|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A drawing of a face  Description automatically generated | |
| **Interview data sheet:** Behind the Scenes Project | |
| **Ref no:** THM/258    **WAV files ref:** | |
| **Collection title:** Behind the scenes: saving and sharing Cambridge Arts Theatre’s Archive  **Interviewee’s surname:** Goldhill  **Title:** Professor  **Interviewee’s forename(s):** Simon  **Gender:** Male  **Occupation:** Professor | |
| **Date(s) of recording, tracks (from-to):** 8th March, 2022  **Location of interview:** Cambridge Arts Theatre  **Name of interviewer:** Katherine Moar  **Type of recorder:** Zoom H4N **Recording format:** WAV  **Total no. of tracks:** 1 **Total duration (HH:MM:SS):** 00:39:19  **Mono/Stereo:** Stereo | |
| **Additional material:** | None |
| **Copyright/Clearance:** Assigned to Cambridge Arts Theatre. | |
| **Interviewer’s comments:** |  |
| **Abstract:** | Professor Simon Goldhill, Executive Director of the Cambridge Greek Play, describes the behind-the-scenes process of staging a production in Ancient Greek. He discusses the controversial introduction of surtitles, the Greek Play’s famous alumni, and the longstanding relationship between Cambridge Arts Theatre and the Greek Play itself. |
| **Key words:** | Greek Play, Euripides’ *Electra,* Cambridge University, Corn Exchange, Sophocles’ *Electra*, *Oedipus,* Aristophanes’ *The Frogs, Prometheus Bound*, Tom Hiddleston, *The Persians, The Cyclops.* |
| **File** |  |
| **00.00** | Goldhill describes his relationship to the Arts: he has been working here for more than 20 years as producer of the Greek Play. He is now head of the Greek Play Committee. |
| **0.50** | He first acted in the Greek Play when he was a student at Cambridge. He played the Farmer in Euripides’ *Electra*. He later became the Secretary of the Committee and is now the Executive Director. |
| **1.40** | He explains the history of the Greek Play. It is the longest running student drama production in the country. It started in the last quarter of the 19th century with the first ever full-scale production of a play in Ancient Greek. It was surprisingly successful. There were extra trains laid on from London to Cambridge to allow ‘the aristocratic audiences’ to see it. He says that it is still a transformative event for many people. |
| **3.10** | Goldhill lays out the production process. The show runs for a week and, in the years since Goldhill has been involved, it is always sold out. People from all round the country come. It happens every three years and has a budget of over 50,000 pounds – unusually high for a student production. The first task is appointing a director. All the productions Goldhill has been involved in have had professional directors and – of course – a professional theatre. Many of the actors go on to be professionals. Then the play is decided on. In recent years, they have done double bills of a tragedy and comedy, which is how plays would have been shown at the Ancient Greek festivals. Next, they select the actors – often a year in advance of the performance. The cast comprises students. In recent years, some young professional actors who want the experience have also been involved. Then follows a long period of training in movement, speech and Ancient Greek. There has occasionally been some impressive ad lib-ing. Then an intense period of rehearsals over the Summer, ready to perform in October. |
| **10.20** | It was Goldhill’s initiative to introduce surtitles. This was slightly controversial. The Cambridge Classics Faculty produce a translation each time. |
| **12.00** | He says that the two most important things are that the audience get to hear a play in Ancient Greek and that the students get to perform a play in Ancient Greek. |
| **12.45** | The play is unique at Cambridge University. It has the highest production value. When Simon was a student here, it had more of a ‘school-play’ feel. It is now of professional standard – the directors are professionals and students know what is expected of them. It has produced the most professional actors – comparable, perhaps, to the number of comedians Footlights has produced. |
| **15.05** | The play has been at the Arts since it opened in 1936 (except for a brief period when the Theatre went dark and it moved to the Corn Exchange). Before that, it didn’t have home. It moved round many venues. |
| **16.30** | The play must speak to a modern audience. There are two audiences in mind: schools and the general theatre-going public. |
| **18.15** | The student cast invariably have some theatre experience and aspire to be some sort of professional. Simon knows former cast-members who are now in their forties and still remember their whole part. No previous knowledge of Greek required. It used to be that only Greek students would perform but a lot of them ‘couldn’t act for toffee’; now, the cast is formed from the best actors. |
| **21.30** | Simon is currently responsible for fundraising. The greatest cost comes from hiring a director for a year or more and renting accommodation for the cast during holidays rehearsal periods. Support comes from colleges, individuals and trust funds. |
| **24.15** | The process for the 2022 production has been ‘absolutely awful’ during COVID. What worries Simon most is not the standard of the play but whether there will be a good audience. |
| **26.15** | Simon has been involved in theatre since his school days. His academic interest is Greek tragedy, so he has continued to work in and around theatre. |
| **27.00** | There is a tradition in the Greek Play Committee that the producer is given a silver denarius dating from the 5th century. There are no rules regarding tenure for the producer. |
| **29.15** | Highlights for Simon have been putting on Sophocles’ *Electra*, a gender-swapped *Oedipus* and Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*. Simon had once said to the director: ‘there are two things you can’t do – *Prometheus Bound*, because nobody moves, and a comedy, because nobody laughs.’ The director went on to do exactly that – a double bill of *Prometheus Bound* and *The Frogs*. It was a resounding success. The music was very well-conceived, and Simon remembers hearing audience members singing it in the street after the show.Simon also finds it amusing to the remember that the director of *Oedipus at Colonus* (which was set in a hospital) had wanted to give out hand sanitiser to audience members entering the theatre to add to the atmosphere but was not allowed to because the theatre manager said, ‘no one will put up with having hand sanitiser at the door’. Now, during the pandemic, you can’t enter a theatre without hand sanitising! |
| **34.10** | Simon taught Tom Hiddleston. He didn’t think he was a particularly good or interesting actor! He was quite interesting as a student – but ‘another one of those Etonian boys’. He had a small part in the play. It was a play about women, and he was the boy at the side. He was perfectly good at what he was doing. |
| **35.50** | Simon thinks the link between the Greek Play Committee and the Arts Theatre is ‘very important’. He is proud that the theatre puts on the play and puts it on properly. |
| **38.50** | The 2022 play is a double bill of *The Persians* and *The Cyclops.* |
| **END.** |  |