

Transcript of vox pop interview with Elizabeth (Buffy) Watling and Amy Ward

Students from the University of York and director of and actor in *Mother Rachel and Her Children*

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Libby Clark (LC); Buffy Watling (BW) and Amy Ward (AW)

LC: Thank you both very much for agreeing to talk to me this evening. Can I start by asking you to tell me what your role was in this performance of *Mother Rachel and Her Children*?

BW: I was the stage director

AW: I was the narrator

LC: Can you tell me how you got involved in the performance?

BW: I was brought in quite late. One of my friends was supposed to be stage director and she had to pull out unfortunately. So she suggested me and Mark France [Director of *Gideon Klein: Portrait of a Composer*] got in touch so that's how I ended up being the director

AW: Auditions were run in my department in my University by one of my lecturers Lisa Peschel. We had studied some of the texts like *Harlequin in the Ghetto* in my political theatre so I auditioned because the project really interested me

LC: And what drew you to become involved in this production in the first place. Amy, for you is it the case that you audition for everything that you see coming up or do you pick and choose depending on your own interest?

AW: I didn't chose to audition specifically for this for any other reason than I couldn't do the other ones because of conflicting time restraints. But in hindsight I probably would have chosen this one anyway because what I find really interesting about it is there is a lot of historical detail and history of the Jewish people whereas the other ones are more performance pieces. For example, *Harlequin in the Ghetto* is a comedy written to distract people from the awful situation that they are in. At school I studied Spain from the point of view of the Kings and Queens and we never got to....we studied as a political move the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 but you don't get it from the Jewish perspective which is an absolute disgrace. You should get the history of atrocities from the voices of the people and I think this oratorio is really important in doing that.

BW: I chose to do this for two reasons. The first is the music in it. I hadn't heard the music when I first got the script and got involved but I knew that it was heavily reliant on the music and as a former chorister myself, I sing, and the thought of being involved in something like this from a directorial point of view that involved singing and involves moving a choir about and using them in the performance, that was so exciting to me. And the whole thing being an oratorio and being so musical in its nature, that really drew me.

And the second reason was that I had heard a lot about the project and there has been so much advertised in the University of York and I really wanted to be involved. The other projects were clashing with my schedule so when I was offered this I had to say yes because as someone who is non Jewish I really wanted to learn more about it. It's really exciting to be part of something like this that's not just for Jewish people to be involved in. It's really awesome to be asked to be involved in it

LC: Did you know anything at all about Jac Weinsteins or the topics and issues presented in *Mother Rachel and Her Children* before becoming involved in the project?

BW: I knew about some of the history, but the piece itself, the compositions and the writer, I knew nothing

AW: The same for me really.

LC: Could you share with me a bit about your emotional responses to the piece and to your involvement in it

BW: It's such an emotional piece. I mean, right from the very start its got no downtime. The day I was brought on as director I was given the script. I went home, I sat in my bedroom and read it and I just felt like crying. It's just so powerful. I learnt a lot from the script as well about how the Jewish plight has been, it's been terrible. I remember when we first had our read through we all had to take a step back afterwards and be like 'phew' because there is no downtime...I can't really articulate myself very well. It's one of those things that is so emotional that you can't really think of words to describe it.

AW: Similarly, that was my experience. When we were working on the voice because there are a lot of different sections and detailed different historical moments, so we went through to try and find the variation and different ways of approaching the sections so it wasn't all at an emotional peak. That's what gripped me emotionally was the fact that we had to work so hard to vary it because it is just so reflective of Jewish history that there is no break, it is so long lasting this suffering. That really hit home with me.

BW: And I think especially as non-Jewish people, I will speak for myself not for you guys, but its something that we didn't grow up knowing. Of course, we knew some of the facts and we learnt about it in history class at school but getting behind the eyes of a Jewish person and seeing their story in that way and becoming someone who is telling that story is very strong and very powerful.

AW: Definitely. And when you combine the words and the music, because music is unlike any other art form in that it can express emotion that words just cannot get to. The pain and the suffering – those words don't seem enough but the music is so...it speaks to you on a level that goes beyond the facts, the figures, the brutality. It gets to the root of the pain itself and it is intensely emotional.

LC: And in terms of that mix of the narrative, the music, the use of the Bukovsky paintings, is that something that you have been involved in before, bringing together all those different mediums? Or have you been exposed to some new methods of performing and presenting works that you haven't before?

BW: For me, I don't think I have ever done anything like this before. Maybe when we were in a drama class in year 7 we might have been told, 'put a tableau together based on this picture' or something like that but to have all those elements it was really unique. And as I said in the Q&A we used the music and the images in rehearsal to help our performance. And I was also a very strange thing because we had to rehearse separately. I went to see the choir in rehearsal twice but really it's only today, the day of the performance that we have been able to put all these things together and then suddenly they made so much more sense

AW: As a performer, it had a lot more emotional impact bringing it together on the day. The words spoke so much but the music, as I was saying before, the emotional resonance it just brought it all together. Going back to the question about have we worked with these different kind of mediums before, as a theatre major studying at University we are always told put something in only for a specific purpose so you don't normally combine images, music and text because you have to focus specifically on one thing to give it depth and meaning, but in this piece all three art forms, you can separate them and they stand alone as striking works of art with such intense meanings behind them. And to link them, you tie in those emotions and it is unique in that aspect because there is a need and a necessity to put them all there together which you don't usually get with something that's not rooted in such an emotional and deeply historical topic.

BW: There's not too much of anything, the balance is just right, they all work together so well. Its really intense, the relationship between all three

LC: Just one more question if I may. As you look forward to your next couple of years at University and to your future careers is there anything that you have learnt from being involved in this that you would like to take forward into the future?

AW: I think in terms of my future career I think it really depends on what type of projects I work on and what type of employment I go in to because I'm still, I don't know, I'm only a student in my second year so the world is my oyster or not, there are so many doors closed. Anyway, that's a different kettle of fish. For me personally it has given me the impetus to want to go out there and research this history that should be and should rightfully be ahead of a lot of things we study in school. It has highlighted to me how unimportant lots of the things I studied at school were. I think about studying the Tudors and how maybe I'll pass a church and think 'that was built in the Tudor era and then torn down by Henry VIII' but that doesn't mean anything to me, whereas this has touched me in so many more ways than any of the history and I studied and its given me the impetus to want to go out and research it more. I went to Berlin over the summer and went to the Jewish museum and I want to go back there and look at it in more detail and understand more about what I'm seeing. At the time, I could read it and understand the facts but there wasn't the emotional connection that I think I would have now.

BW: For me it is also that, I feel a lot more connected to the Jewish story. And not that it's my story but I understand it a lot more. But also, from a theatrical and professional level I think doing this project has given me the confidence to go forth and do other things. I'm not necessarily part of a certain world, a certain cultural group, a certain religion but I can still research and have the confidence to go forth and present something based on that. And, you know, being generally in charge of how things are put together for a project as big as this and that means so much to so many people, personally for me, because I am normally quite a shy person it was a big deal and having a whole choir listen to me and helping me create something, it really gave me confidence as a theatrical person, as a director.

LC: Thank you both very much indeed for taking the time to talk to me.