**Music for The Plantagenets trilogy**

Sometime In late 1986 I was asked by Guy Woolfenden, the then Director of Music at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon- Avon, if I would like to write the music for forthcoming productions of some of the Shakespeare History Plays. As I was then a full-time academic at Goldsmiths College in London, I had to think long and hard about the time involvement for such a project; but having had a supportive response from my Head of Department by means of being offered a sabbatical, I responded positively to the invitation and duly arranged to meet with the director, Adrian Noble (later to become Artistic Director of the RSC). We got on well, and the commission was offered and contract signed; but I could not have possibly imagined what a long and exhaustive (nay exhausting), but ultimately highly satisfying, project it would turn out to be.

The so-called *Plantagenets Trilogy*was actually a compilation, or contraction, of four history plays into three: Henry VI parts 1, 2 & 3 and Richard III. Adrian Noble’s solution to the ‘problem’ of the many battle scenes in these plays, was to ask for music to underscore the action, rather in the manner of a film. However, I had to be inventive in the means of achieving this without resorting to endless bugle calls and drum ‘rifts’. Part of the answer came through composing a number of ‘leitmotifs’, which would tie the action together in a unified manner, and ultimately make some sort of cohesive sense by the end of the cycle (in this sense the solution was Wagnerian). The other solution was to have all twelve or so RSC musicians on stage for the really big battle scenes, representing the ‘war machine’ in a particularly visceral manner (drums of all kinds and metal percussion). The sonic world that the audience experienced visually and aurally when the musicians appeared through the ubiquitous dry ice, was truly mind-blowing!

There are also many poignant moments in these plays, and it was good to be able to write expressively to mirror the emotions of the action on stage. Scenes such as ‘At the Welsh Court’ and 'The Death of Henry VI’ were memorable in this sense. Adrian Noble understood the power of music to express emotions when words are not able to, and he gave me considerable license to create such moments. However, in the end, the one thing a composer working in the theatre has to understand is that the Director is God! So when it comes to technical rehearsals, for example, if a scene has to be cut or extended, the composer has to fulfil the musical responsibility of such re-arrangement of his material, quickly and efficiently, and without tears for lost musical treasures!

The experience in Stratford was deeply rewarding. In all, I had to write over an hour’s worth of actual music, and attend countless rehearsals before the first night. The cast of actors - all the way from Ralph Fiennes as Henry VI, David Calder as Richard Plantagenet, Anton Lesser as Richard III, Penny Downey as Queen Margaret, and so on - were outstanding; the production team of Adrian Noble (director) Bob Crowley (sets and costume designs) Chris Parry (lighting) visionary... the thrill of those productions live on in my memory!

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