



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: **THE KELVIN PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY**

Name of Production: **'ANNE BOLEYN'**

by Howard Brenton

Venue: The Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol

Date: 12th July 2018

Adjudicator: Rebecca Thompson

Presentation

Neutral-toned pillars flanked the main acting area. Beautifully inscribed with the qualities that were characters in the Masque, they were also decorated with a Tudor rose. The words from John 1: 1 were written on the floor in a circle, stage centre; This was powerful - highlighting the role of the Bible in both plot and relationships.

A wooden throne and small bench were brought on to accommodate players in the court scenes. This open set suited the blocking very well. It was lit effectively. I loved the colder tones subtly utilised for Wolsey. Shading in the forest worked well - but there was also a brightness lighting Tyndale well here. Grilled window effects were impactful.

Costuming was outstanding. From the programme, I assume that a lot had been made for the show - no doubt you borrowed from your store as well. The initial white bodices and skirts for the four women presented a lovely image of purity. These were beautifully detailed - pearl effect buttons on the sleeves, and the hooped waistlines. Simple headdresses completed these outfits. The dressing of characters on stage worked very well and gave us a glimpse into the layering of underclothes. The typical square neckline and turned back cuffs are very evocative of women of this time; deepening colours and richer

effect of Anne's costume in the second half , switching from turquoise to burnt orange, accented by black, was striking and unsettling. Variety and opulence of fabrics was also apparent for the men; again layering was very appropriate, as was the use of half-shoulder cloaks. Henry's change of cloak added further interest in the second half; the use of cream gave an appropriate femininity to James' outfit, and George's loose hair and feathered hat underlined his character well.

Clergy were very well dressed; use of fur for Andrews was a lovely detail; strong use of black was striking and the sewn, cloth caps again an appropriate touch. Wonderful accessories - rings, chains, headdresses - completed this sumptuous visual presentation.

The production started with evocative accompaniment and a period dance - well choreographed. The use of accompaniment under scenes often contributed to the atmosphere; tones of instrument captured this era so well. Timing under dialogue was excellent. I loved the rhythmic drums during the final Tyndale scene. The concluding dance enabled you to shape Anne's last appearance effectively.

Direction

This was an excellent choice of play for this venue. Written to be performed at The Globe, the script demands an in the round theatre, facilitating rapport with the audience, and also the requisite fluidity to present the manic, sinister and dramatic momentum of life at court. Physicality was outstanding. Sense of period was highly developed in terms of posture, eye contact, turn of the head: the status of characters was effectively visualised from stage positioning right through to the subtleties of eye level - for example the strong grouping of the servants by the pillars in James' first scene, as they watched and responded with utmost conviction and focus. Certain characters were always on the edge of the action and this underlined their position in court very effectively; Lady Jane positioned at the far side of the acting space in the final scenes underlined her position as Cromwell's puppet. Physicality also established some wonderful moments of tension; as the royals relaxed and conversed, their servants did likewise: and then there was a sudden jolt back into the pecking order as the mood changed. This often happened in the court of James, as he lolled, joked - then snapped back into the monarch. The subtleties of Lady Rochford's eye contact with, and avoiding Wolsey, gave us a convincing picture of her conflict as she was interrogated. Striking facial reaction amongst all the cast also helped you emphasise the confident Anne - whose stare - 'she'd look straight back at you and wasn't scared,' contrasted beautifully with the modest glances of her women. Some lovely entrances and exits: Anne's first gliding down the stairs as a ghost; James' exuberant dash onto stage in drag. Sexual chemistry was beautifully marked too. There was a tenderness between Henry and Anne - also an underlying compulsion on Henry's part. James' and George's relationship was confidently explored; the status of men as predators underlined in some effective use of posture and positioning in relation to the women. Groupings added definition to the plot and argument. The country folk were humble, yet their strength and resolution physically

defined. Clergy established a combination of religiosity and antagonism. James was brilliantly eccentric, relaxed, yet could switch to the intelligent prober in an instant. It is to your credit that none of these physical interpretations were contrived or stereotypical.

Brenton's dialogue is typically naturalistic in this play. It also carries a very strong political momentum, within the confines of an historical setting. Delivery was outstanding. A wonderful range of vocal dynamics shaped the text so effectively. You had coaching for the dialects: this paid off. We weren't aware of accent, rather James' Scottish and Tyndale's Gloucestershire gave a wonderful gravitas to the production. It seems rather obvious to write about strong cueing, security of text, interaction, listening, shaping, timing ... these were such polished, confident, intelligent performances that I rarely thought about these aspects: my attention was rightly pointed to the play's thesis and emotional journey. This competency amongst players points to an underlying confidence in both material and director. Characterisation was rounded and never over simplified. Emotional journey of the leads was clear, but never overwhelmed the integral idea of court v religion, which has to be evident if we are to empathise with Anne's part in this. Excellent representations of all three monarchs; sense of power was so well communicated - and so were the glimpses of vulnerability. The clergy managed to stimulate us into considering the role of the church in misinterpreting, distorting and reinventing the Bible. The power of the church was unsettlingly apparent. There was an appropriate thirst for attention from every single character, though. And this gave the production an unsettling impact.

In terms of structure I do think the play is slightly overlong ... momentum was lost a little towards the end in terms of audience absorption - but this is down to the play's structure, not its manifestation. This was an extraordinary piece of amateur theatre. It was a privilege and a pleasure to be there.

Anne Boleyn

You totally inhabited this role. From the start you captured Anne's bright spirit, quick mind; your confidence as you showed the audience your severed head set the tone for your relationship with us and your love of life: 'I'll bring you Jesus.' Excellent diction, beautifully-timed delivery and an unwavering focus ensured that we believed in your love for Henry and the Bible. The skipping round the words from John in the first scene highlighted the complexities of this. Some wonderful moments with the King - the scene just before the interval as you finally conceded to Henry's advances, followed by that wonderfully timed line, ..."There will now be a twenty minute interval." You were also quick to expose your courage - this happened particularly in your conversations with Lady Rochford, who was rightly unsettled by you. As your position in court strengthened, your physical and vocal stature grew. Emotive response to the births of both children and a heartfelt scream of pain as you were arrested. Stimulating and telling rendition of the final lines of the play.

Henry V111

The playful, compulsive aspect of your relationship with Anne was captured from the start; excellent timing in your initial dialogue with her, there was always a subtle combination of power yet disempowerment with Anne as you battled with your lack of sexual fulfilment. The boyish aspect of your portrayal was always impactful - this was evident in your infatuation and in your occasional bout of volatility - in the manifestation of your angry frustration at the 'technicalities' of your divorce. Henry's aptitude for political manoeuvring was also communicated, as you handled the confrontation of Anne's meeting with Tyndale for example; and there were hints at your growing frustration with Anne, but these were coupled with a powerful tenderness towards her. The connection between you and Anne was palpable - the outstanding timing during the letter scene is an example of your stage relationship. This was not a caricature - but a very human portrayal of this famous king.

Wolsey

Your striking, red robes gave us an immediate and strong image of this infamous clergyman. Very well-modulated delivery of the dialogue, you managed to find just the right tone for the words of this sinister man. A lot of his dialogue is quite vitriolic, yet your controlled, intelligent tone captured just the right note of passive aggression, so that we always believed in Wolsey's power. Effective physicality here; hands behind your back gave a disarmingly aggressive approach; the pacing around Lady Rochford and Celia was appropriately predatory. Your circling round Anne helped you shape this powerful episode - contrasting with the wonderful skip of spiteful glee as you exited. Excellent shaping of your final lengthy speech as you acknowledge your fate.

I wasn't quite so convinced about Henry Barrow; I suppose I was expecting someone harsher for the extremist - surely these were dangerous members of the church? I just wondered about the humour here.

James

There was an innate drive about your characterisation that filtered into both physical and verbal communication. You used the set so very well - lolling against the pillars, curling up on the throne like a child, and yet you were so quick and able to transform physically, and let the monarch emerge. Playful, witty communication with both servants and Anne could turn quickly to purposeful, informed discourse about the church. The pointing of the dialogue with the bishops in Act 2 was outstanding: this could have so easily been dry, but you shaped the text so skilfully with such precision and intention. Underlining of wit was superb too - "are there some (Catholics) here?" An inherent unpredictability was always present - we were drawn to you, but also never fully sure of your intentions. Such a confident and exciting pause as you 'deliberated!' The combination of physical energy and restlessness was always grounded by your resolution to understand Anne; and so your

performance had such credibility. This was an instinctive, compelling and utterly convincing performance. An absolute joy to watch.

Robert Cecil

Over articulation of the words gave an appropriate sense of affectation here; this energetic delivery was matched by a wonderful physical stoop ; this enabled you to create a very textured characterisation of James' advisor.

Parrot

Strong use of eyes, your consternation at the book was evident. Lovely exit as you talked about your place ... "The mighty and the mice..."

George Villiers

Great casting physically, your boyish looks and open face were an obvious draw for James. Excellent rapport with the King, there were some lovely moments here: the chase before the kiss at the beginning of Act 2 for example.

Lady Rochford

Such security in delivery, you portrayed an intelligent, loyal courtier, but your excellent use of eyes always communicated a touch of vulnerability. Effective reaction to both Wolsey and Cromwell and a moving desperation as you gave your final plea: "I just want to be alive."

Thomas Cromwell

A very controlled performance; initially your status in court was very clear and your duties conducted with assurance and a right sense of place. However, your character grew so beautifully in terms of ambition and intent, particularly in relation to all the women. Unsettling interrogation of Lady Rochford, and a heartless manipulation of Lady Jane were matched by a strong physical presence in these scenes. Your rounded delivery developed a subtle harshness as the characterisation grew and this enabled you to build your performance so effectively to Brenton's explanation for this man:

Lady Rochford: "I hate politics". Cromwell: "Really? I love 'em".

Simpkin

Excellent cueing as you discussed Anne's disappearance with Cromwell, your resolute character made an effective contrast to the humorous Sloop. Your resolute focus added to the threat in the scenes with Wolsey and Cromwell.

Sloop

Your open face and reactive eyes enabled you to establish this lively, reactive man. Your boyish physicality led to some wonderful movement - as you slid down the pillar as you described the torture for example; you also handled the book very well indeed. The underlying resentment towards Cromwell was carefully communicated.

William Tyndale

This 'unexpectedly rustic' man was clearly portrayed - presenting an effective contrast to the courtiers. Your warm vocal tone, clearly delivering the Gloucestershire accent, also contained the requisite and quiet passion for your writing and translation.

Dean Lancelot Andrews

Your consternation at the prospect of change was evident; the earnest vocal tone was enhanced by some lengthening of words, which enabled you to convey a patronising attitude to Barrow.

Dr John Reynolds

The pent up frustration of the Doctor was communicated through a purposeful delivery; both devotion and single-mindedness were evident.

Ensemble

You all played such a key part in this production. Those of you with no dialogue stood, responded and contributed to the atmosphere of your scenes with a wonderful intention and focus.

Thank you for your welcome and hospitality. This was a very memorable evening.