

...from 'Director's Cut'

Madge, the director, was even more scary in person than her Wikipedia entry suggested. Her black clothed body was accessorised by a myriad of piercings and an excessive amount of bangles. Her long grey hair fell over her shoulders and bled into her dress like an upturned pot of paint. All conversations stopped upon her entrance. She was provided with a chair in the middle of the rehearsal studio and the cast members sat on the floor in front of her. It was like we were back at infant school. I half expected Madge to produce a large rectangular register and call our names. Some of the younger, more agile actors were actually sitting cross-legged. I was wondering if we had to raise our hands to ask permission to go to the lavatory when she began to speak.

'Today you are all present at the birth of a ground-breaking theatrical experience. I have selected each and every one of you for the unique contribution that you can bring to this historic event. We shall be showing to the world a Shakespeare that has never been seen before. Of course, we all know that if he lived today he would be proud to count himself amongst the transgendered community. Why else would his cross-dressing themes be so prominent amongst his great works?'

Madge left this thought for us to take in. Some people nodded sagely. She continued, looking into the middle distance. 'I see us pushing the frontiers of European theatre. I want us to free our minds from what has gone before. Forget the patriarchal hegemony of Gielgud or Olivier. I want fresh eyes to devour the text and read the words anew as if they were still wet on the page. Take a few minutes to find your centre and reconnect with your inner core.'

She dismissed us to find our own space in the studio. I looked around and saw my fellow actors sitting, crouching, some even lying down. I thought it prudent to close my eyes and at least look as if I was considering the claptrap she'd just spouted. Could she be for real? After an age, which was in reality only ten minutes, Madge announced there would be a twenty minute break before we attacked the text in earnest.

Andrew Campbell Kearsey