

In July, the Globe renewed its acquaintance with 'original pronunciation', this time in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. There were three events: an introductory exploration of OP, an evening of songs and sonnets, and a production of *Macbeth* in the Read not Dead series. Master of Pronunciation **David Crystal**, and Master of the Events **Ben Crystal** reflect on the experience.

HOW DID IT SOUND TO YOU?

David: This was a first for me on many levels. We were able to explore OP in a much wider variety of settings than ever before. I'd never heard Shakespearean OP in song, for instance. Or heard regional accents in OP – crucial for the four-captains scene in *Henry V*. Nor had I ever heard it in such an intimate space. And I think it was a first for you, too, Ben?

Ben: Absolutely. It was a first for OP, a first for the SWP, and a first (for 400 years) for Shakespeare. For the *Macbeth* reading, we spent delicious hours exploring how and where we might hang the chandeliers for each Act, what kinds of new stagecraft we'd have to learn for this new-old space, how this new-old sound would make us move differently around that stage, and how we might fuse our 'two hours' traffic' cut of the text with this flickering, shimmering theatre.

David: It is such an intimate space. The speeches felt like conversations with the audience. And I think this made the actors much more aware of the phonetic properties of the OP. They got their tongues around it in a way that I'd never heard before – dwelling on the vowels longer, for instance. I'm thinking of moments like Siward's 'Advance the war' towards the end of the play. (In OP, 'war' is pronounced with the same vowel as in modern 'star'). He relished that more open sound, with its following sounded *r*, and I must say it made my skin prickle. But the entire company produced the best quality OP I've ever heard. I suppose that's a natural outcome of working with the kind of ensemble you've brought together?

In *Macbeth*, the audience immediately noticed the way the rhymes actually work in the opening scene, with *heath* rhyming with *Macbeth*.

Ben: I definitely hoped that would be the case. I've been steadily building the ensemble over the last few years, and they're refining a number of skill-sets, OP being one of them. The other skills – a physical methodology I've adapted from Lecoq, a familiarity with the benefits and hindrances of the First Folio, and using cue-scripts in rehearsal – all are there to emulate

or reiterate a new version of the old ways of working.

David: So an all-round original practices company then?

Ben: With updated twists (like male and female members), yes. There's a commonly encountered misunderstanding about

Original Practices – the idea that there's nothing to be gained from them, that they're 'artifactual' experiments. It's understandable, but just as we needed linguists to decipher the Rosetta Stone, as well as archaeologists, so too we'll learn an incredible amount by hitting Shakespeare's works with the right tuning fork, as it were, and these are all the right elements, albeit with natural, inherently modern twists. So what if the main house at the Globe is too wide, or the stage too high, or the Wanamaker has some poor sightlines, or the Folio has some errors? A reconstruction of Shakespeare's theatres, the use of the Folio, and now particularly the exploration of Original Pronunciation bring us all as close to his primary aesthetics as we'll ever be able to get, and we've plenty to learn from them.

David: I keep learning all the time, with every play I explore. We're not the first to think that an OP perspective can illuminate a line, of course. That's been part of critical awareness for a



OP *Macbeth* in performance. Photo Anne-Marie Bickerton



The company. Photo Aslam Percival

century. But those early editorial observations were sporadic, and they need to be supplemented by a systematic examination of every word in every line in every play. So, for instance, in *Macbeth*, the audience immediately noticed the way the rhymes actually work in the opening scene, with *heath* rhyming with *Macbeth*. And this suits the mood very well, as whatever else witches do, they certainly rhyme! Similarly, at the end of the play, OP solves the final couplet which has given actors angst for generations as they wrestle with the name *Scone*. The fact that *one* was pronounced 'ohn' removes the problem. In the talkback after the play, these seemed to be some of the most appreciated points.

Ben: What were the stand-out moments for you, over the 10 days?

David: For me, it was the way the ensemble produced such a consistent OP. Often, especially when a company has had little time for accent-coaching, there are noticeable differences among the cast. Not so here. And as a result, people bounced their lines off each other in exciting ways. What about you?

Ben: The somewhat show-stopping 'Hey Nonny Nonny' and 'Come Away Death' in the Songs and Sonnets night, and the Captains scene in the first night, are up there.

David: I found the unison effects (as in the three witches' scenes and the sung choruses of 'Hey Nonny Nonny') electrifying.

Ben: And the change when the actors finished speaking the Willow scene from *Othello*, and the musicians stepped in to sing the song again with harp and fiddle, was pretty magical.

David: I think we got our priorities right. I was delighted to hear, in the audience talkback – and to read, in later online review comments in social media – that people talked mainly about the freshness and impact of the production, and saw the OP as a means of achieving that.

Ben: There were plenty of moments in the first two events when you could feel the OP sound start to really hum, but you're right – the 1hr 45mins of *Macbeth*, where it really got to spread its wings – now that was something. Aided, I think, by the familiarity of the play, to hear it in relatively unfamiliar sounds. So yes, to hear people say they saw *Macbeth* in a new light, as it were, was terrific.

David: That's the way it should be: the OP –

Ben: – all original practices –

David: – indeed, are a means to an end, not ends in themselves. As ever, the play's the thing.

David Crystal OBE is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor. His books include *Shakespeare's Words* (with Ben Crystal) and its accompanying website www.shakespeareswords.com, *Pronouncing Shakespeare* and *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*.

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