

KATE FLEETWOOD ON CRUELLA DE VIL

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION

Welcome to the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre podcast. In this episode, we invite arts journalist and theatre critic Fiona Mountford to sit down with Kate Fleetwood, who will be playing the iconic villain Cruella De Vil in our new musical *101 Dalmatians* this summer. Delving into the rehearsal process, Kate's return to theatre, and techniques over the years that have helped her acting career, we cannot wait to hear more.

Now, let's hand over to Kate Fleetwood for our latest episode...

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Hello, I'm Fiona Mountford and it's my great pleasure to be here this afternoon to chat with Kate Fleetwood. Kate is of course, an Olivier and Tony award nominated stage actress with notable theatre productions which include Rupert Goold's ground-breaking version of *Macbeth*, *Medea* and *Goneril* in *King Lear* at the National Theatre. She is well known for television work that includes *The Wheel of Time* on Amazon Prime and *Harlots*. Kate has also been steadily developing a notable side-line in musical theatre, performing in *London Road* at the National and *High Society* at the Old Vic. All of which brings us neatly onto the Open Air Theatre's exciting new musical version of the Dodie Smith classic *101 Dalmatians*, in which Kate plays that memorably mad haired villain Cruella De Vil. Perhaps I should state for the record that Kate's hair this afternoon is her regular shining chestnut, rather than a crazy extravaganza of black and white stripes. Welcome Kate and thank you for talking to us.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Hello, hello, no very - thank you, my pleasure, my pleasure.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Kate is currently in the fifth week of rehearsals for Timothy Sheader's production of Douglas Hodge's new musical so perhaps I should start by asking, how are things going so far and are you up to a full compliment of *Dalmatians* as yet or are you, I don't know 84 currently.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

laughs I sort of feel like I've lost count, I don't even know when we opened the show, I sort of tend to leave that to – that somewhere pending in the future. I'm very well thank you, the show is coming on in leaps and bounds, we are as you say in week five which is often a difficult week because, because you still haven't made the show complete yet and you're not doing runs of the show, so as, we'll probably start doing that next week, when we start to put things together, little sections together and then you can sort of see what you've got. So there's a lot of work going on in these rooms and there are a lot of moving parts in this production because we've got so many puppets, large and small, children,

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Large and small

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Laughs large and small, loads of actors large and small and we've also got musicals who are also actor musicians so they're going to be populating the stage as well and we've got amazing choreography by Liam Steel and that man has not stopped working since day one and it's just got many, many moving parts so I'm likening it to, at the moment, sort of, creating an enormous buffet for Christmas lunch and not knowing if I've got enough food yet -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok right -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And thinking, and then when you spread it all out, I'll realise that we've made far too much coleslaw and no one's going to eat all those sausage rolls!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

So until we know, what we've got, I think there's a sort of tension, it's not a negative tension but there is a sort of fizz in the air like we are, we need to keep going, there are never enough minutes in the day at this point.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok, so you're going to have the first run through of sections at least, next week

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I suspect that's where we're heading, I think.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Maybe by the end of this week, I don't know but it's -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Does everybody know all the songs, all the lines, give us an idea -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well this is the other thing, it's a new musical and often with new work, as you'll know, you know that's a very changeable, moveable thing so we're getting rewrites every day and new verses and changes, because you're dramaturging as you go so thinking, this beats not quite telling the story we thought it was on the page, we need it to be clearer, maybe we need to drop this beat in earlier, or maybe we've done too many of these beats so you'll sort of, each department is crafting a way continually -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Sure so do you have a lot of homework each night?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

All the time, yes, all the time, and I think oh my gosh, oh my gosh, yes, yes, lots of homework

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Lots of homework, so you've mentioned there puppetry plays a key role, is going to play a key role in this show, without spoiling anything because we don't want to do that, give us a tantalising glimpse into how the puppetry works in this show for example.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well they're multi handled so you'll have two for each dog, the parent dogs, Perdi and Pongo and then of course we have children who will be playing you know, named puppies and they sort of take on, they're very particular puppets that have been beautifully made and but they're going to be echoes of sort of different ways of telling that stories in different illustrative ways throughout the show, so yeah, they'll be some surprises

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Well don't spoil those for us, don't!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

They're amazing and it is amazing when you watch puppetry because no matter how many bodies are attached to the moving parts, it is magical because you don't see the humans, you just see the dog and the puppies, and it is a slight of the eye, and you know, we're just in a rehearsal room and they're just so alive. It's, they are very magical puppets, yeah.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

That's going to be a real treat for our audiences and what's so perfect about the Open Air Theatre is the venue for this show, is that the original story is set in Regent's Park, isn't it so -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

That's right, I know!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And how, will you be sort of be playing off the setting of the Open Air Theatre?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

We absolutely are

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh my goodness

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I mean it's mentioned in our first few songs is being in Regent's Park

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

That is -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

It's amazing and my character sort of, probably lives in the Inner Circle probably, I suspect, somewhere and somewhere nice, and it's always very current, very present and that's therefore the park is a character isn't it

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

That's what I always think the Open Air Theatre, the surrounds are a character in every show, but in this show in particular it's literally happening all around, that's wonderful. So Kate, you've had to wait two year -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

We have -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

To get stuck into this part, given that the show had to be postponed twice due to covid, but I believe that however you've used these really frustrating displays, you've used them really fruitfully to engage in multiple conversations with director Tim Sheader to develop the character Cruella. Can you tell us something about that?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes, I mean there was a sort of, lockdown came and we were supposed to start rehearsing the following Monday, it was brutal, as it was for so many people in different ways, and then we thought we would, and then we sort of, as we all were sort of just, everything imploded we didn't know, no one knew whether they were coming or going, and then of course there was this sort of promise the next year as Spring came, we thought maybe we'll try it again, and that fell flat for everybody because there wasn't enough confidence in the audience, wouldn't be able to come back. But I hadn't heard, at that point got involved in retalking about the script, connecting with it again, partly because -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Tempting fate

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes tempting fate but also I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it, with my filming dates and so, I didn't think it was responsible of me to sort of wade in talking about this character and sort of getting involved in decision making, unless I could honour doing it, so, I sort of had to wait for, and I remember getting the green light from my Wheel of Time producers and I think I fired off an email immediately to Tim saying send me the next draft.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

laughs Yes brilliant!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Literally I think it was on the same day I said, send me the new draft, send me the new draft and then I start to juicing it again and sort of connecting to it.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So have you been involved pre rehearsals with the development of the character, with Tim and Douglas?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

A little bit, yeah. Yes because we have quite a strong take on Cruella.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I don't know if I want to give it away but it's contemporary and we – she's such a, women all talk about this but, she's such an iconic villainess villain and you know the big decision to make about Cruella is in the light of Disney's new habit of doing origin stories movies, all these great characters, a lot of which are developed with a redemptive arch, you know has it's place but I just wanted her to be a villain *both laugh* just because I believe in the power of having a monster under the bed, there's a catharsis to that, and if we, sort of humanise her too much, or feel sorry for her too much because she's had a terrible childhood, whatever, then that power is going to be lost and diluted and so I mean I have my own backstory which I play but that's not the audiences job, that's my job to know that, and it's the audiences to fill in the blanks. I think imaginatively, that's where villains often work best when Fiona you watch Cruella and you wonder what her problem was, what happened? And then you can lace and knit something together and it's more power and pertinent and personal. If I spell everything out then you can, you sort of remove yourself from knowing her. Do you know what I mean?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You don't have to put the work in because it's all laid out before you.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes and it's also, you can say, she's nothing like me, whereas in this, when you don't spell everything out, you might say to yourself, ooh, I sort of recognise myself a little bit there.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So you've touched on this and I – this was a question I was going to ask but Cruella De Vil, she's the character we love to hate but there's the enduring appeal of audiences and actors alike, keep coming back to this part for a reason. Tell us a bit about the reason for why that is?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I think it's because she is – it's the worst thing you can do isn't it, skin puppies. It's such, it's so awful and I think, I think, well you know, what is it she does? She's basically a capitalist isn't she? So you could look at it as an anti capitalist, piece of anti capitalism *both laughs* but she's a consumerist

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Everything can be monetarist -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Narcissistic, consumer capitalist, class one blank. And I think it's so astonishing that what she wants to do, there's no rhyme nor reason to it and it's absolutely unbelievable, what she wants to do and I think that's the - it's phantasmagorical isn't it? and of course the fashion and I think that's one of the things.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ohhh, well talk us through, so it's a podcast so it's the perfect thing to talk about visuals. Talk us through the wig, talk us through your hair?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well I haven't had the wig fitting yet, but I'm having numerous.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Are you?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And its - if I give you - and I've got hundreds of, not a hundred and one, but almost a hundred and one costumes which I'm preparing my body to get in and out of at speed

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Are they all fantastically dazzling?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

They're all going to be fantastic

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

With a very strong flavour and my wigs are all going to be fantastic with a very strong flavour and yes I think they're having to put a lot of my wigs on a helmet so I can get them on and off quickly.

both laugh

And god knows where my mic packs going to go but I think I'm giving you a clue if I say she changes a lot in every scene, she's almost in a completely new -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Wow so it's going to be a visual extravaganza!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes I think it will be.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Wow

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

So all the costumes alongside the puppetry and the design, it's all going to be really visual.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes, so do you know how many costume changes you are going to have? Do you know?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I think I've got about seven?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Seven gosh!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Something like that and they're all progressive, they all progress in different ways, they all have moveable bits and pieces, but the show it's – it reminds me of the Christmas shows I used to do at the Young Vic years ago, it's – it's incredible – we're doing a lot of physical work so it's very imaginative, so it's very pop arty, there's a sort of pop art element to it so slightly comic strip element to it, so that's made it, meaning that you know, things aren't what they might seem or they can get expanded or there's elasticity in everything so the scale of something can then move into something else so there's a – it's very expressive of what we're making, so it's got a, old fashioned, it feels old fashioned to me, you know, it's got this kind of physical theatre quality which Liam is bringing and he's assembled a great company together and everyone is doing something with one piece of fabric and a thing and piece of clothing and a limb, you know it's very very -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

It sounds delicious -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

It's going to be great and the music's excellent and I didn't know Dougie's a composer, that's a -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So as we've, I think everybody knows Cruella is famously not a very nice person to say the least. Do you need to improvise with her in any way in order to bring her fully round to life or are you just she's an outright villain, she's a glorious villain? Do you need to, for yourself as an actor, do you need to find any humanity or empathy there?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes that's my job you know. And I – I there are certain things I know about her, you may not know about her, the audience may not know about her that will trigger her, or that will make her feel threatened for certain reasons and then there are certain things

that can make her you know, fight or flight mode and then you can start adding colour into – the last thing I want to do is be yelling *both laugh* you know being yelly and scary, you know along with singing. So yes, I approached her in the same way I approached Medea, you know or any character I approach you know, there's – she's got secrets and wishes and wants and dreams and hopes and aspirations and embarrassed and ashamed about like every human so I play -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Give us a glimpse of, what's one thing that triggers Cruella.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

In my Cruella?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yep

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

It's not, it's being not seen.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes feeling invisible.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Literally, or metaphorically or both?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Both but to be seen as invisible and to be seen as irrelevant.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Right –

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes and to be not nurtured. Yes.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok right, so -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Because a play, the book, the story is about a story enduring a kidnapping and then getting back together, and she's got, she's the serial killer as it were but she hasn't got a family to pull back to which is, it's a tragedy the tragedy of Cruella De Vil but you know, that's her tragedy, she doesn't see the family that she could have and so yeah, it's a story about a family that get separated and they come back together and the moral is, it's better to do things together.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok and that's a useful moral always I think – so I was thinking about this preparing to come meet you and one might easily trace in your work the lineage of famous bad women drama. Medea to Lady Macbeth to Cruella De Vil, that's it, three easy steps. What's the appeal of these characters?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I get asked to do them *laughs* and I say yes, it's a job! No, oh gosh, you know, I don't know, I don't choose my work a lot of the time, I'm lucky to be asked to do things, and I'll go, that mix of things is attractive and I've never worked at Regent's Park before, I haven't done a musical for a while and it's a great iconic character. I knew it was going to be playful in the room because of who was attached to the show and the choreography and the kind of show it was going to be and I hadn't done a show in such a long time and it happens to be a villain, you know it could have been something in Guys and Dolls or something -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Are villains more fun to play than good guys?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

They are, they are, they are I think people really enjoy watching them don't they?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes, yes

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And I think if I, if I'm an actor, any kind of actor, I want to entertain an audience so it's thrilling that you know, I'm probably going to get horribly booed aren't I? I mean, there's sort of no doubt.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

But the louder the boos the more successful you are though?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yeah, but people do love it, I think people love villains they love to blueprint themselves, they like to say I am definitely not that bad, you know, I am definitely not her or I know someone like her or I know she reminds me of, or he reminds me of – and it's a catharsis and it's something that we as humans, why we love storytelling.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

I might have forgotten to clear the rabbits cage out at the weekend, but I'm not as bad as Cruella De Vil

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

You know we need them to feel better about ourselves but yes I do often play a lot of villains, I would like to play -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Someone dripping with good, I don't know, Mother Teresa or someone.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well as you know, I often think I must step away from the cauldron but I don't necessarily just want to stand by the microwave either, so *both laugh*

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Step away from the Cauldron. That's a great line. Did you do, before rehearsals started, did you do any research or background reading or did you in fact go full kind of method acting and adopt a Dalmatian?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

laughs No, my daughters always saying mummy can we have a dog and I'm like, well I'm always away so who's going to look after the dog?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You haven't snuck a spare Dalmatian in your bag?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

No, I'm terrible. No I was – I feel like I can't sort of go into it because it'll give away so much but I – I've been creating a Pinterest mood board for Cruella De Vil since 2019

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh my goodness wow

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

laughs wow, ok. There was, at one point, I wanted her to be vegan, I thought it'd be funny and yeah they've let me really contribute a lot which I – I'm lucky, as the older I get the more experience I get, you know that's the fun of being an actor is to be able to contribute -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And is that, I guess that must be something lovely to be involved in a new work, a new piece, because it's all up for grabs?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes, that's right and it could go in either direction and you could really make a difference. I mean I've never thrown my toys out the pram and disagree and say no I want it to be like this cause there's always a dialogue but I'd like to be able to say oh maybe she could have - and then they go oh great - and suddenly it's in the script and you think that's great and so -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And this Pinterest mood board have you shared it with other people?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

So, then I would then share that with the Designer you see?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh wonderful –

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes, we could talk about costumes and we could say, oh maybe it's that and then you start having these conversations and then that will trigger something and then that seems more about that then, rather than that and then you can then talk to the writer and then, you know it's a patchwork

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes and then it's building it all up. So what specific voice work or training have you been doing in preparation for the singing for this role?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well I know – you've just got to drink water.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And Kate has got a very is it two litre bottle of water?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

two litres.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And she's done very well, there's actually very little of it left so she's obviously fully hydrated today.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes I try to drink one of these today and Jakemans and steaming your voice and the thing about the voice is the more you, I mean I'm tired today because I was doing a lot of yelling yesterday, your rehearsals are tiring because they are eight, nine, ten hours a day, but performances are only two or three hours so – and you only sing the songs once when you are performing but in rehearsals you might be singing it twenty times you know. So you have to pace yourself in rehearsals and not sing out all the time, trying to sort of go look I can do it everybody, you have to say I'm going under now, I'll say I'm going under now I'm not doing full pelt on this one now.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

How many songs do you have?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Four, five?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Four, five, yeah? And but, the thing about the voice it's - it's very very closely related to your feelings and your psychology so there's the same lining really apparently around

your voice box is the same lining around your brain and the same lining around your stomach as well, that's why you lose your voice when you're worried, tired or something bad happens to you, you can't speak because it's connected, all connected. So, if I lose my voice, I just have to say, I'm going to be fine, the more you worry about it, the harder it is, the more likely is that it won't come back. But my voice is doing quite well at the moment actually, but a tip, we have a voice coach here I've used to work with for years and years ago, Barbara Houseman who is wonderful and she gave me a brilliant tip years ago as a young actress, I used to lose my voice a lot and I went to see her and I said I don't know why I keep losing my voice, and she said because in your daily speaking, you're speaking very high. So, I was like, *speaks in a high pitch* everything was like that, and she said, just drop your natural voice, think it consciously and that's why I sort of have this launce, richer voice but is because I get older, it gets richer but I deliberately dropped my voice and placed it here when I was 22, just in order to save my voice.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And it's, that's why I mentioned it in the introduction, you're a well-known classical stage actress and the musical line as well. Cause there's not so people who straddle the two are there?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I'm really lucky. I'm really lucky. Singing was something I did as a child, my sister is a professional musician and singer that's her job and I was always singing at church and singing in school plays and singing in National Youth Music Theatre and then, I was often singing in shows and then I sang, I sang in one of Rupert's productions of – I mean the thing about Shakespeare is there's often a song

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

There is lot of hey nonny nonny options

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And you know, the Willow, Willow in Othello and many many songs and I was an actor muso for a while, I played the violin and viola and stuff and I was like a really handy actress to have in a company because I could read music, I could move relatively well and I could sing and stuff and then I think I said I must put my violin down and just, much like I'm trying to step away from the cauldron I had to put my violin down. Someone – I remember Rupert once auditioning some actor muso musicians and they said, oh no, don't do that anymore and he said why don't you want to be an actor muso anymore and he said cos I'm sick of not being lit, but we've got some actor musicians in our cast and a lot of them are going to be onstage which is fantastic and will add another layer of brilliant to the show, but yeah I'm very very lucky, sometimes it's conscious, I think I want to do a musical now and then you sort of just ask the universe and try not to be Noel Edmonds about it but, the screen stuff I had to make a very conscious decision to say, ok I need to stop doing theatre for a bit, just a bit, just to see if I can push down this wall, this door a bit.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And have you enjoyed that, that move into television? That long series with long contractual obligations?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Very much, because part of it is to feel comfortable -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Of course, to know the mortgage can be paid for the next year or so -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And physically on set because you know, cause it's such, it's like this it's wire and cords and when you don't spend your days there, and you're maybe a day player, which is an awfully hard thing to do to go in on a long running show and be just a, someone who does a few days, it's really torturous and I've done many, many, many jobs like that, that's why I'll make a real effort on a long running show to be really, really opening and welcoming to anyone who is a day player because I know how nerve wracking it is, because you don't know how that crew is working, so it's like such a lovely thing to be on a long running show and feel like you're in a rehearsal room in that kind of way. And feeling comfortable on camera and feeling confident to contribute to the writing and saying well have you thought about that -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

We'll soon be turning out some Pinterest mood boards. *laughs*

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yep well I definitely did that with Harlots. I did!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Did you? Ok, and were they were they taken onboard?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

They were.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

There we go!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes Nancy Birch was not a cross dresser in the script.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So do you think about getting into writing or directing yourself? Or are you happy to stay in the directing side of things?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

That's a good question, I get asked that a lot, and more and more actors are being asked that, and I think about that quite a lot, like what is that, and well you know, I'd like to direct, I think I could direct, I think I'd be terrified and I don't think I could handle the stress as well as some of the directors I know, and, because it's hard, and I think I

could write something but again, I'm not sure whether I – I've got an idea for two or three things which you know, which I keep thinking, I just need to sit down and write it but -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And did you do any of this during lockdown, was this the time? Or was it all banana bread and Tiger King in your house?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Oh no, not even that. It was just, no, of course no.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Did a bit of home schooling?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Loads of home schooling and printing off things for my children to complete by 3pm, but the other truth about the writing, directing thing, or the making or whatever, which while I think it's brilliant that so many actors do that, I love being an actor. Like with a passion, it brings tears to my eyes a bit thinking about it, because being an actor, is like, you are so privileged, you are at the coal face with every department

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes of course, yes

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Right, you get to have conversations with the writer, you get to have conversations with make up, every department you have some connection with, so you feel really satisfied and so you can have an input in so many areas.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And I suppose when you've reached, you're an actor of your standing -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Age *laughs*

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

No, your standing you know with the acclaim and the work you've done, the nature of it is, your voice, your words are going to be taken with a lot of, they're going to be really listened to, whereas perhaps if you've just graduated from drama school, it's your first job, it wouldn't be taken with quite the same level of seriousness.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Maybe not, and I think that comes with an inner confidence which I've grown over the years because I've not always been, had, and some younger people are confident enough to contribute, write something for instance and then so many brilliant young people can contribute in that way as well but for me personally -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

How have you grown your inner confidence over the years?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Well I met some amazing, I mean – how have I – just working, just knowing what things work, what things doesn't work and going this is working, ok I'm in the pocket of this, this scene is now working, everything is now working, this scene is now working. You can always feel when something is, gears aren't working, this is fat on the bone, we can lose this, lose this, lose this. So you can feel it within it, so the more you do, the more experience you do, it's like making a roast dinner you just know, don't bother putting them in yet because we're not going to be eating until you know, so it's just experience. But also, you know working with certain people gave me wings, you know and one of those people was Fiona Shaw

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Right ok

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

years and years and years ago doing Medea. I don't know if you remember it, the Queen's theatre and Deborah, the woman who directed is, and Deborah used to say amazing notes someone at some point needs to do something fantastic and fascinating on this line and I would just throw something in and - but Fi would play, play, play, play and it was never not playing, so I'm like that in a rehearsal room, I was inspired by that and I play all the time, and I call it play, so if we're thinking of something, well what can we do at this point, I'll say well let's play that game and see where that leads us -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes you're generating ideas

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes constantly generating as many ideas -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So also are you stepping away from the cauldron, perhaps you're stepping towards the cauldron over bubbling ideas, it's a different cauldron!

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

It may be a different cauldron, but that to me is your responsibility as an actor, you have a responsibility to offer the room things, you can't just stand there and be told what to do, and I take that responsibility particularly when I'm leading a company, which is what I'm doing now if you like, when you're playing the title role, the role everyone knows as. It's not exactly the titch of the character, the titchy look, but you have a responsibility as one of the senior members in the company to play and show young actors that that's where you're going to get your confidence from -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And you enjoy doing that obviously?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yeah and looking after that, nurturing that

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes sure

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And making it as playful an environment as possible, so that anything can happen and being off book as soon as possible.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And did Tim ask you all to be off book at the being of rehearsals?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

No not necessarily because it's a new writing so that's always changing but I try to get off book before I start rehearsals, cos then you can listen to each other rather than going oh I think my bit

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

More scope for playing

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yeah more scope for playing

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So what's the appeal for you, for performing in the Open Air. Have you acted in an outdoor theatre previously?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

The Globe.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

The Globe ok, the Globe

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

But very different

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You can't get fully drenched, can actors get fully drenched at the Globe? You can always –

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Can you get fully drenched at the park?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh yes, oh yes I hate to break it to you Kate.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

There is no roof is there

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You can get fully drenched, the Globe I don't think you can get as fully drenched?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

No I don't think you can

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ok so the Globe is your experience

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And I got anaemia at the Globe

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh my god -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes I really was tired, yeah -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

From the weather gave you -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

It's cold and tiring. It's tiring being, working outside because we didn't have mics, you don't have mics at the Globe so we do have mics here but – and now the mics are so good

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So were you, what are you looking forward about performing outdoors?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I'm really looking forward to the light falling

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Having that sort of night fall.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Have you seen many productions at the Open Air?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes, it's exquisite when the light, you really feel that you're sharing not only a show with your fellow audience members but you're sharing nature, there's the show of nature and yes that light coming down very gradually, it's a very beautiful thing I think.

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And you share that together and then of course the show will sort of morph into something else and transform from something and you know I remember at the Globe, what I really learnt about Shakespeare at the Globe was about direct address, because then you know, when you've got "I left no ring with her, what means this Lady, Fortune forbid I, my outsides have not charmed her" for instance, you know, you can ask people, you can see, the urgency for the need to speak is very there, you know. And often you're playing in a soliloquy like that in a dark space, you're like, I've got to imagine the audience out there I'm trying to connect with which might help with this conundrum -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes so you like being able to see the audience?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

So there's that, that's going to be amazing to be able to look people and scare them and yes, I'm really looking forward to that because I haven't done that in such a long time.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And what are you most looking forward to about being back in front of a live theatre audience after such a long stint, as we've been discussing working in television and lockdown. What will it be like every night, every matinee, a live theatre audience there?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Umm -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Are we at the stage where we're absolutely terrifying? Are we at that stage of rehearsals?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

I can't wait, I'm really tearful about it because it's been such a long time and you know I really love my job

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Did you ever think I might not do this again?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yeah, there was a chance that the dates wouldn't have collided, wouldn't have lined up so beautifully.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So am I right that this is the first time in theatre since 2018 is that right?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

What was I doing?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Absolute Hell was it not?

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes yes

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So four years -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yes it was and do you know what, I left Absolute Hell at 10, no it's 11, it's longer than that, I can't remember what time I came off the stage and I left the stage and I didn't go back to my dressing room I had to, my wig was coming off in the wings -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

A more wig action -

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Yeah, people were dressing me, and I got into a car at the Stage Door that took me Euston and then I went to York and I was in the make-up chair at 5 o'clock the next morning doing Victoria

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

gasps Oh my gosh

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

And I haven't been on stage since that minute

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Oh my gosh wow, so-

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

So it means a lot to me to come back into the room

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Now how lovely, well the theatre will be delighted to have you back and I'm afraid there we must leave it to go back to reherasals and do a Dalmatian count and make sure that none have disappeared whilst she's been here talking to us. Kate, thank you very much for your time and the best of luck with the show

[KATE FLEETWOOD]

Thanks Fiona, lovely to see you

We hope you enjoyed our latest podcast episode. Thank you to Kate for sharing her acting tips and tricks, whilst giving us a glimpse into what *101 Dalmatians* the musical will be like. Tickets for *101 Dalmatians* are now on sale via openairtheatre.com. Performances run from 12 July to 28 August 2022.

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