



BLACK WATCH RESOURCES TRANSCRIPTS

BLACK WATCH | STAGING

How I arrived the concept of, for the staging of Black Watch, and Black Watch has only ever been seen in that staging, which is which is basically two seating banks, it's all traverse seating arrangement, but two seating banks either side of a kind of esplanade.

I remember being taken by a friend to see the Tattoo and I was kind of absolutely amazed, and it was an incredible experience because there were all these kind of regiments and marching bands from all over the world, that were there and I remember at that at the time thinking in quite a kind of naïve way really, but kind of clutching my pearls a bit and being like this is, this is, this is about killing and death and blood and blood guts and here they are because of this this narcissism.

There was a lot of anti-war sentiment and feeling in in the country and I was very much in that camp, we kind of went into Black Watch you know fuelled by an anger really about the the fact that Tony Blair was taking us into this illegal war, so I went in with that kind of view you know, having seen the Tattoo and feeling there was a real contradiction and so I thought well it'd be great to open it at the Edinburgh festival which was was the plan, and it'd be great to open it close to the Edinburgh Castle where the Tattoo will be on, so we found this old drill hole that was being used by Edinburgh University as a car park we worked out we could get two seating banks in and that we could be, we could kind of have a Traverse staging and I love that idea because then it also meant that as the audience came out the canons and everything were happening at the end of the Tattoo, so that that seemed to be kind of perfect for that but then it was interesting because I realised that it was very naïve of me to think that you know there were these warmongering young men, who just wanted to kill and actually the Tattoo and the the spectacle of the Tattoo and you know the marching etc is very very very important and for a lot of those soldiers, you know they they were looking for an identity as young men and that's what the the whole idea of the Tattoo and the uniform and everything gave them and that was the kind of journey that that certainly I went on with you know realising that you know, that yes we've been really badly let down by our government and the government of the United States but those soldiers who are on the front line have been let down more than anybody.

BLACK WATCH | DIRECTING TOP TIPS

So my top tips for anyone wanting to get into theatre directing would be, watch as much theatre as you can before making that decision, even though half of being a theatre director is saying 'I'm a theatre director' but still its a long and winding road before you actually feel like you are a theatre director in some ways you don't, you know your always waiting to be found out like a lot of people in our business.

I would say make sure you have got the stamina because the hours are long, the rejection is frequent and the pain is real.

And know that, make sure that you know that theatre is incredibly important to you and you have got huge and endless belief in what it does for the world and what it means for audiences and that whole idea of sitting in an audience and sharing an experience with an audience and being transported and being made to feel a bit less alone in life.

Make sure you've got an endless supply of that belief because its going to have to preserve you and keep you going through some really, really rocky times.

BLACK WATCH | INTERNATIONAL TOURING

The first international place we took it to was Los Angeles. A city not known for its affinity with broad, fife Scottish accents and, and a lot it was a lot of the original cast members who you know we'd spent a lot of time you know when we're performing in Scotland, because it's such a Fife regiment and so we spent they'd spent a lot of time perfecting the you know the Fife accent and then we went to LA and so I remember from the different from when we're performing Glenrothes.

I mean New York's a bit better but LA oh, and I said so you you're gonna have to you know, it's because that's they've got so kind of emerged and fused with those characters and their experience and they felt a real honour to be telling their story, for these lads who are being forgotten, and so it took me a while to kind of extricate that kind of passion and determination for them and say you are still being as loyal and you are still telling the story in as important a way, but if they can't hear a word you're saying, there's no point in telling the story and I said so you know even if you spoke in the gently Scottish accent you know you'd still seem like you know, Braveheart to them, so it took quite a while to do that but you know and then it was seven years of touring internationally, you know constantly coming back to Edinburgh and to Scotland mainly Glasgow actually because it found a home at the SECC in Glasgow and came back there and also New York, it was, it returned to New York three times I think, at St Ann's warehouse in New York but you know, and then to Korea and to, Wellington in New Zealand, the Sydney Festival it went to, I mean you know it was, it was an amazing you know, it's almost 20 years ago now back in 2005 that we first started talking about it and then opening it in 2006, but it then, it then toured until 2013.

So yes it's been a big part of my life.

BLACK WATCH | COMMERCIAL

Do I think Black Watch would ever have been commissioned as a commercial piece of theatre?

No I don't think it would have, it would have and in fact I remember at the time when we were first working on the original, initial idea and and we were developing it I spoke to a few festivals, people like that about it and nobody got it- at all, and you know as well as that the military was so unpopular at the time because nobody knew what was happening, nobody knew what you know what experience those lads were having and it's never really operated on a commercial stage, it's all, it's always been part of the you know the National Theatre of Scotland. I mean I I've always tried to be very careful about what the capacity is because because it is in those seating banks either side of a traverse stage and part, you know when we first opened it at the Edinburgh Festival in 2006, I think the capacity was something like 300 and I think if that and so they were only like four or five rows of seats so the audience, you could literally kind of you know see the sweat, you could you know you could see the, you could see the, the spit coming out of the actor's mouth it was an incredibly intimate immersive, almost immersive experience and the Gareth Fry our sound designer put these incredible bass speakers all around the thing so it felt like when the explosions happened, it felt like they were in in the field with them.

That's why subsidised theatre is so important because without that, you don't have plays like Black Watch which become commercial successes as well or can become massive commercial successes. You know one of the other things was that you know the, it was a very expensive process putting the play together as well and and finding the people, researchers and things like that and then the whole process of writing it and the whole process of the of, of the rehearsal period which again was double the length the usual, so yeah I think it's very important that we still have that subsidised theatre sector or we possibly lose the future, reductions like that.

BLACK WATCH | WRITING TOP TIPS

I think, I think the thing about writing, any form of writing and I think drama, writing drama, we all are writing drama in our heads all the time because every single person, you know, something will happen you'll have a conversation with someone you know or you'll whatever it is or you'll be in a situation where afterwards you go we should've said this, I wish it said that.

Right, so we do that all the time, every day, all that drama is and writing drama, is doing the perfect, doing the version of that conversation that's that you wish you'd had and saying the smart and witty things instead of the stupid things you say and I think that's it's as simple as that, you just kind of, you know we're all doing that in our heads every day and writing is the main thing. If you want to be a writer you have to write you know, and you have to show people what you write but this first, the first thing is write, is you just have to start writing but you can do lots of other things, you can go and join theatre groups or drama groups you don't have to be an actor you can do stage management, you can do off stage stuff, all of that stuff it's all, it's all, everything's just to the mil but if you want to be a writer you have to write that's what I would say and it's very very easy to and I still do it I've been writer now for 23 years and I still you know, there's still that temptation to sit around talking about writing rather than doing the actual writing and that's the thing, I think you just have to write.

BLACK WATCH | CAREER

How I came to be writing for theatre is a complete accident really, I mean I never really at any point in my life ever considered being a writer or doing anything until I kind of wrote something.

It was quite again, quite a, quite an unusual tale.

I mean I just kind of I wrote, a play called *Gagarin Way* and I sent it unsolicited to the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, we ended up doing it and it was a big success as well and it ended up at the National Theatre in London, and that's how I became a writer really, so it was a kind of, I never went to theatre, I never really was interested in theatre, I just wrote something- I thought I would try and write something, I probably thought I was going to write a novel and it all came out as dialogue so when I looked at it on the page I thought well

that's a play the Traverse Theatre was the closest theatre to my house, so I sent it there.

I mean it's ridiculous really, I mean I don't even like talking about it I mean it's just silly and so it was one of those things where I became a playwright. It wasn't by accident obviously I had to write the thing but I never ever saw myself as being a playwright until I was a playwright and I didn't really know what I was doing,

so yeah that's how I got into writing. I got into directing through being sent on, I did Theatre and Classics for my degree and I went to the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds which is the closest big theatre to where I'm

from in Huddersfield, on a marketing placement as part of that degree and I met on the Friday on the last day of, of my placement there, there was a young director who I was on the same table with called Vicky Featherstone and the two of us were introduced and we got talking and she was running a street theatre Festival all that summer in Leeds, she'd been she'd been on the regional theatre young director scheme, and I'm, and she ended up offering me a job at the end of that lunch and that was back in 1993, so then I, she encouraged me she kind of you know really encouraged me to apply for the regional theatre and director scheme myself which I went to at the Traverse so because, because you know knowing a lot about the Traverse from being at Glasgow University and then I was in, I stayed at the Traverse for seven years and then I went to work with

Vicky at a company in London called Paines Plow and then and then the two of us came back up to

set up the National Theatre of Scotland in 2005, so it was all, it's all, it's all due to Vicky Featherstone as she keeps reminding everybody and telling me that she knew me when I had nowt.

BLACK WATCH | CREATING BLACK WATCH

Yeah creating the show was, was kind of like a whirlwind really because I had no idea what I was doing because you know I've kind of, I've spoken about this before but, I'd worked in Scotland for quite a long time even though I'm not a Scottish myself and been to Glasgow University and studied Scottish theatre and kind of I suppose developed to thoughts about what the characteristics of Scottish theatre were and and it's not a literary tradition.

It isn't there are amazing plays written by amazing playwrights but that's not the whole story, there's a lot of direct address, there's a lot of music and movement and comedy and direct narration as I say, and politics and the idea of looking at history in order to in, in order to understand the present.

So I thought I'm going to make one of those shows, at the start rehearsals and Greg was like okay and he says 'how do you make one of those shows then', I was like 'I don't know but we'll find out'. I think it was it was very different to writing a normal play because number one it was, it took a long time to find the subjects that we could speak to, and the play was already programmed even though we hadn't really spoken to anyone. Vicky Featherstone who was at the time was a National Theatre Scotland artistic director, she commissioned me to kind of follow the story of the Black Watch in Iraq, and I did and I kind of I always remember thinking that the story of the play and how I would like to do the play wasn't just about that moment in Iraq it was actually about the kind of history the regiment in 300 years, because it went right back to like say the Jacobite rebellions so it went right back to almost the union of the crowns, and it felt like you could kind of tell a contemporary tale about Scotland and about, about the development of modern Scotland through the regiment, but yeah it was so it was a quite a difficult process to find the people that we spoke to and it was always billed as a verbatim play at first and it kind of didn't really end up as verbatim play, it was, we still had interviews with people and we used the real words and there was obviously the you know the music by Davey Anderson, there was the direction by John, there was the movement by Stephen Hoggett there was, it was just this, it was it was probably more like working on a musical really than an actual straight play in it's kind of process, but it was a very frenetic process and it was very kind of, I mean it was really it was rewritten a lot and right up until and we literally had the first preview, we were still rewriting it constantly, and all sorts of people were also chipping in because we had many many people who were part of it, part of the process, including the whole cast as well so it was a very kind of, it was great, it was very collaborative and it was very special but I think you know it was only once we really got it up and running that we we realised it worked.