

## **Stephen Joseph: The Devils and an Actor's View - Terry Wilton**

The Manchester Drama Department was in Italy to perform John Whiting's *The Devils*, directed by Stephen Joseph, in the magnificent Teatro Regio in Parma. Andrew Sanders's designs had been sent across in feet, and the master carpenters of the opera had built them in metres. In the workshops, we gazed at the gigantic confessional and Grandier's bed, which appeared like siege weapons on their mighty wheels. Stephen, of course, was quite unfazed. The set was abandoned, and he quickly redirected the whole thing in pools of light, which was probably his preferred option anyway, and the storytelling was simply and speedily played out upon the enormous, exposing stage.

During rehearsal, Stephen gave me a brilliant note, which I have carried with me like a lodestone throughout my career. I was having trouble with the wonderful speech in which Grandier 'creates God'. He creates him from a kaleidoscope of impressions of French peasant life and landscape, squalid and morbid, simple and ecstatic. Stephen said to me: "See the images. Literally, see the images, and then speak them lightly and swiftly. Don't describe them, see them." He, of course, was himself a visionary. But the practical note is still brilliant.

We were blessed to encounter this gentle, charismatic giant at such a tender and burgeoning time in our lives. That summer season of 1965, when we were employed to work 'in the round' at the Library Theatre in Scarborough, rubbing shoulders with luminous practitioners like Alan Ayckbourn, David Campton, Henry Livings, Alfred Bradley, Stephen himself and our own Mike Stott, was indeed a time of gifts, a sensational way to start a professional journey.

I have tried to 'see the images' throughout a long and lucky career. Numbers of seasons with the RSC, with the Old Vic Company, Bristol Old Vic, Young Vic, the National Theatre, four years working with Mike Alfreds, Regent's Park Open-Air, the West End, the Edinburgh Festival etc.. I have acted in astonishing places: in Elsinore Castle, in front of the Sphinx, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in amphitheatres, palaces and castles across the Mediterranean and the Middle and Far East. I have performed in twenty-two different states of the USA, played Lear in a lifer's penitentiary in Indiana and also in a German Barn in Texas in the middle of an astonishing electric storm, where we shared our waterlogged wooden stage with dozens of frogs and armadillos, while deer and antelopes stampeded past outside. No problem with seeing the images: 'Blow winds and crack your cheeks'.

However, the body of work' which enables me to say with pride that I have had a career' has been the fifteen productions in which I have appeared 'in the round' in Manchester's glorious Royal Exchange. I was first cast there in 1982, as Queequeg in Michael Eliot's version of *Moby Dick*. I fell in love with the space, it has become my spiritual home, and I last appeared there in 2015 as Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In between: as Paul Verrall in Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*, in *Court in the Act!*, which transferred to the West End, as Kent in *King Lear*, as Judge Brack,

Enobarbus and Harry in Tom Murphy's *Sanctuary Lamp*, as Hermocrates in *The Triumph of Love*, the Messenger in *The Bacchae*, Colonel Pickering in *Pygmalion*, both Dukes in *As You Like It* and in half a dozen new plays. This has been my real and passionate umbilical with Stephen Joseph, and many times in a tech, as I've sat inside the glowing circle, I've wondered, 'Stephen, what would you make of all this?'