

OTG

Off The Ground Theatre



The
Adventures
of **Robin
Hood**

by
Connor
Wray

www.offtheground.co.uk

Director's Notes

In March this year, we were trying to make the decision about whether or not to put on a show this summer. It wasn't an easy decision. Infection rates were decreasing but we were still in lockdown and the plans for coming out of it all were a little vague. Were we going to be able to rehearse? Would anyone be available/allowed to perform in the summer? Would anyone want to come out to the theatre? And then there were all the usual worries: what should we do; who could write it; who would be available to direct and where could we perform it?

Our company meetings at the time were, in accordance with Covid regulations, good walks, often along the beach and with a new lockdown puppy in tow. Sometimes the logistics of organising a tour came very much second to playing with the dog. As well as playing with the dog, we played around with ideas of what we could do. Shakespeare was our first go to, but our most recent tour was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and we are keeping an all-singing, all-dancing production of *Love's Labour's Lost* ready for when we can do a full scale tour again, so we decided that maybe something else was best. We felt that what we all needed was a laugh. We're very proud of some of the challenging theatre we have done over the years, but this wasn't the time for it. We needed something that would cheer us up, something where good will definitely triumph over evil (probably after a cool fight), and something an audience could definitely enjoy with plenty of food and a bottle of wine.

Robin Hood came out as the winner.

And then, nothing happened. I don't mean we did nothing. We walked a lot more on the beach, the dog got bigger and we contacted all our usual venues to make sure that, if they could open, we could come and do our show there but, in terms of firm plans, nothing happened. As a small company we really couldn't afford to get a tour ready to go only to have it cancelled at the last minute, so we spent a lot of time watching the news (which, let's be honest, was a fairly miserable way to pass the time) and trying our best to keep up with government guidance which was, at best, very last minute.

Postponements of mask mandates or surges in cases all made organising rehearsal venues or R&D sessions more or less impossible. And so, it came to the end of May, then we really had to make a decision.

There's really no jeopardy in guessing what that decision was as you wouldn't be reading this if we'd decided not to bother. We felt that as we were going to be performing outdoors and that some cheering up for all of us was in order, we were going to go for it.

That's when things got a little manic. It had taken us three months to decide on what show to do and then we realised that we only had one month to get that show ready to go into rehearsal. After several slightly less relaxed walks where cast numbers, characters and potential plot lines were discussed, we locked Connor (our writer) in a room and only let him out when he had a new scene to share. Dan and Tomo (our directors) had been fairly quiet for the first few months of the year so were a given a bit of a shock when they suddenly had no time and not enough sleep (Tomo was also directing *Macbeth* for **Young Everyman Playhouse** in June and Dan was having a daughter) and had to plan for a new show which wasn't yet finished.

As soon as Connor had written the first draft of the script, he was then sent off to write the risk assessment. (It should be noted that the risk assessment is only slightly shorter than the script.) Each venue or council has its own safety arrangements, so this was no mean feat, but it goes without saying that keeping our audiences and cast both safe and happy is of utmost importance. I think it's fair to say that never has a set of swords been so well cleaned throughout rehearsals and never have the way an audience might enter a field been so well considered. (After, genuinely much consideration we concluded that the audience would enter in the same haphazard, COVID friendly way they always do so, if you could stick to that lack of a plan, we would be very grateful.)

We were ready to go, except for one small detail. A CAST! Lockdown, furlough (or lack of it for freelancers) and the general confusion of the last 18 months have meant that we simply didn't know who was around or available or able to come on tour. We usually work with a cast of 16 or more actors but, due to safety issues and the expedited and shortened nature of the show, decided that a cast of 8 would best suit our purposes. We don't want to lose the feel of the big cast shows we have been performing for the last 25 years, but we simply weren't able, due to time, financial and fairly obvious pandemic pressures, to have such a large cast. This meant we needed some pretty impressive performers who could each fill the role of two people!

We put the call out to offer work to some of the people who have been stalwarts of the company over the last few years and were so lucky to be able to assemble a crew of brilliant actors who have all performed with us on at least one previous tour. Amongst them are principal tutors from our own youth theatre, highly sought-after movement directors, Shakespeare experts, actors from our acclaimed studio shows, physical theatre practitioners and 8 of the best and funniest people you could ever hope to spend time with.

And the last three weeks in rehearsal have been as manic as the weeks preparing for it. We've been ensuring that our story makes sense and that the actors know which characters they're playing in which scene (there's some very fast costume changes!) We've been practising our fights and making sure we turn up on stage with the right weapon (and that weapon is suitably sanitised). And above all, we've been trying to make each other laugh a lot, and the deciding on the jokes we think will make an audience laugh a lot too.

After 25 years of touring, this will not be the biggest show we've ever put on. It won't be the most developed or the most well-rehearsed. It's definitely not the easiest one we've done. But hopefully, if, after the difficulties of the last 18 months, it manages to get some laughs and to remind us of the joy of being together again, then I think we'll remember it as one of the best.

Dan Meigh-

Cast List



Peter Darwent
Robin Hood



Billy Czajkowska
Maid Marian



Grace Goulding
Little John



Chloe Hughes
Scarlet



Mat Oliphant
Mock, The Miller's Son



Nick Crosbie
Sheriff of Nottingham



Kathryn McGurk
Princess of Aragon



Phil Raynor
Glom

*Other parts played by members
of the company.*

Crew



Connor Wray
Producer



Dan Meigh
Director & Choreographer



Chris Tomlinson
Director



Grace Goulding
Choreographer



INFINITE 3D

ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY
& 3D VISUALISATION

Stewart Jones
Art Work

John Boon
Photography

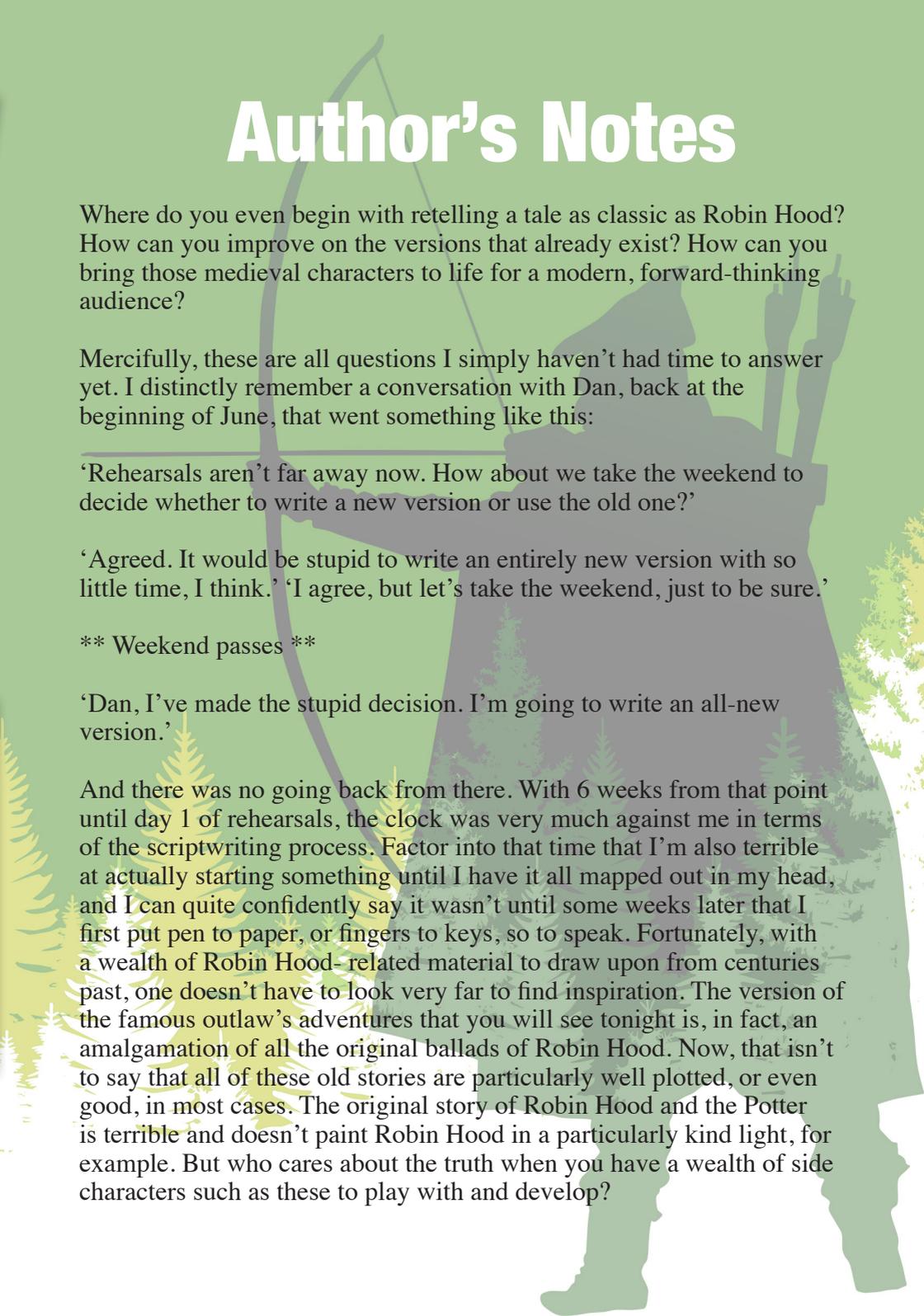
Off The Ground would like to thank:

Si Large, Ciara Durnford, Mooncup Theatre, Georgia Banton & Dave Jones, Val Curtis, Jan Foster and all at Hoylake and Meols in Bloom, Marion Flanagan, Tessa Willams, Paul Evans and all at Plas Newydd, Rachel Pollitt and all at Gawthorpe Hall, Andrew Pimbley, Barney and all at Claremont Farm, Events @ Isla Gladstone, Jo Burns, Alison Heywood-Smith, Julia Johnson and all at Birkenhead Priory, Williamson Art Gallery, Tom Betts, the Betts Family, Colin Spencer and Friends of Burton Manor, Ally Noonan, Rosemary Illidge, Ian Roberts, Steve Smith, Carl Fryer, Rangers of Royden Park, Wirral Council, Hillbark Hotel, Jonathan Briers, Lesley Lewis, Yaz and all at Gordale Garden Centre, Peter Grant, Wirral Globe, Jim & Sue Darwent, Calday Grange Grammar School, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse, Maria Felix Vas and BBC Lancashire, Caroline James and BBC Radio Merseyside, Debbie Hall, Joey Lockhart and Flairbox, Slipmat Records, John Roberts and ReviewsHub, Nicola Bolton and Heswall Primary School, Catherine Jones, Lee Van Hire, Barbara Meigh, Alf, Syd, Zeller and Pip.





Author's Notes



Where do you even begin with retelling a tale as classic as Robin Hood? How can you improve on the versions that already exist? How can you bring those medieval characters to life for a modern, forward-thinking audience?

Mercifully, these are all questions I simply haven't had time to answer yet. I distinctly remember a conversation with Dan, back at the beginning of June, that went something like this:

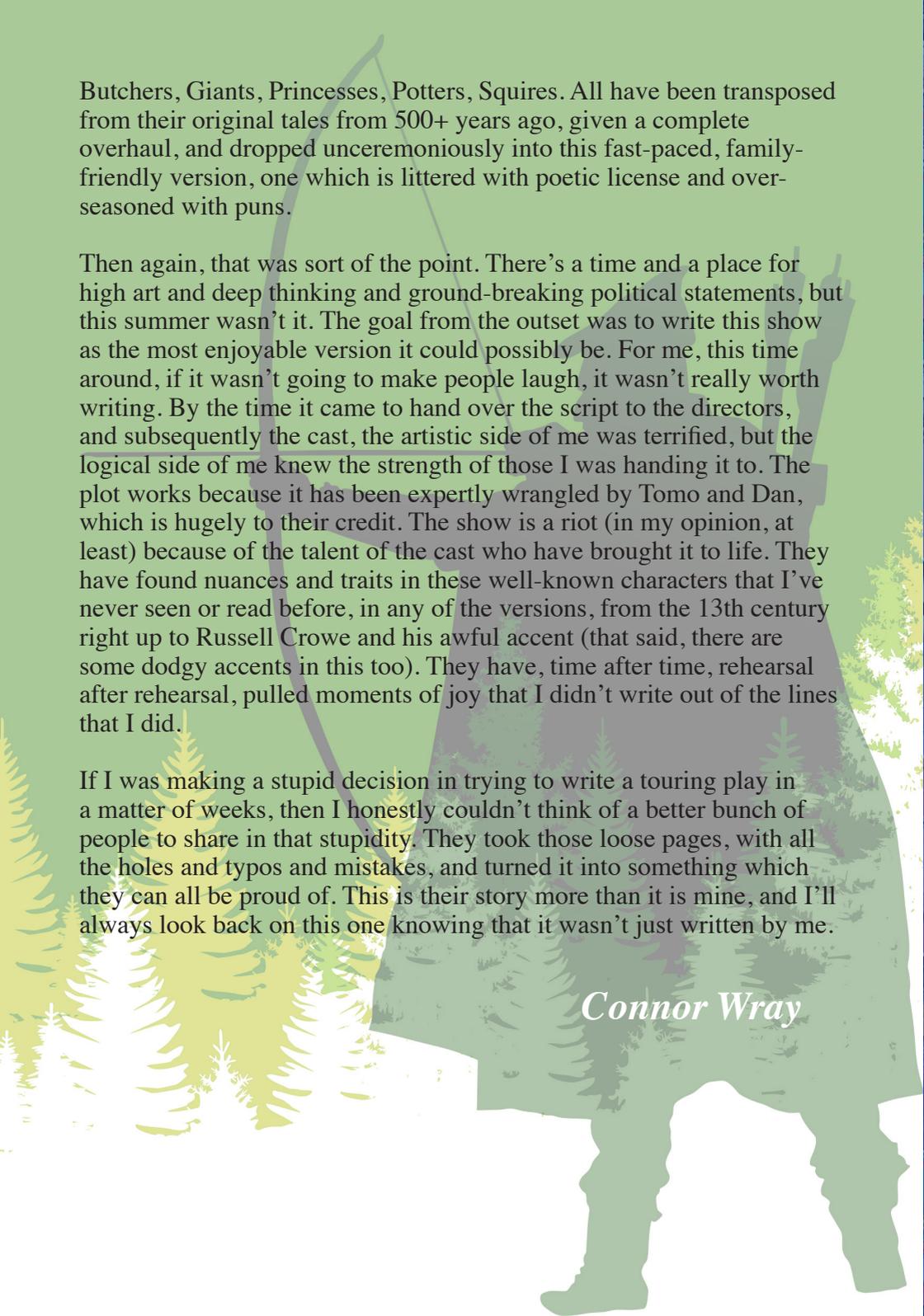
'Rehearsals aren't far away now. How about we take the weekend to decide whether to write a new version or use the old one?'

'Agreed. It would be stupid to write an entirely new version with so little time, I think.' 'I agree, but let's take the weekend, just to be sure.'

** Weekend passes **

'Dan, I've made the stupid decision. I'm going to write an all-new version.'

And there was no going back from there. With 6 weeks from that point until day 1 of rehearsals, the clock was very much against me in terms of the scriptwriting process. Factor into that time that I'm also terrible at actually starting something until I have it all mapped out in my head, and I can quite confidently say it wasn't until some weeks later that I first put pen to paper, or fingers to keys, so to speak. Fortunately, with a wealth of Robin Hood-related material to draw upon from centuries past, one doesn't have to look very far to find inspiration. The version of the famous outlaw's adventures that you will see tonight is, in fact, an amalgamation of all the original ballads of Robin Hood. Now, that isn't to say that all of these old stories are particularly well plotted, or even good, in most cases. The original story of Robin Hood and the Potter is terrible and doesn't paint Robin Hood in a particularly kind light, for example. But who cares about the truth when you have a wealth of side characters such as these to play with and develop?



Butchers, Giants, Princesses, Potters, Squires. All have been transposed from their original tales from 500+ years ago, given a complete overhaul, and dropped unceremoniously into this fast-paced, family-friendly version, one which is littered with poetic license and over-seasoned with puns.

Then again, that was sort of the point. There's a time and a place for high art and deep thinking and ground-breaking political statements, but this summer wasn't it. The goal from the outset was to write this show as the most enjoyable version it could possibly be. For me, this time around, if it wasn't going to make people laugh, it wasn't really worth writing. By the time it came to hand over the script to the directors, and subsequently the cast, the artistic side of me was terrified, but the logical side of me knew the strength of those I was handing it to. The plot works because it has been expertly wrangled by Tomo and Dan, which is hugely to their credit. The show is a riot (in my opinion, at least) because of the talent of the cast who have brought it to life. They have found nuances and traits in these well-known characters that I've never seen or read before, in any of the versions, from the 13th century right up to Russell Crowe and his awful accent (that said, there are some dodgy accents in this too). They have, time after time, rehearsal after rehearsal, pulled moments of joy that I didn't write out of the lines that I did.

If I was making a stupid decision in trying to write a touring play in a matter of weeks, then I honestly couldn't think of a better bunch of people to share in that stupidity. They took those loose pages, with all the holes and typos and mistakes, and turned it into something which they can all be proud of. This is their story more than it is mine, and I'll always look back on this one knowing that it wasn't just written by me.

Connor Wray

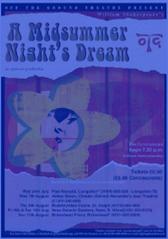


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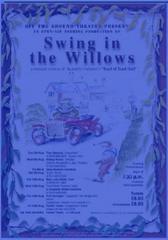
- 10 - 21 year olds
- 25 years
- 75 shows
- Theatre professionals
- Local sites
- Flexible payments



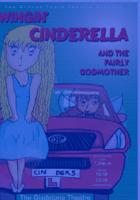
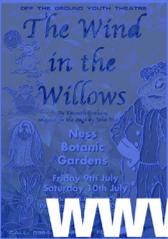
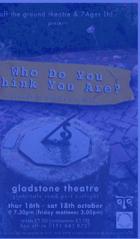
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