

Kate Mosse:

Well, hello. How lovely and beautiful you all look. What a relief it is to be back here on this magnificent stage, on this beautiful summer day, where we're all feeling so cheery and full of the joys of spring but, here we are back. And, of course, before we even start, I feel an enormous round of applause for your artistic director, Daniel Evans.

I'm still Kate Mosse, even though there's been a year and a half off. And it's my great privilege to be able to grill the directors, and sometimes the writers, about the shows that you will see. This is obviously a much smaller season, but we're here tonight to celebrate the theatre being open, and particularly the extraordinary production of *South Pacific*, which is previewing at the moment and will open tomorrow night. This, of course, was supposed to be on before. And, you have basically kept your cast together. If you can remember right back to when you thought *South Pacific* would be a wonderful musical to revisit, and it would be wonderful for here. Can you just tell us a little bit about why you chose it? And why now? Why it matters now?

Daniel Evans:

Well, I suppose the first thing was that I knew that it was considered to be a master work. And, that is because the songs are... The score is ravishing, and the songs we could probably all sing them right now because the lyrics have somehow found their way into our consciousness. They've become part of our everyday knowledge of song. And so I knew... In the summer we tried to bring joy with our musical and so, we knew that this is a score that brings that kind of joy. But also, I suppose, typically to Hammerstein and Rodgers, it's also a musical that I feel has something to say. It's a story about many things, but partly about a nurse from Arkansas, who has gone to war and is working for the U.S Navy in the South Pacific, who falls in love with a French plantation owner.

And, it's all going swimmingly until she finds out that he has two children by a previous woman, a previous relationship with a woman from Polynesia. And because of her background in the segregated South in America, she freaks out. And she can't cope with the fact that he has two Polynesian, or mixed race, children. As well as dealing with a story of war, and a story of racism, it also deals with class, and gender, and age, and difference. And I felt that those two things combined, a ravishing score and a master work of a script, along with a story that has something to say for our times, felt like a great combination.

Of course, in the year since we... The show didn't happen last year, it's been a momentous year for lots of those topics and lots of those themes. Actually, the response to the piece is, I suppose, is now seen through the prism of the last year and the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, the rise of anti-Asian hate crime in America throughout the last year. Things like Donald Trump calling coronavirus the Chinese virus, and the direct correlation between the anti-Asian hate that was happening in America, and the very day he said that phrase, the Chinese virus, those things are things that are in the background to our play in our production.

Kate Mosse: It's based on the wonderful series of stories by James Michener. He won the Pulitzer in, I think, 1948 for the series of stories. And, of course, he used his own experience in the American Navy out there in the South Pacific, during the second world war. There's a great deal that is very gritty and that he witnessed himself. Having said, there are challenges aren't there? However you want to contextualize something, there are challenges of things being of their time, but you've made some quite big and important decisions in order to make it for now, as well as when it first started, back in... When was the.... Was it 1949?

Daniel Evans: 49.

Kate Mosse: 49. And then, of course, the film that many people know is 58, wasn't it?

Daniel Evans: Yes, that's right.

Kate Mosse: Can you just say, before we get onto the casting and this actual... The joy of the singing and the dancing, as you say, the wonderful score, there are still things, presumably, you knew as a modern director in modern times, you needed to address within the script... The book really.

Daniel Evans: Indeed. For those of you who haven't read the Michener, I urge you to do it because it's beautiful prose and it's clearly written. It's so rich and detailed that you know that it must be based on truth, and based on his experience, because the details in it are so extraordinary that you think it must be real. It must be real life because no one could really think of these things, but, of course, he's fictionalized it too. It's an interesting hybrid.

Yeah, there are some challenges with the piece, and that's an understatement. One of the characters is a young Asian woman whose mother, basically, tries to sell her off to an American GI. Which is obviously problematic for us nowadays because it's become a trope, that image of a young, beautiful Asian woman, and the American handsome Princeton graduate. It's something that comes up in things like Madame Butterfly and Miss Saigon and, many, many people have written about this cliché that's been explored. And, in the book of South Pacific, that young Asian character only has seven words to speak in the whole piece.

Kate Mosse: It's about agency. How do you make her a character?

Daniel Evans: Yeah. And very early on, in fact, one of the first conversations I had with one of our creative team members, Ann Yee, who's our choreographer, who incidentally lives in Minnesota, in the city where all that happened last year. And, indeed, this year. We were discussing... I was asking Ann whether she would come on this journey with me, she choreographed Caroline, or Change here at Chichester in my first season here. It was an extraordinary piece and I'd loved Ann's work, and been a fan of her work, for so long. I was thinking about the kind of person that I'd like to work with and, knowing that this isn't necessarily, or traditionally anyway, known as a major dance musical, we

needed someone who really knew... Who had a background in dance, but also knew about movement, and knew about actors in space, and Ann immediately came to mind.

And Ann's initial response was that, she really wasn't interested in working on this piece. She thought there were other topics that we could be exploring. So, I started to explain to Ann, or tried to explain to Ann, why I felt the piece was pertinent, and that we should explore the piece. And, one of Ann's immediate challenges was, how do we deal with this trope of this young Asian character?

And in our discussions... In a song that happens in act two, Happy Talk, is a moment in the script where there's, basically, what we'd call in musical terms a dance break, and the singing stops. And there's a stage direction that says, Liat, the name of the character dances. And, it felt like there was a clue to a way forward, how we could find agency for that character. And Ann's idea was that, we should find a movement language. Maybe she doesn't have much verbal language, but she could have a movement language. And that movement language should be the start of our show. And I thought it was such a genius idea that we wanted to take that further. Indeed, that is... For those of you who will see the show, that is what happens. We start our production with a dance from Liat, that is about her connection with her island and then the U.S Navy arrive on the island.

Kate Mosse: Yes, so you reverse it really. That it's not simply seen through the prism of the... Well, the new arrivals. They're not invaders, technically, because they're all on the same side, technically-

Daniel Evans: But they commandeer the space.

Kate Mosse: But they accommodate the space.

Daniel Evans: Yeah.

Kate Mosse: It's very striking, I think. Very striking indeed.

Daniel Evans: Yeah. One of the major themes in the piece, that I get excited about, is this idea of cultural exchange. On the island, there are so many different communities. Even within the U.S Navy, there are Marines, and Seabees, and sailors from all over America, to begin with. All of them are bringing their own cultural differences. At the time, of course, black Marines, sailors, Seabees, would have been segregated from their white counterparts. That doesn't happen in our production because I felt like we... We're doing the play for our times. That isn't really something that's examined within the text, but also, then you have the French colonialists. The French people who had arrived in the islands, even the decade before. And they are the plantation owners. Then, also, you have all of the island communities from the South Pacific. So Bloody Mary is a Tonkinese woman.

She's come from Northern Vietnam to work. As many were, they were paid by the French government, their passage was paid, and they were housed, and fed, and paid, by the French colonialists to work and on the plantations. So there's a whole French community. The island, in one way, it's a hotbed of cultural difference and cultural exchange. And, that makes for great drama. We wanted to set up a prologue that could somehow set up this exchange of ideas, and cultural ideas, between those various communities. That's just one idea that Ann and I, and indeed Nigel Lilley, and our orchestrators too, David Cullen and Theo Jamieson.

There are some songs that have had new arrangements to them, that we have just tried to draw out this idea of, how do people from different cultural backgrounds share an island? And after all, as islanders as ourselves, we're, indeed, seeing the reaction to the football result last night on social media, and the racism that has been aimed at, in particular, three of our best players. This seems like something that we are really trying to grapple with as a society, and it's important that we do grapple with it.

Kate Mosse:

This is very important, obviously, to have this conversation about why you would program anything and how you make it work. I do feel that Hammerstein, himself, would be really thrilled, because he was extremely active in a lot of the anti-Nazi leagues, anti-racism in America. And, indeed, was called up before the McCarthy committee, wasn't he? For being un-American.

So, in a way, it fits within the context of where it came from. Before we start to talk about the joy of it, and the actors, and the wonderful cast, and the stage being filled with people dancing and singing, and it was just so joyous to see. How much latitude do you have as a director? Or, when you're doing a new production, can you decide to move songs around? Can you decide to not do certain bits? I think people are very interested to know what level of control... Is it like Shakespeare, you can rewrite the whole lot?

Daniel Evans:

Not quite, but you're absolutely right about Hammerstein. For example, he'd already shown his credentials, in terms of his stance on racism, early on with *Showboat*. Because, *Showboat* was the first time that black and white actors were allowed to perform together on stage, as they did in New York, in that original production. When the production then toured, the governor of Georgia said, "No, we're not going to allow that in this state." And Hammerstein says, "Fine. We'll simply skip Georgia on the tour." And they caved in, and allowed black and white actors to perform for the first time.

Just another side note... It's just interesting that Hammerstein, himself, had to renew his passport just after *South Pacific*. And the authorities said, because of his work, that they refused to grant him unless he signed a declaration, swearing his allegiance to the American flag. So, he had to have a temporary passport for six months, while he considered whether it was worth him filling out this form. When you think... A composer, a lyricist, and playwright, at the height of his powers, having to go through that. Kate, as a writer, imagine the

authorities saying to you, "No, we need you to go through this test before you can renew your passport."

Kate Mosse: Absolutely. I think it's really important because all of that underlies, why South Pacific matters. Because it's very easy to look with 21st century eyes and go, "Well, that seems a bit old fashioned." Actually, radical in its day and doing many, many things.

I think that it's just the underlying of why you wanted to do it, I think. And-

Daniel Evans: Exactly.

Kate Mosse: Yeah.

Daniel Evans: To come back to your question. Because, of course, there are copyright issues and these shows are still in copyright, because copyright lasts for 75 years after the creator's death. With Shakespeare, you can do what you want because, of course, he's long in the grave. But with this show, no, you have to seek permission. We have interpolated some of the... One song and one scene that was in the original production, that was cut after previews and the out of town try-out, we have brought back in. And that's the song, My Girl Back Home, and the whole scene between Cable and Nellie. So, that's something that's brought back in for us. And also, as I mentioned, the new arrangements and new orchestrations, those have to be created and sent to the Rodgers and Hammerstein estate, and approved by the estate before we can use them.

We were being as bold as we felt we possibly could be with our new arrangement of the prologue, and, indeed, with other arrangements. For example, Happy Talk has a brand new arrangement. We made our statement and we sent the score off, our arrangement off, crossing everything. Then you just have to wait for a week, or 10 days, until the estate come back and either approve or disprove.

Actually, we were so fortunate because in every instance, the estate recognised what we were trying to do and approved. I think the estate are at a point... I hope they won't mind me saying this, but I think the estate are at the point where they, themselves, are recognizing that these pieces of work have something to say to modern society. Indeed, if they, as an estate, want these pieces to continue to live in the way that they have done, then they too have to adapt. I think that's a wonderfully courageous and necessary thing for them as an estate, in order to stay resonant.

Kate Mosse: One of the things that... I could feel it when I was in the audience, you forget quite how many bangers, as they've been called, incredible songs that are part of... In a way, almost national consciousness aren't they? And they just come one, after the other, after the other, and you go, "Oh, of course! That comes from here as well."

When you're putting a big production like this together, do you have that sense of, "Oh, I'd like to do this slightly differently. I want it to not sound like all the other... I'm Going to Wash That Man Out of My Hair, or Bali Ha'is, or whatever?" Or, does everything come from the way you've decided to interpret it? And the incredible singers, not least of all, Gina Beck, Julian Ovenden, Joanna Ampil, that you've got at the heart of things.

Daniel Evans:

Yeah. I think it's a bit of both. I think Ann and I talked a lot about, how do we make something that doesn't feel and sound like every production of South Pacific you've ever seen? Are there things that we can draw out that we feel are original? Or new? Or perhaps, most importantly, can be pertinent and can speak to now? And then, I think once you've done some of that work then casting, and design, and choreography, and direction, all come from that place. Because then you've alighted on the themes that you wish to draw out. Once you've found your way in like that, well, one of the pleasures that we found anyway, was that... You find that, that theme of cultural exchange, for example, is everywhere. And it's not just to do with race.

For example, once you get hooked on this theme of gender, of the differences between male and female, you realize that, in Act One, there's a song where the gents sing about desiring women, There's Nothing Like A Dame. Followed, quite closely, by a song where women wish to cancel men, I Want to Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair. This difference is constantly being drawn out. There are countless jokes about age. Cable, for example, thinks it's unlikely that Nellie is in love with Emile because he's a middle-aged man. And then, Brackett, who's our commanding... The captain on the island, of the Navy. It really takes him to task, because he's made an assumption that middle-aged men are somehow past their prime. Which is a great source of laughter, and also class comes into it.

Cable is ribbed by the Seabees because he's gone to Princeton. He tries to hide it, but it eventually comes out that he's gone to Princeton. Which is, obviously, Ivy League college for mainly privileged folk, and not to Rutgers, which is the more public university. So many aspects suddenly just start to be drawn out. And then your choices around casting. Yes, of course, the score is the score. And you know that, actually, the songs demand to be sung in a certain way. And I'd, fortunately, worked with both Gina and Julian before. I directed Gina in Showboat and acted alongside Julian twice at the Donmar. So, when I was thinking about how this should sound, and how these songs need to really be given the respect, and skill, that they need, those two just came immediately to mind.

Kate Mosse:

Yeah. And they're a wonderful pairing. Although, there's another slight challenge there.

Daniel Evans:

Yes.

Kate Mosse:

I don't know if you want to share that with the audience.

Daniel Evans: Yeah, I will happily talk about it because it's something, I think, to celebrate. Which is that, of course, this was meant to happen last year. And Gina, I know she won't mind me saying this, has been trying for a baby, her and her partner. So, she emailed me with the title, some news. And in the email she explained that they just weren't sure, at the beginning of the year, whether the show was even going to be allowed to happen because we were in our darkest lockdown. And by darkest, I mean, I found it pretty dark. I don't know about you, lockdown number three was pretty heavy going for me. And she said, "I'm pregnant." And so, I got on the phone and said, "We're going to make this work. But, tell me, by opening night, how pregnant will you be?"

Kate Mosse: Pregnant.

Daniel Evans: And she said, "five months." And I said, "there is a famous scene where you're in a bathing costume, and you have a shower on stage." And she was saying, "yes, can we hide it?" I don't think we can hide it. And I think if people can suspend their disbelief, and think that we are dancing and singing in unison, then I think we can suspend our disbelief that this actress is not pregnant. It's a small thing to ask. And when you hear Gina sing, I think everything else just goes away, because it's just... Well, for me, anyway, it's just heaven. It's utter bliss.

Kate Mosse: And when she steps down, the wonderful Alex Young is coming in, who you will all remember from *Me and My Girl*. Did such a wonderful job. So, she's not going to be onstage with a baby.

Daniel Evans: That's right. So then, of course, there was a big discussion around how safe? Because, obviously, Gina's safety and her baby's safety came first. Then we just talked around when Gina might feel like she should step away, and could step away. And then, of course, Alex Young has herself had a baby during lockdown, during Covid times. I think the baby is nearly one. And Alex was delighted that this would be her first job back from that initial period of motherhood. I'm proud that at CFT, we're making this work for not one but two working mothers. And that's great.

Kate Mosse: Yeah.

This audience who come to these talks, and who know how things work, and know how complicated any big production is. But I'm not sure people realize, if they're not in your seat, behind the stage, trying to make theatre work, the promises the theatre's going to be on... And then it isn't going to be on, and all of this. It's been very, very difficult. But, I think it would be really interesting for everybody, if you could just explain a little bit about how you had to go about rehearsing a huge show, but all of the procedures that you had to put in place. And, of course, that then led to the most extraordinary tech run that you've ever done, didn't it, Daniel? If you don't mind, maybe sharing that inside story as well, because I think we're all also grateful to have... That this is happening. That live theatre is back here, in our town. But it's not been easy, has it?

Daniel Evans:

No. And I really, really have to pay tribute to Kathy and the team. Kathy Bourne, our executive director, and the entire team at the theatre, who have really worked like Trojans to make this happen. We were lucky to be recipients of this second round of the cultural recovery fund, which meant that we had extra money that we could spend on making this safe. Safe for our audiences, safe for our staff, and safe for the visiting artists. We had to audition over Zoom, first round. And then the second round auditions, we did do in a room. But, we had to spread it out over a long period of time. And we had to mark areas in the audition rooms, where people could stand all in masks. And people could take their masks off to sing, but we had to make sure that they were far enough away.

That was the first round of, strangeness, auditions. Then, in the first week of rehearsals, we had three Covid nurses with us. We had a separate room next door to our large rehearsal room, and that separate room became a testing room. Every day, everyone had to turn up early, before rehearsals, and have a Covid lateral flow test. So, the swab up the nose and then wait 15 minutes. I think we've gone, now, through something like 5,000 lateral flow tests because we tested the actors every single day. Just to know exactly where we were, and to make sure that people knew that we were taking this seriously, and to reassure everyone that we had a negative company. Negative in the sense of being testing negative, not in their attitudes. They were very positive in their attitudes, I have to say. Then everyone was taught how to do their own swab test.

And from week two onwards, we were doing tests at home every day. We had to rehearse in masks, including singing in masks. Unless you were working in a bubble. So, Julian and Gina formed a bubble, and they could rehearse their scenes together without masks. And the first time... I have to say that they kiss in the play, and the first time they kissed in the rehearsal room, it was so shocking and emotional, because we haven't had any physical contact. Because of being in a bubble and being very careful, they could do that. And that was really hard. I don't want any violins out but, Ann, our choreographer, her warmup is vigorous. So, just asking actors to warm up and do that vigorous warm up in masks, and people just gasping for breath. It was incredible to witness. And again, not a complaint from the cast, they just dealt with it so amazingly. I'm so proud of them.

And then, of course, there were things like... For example, one of our creative team members tested positive one morning. But, that turned out to be a false positive, so we had to wait for the PCR test overnight. There were a few other instances. One of our children was pinged from school, as it seems that the majority of children are nowadays, because Covid is awash in the schools. And then, lo and behold, having told the actors, "please be careful and please take it seriously. We need everything to keep the show going." The Saturday before we started tech on the Monday, so technical rehearsals, my partner, Tom, tested positive. We were bewildered. And he had symptoms. I saw him at 5:00PM, at home. I came in to do a dry tech session, which is a session where we can just

see the pieces moving around on the stage without actors. And by the time I'd got home at 11:00PM, he had symptoms.

So, I walked through the door and said, "hello". And he said, "oh, I'm not well." And I put my mask on, I stayed by the door, and I said, "please put your mask on, and get out of the kitchen." And so, he then went to another room. I put a lateral flow test ready for him. I went, then shut myself in another room and shouted, "okay, go and do a lateral flow test." He tested positive. We slept in separate rooms. He then did a PCR test, the following morning in Northgate carpark, and went back to London. And so we separated, the test came back positive. And so I had to isolate for 10 days. So, I conducted the tech via Zoom. So they set up a big screen-

Kate Mosse: I don't know that I know anyone who has done this.

Daniel Evans: Well, the only way I could do it was because of the team, and really Ann. Ann, our choreographer, and I set up a WhatsApp call on... So, Ann had headphones, and she had me in her ear for 12 hours a day, for seven days, or six days, that week. I really could not have done it without Ann, and the entire team, just pulling together, and the cast too.

They made my Zoom voice come over loudly into the room, so I could give some instructions and just watch it via three camera angles. So I had one from this angle, one from this angle, and one from the centre, and somehow we got through it. Then I had to miss the first pre... I watched the first preview on Zoom last Monday, which was, of course, a very emotional night for everyone in the theatre.

Kate Mosse: And you weren't here.

Daniel Evans: I wasn't here. I felt very sad and lonely, but very grateful that the show happened, and that the team could pull that together without me being actually present. And then, I saw the show on Tuesday when I was allowed to be free again.

And we've worked... It's been quite a gruelling week for the cast, and we've worked through it and we're ready to open tomorrow night.

Kate Mosse: Yeah. Amazing. I just think... For everybody to know quite how much has gone into making this possible. It's not just a normal production.

I'd like to say never again, but you just don't know, do you?

Daniel Evans: No you don't. And that's the thing, every morning we have a brilliant Covid officer, Emma, who looks after us and keeps us on track when we're not wearing our masks properly. And this and that. And Emma texts me every

morning to say, "yes, we have a fully negative cast", so that means we can do the show tonight.

And it's literally on a day by day basis, because you've probably read... Today the news is The Prince of Egypt at the Dominion theatre, they now have had to suspend performances because there's a Covid positive case in the company. The Royal Court, this week, has had to suspend performances. Joseph at the Palladium had to postpone. It's everywhere, clearly in London. We're just, day by day, praying.

Kate Mosse: Yes. Good job you've got a proper wooden table, I think.

Daniel Evans: Indeed.

Kate Mosse: It doesn't fall over. It's not a prop. Before we take some audience questions, because I'm sure some of you do have some questions, just to go back to the joy of the music, the joy of the big dance routines, that sense of being somewhere completely different, a different type of story. When you imagined how you were going to direct South Pacific, all of those years ago now, what do you feel when you see it? Is it the show that you... Is it how you thought you were going to make it? Does it look how you imagined it? Or, has it changed over the 18 months, 2 years before you actually could start?

Daniel Evans: It's definitely changed.

Kate Mosse: How's it changed?

Daniel Evans: I'm just so pleased and proud of the collaboration, with the cast, and with our creative team. Because everyone... It's been quite an emotional time because, of course, all of them are freelancers. And lots of them haven't been able to work at all during this last period. So, people have brought such generosity, and patience, and passion, to this project and it feels like the investment from everyone has been total. It's all the richer for that. From Howard Harrison's lighting, and Paul Groothuis' work on the sound, Ann's choreography, and Nigel's work, Nigel who's our musical supervisor, and Cat, our musical director. Everyone is just... Peter's design is beautiful, and confident, and bold. Gillian Tan has brought exquisite projection, very subtle projection work. It's just beautiful. It's richer than, actually, I ever imagined.

Kate Mosse: Yeah, it is really beautiful. You feel you're in a space flooded with light and colour.

Daniel Evans: Yes.

Kate Mosse: Absolutely. And four of your wonderful, and very brilliant, cast are making their debuts here.

Daniel Evans: Actually, six of them are. Six of them are, but four are making their professional debuts, but four of them have had to wait a year because they graduated last year, and have been Amazon delivery drivers, Sainsbury shelf stackers, throughout the year. And they've had to wait until... This is their first job. So, it's been an emotional time for them too.

Kate Mosse: Absolutely. But it has... It's worth it. Yeah.

Daniel Evans: Hope so.

Kate Mosse: It is worth it. Right. We can have a few questions.

Does anybody have a question that they would like to ask?

How many weeks you are in rehearsal? It's a really good question because musicals are often longer aren't they than a straight play.

Daniel Evans: We were five weeks in rehearsals. Four of them in London, in a very large room with the Jerwood space. And then a week here in our rehearsal space, in the Pimlott building. And then a full week of technical rehearsals. So, I guess that's six weeks in all. Then we've had a week of previews last week, seven previews. So, Monday to Saturday, with a matinee on the Saturday. Opening night is tomorrow. So-

Kate Mosse: Is it usual to have such a lot of previews for a musical?

Daniel Evans: It is-

Kate Mosse: Because there's so many complicated bits and bobs.

Daniel Evans: It is and, for us on this stage, one of the joys of this thrust stage is that we... You have to think outside the box. We're not bound by a proscenium, but that means that we have to find innovative ways to bring scenery on and off. And so for us, the glue that draws the production together, to make it feel like a whole... We've tried very hard in the last week to make that as smooth as possible, so it just feels seamless. And that thread of storytelling is held taught from beginning to end. We've used every single minute possible in those six weeks.

Kate Mosse: And when you open tomorrow night, there are then... they're just in performances every day, except for Sunday off, aren't they? They don't suddenly get a break.

Daniel Evans: No. That's right.

And the creative team will leave us. I'll stay, obviously, and Bobby, our assistant director, takes charge. And she becomes my voice, as it were, looking after the

cast. And we will do one socially distanced performance per week, for the people who are nervous. Then we'll remain socially distanced, as you are this evening, until the 19th. And then we'll just increase numbers by a little. We won't be full, just because... I just feel like we're still finding out... Boris is probably talking to the nation right now, about what to expect on the 19th. Although, we don't expect there'll be much clarity on that.

Kate Mosse: No. How very elegantly put.

Daniel Evans: So, we'll see what the appetite is, and how public confidence is, and how... What the feedback is from our audiences.

So far, the feedback... I have to, again, pay tribute to the front of house staff, because the feedback so far from last week has been wonderful. People saying they feel safe, it's very clear what's going on, and they are able to enjoy, and forget about Covid for 2 hours and 40 minutes. We want that to continue. So we'll open up gradually.

Kate Mosse: And, when I was in, I thought the front of house staff and everybody... It felt really joyous. It didn't feel mechanical and everybody's being tested. I mean, they were, but it was very calm.

Is there another question from anybody?

Yeah. That's a really lovely question. If there have been positive changes? Things that, actually, you've learnt and presumably feel... Good things to have learned, because of the COVID restrictions.

Daniel Evans: Yeah, a good question because... Oddly enough, sometimes it's true, I find, that when you give a company, or a creative team, strong parameters, then you have to find freedom within those parameters. Actually, for us, we had these strong... In the rehearsal room, it was comical because the actors all had to sit... We had plastic screens, separating chairs between actors. Everyone had a chair and only they could touch that chair. And they had a box underneath the chair, that could hold all of their belongings. And when they weren't working, they had to go back and sit in the chair, and stay in the chair. And a screen either side of it to stop any, what is it? Droplets... From being tempted to talk. So, they had to talk through screens, wearing masks. It was hilarious, not. But, weirdly because of those strong parameters, it gave the work an immense focus.

It really... The concentration in the room, the quiet in the room, I don't think I've ever really had to tell the company to be quiet, because everyone just had to... They felt like they were so confined to their areas. And while you would never want to wish that normally in a rehearsal period, where you want to create an atmosphere of relaxation, and freedom, and support. Oddly enough, I think people felt that that was a kind of support, and that felt like it was safety, and making people feel safe, and therefore the work, the concentration, and focus,

on the work. We had this revolve, a replica of this revolve, in the rehearsal room. Well, in London, at least. It couldn't fit into the rehearsal room in the Pimlott building. So, we had to do our last week without it. But it just gave the work a kind of focus.

While you'd never ever want to repeat what we've gone through, and we may have to, who knows how long this is going to be with us, you would want to find a way of finding that focus, and that concentration, that was immensely helpful. And I think it's deepened the work. I think it's given the work... It's imbued it with a kind of seriousness of intent, and also allowed us to celebrate the joy when the joy comes. That moment, the first time the actors sang without masks in the Sitzprobe, which is when you hear the band and the cast sing together for the first time, I was watching on Zoom because it was during my isolation time. But, I gather it was a very emotional moment for the cast because they were mask free, and singing with live musicians for the first time, for many of them, in over a year. That joy has been doubly meaningful because of the abstinence that we've all had to go through, through this last period.

Kate Mosse: And it matters.

Daniel Evans: It matters.

Kate Mosse: Making live theatre matters.

Daniel Evans: Yeah.

Kate Mosse: Yeah.

Is there another question? We have time for one more.

That's a very lovely question. Can you explain the corrugations, given it's a musical and beautiful setting, South Pacific.

Daniel Evans: Simply... In the research that we did, the photographs from the time, and there are many, many wonderful books of photography from the period, which is extraordinary. Apart from jungle, the two major elements were beach, and the makeshift nature of everything that the Naval base had made, in order to make the base. You'll see that there are many, many elements of the set, that have the feeling of being made by the Seabees. Seabees, standing for Construction Battalion. So, this is part of the language of the Navy. Whereas this, as you'll see in the opening of the prologue, is very much part of the natural world. And again, it's part of those two things coming together, the cultural meeting of these two worlds. The man, or woman, made world and the natural world.

Kate Mosse: Lovely, thank you.

That has brought us to the end of our time because, as you would imagine, firstly, there will be a cast warmup, but I'm told that before that there's actually going to be a fight rehearsal. And I feel that we all need to get off the stage. But, I'm sure, listening to Daniel, you will all want to join me in wishing him, everybody at the theatre who has worked so hard to bring this theatre back to life... I can say this because I'm not part of the theatre, I think CFT has been one of the leaders in the industry over this difficult time, has kept trying to make work, has kept things going, when many other theatres have not really been able to do that. And I think we're very lucky to have you, and all of you who are here, but most of all, break a leg for tomorrow night.

Ladies and gentleman, Daniel Evans.