playing Macbeth) on chairs in the centre of the room. The rest of the company were asked to bring their chairs into the centre of the room and think carefully about where they decide to place themselves - are they in close proximity to those they're characters are close to and far away from those they are suspicious of? They angled themselves towards some people and away from others, creating a cluster of people at the centre of the room. Yaël encouraged the performers to be physical if they felt the need to during the read through - some moved nearer to others when speaking to them, others stood up and went further away, some shouted, some whispered. As a result, the read-through gave much more of a sense of what the potential of the production could be as the performers were encouraged to follow their instincts rather than feel restricted to the format of a traditional table read.

2/ MOVEMENT EXERCISES

Yaël, and Movement Director Emily Terndrup, used lots of movement based exercises to explore character and relationships. Early on, some exercises used were:

- Macbeth and Lady Macbeth explored their relationship non verbally through movement based exercises, where they were restricting each others space, invading each other's space, and their bodies were used to communicate emotion and story.
- Traditional exercises such as Seven Levels of Tension were used to explore movement in space before specific group scenes were explored through movement. For example, early on in rehearsals Emily would guide the group with movement exercises before Yaël asked the company to move into specific group scenes and explore them through movement only. Through these exercises, we looked at how movement could be used to convey how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are with the group as friends but their physicality can also convey a distance as they begin to plot the murder of Duncan.

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

Cast and Creatives

By William Shakespeare
Direction: Yaël Farber
Set Design: Soutra Gilmour
Costume Design: Joanna Scotcher
Light: Tim Lutkin
Sound: Peter Rice
Composition: Tom Lane
Movement Direction: Emily Terndrup
Casting: Julia Horan CDG
Children's Casting: Verity Naughton
Fight Direction: Kate Waters
Costume Supervisor: Sydney Florence
Text Coach: Andrea Ainsworth
Assistant Director: Yasmin Hafesji
Assistant Set Designer: Rachel Wingate
Children's Casting Assistant: Nick Hockaday

Cast

Michael Abubakar
Ross Anderson
Aoife Burke
Emun Elliott
Diane Fletcher
William Gaunt
Myles Grant
Akiya Henry
Maureen Hibbert
Reuben Joseph
Gareth Kennerley
Valerie Lilley
Jamie-Lee Martin
James McArdle
Adam McNamara
Henry Meredith
Dereke Oladele
Richard Rankin
Saoirse Ronan
Emet Yah Khai
K-ets Yah Khai

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