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“Would they not wish the feast might ever last?”: Strong Spice, Oral History and the Genesis of Globe to Globe

Abstract: The 2012 Globe to Globe Festival proved a great success. Actors, directors, musicians, dancers, designers and technicians travelled from all over the world to perform on the Globe stage. Visitors to London’s Cultural Olympiad enjoyed six jam-packed weeks of Shakespeare, presented in an array of international languages. The Globe’s Artistic Director, Dominic Dromgoole, and his Festival Director, Tom Bird, had achieved what seemed, to many, the impossible. Nonetheless, filmed interviews with Dromgoole and Bird, conducted during the festival by the American documentary-maker Steve Rowland, offer tantalizing insights into the genesis of the festival venture. These candid interviews confirm the sometimes farcical, often exhausting, but invariably serendipitous truth behind the Globe to Globe Festival’s short, intense history. Although the Globe was “flying completely blind,” it still succeeded in hosting a glorious feast of Shakespearean delights, seasoned with the strong spice of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Globe to Globe Festival 2012; Dominic Dromgoole; Shakespeare; Cultural Olympiad; Globe Theatre.

We had no idea whether it’ll work or not and we had no idea what we were doing. And we were flying completely blind.
(Dominic Dromgoole, Interview by Steve Rowland, 2 May 2012)

2012 was a significant year in Shakespeare history. International festivals brought communities of performers, artists, and academics together in unprecedented ways. The Cultural Olympiad, an inspired offshoot antidote to London’s more famous sporting event, promised its alternative adrenaline rush of creative dialogue manifesting in international artistic exchange. The World Shakespeare Festival, a culturally ambitious project under the Cultural Olympiad’s imaginative umbrella, focused specifically on Britain’s Bard, with invitations extended to theatre companies to express their engagement with Shakespeare in a year when the world seemed set to travel to the playwright’s native soil. Languages and dialects from across the globe resonated in the

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theatrical and artistic spaces of the UK. As Susan Bennett and Christie Carson explored in *Shakespeare Beyond English*, one London base, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, became a focal point for this cultural celebration. For an intense six weeks between April and June of that year, theatre companies from Serbia to China, New Zealand to Afghanistan, South Sudan to South Korea, were stirred to offer their own versions of that quintessentially British cultural phenomenon, Shakespeare. The Globe to Globe Festival invited thirty-five international production houses (not including the Globe's own company, the London-based Definitely Theatre, and the UK-exiled Belarus Free Theatre) to travel to Britain's capital and perform – most only twice – on the Globe stage. A matinee and an evening performance was the norm: no more, no less.¹ As Bennett and Carson's book suggests, the effect not only on the Globe audiences, but also on those involved, was life changing and life enhancing. The Globe's Artistic Director Dominic Dromgoole, and Festival Director Tom Bird, whose privately recorded observations form the main source for this article, had fulfilled their seemingly impossible promise to celebrate the international appeal of Shakespeare when the eyes and ears (and newsgathering media technology) of the world were concentrated wholly on and in London. The impossible was made possible through hard work, gargantuan effort, near military organizational precision, and, in Dromgoole's own words, "great good luck" (Bennett and Carson xxiii).

For the international theatre practitioners who participated in the Globe to Globe Festival – actors, directors, designers, choreographers, composers, musicians, dancers, singers, poets – the experience would never be forgotten. One US-based documentary maker, Steve Rowland, who filmed interviews with the creatives and performers during the festival season, captured much of this excitement. Rowland's recorded conversations with Dromgoole and Bird, conducted likewise in the midst of the festival season, nevertheless offer some surprising and entertaining insights into the Globe to Globe Festival's complex birth and development.² Rowland, whose oral history expertise spans thirty years, and whose award-winning documentaries celebrate American music icons such as Miles Davis, Leonard Bernstein, John Coltrane, Frank Zappa, and Carlos Santana, approached these interviews with the same professional expertise, coupled with a passionate interest in Shakespeare. Following an art cinema visit to see Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004), starring Al Pacino as Shylock, the Seattle-based documentary maker spent the following years interviewing actors, directors, and scholars, to provide a snapshot of twenty-first century Shakespearean endeavour. As part of this project, Rowland forged

¹ South Africa, China, the USA, Brazil, Turkey and Lithuania performed three times.

² My thanks to Dominic Dromgoole, and especially to Steve Rowland, who has given very generously of his time, via email and Skype conversations, as well as unprecedented access to his Globe to Globe sound and video archive prior to publication on *Shakespeare Central*.

relationships with the key players in American and British Shakespeare production. The project also introduced him to Dromgoole, whose decision to stage the Globe to Globe Festival was, in Rowland’s own words, an act of “absolute sheer brilliance.”³

Sensing the “brilliance” of the Globe to Globe Festival, Rowland asked Dromgoole what was, in the documentary-maker’s opinion, a simple question. Who was in charge of the Globe’s “interview team?” Dromgoole’s bemused response – “What interview team?” – left the oral historian reeling. The organization of what Dromgoole would later call this “big, simple, stupid idea” was so intense and so hectic that neither he nor Bird had considered employing any documentary team, professional or otherwise (Bennett and Carson xxiii).⁴ Aware that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity, Rowland volunteered his services to document, in whatever form seemed appropriate, the impressions of those who participated in the event. For Dromgoole, the offer of a documentary maker’s eyes and ears adding observational weight to the project was embraced and accepted eagerly. Rowland was invited to the festival, accommodated by the Globe, and given unprecedented access to the participants and to the theatre’s resources. In return, his oral histories would belong jointly to himself and to the Globe, and be made freely available to the international Shakespeare community. Not a trained, and therefore potentially constrained, Shakespeare scholar, but a professional interviewer with an encyclopaedic knowledge about contemporary Shakespeare performance, Rowland knew his interviews might uncover unwitting insights into the creative, cultural, political, and, for some, spiritual implications of the project. He was less prepared, however, for Dromgoole’s candid admission that the Globe to Globe Festival team “were flying completely blind.”⁵

The significance of the Globe to Globe Festival’s innovatively blind flying cannot be overestimated. Given the timescale, improvisational immediacy and responsive action were of the essence, especially given the Cultural Olympiad’s less than wholly envisioned genesis. Originally proposed as part of London’s overall Olympic and Paralympic bid, and recorded in Arts Council England’s *Reflections on the Cultural Olympiad*, this “once in a lifetime” event was intended to “champion culture and education alongside sport, celebrate the work of Deaf and disabled artists, and inspire young people all over the UK” (Hall 19). The event’s grand “finale” would be the London 2012 Festival, where

³ All quotations from Steve Rowland, unless otherwise stated, are taken from private Skype conversations with Kevin Quarmby, 9 January 2014.

⁴ Subsequently, the Globe Education team, under the direction of Patrick Spottiswoode and Farah Karim-Cooper, embarked on their own oral project, conducted by various Globe Education staff members who asked a scripted series of preselected questions.

⁵ All quotations from Dominic Dromgoole, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the transcript of Steve Rowland’s recorded interview at the Globe Education building, London, 2 May 2012.

“world class artists from round the World and the UK” would be commissioned to provide “innovative work which would highlight cultural hot spots for tourists, and offer free participation opportunities for local communities” (Hall 19). The Cultural Olympiad’s ambitious “game changer” aim, of “putting art at the heart of the Games themselves,” while “showcasing UK world class excellence,” was, prior to the Olympic announcement, far from concretized (Hall 1). Nobody was fully aware, therefore, how London’s 2012 Festival might manifest itself. When, then, in July 2005 London did indeed win the Olympic bid, and it became clear that an important part of the bid’s success was what Dromgoole calls “the cultural offer,” the ball very firmly entered Britain’s theatre-producing court. In consequence, as Dromgoole explains, he received notice of the Cultural Olympiad in 2006, his first year as Artistic Director at the Globe.

Significantly, and perhaps somewhat irksomely, Dromgoole found the Globe already “linked into the Cultural Olympiad” as an Olympic Games “offshoot,” without, as far as he knew, his new company ever “having been asked.” Not necessarily a bad thing, the Globe’s involvement was nevertheless presented as a *fait accompli*, with an announcement by Cultural Olympiad Board member Jude Kelly, that the World Shakespeare Festival would benefit from the Globe’s “willing and excited participation,” masking an uncomfortable reality. Neither the Globe, nor (more worryingly for him) its new Artistic Director, had any idea what such “participation” might entail. A “willing and excited” participant in a sporting nation’s Olympic bid is one thing. The reality of a clearly defined Cultural Olympiad Festival event is something entirely different.

Dromgoole’s description of the ensuing discussions is comical, not least because of the ill-preparedness of Britain’s Shakespeare creatives. It was as if the success of London’s Olympic bid took everyone by surprise, especially those “willing and excited” members of the Shakespeare community upon whose participation the Cultural Olympiad offshoot so obviously relied. How would a World Shakespeare Festival manifest itself? What form should it take? Aware that the deadline loomed, and the Olympic clock erected in London’s Trafalgar Square was ticking inexorably toward 2012, representatives from theatre and TV organizations like London’s National Theatre, the BBC, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and, of course, the Globe, called a series of high power meetings. Describing these as “hellish,” and full of “jargon vision speak,” Dromgoole paints a comically negative picture of a group of “baloney meetings where everyone got together” and asked unhelpfully cerebral questions like, “What is Shakespeare? What is an audience? What is a theatre? What is the Festival? Why do we need to do these things? We must discuss these things for ages.” Rather than an opportunity for the nation’s creatives to find solutions to their cultural festival problems, these brainstorming sessions seemed, to Dromgoole, at best fruitless, at worst mind-numbingly counterproductive: “[W]e all collectively wanted to kill ourselves in every single one of these meetings.” The

mass suicide of Britain’s Shakespeare producing elite would hardly represent the most auspicious start for the Cultural Olympiad undertaking.

“Eventually,” Dromgoole explains, and “in pure exasperation,” the depressed group members decided, “why don’t [they] all just disappear and only come back together again” when they had “concrete proposals” about what they wanted to “do,” rather than ponder endlessly on “what this is all about.” This distance, this going away and thinking, proved significant for the Globe to Globe Festival because, as Dromgoole explains, an idea came to him “very quickly and very automatically”:

A very simple idea that we should do every play of Shakespeare’s – every play in a different language. [...] I thought of that for about five seconds – and then I thought, every play done by a different country from abroad. [...] And then I thought for another five seconds, and I thought, we’d invite companies from all over the world to come here and do it all in six weeks. So, thinking [about it...] probably took less than a minute. (Dromgoole 2 May 2012)

This “less than a minute” decision, after so many failed collective meetings, identified the Globe’s approach to the World Shakespeare Festival, and offered if not a blueprint, then at least a focus for their Cultural Olympiad involvement. “Really,” continues Dromgoole, “it’s just about playing to our strengths”: “The building is an icon – the building is a huge temple of theatre – it has a massive international reputation.” The iconic status of the venue would draw international attention and participation. At the same time, the Globe’s iconic status would attract artists from “all over the world,” not so the Globe could “dictate how or why they were doing Shakespeare,” Dromgoole urges, “or to get into some meaningless collaboration or co-production where we all try and share languages and share different cultures and so on.” Such collaborative moments of cultural exchange “sometimes have fruitful results,” Dromgoole concedes, but often the upshot is “everybody diluting their own flavour,” while producing a bland ersatz version of Shakespeare that is neither appetizing nor fulfilling. Instead, Dromgoole decided, in that fateful “less than a minute,” how “great” it would be “to have thirty-seven really strong and pungent flavours coming from different places to this building.” The Globe to Globe Festival would offer a taste of the world’s engagement with Shakespeare, while injecting some “strong and pungent” spice into London’s theatrical scene. Culture, food and sport added to the sensual potential of Dromgoole’s innovative idea.

Innovative it might be, but how logistically was this grand pseudo-culinary Shakespeare feast to be achieved, let alone catered for? Significant for its success, Dromgoole knew, was the active and willing involvement of the international political and cultural community. Without the support of these government-sponsored bodies, little could be accomplished. Describing his

“initial instinct” as the need “to get the word out there” about the Globe’s ambitious plan, Dromgoole explains his idea of contacting a “whole variety of cultural attachés and people from embassies,” as well as theatre institutes worldwide, and inviting them to London for a meeting. Hopefully, by bringing these political and cultural powerhouses together in one place to talk about the project, they would begin “spreading the word back into their communities,” thus garnering local and national support.

In the subsequent quest for “strong and pungent” flavours, the Globe’s own catering facilities became a vital ingredient for unlocking the world’s cultural doors. At the end of 2010, therefore, less than sixteen months before the festival was scheduled to begin, the Globe hosted a breakfast in its Swan Restaurant. This breakfast was well attended, but still its host Dromgoole was unsure how to achieve his goal. Explaining how he arrived late to his own meeting because he had his mobile phone “nicked on the bus on the way in,” Dromgoole wryly describes his mood that day as, “in a slight temper.” Hardly the most auspicious of emotional states, Dromgoole’s barely-contained anger spread into his welcoming speech, which focused more on the theft of his phone than on the proposed festival. The speech’s narrative, which exposed a criminal underbelly to London’s public transport system, understandably failed to impress the assembled international breakfasters. Seeing that his Globe staff, and “all these cultural attachés, about sixty or seventy of them, were very tensed,” Dromgoole recognized that his breakfast gathering had developed a decidedly “frosty, frozen atmosphere.” Rather than inviting strong and pungent flavours, the event was leaving an insipidly unpleasant taste in their collective mouths, so much so that Dromgoole panicked inwardly, with thoughts like: “Oh, this is not going well. This is going to be difficult. This is going to be much harder than we thought.”

At this moment, Dromgoole instinctively relied on the Globe Theatre’s greatest asset: its iconic status. In desperation, and little knowing how to salvage the situation, Dromgoole invited the breakfast party on a tour of the Globe:

Then I set off with this chain of people behind me through the yard and then [...] on to the theatre. With all these people – when you see seventy nationalities together – they all sort of exaggerate, they’re in stereotypes slightly and they [...] become more archetype. So it was like I was being followed by this enormous [...] multinational sitcom. (Dromgoole 2 May 2012)

This “multinational sitcom,” reminiscent of the cringingly incorrect British TV comedy series of the 1970s, *Mind Your Language*, manifested in stereotypical national archetypes that were, as Dromgoole rather guiltily admits, at this stage as “high as kites” from the Globe’s early morning alcoholic hospitality. To Dromgoole’s obvious amusement, this diverse group paraded dutifully into the

Globe space and onto the stage. “The moment that we were on stage,” Dromgoole explains, “they all became electrified”:

There’s something magic about that space – and they all started jabbering – and they all started getting a little bit thrilled – and we took them in the [tiring house] – and they started offering up suggestions – and they started saying, “our national theatre will come in, our national theatre will come in, and we’ll help pay for this, and we’ll help pay for that.” (Dromgoole, 2 May 2012)

Instinctively recognizing the Globe building as the company’s “great magnet” and “great source of strengths,” Dromgoole salvaged this “frosty, frozen” moment. It was not grand speeches or Shakespeare intellectualizing that enthralled Dromgoole’s “multinational sitcom,” but the materiality of the Globe’s theatrical space, which “really electrified the whole prospect for all of them.” Excited international representatives of governments, cultural bodies, and the press, “started spreading the word.” The promotional breakfast was obviously a success, so much so that Dromgoole could express “great surprise” at “how many really substantial companies” clamoured to be a part of the Globe to Globe event. Especially in late 2010, however, the success of Dromgoole’s festival vision, this feast of “strong and pungent” Shakespeare spice, seemed far from guaranteed.

For the festival to succeed, Dromgoole recognized the need for an excellent Festival Director. He immediately lighted on Tom Bird, Head of Music at the Globe since 2008. By the middle of the Globe’s 2010 season, with *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2* in the repertory, Bird had decided not to renew his contract and was looking to take his musical talents elsewhere.⁶ Rather than lose Bird’s skills, Dromgoole approached him, saying, “You know, we’re doing this massive Olympics project – do you want it?” Little realizing the enormity of the undertaking, Bird responded, “Oh, yeah God – is it really like thirty-seven plays and thirty-seven different languages?” Dromgoole’s seemingly offhand, “Yeah – you do it,” and Bird’s equally nonchalant, “Okay,” set in motion what Bird admits “at the time” seemed a “completely insurmountable” project. By January 2011, only a few weeks after the multinational sitcom breakfast, the enormity of the undertaking really struck home. Describing this as “the most difficult part of the gig,” Bird remembers his anxiety at having only one international theatre company confirmed, even though tickets for the festival were due to go on sale that following September. With an entire festival to arrange, promote and sell, and far “too many things to organize,” Bird’s reaction was understandably one of frustration mixed with a healthy dose of blind panic. “Oh God,” he thought, “This is never going to happen. This just can’t happen. This is too much to do.”

⁶ All quotations from Tom Bird, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the transcript of Steve Rowland’s recorded interview at the Globe Education building, London, 8 May 2012.

Surprisingly, given the tight schedule, deals with theatre companies were finalized, but not before Bird, accompanied on several occasions by Dromgoole, had flown to no less than twenty-one countries, and that during only the first few months of 2011. This intense period of international travel was not without its humorous adventures, not least at Bird's first port of call, Istanbul. This inaugural trip in Bird's "most bizarre, incredible year imaginable," was to see a Turkish production of *Macbeth*. To Bird's shock, a fellow passenger in a seat two rows down from him decided to die mid-flight. Like any true Shakespearean, Bird's immediate reaction was to see the irony of this "old man," who "could have been playing Duncan the King," parting his mortal coil at so dramatic a moment in the Globe's festival history. An uncomfortably swift landing, and an annoyingly long wait on the Istanbul tarmac, proved an omen for many more "strange" early mornings in international airports. The relentless schedule continued apace. Admittedly, says Bird, "you never think someone will give you a job that says, 'go around the world, watch Shakespeare plays.'" It may have been, in Bird's understated words, "nice," but inevitably it also took its toll on this lone Shakespeare traveller. Following one nightmarish forty-eight hour round trip to see a production in Japan, Bird eventually succumbed to the stress and ended up exhausted in a Polish hospital. Despite, as he describes it, "this slightly dark time," when the insurmountable task infected Bird with panic and self-doubt, things actually "picked up from that point on."

This low point in Bird's festival experience, with its hectic travel schedule and the obvious toll on his physical and emotional wellbeing, might have hospitalized him momentarily, but it failed to dampen his enthusiasm. Administratively, as Bird admits, the festival did indeed prove "very difficult" to put together, but the finding of suitable international companies to perform at the Globe was the least stressful part of the "incredible challenge." Bird accounts for the relative ease of finding willing festival participants to the "great flood of enthusiasm" that always accompanies any request from the Globe. Such enthusiasm is now firmly established despite some early negativity toward Sam Wanamaker's original vision. In the UK, the building of the Globe initially drew nay-say detractors, who, as Bird bemoans, claimed that it was "not going to work": "It's only a tourist venue and [...] they can't really put on respectable theatre here." As his festival experience confirmed (and with an unwitting irony considering the subsequent sensitivity over the Israeli and Palestinian Globe to Globe productions), Bird describes how the Globe soon overcame these negative responses, becoming instead "a kind of Mecca for Shakespeare." "Theatre people," ignoring the pessimism and disapproval of the anti-Globe critics, commentators, and intellectual nay-sayers, proved "desperate to come and play in the space." For Bird, the explanation was self-evident: the Globe had earned a reputation for being "both prestigious and experimental." The Globe's international renown, and its creative team's willingness to push the boundaries

of theatrical experimentation, ensured that Bird had no difficulty finding people “to come and play.” The only “difficult thing to do,” Bird suggests rather drolly, was to convince “people to come and play *Henry VI, Part 2* instead of *Romeo and Juliet*.” Describing this as “the single biggest challenge,” Bird offers surprising insights into the festival selection process, which again suggest a mixture of planning and serendipitous good fortune.

For the festival to succeed, the internationally diverse theatre companies needed to agree to perform any play from the Shakespeare canon, regardless of how obscure or unknown it might be to them. Early on, Bird discovered that if he spoke to theatre groups and asked the simple question – which Shakespeare play “really [...] floats your boat?” – the answer would invariably come back, “‘*Macbeth*, you know, we have to do *Macbeth*,’ or, ‘we have to do *Hamlet* because, you know, this is deeply important part of [our] culture.’” In consequence, and with the deadpan delivery of a comedy straight man, Bird describes how his standard response was to “go back and say, ‘Okay – how do you feel about *Cymbeline*?’” Rather than outright refusal, and, as Bird remembers, the fear that “it might just be the kind of fringe groups” who would accept the challenge of performing the lesser known Shakespeare plays, the late 2010 and early 2011 Globe press releases prompted “national theatres” and “big directors of Europe [...] to get in touch,” all eager to participate in the festival experience.

As more and more theatre companies expressed their interest in performing at the Globe, the next difficulty was deciding exactly which play suited which nation. An early choice in this decision-making process, and one guaranteed to annoy Shakespeare completists, was to remove *The Two Noble Kinsmen* from the festival’s potential offerings because of its “very co-authored” status in the canon. That contentious omission aside, another immediate resolution was to recognize very specific languages that have a pronounced community presence in London. Interviewed on the second performance day of the Dhaka Theatre’s Bangladeshi production of *The Tempest*, Bird admits that Bangla was “one of the languages that really came out in the very first conversation.” As Dromgoole and he immediately decided, they had “to have Bangla [at the Globe] because,” as Bird explains, “there’s a hundred thousand Bangla speakers a mile away in [the East London Borough of] Tower Hamlets.” Concentrated around the East End’s Brick Lane, the historical home for wave upon wave of poor immigrant and minority populations, the Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi community provided the starting point for the Globe’s innovative attempt to attract new audiences from more localized, ethnically demarcated areas of urban London. Since London was the focus of the Olympics, London was likewise to be the focus, at least initially, for the Globe festival organizers. Having decided on their “list of the plays,” they then considered the other non-English “languages of London, the big London languages,” spoken by first,

second and third generation immigrants and mostly neglected by London's theatrical and cultural industry.

With the "big languages of London" catered for, the next decision was to add less London-specific "big languages," focusing instead on those international communities "in which people perform Shakespeare and [for] which Shakespeare is very prestigious." These languages must include, it was decided, Japanese, German and Georgian, as well as Armenian, a seemingly unusual choice were it not for the fact that, as Bird explains, "Shakespeare in Armenia is God." With a selection of languages chosen, and a "few different sets of criteria," Bird then started "matching things up." His first attempt involved looking at the repertoires of theatres in Europe and seeing what Shakespeare productions were already on offer. A strong state-owned and financed theatre tradition in Germany, for instance, meant that Bird was likely to look at any theatre's repertoire "and say, 'Oh, they've got *Timon of Athens*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Love's Labours Lost*.'" It was then his role to "go and see them, [and] see which one works." By way of explanation, Bird takes pains to stress that, "it's not so much the case of what's a good show":

It's a case of, okay, [which] of these shows could transfer into this theatre, where we don't turn the lights down on the audience, and it rains, and you see the eyeballs of the audience when you're acting. So you have to pick [...] the kind of companies that could show up and play in the village square, or in a field, or anything, even though this is a great, huge, prestigious world theatre. (Bird, 8 May 2012)

This search for productions already in existence, and capable of adapting to the open-air immediacy and intimacy of the Globe space, was certainly successful. It still left, however, over half the thirty-seven plays unaccounted for. Now, so Bird explains, the problems really began. Getting invited to established national theatres to view Shakespeare plays already in their repertoire required a specific set of diplomatic skills. Approaching international theatre companies with the "idea" of a specific play from the canon, and one not already earmarked for another language, was difficult enough. Requesting to visit their theatre to see if the Globe would "like this company's work," and decide if the company could "work in a place like the Globe," was, as Bird admits, a far more "problematic thing to do." How might a theatre company, famous in its own country, react to what in effect was an audition, a judgement as to merit by this visitor from London? Would they accept a lesser-known Shakespeare play, or would they view any refusal to offer them *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* a snub to national pride? Diplomacy was, at this stage of the festival's organization, of paramount importance. Even more so was the need to ensure that each company, each national cultural entity, knew that whatever play was proposed and accepted, ultimately "it had to be their own show." Bird knew how vital it was to stress

that it was “not [the Globe] saying, ‘do it like this’,” but an invitation for Shakespeare experimentation and freedom on an international scale. Admittedly, certain constraints were evident in subsequent Globe guidelines about the “many idiosyncrasies of working on that particular stage,” as well as demands for strict performance length, storytelling techniques, and minimal sets (Bennett and Carson 15). Nonetheless, that Bird’s original assurance was considered necessary is testament to his sensitivity to possible misunderstandings or accusations of postcolonial posturing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the Globe’s reputation, this potential minefield for Shakespearean faux pas proved less problematic than the logistical trauma of Bird’s travel schedule. Bird cites the example of Palestine, to which he flew with *Richard II* as the Globe’s chosen play. Rather than a hard sell, Bird found the Palestinian Ashtar Theatre company “interested in [*Richard II*] from very early on,” especially since they “thought that they could tell a [good] story through” it. As Tamara Haddad notes in her review of the Globe production, this “story” included the unfurling of Palestinian flags by face-covered actors who shouted their support for the usurping Bolingbroke (Bennett and Carson 126). Less politically nuanced, perhaps, was the Afghan Roy-e-Sabs troupe, well known to Bird from their 2005 Kabul production of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Knowing that this production had “done really, really well,” Bird went to the company “with the idea of one of the other super world plays, one of the other History plays.” Roy-e-Sabs’ response was, “just not interested”: “We don’t want to tell a story. We wanted to escape that stuff. So let’s have a comedy.” The opportunity to escape the reality of internal conflict and social deprivation proved more enticing to Afghan creatives, whose *The Comedy of Errors* was no less charged with political significance given the opportunity, as Stephen Purcell explains, for Taliban banned physicality openly to be expressed by the play’s mixed gender performers (Bennett and Carson 283–4).

If Afghanistan sought to escape the immediacy of its political and social unrest, the same cannot be said for the Habima National Theatre of Israel. This company staged *The Merchant of Venice*, a choice that Suzanne Gossett describes as, “at once brave, perhaps unwise and finally over-determined” (Bennett and Carson 269). Such over-determination was hardly the Globe’s doing, however, especially since Bird explains how “very keen” the Habima were to take on that specific play. Because of the inescapably anti-Semitic overtones of its narrative, *Merchant* seemed a “huge surprise” for the Israelis to choose: “But [the Habima company] were so keen,” Bird stresses, “that we thought we had to [...] go with their wishes.” In this instance, cultural expectation for a less than sympathetic response to early modern religious intolerance proved fundamentally flawed.

By the end of this process of apportioning plays to the international community, all thirty-seven (plus a thirty-eighth, the South African staging of

Venus and Adonis) were accounted for and, as Bird light-heartedly explains, his fear and “expectation” – that he might “just have to say, ‘Look, if you want to be in this festival, and I know you do, then you have to do this play’” – failed to manifest itself. Admittedly, Shakespearean luck played a role in this, especially with a drama like *King John*. Although relatively rarely performed in the UK, *King John* is a “hugely popular play in Armenia,” it having been staged at the Sundukyan National Academic Theatre some years before. Likewise, the unexpected popularity of another Shakespeare play almost led to a “*Julius Caesar* from Africa,” especially since, as Faisal Fatehali Devji describes in his 2000 article “Subject to Translation,” Nelson Mandela had a copy of Julius Nyerere’s Kiswahili translation in his cell on Robben Island. In the end, though, an Italian company, in association with *Teatro di Roma*, understandably claimed *Julius Caesar* as their own. British taste, or school curriculum diktat, might favour *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* as a nationally popular play, but Bird found that a diverse international appeal and appreciation of (and occasional self-recognition in) many of the lesser performed Shakespeare plays guaranteed the completion of the festival calendar in time for the all important ticket sales to begin. As he admits, the confirming of “some very big companies” – notably Eimuntas Nekrošius’s Lithuanian *Hamlet* or the *Richard III* of the National Theatre of China – assisted in highlighting “the quality of the work in the festival,” and ensured many more theatre companies were eager to offer their services to its cause. By March of 2011, less than six months before Friends of the Globe could purchase their advance ticket seats, the festival had taken shape.

The Globe to Globe Festival’s success is a matter of historical record, as, thanks to Rowland, is the fraught, occasionally farcical, but fundamentally inspired process by which it came into being. Noticeable, however, at this mid-point of the festival proper, when Rowland is conducting his interview with Bird, is the Festival Director’s recognition of the “massive favour” the Globe was inadvertently offering its international guests. The catalyst effect of performing in so prestigious an event, and in so celebrated a venue, was that various theatre companies were “being funded more by their own government, by their own cultural ministry in their own country.” This advantageous economic side effect was accompanied by a more philosophical home grown challenge, whereby London audiences and producers were being forced to consider the meaning of Shakespeare in an international context. Complaining that London’s theatre scene had “been a kind of bubble” for the last thirty years or so, Bird observes how “a lot of theatre in London is made by Londoners, for Londoners, about London”: “Not even about the UK, you know, but about London.” The Globe to Globe Festival, with its “strong and pungent flavours,” certainly forced the UK capital to question its theatrical London-centricity, and embrace Shakespeare in an intense and flavoursome six week feast of

international creativity. Rowland’s interviews, which record Dromgoole and Bird’s personal responses to the pre-festival planning, ensure our awareness of some of the complexity of the Globe to Globe’s organizational process.

The Globe to Globe Recipe: An Afterword

Dromgoole’s quest for “strong and pungent flavours” led to an almost ritualistic response to the Globe to Globe Festival’s multinational participants. Privileged to attend the daily morning dress rehearsals on the Globe stage, where each theatre company prepared for their first matinee performance, Rowland describes Dromgoole and Bird’s “very systematic way of welcoming” their guests. At a very specific time, at or near twelve noon, the Globe would conduct a ceremony whereby “the whole ensemble – the directors, the producers, all the actors – stood onstage.” The only people in the auditorium were Rowland and a handful of the Globe’s ubiquitous red tabarded volunteer stewards. The ritual called for two helium balloons to be brought onstage, one bearing the name of the day’s performing company and its country of origin, the other emblazoned with the Shakespeare’s Globe red insignia. As well as balloons, two bottles of alcohol (wine, beer or spirit) associated with the company’s country of origin, were handed to two members of the troupe. Dromgoole would then give a speech of welcome to the festival, to the Globe, and to London, after which all would come together in a large circle to embrace in a communal hug. As the two balloons were released into the London sky, a decidedly secularized oblation followed this moment of intimacy and camaraderie on the stage below. The two bottles were opened and, beginning at the upstage left and right rear corners, their bearers would run forward around the edge of the stage, passing each other downstage centre, while pouring their respective bottles into the yard beneath. The entire semi-circular sweep of the groundlings’ fore-edge standing space was doused in this ritualistic offering. As Rowland confirms, this simple symbolic moment of collaborative unanimity “made people feel so special, so warm, so welcome, and so connected to London – they felt they could touch each other, the past, the future – it was incredible.”

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