



Interview Transcript

Ayoola Smart

Rona Kelly: We're back with the Queen of Cats herself.

Ayoola Smart: Hello!

RK: We are now in the first week of performances.

AS: Yes.

RK: How's everything been going?

AS: It's been very intense, going from tech to open is always a crazy period in any show. But there's a lot of technical stuff that we had to do, there's lots of physical aspects to the show so it was really great to get up on to the stage and to play the space and see what that was like. And then going into the first audiences and to get a response from the crowd always lifts and changes the play again in its own way.

RK: And we've got some questions from our wonderful hosts who've been putting them to you.

AS: Good!

RK: So, thinking about tech week and the first couple of performances, they'd love to know...

Students: How did you feel before the first performance? And how did you feel after it?

AS: Oh, well...before, as many actors will probably tell you, I get terrible stage fright. So just before going on, there's this build up and you're all running around saying good luck and I've got a little ritual that I do before every show to like calm me down and centre me and stuff. When the show starts and it's just before going on stage, I feel sick to tell you the truth and very excited but sick.

And then afterwards, just a huge buzz and release and it's an incredible feeling. Very euphoric and like you want to do it again straight away.

RK: This is your first time playing a male character at Shakespeare's Globe, and they had a couple of questions about that...

Students: How did you feel playing a male character? Did you feel comfortable?

AS: Um, yes I do feel comfortable. Because I think historically speaking in a lot of plays, they are male dominated. But there's nothing in them that would suggest that they have to be a certain gender. And I think especially with classic plays when you start opening that up and looking at who the character is and what their qualities are and what makes them them, it's very rarely their gender. And so it brings an opportunity to really explore and get to stretch into different roles.



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Students: How did you change your traditionally male character into a girl?

AS: So our Tybalt is female, so in the play also we have changed some pronouns as well and she is a girl. Again in quite a lot of classic plays (not all), the female characters aren't often as fully-fleshed as the male ones. So it's really nice. And especially with Tybalt, because she is so fun to play because you don't often get female characters again that are all about fighting or all about honour and front-foot[ed] and violence. And enjoying violence as well.

Students: Did you have to dress as a male?

AS: I'm wearing very awesome leather trousers. But that's not to suggest that I'm playing a male character. It's just because girls wear trousers.

RK: And one of the best things about your costume for me is the knuckle duster.

AS: Yes! So I didn't actually get the final version until tech, so until two days before the first performance. So I was very excited/nervous, because I had no idea what it was actually going to be like. And we had a couple of versions and was just like this giant claw that went out, straight out. And we realised it probably wasn't that practical!

RK: I just imagine a massive Wolverine claw!

AS: It was! But it wasn't curved either so it just went straight, poker out. So we've kind of like trimmed it back to the claw. But I love it, because it really plays into Queen of Cats and her kind of attack. She's a striker and I like that.

Students: What reactions have you had from the audience?

AS: So the first show with schools, I came out and everyone just started whooping and making loads of noises. But that was very overwhelming because it was so loud and I just didn't expect it. So I had to really struggle not to corpse and smile and be like, "Thank you, thank you so much!" And remember it's for the character, not me!

But it's been a mix. I was always wondering how audiences would respond to the fact that I kill Mercutio. Would they see me as the enemy? Would they want to be on side with me and stuff? And I think it's been a little mix of both, but I think I've been nicely surprised by how many people are on my side actually.

RK: And then kind of to round off, have you had any favourite moments from the last week of performances?

AS: I think a funny moment's always when Chris [Chung] comes down through the sky in the helicopter, because I'm dead and the audience always starts laughing and looking at him. And I have to just really try and maintain being dead and not breathing!



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And I get people at the side near me whispering to me and being like, "Tybalt, Tybalt, Tybalt! I can you're breathing!" And I'm trying to not be like, "Yes, it's because I'm not actually dead".

RK: "Don't tell anyone!"

AS: But it's all been pretty great so far, and there's some nice backstage moments as well. Especially when it's cold and we're all huddled up and they put blankets and hot water bottles backstage for us, so we're coming off and like wrapping ourselves up. It's really nice.

RK: Well thank you so much for chatting to us today.

AS: Thanks for having me.

RK: And we'll probably catch up with you right in the last week.

AS: Wow, it's already going to quickly. It's mad.

RK: I know, it's crazy!

AS: It's my birthday in like two weeks, so I'm very excited.

RK: The perfect way to round off the show then, isn't it?

AS: Yes, I'll be doing a matinee so I'll make sure I go out and be like, "Everyone sing happy birthday to me!"

RK: The Capulet party scene is because it's going to be Tybalt's birthday! Exactly.