

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 925th meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place on Tuesday 9 April 2019. The speaker was Dr Russell Jackson, Emeritus Professor of Drama at the University of Birmingham, who spoke on Trevor Nunn, Shakespeare and the RSC: Psychology, spectacle and the Zeitgeist. The meeting was chaired by Sandra MacDonald.

Trevor Nunn's success as Artistic Director of the RSC from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s can be attributed to his ability to reflect the temper of the times. Dr Jackson defined discussions about the theatre in this period: the need for public subsidy, for radical innovation, and the purpose of performing the classics. Social upheaval and political disenchantment fed programmes like *That Was the Week That Was*, secondary and university education were both free, and National Service had ended. Nunn was a product of this liberation: a cartoon of him in the style of the Beatles in *Yellow Submarine* even appeared on the cover of the RSC's magazine *Flourish*.

Nunn has always seen theatre as a place for both popular entertainment and experiment, of musicals and *King Lear*. Educated at Grammar School, he went to Cambridge University where he met Ian McKellen and Michael Pennington who would star at the RSC. His ideas about theatre were influenced by the ideas of his professors Professor F R Leavis on psychology and George Rylands on verse and verse speaking.

At the RSC Nunn made important appointments: Christopher Morley who designed the flexible "white box" set, voice coach Cicely Berry, musical director Guy Woolfenden, and director Buzz Goodbody. Popular culture was a strong influence: for the 1969 production of *The Winter's Tale* the programme copied the cover of the Beatles' White Album and the Bohemian scenes mimicked the rock musical Hair.

Dr Jackson examined Trevor Nunn's RSC career chronologically, beginning in 1966 with his first success, *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Set in a glamorous, decadent world it was "funny, shocking, macabre and stylish". Nunn's career has been packed with highlights but Dr Jackson mentioned in particular his *All's Well That Ends Well* at the RST, his *Macbeth* and *Othello* at The Other Place, and his *King Lear* at the Courtyard Theatre.

From the start, Nunn was "the fresh air in the theatre" and his Shakespeare productions have been characterised by spectacle, audience involvement, detail and, apart from a few exceptions, textual fidelity.

The meeting closed at 9.20.