

**National
Theatre**



MACBETH

by William Shakespeare
adapted by Rufus Norris

Background Pack



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

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Welcome to the National Theatre's background pack for *Macbeth*

This background pack, written by Liz Stevenson, the staff director of *Macbeth*, introduce the process of rehearsing and staging the play.

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Jane Ball
Programme Manager, NT Learning
September 2018

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The rehearsal and production photographs in this background pack were taken by Brinkhoff/Mögenburg

Cover image by Felicity McCabe

Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

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nationaltheatre.org.uk

The National's Production

Gentlewoman	Nadia Albina
Doctor	Michael Balogun
Duncan	Stephen Boxer
Lady Macbeth	Anne-Marie Duff
Porter	Trevor Fox
Siward/Murderer	Andrew Frame
Banquo	Kevin Harvey
Witch/Boy	Hannah Hutch
Lennox	Nicholas Karimi
Macbeth	Rory Kinnear
Murderer	Joshua Lacey
Rosse	Penny Layden
Witch	Anna-Maria Nabirye
Lady Macduff	Amaka Okafor
Macduff	Patrick O'Kane
Ensemble	Hauk Pattison
Murderer	Alana Ramsey
Witch	Beatrice Scirocchi
Fleance	Rakhee Sharma
Malcolm	Parth Thakerar

Understudies

Lady Macbeth	Nadia Albina
Banquo/Porter/Lennox	Michael Balogun
Duncan	Andrew Frame
Fleance	Hannah Hutch
Macbeth	Nicholas Karimi
Malcolm/Macduff	Joshua Lacey
Lady Macduff	Anna-Maria Nabirye
Murderers	Hauk Pattison
Rosse/Doctors	Alana Ramsey
Boy/Gentlewoman	Beatrice Scirocchi
Witch	Rakhee Sharma

Musicians

Bass clarinet/New wind instruments	Sarah Homer
French horn/New wind instruments	Laetitia Stott

Director	Rufus Norris
Set Designer	Rae Smith
Costume Designer	Moritz Junge
Lighting Designer	James Farncombe
Music	Orlando Gough
Sound Designer	Paul Arditti
Movement Director	Imogen Knight
Fight Directors	Kev McCurdy and Jeremy Barlow
Music Director	Marc Tritschler
Pole Captain	Hauk Pattison
Instrument Maker, Sonic Bricolage	Simon Allen
Company Voice Work	Jeannette Nelson
Staff Director	Liz Stevenson
Production Photographer	Brinkhoff/Mögenburg

Setting

Now, after a civil war

Opening

Olivier Theatre
6 March 2018

Rehearsal diary: week one

Rehearsals for *Macbeth* began on Monday 8 January, 2018.

Staff director Liz Stevenson's rehearsal diaries reveal how the process unfolded.

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most celebrated tragedies, and Rufus Norris' production will be the first revival of the play at the National Theatre since 1993. This production is set in a world and time similar to our own, but after the ravages of a civil war that has left the people of Scotland desperately struggling to survive in a brutal environment. Months before rehearsals begin, the production teams set to work on realising this concept in various ways, and over the following seven weeks a cast of 20 actors will join them in bringing this classic text to life for a modern audience.

In the run up to rehearsals, some of the actors and the production team take part in a workshop that begins to investigate the witches. The set for *Macbeth* will incorporate multiple poles of various materials, which reach heights of up to six metres – these will be the designated homes of the witches. In this way, these ethereal, mystical characters will be located in a liminal zone between the earth and the skies, occupying a sacred space that provides a perfect vantage point for observing the characters on the ground as their fates unfold.

Climbing these poles is a real physical challenge and requires specialised training. The actors initially spend a few days doing pole-work at the National Centre for Circus Arts, and then move to more regular training with pole specialist Hauk Pattison, who will also be performing in the production. The actors then commence work with movement director Imogen Knight, exploring what the physical language of the witches might be and starting to experiment with different masks, props and costumes. Rufus explains that he considers the witches to be the most challenging aspect of the play, and it is therefore invaluable to have this time to explore and develop a sense of who they might be, and how they might relate to and interact with their on-stage world. On the first day of rehearsals, the company sit down to read through the play for the first time. Many of the smaller characters in the play have been cut for this production, but at times their dialogue is recycled and spoken

through the mouths of other characters. This decision will allow the audience to follow the narrative of the main characters more closely, and will serve to maintain the play's momentum. Another significant change to the text is the reduction of the witches' lines – much of the cauldron-boiling, fog-hovering and tempest-tossing has been removed. The language of witchcraft is historically and culturally specific to the time the play was written, so the choice to remove these lines allows the cast more freedom to reinterpret the witches and their particular brand of magic for a modern audience.

During the first half of the week we sit around a table and begin to delve into and mine the play, considering what Shakespeare's intentions may have been and what the answers might mean for our production. Each day the cast practice pole work for a few hours, which involves a thorough physical warm-up and cool down led by Hauk. It's thrilling to watch Hauk climb, twist, hang and roll up and down the poles, and we begin to consider how our witches might use this medium to colonise their otherworldly habitat.

On Wednesday, the company have their first session with fight director Kev McCurdy. Through a series of exercises, they explore the psychology of fighting and the physical signs and signals humans tend to give when they are threatened, or when they find themselves in conflict situations. While the company are working on this, the assistant stage managers, Nicola Hill and Jo Phipps, bring in a wide range of weapons for the company to experiment with. In the post-apocalyptic world of the play there would be no ammunition left, so we need to imagine what weaponry these characters might use – what might they be able to get their hands on, and what exactly would they need their weapons to do? Rufus also asks Kev to explore what it means to fight in pairs, as many fights in the play see two characters pitted against another two. The session was really enjoyable and was a great way to start exploring the physical violence of the play.



Rehearsal diary: week one *continued*



Set designer Rae Smith and costume designer Moritz Junge also present their designs to the company during this first week. Rufus starts by explaining the two big questions he had when approaching the design and staging of *Macbeth*: firstly, how can we celebrate the Olivier with this production? And secondly, how do we approach the witches? With these questions as a starting point, he and Rae developed the concept together. The Olivier is large and has an epic quality, which lends itself well to the wildness and expanse demanded by and covered in the play, but *Macbeth* also has some incredibly personal and private scenes, and so the challenge was to create a design that supported both the intimacy and the epic nature of the play.

The production is set in the near future and shows an alternative Scotland, one mostly destroyed and in ruins after a long and devastating civil war. The reduced population have had to adapt to survive in this broken and ruthless world. Rae shares images that have inspired her and Rufus – they depict lots of vast, grey, haunted landscapes, landscapes that had once thrived, and the remnants of abandoned agricultural buildings where only scraps of plastic remain. Rufus and Rae have worked through the whole play scene by scene and have a storyboard of images, but they stress that they plan to develop the design alongside the rehearsal process as new discoveries are made. Similarly, Moritz Junge, shares his inspiration images and preliminary costume drawings, but also asks the actors to work with him on the designs. Both designers believe that by exchanging and sharing ideas with the actors, everyone will come to know more about their characters.

On Thursday evening, sound designer Paul Arditti comes in to work with Rufus and the three witches. Paul records the witches saying their lines into microphones, and we then try replaying the lines backwards, finding that this has a very interesting effect. It sounds faintly like Scottish Gaelic – which we had explored in the workshop the previous week – and is at once amusing and unsettling, but certainly very otherworldly. For the next few hours everyone suggests ideas and we try many different versions of the same effect, discussing how these reverse vocals might be used in performance.

Towards the end of the week, we begin to get scenes up on their feet, playing with different choices and learning more about these characters and their inhospitable world. The soldiers start to develop a shared understanding of the war from which they've recently returned, and decide that they'll need to develop their own rituals and physical language which are somehow unfamiliar to our modern audience. Rufus works closely with Rory Kinnear (*Macbeth*) and Anne-Marie Duff (*Lady Macbeth*), delving into their background and current circumstances. They talk about what effect the war might have had on their relationship, as well as the loss of their child, or children. The couple find themselves in a desperate situation in this unsafe, unpredictable and paranoia-inducing world, where becoming King and Queen is seen as the only way to guarantee security.

The first week has served to immerse the whole team in the text and in Rufus' vision for the production. It's exciting how much has already been revealed, and the weekend gives everyone time to absorb ideas – and rest aching muscles! – before we launch into week two.

Rehearsal diary: week two

At the start of the second week, we continue to explore how the witches move, and look particularly during their interactions with Macbeth and Banquo. Rufus wants the witches to reflect and emulate the humanity they witness, and just as this was explored with their voices in our sound session last week, we start to look at how it might be incorporated into their movements. The witches play around with mirroring Macbeth's gestures – almost as if they can predict his every move – and this proves to be discomfiting for Macbeth and Banquo. We also found that long bouts of stillness followed by sudden irregular and violent movement was very visually effective. It is the beginnings of a language that Imogen Knight, our movement director, will develop further with the actors later in the week.

Two musicians will perform alongside the actors on stage, playing handmade instruments made out of materials that, in a post-apocalyptic world, could have been found modified and adapted. The musicians arrive at rehearsal armed with instruments made out of plastic pipes, and the eventual aim is for them to also utilise elements of the set to make sounds. After a morning of initial experimentation with these new instruments, the musicians and composer Orlando Gough are introduced to the rest of the company, and we start to explore a key scene together.

In Act 1 scene 6, upon King Duncan's orders, the army go to Macbeth's home to celebrate winning the war. Rufus wants to investigate what a party might be like

for these characters. Rather than discussing this as a group, Imogen leads us as we launch straight into a physical improvisation. She plays a ten-minute music track, and her only instruction to the group is for the actors to find physical activities to occupy them. The musicians also play their instruments at the party. As the music builds, the actors start to interact with each other and with different elements of the rehearsal set, and Imogen and Rufus jump in to give individuals or small groups the odd instruction, shaping different images and developing ideas that were happening organically. It is fascinating to see the scene gradually develop into a raucous, energetic rave, simultaneously familiar and utterly bizarre. Several of the moments which emerged from this improvisation will be returned to later in the rehearsal process.

Every week we have a production meeting, which is a chance for staff from different departments to get together to raise any questions and share their progress. With representatives from set, costume, sound, props, wigs, hair and make-up, stage management and members of the production team, it is quite a large group! Set designer Rae Smith shares drawings, images and model pieces to demonstrate her ideas to the team. Decisions are made about the locations of poles and the height, angle and positioning of the bridge. It is always tricky to balance making creative decisions early enough to ensure everything is made on schedule, but not so early that there isn't time to respond to what is developing when working with the



Rehearsal diary: week two *continued*

actors in rehearsal. For instance, this week there was a focus on the interior spaces in the play. One example of a unique, interior space is Macduff's castle, in which Lady Macduff witnesses the murder of her young son. Using elements of scenery, props and furniture available in the rehearsal room we try multiple ways of playing this scene, and discuss the characters' motivations and relationships. We find the confinement of this space quite useful to the scene – the walls and ceilings being lower than normal is visually interesting as it made the actors look and feel more vulnerable. Discoveries like these are made throughout the week, and these, in turn, feed into the development of the design.

On Friday we began working on Act 4 scene 1, in which Macbeth seeks out the witches and bears witness to a number of apparitions which predict his future. These apparitions are intriguing in that they aren't conjured through description or by the mouths of the witches, but are summoned by them in some way. We read the scene together and Rufus communicates some of the various treatments and approaches to this scene he wants to try, one being the idea that the apparitions will come to life through the bodies of the surrounding ensemble. We play around with distributing the witches' lines amongst the ensemble in a number of different ways. Imogen then leads some movement work with the ensemble, using masks eerily worn on the back of their heads, and also incorporating dolls – a recurring motif we've been experimenting with. It is mesmerising to watch and throws up lots of ideas for Imogen, Rufus and Rae.

Towards the end of the day, costume designer Moritz brings in a prototype of the masks, which look more like the heads of babies as opposed to the adult masks we've been using in rehearsal. We compare the adult and more child-like masks and talk about the impact they each have. There are many unusual and exciting ideas concerning the witches coming from the company and technical team, and the challenge facing us now is to refine these ideas and make a decision, ensuring that the design and movement complement each other and tie in with the overall vision for the production.

It's been a week of constant discovery as we've rehearsed each scene for the first time. We've learnt a lot about each of the characters, their relationships and their environment, and this will continue as we move through to the end of the play next week.



Rehearsal diary: week three

At the beginning of week three, Jeannette Nelson, Head of Voice at the National Theatre, takes some of the actors who haven't previously worked in the Olivier Theatre onto the stage, to help them to start thinking about the ways in which they'll need to adapt to the performance space. It's always a momentous change and stark contrast to the rehearsal room when the company transition into the theatre, and so it is useful to prepare for this and acclimatise where possible.

Jeannette takes the company through the acoustics of the space, pointing out the weak and strong spots and encouraging them to explore the stage and the auditorium by listening to each other speak and giving feedback. There are certain technical skills that the actors will need to employ to perform in a vast theatre like the Olivier, and they are reminded of the importance of articulation, breathing and some of the more specific requirements of this particular performance space.

This week we make good progress with Act 4 scene 3, which begins with Macduff trying to persuade Malcolm to return to Scotland in order to overthrow Macbeth. This is the only scene set in England, and Rufus wants this location to feel very different to the Scotland depicted in our production. England remains untouched by the destruction of the civil war, and Malcolm has chosen to taken refuge there. Rufus wants to make it clear that Malcolm has been very much removed from his home country and its people, an environment he

has grown accustomed to. Rufus explains to Patrick O'Kane (Macduff) and Parth Thakerar (Malcolm) that the two men should feel like complete opposites to the audience; Macduff is hot-headed and passionate, whereas Malcolm more of a precise politician. This decision then informs the actions of the characters – Macduff begins to charge around the space with directness of movement and intention, while Malcolm remains behind his desk, unmoving and relaxed.



In this scene, Malcolm is testing Macduff's loyalty to Scotland. He needs to know he can trust him before he can admit that he already has the English army mobilised and primed to fight for their cause in Scotland. Rufus works with Parth on the different ways in which Malcolm might elicit his intended response from Macduff. Ross (Penny Layden) interrupts this scene in order to inform Macduff that Macbeth has ordered the brutal murder of his family.

Rufus has made Shakespeare's 'Rosse' a woman, and Penny plays her as a tough and resilient fighter, who has had to do whatever it takes to survive. We discuss the reasons Ross takes her time to tell Macduff the news about his family, and why she doesn't answer him directly, even when he explicitly asks her, 'How does my wife?'

Rehearsal diary: week three *continued*

This leads to a discussion of an earlier point in the play, as Ross's intentions here are entirely affected by our interpretation of this scene. In Act 4 scene 2, Ross goes to Lady Macduff's home to tell her that Macduff has fled to England, and by the end of this scene, Macduff's castle has been besieged. We decide that Ross has always been close to the Macduffs, which makes it especially difficult for her when Macduff reaches out, seeking comfort.

At the end of the week, we make an interesting discovery regarding the language of soliloquys. In Act 1 scene 7, Macbeth talks to himself during the party to mark the end of the war and decides against murdering Duncan, before Lady Macbeth appears and convinces him otherwise. When first staging this scene, we try having Macbeth walk away from the party in search of solitude and the opportunity to be alone with his thoughts, but as the guests at the party moved in slow motion upstage, the soliloquy is punctuated by eruptions of activity and noise at certain points. Then Rufus asks Rory (Macbeth) to remain in amongst the crowd, and instead has the ensemble freeze around him.

Keeping Macbeth and the crowd together in this way, rather than splitting the image into two, proves very effective – it serves to plunge us into Macbeth's inner thoughts and prevents the action of the party distracting from the soliloquy. This is a device we will go on to experiment with as we approach other soliloquys in the play.

On Saturday, we experiment with some new handmade instruments specially created for the production. Some old organ pipes were of particular interest. The day finishes with Rufus, Orlando (composer), Paul (sound designer) and Marc (music director) going through the entire script, identifying the key musical moments and sharing and developing musical ideas as they go.



Rehearsal diary: week four

This week we start to run large sections of the play. We look at Act 1 scene 6, which sees the arrival of King Duncan and his party to Macbeth's home, right up to Act 2 scene 4 – the discovery of Duncan's murder. By running these scenes one after the other, everyone begins to see the production coming together and how one sequence will cue or follow the next. It's useful to think about these scenes as one long, continuous section, as all of the action between Act 1 scene 6 and Act 2 scene 4 happens over the course of a single evening. We then revisit all the scenes in Act 1, beginning to excavate and find the detail in each and continuing to develop the characters. We explore the possibility that King Duncan (played by Stephen Boxer) is much-loved by his people, but that he is not necessarily the most strong or effective king. When we come upon the play and its characters, they have only just emerged from a long, bloody and devastating civil war. Duncan may be well-meaning, but he has been blind to the previous Thane of Cawdor's betrayal and ultimately goes on to be betrayed again by Macbeth.

At the top of Act 1 scene 4, we come across a furious Duncan, distressed and outraged by the Thane of Cawdor's betrayal, and his son, Malcolm, attempts to calm him down. Rufus wants the company to convey the fact that Duncan and Malcolm are very close, and this is another reason to cut the character of Donalbain from this production, to make the relationship between Malcolm and Duncan even stronger and clearer. When Macbeth enters this scene, having just helped to win the war, Duncan puts on a melodramatic display of gratitude for the amusement of the group, before bursting into tears in response to Banquo's expression of devotion. It is clear from the reactions of the group that this sudden emotion is a regular occurrence, and is not behaviour anyone else indulges in – the soldiers are fighting for their lives every day, whereas Duncan has not been numbed by direct involvement in the battle. Duncan's position has afforded him the luxury of time and distance away from the war, and he can indulge in sentimentality in a way the other characters can't.

After Duncan's outpouring of emotion, he immediately announces that his son Malcolm will be the future King. Again, the response from the soldiers indicates that this is a poor decision that none of the company approve of; Malcolm, much like his father, is set apart from Ross, Lennox, Macduff and Macbeth, who are the fighting soldiers. There has been much discussion in rehearsal about the qualities of good leadership, both in the imagined world of our production and more broadly. We ask each other questions: is good leadership different in times of war than in times of peace? What qualities does a person need to have to be a good ruler?

Even though the killing of Macbeth results in Malcolm becoming King of Scotland, Rufus plans to point to Fleance in the final moments of this production. At the beginning of the production the witches see Macbeth decapitate a man – we consider that they might see Macbeth as the ruler who can take his people to the very bottom, in order to allow a new and better society to form afterwards. In a sense, this production has a happy ending (or at least one that is more positive than usually portrayed!) as it points towards a good leader who is well-equipped to take this society forward, and one who will go on to produce a 'line of kings', as the witches predicted.

This week, we also look at Act 3 scene 4, in which Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo. At the start of the banquet, Macbeth enters the room to find Lady Macbeth, Ross, Lennox and the other lords celebrating Macbeth's coronation and playing a drinking game. Amidst the fog of drink and revelry, Lady Macbeth endeavours to preserve the good humour of the group by making a joke out of Macbeth's suddenly strange behaviour, but her attempts don't succeed for long. Rufus points out that these characters are likely to have seen people suffering from PTSD, or similar behaviours as a result of the atrocities they've witnessed during the war. We plan to revisit this scene with fight director Kev McCurdy, as Rufus sees it becoming physically violent as the guests try to restrain Macbeth in his pursuit of the ghost.

Banquo's ghost disappears by walking upstage into the darkness. In the world of the play electricity is a luxury – although the room in which the banquet takes place is starkly lit, the stage itself and surrounding area is not. This use of lighting should add to the vulnerability of the characters, as well as the confusion as Macbeth charges around, addressing a Banquo who is invisible to the rest of the characters. Musicians Sarah and Letty, working closely with composer Orlando, play horn music when the ghost appears in Macbeth's mind, which adds to the dangerous, unsettling and violent atmosphere evolving in this scene.



Rehearsal diary: week five



This week we focus on a different act of the play each day. We work on individual scenes in detail before running the act together, with Rufus giving the actors notes afterwards. This method is beneficial as everyone can see how the production is taking shape.

Rufus works with Rory on Macbeth's soliloquys. Through some of the choices in the direction, the audience are brought into what's going on in Macbeth's head. For instance, not only do we see Banquo's ghost in Act 3 scene 4 (as is scripted), but in this production the ghost of Banquo also appears in Act 5 scene 3 when Macbeth is told that the English army is approaching.

Rufus links the use of the revolve to Macbeth's psychology. The revolve isn't arbitrarily used for a functional scene change, instead its use is connected to Macbeth's thought process. For example, during Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 3 scene 1 when he's just returned from his coronation in Scone, Macbeth expresses his fearfulness of Banquo. Across this speech he goes from a place of complaint, to self-justification, before finally building himself up into a state of ruthless confidence in order to be able to kill Banquo. With each of these shifts of thought, the stage revolves, letting us into Macbeth's journey of thought whilst simultaneously getting us into the right place for the moment where Macbeth recruits two murderers to commit the deed.

Now we're starting to run acts of the play and thread the whole production together, Rufus looks for places for images and ideas to recur and evolve. For example, after Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo, Lady Macbeth tries

to comfort her husband by holding him from behind. This image is mirrored in the way Macbeth holds Lady Macbeth's body after she has killed herself. A recurring material is plastic, which is used in the set and costume design. At the start of the play, Macbeth decapitates a soldier and puts the head in a plastic bag and hangs it on a pole. Plastic bags are seen again at the party when the drunken revellers put them on their heads and wear them as hats. The repetition and progression of images helps to communicate the ideas of the production and bring the whole piece together.

This week we rehearse the ending of the play in more detail, working out how each character's journey comes to an end. One of the challenges of these final scenes is how to evoke the tension and scale of the invading English army of 10,000 people with a cast of 20! In Act 5 we go from scenes of war in the open air, to interior scenes between Macbeth and another character, such as the Porter or the Doctor. Decisions are made about how to help the audience focus in on the intimate moments of the play, and support the epic ones.

When we finally run Act 5 together, it's exciting to see this starting to work. There's a swelling sense of chaos as the bridge moves, the stage revolves, and characters travel through the space mid-flight. This sense of chaos builds, driving forward to the climax of the play when Macbeth is killed. In contrast to all this noise and violence, the final musical lament, and the subdued 'Hail, King of Scotland' from the remaining few survivors, finishes the play in a melancholic though somehow hopeful, more peaceful place.

Rehearsal diary: week six



This week we continue to tighten up certain scenes, add more subtle details and work more specifically on transitions. Working with Imogen, the actors look at giving more shape to the party at Macbeth's home at the end of Act 1 scene 7. As a warm up, Imogen asks the cast to dance freely to some music – the company oblige, and soon everyone's blood is pumping. This exercise also loosens the inhibitions of the cast, enabling them to be more physically playful and present in the rehearsal.

Imogen looks at the moment the party freezes for Macbeth's soliloquy, and works on making the frozen tableau as interesting as possible for the audience. She tells the actors that the image should feel alive, and like a real moment in time that could resume at any second. The actors then release the frozen image, but move at half-speed and with half of their normal energy, turning themselves outwards to the audience as the revolve moves round. This sends the image upstage before it is finally brought to back to life and normal speed, and the revelry collides with the private moment between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Imogen and Rufus refine the journey of the party and work on transitioning between the key moments they need to hit. Now all that is needed is to see the whole sequence play out on the Olivier stage – it is exciting to consider how much the sound and lighting design will help to create the mood of the party and serve to enhance the action.



Rehearsal diary: week six *continued*



Rufus continues to work closely with Rory and Anne-Marie on the specifics of their scenes. In Act 3 scene 2, he works to find ways to make their conversation seem as dynamic and lively as possible, and to ensure that they're genuinely affecting one another from moment to moment. Previously, we had Lady Macbeth trying to soothe Macbeth with 'You must leave this' – and he breaks down, responding with, 'Full of Scorpions is my mind, dear wife'. However, Rufus encourages the couple to challenge one another in this scene, and now Anne-Marie plays 'You must leave this' as though she is forcefully telling Macbeth to pull himself together. Macbeth's response is then played as an attack – he resents his wife for failing to address the gravity of their situation. Shakespeare affords so many different interpretations of his lines, and it's always an exciting process to select which story we want to tell and how we want the relationship between these characters to develop.

At the end of the week, Imogen, Rufus and Moritz work with the three witches to make some final decisions ahead of technical rehearsals. We discuss the idea of the witches representing nature, the use of dolls in the design and the decision to use them with the apparitions in Act 4 scene 1, and their journey throughout the production. So far, the movement of the witches has been very much connected, with the three actors moving as one body and sharing the same energy, pace and style. Rufus and Imogen feel that although this is distinctly spooky, it is perhaps too predictable to be genuinely frightening. So instead, they explore the possibility of having each of the witches as individual entities. One witch moves steadily and slowly, the second moves in a direct but rapid way, whereas the third's movement is fast and chaotic. Rufus compares

them to the Orishas of West African cosmology, which inspired his early thinking about the production. The Orishas are goddesses who are known for having control over specific elements of nature. The first witch has the steadiness of the ocean, with its capability for powerful destruction, whereas the second moves like the wind. The Orishas aren't simply 'good' or 'evil', and nor are they revered as infallible saints, but have many qualities and individual personalities, meaning they reflect the complexity of humans. This individuality within the witches' movement feels right and it will be interesting to see what affect it will have on Macbeth and Banquo when we revisit Act 1 scene 3 next week.

Rufus and Imogen work through the whole play with the actors, discussing when the witches might feature outside of their main scenes. Next week we'll incorporate this into a full run-through of the play in the rehearsal room, to see how the presence of the witches might affect or enhance certain moments of the story. Sometimes the witches will only be heard and not seen – their breathing will punctuate certain moments, as if they are an eternal presence in Macbeth's head. Other times the witches will physically appear, particularly in moments of violence, from the murder of Banquo to the death of Macduff's son.

On Friday we run the whole play for the first time. It is an exhausting and moving experience for all involved. So much has been learnt from seeing the play in its entirety, experiencing the emotional peaks and troughs and seeing opportunities for further development. Rufus' notes will be shared with the cast next week and incorporated into the final run-throughs in the rehearsal room before we finally go into technical rehearsals in the theatre.

Rehearsal diary: week seven

The week begins with the final runs of the play in the rehearsal room. Responding to last week's run-throughs, Rufus makes some changes. Originally in this adaptation Paul Prescott (text arrangements and edits) and Rufus changed the order of the scenes in Act 5, but Rufus rehearses the act again with the scenes in Shakespeare's original order and concludes that the action flows better.

Act 4 scene 1 (in which Macbeth goes to visit the witches and is presented with numerous apparitions) is a visually and conceptually challenging moment in the play. Using their supernatural powers, the witches show Macbeth a vision of the future. It is the only time the witches do this, and how and why they choose to do so is a big decision for anyone staging a production of the play. In this production, each apparition is presented to Macbeth using the bodies of the ensemble – they are an extension of the witches, and the meaning of each apparition is symbolised through movement, props and costume. Rufus and Imogen feel that the ensemble movement is too consistent at the moment, characterised by one pace and energy. They also feel that Macbeth should not stand back and watch the apparitions but that he should be physically in amongst them, as though each one overtakes him – he is both alarmed and mesmerised by them.

We also want the first three apparitions to build the suspense for the audience, but to be distinct from one another. The fourth apparition, after the witches warn Macbeth: 'Seek to know no more' should be different altogether, and the most terrifying for Macbeth. Imogen and Rufus work with the ensemble to adapt the apparitions in pursuit of these aims. For the first apparition, three members of the ensemble travel downstage walking backwards, their masks facing the audience, holding dolls. As they come forward, their movement is steady and haunting, their arms twist behind their backs and hold the dolls maternally, before they throw up their arms with a sudden and violent movement, holding the dolls out so they dangle by the umbilical chord, before darting upstage and behind the bridge at speed. Macbeth stands in the midst of them as all this happens. The work on all of the apparitions simplifies the scene so that the audience will know what to focus on from moment to moment. We'll only get the full impact of this epic moment once we're in the theatre, and I suspect that this technically and creatively challenging scene will continue to be worked on right up to opening night.

In Act 5, when the action returns to Macbeth's home, we originally planned to return to the same set pieces that were used in Acts 1 scene 3: various walls and furniture set up to create the rooms of the Macbeth household. However Rufus makes the decision to explode the set, with remnants of all that has happened in the play scattered across the stage; the sofa from

England, the table Duncan was killed on, the chairs from Lady Macduff's home are all upturned and strewn across the floor. This takes us into a different world for Act 5 as everything unravels; it frees up the action allowing us to move seamlessly from one scene to the next; and it represents the destruction of Scotland and of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's mental state. We rehearse the scenes in Act 5 with this new configuration so we can incorporate the change into the final run-through in the rehearsal room.

On Wednesday we begin technical rehearsals. This is when we finally move onto the Olivier stage, joined by staff from all departments to start working through the play in situ. It's all hands on deck for sound, lighting, music, costume, make-up and wigs, set, props, voice, stage crew and stage management to bring everything together for first preview. It's a complicated and lengthy process, but it's exciting to see all the plans and ideas finally come together.

Despite the months of planning and rehearsal, there are always elements that don't have the result you expect once you get into the theatre, both practically and artistically. However, when everyone walks into the theatre for the first time they're hit by the overwhelming impact of the huge bridge, the stunning backdrop of black plastic sheets and the way they transform in different lighting states. It's also great to see the world come to life as everyone gets to see the whole cast in full costume. Now we're ready for that exciting and nerve wracking time as everyone works towards that first audience...



Rehearsal diary: previews

Throughout technical rehearsals and previews, the whole company continue to work on the show. The way in which the company experience elements of the show anew when it gets in front of an audience for the first time is amazing. Throughout this period, elements that do and don't work become clear and the production undergoes all kinds of changes as a result.

The witches continue to develop throughout previews. Rufus and costume designer Moritz Junge feel that the witches' costumes are getting washed out against the backdrop of the set when compared to the other bolder costume designs. Their costumes go from translucent, ragged material of greens and beige hues to broken-down black lace dresses. The black has the effect of rendering them shadowy figures – the witches now feel a part of the black plastic world that surrounds them.

In rehearsal, we had been experimenting with the witches breathing to punctuate or underscore certain moments. Throughout previews this develops into more of a vocal language. Working with music director Marc Tritschler, each witch develops their own range of vocal sounds which come naturally to each actor. These noises complement one another and are approached like a musical score which becomes like a language of their own. To explore and practice this new language,



music director Marc Tritschler almost composes them as a warm up – bringing each witch in and out at different moments, encouraging them to reduce then increase the volume at different points.

The transition into Act 5 scene 1 also changes throughout previews. Initially, various characters visibly set the furniture strewn across the stage, as though they're all in Lady Macbeth's head before we see her in the sleepwalking scene. This feels odd in the context of a full run in the theatre, as it doesn't happen elsewhere in the production. When we got into the space, we found that the use of the downstage arc of plastic (which behaves like a flown-in curtain) has a bold and dramatic effect. It enables scene changes to happen upstage, unseen by the audience. While this happens, Lady Macbeth comes downstage with her lantern and holds some of the baby clothes which were packed in her room.

The contents of the Macbeth household are littered across the stage as their minds and the environment around them is in disarray. One of the witches (Beatrice Scirocchi) is an observer, who moves in a steady and direct way, but also enjoys stillness. She watches Lady Macbeth closely at this moment, and draws much closer to Lady Macbeth than the witches have approached before, which has an unsettling effect. As the black plastic curtain hanging from the arc is pulled upwards revealing the setting for Act 1 scene 5, Lady Macbeth reaches up as if to touch the plastic. For me, this expresses the change in her mental state – as she sleep walks, she is in between waking and sleeping, in between life and death in her mind as she sees the 'murkiness' of hell and blood on her hands.

The physical language of the ghosts also develops during previews. Duncan's ghost has a hauntingly smooth, sustained, dignified quality. Banquo's ghost staggers, searching as though he's lost, with a faster internal tempo than Duncan's ghost. In a sense, the different qualities of the movement of the ghosts mirrors the different movement qualities of the witches.

There have been several other changes, for example, the musicians aren't really seen much by the audience, only a few times, as they don't have a specific on-stage home. The witches don't watch the killing of Banquo as we rehearsed in week six. During Act 5, it's only some of the furniture from Macbeth's house which is scattered across the stage, not the remnants of all that has happened in the play as we originally envisaged. Throughout the week lots of changes are made to continue to refine the clarity and effectiveness of the storytelling. It is fascinating to see how the production evolves as it responds to the Olivier theatre and to the reactions of a live audience.

Interview with Set Designer Rae Smith

What was your starting point to conceiving this production of *Macbeth*?

When you first start the design process, you have to think about the venue, which in this case is the Olivier Theatre, and then the story, the structure of it and how it works. It's a very active story, and the actions that people carry out are what motivate the catastrophe and destruction of the play. My basic starting point was therefore being aware of the dynamic of how the theatrical space could be used for this story, and how best to avoid holding up any of its action – I wanted to ensure it remains moving forward to the catastrophic events at the end. As a designer, my main aim is to help the director portray the fluidity of the plot, and not to design anything that would hold up or inhibit the production.

What images and influences shaped this production of *Macbeth*?

When it came to working with Rufus, I found that it was better to work through everything together than preparing a model for him. It started with an image that I found on Facebook – a picture of a set from a friend who is a puppet-maker, it looked almost American and was very sketchy and impressionistic. I really liked it, it had a feel of the violence of a big landscape, but with a small space within it. The colour and sense of violence, concentration and claustrophobia of that image condensed itself into Lady Macbeth's room. We were considering how to fit a small room inside an epic landscape, and discussed panoramas and Westerns. We wanted a panorama that didn't dwarf the actors in the Olivier Theatre.

I sent Rufus that image as a starting point, and continued to send things to him to see what he batted back and what he connected with. He's such a busy man and was tackling the production intuitively, poetically and intellectually as well as trying to make it work technically, and so at these early stages what connected to him was what felt right; images are a way of finding out what feels right and that is subjective to both of you. You're looking to create pictures and images that can then become collages and collate the mood of what's around you when you're in the middle of the story.

I was looking at painters like Anselm Kiefer, and artists who paint muddy, earthy or war-torn landscapes. One of the things that struck us particularly in the initial stages was an image of an old frame of what looked to be agricultural equipment. This made us consider the idea of growing plants as an industry – but once a country has been at war for a long period of time, a civil war, there's no growing of any kind. If you turn that image into something that is damaged beyond repair and can't be refertilised, it began to have the right feeling of the context of telling the story.

In our case, an image that influenced the process was an image of a plastic bag caught on a tree that looks like a crow. We thought about the environment and how this might impact the characters' costumes – after a civil war everybody is dirty, all clothes would have turned brown and stained and very few people manage to wear something nice. We considered the idea of textures in a world made up predominantly of dirt, and what weapons these people might have to defend themselves. We thought about Darwin's phrase, 'To adapt is to survive', and if that is taken literally, a character might have on their person a tin opener and a knife to defend themselves – perhaps some antiseptic spray and gaffer tape to tape on extra layers when it got cold, and a plastic tarpaulin or canopy to shelter under. We thought about lighting, too – if all electricity had gone except for a portable generator, what could you burn or what would you have about you to allow you to survive? From the starting point you therefore begin to consider how to build a world around it.

These images of the shells and skeletons of architecture that used to be a living, breathing society all helped to create a feeling of desolation and of nature turning against us. Shakespeare describes this multiple times in conjunction with civil war, there are strange goings-on and there is an elemental feeling that nature has turned against man, and indeed it does in times of civil war. We come to a place where people have taken it upon themselves to attempt a coup – the kind of thing that happens when people are at their lowest ebb.

We also looked at images of refugees and plastic, the way in which plastic is scattered around the landscape as it the only thing that doesn't break down. It has the power to alienating us and make our world feel more primitive. A plastic bag becomes a dead crow on a tree, which becomes a harbinger of something dreadful that is about to happen.

What was the idea of the poles that the witches climb up? Where did that start?

I was always keen to build a hill in the Olivier that would somehow create a landscape. On this 'hill' we started to put the poles, which looked more like Thai fishermen's poles, and we thought that the witches should also be present up the poles, looking down on everything that was going on in the earth. We thought of these poles as being places of worship that the characters might hang offerings on. We looked at poles in different cultures and societies where people have traditionally hung their dead or parts of their dead on poles. Initially, it was a way of focusing the idea that the witches were ever-present – they would observe from a height, and then come down and run around the living. This idea then developed in that the height of the poles also meant that they were like antennae, and this was to do with the fact that the witches would catch the messages of nature in the wind.

These messages would feed into the ears and minds of the witches and come out of their mouths and be communicated to the humans through their actions. We had an idea about the earth taking its revenge through the action of the embodiment of the wind on those who caused it such destruction.

You mentioned that you always wanted to create a landscape in the Olivier and a hill. What else do you think about when designing for that theatre?

The Olivier is made for landscapes rather than interiors, which is the first conundrum to come to terms with. It's not a neutral space and it rejects anything that is vulnerable or inconclusive. You need to be aware of the perspective of the actor in relation to the architecture you're using.

What interested you most about Macbeth when you read it?

From a storytelling point of view, what's intriguing about it is that someone who vaguely has a conscience – or really has, it's difficult to say – ends up taking a murderous course in a matter-of-fact way. So you're inside the mind of a psychopath. It's interesting to consider whether Macbeth is a psychopath because he is told to be, or was he one before? What does a psychopath think? Does he have remorse? It is a fascinating concept and that's why people love it. It's getting inside a murderer's head, and there's two of them, it's about Lady Macbeth as well. Our Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are believably a couple and together in their plotting, and when everything comes undone it affects both of them. The ambition of their project overwhelms them in every way, and I think that's what is attractive about it. People love the story and they love violence and murder and gore, because the theatre allows you the space to watch it. In terms of designing, it is important to find a dramatic context for the story to exist in – the misery of long-term civil strife and the barren landscape of our production means that our characters have nothing, because everything has been taken away from them.

Interview with Movement Director Imogen Knight

Could you talk to us about what a movement director does? What is your job when working on a show?

It can vary a great deal, you can do a large amount on a show including staging every moment, to just a very small and particular sequence, which is why it is very exciting. With productions generally it is somehow about what is the world that all of these people and actors have to inhabit? To create a true atmosphere and a true world for an audience, there's a transmission of how we enter something. For me, that's my keenest interest: how do I create worlds where whatever people do makes sense within that world? People can do lots of crazy things, which taken out of context can seem bizarre, but it works if you set up the world through improvisation and discovery. Through people's bodies and not using text, you create a world and then you stage what the people are doing in that world. Many actors feel that as well as using the text to explain a story they are also able to be in the story physically, so they are not having to over-pretend because it is already in their system.

You've been working with the actors playing the witches – how did you help them approach their characters?

Initially we started with a lot of improvisation. This involved playing around with costumes and attaching things to them – all kinds of weird and wonderful things – to try to discover if they were human, or what elements of humanity they have. We gradually refined this idea to give the actors a clearer idea of where the witches originally came from. During rehearsals we made the great discovery that all three witches are different – so instead of performing in unison we liked the idea that they were all unique but all come from the same place. So one of the witches operates on a very fast motor, another operates on a medium motor and stops quite often, the third continues to walk at a slow tempo, like a driving force. This helped us to define that, though the witches are elementally and essentially the same, they are wildly different beings.

The approach towards the witches originally came from the idea that they are connected to nature – can you tell us more about that?

The tempo at which they move is connected to nature – in nature you get these different speeds and this is one way in which we've shown their link. Their connection to nature sees them operating independently of the other characters in the play – they are not conversational, they enter and exit the stage in a different way, but the natural aspect to them is that they are always present – they

don't die but are a constant presence. With the witch who moves quickly, we connected her with the idea of a storm, water moves slowly like another witch, and the last one who moves at the medium pace can be seen as the growth of things. There aren't direct connections but these are some of the sense behind the choices: the most important idea is that they are three women and have the ability to create life. Female force is a kind of never-ending journey – the idea that the slower witch is like an ancient mother, like mother earth, the middle one is mother, and the faster one is daughter – they are in a line of mothers which feels really strong and gives the women a real sense of why they're there. They don't have many lines in the show but they know why they appear.

How did you develop the characters of the witches throughout the rehearsal process?

In the early stages of *Macbeth*, I'd often work in a different room with the witches, just to generate who and what they were. I didn't go in having a clear idea of what I wanted for them, I knew what I thought they might be, but I work very closely with actors and am very interested in how they interpret what I have to say and what they bring to something, so it was about having focused time together to find that world and discover what is possible. Then the actors also had this training to be able to climb poles, which was very intense for them – they learned to climb up and down and to do various things, which was very interesting in terms of what was happening in the play.

We would also work with the other actors, to see if the movement language we had discovered could be integrated into the play. At one point we did a session where we created an event that happens with the witches, and the other actors involved had no idea what was happening when we performed it with them – and for the first time the witches had the impact we'd desired. The actors involved in that session were shocked, alarmed and physically maneuvered around the space by what the witches were doing.

What do you think about when working on a production that is going to be staged in the Olivier?

The Olivier is an amazing theatre and I love it. I've done quite a bit for it, and I think of it as being in the round, even though it's more like an amphitheatre. If you think about it in the round I think it opens up so many possibilities.

Theatre Glossary

Meet and greet

Usually held on the first day of rehearsals, the meet and greet is a chance for the company and production team to meet everyone who is involved in the production as well as staff from marketing, learning, fundraising, etc. The director – and sometimes the writer – may take this opportunity to explain a bit about their vision for the production.

Round the table / table work

Some directors like to start rehearsals by reading through the script, and getting an understanding of the play, characters and setting without adding movement or blocking.

Blocking

Working out where actors should stand or move on stage, and at what point.

Put on its feet

The point in rehearsals where the company start to add in blocking and try out movement for scenes. Some directors like to put a play 'on its feet' from the very start, and work out the intention of the play and the characters at the same time as the movement.

A run

Rehearsing each scene of the play in chronological order, without interruption. Runs help directors and actors to see which parts of the production may need more attention or reworking. The first run-through of a play is often referred to as a 'stagger-through', as there are usually delays and mistakes.

Off book

Once an actor has learnt their part, they no longer need to use their script in rehearsals and are described as being 'off book'.

The book

This is another name for the script. A stage manager who is 'on the book' will be in the wings of the stage, ready to help any actor who may have forgotten a line – they are also known as the 'prompt'.

Act

The separation of a play into different sections, which in turn are sometimes sub-divided into scenes.

The space

The area in which the work is taking place. This term can refer to both the rehearsal room and the theatre stage.

Staff director

The National Theatre uses staff directors rather than assistant directors. Staff directors have a variety of jobs, depending on the production and the director they are working with. They can help with background research for rehearsals, lead improvisations and act as a liaison

on behalf of the director. Once a production has had its press night, the director steps away from the production and the staff director takes over. The staff director rehearses the company at 'bring back calls' and also rehearses the understudies.

Bring back call

The National Theatre operates a 'rep' system, meaning that a production will not be playing every day and a company may have a break every other week or so. A bring back call is a short rehearsal on the day when the company return from having a break. The staff director normally holds a line run with the company, and rehearses in more detail complicated scenes, movement sequences or fights.

Rehearsal call

The stage manager will work out a day-by-day rehearsal schedule for a production, in consultation with the director. The rehearsal call sets out the scenes that are being worked on that day, and the actors or production team who are needed, and when.

Ensemble

A company of actors or performers where the emphasis is on collaborative group work.

Company

The cast, production team and other staff associated with the show.

Understudy

An actor who learns the role of another member of the company so that they can perform that part in the event of injury, illness or scheduled absence.

Actioning / intentions

A way of approaching a text, which some actors and directors like to use. Each line is assigned a transitive verb, which may help the actor to explore ways of delivering that line and uncover the meaning behind what their character is saying or trying to achieve.

Stanislavskian

Relating to Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian theatre practitioner usually associated with method acting.

Beckettian

Relating to playwright Samuel Beckett, whose work is associated with minimalism.

Alexander technique

A system designed to promote healthy movement and posture. Named after its creator Frederick Matthias Alexander.

Upstage

The area at the back of the stage furthest from the audience.

Theatre Glossary *continued*

Downstage

The area at the front of the stage closest to the audience.

Improvisation

Action taken by an actor(s) that is unprepared or unrehearsed. During the rehearsal process this is often led by suggestions from the director for the purposes of exploration and discovery. During performance improvisation is often used by actors to cover a mistake or accident on stage.

Beat

In the script a playwright may use the term 'beat' to denote a pause or a shift in pace or intention in the play. In rehearsal, the term is often used to describe a particular moment or event on stage. It can also be used to describe a unit of time.

Line run

The company say their lines without adding movements. Line runs help actors to feel confident that they know their words before going on stage. Sometimes line runs are done at speed, which can really test how well actors know their roles.

Model box

A scale model of the set, used by the director and designer to work out how each scene could look. For the acting company, model boxes help them to visualise where they will be standing on stage and the world their character is living in. Carpenters, production managers, scenic artists and prop-makers will also study the model box, to get an idea of textures and finish on the set, as well as the overall look. Model boxes can also help to flag any issues with elements of staging before they are made.

Fit up

The set is assembled on the stage.

Get in

The set, props and costumes are brought to the stage, ready for technical rehearsals.

Technical run

Running through the play setting all technical cues, including lighting, sound, set changes and automation. This is an opportunity to practice scene changes, characters' entrances and exits, costume changes, and for actors to get used to being on the set.

Dress run / dress rehearsal

A dress rehearsal is a chance to pull together all elements of a production, including sound, lighting and costume, and work through the play as though it is a performance.

Previews

Before a production has its press night, it normally has a couple of preview performances. Productions can still change right up to press night, and it is during previews that the company and director get to see how audiences respond to the production, and they may rework sections accordingly.

Press night

The night the critics see the production before reviewing it.