

Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 921st meeting of the Shakespeare Club took place on Tuesday 11 December 2018. The speaker was the Club's President for 2018-9, Theatre Director Emma Rice, who spoke on "The Trouble with Shakespeare". The meeting was chaired by Susan Brock.

Her relationship with Shakespeare, she said, was like that of Liz Taylor and Richard Burton, troubled and passionate. Although interviews have suggested that she does not like Shakespeare, he has been a recurring theme in her life, inspired by her mother's infectious love for his plays. She described how as a child in Nottingham trips to the RSC at Stratford were always special events. The magical production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which the fairies were puppets (1981, directed by Ron Daniels), was decisive. Later, the Brian Cox production of *Titus Andronicus* (1987, directed by Deborah Warner) impressed on her Shakespeare's emotional power.

After an acting course at London's Guildhall she directed at two companies, Alibi and Kneehigh, where she developed ways of telling big stories in a physical, playful style of theatre. Her first major Shakespeare production was *Cymbeline* for the RSC. Determined never to be boring, her heavily-adapted version received mixed reviews in Stratford-upon-Avon, but on tour in Colombia this story of lost children, finally reunited with their families, provoked a genuine response.

She went on to talk about her time as Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, which began as a big adventure, intoxicating and wonderful. Within only a few months of the opening of her first production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Board had given her no option but to resign. Still within this hostile environment she was timetabled to direct *Twelfth Night*, a play that explores the depths of loss and happiness. It was a challenge to deliver what she called "the precious thing", but she found that Shakespeare carried her through.

Emma Rice's frank and open talk was greeted by warm applause and many questions from the large audience. After the meeting closed at 9pm she held lively discussions with members and visitors over refreshments.