

Q&A BETWEEN PAUL CREWES & EMMA RICE

TAKING THE JOURNEY: AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR EMMA RICE

Wallis Artistic Director **Paul Crewes** rang up his friend and collaborator **Emma Rice** about the upcoming Kneehigh and Bristol Old Vic production of *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk*, about the romance between Marc and Bella Chagall, running February 23- March 11, 2018.

PAUL: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art recently held a blockbuster exhibit featuring Chagall's designs for theatre and opera. What do you think owes to Chagall's ongoing popularity?

EMMA: There is something so personal, sensuous and seductive about Chagall's work. The colours are intoxicating and his magical, detailed and surprising subjects seem to dart around your heart, mind and soul. The worlds he creates capture another life and a time that I wish I could visit. His painting allow to do this. They welcome us into this lost and precious world. Green cows and flying Rabbi's, intimate kisses and airborne brides; he fills the canvas with dreams, and we all want to share them. His mind was brimming with wonder and it would take the hardest heart not to long to jump into Chagall's world, to fly up and look down through his unique eyes. This universal joy and possibility is his enduring popularity.

PAUL: *The Flying Lovers of Chagall* began performances in London this week, after critically-acclaimed runs in Bristol and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where the show won the Carol Tambor Best of Edinburgh Award. How does the 20th century story of Marc and Bella Chagall's marriage relate to 21st Century audiences?

EMMA: There is the love story of course - two young people, brilliant, ambitious and fearless set out on an adventure together. Who doesn't respond to this intimate narrative as we watch them negotiate life, art, children and politics? But then there are the historical parallels. We see them compelled to flee time and time again; they are refugees, forced out of their homes and never allowed back. They experience the brutality of war, the destabilising force of revolution and the personal pain of anti-semitism and hatred. I am moved by this piece every time I watch it, but my tears come for different reasons. I cry for Marc and Bella and their precious love, I cry for their loss of home and of each other and I cry for all the people of their generation that lived through, and survived so much. It is a humbling and resonant piece, and very easy to draw modern parallels as we again watch new communities forced to leave their homes in fear of their lives.

PAUL: The original version of *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* was performed as *Birthday* by Theatre Alibi in 1992. How has the show - and your relationship to the work - changed over the last 25 years?

EMMA: I think the writer Dan Jamieson and I have grown up alongside this piece. Originally we were both in it and, like Marc and Bella, were filled with the romance of life. I associated strongly with Bella; in those days I often felt hidden and frustrated as an artist and loved pouring all my creative energy into this piece created with my friends and colleagues. Then, over the many years when this piece was lost, I began to associate more with Marc. Hidden no more, I began to think about the cost of being an artist to both oneself and the people around you. When Dan and I returned to it, it was re-written extensively. Since we had performed it, several large Chagall pieces from the Jewish Theatre had been discovered and this gave Dan a new focus for the later scenes of the play. We allowed Marc and Bella to mature and to be more complex. We went deeper politically and emotionally and theatrically, I was able to use all the craft I have developed in the last 25 years to full effect. It has been a privilege and a learning curve. I am just thankful that I was able to make this journey with Dan, Marc and Bella by my side!

