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Rose Revitt Wins with Robe at The Stage Debut Awards 2020

Robe proudly sponsored the 'Best Designer' category of this year's The Stage Debut Awards which was won by set and costume designer Rose Revitt for the raw, edgy, visceral visual environment she created for "Dr Korczak's Example" at Leeds Playhouse which was staged in January / February.

The Stage Awards celebrate the very best breakthrough talent in theatre, including actors, directors, designers, writers, composers and lyricists making their professional debuts in the past year, so works made after August 1st 2019 were eligible and the competition was extremely stiff!

For Rose, this particular journey started with another prize-winning opportunity. Last year, she won the biennial Linbury Prize for Stage Design which offers 12 emerging designers the chance to work with some of the UK's leading theatre, opera, and dance companies.

Newly graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff with an MA in Design For Performance (set & costume specialty), Rose applied for the Linbury Prize with her portfolio and as one of the 12 finalists, was linked up with Leeds Playhouse who gave her and two other designers a brief for "Dr Korczak's Example".

The Leeds Playhouse team chose Rose's dramatic bombed-out, rubble-strewn set concept from the three options, and with a short lead-time, this challenging heart-warming yet bitterly realistic work in the time of the holocaust was realised and staged in February 2020.

This turned out to be exceptionally fortunate timing, just before the pandemic hit and shut down theatres nationwide and the actual turnaround time from drawings, photos and model box visualisation to full stage realisation was only a few weeks, galvanising all involved in the production.

Set in 1942 during the final days of an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto, the emotive and enduring true story reveals the stark choices of Polish educator and children's author Dr Janusz Korczak, who champions the rights of young people already leading tough lives in a time of war, intolerance, hate and totalitarian rule.

The work addresses numerous moral dilemmas about the values that Dr Korczak is teaching the young people around him, all trying to survive a world with odds stacked against them.

The design was for the Bramall Rock Void, an exciting, completely new, contemporary and fully flexible space at Leeds Playhouse with exposed brick and rock walls that Rose found a huge inspiration for her fragmented rubble and debris strewn world which set the scene for the action to unfold.

This symbolic architecture helped tackle conundrums like how to represent hundreds of children and the larger world in a design and introduce motifs, dolls and other objects, props and treatments to assist the narrative and humanise the characters and their situation.

"It needed a dignified response and there were many joyful aspects of the show, but I also didn't want to shy away from the underlining destruction and seriousness of the piece," and doing this with elegance made it all the more difficult to replicate the true horror of the outcome.

Rose found it hugely challenging and simultaneously invigorating to design, and enjoyed working with director James Brining, who is also artistic director of Leeds Playhouse.

She fully appreciates how lighting "can make or break both the illusion and the reality of a story and the way your set and costume designs look and work," so collaborating closely with the LD is something she thinks is "essential" and always strives for.

In this case, the lighting designer was Jane Lalljee, and the experience was "fantastic". Rose and Jane spent time meticulously crafting sinister moody looks and rearranging shards of wood and furniture to create dramatic spikey shadows and texturing on the brick walls.

The start of Rose's design process will always involve lots of sketching, drawings, and model box work in which she always includes colouring and light, "lighting definitely adds another layer of magic," she confirms.

Apart from working on this stimulating production, Rose, who comes from Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire, was also delighted to be working for a local company.

Before Rose studied in Cardiff, she was based at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester and trained as a technician and producer for their Young Company which fuelled her interest in stage architecture, set design and visuals.

She had the chance to work on many experimental productions in numerous different formats like in the round, traverse, etc and also worked on some exciting and ground-breaking site-specific projects including as assistant producer on "Mixtape" a gig style presentation designed by Khadija Raza which fused multiple performance styles and narratives.

Winning The Stage Debut Award for “Dr Korczak’s Example” means a massive amount to Rose in terms of “recognition for the design and all the work that went into it.”

“Having that affirmation from industry experts “is amazing, especially at a time when everything effectively vanished,” she stated.

Other nominees for the ‘Best Designer’ category were Liam Bunster for set and costume design on “The Taming of the Shrew” at Shakespeare’s Globe in London and Andrew Exeter for lighting design on “High Fidelity” staged at the Turbine Theatre, also in London.

Theresa Gibson, head of marketing at Robe UK commented, “We were delighted to sponsor The Stage Debut Awards for the third consecutive year. Our involvement was more important than ever this year due to the challenges our industry is experiencing, especially the theatre sector and how it has suffered due to the pandemic! It was wonderful to have three strong nominations for ‘Best Designer’ under such circumstances.

Theresa observed that The Stage did an “excellent” job of holding the Awards event online and producing a “fabulous virtual ceremony” from The Theatre Royal Haymarket hosted by Miriam Teak-Lee. Theresa and the Robe UK team were among thousands of viewers who tuned in that evening to see Rose collect “this special accolade for her amazing work on Dr Korczak’s Example”.

“Robe UK are hugely proud to support some of the very best in up-and-coming designers trying to gain a foothold into the industry. Being an award sponsor gave all involved a great reason to celebrate and recognise the talented individuals this industry has to offer and realise just how much we appreciate and are missing live theatre.”

In a strange year where everything halted in March, Rose has new work on the horizon and is designing costumes and associate set designer for “A Christmas Carol” at the Bridge Theatre in London, which opens at the end of November.

Simon Russell Beale, Patsy Ferran and Eben Figueiredo will play all the parts and share the storytelling in a vibrant new Nicholas Hytner devised version of the timeless classic. It will also mark a fabulous return to (Covid-compliant) live performance for this cutting-edge venue.

Photo Credit: Rose Revitt





