



sharedexperience

A close-up portrait of Jean Rhys, the author of 'Wide Sargasso Sea'. She has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the left with a serious expression. Her hand is visible near her ear, touching her hair. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

AFTER MRS ROCHESTER

THE STORY OF JEAN RHYS
AUTHOR OF WIDE SARGASSO SEA

BY POLLY TEALE

EDUCATION PACK



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AFTER MRS ROCHESTER

THE PACK

THE STORY OF JEAN RHYS

This pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing a performance of *After Mrs Rochester*. I've included background material and also information specifically on our production; which includes interviews with the creative team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful to provoke discussion and practical work of your own.

Gillian King





AFTER MRS ROCHESTER

THE STORY OF JEAN RHYS



AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK IS THE **POWER** AND **EXCITEMENT** OF THE PERFORMER'S **PHYSICAL PRESENCE** AND THE UNIQUE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACTOR AND AUDIENCE - A **SHARED EXPERIENCE**. WE ARE COMMITTED TO CREATING A THEATRE THAT GOES BEYOND OUR EVERYDAY LIVES, GIVING FORM TO THE **HIDDEN WORLD** OF EMOTION AND IMAGINATION. WE SEE THE REHEARSAL PROCESS AS A **GENUINELY OPEN FORUM** FOR ASKING QUESTIONS AND **TAKING RISKS** THAT REDEFINE THE POSSIBILITIES OF PERFORMANCE.

Nancy Meckler
Joint Artistic Director

SHARED EXPERIENCE ON EXPRESSIONISM

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place FEELS like than what it realistically LOOKS like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale

INTERVIEW WITH WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF *AFTER MRS ROCHESTER* - POLLY TEALE

What made you decide to write a play about Jean Rhys?

I read Jean's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* whilst doing research for my own adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. I was immediately struck by the intensity of the writing - the profound sense of loneliness, of dislocation. The introduction to the novel contained a few details of Jean's life and it intrigued me. As I began to read the rest of her novels, and talk to people who had known her, a picture began to emerge of an extraordinary life. I was struck by the parallels

between her own story and that of Mr Rochester's mad wife - the woman who would become the heroine of Jean's late masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Like Jean, Mrs Rochester was a white Creole born in the West Indies who ended her life isolated in the remote English countryside.

Tell us more about Mrs Rochester - why was Jean drawn to write about her?

Jean first read *Jane Eyre* as a young woman. I have often thought how startling it must have been to discover a West Indian character hidden amongst the pages of English literature, which made up her father's library. It is not surprising that this creature took hold of Jean's imagination. She too was rebellious. She too felt misunderstood. She too was prone to fits of violent temper. Years later Jean would be sent to Holloway Prison for biting a neighbour who she said had made too much noise and disturbed her writing. Mrs Rochester used a similar method of attack on unwanted intruders into her attic.

By the time we meet Mrs Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, she has become a monster, scarcely recognisable as human. It is not surprising that Jean felt a desire to rewrite Mrs Rochester's story, to tell it from the beginning. To tell it from the inside.

Why the locked room? Where did that idea come from?

As I found out more about Jean's life I was struck by the number of relationships she had had (including three marriages and many affairs) but how rarely she had ever felt close to anyone.



Polly Teale

INTERVIEW WITH POLLY TEALE CONTINUED...

"I've always felt best when I was alone. Felt most real. People have always been shadows to me... I have never known other people"

Her own daughter never lived with Jean. She found it hard to get to know her mother. Her visits often ended in acrimony. The metaphor of the locked room began to take hold. Whilst Mrs. Rochester was literally locked up and held captive, Jean was also a prisoner; a prisoner of her own psyche, of the conditions that had created her unhappy life, the schizophrenia of growing up as a poor colonial, her critical controlling mother who convinced her she was unlovable.

Jean's mother seems to be a key figure...

I wanted Jean's mother to represent that whole system. The fears that underlay so much of the way colonials behaved - their obsession with control and order in the face of the unknown. Although she behaves monstrously, I see her as a tragic figure born into a regime that was based on repression.

So it was Jean's mother that instilled these fears into Jean?

It must have been very confusing for Jean, she saw - and longed for - the freedom of the islanders, yet her head was crammed full of Western notions of respectability and superiority.

Do you think this schism partly explains Jean's unhappiness?

Carole Angier in her excellent biography describes how the novelist Rosamund Lehman met Jean in later life having admired her novels. They met for tea in a smart London restaurant. She was expecting to meet a bohemian, a kindred spirit, but Jean was a picture of poise and elegance. She was charming but distant and refused to talk about her work at all. Later, when Rosamund

was invited to Jean's home, she met a different woman. Jean's husband answered the door. His face was scratched. Jean was drunk and dishevelled, muttering angrily; only half aware of her guest, whose visit she had forgotten. Rosamund stayed only a few minutes.

Was Jean afraid to let people know her?

The need to conceal the parts of herself that she knew to be unacceptable was a constant theme in Jean's life. Her obsession with her appearance and her clothes was in part due to this. Yet in spite, or perhaps because of her need to hide she spoke the truth in her novels. They are as vivid an account as you will find of the dark underside of human experience, the voice of the underdog, the outsider. She speaks for anyone who has ever felt alone or afraid.

For Jean writing was not a choice but a necessity. Through it she tried to exorcise her demons.

"When you've written it down it doesn't hurt any more"

She was not always successful.

She also wrote,

"If I could put it into words it might go. Sometimes you can put it into words and get rid of it. But there aren't any words for this fear. The words haven't been invented"
(*The Sound of River*).

And yet Jean *did* find the words. With extraordinary honesty she strips away the layers of social behaviour and shows ourselves at our most naked, our most alone.

INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER ANGELA DAVIES

What were your initial thoughts on reading the play?

We wanted to create a lonely environment for Jean. An Island, which could serve as the room that she morooned herself in at the beginning of the play. This is also evocative of the island that she grew up on and revisits for inspiration. A type of 'dream landscape'.

Do you plan to watch many rehearsals?

As much as possible, it will become increasingly important to watch some rehearsals as things get set, e.g., type of prop wanted and where it should come from on the set. Many ideas will come up in rehearsals that I will be expected to respond to.

Do you have a favourite image or scene?

The image that comes to mind is in the text; an image of forbidden mangoes lying rotting on the ground in the garden of the house in Dominica. This image may not necessarily be staged, but none the less, for me it's a foreboding key image for the play.

Do you have any advice for students who would like a career in stage design?

As for schooling/training, choose a good course that will both let you explore your ideas imaginatively and provide you with competent technical skills to realise your ideas. Which also allows you to develop good communicating/ collaborating techniques.

Get to know your text very well, always respond in an instinctive, honest way. Be prepared to be a bit of a chameleon, as each play/ director/ company, will require a different approach.

JEAN RHYS CHRONOLOGY

1889 Nov

Older baby sister dies (before Jean's birth).

1890 August

Born in Dominica - Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams.

1896

Sister, Brenda, born.

1904 May

Goes to board at Convent.

1904

Meets Mr Howard.

1905/6

Leaves Convent.

1907

Sent to England.

1907/08

The Perse School, Cambridge.

1909 Jan - July

RADA. Leaves - becomes a Chorus Girl, touring the UK.

1910

Meets Lancelot Gray Smith.

1912

Affair with Lancelot ends, although he supports her financially until 1919.

1913

Late abortion, paid for by Lancelot.

Simon Thorp and Sarah Ball

1914

Works as artists' model and 'escort'.

1917

Meets and starts affair with John Lenglet.

1919

Moves to Holland with John.

1919 April

Marries John. They move to Paris.

1919 Dec

Son, William Owen, born.

1920 Jan

William dies.

1920/21

Moves to Vienna, then Budapest.

1922

Maryvonne born. Jean puts her in a Paris clinic.

1923/24

Works as shop receptionist, tour guide, artists' model, mannequin.

1924

John arrested in Paris. Sentenced to 8 months in prison. Jean moves in with Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen.

Affair with Ford Madox Ford starts. 1st writing published in Transatlantic review. Name changed from Ella Lenglet to Jean Rhys.

1926

Affair with Ford Madox Ford ends.

1927

Jean's mother dies in London.

1928

Jean returns to England. Moves in with Leslie Tilden Smith, her agent. Sells her first novel - *Postures* (later published as *Quartet*).

1929

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie published.

1933

Divorced from John.

1934

Marries Leslie Tilden Smith. They are very poor and move at least 3 times that summer. *Voyage in the Dark* published.

1935

Jean & Leslie arrested after drunken brawl in street. Spends night in police cells & fined for being 'Drunk & Disorderly' the following morning.



Jean Rhys

JEAN RHYS CHRONOLOGY CONTINUED...

1938

Throws Leslie's typewriter out of the window during row.

1938/39

Writes *Le Revenant* (an early version of *Wide Sargasso Sea*) at this time, but burns the manuscript after a row with Leslie.

1939

Good Morning Midnight published to 'sparse and grudging reviews'.

1940

Fined for being 'Drunk & Disorderly'.

1945

Meets Max Hamer, Leslie's cousin.

1946

Max Hamer living with Jean.

1947

Marries Max.

1948 March

Jean throws brick through neighbours' window.

1949 April

Row & fight with Bezant (their neighbour). Appears in Bromley Magistrates' Court. Fined £4. Bound over to keep the peace.

1949 May

Fails to appear for 3rd charge of assault.

1949

Charged with assault and beating Bezant. Remanded to Holloway Prison for 5 days for medical and psychiatric reports.

1949 July

Sentenced to 2 years' probation & medical and psychiatric treatment.

1950

Max arrested. Sentenced to 2 years in Maidstone Prison.

1950/51

Jean disappears.

1957

Good Morning Midnight is broadcast. Jean is tracked down. She is working on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Francis Wyndham, editor of André Deutsch, contacts her, he is offered the script that she is working on.

1964

Jean is persuaded to publish the first part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Arts & Literature.

1966

Max dies. *Wide Sargasso Sea* published. The novel wins the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W.H.Smith Award. Jean is made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

1968

Tigers Are Better-Looking published.

1976

Sleep It Off Lady published.

1978

Made a CBE.

1979

Jean dies on May 14. Her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* appears.

JEAN RHYS

1890 - 1979

Jean Rhys - pseudonym of Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams

Jean Rhys was born in Roseau, Dominica, West Indies. Her father was a Welsh doctor and mother was a Dominican Creole. Rhys's Creole heritage, both in the Caribbean and in England, influenced deeply her life and writing. As a child she loved literature. At the age of 17 her father sent her to England. She attended the Perse School, Cambridge (1907-08), and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (1909).

"It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different...I watched it [England] through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had, everywhere fenced off from everywhere else."

Rhys was forced to abandon her studies when her father died. She worked for a while as a chorus girl. She also received a small allowance from a former lover.

In 1919 Rhys went to Holland and married the French-Dutch journalist and songwriter Jean Langlet. In 1920-22 she lived with him in Vienna and Budapest, then in Paris, and after 1927 mainly in England. They had two children, a son who died in infancy and a daughter. Rhys began writing under the patronage of Ford Madox Ford, whom she met in Paris. At that time her husband was sentenced to prison for illegal financial transactions. Her affair with Ford ended with much bitterness. Rhys and her husband were divorced.

"The perpetual hunger to be beautiful and that thirst to be loved which is the real curse of Eve." (from *Illusion* in *The Left Bank*, 1927)

In 1927 Rhys published her first collection of stories, *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, taking the penname Jean Rhys. Her first novel, *Quartet* (1928), is a story of the fate of the innocent, helpless victim caught in a sexual game that she does not understand. The book is considered to be an account of Rhys's affair with Ford Madox Ford.

From 1939 to 1957 Rhys dropped from public attention. She had married in 1934 Leslie Tilden Smith, who died in 1945. Two years later she married Max Hamer, who had served a prison term. He died in 1966. She lived for many years in the West Country, often in great poverty, avoiding literary circles. Also Rhys herself was thought to be dead, but after a radio company became interested in her work, she returned to publicity. In 1959 her novel *Good Morning, Midnight* was adapted by Vaz Dias for the BBC. Encouraged by Francis Wyndham, Rhys started to write again, and her short stories were published in the *London Magazine* and *Art and Letters*. Rhys continued to live alone in her primitive Devon cottage, drinking heavily but still writing.

"I also was tired of learning and reciting poems in praise of daffodils, and my relations with the few 'real' English boys and girls I had met were awkward. I had discovered that if I called myself English they would snub me haughtily: 'You're not English; you're a horrid colonial.'" (from *The Day They Burned the Books* in *The Collected Short Stories of Jean Rhys*, 1968)

JEAN RHYS

BIOGRAPHY CONTINUED...

Rhys gained international acclaim in the 1960s with the publication of her most admired novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Praise for *Wide Sargasso Sea*

"The novel is a triumph of atmosphere-of what one is tempted to call Caribbean Gothic atmosphere... It has an almost hallucinatory quality." - New York Times

Rhys was made a CBE in 1978. Among her awards were W.H. Smith Award, the Royal Society of Literature Award and an Arts Council Bursary. She died on May 14, 1979, in Exeter. In the same year appeared her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* (1979).

Selected works:

- *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, 1927
- Postures, 1928 (as Quartet in 1929) - Kvartetti - film 1981, dir. by James Ivory, screenplay by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, starring Isabelle Adjani, Maggie Smith, Alan Bates
- translator: Perversity (by Francis Carco), 1928
- After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, 1931 - Herra Mackenzien jälkeen
- translator: Barred (by Edward de Nève), 1932
- Voyage in the Dark, 1934
- Good Morning, Midnight, 1939 - Huomenta, keskiyö - television film in 1959
- Wide Sargasso Sea, 1966 - Siintää Sargassosmeri - film 1992, dir. by John Duigan, starring Karina Lombard, Nathaniel Parker, Claudia Robinson
- Tigers Are Better-Looking, with a Selection from the Left Bank, 1968
- Penguin Modern Stories 1, 1969 (with others)
- My Day, 1975
- Sleep It Off Lady, 1976
- Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography, 1979
- Jean Rhys Letters 1931-1966, 1984
- Early Novels, 1984
- The Complete Novels, 1985
- Tales of the Wide Caribbean, 1985
- The Collected Short Stories, 1987



Jean Rhys

INTERVIEW WITH MOVEMENT DIRECTOR - LEAH HAUSMAN

What were your starting points for working on this production?

I first spoke to Polly about the play and her ideas and then I read a biography on Jean Rhys.

Were there any specific challenges to overcome?

I had to research into new subjects, for example: 19th century Music Hall and West Indian sounds and music, and about specific dances: quadrilles and waltzes.

What is the difference between working for Shared Experience Theatre and other theatre companies?

The process at Shared Experience is very relaxed, organic and collaborative.

If a student was interested in becoming a movement director what advice would you give them?

Be diverse; learn as much as you can about acting, directing, singers and singing -the people you may be working with and learn about lots of different forms of Theatre and dance.



Polly Teale and Leah Hausman

EXERCISE:

- ▶ *Leah and the company worked with different 'energies', early on in rehearsal: water, fire, earth, hot, cold.*
- ▶ *Work step by step - first lie on the floor with your eyes closed and experiment with simple movements responding in turn to each of the 'energies'. How do they affect your body? The quality of movement?*
- ▶ *In small groups experiment crossing a room (physically), as if you were water or heavy earth etc.*
- ▶ *Form two groups and from either side of the hall/studio cross and meet in the middle.*
- ▶ *What happens when two energies meet?*
- ▶ *How do the qualities of movement change?*
- ▶ *Which element is the most dominant?*
- ▶ *Physically what happens to the 'weaker' group?*
- ▶ *Which characters in the production belong to which element(s)?*

INTERVIEW WITH DIANA QUICK - JEAN

What attracted you to the part of Jean?

I grew up reading her earlier works and then *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published when I was at University; it was extremely popular in the mid sixties. And then recently I have come to know Dominica as I was in an adaptation of 'The Orchid House' by Phyllis Shand Allfrey for Channel 4 and have been back to the island several times since.

I also think Jean was a great artist, a great writer. And she dealt with an area of female experience which no-one else had touched in English: the tendency in the female to be a narcissistic that is to see herself and value herself according to how others see her.

How much research do you as an actor do?

It depends on the part, but for this, a documented person, you have to do 'ice berg' work, that means you do a lot of research but only a small part of that will find its way into

the part. You have to feel your way towards incorporating that person into the part - get a sense of what she was.

I of course re-read some of her novels and read her letters, diaries and her biography and I spoke to Francis Wyndham, her literary executor. He loved her earlier novels and he went out of his way to encourage her to write more. *Wide Sargasso Sea* probably came out of his encouragement.

How vital was it for you to get the accent early on in rehearsals?

Jean has to have a partial accent, which means you have to know an accent well before you can reduce it. She is from an earlier era as well which means that her speech is higher and more clipped than we are used to hearing today. She also spent a lot of time speaking French and Patois, and that sound is much further forward in the mouth than English - that's what I'm working on.



Diana Quick

INTERVIEW WITH DIANA QUICK CONTINUED...

Are there any similarities between you and Jean?

At the moment I am in the process of writing my first book, which looks at aspects of my own experiences. It is hard to pull these out of yourself and I struggle to find a point when I can let things go and let them stand on their own. Jean always wanted to change and edit her work. Like her, it's hard for me to meet the publisher's deadline!

I also share her love of Dominica and although I don't share her dependence on men, I do understand especially growing up when I did - as a child in the fifties and a teenager in the sixties that a passionate woman doesn't often fit into polite society.

I grew up straddling two worlds, my Father was born and raised in India and although I was born here I had a sense of not being entirely English, not quite belonging. Perhaps that was why early on in my career I played a lot of exotic characters: Eastern princesses, Greek peasants etc etc!

How would Jean's life have changed without alcohol?

She would have felt a lot more pain and a lot less pain, alcohol was a necessary anaesthetic. Her life was full of emotional turmoil: her break up with Lancelot, Ford Maddox Ford abandoning her, living as a semi call girl. Alcohol disinhibited her. Her husband would often give her wine to help her settle down to write, but it often got out of hand and led to all manner of problems - it let out all the anger, rage and helplessness she felt. It got her in trouble with the law: it created a dependency in her: but then she probably wouldn't have written at all without it.

How do you find working with Shared Experience?

It is much more physical than other companies, which I like. I love the visual aspect of theatre and this particular play is very different from anything I have done before as there are three of us playing the same character: Jean, Ella and Bertha.

QUESTION

► *There is a very fluid time line in After Mrs Rochester, what do you gain theatrically by jumping and cutting between different times and characters?*

► *Perspective switches two times in the novel Wide Sargasso Sea*

What is the effect of reading the same story from different people's points of view?

Which narrative voice do you trust more?

Why?

JEAN, JANE AND BERTHA



In our production of *After Mrs Rochester*, Sarah Ball plays Bertha Mason, ‘the mad woman in the attic’. She is the first Mrs Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and also Antoinette/Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In *After Mrs Rochester*, Bertha represents everything in Jean which is unacceptable to others: both the positive and negative aspects ie. her sexuality, sensuality, imagination and joy, as well as her rage and grief.

The play, *After Mrs Rochester* shows the three women, Jean, Jane and Bertha, act and interact in the same space; Jean’s locked room. The audience is led to the places of her imagination and memory - Jean’s fascination with the novel of *Jane Eyre* as a child takes us to scenes between Jane and Rochester on stage. Ever present is Bertha Mason, the woman from the West Indies from the novel *Jane Eyre* - the character who is thought to be mad for her passionate outbreaks and the woman with whom Jean empathises and finds herself interlinked and indistinguishable from in our play.

Some critics have viewed *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha as a symbol of the silencing of the female voice: she is locked away and kept secret as if she does not exist, and her words and actions are interpreted as monstrous (especially by Mr. Rochester) because she has been labelled “insane.”

QUESTION

- ▶ In *Jane Eyre*, some critics like to view Bertha as Jane’s “evil twin.” In the production of *After Mrs Rochester* can Jean be viewed as twinned to Bertha as well?
- ▶ If so how does the production show this?
- ▶ Physically, how does Diana (playing Jean) succumb to her ‘Bertha’ side?

JEAN, JANE AND BERTHA CONTINUED...

In Chapter 12 of the novel, Jane Eyre articulates what was for her time a radically feminist philosophy:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

EXERCISE: THE BELIEF LINE.

- ▶ Draw or imagine a line running the length of your hall/studio. Choose one end which represents 'Strongly agree', the other end therefore represents 'Strongly disagree'.
- ▶ In groups create a list of questions or statements (for example: Women are equal to men: Respect is the most important quality in any relationship...) and answer the questions by choosing where you stand on the belief line.
- ▶ Now answer as Bertha, Jean, Jane or Rochester.

JANE EYRE -
adapted by Polly Teale

AN EXTRACT FROM SCENE THREE

Lower School. Assembly. Jane stands on a high stool.

BROCKLEHURST:

I place her thus so that everyone may see her and recognize her. You observe she possess the ordinary form of childhood. No one would think that the evil one has already found a servant and agent in her, yet such is the case. This girl is not a true member of the flock. You must shun her example. Avoid her company. Teachers, you must keep your eyes on her movements and weigh well her words, for in these words is her illness. This girl is a liar. (Sees a girl in the audience) what is that girl with curled hair? Curled red hair. Stand up. Turn around. Why has she or any other curled hair? I have again and again said that hair must be arranged modestly, plainly...

TEACHER:

Her hair curls naturally, sir.

BROCKLEHURST:

We are here to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh. To teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety. That girl's hair. It must be cut off entirely. I will send a barber tomorrow.

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH BALL - BERTHA MASON



Sarah Ball

What attracted you to the part of Bertha?

The fact that it was so scary! A character that would grow in rehearsals. The physical side of the part I also find very interesting.

How much research do you as an actor do?

On this project I focussed on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as I see that as Bertha's story. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is such a vivid book, full of wonderful images and as a lot of what I (Bertha) say is so disparate it helps me to have clear images in my mind.

Bertha is a very physical role -what advice would you give a student playing this role or similar?

Don't be scared, follow your instincts and then it's impossible to fail. If you try something and it doesn't work, that's a way of learning. Don't edit anything, go for it and don't be worried about being embarrassed or wrong.

In AFTER MRS ROCHESTER, Bertha is only a product of Jeans imagination, is it hard to have your own objectives?

Wide Sargasso Sea really filled out Antoinette's life for me, although Bertha is a fictional character from *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* fills in the details.

I feel Bertha is the dark side of Jean, she's not around when Jean is happy, she only surfaces when Jean is alone or upset.

Do you have a favourite line?

'Some people say that life is short but it isn't if you don't want it - it go on and on and on...' (Bertha)

QUESTION

► *Many of the characters in all three texts: After Mrs Rochester, Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre are troubled and many are drunk. How do 'madness' and drunkenness serve the characters? Do they give the characters freedom? protection? the ability to see the truth? the ability to hide from it?*

DIAGNOSING BERTHA

Was Bertha’s madness hereditary, a product of her upbringing or a direct result of her confinement by Rochester?



Sarah Ball

THE VICTORIAN DIAGNOSIS:

Victorian psychiatry held that the beginnings of insanity was hereditary and was passed on through mothers, this is the first criteria which Rochester uses in his diagnosis of Bertha’s insanity. He states that his honeymoon with Bertha ended when he learned that his mother-in-law was “‘mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum’”. As Elaine Showalter states in her book ‘The Female Malady’,

“Bronte’s account echoes the beliefs of Victorian psychiatry about the transmission of madness: since the reproductive system was the source of mental illness in women, women were the prime carriers of madness”

Women were seen as especially susceptible to madness which was seen as linked to their menstrual cycle. Doctors believed that either “an abnormal quantity or quality of the blood, according to this theory, could affect the brain”. It should be noted that Bertha’s violent escapades are on nights when the moon is “blood-red” or “broad and red” while at other times she is quiet and calm. Her reproductive cycle, and her femininity is also seen to be a contribution to her insanity.

Age old beliefs regarding women and insanity still have influence today, not least because of the fear and confusion surrounding early misunderstandings of menstruation. The influences can still be seen in our language, for example, the word hysteria means ‘wandering womb’ and the slang term ‘the curse’ for menstruation.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ *What is ‘madness’? Do you agree with labelling Bertha as ‘mad’? What has caused this madness?*
- ▶ *Why does Jean identify with Bertha?*
- ▶ *Physically, how would you illustrate Bertha’s madness on stage, or in a dance piece?*

TREATING BERTHA

Moral management

In *Jane Eyre* the madwoman in the attic is a very unsympathetic character, an obstacle that stands in the way of the union of Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre. Charlotte Brontë portrays Mr. Rochester as a man with a dark past who nevertheless is not to blame for the burden with which he is saddled. *Wide Sargasso Sea* obviously sees this situation from a different angle. What are some of the factors that might have led to the difference between Charlotte Brontë's version and that of Jean Rhys?

The accepted treatment in the Victorian period for the wealthy who were insane was to keep them locked away in their homes. Bertha had been shut up upon being declared mad by a doctor.

Brontë reflects Victorian humanitarianism when she criticizes Rochester's treatment of Bertha. Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady* states,

"during the first half of the nineteenth century...the idea that...lunatic patients could be handled without recourse to physical restraint won wide acceptance in England".

This type of treatment for the insane was named moral management. Moral management includes therapy, non-restraint, regular visits by a doctor, and a suitable "moral" environment to cure patients of their insanity. And yet, when he is unable to control Bertha, Rochester ties her up. Jane admonishes him, stating:

"you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady...It is cruel—she cannot help being mad"

This reflects the Victorian disapproval of physically restraining the insane. They believed that therapy was a better, more humane treatment for mental illness than locking people away. Victorian psychiatry held that:

"violence of manic patients was in large part caused by the harsh way they were treated. Treating the patient like a rational person, they suggested, was the best way to cultivate the sense of self-esteem that would lead to self-control"

The physical restraint that Rochester used would have been seen as outdated and non-productive by modern Victorian science.

By locking Bertha up, Rochester would not be seen as cruel but merely outdated. The Madhouse Act (1828) and the Lunatics Act (1845) allowed for a more humane treatment of the mentally ill, providing a clean, safe environment to cure insanity. But the social stigma of having a mad wife is too great for Rochester.

(From extracts by Patricia L. Herrick)

INTERVIEW WITH MADELEINE POTTER - ELLA

What attracted you to the part of Ella?

I found the challenges in the script very attractive. It requires the creation of a new theatrical language. For instance, two people, Diana Quick and myself, play Jean Rhys, while another character, Bertha, exists both in her own reality and as a kind of alter-ego in ours. The play is a memory play and the use of time is very original. Also of course, I loved the part. I had never read Jean Rhys's books. I have now read them all and they are startling and brilliant and very modern. I was drawn to the artist and to the woman herself.

How important a factor is the geography/world that Ella grew up in? How does it shape her personality?

Jean Rhys, or Ella Gwendoline Rhys as she was named, was a white West Indian. The lushness, beauty and ferocity of the Dominican landscape in which she grew up could not but powerfully affect her. There is a profound sense of displacement and alienation in her books. She emigrated to a cold country, but had a sunny country within her. This is a theme in all her books.

Do you have a favourite line?

Yes, I like what Ford Maddox Ford says to Jean:

'We are trying to bridge this great chasm between ourselves and others. To find ourselves in a story'.



Madeleine Potter and Hattie Ladbury

LETTERS AND LOVE LETTERS

Jean Rhys spent her life struggling with her nature. She desperately needed love but was unable to receive it. Carole Angier, in her biography of Jean Rhys, entitled *Jean Rhys, Life and Work*, summarises Jean's most painful feelings, amongst them:

'Her absolute inability to be alone: "You know I can't be alone. I can't," she wrote in the very beginning, in The Left Bank. Her inability none the less ever to feel anything but alone: ever to feel any real connection to or understanding of another human being.'

Jean writes many letters in 'After Mrs Rochester'. On the written page, she could express desires and thoughts that she felt may be forbidden to be spoken, as she so often found herself in trouble for her actions. However, Jean distrusted 'just words', as Carole Angier's described:

Nothing, of course, could be more like Jean than this distrust of 'just words', and the sense that all that matters goes on beneath their surface. It's part of her general sense that what is important is hidden; it's part of her instinctive preference for suggestion over statement, for feeling over thought...'

Polly Teale captures Jean's struggle with trusting words in the play; shown in this excerpt, after Launcelot has ended their relationship:

JEAN I found a room. Somewhere. Anywhere. I didn't care. I closed the curtains and got into bed. For two days I wrote letters.

ELLA *(writing)* I'd like to see you just once more. It needn't be for very long. It need only be for an hour. *(Corrects)* Half an hour.

BERTHA SCREWS UP LETTER. AS SHE SPEAKS ELLA WRITES HALF SPEAKING THE WORDS ALONG WITH HER.

BERTHA Me love you. Me love you. Me love you. You can't do this to me. If I were a dog you wouldn't do this to me. I wish I was your dog so that I could follow you and smell you and sleep at the bottom of your bed and eat the scraps you throw under the table and lick your shoes and have you beat me.....

ELLA CONTINUES TO WRITE DOWN BERTHA'S WORDS AS JEAN SPEAKS.

JEAN For three days I wrote without stopping. Page after page. I didn't sleep. Didn't eat. On the third day I caught the last post.

SHE READS THE FINAL LETTER AS SHE PUTS IT IN AN ENVELOPE.

ELLA I am now living at Number Ten Offord Street. I hope your trip is a success. Regards. Ella.

JEAN I put the rest of the pages in a chocolate box and locked them in a suitcase. When you've written it down it doesn't hurt so much. But you're finished. Part of you is gone.

LETTERS AND LOVE LETTERS CONTINUED...

Charlotte Brontë similarly often expressed her most personal feelings in letters. This letter was written by Charlotte Brontë, English writer, to Professor Constantin Heger. There is no evidence that this love was ever returned by him.

January 8, 1845

*Monsieur,
the poor have not need of much to sustain them – they ask only for the crumbs that fall from the rich man’s table. But if they are refused the crumbs they die of hunger. Nor do I, either, need much affection from those I love. I should not know what to do with a friendship entire and complete – I am not used to it. But you showed me of yore a little interest, when I was your pupil in Brussels, and I hold on to the maintenance of that little interest – I hold on to it as I would hold on to life.*

QUESTION:

Jean Rhys had many lovers in her life and although they sometimes provided peaks of happiness they more often than not contributed to her troughs of despair.

- ▶ Jean described herself as: **“a doormat in a world of boots.”** Why do you think she felt this?
- ▶ Jean writes and receives many letters in *After Mrs Rochester*, how are they used in the production? What do they mean to you?

EXERCISE: SOLVING AND DRAMATISING.

- ▶ When might a letter be useful as a dramatic device?
- ▶ How could you stage the writing of a letter on stage?
- ▶ In today’s world of texting and email, would a letter have a different significance? In what circumstances would you write a letter and why?
- ▶ As a class, write a letter from Ella as a chorus girl, to her mother. What might Ella want to say and what would go in the final posted draft? How could you dramatise this? For example, would you use Bertha, Jean and Ella, as Polly has done? Would you have the mother in view on stage? See the mother’s reaction to the letter? Have a fictional scenario that shows the result of the more truthful version that can’t be sent? Think about the hidden world of Ella’s pain and feeling of rejection from her mother. How could you stage this?
- ▶ Discuss in groups and work as an ensemble to solve and stage this, using the same letter that the whole class composed together. How different are the various dramatisations?

ROSEAU AND ENGLAND

Wide Sargasso Sea begins in Roseau, the capital of Dominica. The setting of the play *After Mrs Rochester* is multi-locational, in that we leave Jean's room to go with her, in her imagination, to the places of her past. One of these places is Roseau, where Jean lived as a child.

Her mother describes the island in the play:

MOTHER: Of course it's beautiful here... but impossible. It's the heat and the humidity. We have to change our clothes three times a day. Fabric rots. Furniture falls apart. Nothing lasts. Everything decays as quickly as it grows. The road they built has almost returned to forest. Three times they've sold the house on the Imperial road in as many years. They try but it defeats them in the end.

From 'After Mrs Rochester'

QUESTION:

- ▶ How does this description of Jean's homeland give us insight into her character?

Jean is sent to England to complete her schooling there. Jean describes her memory of her first sight of the country;

JEAN: *England. It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. The colours were different. The smells different. I watched it through the train window, divided into squares like pocket handkerchiefs. A small tidy look it had. Everywhere fenced off from everywhere else."*

"She found pleasure in memories, as an old woman might have done. Her mind was a confusion of memory and imagination. It was always places that she thought of, not people. She would lie thinking of the dark shadows of houses in a street white with sunshine; or trees with slender black branches and young green leaves, like the trees of a London square in spring; or of a dark-purple sea, the sea of a chromo or of some tropical country that she had never seen." (from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, 1931)

QUESTION:

- ▶ How does Jean's first impressions of England manifest itself in her experience of England and the English?

ROSEAU CONTINUED...

An extract from *After Mrs Rochester*

ELLA *(reads Jane Eyre)* I instantly fell in love with that tropical clime where the light is golden and the air warm. *(addressing Jean)* How did she know?

JEAN She made it up

ELLA She never came here?

JEAN She lived on the Yorkshire moors.

ELLA *(reading)* I walked amidst the dripping mango trees of my wet garden. Amongst its drenched pomegranates and pineapples. Mosquitoes hummed.

JEAN She used to read the travelogues in the back of her father's newspaper.

QUESTION

- ▶ Why is the climate and the descriptions of nature so important in all three texts: *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *After Mrs Rochester*?
- ▶ What effect does the move to England have on *Bertha* and *Jean*? How is this shown in the production?



LOOKING AT A SCENE

ELLA READS ALOUD TO TITE. THEY ARE LYING TOGETHER ON THE GROUND. SOUND OF THE RIVER.

ELLA: He answered me without hesitation *"The creature of an over stimulated brain. I must be careful of you my treasure. Nerves like yours were not made for rough handling"*. (Ella closes the book)

TITE: What happens next?

ELLA: They go to the church but in the middle of the wedding a man shouts for it to stop. It turns out Mr Rochester is married already. He's married to the woman who escapes at night from the attic. And guess where she comes from?

TITE: You've read it before?

ELLA: Five times. Guess

TITE: I don't know.

ELLA: The West Indies. He came here and married her. (she reads) I instantly fell in love with that tropical clime where the light is golden and the air warm. (looks up from the page) When we're grown up and married let's still come and meet at the river.

TITE: Me thought you going to England. Become a lady.

ELLA: Promise.

TITE: Live in a house you get lost. Can't never get out.

ELLA: Say we will.

TITE: I ain't getting marry.

ELLA: You have to.

TITE: Say who.

ELLA: Everybody. You have to marry. You have to marry if you want to..

TITE: My mother ain't marry.

ELLA: But how did she.....she's got....You've got to be married to have babies.

TITE: (laughs) Sometimes you is like a baby. Some times you is too stupid to be a baby. (she laughs and laughs)

Polly (the director) and Madeleine (Ella) look at the scene early on in rehearsals

Polly: Why does she want to read the book to Tite?

Madeleine: She wants to show Tite how exciting reading is and her knowledge gives her a feeling of control over Tite who can't read.

Polly: What about Bertha. Does she find her frightening? If she shares the story with Tite will it will diffuse the fear?

Madeleine: I don't think she understands it yet.

Polly: It fascinates her, yet disturbs her too - the fact that Bertha comes from the West Indies, the place where they live themselves. Why does she say, when we are married lets come back here?

Madeleine: I think that the weight of sexuality and adulthood stops your freedom, that's why she wants to come back, and back to a place with her best friend and the freedom that Tite represents to her.

LOOKING AT A SCENE CONTINUED...

Polly: *Jane Eyre* is a novel about the dark and frightening adult world.

Madeleine: I think Ella is realizing that her parents and adults don't have everything under control.

Polly: Tite is very mocking, poking fun at the fantasy of living in a big house in England as a lady. The fantasy excludes Tite and so she is keen to undermine it.

QUESTION:

- ▶ *What would Ella have been told about babies and marriage?*
- ▶ *Look at the scene closely. When do you think Ella is in control and when is Tite?*

EXERCISE:

- ▶ *Discuss the word 'status'. What does it mean to you? What defines status? How does it affect our relationships?*
- ▶ *In groups of 4, allocate two actors to play Ella and Tite; the other two people have a selection of different number playing cards. Play the scene and during the scene adjust each character's status by showing the actors different playing cards. A high number signifies a high status, so 10 would be high, 1 or ace is low. For example, the scene may start with Ella on a status of 9 and Tite on 3. How does status affect the scene and your characterisations? Make sure you allow time for the actors to develop their work on each status before switching them.*



POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE IN WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Wide Sargasso Sea is not only a brilliant deconstruction of Brontë's legacy, but is also a damning history of colonialism in the Caribbean.

The story is set just after the emancipation of the slaves, in that uneasy time when racial relations in the Caribbean were at their most strained. Antoinette (Rhys renames her and has Rochester impose the name of Bertha on her when their relationship dissolves) is descended from the plantation owners, and her grandfather has had many children by negro women. She can be accepted neither by the negro community nor by the colonial elite. As a poor white creole she is nothing. The taint of racial impurity, coupled with the suspicion that she is mentally imbalanced bring about her inevitable downfall.

The merging of Antoinette's fate into that of Bertha's is inevitable, but Rhys allows us to interpret the fate of Antoinette differently by having the ending open. Antoinette dreams of the fire and leap to her death, but the novel ends with her resolution to act rather than a description of her death or an exact repetition of Brontë's words. Thus the possibility of a different fate for Rhys's character is left intact. The more recent text can be said to have an influence on the earlier text and to extend its possibilities.

The desire to rewrite the master narratives of Western discourse is a common colonial practice, with texts like *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Great Expectations* being given the same scrutiny that Rhys affords to Brontë's text. The telling of a story from another point of view can be seen as an extension of the deconstructive project to explore the gaps and silences in a text. Since writing has long been recognised as one of the strongest forms of cultural control, the rewriting of central narratives of colonial superiority is a liberating act for those from the former colonies. Rhys's text is a highly sophisticated example of the re-evaluation of European perceptions of the Caribbean creole community.



David Annen

IN CONVERSATION WITH AMY MARSTON AND SIMON THORP



Amy Marston and Simon Thorp

How much research do you as actors do?

Simon: It always depends on the project; I've read the adaptation of *Jane Eyre* that Polly wrote, bits of the novel and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Amy: On this project we've done quite a lot; the more information you have, the more chance that within that you will find something that you can use. On this project there are lots of different timescales and locations to learn about.

Do you find it hard to play a character based on a real person?

Simon: It depends on the character, but usually if they've been written into a play it's because they are interesting. A Ford Maddox Ford society exists - if they came to see the show, that would be frightening!

IN CONVERSATION WITH AMY MARSTON AND SIMON THORP CONTINUED...

You were cast to play Jane and Maryvonne, do they share any similarities?

Amy: Yes, they are both 'good' people, Maryvonne strives to do what is right. She is very practical in contrast to her mother. Jane, too, she doesn't want a proper wedding dress for example, whereas Jean loves make up and looking beautiful.

What do you consider to be the vices and virtues of Jane and Rochester?

Simon: Rochester's vice is women; he's searching for the perfect woman. With Bertha and locking her up, he thinks he is acting in her best interests, he is an honourable man underneath and he thinks he's doing the right thing. He doesn't accept responsibility until he meets Jane. He is a romantic but he is selfish.

Amy: Jane hides her feelings due to necessity so perhaps that isn't a vice, if you were her friend you would be frustrated at how she hides her feelings and her temper. She tries to be honest, doesn't flatter and is selfless.

Simon: They both have parts missing, what one lacks the other offers.

How different is it working for Shared Experience than other companies?

Amy: It is a very different way of working, in the first few days we did a lot of physical work, improvising and exposing physically the underneath of our characters, revealing the inner emotional states. It is a very freeing way to work.

Simon: It's a combination of work I've done before -naturalism, physical theatre, discussion, improvisation.

Do you have a favourite line/s?

Simon: As Rochester: 'Mangoes grow on the trees, Jane'. And as Ford Maddox Ford: 'It's frighteningly alive, dark, truthful, I've never read anything like it'.

Amy: In the last scene, Maryvonne to Jean: 'although I never knew what to say to you... I knew everything about you'.

WHAT DO I WANT?

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

During rehearsals, Polly, the director and the actors discussed what each character's objective and obstacle might be. These are never carved in stone as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change.

Character: Rochester

Super Objective: To be loved.

Obstacles: He (and Jane) are incomplete. His main obstacle is his guilt over Bertha Mason. He has some significant insecurities too, he considers himself unattractive, he has a fear of rejection and he has a need to protect himself.

Useful Words: Bombastic, Cantankerous, opinionated, perceptive, suspicious, vulnerable, insecure, lonely, romantic, wealthy.

Character: Bertha Mason

Super Objective: To be whole.

Obstacles: Feels broken.

Useful Words: Anger, deprived, sexual, alone, waiting, pain, numbness, endless, rejected, abandoned, vengeful.

Character: Maryvonne

Super Objective: To have a peaceful life.

Obstacle: Her Mothers' impossible behaviour.
She loves her mother.

WHAT DO I WANT? CONTINUED...

Character: Tite

Super Objective: To live life to the fullest.

Obstacle: Growing up, life changing, growing apart. Racist society.

Useful Words: Life, love, liberator, freedom, work.

Character: Lancelot

Super Objective: To be chivalrous -to rescue a 'damsel in distress', to be a gentleman.

Obstacle: Low self-esteem and feelings of failure.

Useful Words: From 'Voyage in the Dark': *'as if everything and everybody in the whole world belonged to him'*, cut glass. From his Father: *'No Smith has ever been a stockbroker'* and as an old man: *'My cousin, the Queen'*.

EXERCISE THE CHAIRS GAME:

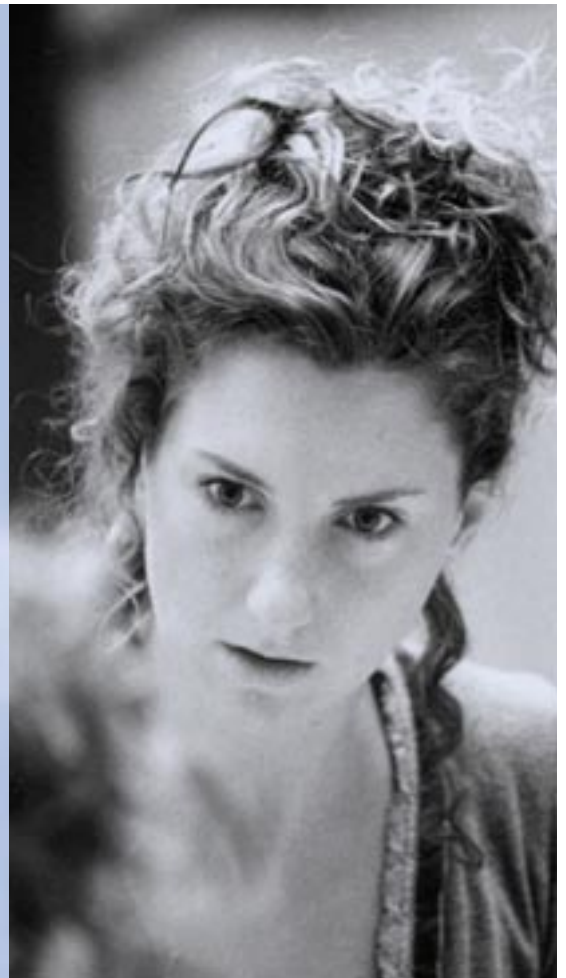
Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', which should work in opposition to his/her partner's 'want' for example:

- ▶ To punish
- ▶ To want forgiveness
- ▶ To enthuse
- ▶ To freeze
- ▶ To protect
- ▶ To blame

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person and the space, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor of theirs.



INTERVIEW WITH THE COMPOSER - HOWARD DAVIDSON

How do you arrive at creating the sound and music for the play?

I start by experimenting with textures based on certain key words or phrases that feature strongly in the script. 'Buzzing' is one example. 'Time' is another. And there are particular scenes that are particularly suggestive of music. Convent. Rainforest. Vienna. Passages from *Jane Eyre*.

I try and assemble a palette of sound and instruments that suit the whole score. A basic texture or ambience for example that could suggest rushing, water, confusion, anger, when combined with a few other key sounds. Sounds that we've heard before in different contexts. For example the various clock ticks (and tocks) that are heard at the beginning are later used as 'stings' to enter and then exit fantasy sequences. In this way, I think, the score becomes 'organic' and homogenous.

Were there any specific challenges to overcome?

A few. The play is very 'not real' as it were. So both music and sound have to compliment this. So what sounds like a rainforest isn't really a rainforest at all. The clocks are not clocks. It's me inside a grand piano with the sustain pedal down.

Do you do any historical/geographical research?

Yes a little. It took me a while to get the island right. Dominica not Dominican Republic. And I found the actual musical that Jean Rhys was in. A Dominican actor taught me a song he sang as a boy-and it's in the show. It's in Creole too, so I learnt a little about that.

What are the main differences between working with Shared Experience and other theatre companies?

I do very little theatre work so I don't really know. I have worked a lot with dance companies and they are very physical. I quite like the idea of several people playing the same character at once on stage.

COMPOSING EXERCISE

Much of Howard Davidson's scoring for *After Mrs Rochester* plays under a scene. As he states in the interview on the previous page, the play is full of evocative scenes that are suggestive of music, but Howard will not always use instruments in their obvious way.

Split the class in to 3 groups and use voices only to create a soundscape inspired by the following given titles, composing your scores for the following excerpts from the play:

1. INSIDE BERTHA MASON'S MIND:

Bertha: Six flights. Four landings with ten doors. All shut. Forty five steps. Forty five or forty six. I lose count. Too tired to count. Too tired to sleep. Too tired. And there are so many hours left to live. So many. People say that life is short but it's not if you don't want it. It go on and on and on and... Never ending. No ending.

2. ELLA'S HOME AS A CHILD:

Mother: Do you know what they say about us?

Father: I don't know and I don't care.

Mother: The house falling down around their ears. The crazy daughter who walked down the street dressed like a nigger.

Father: She's a child.

Mother: She's thirteen years old.

Father: A child.

Mother: It's all very well for you. You're a man. You can do as you please. But a woman. A woman has to learn to fit in. To do as she's told. Who do you think will want her? Who will marry her if she doesn't know how to behave? (To Ella) Who do you think will love you?

Ella: I don't know.

3. THE ISLAND OF DOMINICA:

Jean: Whenever I could escape from the house I would follow Tite down to the river to swim. Past the abandoned sugar works. Into the forest. Where there was no road. No path. No track. The trees grew wild there. Huge rotting flowers drop into the water. The smell was heavy sweet and very strong. You could smell them a long way off. The smell of decay, of death, and a fresh living smell.

COMPOSING EXERCISE CONTINUED...

It's best if the 3 groups can create the soundscape in separate rooms. At first, read the excerpt that fits with the title you are composing for. Discuss the title and the scene. Create the soundscapes by sitting in a circle, discussing the group's thoughts on the atmosphere of the place - How does it feel? Is there a colour that would best suit it? Emotions? Are there actual sounds present that should be layered into the atmospheric score? Then the group should close their eyes and improvise, experimenting with sounds and listening to each other's ideas, sometimes layering sounds and leaving solitary sounds at other times. Then open eyes, discuss what worked and didn't, set some of the sounds, and repeat the exercise. Once the soundscape is complete, invite the other students to come and sit in the middle of your sound circle and close their eyes. This time the composers can keep their eyes open as they repeat their soundscape for the captive audience. At the end, the audience should be asked to describe how the score affected them, what atmosphere it evoked and if it gave rise to any images for them.

Now rehearse and play each short excerpt that you have composed for and work with the soundscape.

- ▶ Can you integrate the performers of the soundscape as ensemble players in the scene, or would you rather keep them out of the playing space?
- ▶ Does your composition introduce or punctuate the scene, or should it continue under the dialogue?

After performing, discuss.

- ▶ Did the sound enhance your audience's understanding and enjoyment of the scene?
- ▶ Did it create the right environment and atmosphere?
- ▶ What, if anything, would you change?

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A REVIEW

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart

- Don't worry about given theories
- Create your own theories

- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Question that moment
- Find out what it says to you
- Say why it spoke to you

CONSIDER

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text

- The set, the costumes, the style of the production
- The Objects: The fans... Books... Wardrobe... Embroideries... Bottles... Glasses... Papers... Clothes... Suitcases
- The themes... The characters... The story... The ending...

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

Send your review to:
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Simon Thorp and Sarah Ball

FURTHER READING

- Jean Rhys* by Louis James (1978);
- Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* by Thomas F. Staley (1979);
- Jean Rhys* by Peyer Wolfe (1980);
- Jean Rhys* by Arnold E. Davidson (1985);
- Ladies and the Mammies: Jane Austen and Jean Rhys*, ed. by Selma James (1986);
- Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* by Nancy R. Harrison (1988);
- Critical Perspectives in Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette Frickey (1990);
- Jean Rhys: A Life and Work* by Carole Angiers (1990);
- Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* by Veronica Marie Gregg (1995);
- Jean Rhys* by Carol Ann Howells (1991);
- Jean Rhys* by Sanford Sternlicht (1997);
- Jean Rhys* by Sylvie Maurel (1999);
- The World of Jean Rhys* by Sue Thomas (1999)
- The Female Malady* by Elaine Showlotan



Amy Marston



sharedexperience

AFTER MRS ROCHESTER

THE STORY OF JEAN RHYS

YOUTH, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ACCESS

The company's Youth Theatre, based at the Soho Laundry and supported by Westminster City Council, is a hotbed of creativity. Young Performers come to stretch their physical and imaginative muscle in courses led by artists from within the company. It runs a wide variety of workshops and projects designed to put members in touch with the physical style of the main company's work.

Contact Kate Saxon, Education and Youth Director, at Shared Experience on 020 7434 9248 or katesaxon@setheatre.co.uk

Shared Experience would like to thank the following for their imaginative and enlightened support:



A Shared Experience Youth Theatre Workshop