



Interview Transcript

Shalisha James-Davis

Rona Kelly: We're here this morning with Shalisha.

Shalisha James-Davis: Hi!

RK: We have some questions from our wonderful audiences who'll be coming in. What was your experience of Romeo and Juliet or Shakespeare at school?

SJD: At school...yes, I did it later on, in secondary school. But it was very basic and I guess we always saw it as a love story turned into a tragedy and that's as far as we went in terms of unpacking Shakespeare.

And I always kind of found it so kind of boring, because I never understood any of it really. I wasn't heavily into poetry then and I was like, "Why can't he just use normal language? Why are we studying this when we could be studying a play that we actually understand?" So yes, I grew up not really being into it, and then when I knew that I wanted to be an actor I was like, "Right okay, I definitely don't want to do Shakespeare!" Because of my experience in school of Romeo and Juliet. But as I got older and I had to study it when I was training to be an actor, I had to really just put all those sort of preconceptions of it and my experience of it before that to the side and actually like unpack it. And I find it so exciting, it's so like the complete opposite experience now.

RK: And now you're performing Shakespeare at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre!

SJD: Yes, which is crazy! I mean I'd done a show of Romeo and Juliet before when I was training. And I played Juliet which was crazy, because I never thought I'd be cast as Juliet being a black actress and that, and not really really having anybody to really look up to in that sort of sense. And I always thought that I could play maybe like Mercutio or the Nurse, I always thought just let me audition for the Nurse because that's like a safe bet. So when I was asked to play Juliet, I was like, "What?!" And so that was great and to explore her. Our Romeo and Juliet at school was set in the 50's, so it was very kind of like sexy and loud and big and so when I came to find out that I was doing Romeo and Juliet on the actual Shakespeare stage, the Globe, that was like incredible. Because it was a story that I know quite well, after doing it at drama school and to play like Benvolio which is traditionally a male character. I was so excited, it's like a dream. I remember like two years ago sitting outside the Globe being like, "Oh my gosh! Wouldn't it be insane to be there...yes, maybe when I'm like 50!" So yes, it's really exciting.

RK: Had you seen anything at the Globe before?

SJD: Yes, I saw...it was the last play that Emma Rice did here actually, the Cymbeline...



Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank

RK: Imogen.

SJD: Imogen! And that was insane, I came with the cast of R&J that I did previously so when I was actually training. And I was standing, which I think is like the best thing to do when you come to the Globe...I mean to be fair, I haven't actually had a seat! But I've only stood, so I can only say that. But it was just so cool and vibrant and I was like, "Is this actually even Shakespeare?" The way that I could understand it and follow it and just how some of the actors were in the pit with us, that was just like crazy. I had never been in a performance like that before, where I could almost touch the actors...although you're not allowed to do that! But yes, so that was amazing. And seeing a lot of actresses that look like me on that stage as well, which was just so lovely and it was very accessible, I found.

RK: And now, these kids are going to come, stand there and see you guys perform on the stage. You can kind of appreciate it from both angles then.

SJD: Absolutely, absolutely. Because I remember it so clearly, watching a show on the Globber [stage] and it wasn't that long ago either. But it looking so huge, but actually we've been on the stage already to take in the space and it is as huge as it looks. Sometimes when you go on a stage you're like, "Oh it's not actually that big from like looking at it". But actually, it is a huge space. And I think when I was younger, when I was like 15 or 16, going to the theatre was quite accessible for me, I feel like quite privileged. It was an interest of mine of course, like my brother didn't care about going to the theatre, I obviously [did]. And my Mum would take me to the Nottingham Playhouse and to the Nottingham Theatre Royal, which is obviously where I'm from. And I'd see shows and a lot of pantos mainly when I was that age, but the costumes and the lights and the music, especially when it's music that I recognise. It feels very much more accessible and I think the Globe does that really well too.

RK: Well we can't wait to hear how your journey on that stage progresses, and we'll look forward to talking a bit more about Benvolio and what you're discovering in our next catch up.

SJD: Amazing!