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Last month, legendary theatre director and master of Shakespeare **Michael Bogdanov** sadly died after a long and incredible contribution to the UK theatre industry. Michael was a mentor and extraordinary influence on the work of Mountview's Principal and Artistic Director Stephen Jameson.

To honour and remember Michael, please find below a tribute from Mountview friend and tutor **Andrew Jarvis**, originally published by the **British Shakespeare Association**.

MICHAEL BOGDANOV – A SHAKESPEAREAN GIANT REMEMBERED (OR “ANDY.....ANDY!”)

“Andy.....Andy!” Imagine those words spoken with a breathy, child-like enthusiasm – as any one of our own childhood friends would have done at seven years old on the first day of the Summer Holidays, filled with some mad-cap exciting idea in hand.

When Hotspur’s father Northumberland fails to appear at the Battle of Shrewsbury in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV Part 1*, he has a line which for me, at this moment, sums up the loss of Michael Bogdanov to British theatre – and in particular, to its Shakespearean life : “A very limb lopped off.”

It is a sentiment and sense of loss in which I unconditionally share. The one man who has had the greatest influence on my life as a Shakespearean actor during my 50 year career is, I can quite easily say, Michael Bogdanov.

From the first moment I met him in 1986 – at an interview for a prospective role in his embryonic English Shakespeare Company – his enthusiasm and passion for Shakespeare completely bowled me over. Here was a man full of

a commitment to the performing of Shakespeare's plays as a necessary requirement and responsibility in this particular political and cultural moment in our society's life. It wasn't just : "Oh well, we might as well do a production of *Twelfth Night* – because that's always popular"; but rather : "It is vital that we put on the *Henry IVs* and *Henry V* now, because....." – and then he didn't pause for breath for the next 40 minutes.

The opening description, and the latter one – illustrations from my professional life and relationship with Michael, simply sum him up: creative joy and political rigour.

A child-like enthusiasm and playfulness in the act of creating theatre – where anything, no matter how initially improbable we of lesser imagination and courage think it; coupled with a passion that believed that we can change the world, if we can only commit ourselves fully and unconditionally to the act of theatre as a tool of social and political change. That was Michael.

He was quite simply a giant of Shakespearean theatre.

I could fill a book – in fact, probably two, with the detail of what it was like to work with Michael.

First and foremost, for we actors – he was simply our dream assignment. He did what all play directors should do for their actors – he released them into the freedom of finding their fullest acting resources. He served the playwright, he served the play – and then, he gave his actors the insights, the pre-conditions and the confidence which enabled them also to fulfil those same objects of service. His brief was always the same: to tell the story – and by that he didn't just mean the storyline, but the story of each character's individual thought and action, moment by moment. He provided the runway in rehearsal – the circumstance out of which the action could proceed – by his rigorous honesty in questioning what the playwright required from us as storytellers at any particular moment. It made acting appear to be so simple – which indeed, ultimately, it is. His trust, his invitation to a collusion in a joint process of discovery, made him irresistible. And working with him was what proper theatre should be – ego-less. Get out of the way and let Shakespeare speak.

It is that passion, that ability to imagine hugely, and that enthusiasm, to which I immediately return when I think of Michael now following his passing.

I remember, that while we were still in rehearsal for *The Henrys* in 1986 – and not a word at that moment had been spoken in public by the English Shakespeare company – I walked into rehearsal one morning to be greeted by Michael saying : "Andy.....Andy – I was just saying, that we should do the entire Shakespeare history cycle next, and just do *The Wars of the Roses*." I remember the moment vividly. Already, another extraordinary dream – before the first one had even properly started. Sure enough though, in time we then proceeded to do *The Wars of the Roses* – against all of the odds.

Then again, in the late 1990s, when Michael was opening a new office for the ESC in Newcastle, he asked me to join him in a press conference to launch the venture. While we were waiting backstage, Michael suddenly said :

“Andy.....Andy – I’ve been thinking – for the Millennium celebrations, we should do the Complete Works of Shakespeare non-stop, over a week. Five companies of actors, with five directors, performing all of the plays, 24 hours a day.” Over a week! I remember saying : “But Michael – that would mean that you would end up performing *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at two o’clock on a wet Wednesday morning!” Oh ye of little imagination! Michael simply brushed my wimpish and unimaginative protestation aside. In the event, Michael’s plan never materialised – but even now, I remember thinking at the time what an extraordinary visionary he was. Not only did he have the vision and imagination to come up with this idea in the first place– but he then had the utter belief that it was achievable. I remember sitting there simply in awe at his courage and child-like ability to believe that anything was possible. And that is what made him one of the greatest Shakespearean directors of his generation.

Over the final four or five weeks of his life I had the great privilege of exchanging frequent telephone calls and e-mails with Michael. We were planning a project together which, unfortunately, can now never happen – although it will, in a different form, and in honour of his name, you may be sure. During those conversations, his energy, passion and enthusiasm were undiminished – it was still : “Andy.....Andy!” On each occasion, I left either the telephone or the computer both elated and refreshed by his imaginative honesty and clarity. He remained a true life-force. A few days later – and he was no longer with us. But without any doubt, he went down with all flags flying and all guns still blazing. He was not about to “.....go gentle into that good-night” – to quote another of his great heroes, Dylan Thomas. The greatest tribute that I can pay to Michael is to say that he changed my life – and the memory of his Shakespearean force will continue to influence all of my work.

Just over two years ago, the BSA held its conference at the University of Stirling. The climax and highlight of the conference was a session on the final morning entitled – *InConversation : Michael Bogdanov and John Drakakis*. That morning, I kid you not, I thought I’d died and gone to heaven. Two giants of Shakespeare – just talking! It can all end now I thought. However, what came out of that morning was revelatory for me. I had always known that I had learned a lot from Michael over the years – but that morning made it absolutely clear that everything – and I mean EVERYTHING – that I now believe about Shakespeare and its performance, came from Michael. Only in his death is he receiving finally the generosity of acclaim which he was so shamefully and so often denied during his life. A great light has gone out.

I can now turn only to Michael’s mentor – the old man himself – to put it into words for me : “The breaking of so great a thing should make a greater crack”.

Michael – “May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”