Saint Joan
by Bernard Shaw
Travelex £10 Tickets

Background pack

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IN ORDER OF SPEAKING
Robert de Baudricourt BRENDAN O’HEA
Stewards and Pages LUKE TREADAWAY
Joan ANNE-MARIE DUFF
Bertrand de Poulengey ROSS WAITON
Duke de la Tremouille, the Lord Chamberlain JAMES BARRISCALE
The Archbishop of Rheims JAMES HAYES
Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard) GARETH KENNERLEY
Captain La Hire FINN CALDWELL
Charles, The Dauphin PAUL READY
Dunois, bastard son of the Duke of Orleans CHRISTOPHER COLOQUHOUN
Richard, Earl of Warwick ANGUS WRIGHT
Chaplain de Stogumber MICHAEL THOMAS
Peter Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais PATTERSON JOSEPH
The Inquisitor OLIVER FORD DAVIES
Canon John D’Estivet WILLIAM OSBORNE
Canon de Courcelles SIMON BUBB
Brother Martin Ladvenu JAMIE BALLARD
The Executioner JONATHAN JAYNES
Ensemble MICHAEL CAMP, EKE CHUKWU, SIMON MARKEY, DAVID RICARDO-PEARCE
Understud to Joan POLLY LISTER

Other parts played by the Company
Music played live by Harvey Brough (Music Director, keyboard, psaltery, voice), Melanie Pappenheim (voice), Belinda Sykes (woodwind, voice), Kelly McClusker (violin, voice), Laura Moody (cello, voice)

Director MARIANNE ELLIOTT
Designer RAЕ SMITH
Lighting Designer PAULE CONSTABLE
Music JOCELYN POOK
Sound Designer PAUL ARDITTI
Choreographer HOFESH SHECHTER
Music Director HARVEY BROUGH
Company Voice Work JEANNETTE NELSON
Textual Adviser SAMUEL ADAMSON
Staff Director KATE VARNEY

Opening of this production:
The Olivier Theatre, 11 July 2007

SYNOPSIS
Scene 1: The castle of Vaucouleurs, France, February 1429
Captain ROBERT DE BAUDRICOURT is storming at his STEWARD because there are
no eggs and no milk; the Steward claims they are bewitched, until Robert agrees to see The
Maid who is waiting outside. Robert insists she should be sent back to her father in Lorraine,
but it seems the girl will not go. “She really
doesn’t seem to be afraid of anything”. When
he reluctantly agrees to talk to her, JOAN tells
Robert that he is to give her a horse, armour
and some soldiers: “Those are your orders
from my Lord”. Robert is furious – he takes
orders only from the king, but Joan says that
her Lord is the King of Heaven. She will not
need many soldiers to go to the Dauphin and
raise the siege of Orléans, as God as sent her
to do, and several of his men, whom she refers
to by their nicknames, have agreed to come
with her. Astounded by her reckless
impudence, Robert finds himself agreeing to
talk to BERTRAND DE POULENGEY (POLLY),
one of the squires she has enlisted. Surely
commonsense dictates that they shouldn’t
take this mad girl seriously. Polly thinks if they
had any commonsense they would join the
Duke of Burgundy and the English king who
hold half the country. The Dauphin is trapped
in Chinon, and the English will take Orléans
unless “the Bastard” (Dunois, illegitimate son
of the Duke of Orléans) can stop them. Polly
claims that Joan is a bit of a miracle and they
should risk trusting her. Robert calls the girl
back in and questions her about her
background (she is from Domrémy, thinks she
is 17 years old, and the Saints Catherine and
Margaret talk to her every day). He tells her
this is her imagination (“Of course,” she
replies. “That is how the messages of God
come to us.”) and warns her of the brutality
of the English soldiers and their Black Prince.
She knows this – the “goddams” came to her
village – but she pities them and is unafraid.
She just wants them to leave France. Robert
begins to see that their troops might be
persuaded by Joan’s passion. He finally agrees
to send her and an escort to Chinon. “And I
may have a soldier’s dress?” “Have what you
please. I wash my hands of it.” The Steward
runs in with a basket of eggs. The hens are
laying again. “Christ in heaven!” Robert
exclaims. “She did come from God!”

Scene 2: Chinon, in Touraine, March 1429
The ARCHBISHOP OF RHEIMS and the Lord
Chamberlain, the DUKE DE LA
TREMOUILLE, wait for The Dauphin while complaining of his extravagance. GILLES DE RAIS (known as BLUEBEARD) is announced, with CAPTAIN LA HIRE. CHARLES, THE DAUPHIN, who is derided for not having inherited the wisdom of his grandfather, Charles the Wise, has a letter from de Baudricourt about Joan’s imminent arrival. “He is sending a saint, an angel. And she is coming to me: to the king, and not to you, Archbishop. She knows the blood royal if you don’t.” They devise a plan for Bluebeard to take the Dauphin’s place on the throne to test if Joan can recognise the true blood. The Dauphin taunts Bluebeard with being unable to save Orléans, for all his bullying, though his letter says Joan will achieve this. Bluebeard claims that if the “brave, handsome, invincible Dunois” can’t raise the siege, it’s unlikely a country lass can. Dunois and his troops are stuck on the bank of the Loire where the English hold the bridgehead. He’s been waiting for the wind to change so that he can ship his men across the river to land upstream at their rear. The Archbishop thinks Joan will have no trouble picking out the Dauphin as she will know his reputation as the worst-dressed man at Court. He says this will be no less of a miracle, though: “A miracle, my friend, is an event which creates faith.” Joan is brought in to the throne room and, as predicted, is not fooled for a moment by the ruse. She tells the Dauphin that she is sent to crown him king in the cathedral at Rheims. When she kneels and asks the Archbishop’s blessing, even he is moved, but tells her she is in love with religion. She asks to speak to the Dauphin alone. He tells her he has no wish to lead an army into battle, and when she urges him to take his rightful place, says “What is the good of sitting on the throne when the other fellows give all the orders?” She promises to stay by his side and teach him to pray, but he reminds her he is not a child but a grown man and a father, though he and his son can’t stand each other. Gradually she encourages his strength of purpose. He summons the Court to tell them he has given Joan command of the army. She cries out “Who is for Orléans with me?”

Scene 3: Orléans, April 1429
DUNOIS and his Page watch a kingfisher as they wait with great impatience for the wind to change. Joan arrives, keen to be on the other side of the river, and promising to relieve Dunois of fear. He says he would be a bad commander without fear and explains that the English numbers are far superior. Joan vows to lead their men into battle, though Dunois tells her none will follow her. Her reply – “I will not look back to see whether anyone is following me” – shows him she has the makings of a soldier, but he tells her she is in love with war. She says she is a soldier and does not want to be thought of as a woman. “Women dream of lovers and of money. I dream of leading a charge.” He says he welcomes her as a saint not as a daredevil, but she tells him she is a servant of God, her sword is sacred and her heart full of courage. Dunois asks her to pray for a west wind and offers to take her to church but she will not go to church until the English are beaten. She will, however, tell St Catherine to intercede for a west wind. Immediately the Page notices that the wind has changed: the army can cross the river.

The French go into battle with Joan at their head.

Scene 4: The English Camp, May 1429
Richard, Earl of WARWICK, and the Chaplain DE STOGUMBER discuss the way the war has been going. De Stogumber says the French victory at Orléans was clearly achieved by sorcery, but since then the English defeats have gone on and on. He would like to “strangle the accursed witch with my own hands”. Warwick declares Dunois a tougher problem. He derides the new fashion of talking of “the French” and “the English”. “Men
cannot serve two masters. If this cant of serving their country takes hold of them, goodbye to the authority of their feudal lords, and goodbye to the authority of the Church.”

He promises De Stogumber that they shall “burn the witch and beat the bastard all in good time.” He plans to offer a king’s ransom for her. De Stogumber rails against the Jews who will profit from this, but Warwick says that Jews give good value – “the men who want something for nothing are invariably Christians.” They are joined by the Bishop of Beauvais, Monseigneur CAUCHON. Warwick explains their predicament: the Dauphin is to be crowned at Rheims, which will make him more powerful. Warwick wants to sound out Cauchon about handing Joan over to the Inquisition if she is captured in his diocese. De Stogumber insists that Joan is a witch – at Orléans she was wounded in the throat and yet fought on all day. Cauchon thinks her inspired, “but diabolically inspired.” He believes his first duty is to seek Joan’s salvation. But if she is an obstinate heretic, the Church will hand her over to the secular arm. Warwick claims this role for himself. “Hand over your dead branch; and I will see that the fire is ready for it.” He silkily keeps the peace between de Stogumber (who calls Cauchon a traitor) and the Bishop, believing that “if this cult of the Maid goes on, our cause is lost.” De Stogumber cannot see how Joan can be condemned when she behaves like a faithful daughter of the Church.

Cauchon believes that the letters Joan sends to the English king, giving God’s commands, are like those written by “Mahomet, the anti-Christ”, against whom he rails. Warwick says that as a pilgrim he saw something of the Mahometans. “They were not so ill-bred as I had been led to believe.” Cauchon thinks this shows he has been perverted by infidels, but Warwick hopes they can proceed without bigotry. He is not concerned that Joan will become another Mahomet, but that she could wreck the whole structure of Christendom: if she gets her way the aristocracy will be superseded and the king made “sole and absolute autocrat”, taking the lands they hold and giving them to God. Cauchon realises they will not defeat the Maid if they are at loggerheads, and proposes they sink their differences in the face of a common enemy. While he is concerned that Joan thinks only of God and herself, not of The Church, Warwick feels she thinks only of the king and herself, not of the peerage. Warwick agrees. “It is the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God. I should call it Protestantism if I had to find a name for it.” De Stogumber, on the other hand, is against Joan because she “denies England her legitimate conquests, given her by God because of her peculiar fitness to rule over less civilised races for their own good.” While Cauchon will not imperil his own soul, and Warwick avers he will spare her if he can, de Stogumber would happily burn her with his own hands.

INTERVAL

Scene 5 Cathedral of Rheims, July 1429

Dunois tells Joan to cease her prayers – the Dauphin has been crowned and the people outside are calling for The Maid. She wishes they were back at the bridge at Orléans and asks him why everyone at Court hates her, despite all she has done. When she has taken Paris, she plans to return to her village. Dunois thinks they won’t let her take Paris and urges her to take care. She seeks comfort from her voices, which she hears in the church bells. The newly crowned Dauphin complains of the weight of the robes and the smell of the oil that anointed him. When Joan tells him she’s going back to her father’s farm he casually dismisses her, but she asks if she and Dunois can take Paris first. She chides the Dauphin for calling it luck that has got them where they are and urges him not to stop while there are still Englishmen in France: “What is your crown worth without your capital?” The Archbishop
**Synopsis - Saint Joan**

Joan is brought in. She has been ill because some carp the Bishop sent her has disagreed with her. Courcelles questions her about her attempts to escape. “If you leave the door of the cage open the bird will fly out”. They take this as a confession of heresy: since she is held by the Church, to escape is to desert the Church. Joan says no-one could be such a fool as to think that. She says she cannot tell them the whole truth: “God does not allow the whole truth to be told.” They threaten her with torture but Cauchon does not want it said that they forced a confession from her. Cauchon asks Joan if she will accept the judgement of the Church. She says she will, “provided it does not command anything impossible.” She cannot deny her voices or go back on what God has made her do. Though the Inquisitor insists that her visions are sent by the devil, she says it is God’s commands that she follows. To the court, one of her greatest sins is dressing as a man – why should an angel give her such shameless advice? She reasonably responds that this was commonsense: she has been living among soldiers and is now guarded by them; if she dresses as a soldier they don’t think of her as a woman. Ladvenu cautions Joan against pert replies, and introduces her to the Executioner. The stake is ready in the market place, he says, and her death will be a cruel one – there are 800 English soldiers outside ready to make sure of that. She finally realises that she could burn. Cauchon and Ladvenu tell her that she can still save herself. Her voices have led her to her execution but “The Church holds out its arms to you.” Joan despairs of her voices. “Only a fool will walk into a fire: God, who gave me my commonsense, cannot will me to do that.” Ladvenu rushes to write a confession for her to sign, though de Stogumber protests that Joan should not be allowed to escape them: “You are all traitors!” Ladvenu reads out the confession: “I confess to the sin of sedition, to her simplicity. The Inquisitor speaks of his long experience of such trials and warns them against their natural compassion: “If you hate cruelty, remember that nothing is so cruel in its consequences as the toleration of heresy.” He knows the righteousness of his work, its necessity, and its mercy. Cauchon agrees with him and adds that the danger they are confronting throughout Europe is “this arch heresy which the English Commander calls Protestantism.”
the sin of idolatry, to the sin of disobedience,
to the sin of pride, and to the sin of heresy.”
The Inquisitor asks if Joan understands and if
this is true. “If it were not true, the fire would
not be ready for me in the market place”. She
signs, Ladvenu praises God, and the Inquisitor
declares her set free from the danger of
excommunication. But, so that she can repent
her errors in solitary contemplation, she will
spend the rest of her life in prison. With the
dawning knowledge that she will never be free,
Joan snatches up the confession and tears it
up. “It is not the bread and water I fear… But
to shut me from the light of the sky and the
sight of the fields and flowers…” She cannot
live without these things, and the “blessed
blessed church bells that send my angel
voices floating to me on the wind.” She knows
that “your counsel is of the devil, and that
mine is of God”. Cauchon and the Inquisitor
intone the words of the excommunication as
de Stogumber and the soldiers hasten her out
to the waiting pire, Ladvenu wants to be with
her, and the Inquisitor restrains Cauchon from
intervening; “I am accustomed to the fire: it is
soon over.” He tells Cauchon that Joan is quite
innocent and had not understood a word of
the trial.

De Stogumber returns and asks Warwick to
pray for his soul “I did not know what I was
doing… I am in hell for evermore.” He
describes how when Joan asked for a cross, a
soldier gave her two sticks tied together.
“Thank God he was an Englishman!” Ladvenu
describes Joan’s end. “I firmly believe that her
Saviour appeared to her… This is not the end
for her, but the beginning.” Warwick asks the
Executioner for assurance that nothing
remains. “Her heart would not burn, my lord:
but everything that was left is at the bottom of
the river. You have heard the last of her.”

Epilogue
Ladvenu describes the nullification trial, 25
years later, at which the sentence on Joan was
set aside. The Dauphin tells how he had led
his army in subsequent battles. “I made a man
of thee after all, Charlie,” says Joan. Cauchon
has been excommunicated and vilified. Dunois
tells how he had helped drive the English out.
“Perhaps I should never have let the priests
burn her; but I was busy fighting.” Warwick
declares “when they make her a saint, she will
owe her halo to me.” Ladvenu tells how finally,
in 1920, Joan had indeed been made Saint
Joan. They all praise her, and Joan asks if she
should return to life? But each one admits that
she had better not. “O God that madest this
beautiful earth,” she cries, “When will it be
ready to receive Thy saints?”
Interview: Anne-Marie Duff

Anne-Marie Duff plays Saint Joan in this production.

Had you worked with Marianne [Elliott, director] before?
The first time that I met Marianne was with a view to playing Joan in Saint Joan, and that was last autumn. I was very nervous, because I’ve watched her work and I think she’s an amazing storyteller. I was very excited.

Did you know the play before you went to meet her?
The last time I’d read Saint Joan I was about 18. It’s one of those rites-of-passage pieces for young actresses: you can’t help but read it.

When you read it again, what were your first impressions?
Of the play itself, I just thought it was incredibly pertinent and relevant for us now as an audience. All the points of reference are incredibly immediate. She is just such a vital character and also, over the past few years, we’ve all had to address the notion of what is a martyr, and what differentiates them from other people or indeed what makes one of them a saint, or a sinner. I think that’s the kind of didactic that’s in the play anyway. It felt very current.

Are you and Marianne working consciously to bring that out? How explicit are those references in this production?
I think there are a couple of moments, certainly in the trial scene, where we’re very aware of it. It was one of the first things we discussed when we first met. And it’s always been in my head. You’re aware of it without labelling anything. I don’t think you need to actually.
I think that’s the same with the epilogue: we don’t need to be reminded about the relevance of the play – which the epilogue kind of does, so I think it was appropriate to cut lots of the epilogue.

We’re in the penultimate week of rehearsals now. How do you think it’s going?
It’s been the most brilliant rehearsal process. It’s an incredible rehearsal room to be in because it’s an intensely safe atmosphere. Normally by this stage in rehearsals, one tends to be full of panic and dread and fear, and I’m pretty certain that all of us are nervous, but I think we’re in a good place and have a real sense of the landscape of the play. Because of its episodic nature, because it’s so strictly divided into six chapters, that really helps. It’s like six mini plays. I love the staging because it reminds me of a mystery play, which seems completely of the right flavour.

Is there any resonance in St Joan’s faith for you? How do you access that as an actor?
I remember once talking to a priest about having an intense faith, a vocational faith. He said it is like being in a loving relationship. I think that’s the way to think about it – that sort of unconditional love that you would have for a child, perhaps. It’s a commitment to an ideal as well. I think there’s a safety and structure to religion that’s very comforting to a lot of people: it give us a guideline for life. I think at times of crisis we need a heaven to look forward to. During wars that is incredibly necessary, or slavery, or any of those epic crises that humans have to live through. Faith is intensified because it’s a coping mechanism. Joan’s faith is so much to do with her mentality, which raises all sorts of questions about whether she is suffering with any mental delusions or paranoias – which lots of people have debated over.
How helpful is that to you as the actor, when Joan talks about “my voices”?
It’s reasonably helpful. You, as Joan, have to believe that the voices are real. Whether you are ill or not is irrelevant because people who are suffering with paranoid schizophrenia aren’t conscious of it unless they’re in treatment. You have to have as much conviction as you can. The only way to make it valuable is for Joan to believe she is the chosen one, in her head.

How have you placed that in terms of her back story? How does someone like Joan spring up from nowhere?
It’s the time she’s born into, the family she comes from and her age at which everything starts happening. At that age, people fall in love for the first time and think they’ll die without it. And everything takes on a very epic quality. Everything is about life and death. You are experiencing things for the first time and so the pain of anything feels like it might kill you because you don’t know that you can recover. Within that, too, you have the invincibility of youth and I think that’s the fascinating threshold that she’s at.

Joan is a child of her time. In terms of religion, she’s a child of her time as well. The medieval notion of heaven and hell is a very different one. The revolutionary idea that God will visit you personally, as opposed to you having to go via bishops or priests to get to him, is very modern and very familiar. It doesn’t feel in any way wrong. That’s her revolution.

Do you get the sense that Shaw really likes Joan?
I guess so, although sometimes as an actor you do feel that she’s a bit relentless, and you think, Enough already! But yes, you do feel the support of the writer. You don’t feel that you’re fighting against judgement.

If you met Joan, do you think you’d like her?
She’d probably drive you up the wall! Anybody who has a commitment of that nature is utterly compelling, whether they’re lunatics, or Martin Luther King. We’re drawn to people with a tenacity and who are driven and seem to utilise every nerve to achieve their goal. We’re always really fascinated by them, whether they’re serial killers or revolutionaries, we just can’t help but be intrigued by them. I certainly would be very seduced into finding out more about her.
Some directors have lists – was Saint Joan on the list for you?
No absolutely not. I do have a list, but it wasn’t on it. I didn’t know of it actually, I never really thought of doing a Shaw play. But Nick Hytner [director of the National] sent it to me and asked me what I thought of it, and I thought actually it was really interesting. So I said it might be quite good, especially if I could get the right Joan to play it. Reading it made me realise what an extraordinary person she was. She was a real person, very ordinary, couldn’t read, couldn’t write and yet she became this extraordinary person within two years and a catalyst to unify France. She’s a fundamentalist, so I thought it was very relevant. Also, there aren’t many plays that have such a fantastic part for a woman, who drives every single scene. So yes, it really interested me, but it was a bit scary.

Scary for you as a director?
Yes, ‘cause it’s quite wordy and there’s not a huge amount of sub-text, which is what I like and scary because I’ve never worked in the Olivier before. If you fail or you get something wrong, you’ve got a thousand people watching you. It’s very exposing. I wanted to do it in a way that was possibly a bit more avant-garde than had been done before. I had a particular vision for it, I suppose, quite a bold vision, so it’s very scary if it doesn’t work. We made brave choices.

Going back to the casting, to finding the right Saint Joan. What was it about Anne-Marie Duff? You hadn’t worked with her before, had you?
No I’d never worked with her before but I’d seen a lot of her work. And I felt that she was right because she has a core of integrity. She’s worried, for example, that Joan is going to look smug, which I think is the danger with Joan, that just because she feels she has a hotline to God, she’s constantly alright and therefore she’s got this kind of shield of invincibility around her. Whereas actually she’s a very ordinary person who has to struggle like everybody else does even though she has this faith in God. So Anne-Marie’s integrity was important as well as the fact that she has a streetwise feel, and also you feel that she’s young and youthful and vulnerable but also that she’s seen stuff; she has wisdom.

I want to ask about your idea of the repetition. When did that first occur to you – that central concept of trying to tell and re-tell Joan’s story until the world is ready for her?
I can’t really remember when it first came to me! I suppose I thought that the Epilogue was slightly strange and that, in the Epilogue, it was a bit like actors talking about their characters after they’ve played it. It started a whole lot of thinking between Rae [Smith, designer] and I that the story could be told by an ensemble; the ensemble were actors that would get into character to get onto the platform. And because the point of the Epilogue is that nobody will ever receive Joan again, the world isn’t ready to receive her; it made sense that we as actors would have to start the whole thing again for tomorrow night. So it all came together, but it took a few weeks, with Rae and I chatting about it.

Has working on this play made you think about your own faith?
It doesn’t make me think about my own faith, because I’ve done quite a lot of soul searching about faith in the past and I don’t particularly want to go over that ground at this moment in my life. But it has made me think more firmly about things that I thought before, which I suppose is that there are two sides to every story: to some people Joan’s a martyr, to others she’s a terrorist. That’s the sort of message I’m trying to tell with this production I
Interview: Marianne Elliott, director

suppose. But although life is never that simple, although she’s a fundamentalist, and an insurgent, she’s now absolutely lauded to the hills. We’ve now had 500 years between her life and now, so we can, with hindsight, look back at her and canonise her as a saint. Maybe that will happen in the future with other people and maybe we should try and take that on board a bit more as we are living our lives, with people in our lives now.

Do you feel like you can put this play ‘to bed’ or do you feel restless about plays after you’ve directed them?
I don’t think you ever put a play to bed until it’s finished. You get obsessed and completely devoted and addicted to it until it’s finished. You have to be, I think, in order to work on it, to keep going with it, and keep plugging away. Sometime it’s quite difficult to get distance from it until it’s over and be objective about it. I won’t know what’s good or bad about this production – even though I’ve been working really hard on it – until it’s finished.
The visual language

The visual language of Marianne Elliott's production of Saint Joan

Perhaps this production’s biggest departure from Shaw’s play as it first appeared in 1923 is the visual language which the director, Marianne Elliott, has created. Collaborating closely in advance of and throughout the rehearsal process with choreographer, Hofesh Schecter and designer, Rae Smith, Marianne has been in pursuit of physical and scenic action on stage that will support her central idea; the notion that in every age of humankind, saints are burnt or destroyed by a society who simply cannot recognise or understand them. This idea of helpless repetition is emphasised in much of the choreography; for example, the play begins and ends with an identical sequence of the ensemble unravelling the chairs that make up Joan’s funeral pyre, suggesting that this company of storytellers are trapped in an endless cycle of telling and retelling Joan’s story until there is a breakthrough in finally understanding this young martyr. And in the world of the play, the breakthrough never comes...

Another, key decision of Marianne’s was to stage the scenes that Shaw didn’t write; to give life to key events like Joan’s victorious battle at Orleans and Charles’ subsequent coronation at Rheims cathedral, and by doing so, enliven Joan and the characters around her. As Rae Smith says;

“We began the process for Saint Joan by asking what was brilliant about Shaw, and what needed to be emphasised in our production? What became clear from reading it was the play’s vigorous intellectual line and very determined pattern - its skeleton was very much in place - but it came across as quite dry and not at all sensual. Joan’s spirit was a passive idea rather than a proactive entity. The feeling of the world and the questions of being alive were subdued with the bigger, intellectual argument. So our question then became how would we stage the play with an emphasis on a kind of living, breathing, visceral, space, how could we give the play life?”

As a result, in this production, we witness Joan’s bloodlust in the violent and brutal battle scene and so we understand the way in which this remarkable 17-year-old girl could have actively inspired these jaded, war-weary French soldiers to achieve great victories. Rae’s set, barren but for its war-blasted trees, suggests that where there was once the idyllic, pastoral France that Joan despairs of being shut away from when she is condemned in the trial, “…the light of the sky, and the sight of the fields and the flowers”, there is now only desolation, and a war torn landscape stripped of all colour and life. This barren lifelessness that frames the stage echoes the state-of-mind of the men that Joan encounters and systematically reawakens and inspires as she journeys through the play.

Hofesh Schecter has worked very closely on using the chairs that the ensemble members sit on; other than the trees and the central platform, they are the only ‘set’ to speak of. As well as providing these storytellers with an ever-present place to be, to witness, on stage, these chairs become, at various times in the action of the play, a weapon, an opponent in war and an impromptu stake at which Joan will finally burn. The way we learn about the changing function of these inanimate objects is through the physicality of the actor working with them. When they pull apart the pile of chairs at the beginning of the play with a sense of hallowed awe, we learn something about the focus and purpose with which they are bound to tell us this story. And later on, when they slam the chairs down in battle as if crushing an enemy skull, we witness the desperation of these Frenchmen to defeat the invading English who have been holding their country to ransom for generations.
The visual language of Saint Joan

The platform is also a key design element key because it focuses the vast space of the Olivier theatre and, as Rae says, it sets up a deliberate and purposeful area in which Joan’s story can be told;

"Do we declare we are telling a story?" was an important question we asked ourselves as we started work. We felt that the acting company should be empowered by the story in order to tell it. In terms of the design, what that meant was to build a platform in which someone could enter the space – The Olivier, which is a big space – and then deliberately, consciously enter a stage in order to tell this story. The platform also allows the Olivier space to work; it focuses the story and allows the space to breathe without building a ‘set’. I’ve worked on a Shaw play before – Mrs Warren’s Profession – and what one can be confident of is Shaw’s structure. What we’ve done here, for Saint Joan, is got rid of the walls and the front curtain, and so the play lives in an open space which isn’t prosenium, it’s slightly cinemascope, and at the same time it is like an apron stage. You’ve got a double perspective. That’s how we’ve done it.*

This central design concept of the platform also responds to Marianne’s brief of creating a sense of the epic on stage for this production of Saint Joan. The platform simultaneously creates the feeling of a vast landscape and is simple enough to allow the actors to function as the storytellers within it. As Rae describes it;

“What one has to do is focus the detail of the minimal, and then allow the epic to occur, rather than design an epic space; that’s what the Olivier space is, anyway. So the focus of the individual, the human figure in there is achieved by the use of the platform, and then by creating a landscape around it which doesn’t shut down the space; it allows it to flourish and live quite easily, but it helps focus the minimal, the acting space of the platform and the actors themselves; it gives it parameters.”

In terms of the specifics of time and place, the design of this production of Saint Joan echoes both when the play is set – France in 1429 – and the time when Shaw was writing it – as an Irishman living in London in the early 1920’s. Marianne felt that the Anglo/Irish political situation that was contemporary to Shaw was extremely prescient in the author’s mind when he wrote ‘St Joan’, which is, after all, a play about an individual who fights, with God, for the right to ‘Home Rule’. In design terms, this translates directly into the early 20th century-style army uniforms that the English and French soldiers and, indeed, Joan herself, wear. Thus, Poulengey, a squire in rural, 15th century English-occupied France, bears more than a passing resemblance to an English soldier in the trenches of the Great War or an Irish freedom-fighter on the streets of Dublin during the Easter rising. In addition, there are key visual markers in Shaw’s script which root the play exactly in its medieval timeline, such as Dunois’s shield, decorated with the ‘bend sinister’, or Joan’s sword, found, as she tells it, "behind the altar in the church of St Catherine, where God hid it for me...". These have been retained and combined with the 20th century visual references so that the political circumstances of both these eras can resonate for this production in a way that is poetic, literal and epic, all at once. As Rae says, “The year the play was first performed (1923) and the year Joan was burned (1431) are really important reference points to get to the truth of the story of Saint Joan. We wanted to interpret these periods of time in a non-documentary, non-literal way; a more poetic way in order to tell the story. You have to nail the specific elements, though, so I’ve been particular about the pageantry and the coronation of Charles, for example; moments when the visual imagery should be directly sourced.”

Ultimately, these design specifics that combine to create the visual language of the production will reach each audience member in a different way. It is the job of Marianne and her creative team to suggest echoes and parallels; the second half of the theatre dialogue occurs when the audience respond to these suggestions and challenges in ways which will resonate for themselves, as they witness this re-telling of Joan’s story.
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PAUL READY: THE DAUPHIN

Have you worked with Marianne before?
No I haven’t. I’ve watched stuff Marianne did, like Therese Raquin, which was very brilliant and beautiful. So I was very excited to work with her and very excited to do this play, and this part, the Dauphin, which is a really fun part.

Is that the main appeal of the part, that you can have fun with it?
Well, it is one of the great appeals. But also because of the plays I’ve just been doing, I was looking forward to play a character. I’ve done a couple of plays which haven’t really required character work, with Katie Mitchell.

Is it hard to adapt to different directors and their styles?
No, I don’t think so. I think what Katie taught me, which is so brilliant, is to ask a lot of questions, which you do anyway, but sometimes you forget how many you have to ask. You can’t say somebody’s name or talk of a place like Orleans or Chinon, without knowing what that place is. Katie has a very thorough way of working which is not something I’ve always done, really and it’s good to take that into another process.

What did you first think of the Dauphin when you read it? Did you know the play?
I didn’t know the play at all. It takes me a little while – or with something like this, a long time to digest it and come up with any kind of questions or ideas of what I would do with it, how I see it. But having said that, it’s obvious that it’s a fun part, he is obviously very witty, but at the same time very childish, intelligent, petulant, moody, very changeable, very insecure, very paranoid. A lot of things to look at or discover, or a lot of choices.

Is there a particular aspect of the character that you find especially difficult?
The major challenge at the moment is that there’s a lot to know historically, but it’s not necessarily the historical characters that Shaw has written. For example, historically the Dauphin is very pious and attended three masses a day, ad would never let the business of court get in the way of religion. That’s not in the play. So you need to filter it out. Do all the research and then filter what’s not useful.

Can you tell me about the work you’ve been doing on the physicality of the Dauphin?
That is something I am looking at in the history books. He is quite a physically weak character, he doesn’t really fit into what you’d imagine a king to be – graceful and stately – he’s insecure and treated as a child and nobody really believes in him as a king. Then there are the rumours about his illegitimacy. This feeds into his physicality and at the moment, a fidgety-ness, a petulance, a stamping kid who loses his temper in a sulky way is what’s developing, physically. Because this is quite specific, because it was said historically, I guess I try something out in rehearsals, to try and break through not walking like how I walk, not moving how I move. This time, I did some work with Hofesh, the choreographer, I asked him to keep an eye on what I was doing, not being too exaggerated. You want it to be part of a person, you don’t want it to stick out so it looks like a funny walk or a funny physicality. It’s got to be how someone is. I haven’t been trying for something really obscure or really exaggerated, I’ve just been trying gradually to feed things in.

Does the audience’s response to your character ever cross your mind?
I don’t know. I don’t think about what I’m trying to get across, I’m trying to think about what Shaw has written, so I find out what he’s written. As an audience, you make up your own mind. It’s a slippery slope if you try and
get an audience to feel something, forget it because you won’t be able to – they’re all individuals.

Do you understand why the Dauphin betrays Joan?
Historically, he was very good at using factions in the court, and playing people off each other. He would never get too close to anybody. So that if they became unpopular, he could just sidestep and move to somebody else. If Joan is becoming unpopular, he doesn’t want to be attached to her too much. In the play, it feels like her popularity is challenging his new position as a king. Now she’s got him there, all the people are calling out for Joan and not him, so maybe there’s jealousy. But why doesn’t stop her from being burned? It’s amazing that he doesn’t.

SIMON BUBB: CANON DE COURCELLES
What made you want to be an actor?
I started, like most people, at school and when you do school plays that’s the moment when you think actually, this is the thing I enjoy more than anything else. I went to university and studied English, ‘cause I was persuaded that way, to get a degree and do something serious, rather than going to drama school and as I got to my final year at university, I still hadn’t come across anything that I wanted to do more than acting. I decided I did need to train to be a professional actor, so I applied to drama schools, and went to Webber Douglas in London on the two-year postgraduate.

Have you worked with Marianne before?
Yes, I have, on Much Ado About Nothing, which was part of the RSC Complete Works Festival last year, which was fantastic. I loved working with Marianne – so much, that I practically hounded her until she gave me a part in this play!

What’s particularly good about having her as a director?
The bottom line is that she’s very good. She creates shows that audiences enjoy, so you feel safe and you can trust her to do a good production. You actually feel that in rehearsals as well. You feel you’re in the hands of somebody who knows what they’re doing and has a vision. She won’t just do the same old thing: she tries things that are new and different. But she does it in a way that makes you feel part of the process, You don’t feel alienated by her.

How do you see Courcelles?
Marianne is quite keen to say that Shaw has not written any people who are black or white. In the trial process, which has historically been seen as completely corrupt and unfair, Shaw is keen that everyone has their own point of view. If there’s anyone who is more closely drawn as a villain, Courcelles’ one of them. But he’s not a complete caricature; he’s believable. There are people like that, even today, who will fight for what they believe to be justice, and who cannot really be persuaded by emotional arguments, or have sympathy.

And so how do you find it in yourself to get the truth of someone like Courcelles?
It’s helpful that we’re doing a play that’s history-based. So you can do your research. For example, Courcelles was the one most in favour of torturing Joan and when you look at the trial records, you find that’s true: there were 14 assessors and only three of them voted to torture her and one of them was Courcelles. So you know that it wasn’t just a dramatic device: it’s really what happened. He must have had a good reason as far as he was concerned. What I have found useful, which is something we’ve done throughout the rehearsal process, is to draw comparisons with the Iraq war and the trial of Saddam – not that Joan and Saddam are the same, but comparable. So I wondered how does...
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Courcelles feel at the end, the chance that Joan might have got away with it? Constantly through the process most of the priests believed that the most important aim is to save Joan’s soul. I sort of think that Courcelles doesn’t necessarily agree with that. He knows he ought to. But I feel he’s probably like some American preachers, even if Saddam had totally repented and asked forgiveness for all the things he’d done, there must be some religious people who would say hang him, to punish him for what he’s done. I think Courcelles is just so wrapped up with the fact that she’s such a horrendous heretic. You’re beginning to sound like Courcelles!

At the moment I’m toying with how far to go in terms of creating a psychological background. Is the fact that she’s a woman a real problem for him? It sounds ridiculous but you could start asking what is in Courcelles background to make him like that — did his mother desert or mistreat him? Is he taking it out on Joan in the way that is more than just about what she’s done but is about him as well?

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Is that something that you do in private as an actor or do you need to do that in the rehearsal room?

In general I think you do it in private, because there’s absolutely nothing in the text to support that. That would be my own stuff.

You’re understudying Warwick — and you could see Courcelles as a younger version of Warwick, really.

You could do, absolutely. They’re both pretty ruthless. Except that Warwick represents very much the secular power. If Warwick and Courcelles met they probably wouldn’t get on, although they might have the same aims in terms of Joan. I understudied last year at the RSC. In Romeo and Juliet I went on for a month as Benvolio. It’s fun but terrifying; it’s like ice-skating: you’re terrified that at any moment you’re going to fall over. Then I went on again for the Duke of Austria with a bit more warning. More fun.

POLLY LISTER: UNDERSTUDY JOAN

What were your first impressions of the character when you read the play?

I think she’s fantastic. I absolutely fell for her really. She is so powerful, because her mission is so clear. She knows exactly what she wants and she meets these men who are essentially her barriers, and she has to get through them. She very quickly assimilates what she needs to be to these people and she provides it. And she’s courageous, positive and unstoppable. I remember saying in the audition to Marianne, the reason why I loved Joan is because she is brilliant, but terrifying. If someone is that brilliant and that positive and sure of themselves, they are terrifying.

What do you think about the question of Joan and her miracles in the play?

I think the Archbishop has got something when he says that miracles shouldn’t be dismissed because even if you don’t believe in them, if they’re a miracle to someone, then it’s a miracle. If they can change great swathes of negativity or cynicism, then it’s a miracle. I don’t think Joan is capable of turning water into wine, but I think that if you are someone who has been lonely for a long time and you crave a friend and the friend comes along, that’s a miracle.

Do you think that’s how Joan sees it?

No. She thinks that she’s divine. I think she feels that she is the speaker of God. He speaks to her, she shines it out. She doesn’t think she is filtering it, but she is, for her own gains. I think she sees herself as a very pure vessel which just receives information and gives it life.

It must be difficult to understudy Joan. Does that make you nervous?

I’m sure when it happens, I’ll be extremely nervous! But I don’t know the words yet, because I am watching how her relationships develop with the different men. It’s not my journey, but I have to watch for those tiny nuances, which is why I never get bored in these rehearsals, because things are changing all the time.

What’s quite sad, is that I know the first time a lot of the company are going to see my Joan is when I’m up there doing it. But when I get up, all I am able to show, is going to be the finished article. That is going to scare me because then people might think, Blimey, I didn’t believe that. When you watch a trapeze artist: if they waver and then succeed, you’re so pleased for them. I quite like to show my underbelly, but I think an understudy can’t because they just have to get up and do it.