



Salome

## **Syndicated Interview - Robin Don on the design for *Salome***

### **Interview by Rachel Stroud Set design and image Copyright Robin Don, 2006.**

#### **You've worked with Patrick before – is there a distinct pattern to the way you approach projects as a creative team?**

It is hard to put one's finger on an identifiable pattern to the creative process when working with Patrick. Sometimes it is a word that sparks things off. Another time it may be a picture or a photograph. He has the remarkable ability to instantly grasp the potential of the three dimensional abstract space -A rare quality in a director.

#### **What was the brief or main objective that you decided on?**

It is not unknown for him to concoct an outlandish brief. The wilder it is the more stimulated the designer will be.

'Airport runway' was the out of the blue 'throw away' brief for *Salome*. I didn't dare ask him why but after reading the script it actually all began to click into place.

#### **Was there anything you encountered that particularly influenced/inspired you whilst you were working on this?**

Military airports appear suspended in their own mysterious world and run on their own time table. Vast powerful machines, manufacturing and employing hideously destructive implements and run by faces we do not know and daren't approach. This is a world that Herod would instantly understand if he arrived at the gates today.

#### **Did you look at designs used by previous productions? How did they influence you?**

The effect of Lindsay Kemp unravelling himself from the cocoon in his production at the Roundhouse was absolutely spellbinding.

#### **What inspired you to use such a muscular, utilitarian design on what is often thought to be quite a sinuous, effeminate play?**

It puzzles me why Oscar was so namby-pamby about his approach to the play. In the midst of all his exuberant excesses it will be interesting to discover what a little injection of real napalm will do.

#### **You've made use of lots of contrasting materials – for example, the use of water is contrasted with that of heavy-duty steel... what informed those choices?**

The steel used in the construction of the set possibly began its life as a molten lump hurtling through space eons ago. Through many permutations it has now arrived on the Nuffield stage. The water lapping in the basement oozed from the primeval swamp and mines of sulphur long before Herod was even a boy. And wasn't it Oscar who said "Plus c'est la meme chose, plus ça change" [the more it changes, the more it remains the same]?

#### **The multi-faceted use of the space in the design is really interesting - tell me a bit about the decision to imprison Jokanaan under the stage, and to use those CCTV monitor-screens...**

The way it has been designed allows the audience to experience the power of the Leader and his minions as well as being able to enter the heart and mind (via the CCTV) of the condemned cells below. The excellent sightlines at the Nuffield theatre allow each member of the audience to experience the maximum use of this unique quality.

#### **How do you think the design of the space will inform the audience's response to the characters and their world?**

Our production, with its military cocoon unravelling just as world events unfold today, instant and involving, will allow the audience to be confronted by repeated re-enactment of the age-old horrific events.

**What unique challenges/opportunities did this particular production present for you as a designer?**

Toying with a story such as Wilde's *Salome* is done at one's peril -it's like putting one's own head on the block.

*Robin Don 26/9/06*