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—Director Julian Arnold



Rehearsals

While I never experienced day-in and day-out what it was like to come to rehearsal, I was able to sit in on one for 30 minutes, and it was definitely enough to catch a glimpse of a work in progress. Arnold acted almost as a blank slate, allowing actors to share their ideas and leaving most decisions to the actors themselves. Talking through their mistakes or thinking about how a scene could be staged less awkwardly, the actors really took it upon themselves to judge what their character would do. Sometimes the odd, “Oh, fuck, what am I doing?” would escape Cairns’ mouth in a thick German accent, only to be followed by a confused—yet joking—reply from Arnold, “Is that a line?” And sometimes, when characters were in the middle of a serious conversation, a designer or stage manager would waltz right through, double-checking that a lamp worked or adjusting a row of books on a bookshelf, and the rehearsal would just keep rolling. Everyone had his or her duties and responsibilities, and only a certain degree of professionalism could have kept everyone focused.

In addition to witnessing the acting and nit-picking onstage, I also managed to grab a tour of the immense workshops and cluttered props rooms that hide behind those thick black curtains. I wasn’t aware that off to the right of the stage is a huge door where an entire set could be rolled through, that is, if it couldn’t be built right there. And behind that door, well, it’s a whole new story: there’s an enormous room used to piece together the parts of a set, an adjoining room filled with table saws and carpentry tools, another room consisting of about 20 different kinds of chandeliers and weird props—like a giant deer head—that you’d never think would come in handy, and another spacious room lined with rows and rows of variously upholstered chairs. Going from the not-so-small Timms theatre to the definitely-not-so-small backstage really say something: there’s so much more that goes into a production that we, as audience members, don’t realize and never get to see. Forget about simply applauding a good performance; we should be commending what happens in the months that have preceded it.

The Final Product

There comes a time when everything finally weaves itself together, and all that’s left hanging is a bit of stitching on the ends. The closure needed usually involves dress rehearsals, photo calls and numerous interviews that need to be scheduled with the press, all in order to promote the show.

For Arnold, this is the moment when his work is ready to stand on its own, but still has a couple of days to gather its strength—and it’s this point in time that fosters the most intense feelings of anticipation.

“We’re in great shape,” Arnold says enthusiastically. “It’s really exciting to see it all come together. The set’s all been built, the lighting’s all been designed and the actors have learned all their lines, and now we’re just in the process of running it, making it more and more smooth.”

Being an actor-turned-director, Arnold has faced his share of potholes. Drawing from past experiences, he was aware of the pressures placed on his cast and crew, and in the end, was able to take everything in stride.

“The fascinating part of the play is that the characters are so complex,” Arnold says excitedly. “The greatest challenge has been keeping the characters sympathetic, but at the same time, they’ve got some pretty unsympathetic qualities. So the process has involved walking that line between making them real and having quirks or idiosyncrasies, and even some pretty negative qualities, all the while keeping the audience on side with their stories.”

The audience, indeed, will play a large role in the outcome of *Mrs Klein*. After all, the reason everyone on the set of the production got involved in the first place is to present their work to others. Arnold and the rest of crew may be talented veterans of the business, but that doesn’t mean anyone else can’t aspire to create their own play. As a cherry on the papier maché sundae—or whatever material you’d use to make a prop ice cream dish—Arnold gives one piece of advice to those out there who, one day, hope to go behind the curtains and create a play themselves.

“Just be open to everyone’s ideas, because it’s amazing how ideas can spark others,” he says. “If you’re really listening—ideas may not always be in the right place—someone always has something to add to the process.”