

**National
Theatre
Learning**



**The
Light
Princess**

a new musical

music and lyrics by
Tori Amos

book and lyrics by
Samuel Adamson

suggested by a story by George MacDonald

Background pack

The Light Princess Background pack

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Welcome to the National Theatre's background pack for *The Light Princess*.

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Jane Ball
Programme Manager, NT Learning
January 2014

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The photographs used in this background pack were taken by **Brinkhoff/Mogenburg**, except for the front cover photo by **Jason Bell**



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Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

The National Theatre production of *The Light Princess*

Characters, in order of speaking:

Voice of 6-year-old Althea **EVE ELLIOTT-SIDI**
Voice of 8-year-old Digby **CONNOR FITZGERALD**
Piper **AMY BOOTH-STEEL**
Llewelyn **KANE OLIVER PARRY**
Althea **ROSALIE CRAIG**
King Darius **CLIVE ROWE**
Digby **NICK HENDRIX**
King Ignacio **HAL FOWLER**
Zephyrus **BEN THOMPSON**
Serjeant-at-Arms **MALINDA PARRIS**
Falconer **LAURA PITT-PULFORD**
Mr Flowers **DAVID LANGHAM**
Mr Crabbe **ADAM PEARCE**
Mr Grey **CASPAR PHILLIPSON**
Lady Delphine **NICOLA HART**
Ensemble **VIVIEN CARTER, JAMES CHARLTON,
CJ JOHNSON, RICHARD LOWE, JAMIE MUSCATO,
LANDI OSHINOWO, PHOEBE STREET**
Acrobats **OWAIN GWYNN, TOMMY LUTHER,
EMMA NORIN, NUNO SILVA**
Swings **STEPHANIE BRON, LUKE JOHNSON**

All other parts played by members of the Company

Musicians

Mari Yamamoto (violin)
Joan Martinez (violin)
Douglas Harrison (violin)
Leonie Adams (cello)
Elena Hull (double bass)
Anna Stokes (flute/alto flute)
Nicola Hands (oboe/cor anglais)
Sarah Thurlow (clarinet)
Lois Au (bassoon)
Katherine Rockhill (piano)
Tom Brady (keyboards)
Martin Lowe (Music Director)

Understudies

Vivien Carter (Althea)
James Charlton (Mr Flowers/Mr Crabbe)
CJ Johnson (Falconer)
Richard Lowe (Llewelyn/Mr Grey)
Jamie Muscato (Digby)
Landi Oshinowo (Serjeant-at-Arms)
Adam Pearce (King Ignacio)
Caspar Phillipson (King Darius)
Laura Pitt-Pulford (Piper)
Phoebe Street (Lady Delphine/2nd Althea)

Director **MARIANNE ELLIOTT**
Designer **RAE SMITH**
Lighting Designer **PAULE CONSTABLE**
Choreographer **STEVEN HOGGETT**
Music Supervisor **MARTIN LOWE**
Orchestrations **JOHN PHILIP SHENALE**
Vocal Arrangements &
Additional Orchestrations **TORI AMOS & MARTIN LOWE**
Animations **MATTHEW ROBINS**
Projection Designer **IAN WILLIAM GALLOWAY**
Puppetry Director **FINN CALDWELL**
Puppetry Designer **TOBY OLIÉ**
Aerial Effects Designer **PAUL RUBIN**
Sound Designer **SIMON BAKER**
Associate Set Designer **PAUL ATKINSON**
Associate Choreographer **NEIL BETTLES**
Assistant Music Director **TOM BRADY**
Staff Director **PAUL FOSTER**
Production Photographer **BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG**
Producer for the National Theatre **TIM LEVY**



This production opened in the National's
Lyttelton Theatre on **9 October 2013**

Above: Nick Hendrix and Rosalie Craig in *The Light Princess*
PHOTOS: BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Pre-rehearsals

Before the rehearsal period started with the full company, much of the physical exploration was already underway.

It's a tremendously ambitious enterprise – a new musical where the title character hardly puts a foot on the ground.

Week Zero, 29 July 2013: a week of trying out ideas with the four acrobats who work closely with the character of Althea, and Rosalie Craig who plays her, was arranged before full rehearsals began the following week. We looked at particular sequences, including the car journey in the epic first act song 'Queen Material'; the encounter with and slaying of the Dimorphodon; and how Althea might be 'puppeteered' in her bedroom in the tower where she's been locked away for a decade.

Ben Thompson, who plays Zephyrus, the Sealand falcon that moves the plot forward at crucial moments, was also present to investigate an appropriate movement language for this and other puppets, including dragons, frogs, swans and dogs, all designed by Toby Olié. Their shapes and modes of operation were similarly assessed in rehearsals and would then be modified in the workshop. Ben also visited a falconry centre with fellow actors Laura Pitt-Pulford (playing Falconer) and Nick Hendrix (playing Digby), both of whom interact closely with Zephyrus. They learned about the creature's watchfulness, its place in the hierarchy of birds of prey and its habits and idiosyncrasies. Zephyrus originally belonged to Digby's late mother and was presented to Digby as a small child by the Falconer who sensed the boy's loneliness. Finn Caldwell (Puppetry Director)

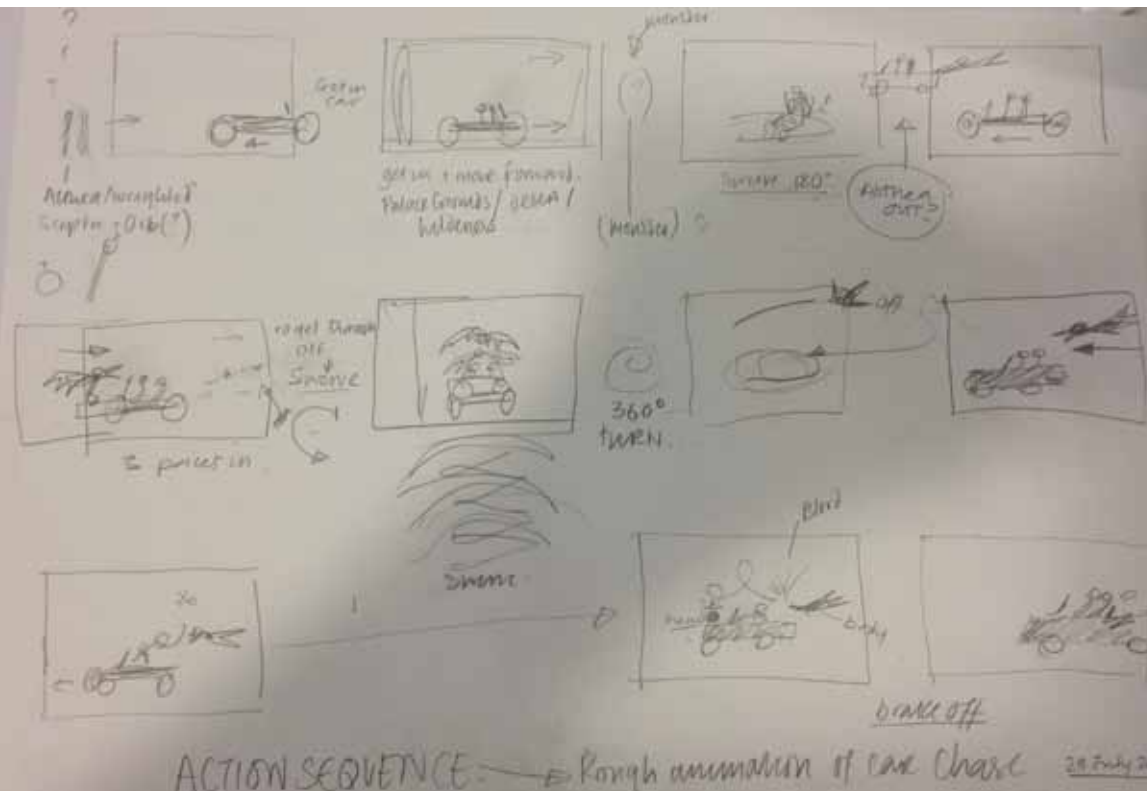
marshalled a 5-person sequence, gradually building up momentum. Moments to arrive at were: circle, swoop, group dive-bomb, pecking Ignacio's eyes.

Aerial work took place, usually in a high-ceilinged hangar in Woolwich. We looked at 'Crash in the Universe', an exciting battle sequence in the second act – where we imagined Althea as Boudicca: a warrior. There were experiments using an 8 ft pole / spear, also controlled or steered by ribbons. The spear was used as a vaulting mechanism and as a pogo stick. This relied on liaison between two flymen controlling up and down movement (Jonny Pascoe) and left to right (Cory Evie), under the supervision of the Aerial Effects Designer, Paul Rubin (Paul Rubin describes this process in an interview on page 19). When Choreographer Steven Hoggett and Paul were content with certain short sequences, these were filmed for the production's director, Marianne Elliott, to offer input and feedback. They would also serve as useful archive material when these sections were explored further in the main rehearsal period.

The production has been in development for a number of years, with exploratory workshops helping to streamline the score and narrative. These were also recorded for archive purposes, so that promising moments might offer stimulus for this full production. An example of this is the group work with silks that form barriers and obstacles for Digby in 'Crash in the Universe' in Act 2.

The entire creative team met each evening to discuss the script and story beat-by-beat. Each scene involves the work of several departments working in synthesis. Matthew Robins (Animations designer) showed early

versions of the projected extracts which illustrate large story sections, ie 'My Fairy Story'. We talked about how 2D shapes might yield to a 3D world; how theatrical worlds relate; how Althea's passion for the tales that Piper reads to her offers visual, spiritual, and emotional sustenance. Finding deft and theatrically engaging ways to convey Althea's lightness will clearly form a good deal of our work on the journey towards opening night. including 'Coronation', which serves as a ringing, joyous finale.



Above: Rae Smith's storyboard sketches for the car sequence
PHOTO BY PAUL FOSTER

Rehearsal diary: week one

Staff director Paul Foster documented the seven-week rehearsal period; these extracts from his diary reveal how the production emerged.

5 August 2013. Over a hundred people are gathered in a massive circle at London's Jerwood Space, which will be the home of *The Light Princess* rehearsals for the next seven weeks. We are welcomed and made aware of just how exciting and anticipated this production is. Marianne Elliott asks each person in the room – National Theatre staff and *The Light Princess* company and teams – to introduce themselves and name their favourite childhood fairytale, and to explain why. The choices are a mixture of familiar and less well-known narratives from all over the world, cherished for a variety of reasons: the memory of the person who read the story, the identification of a particular theme which rang true or gave hope, the vibrant illustrations, even the fanciability of the protagonist. We are instantly reminded of how fresh and enduring these tales remain.

After these introductions, the cast and creative team are left to begin rehearsals. First they gather round the model box of the set. Designer Rae Smith explains how she arrived at the idea of a Victorian toy theatre which presents the story in the traditional framing of a

proscenium arch. Children from that era would spend hours with these card theatres, their imaginations running riot as they inserted characters and scenery pieces onto the stage from left and right. The wilds of the forest where Digby and Althea meet and fall in love are grouped in a similar way. Rae Smith has divided the space in two; one half depicting the desert heat of Lagobel with its oranges and golds; the other the more rational, industry-based Sealand picked out in blues and purples. These opposing kingdoms in Tori Amos and Samuel Adamson's story worlds are clearly and vividly delineated and a beautifully drawn map of this world will be pre-set on a front cloth as the audience take their seats before the performance.

Multiple skills are required of the performers and the rehearsal period helps them to develop. Finn Caldwell and Toby Olié (who both appeared in the original cast of *War Horse*) lead a puppeteering session with the company, in which groups of three construct a simple 'human' figure using brown paper and tape. We learn to articulate the puppet as a unit. Tips such as a quick outbreak before moving and maintaining a constant eye-line to the puppet all aid the storytelling as well as our ability to follow the episodes. Music Supervisor Martin Lowe teaches 'My Own Land', one of the major company numbers, and it's thrilling to hear the vocal power of the cast. Marianne emphasises the high stakes at this point in the drama which falls immediately after the assassination of Alexander, triggering a war between the rival kingdoms. Steven Hoggett begins a rough staging of the number which introduces our adult protagonists, Digby and Althea, and sets up some balancing moments stage left and right, such as the Kings' oratory and the disparity between Althea's awkwardness and Digby's natural authority.

We are running three or four rehearsal rooms simultaneously, so as Tori Amos and the music department craft solos and duets in one room, Marianne talks through back-stories and psychological motivations in another, exploring with Rosalie and Nick how the loss of a parent in childhood may have affected their characters' emotional development. Sessions are also held with the actors Clive Rowe and Amy Booth-Steel, playing King Darius and Piper, who contemplate the intervening decade in the Tower and the kingdom at large. Clive Rowe quotes a lyric from 'The Whistleblower'



Rehearsals: week two

– “My father changed me” – which might hint towards damage and obstacles in the king’s own youth which had to be overcome – tenacity in the D’Arcy blood which Althea, frustratingly for him, appears not to share. Samuel Adamson offers further insights which open up the words on the page. Meanwhile, Steven works in the main room on a sequence of manoeuvres for the Sealand soldiers which expresses their skills in combat and cements their team spirit. Each morning begins with a half-hour physical warm-up of drills and exercises to build vital core strength and stamina. The week is crammed full of exploration and ends with Martin Lowe teaching three company numbers from the second act, including the climactic ‘Coronation’.

The Creative team begin work on ‘Queen Material’, which dramatises Althea and Piper’s snap decision to leave the tower and escape into the unknown, stealing Alexander’s car. Almost the entire company are involved. The number has already been slightly re-shaped since it was taught vocally last week. This is a regular pattern over the days and weeks: songs are tested out in the rehearsal room and then moments extended or trimmed accordingly. Tori watches a sequence that Finn and the acrobats have worked on where the car carrying Althea and a nervous Piper whirls through a dizzying journey into the wilderness. She makes a note of timings and goes off to compose some thrilling music which, when played on the rehearsal piano, augments the tension of the swerves, 360 degree spins and turns. There’s a particularly frightening section when a dimorphodon attacks the car: the three actors are led through precise movements as the huge puppet’s flapping wings and gaping jaw menace the fugitive princess.

Finn and Marianne track the weightlessness of Althea, noting how props and the ribbon that Piper is holding propel Althea towards and then anchor her into the car. Steven devises a rehearsal for Rosalie to find a movement language and walking pattern for the

character, having her lift chairs and carry them whilst putting one foot unconfidently in front of the other. Already, a less fluid and ungainly figure emerges. We rewind to the moment where the girls escape the tower via the bookcase door into a set of corridors and palace floors, each with guarded doors. The guards have 2D keys which they turn as they contend with the fleeing girls. A shadow screen has been set up so that, in time, Matthew Robins’ animations can be blended with the live action – a projected door or portcullis “opening up” on cue as each key turns. Marianne reworks the sequence: she feels it is too quick, and the strangeness not quite conveyed. Sam suggests that the first guard whistles and yells to alert his colleagues and suddenly the tension rises, giving Althea and Piper’s lyrics more punch as they make their way out.



We work on Althea’s solo, ‘My Fairy Story’, which offers the audience its first quiet look at the princess’ enforced “sanctuary” in the tower. After the strains of the botched public speeches, she seeks comfort in a fantasy world of books, specifically *The Little Match Girl*. An initial experiment where Amy holds Rosalie’s ankle ribbon to ground her as she reads is too static, so Marianne and Finn ask Emma Norin (an acrobat) to balance Rosalie via her hands and the soles of her feet. This provides some beautifully fluid movement which helps express Althea’s excitement as she dreams of a contented family life – one in which her “father loves me for who I am”. The bittersweet nature of the melody is piercingly conveyed. Again, the sequence will be augmented by shadow projections using the kind of illustrative plates common to fairy stories.

Steven and associate choreographer Neil Bettles have developed choreography for the soldiers in ‘Sealand Supremacy’ – these offer tightly-constructed displays of the squadron’s martial prowess. Steven reminds the actors that although they have won the battle, energy and effort have been spent. The two princes, however, are invigorated by it all. Weapons will be added at a later rehearsal but it’s already clear that this is a force to be reckoned with. Marianne is adamant that the two lone girls who stumble across the soldiers’ path must feel that they are in real peril.

Marianne works on the ‘Amphibiava’ duet between Althea and Digby which offers a vibrant change from the political chicanery of the first act. Here, the heirs to the throne are frolicking in an aquatic paradise of natural



Rehearsals: week two

abundance. Story beats and key factual information are mined for clues as to their growing love affair. Marianne encourages Rosalie and Nick to plot this progression in detail, and points out how “the solemn prince” adopts familiar tropes and vocabulary: “crown... footmen”, etc. Toby Olié and his design team introduce us to the puppets which will populate this water world: frogs, dragonflies, mudskippers, swans; as well as hand puppets with gloved stamens of beautiful water lilies. These prototypes will be finessed over the coming weeks. A huge lake truck has been built for the rehearsal room made up of three large squares of criss-crossed

elasticated frames joined together. The acting ensemble are concealed beneath it, reaching up through the apertures to puppeteer their creatures onto and above the surface of the lake. As the sequence plays out, the lovers begin to quarrel and the prince’s malevolent father dams the source. At that point, these puppets will decay and wilt. The company throw themselves into this work with relish and the creatures they puppeteer take on an engaging life of their own. The halo of leaping silverfish surrounding Althea and Digby at the end of the duet provides a particularly striking image – “girl and lake forever entwined”.



Rehearsals: week three

Work continues in week three on 'Crash in the Universe', where Digby and Althea race against time to unblock the dam that has caused a crippling drought in Lagobel. The rehearsal room is divided in two as Paul Rubin and Steven Hoggett develop the aerial sequences where an invigorated Althea journeys through the wilderness. This sees Rosalie hone some impressive moves: somersaults, "running" across a silk bridge, pogo-ing across the performance space and zooming off, spear in hand. It is important that Althea musn't seem like a superhero, and therefore reduced by her emotional and literal grounding later in the story. All these exploits should be a means to an end, to help her people; and the assistance of Piper and, especially, the Serjeant-at-Arms are crucial.

Finn polishes the Hydra attack that was tested out in Week Zero, as well as creating a fight between a handful of Sealand soldiers and Digby, and a chase sequence with three of Ignacio's hell-hounds, who threaten the prince. Marianne suggests using "slow-motion" movement sparingly across the performance, to pick out certain moments. Martin Lowe and the



sound designer Simon Baker contribute subtle acoustic transitions which also help to highlight these moments. This segment of the play will obviously demand a good deal more rehearsal time to balance all the constituent elements, but it's good to start shaping key sections.

Marianne starts work on 'The Solution', in which a trio of unlikely suitors respond to King Darius' desperate plea for a husband who can "cure" Althea of her lightness. The drugged-up Mr Flowers, grossly overweight Mr Crabbe and the aptly named Mr Grey prescribe narcotics, force-feeding and love, respectively. The atmosphere in the palace is carefully charted, and the

grotesque opinions about the light princess evinced in 'My Own Land' are developed. Marianne suggests that by now the servants are in dire straits, the populace are articulating the need for a coup d'état, and the king's irritation with his daughter is becoming increasingly pronounced. Certain lines in the script are deliberately interrupted and Marianne encourages Malinda Parris (playing the Serjeant-at-Arms) to totally commit to them: they convey the dramatic stakes and febrile tension in the air. The servants' nastiness towards Althea is echoed in new lyrics: "wafting ginger freak with a ginger beak". Both Flowers' and Crabbe's "solutions" momentarily ground Althea, and specific versions of her descents are figured out with the acrobats buckled onto the bookcase with harnesses. These victories excite the servants and the King – only for the mood to darken as the effect wears off and Althea ascends once again, the second time unleashing a ribbon of paper vomit over the hapless Mr Crabbe. The mouse which lives in Althea's room observes proceedings and it is decided that because he's also been snaffling some of the cakes, he too should vomit. It is a sharply-felt shift in tone which provides a welcome moment of farcical humour, before the King's temper finally snaps and he commits Althea to the dungeon.


Time is spent rehearsing the rhapsodic song 'Althea', which an infatuated Digby sings to the princess during their first meeting. Nick, who plays Digby, is taught the movement for the scene which has him steer and propel Rosalie (who is suspended on wires) through the air, using the ribbons attached to her ankles, waist and wrists. The directional changes are deftly plotted to capture Digby's wonder and celebration of this phenomenon. Marianne's specificity on the actioning of the text and lyrics bears fruit as Nick blends the words and choreography more confidently. There's a palpable eroticism to the encounter between the two protagonists. Marianne also works on Digby's return home to Sealand after this world-changing meeting and discusses the atmosphere in that kingdom – which should contrast sharply with that of Lagobel. Ignacio's despotism is evident in the writing, and Marianne tries a version where the guards in the scene are forced to laugh at the King's jokes, to establish a "yes" culture, a culture of total obedience. The character of Lady Delphine, played by Nicola Hart, is introduced to the audience as expedient "bride material" for Digby. Marianne sets up an improvisation where Lady Delphine is relaxing and chatting in a garden when suddenly a man bursts in and hustles her away. The speed and unexpectedness of the act help to ensure that Lady Delphine arrives at her surprise wedding in a state of shock – unbriefed and terrified.

Rehearsals: week three

Puppetry sessions continue, with Finn and Toby developing a sequence for Digby's ballad 'Highness in the Sky'. Fabric birds are attached to the end of long poles which half a dozen actors wheel around their heads, making colourful shapes in the sky, particularly during the soaring instrumental section. Marianne prefers the birds' movement to be slow – anything more rapid appears to pull focus away from Digby. We also work on the end of Act One where Althea, having been tortured by her father, tries to commit suicide by walking into the lake. As elsewhere in the show, silks are stretched to convey barriers and waterways. At various points around a massive silk which covers the floor, Finn arranges pairs of actors, who experiment with varying degrees of undulation to produce ripples and then rise up as Althea enters the water. It is the first time we have heard Rosalie sing the accompanying song 'Darkest Hour', and we are all moved by its poignancy and sadness.

We finish the week by "staggering" Act One, which allows us to piece together the story and discover which sections need focusing and refining. Marianne reassures the company that they can stop if they need to; and that this isn't a test of how well they have memorised things, but more an opportunity for the creative team and writers to see how clearly the material is communicated and how effective each scene and song appears.

The company respond with exciting, spirited work and the story feels robust and engaging. It is particularly thrilling that the dedicated athletic and acrobatic training that Rosalie has been undergoing for months to prepare for this immensely taxing role have paid off, as she sings effortlessly despite being cartwheeled through the air. The company bond which has formed means that we head into week four buoyed up and prepared for more hard work.

|  Rehearsal Call Wednesday 21st August | | |
|---|---|--|
| Please Check Call Thoroughly | | |
| Jerwood Space 7 | | |
| 10:00am | Physical Warm Up | Full Company except Miss Pitt-Pulford Messrs Fowler, Hendrix, Parry |
| 11:00am | Staging – #4 Queen Material | As Above |
| 12:45pm | Tea Break | |
| 1:00pm | Staging - #16 Zephyrus Call/ Althea Reprise | Misses Carter, Hart, Johnson, Pitt-Pulford, Messrs Hendrix, Parry, Phillipson, Muscato, Charlton, Lowe |
| 2:30pm | LUNCH | |
| 3:30pm | Staging #12 Highness In The Sky (Split call 3:30-4:30*) | Full Company except Misses Booth-Steel, Craig, Parris Messrs Rowe & Silva |
| 6:00pm | SUPPER | |
| 6:30pm | Staging - #10 Better Than Good (SEAR Required) | Misses Booth-Steel, Carter, Craig, Hart, Norin, Oshinowo, Street Messrs Gwynn, Lowe, Luther, Silva, Thompson |
| 8:45pm | CALL ENDS | |
| Costume Fittings, Space 5 | | |
| 9:30am | Miss Craig (new harness – 30mins) | |
| 12:45pm | Miss Norin | |
| 1:45pm | Mr Luther | |
| 3:30pm | Mr Silva | |
| 5:00pm | Mr Gwynn | |
| Wigs, Hair & Make-up, Space 5 | | |
| 1:00pm | Miss Booth-Steel | |
| Music Call, Space 6 | | |
| 1:00pm | Mr Rowe | |
| Space 2 | | |
| *3:30pm-4:30pm | Misses Hart, Pitt-Pulford, Messrs Fowler, Hendrix, Parry | |
| Many thanks, Team Thom, 07720 706812 | | |

Rehearsals: week four

Marianne has been concerned about the Hydra which Althea, Piper and the Serjeant-at-Arms encounter in 'Crash in the Universe'. Whilst the puppet has a strong look and generates excitement, Marianne feels that it is a mistake to introduce a major creature at such a late point in the narrative. Rae thinks that variants on the flying dragon which terrorises the girls in 'Queen Material' could thread through the story more evidently. Toby suggests that there could be three scarily skeletal, cannibalistic dimorphodons to be met in this final battle (their decayed appearances would also be consistent with the drought which has ravaged the wilderness by this stage). Rae plans to further emphasise the "dragon" theme with iconography on Althea's bookcase, and Sam and Tori add a section to 'Queen Material' where Piper fears there are dragons in the wilderness; and Althea dismisses these "myths".

Martin Lowe and Marianne shape the Prologue in which Piper and Llewellyn (as adults) introduce the expository background story. Marianne, mindful of the orchestral colour and shadow projections which will form part of the sequence, encourages Amy Booth-Steel (playing Piper) and Kane Oliver Parry (Llewellyn) to be dispassionate in their narration, leaving room for the play of the audience's imaginations. Particular phrases are timed to catch musical moments, such as the ascending chromatic run over Piper's revelation that the infant Althea, aghast at the "crocodile woes" of the Lagobellan people that swamp her own grief, "lifted her feet and floated". Sam mentions that the story is being told to the next generation, a few years after its climactic events. We look at Matthew Robins' cartoon montages which will run simultaneously with the Prologue. The golds and blues of Rae's set are echoed in the screen world and there is an especially eye-catching fragment where the lights in the windows of the Lagobellan skyline are extinguished in time with the individual notes in the musical score. When Piper refers to the wilderness, Marianne asks Matthew to include dragons inhabiting this area, so that each creative element of the production dovetails with the main story.

I rehearse with the actors playing the Lagobellan servants to explore the precise workings of the royal household. Each one has invented a name and duty within the palace: butler, kitchen maid, housekeeper, and even a member of staff who polishes and maintains the kingdom's gold reserves. We discuss their length of service and what the atmosphere was like when Althea's mother was alive and prosperity reigned. The rawness of their grief at Alexander's recent murder is emphasised when we improvise the return of his coffin to the palace. Tom Brady plays a mournful hymn on the piano and each servant takes a moment to pay their respects to the much-loved prince. We change the mood and devise preparations

for a grand banquet. A discernible hierarchy emerges, with David Langham's head butler taking calm and impeccably-mannered control. At the point where the King would enter the room, Tom plays the anthemic music used when the King is first introduced in the show, and the lyrics are endowed with great respect.

Marianne has invited the company to consider what present-day behaviour or condition they would find most troubling if a member of their family were to adopt them. Responses include having all-over body piercings; anorexia; occasions where a girl weighing only four stone, unable to enjoy life, thinks she is fat; and joining an extremist religious cult. With this in mind, we re-run the section of 'My Own Land', in which the servants follow the King into Althea's bedroom and catch sight of her for the first time in years. Reactions – a mixture of nausea, curiosity and disgust – are now less generalised and more convincingly delineated. David's butler even resorts to thrusting a gruesome-looking garden rake towards her in an attempt to bring her down to earth. Steven works on the idea of façade – ie private/public faces – and our sympathies are more directed towards the King when we see the Lagobellans' panic and desperation at facing an imminent attack from Sealand. They are made more vulnerable by having an heir to the throne who is unable and unwilling to feel the gravity of the situation. The song builds to a tremendously powerful conclusion, and Tori and Martin ask the Sealanders to boost the volume of their final sung lines so that the threat to the stricken Lagobellans is unmistakable.

Steven and Marianne work on the opening of 'Queen Material' in which King Darius pleads with his daughter to "step up" to her calling: she is after all "cut from mighty cloth". At this point, after 'My Fairy Story', Rosalie is still acro-balanced by Emma Norin. Steven asks Emma and the other acrobats to react to the eddies whipped up by Clive's movement as he paces around, by tilting and altering Rosalie's position accordingly. The driving tempo of the music is nicely brought out as the swishes of the king's cloak incite a kinetic and opposing response in the floating princess, who behaves completely irreverently. Sam gives Althea a provocative line during Darius' song, to rankle him further. Marianne pushes the actors to play the stakes of this battle of wills – Althea must feel cornered if we are to fully believe in her spur-of-the-moment decision to flee the palace.

The week draws to a close with a session on 'Sealand Supremacy', which Steven is re-shaping. He wants the number to feel grounded with crisp, sharp movements enacted by killing machines – nothing of the feel of "show-time".

Rehearsals: week four

The Costume Department and Armoury have provided armour and a host of weapons for the actors to trial as they fine-tune the choreography. Individual moves are tested out and any minor adjustments made. The ecstasy and recklessness of victory are conveyed and contemporary parallels discussed. Steven talks about the value of eyeballing Digby throughout the scene – the choreography looks immediately more visceral and dangerous. It makes for an arresting counterpoint to the cowering neediness of the Lagobellans. Martin ends by refining ‘Coronation’. The simple beauty of the music swells to a gorgeous choral finish, healing the rift between the warring kingdoms. I am once again struck by the diversity in the score which encompasses the battle, the chase and this haunting anthem.

We return to the silk movement in ‘Darkest Hour’. A slit has been made in the centre of the fabric towards which Rosalie slowly paces. After her final tolling

phrase “I feel light”, the actors around its edges lift the silk high into the air so that Althea is engulfed by the “water” and disappears momentarily from the audience’s view. Seconds later, a pair of actors lift only the front corners and she is revealed in this canopy, carried aloft by acrobats who have appeared imperceptibly – two of whom are now holding the weighted objects which grounded her as she made her bid for suicide.

The sequence is tightened, and Marianne and Rosalie ensure that Althea’s psychological shifts are precisely defined. It’s almost as if, once Althea is underwater, she abruptly changes her mind, and tries to push up from the lake bed to the surface. It is a starkly beautiful staging of something apparently “unstageable” – and the mood lightens considerably when Digby enters and finds a suddenly radiant princess, her gravity borne by the water. As he too wades and then dives in before reappearing next to Althea, a “calzone” effect is attempted with the puppeteers on the front corners running quickly upstage whilst the rear corners of the silk are brought over Nick and Rosalie’s heads to the front. The actors are enveloped. The rippling piano underscoring fits the aquatic moment perfectly, and I look forward to watching this expressionistic first act finale in the theatre once it has been refined and Paule Constable’s lighting helps tell the visual story.



Rehearsals: week five

The company travel to the hangar in Woolwich to develop the diverse elements which make up ‘Crash in the Universe’. The greater height and depth of the space enable better exploration of key sections: Digby climbing the ladder to hammer the dam wall; the pecking birds that attack Ignacio; the marching Sealand soldiers; the hounds chasing Digby; and Althea’s aerial charges through the wilderness now have space to breathe. Steven and Finn cut and reshape sequences, occasionally assigning different personnel to perform particular duties, based on the exigencies of costume changes and backstage traffic. Paul Rubin is also on hand to finesse the timings of Rosalie’s aerial “sprints” across the fabric walls and somersaults. The complexity of the split narratives – which would presumably be solved by “jump-cuts” in a cinematic version – means that the work is painstaking. Marianne examines each moment for audibility, clarity, momentum and psychological truth.

We end a long day with a smaller session on the build-up to the love duet ‘Althea’, which Marianne feels is arrived at too suddenly. Nick and Rosalie (on a wire) spend time improvising a first encounter between their two characters. Their dialogue, invented on the hoof, articulates Digby’s teasing curiosity and attraction to this strange creature, just as it emphasises Althea’s nervousness, fear and frustration at being toyed with by the Sealand prince. We film these improvisations and show them to Sam and Tori the next day.

More work is done on the storytelling in the lake section in the second half. Balance is sought between the lightness of the puppet creatures (the gaiety of the frogs, the appearance of a cygnet) and the main narrative where Althea and Digby’s relationship sours. Darting movements seem to pull the eye and mind away from the protagonists’ lyrics, so Finn moulds the puppet gestures into subtler motifs. There is still room however for glorious sexual abandon in the instrumental section, when the prince and princess disappear and copulate under the water – and the lake’s flora and fauna busily procreate too.

Sam and Tori have been inspired by the improvisations filmed in the hangar to come up with a pacy and exciting sequence called ‘Levity?’, which segues into ‘Althea’, bridging the gap more convincingly. The ‘Gravity’ theme is used as Digby puzzles out Althea’s lightness (“horizontal” or “rotational”, etc) and Althea has been given some punchy verses where she admits to being both thrilled and confused by her feelings for the prince. The actors are delighted with this new sequence and the quicksilver shifts of mood it allows them to navigate.

Marianne schedules a stagger-through of the whole show as it currently stands and the company rise to the occasion. Martin Lowe’s conducting accents proceedings beautifully. The creative team meet afterwards to discuss alterations and the road ahead as we approach the final week in the rehearsal room before we move to start the technical process in the National’s Lyttelton Theatre.

| Rehearsal Call | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Tuesday 3 rd September | | |
| Jerwood Space 7 | | |
| 9:00am | Acro Team Warm Up | Miss Norin Messrs Gwynn, Luther, Silva |
| 9:15am | Into harnesses | Miss Craig to join |
| 9:30am | Solution/Balcony float | As above |
| 10:00am | Physical Warm Up followed by Vocal Warm Up | Full Company except Miss Pitt-Pullford Messrs Fowler, Hendrix, Parry |
| 11:00am | Staging - #13 Not A Fairy Tale | As Above |
| 12:45pm | Puppet Call & Back to Back | Misses Booth-Steel, Bron, Craig, Carter, Parris Messrs Gwynn, Luther, Silva, Thompson |
| 1:45pm | LUNCH | |
| 2:45pm | Music Call - #32 Coronation & #11 Solution | Full Company except Mr Fowler |
| 3:30pm | Staging #5 Sealand Moon | Full Company except Mr Fowler & Mr Rowe |
| 5:00pm | Staging - #22 Nothing More Than This Part 2 | Full Company except Misses Pitt-Pullford Messrs Charlton, Fowler, Hendrix, Parry Phillipson, Rowe, Thompson |
| 6:45pm | SUPPER | |
| 7:15pm | Staging - #21 Tinkle, Drizzle... | Miss Craig Mr Hendrix |
| 8:45pm | CALL ENDS | |
| The Hangar | | |
| 10:00am | Ariel Call – Althea | Miss Street Mr Hendrix |
| 1:15pm | Travel to Jerwood | |
| Jerwood Space 6 | | |
| 5:00pm-6:45pm | Music Call | Mr Hendrix |
| Jerwood Space 2 | | |
| 12:15pm-1pm | Dialect Call | Mr Parry |

Rehearsals: week six

The week begins with a viewing of the latest version of Matthew Robins' footage. We watch as four vignettes are projected onto a makeshift screen and Marianne, Rae and Finn give pointers based on the interaction of this material with the work being done with the actors. Janice Heyes (Deputy Stage Manager) cues individual passages to coincide with specific musical phrases or scripted lines. In the animated sequence which conjures a backdrop to Piper and Llewelyn's Prologue, Marianne requests that the Lagobellan populace passing the late queen's grave should weep copiously, that the infant Althea's hair should be red and the height disparity between the little girl and her father should be more marked. Once these adjustments are made, the scenic story more neatly matches the textual one. At this stage in the rehearsal process, the team's notes tend to be about such details, fine-tuning every element and ensuring that the narrative is layered and forward-facing. Likewise, we look at the film to be projected behind the helter-skelter car journey in 'Queen Material'. Marianne and Matthew discuss the impression it gives of the wilderness, particularly the exact timing of the ghoulish eyes spied in the trees – which should correspond with the spooky music in the orchestral interlude prior to the dragon attack – and the striking blue lake which Althea chances upon.

The Light Princess benefits hugely from the synthesis between all the departments involved. Weekly production meetings provide an opportunity for heads of departments to update on their progress and keep the creative team briefed on any areas that require discussion. We learn at this week's meeting that the back-to-back harness designed for Althea's first appearance has been delivered. The device has been made-to-measure and will see Rosalie attached to one of our black-clad acrobats Nuno Silva, who will bear her weight as he climbs down the tall bookcase, ostensibly in response to Piper pulling the ribbon fastened to Althea's ankle. A safety team is on hand to oversee the initial attempts at this descent, and this element will be incorporated into each day's rehearsal call as well as the pre-show warm-ups, once the production is up and running. The effect is unique: we barely glimpse Nuno, drawn instead to the floating Althea singing to her father that she "won't go to hell". It makes for a truly arresting introduction to her character, and another ingenious example of the strength and versatility of the performers.

Steven adds some air-punching salutes for the Guards in the 'Bitter Fate' song in the second half where Ignacio reveals his scheme to bring about genocide in Lagobel. The glazed weariness with which Lady Delphine performs these hints at how disposable she already seems to the Sealand regime.

The lilies which are present in each of the animated and live sequences at the lake are also added to the 'Levity?'/Althea' sections to contextualise the lake's location. It also affords Marianne the opportunity to chart the burgeoning Althea and Digby relationship more forensically. We run the songs 'Scandal' and 'Drought', which share a melody and mark the waning fortunes of the Lagobellan people. Marianne reminds the actors about the importance of diction. None of these songs has been aired before, so we can't rely on the audience's familiarity with known material – we must be fresh with our thoughts.

Tori and Sam have been in attendance throughout, and are able to respond quickly to requests from Martin and Marianne. A new verse for the Falconer, willing Zephyrus to "call all of the birds in the sky" to come to Digby's aid has been composed and immediately becomes a bracing introduction to 'Crash in the Universe'. Laura Pitt-Pulford memorises the new music with commendable speed so that it can be incorporated into the next day's final rehearsed run-through, attended by the NT's Director and Executive Director and the teams who will be part of the imminent technical rehearsal period.

After the run, the company head to the National Theatre for the first time to join the Sitzprobe (the first occasion when the orchestra and singers join together to rehearse). It is exhilarating to hear the orchestrator John Philip Shenale's stunning orchestrations for the first time; they are full of exquisite touches and nuance. Each musical number is heartily applauded. It is a really fitting way to mark the transition of *The Light Princess* from the rehearsal room to the theatre – the familiar hooks of the piano lines help to bridge the gap between the two – and it feels like a good omen that Tori Amos' own Bösendorfer piano is here in pride of place.

Fit-up and Technical Rehearsals

A two-week snapshot of the production schedule for *The Light Princess*. Production Manager, Martin Barron, and Deputy Production Manager, Marty Moore, scheduled the pre-production, fit-up and technical rehearsal period

| The Light Princess Production Schedule | | Lyttelton Theatre v9 |
|--|---------------|---|
| Rehearsals / Pre-Prod | | |
| Wed 11/09/13 | 09:00 - 17:00 | Pre-Prod Lyttelton Stage and RR1 |
| Fit Up/Tech | | |
| Weds 11/09/2013 | ACD | Change over |
| Thurs 12/09/2013 | 09:00-13:00 | Fit Up |
| | 10:00 | |
| | 13:00-14:00 | Lunch |
| | 14:00-18:00 | Fit up |
| | 18:00-19:00 | Dinner |
| | 19:00-22:00 | Fit up |
| Fri 13/09/2013 | 09:00-13:00 | Fit up |
| | 13:00-14:00 | Lunch |
| | 13:00-17:00 | Partial Get Out Jerwood |
| | 14:00-18:00 | Fit up |
| | 18:00-19:00 | Dinner |
| | 19:00-22:00 | Fit up |
| Sat 14/09/2013 | 09:00-13:00 | Complete fit up |
| | 13:00-14:00 | Lunch |
| | 14:00-18:00 | Complete fit up |
| | 18:00-19:00 | Dinner |
| | 19:00-22:00 | Flying Mech Check |
| | 22:00-02:00 | Video Line Up & Animation Check |
| Sun 15/09/2013 | 10:00-13:00 | LX focus |
| | 13:00-14:00 | Lunch |
| | 14:00-18:00 | LX focus |
| | 18:00-19:00 | Dinner |
| | 19:00-22:00 | LX Plot / Sound Check / Video & Animation |
| | 22:00-01:00 | Overnight Sound Quiet Time |
| Mon 16/09/2013 | 08:00-09:00 | SEAR on Stage (rigging check) |
| | 09:00-13:00 | Flying Technical Rehearsal with Rosie |
| | 13:00-13:30 | Re-Set for Dry tech |
| | 13:30-14:30 | Lunch |
| | 14:30-18:00 | Dry tech scene changes |
| | 18:00-19:00 | Dinner |
| | 19:00-22:00 | Dry tech scene changes |
| Tue 17/09/2013 | 08:00-09:00 | Carps on Stage |

| The Light Princess Production Schedule | | Lyttelton Theatre v11 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Tue 01/10/2013 | 08:00-10:30 | Carps/Metal on Stage |
| | 10:00-10:30 | Re-Set |
| | 10:30-12:00 | LX Dark Time |
| | 12:00-12:15 | Photo Call |
| | 12:15-12:30 | Re-Set |
| | 12:30-13:30 | Lunch |
| | 13:00-14:00 | Bookcase (Back to Back) Rehearsal |
| | 14:00-17:00 | Notes on Stage (FTS) |
| | 17:00-17:55 | Re-Set for Preview 5 |
| | 17:55-18:55 | Dinner |
| | 18:55 | Half Hour Call |
| | 19:30-22:30 | Preview 5 |
| | 22:30-23:00 | Tech work as required/notes |
| Wed 02/10/2013 | 08:00-10:00 | Carps on Stage |
| | 10:00-11:00 | Aerial Session |
| | 11:00-12:00 | LX Dark Time / Sound Quiet Time |
| | 12:00-13:30 | Notes off Stage |
| | 12:00-12:30 | Re-Set for Afternoon Notes |
| | 12:30-13:30 | Lunch |
| | 13:30-17:00 | Notes on Stage (FTS) |
| | 17:00-17:55 | Re-Set for Preview 6 |
| | 17:55-18:55 | Dinner |
| | 18:55 | Half Hour Call |
| | 19:30-22:30 | Preview 6 |
| | 22:30-23:00 | Tech work as required/notes |
| | ACD | Paint Call (TBC) |
| Thur 03/10/2013 | 08:00-10:30 | Carps on Stage |
| | 10:30-12:00 | LX Dark Time / Sound Quiet Time |
| | 12:00-12:30 | Harness Fitting with Vivien & Phoebe |
| No V&P till 12:30 | 12:00-13:30 | Notes off Stage |
| | 12:00-12:30 | Re-Set for Afternoon Notes |
| | 12:30-13:30 | Lunch |
| | 13:30-16:45 | Notes on Stage (FTS) |
| | 16:45-17:00 | Aerial Refresher |
| | 17:00-17:55 | Re-Set for Preview 7 |
| | 17:55-18:55 | Dinner |
| | 18:55 | Half Hour Call |
| | 19:30-22:30 | Preview 7 |
| | 22:30-23:00 | Tech work as required/notes |
| | ACD | Paint Call (TBC) |
| Fri 04/10/2013 | 08:00-10:00 | Carps on Stage |
| | 10:00-11:00 | Aerial Session |
| | 11:00-12:00 | LX Dark Time / Sound Quiet Time |
| | 12:00-12:30 | Re-Set for Afternoon Notes |
| | 12:00-13:30 | Notes off Stage |
| | 12:30-13:30 | Lunch |

1. The fit-up and technical process for a show of this scale begins with Pre-Production days. These are scheduled before the actual stage fit-up to allow, in this case, for our stage departments to prepare and unload scenic elements into the theatre, ready to go on stage.

Following pre-production is Fit-Up. Led by the Production Manager, the aim of the fitup is to build the set, test any moving scenery and ensure the stage is ready for the actors. In the week starting 16 September, the Company were called into the theatre for technical rehearsals. The two main objectives during technical rehearsals are to allow the company to familiarise themselves with the set, and to rehearse any complicated changes with the technical team. It is also the point when the director and creative team make decisions about speeds and cueing of scenery, lighting and sound.

The complexities of this production required technical calls and work to continue right up to press night. The preview period for a Lyttelton or Olivier theatre production – the very first public performances leading to press night – normally runs for up to 8 performances. For *The Light Princess*, however, there were 12 preview performances, giving time to finesse the work.

Interview with Rosalie Craig, playing Althea

During preview performance week, leading up to press night, Paul Foster interviewed Rosalie Craig about her experience of working on *The Light Princess*.

You've been involved with the production for a number of years. How do you feel Althea has developed from the early workshops (even though in the very early ones you were playing a number of other parts?)

Sam, Tori, Marianne and Steven have really developed her. I think that her lightness early on was just surface level. Her laughter wasn't rooted in anything and it wasn't attached to a grieving process. She was a bit



one-dimensional and I think that was because they didn't really know what sort of character they wanted her to be. And then throughout the workshops I got to see lots of other people play the role, and watch other parts and try to feed in at different areas to try and make that character more interesting. You can't compare Althea from workshop one, to now – except in name only!

We started rehearsing in July 2013, but you've known you're playing this part for a good deal longer. Can you tell me about the physical preparations that you put in place long before rehearsals?

I remember going to watch one of the (two million) workshops that Marianne and Finn were holding with the acrobats, and she suggested then that I should go and train in something called Acro-yoga, which actually is not very 'yoga', it's more about the moves you see in the show, like side balances. That's such a huge discipline to try and learn in itself, plus also trying to learn aerial work. I had to train my entire body for – if I really count it up – probably a year and a half. It's a long time, isn't it!

I can't think of a single example of you saying I don't think I can try that, or I don't think that might work. You're so match-fit for this part, and for the full-on, time-pressured rehearsals that we've had. Do you feel that had Marianne not suggested putting your body through this training, it would have been much more of a struggle?

Yes, I also think that learning new skills like Acro-yoga or aerial work removes the fear before you get into the rehearsal room because you almost feel like you started rehearsing a long time ago. I think I went through all my fear and anxieties with those trainers. Then, I was just going home and thinking I can't do this! I literally can't get onto one of your feet!

You are talking here about something that happens in 'My Fairy Story' in the first act where Emma Norin, who is one of our acrobats, cradles you using the soles of her feet and hands.

It's a complete discipline that balance work, because you have to know it's a partnership; you have to know where to hold yourself when the other person moves a foot. You can't just lie there. Sometimes in performance, Emma will give me a signal with her foot so I know to hold my weight while she moves position.

And this is all completely imperceptible to the audience. We never clock those shifts...

Hopefully not! When I was training, I had no idea what they were, but I feel so grateful to learn that skill and also to know that my training has made all of the acrobats' lives easier. They don't have to teach me how to do it, they can turn up and do their job.

What are the challenges of singing whilst you are being put through all those cartwheels, being swung round by your back when you're in a harness, fighting dragons on stage, being turned upside

Interview with Rosalie Craig, playing Althea

down? It's the most breathtaking physical display that I think we might see on a musical stage. All the time you are singing difficult musical material. How do you find that, have you had to plot it out with the Musical Director?

I didn't ever sit down with Martin [Lowe] and say what shall we change, and what shall we do there? We knew quite early on in rehearsals which positions were the absolute no-goes. If you have to hold all of your body weight on your neck – they're the ones you can't do. We've totally worked out those things. There are certain moments in the show – like in 'Levity' in the first half – where there are a couple of moves that are really uncomfortable, but then they're gone. I have to think, As soon as I get through that, I am fine. I just approached it thinking, well, I bet ballerinas are uncomfortable! You would never know, would you?

Althea's journey across the show seems like an emotional maturing of a girl. What do you enjoy about playing that?

It's difficult to pick out. I find it more challenging to play the giggly aspect of her. I think I am naturally drawn to the darker side of it all. It is such a gift to be able to play a character who comes of age and the complexities that come with that. I suppose the human interactions she has are interesting, when she starts learning about how to interact with other human beings. At the beginning, she's very solitary and the scenes with Piper are lovely. It's us playing around really!

What do you think your sixteen-year-old self would have thought of Althea and her journey? Other people reading this interview might be English, Theatre Studies or Drama students.

I would have thought, that's me! I would have found her frustrating. In the writing and direction there's such a huge understanding of teenagers and the idea of having to thrash around within yourself in order to find who you are. I definitely went through that in spades. I hadn't a clue who I was, who I wanted to be – who ever does? – but I think I would really have identified with that. I also think I would have probably wanted some of her bravery and courage in order to say that was me, but that's not me any more.

It's a real rite-of-passage. I will never forget that moment in the rehearsal room where we pieced together the whole of the play, from start to finish. I found it so moving. Tori and Sam's score is a large factor. Do you still find it a moving journey?

I do, but less so now that I have to take it in sections. I am in survival mode up on stage. But I never struggle to cry at the end. What is so incredible with Tori's music is that it awakens things inside you. Having to suppress that for nearly two and a half hours, well... Thank goodness it comes out at the end!



Rosalie Craig (Althea) and Amy Booth-Steel (Piper)
Photo: BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Interview with Samuel Adamson

Can you tell me about the origins of the production, in terms of when your name became attached to it?

Well, the project started with Tori Amos, because she discovered this story, *The Light Princess* by George MacDonald. I think she went to a few different producers with the idea, but anyway she ended up at the National and they were very receptive. And obviously because they have a stable of writers, and people that they are working with, they said to her



that it would need a 'book' writer. I happened to be working at the theatre at the time, and they asked Tori to see my play *Southwark Fair*, which was on at the Cottesloe (renamed Dorfman in 2014). When we met, we got on very well, and began to talk a lot about the story and what we both wanted from it. Fundamentally we had to make sure we got on. It was Tori's idea to turn *The Light Princess* into a musical, but she didn't really know how to do it.

Have you been influenced by the title and a few core elements so as not to slavishly follow that original lyric poem? Or was there ever a 'beat-by-beat' version which MacDonald would recognise?

I don't think it was ever beat-by-beat. The thing with adaptation, especially with musical-theatre adaptation, is that on the whole you need to find a story that is going to work on stage. A dramatic story. George MacDonald's *The Light Princess* seems eminently adaptable, but we discovered that there are certain things in it that really don't lend themselves to a strong, recognisably contemporary female central character. That was the main problem. In the original

story she is quite passive – and that's hard to dramatise: passive characters don't really work on stage; characters need to want things. Early on we realised that George MacDonald's story was a springboard and an inspiration. There are still key themes from it in our story, and the central idea that the character has no gravity. Other things have remained in our piece in a residual way.

One of the big problems with the original story – although this was a discovery that took quite a long time to make – was that it is in fact a satire: it slightly sends up fairy tales in a very Victorian, elegant and witty way. It stands at a remove and makes fun of certain fairy-tale conventions. I started to do that in my work and Tori started to do that in her work as well. But we discovered that it wasn't very interesting: it's hard to make it really funny, and it's already been done quite a lot (for example, in a very sophisticated way in *Into the Woods*). It would be more courageous to just make a fairy tale. Open it up and honour it. So we abandoned a key element to the MacDonald, that satire of fairy tale. And in abandoning it we've gone to his other stories and to fairytales generally to create a very particular fairytale world, which we don't ironise in any way.

I think it's a Richard Rodgers' quotation where he answered the question 'which comes first, the book or the lyrics?' with 'well actually, the cheque!' Your credit is for the book (librettist) and lyrics (co-lyricist). If you drew a pie chart of the script and lyrics, are your words 50% or 20%, or does it differ from song to song? What's been your songwriting process? Where does Tori Amos end and Samuel Adamson begin?

The answer to that, hopefully, is that you can't quite see the beginning or the end!

It's complex in that there's no one answer. I have written a lot of the lyrics but Tori writes everything from a place of story, so she can't really compose without knowing who she is going to compose it for, what the kind of emotional narrative is and what the stakes are. Stakes are something that Tori has had to learn. In a pop song – the kind of work she's used to – you can spend three or four minutes in one emotional state and that can be very nourishing. On stage that doesn't work. The character needs to be in a different place at the end from where they were at the beginning: they have to change their perspective, momentum, dramatic action.

Sometimes with *The Light Princess* a melody existed that I have written lyrics to; sometimes I have re-written lyrics. Sometimes I have written lyrics to which Tori has written music. It has worked in all kinds of ways. There are two big sequences, 'Queen Material', and 'Nothing More Than This', where the lyrics came before the music, and yet they've become key musical sections. I would often find that sometimes I didn't have enough music and ask Tori for another verse. Nine times out of

Interview with Samuel Adamson, continued

10 she would say, I am not interested in just giving you another verse, this song is going to change...

You obviously have a good rapport with her – was that negotiated or instant? People who are reading this may realise that this piece has gone through quite a number of iterations. There have been workshops, from day-long to fortnight-long, and there have been readings, in a process over five years. Have you found that workshop process rewarding, heart-stopping or blood-letting? Or useful to you as a whole?

I think that is probably true of every musical that's been written. They are very difficult to get right, and very collaborative. Partly it's that Tori and I didn't know each other very well at the beginning – actually we needed to know each other and go through some disappointments, we needed to challenge each other, we needed to understand the story that we wanted to tell. We needed to kind of 'marry' each other – we make a joke that we are married, but it *is* sort of like a marriage!



We both have done other projects over those five years, so we've regularly had to put *The Light Princess* aside and come back to it with fresh eyes. I think that's quite different from the way Tori's normally worked: normally she would write a song and it would go on an album. With this, she's been asked and challenged to look at material in new ways, to look at a song and then maybe unpick it, to realise it doesn't work, to sometimes completely cut a song, write a whole new song for a new moment, or write a song to lyrics that I have written.

The workshops have been brilliant. Now we are in rehearsals, I can see the benefit of the workshops. They have tested the material, that's one thing – and we all feel we are telling the same story. Also some actors in the company took part in the workshops and it feels as if the show is in their blood, because they are calling on work that they have done in other contexts. In rehearsals they are slightly ahead of the game.

There was one workshop I didn't enjoy, because Tori and I weren't quite ready to be subjected to it. But even that, in hindsight, was a valuable process because we progressed and realised we had made certain mistakes. In that workshop, I realised that the show just didn't start in the right way at all. I went home and completely rewrote and restructured the opening number. Doing that was the beginning of a new way for Tori and me to work. So even when things were hard – as when we felt exposed when groups of creatives and actors rigorously tested our work – as long as we asked the right questions regarding story and characterisations, we learned and, hopefully, made the piece stronger.

Do you think *The Light Princess* has given you, as a dramatist and playwright, the appetite to explore the musical world?

It really has. Some people's natural response is to laugh when people break in to song, but I have always been fascinated by the idea that song can take story. I hope to work on musicals again, and I have a new-found appreciation for music in theatre.

Interview with Paul Rubin, Aerial Effects Designer

How did you become involved with the production?

I was working on a project called *The Little Mermaid* in Holland, and Toby Olié was the puppet designer. He talked to me about another project he was working on, but didn't say the name, only that they were putting the show together but were really not happy with the way the aerial work was progressing. A couple of days later, I showed him some of the videos I had made of my work, including an aerial adagio for *Peter Pan*, and he asked if he could show it to Marianne and Steven. The feedback was that they loved it, and it was exactly what they were looking for on *The Light Princess*: something where you could progress the story within flight. I had a couple of 'phone conversations with them and flew to the UK in October 2012 to see one of the last readings of the show and give them a presentation. And here I am!

Some of your work on this production is absolutely incredible. What was your brief? Were you told how it needed to look, what kind of language it needed to have?

No, I didn't get that. Tim Levy (NT producer based in New York) contacted me and talked through what they were trying to do with the production. The only information that I had, other than a script that was a year and a half old at this point, was Althea flying in the song 'Althea', in the first half – an aerial adagio number with ribbons, which is adding another element to a dance piece – and the fact that throughout the show, she was going to 'acro' in other positions, so it was not only flying that would make her float, there would be different elements. Somebody could pick her up, she could be passed on. Wire-work was yet another approach to the floating.

The ribbons – was this a first? You design and choreograph aerial for theatre projects, largely in North America. Have you ever used any of these other things, other than a wire?

I have done aerial fights. There is an element of combat in *The Light Princess*. When you stage a fight



Rosalie Craig (Althea) onstage with ribbons
Photo: BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

with someone flying, they are creating that illusion, they are making themselves do that. Whereas Althea has no control. You let go of her and she floats. When you throw her a staff or a knife or a spear, that weight brings her down. So I have to put that element into each flight. Why is she floating? Where is she floating? How do you get her down in the most realistic fashion?

It is quite a cocktail when you add that in, isn't it? You have to think the language through because from the start the audience have to buy into the idea that if there was no ballast, she would be up as far as the ceiling, as far as the stratosphere.

I actually played with a helium balloon to come up with some of the choreography, watching how the string to the balloon reacts with the balloon movement and how, if you take a balloon and throw it, it only goes a small distance before arcing and going straight up. However, when you put some weight on it, it carries further. Obviously the heavier the weight it would carry then it would go down, or carry, then go slowly, slowly up.

What is your background? It's quite a niche thing that you do for a living. How did you come to it?

I was majoring in theatre under Tech and Performance. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to do stage work or be a performer. A friend of mine was the secretary for a company called Flying by Foy, which has a sister company in the UK. Peter Foy had worked for a company called Kirby AFX, which used to be Kirby Flying (George Kirby taught Nina Boucicault how to fly in the first production of *Peter Pan* in 1904 at the Duke of York's Theatre) – and I had an interview with him, because they were looking for a young college kid to fix equipment when it came back broken. He was impressed with my theatrical background, and the fact that I was a magician and know how to do illusions. He asked me instead whether I would be interested in going out on the road and choreographing flying sequences! I was his protégé for eight years.

Your work blends with that of others in *The Light Princess*: you can't really see where one ends and another begins. You have been working closely with Steven Hoggett, the movement director and choreographer of this production. What has been your experience of that kind of collaboration?

Steven is more hands-on than a lot of the other choreographers I have worked with but I think we have got really good team-work going. I produce all of the flying sequences, I put all of the flying elements in how I see them, and Steven finesses them and adds more movement. He has been involved with the production a lot longer than I have: I have only been around for 13 or 14 months and he has been around for 5 or 6 years. He knows more about the narrative and the dramaturgy around those sequences. He is able to help me with that form of how and why. They have figured out a certain combination of things to weigh Althea down. An orb doesn't quite do it. A crown doesn't quite do it. But an orb, a crown and a sword together do. Steven knows all that maths and he worked on that with me so that we could put together something we are happy with.

Interview with Paul Rubin, Aerial Effects Designer

There was a production of *Barnum* in Chichester in summer 2013 and I think the producer, Cameron Mackintosh, said that *Barnum* is one of the hardest roles – if not *the* hardest – in musical theatre, because the actor has to sing, dance, act, and walk the tightrope. Now I am thinking of Rosalie Craig, who is playing Althea in this production, and her understudies Vivien and Phoebe, and how hard it has been for them as actors and musical theatre performers to learn a completely new skill. It's not something that they are taught at drama school. They have picked it up quite quickly. We have spent a really long time in pre-production. During Week Zero at the hangar, we put together sequences working on body control. Body control is to make your body look as if you are actually in control of the flight that you are doing. Now Althea is floating, but to make it look as natural as possible, she has to react to air, and to her 'floatability'. We have to make this person look as if they actually had this issue: how to move your arms and how to react.



Every action has an equal opposite reaction; so when Althea starts to float across, what does her body do? We worked on those elements to make the movement look as natural as possible.

Now to backstage. What is the flying mechanism? It is controlled by someone in the wings who the audience hopefully won't ever see.

Hopefully! The operators are positioned stage right, so if you are looking from the audience, they are on the left; if you are on stage, they are on the right. They have two axes – one up-and-down axis, and a left-to-right axis. They work in tandem, kind of like an Etch-a-Sketch! If you turn one knob you see a line go one way; turn another knob and they go horizontal: you draw the picture. These operators are doing the same thing essentially: they are telling Rosalie what to do.

What you are avoiding is any sense of jerkiness in the flight. It all seems very smooth.

I designed the system – a track – which pretty much looks like a regular curtain track, with a trolley on it. The trolley has wire and the operators control the trolley in its location left and right, and the wire controls up and down.

One of the issues that Steven was running into in the workshops was that they could never make it look like Althea was actually floating. She never looked weightless or fighting gravity, it looked very laboured. I went very low tech with this system. In *The Little Mermaid*, thirteen people fly and the system is fully automated – one person pushes a button and four people fly. Technology is just amazing. But with *The Light Princess* we have a manual system, and I ended up counterweighting the lift line to just less than what the performer weighs. That way, if she is standing on the ground and she pushes up, she will actually push herself up and then gradually descend. We have to have a bit of control, but the way the operator manipulates the wires makes it look like she just takes off and can go on forever.

Exploring two kingdoms

SEALANDERS AND LAGOBELLANS

Highlighting the contrasts between the two kingdoms that make up the world of *The Light Princess* was always going to be a crucial part of any effective storytelling. Marianne devoted the Thursday morning of the first week of full company rehearsals to discussion and improvisation work with a view to developing an understanding of what the tone and atmosphere in each place might be, and what made the people who lived there tick. We looked at the large coloured map of the kingdoms “divided by a wilderness of emerald” and noted the coastline, size and geographical features which Rae Smith had drawn. On two large pieces of paper, Marianne encouraged the cast to think of words that might be associated with Sealand and Lagobel. Below are some of the contributions:

SEALAND

Canada. Nautical. Salty. Busy. Fast. Fish. Seagulls. Fountains. Tar. Industrious. Systematic. Regimented. Rainy. Dictatorship. Militaristic. Eastern bloc. Brainwashed. Cold. Controlled. Self-sufficient. Practical. Hard Wind. Fighters. Brutal. Foggy. Male-dominated. Machine-like. Rigid.

LAGOBEL

Kenya. Tropical. Dry. Introspective. Arid. Opulent. Siesta. Landlocked. Slow. Spices. Colours. Cicadas. Camels. Adornments. Call to prayer. Opium smoking. Bling. Feudal society. Royalist. Fiery. Extremity of emotion. Tanned. Healthy. Artistic. Flowing robes.

Marianne reminded us that the fairy-tale world was era-less. With that in mind, our imaginations were liberated and we talked about codes of conduct that might operate in the two kingdoms and what Darius’ and Ignacio’s ruling styles might be. A system of Salic law appeared to prevail in both lands, with kings waiting for sons to mature and be trained to lead the kingdoms in both war and peace-time. It was useful to bear in mind the primacy of Alexander and Digby to the future of Lagobel and Sealand respectively. The assassination of Lagobel’s heir would cause havoc and set the wheels of the plot in motion.

Rae and Lynette Mauro (Costume Supervisor) had arranged for a wide variety of potential Sealander and Lagobellan costumes to be brought into our largest rehearsal space. The Sealand rails were full of stiff blue jackets with nautical braiding, trousers and bicorn hats, pointed Viking-like helmets and armoured breastplates, as well as tables laid with pikestaves and clubs. Lagobellans could choose from a brighter palette of greens, golds and crimsons – harem pants, plumed headgear, sandals and loose, flowing garments, expensively decorated.

The company were then randomly split into two groups and given a few minutes to choose some garments to wear. Once they had done this, Steven asked the ones dressed in Lagobellan clothes to walk around the space and make eye contact with their fellow people, gradually exchanging greetings and pleasantries. The pace was languorous and slow and some of the company used fans or the brims of their sunhats to cool themselves. The environment seemed to promote ready smiles which echoed the warmth of the climate. A series of tableaux for a pretend official photographer were created and the groupings similarly showed pride as well as a comfort in the surroundings, one or two of the actors reclining languidly on the floor, laid low by the heat.

The people dressed as Sealanders took their turns next, and began to occupy the space with deliberate, kinetic movement. Umbrellas were deployed and the tempo was fast-paced with a determined populace on purposeful journeys. The interaction was civil but not ingratiating; emotions seemed too hemmed-in by their regimented costume; there was no need to indulge in any small talk. The formal portraits appeared antiquated: people with inscrutable facial expressions, standing to attention.

Steven then asked each actor to choose one of the assorted weapons and engage in a “slow-motion battle” with the enemy. All this would be underscored with mood music. Whilst some of the exercises were purely motivated by play, certain elements would come to infuse specific onstage moments, such as the vanquishing of the remaining Lagobellans at the start of “Sealand Supremacy”. The Lagobellans seemed to be caught off guard and soon found themselves to be no match for the marauding Sealanders. The jubilant side celebrated heartily amidst a sea of their slaughtered enemies: “the golden army dead”. Marianne then suggested that the Sealanders explore gradations of heightened behaviour by factoring in increased alcohol levels after their amazing defeat of the Lagobellans. The



Exploring two kingdoms

behaviour that had originally been striking for its stern, buttoned-up reserve began to unravel into rowdy merry-making, the soldiers becoming more tactile and uninhibited until they either began to fornicate, plunder valuables from the corpses, incite in-fighting amongst themselves or drink enough to blearily pass out. It was fascinating to observe the tangible change in them which undermined all our preconceptions.

In the final improvisation, Steven asked Hal and Clive as the opposing Kings to preside over a wedding party between members of each kingdom. The groups began by eyeing each other from either side of the room before taking tentative steps to close the gap. The tonal shift was perceptible as former sworn

enemies started to manufacture a new opinion of the other; objects and garments were swapped. People resolved to be best friends or lovers – or agreed to disagree. The Lagobellan king even found a moment to discreetly buttonhole a Sealand maiden and subtly leave to continue their bonding elsewhere. With one eye on the climactic Coronation sequence from the show where the erstwhile opponents exchange flowers and garlands, Marianne asked the actors if the reality was a surprise – were the people who they thought they would be? Much of the drama is founded upon insidious mutual scaremongering that has affected each generation – it was invigorating to see how costume could play a key role in the revelation of this theme.



Top: Rae Smith's map of the kingdoms, above left: The Lagobellans; above right: The Sealanders
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