

Transcript of

**“An Interview with Bill Rauch: Trials and Transformations at OSF”**

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Music Recital Hall

Southern Oregon University

Emcee: David McCandless, Director of Shakespeare Studies

Interviewer: Geoffrey Riley, *Jefferson Exchange*

David McCandless:

Thank you for coming to today’s event -- “An Interview with Bill Rauch: Trials and Transformations at OSF” (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), sponsored by Shakespeare America--which, for those of you who don’t know, is an SOU-OSF consortium that has given you, in the recent past, such events as “Much Ado About Shakespeare in America,” “Multicultural Shakespeare,” “The Woman’s Part in Shakespeare,” “A Conversation with Peter Sellars” last spring, and this fall we had “Shakespeare in Prison”. Shakespeare America was founded by David Humphrey and Paul Nicholson, and I hope you will keep an eye out for pending announcements about events that we’ll be scheduling very soon for next year.

I’m David McCandless -- I’m Director of Shakespeare Studies at SOU, and presenter/programmer for Shakespeare America. I want to introduce both participants in today’s event concurrently, then they’ll stride out on stage like the rock stars they are.

So, today we have Bill Rauch, who is in his – alas and alack – final season as Artistic Director at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. And he will be interviewed by Geoff Riley, of Jefferson Public Radio. We’re very grateful to Geoff for agreeing to conduct this interview, bringing his consummate skills as an interlocutor, not to mention his wit and charisma, to today’s proceedings.

As for the man of the hour (here’s the point where I extract my notes -- my cheat sheet.) I’m sure many of you are familiar with Bill’s backstory. Only two years after graduating from Harvard, he and his friend, Alison Carey, founded Cornerstone Theater-a unique, multi-ethnic collective dedicated to touring the country to make theater with underserved communities, adapting classics in a way that addressed local concerns. Bill served as the company’s artistic director for twenty years before leaving to become the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s fifth artistic director in 2007.

These facts are well-known. I just wanted to season this introduction with a few facts you might not have known about Bill – just a few. Did you know he and his husband Chris Moore met at Harvard while working on a Shakespeare play? Bill's first two jobs in the theater were janitor by day and usher by night, but on occasion, he also served as a dresser to stars ranging from Louis Jordan to Robbie Benson. The third obscure fact about Bill involves Alison Carey who, in addition to founding Cornerstone Theater with Bill, is the director of the American Revolutions Program at OSF. Improbably enough, as children Bill and Alison had the very same brain-adjacent tumor. Happily, for us, they both survived.

I wonder, too, if you know how many awards Bill has won. We won't list them all – they run in length to, probably, *War and Peace* – here are just a few: The Margo Jones award, the Theatre Communications Group Visionary Leadership Award, the United States Artist Prudential Fellowship, Connecticut Critic's Circle Award, Drama-Logue Award, Helen Hayes Award, Leadership for Changing World Award, and the Zelda Fichandler Award. It's far more likely that you're aware of all that Bill has accomplished in his—

Audience Member:

Can you get closer to the microphone?

David McCandless:

Okay, should I—Let me start over. Welcome, ladies and gentlemen—I'm kidding. I hope you at least heard the fun facts. That was a particularly favorite part of the introduction from my perspective. Did you all hear the fun facts? Should I repeat them? [*Indistinct audience responses*] I'm hearing some dissension. I don't know. I think the last one was particularly interesting, that Bill and Alison, as children, both had the same brain-adjacent tumor. Did you also hear that he was a dresser to stars ranging from Louis J'ordan to Robbie Benson? Okay. All right. Good. Let me know if I get *too* loud.

It's far more likely that you're more aware of all that Bill has accomplished at OSF. [*Checking on his volume*] Good? Good level? As, for instance, diversifying the repertory with musicals, plays outside the Western canon, numerous world premieres, and a record number of plays written by women and artists of color. Indeed, Bill has been a real leader in the field of equity and inclusion and has diversified the acting ensemble as much as he has the repertory. Bill has directed upwards of 25 plays at OSF, including most of those world premieres, many of which have gone on to achieve great success in other parts of the country, including New York. In fact, if you were to single out Bill's biggest accomplishment, it might be that he actually succeeded in raising the profile of

the Oregon Shakespeare Festival which, as you know, was already pretty high. When Bill arrived, it was one of the top regional theaters in the country; now it's part of the national conversation.

The world premieres that Bill has helmed here include *Roe, Fingersmith*, my personal favorite *Equivocation*, and one that deserves special mention because it went all the way to Broadway.

[Projected video]:

*Jeffrey Richards:*

*Thank you for electing LBJ, once again, with this award to All the Way. I want to thank the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and director Bill Rauch and Louise Gund who joined me in this. When my producing colleague, Will Trice and I went to Oregon, we fell in love with this play, beautifully written by Robert Schenkkan. It then went to the American Repertory Theater, under the guidance of Diane Paulus, where it found a home and where Bryan Cranston joined the company to tell this exciting tale of politics in 1964. Here is Robert Schenkkan.*

*Robert Schenkkan:*

*Thank you. It's a long time between drinks of water in this town, I gotta tell you. What a journey this has been: from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to Boston at the American Repertory Theater to Broadway. Special thanks to my producers here, my director Bill Rauch – Bill Rauch, Bill Rauch, the finest director I have ever worked with.*

David McCandless:

So, let's get started! Geoff Riley and Bill Rauch, Bill Rauch, Bill Rauch!

*(Bill Rauch and Geoff Riley take the stage and take their seats)*

Okay, I hope you'll agree that was a boffo introduction and we're now going to up the ante on the boffo, because there are a couple special guests waiting in the wings to make a special presentation. David Humphrey, director of the Oregon Center for the Arts, and the President of Southern Oregon University, Linda Schott.

David Humphrey:

Good evening, everybody. It's my pleasure to be here tonight to welcome you again, and also have a special presentation to make. It's to Bill Rauch: you are recognized for your passionate dedication to diversifying the company at OSF and for the training of young actors. You have been a great friend to Southern Oregon University, and especially its theater program. In recognition and gratitude of your work, for collaboration and partnership between the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Southern Oregon University, President Linda Schott and I present this token (which is a print of a

student that was an art student here) of our esteem, with great hopes that you will never forget us as you pursue your next great adventure in New York. Thank you, Bill, for your inspiration and innovation, and the outstanding creativity you have brought to Oregon and the world.

Bill Rauch:

I had a very, very powerful transition experience when Libby Appel passed the baton to me. I was appointed in August of 2006. My first season began in January of 2008. There was quite a long gap there. Libby and I overlapped for several months, and it was a fantastic transition. Libby taught me so much, and I think there was great clarity about who was responsible for what, so we're trying to model that now, but of course, the timeline is more narrow. Nataki [Garrett] was appointed in March, so she was appointed a good – what is that – roughly six (or maybe even seven) months later than I was, and I'm leaving a few months earlier than Libby did. So, our overlap is tighter, but we are going at it hard in terms of the transition. Nataki is remarkable. I have said often since she was appointed, I think she is the perfect person to be in this job for the next chapter of OSF's future. She is an extraordinary artist, she's a deep thinker, she's passionate, she's clear, she's calm, and she's just a very, very special artist. OSF is very lucky to have her.

Geoff Riley:

So, walk us through—

*[Audience applauds]*

Bill Rauch:

Yes.

Geoff Riley:

Because she did get here not long before the announcement of next season, the 2020 season – how much was she able to get involved in that process and how much of this is you saying, “Here you go”?

Bill Rauch:

My colleagues and I—Amrita Ramanan, who's the head of our literary department, and many of us on artistic staff – we've been working since last August to finalize the 2020 season. We did the heavy lifting, but we didn't want to completely finalize until the new artistic director was in place. Nataki looked at the plays we had selected and said, “Fantastic. Looks great.” And she's really been able to put her energy into the choices of some of the directors and some of the designers. But she's actually quite excited to

oversee her first season being chosen by people who have been doing the work at OSF for years. She feels like that's a great on-ramp.

Geoff Riley:

Talk about that feeling for you when you came in a dozen years ago. Did you feel like you had a good set of training wheels -- not that you needed them, but did you feel like you had a good support crew ready to let you step in and do what you needed to do?

Bill Rauch:

Unbelievable support. Unbelievable. From the staff, to the audience, how welcoming -- so many of you, in this room, and so many others were. And of course, I had the huge advantage that I had been a guest artist for five years, and even a sixth year while I was a candidate for the job. The fact that Libby brought me back so many years in a row, the fact that I was able to direct in all three spaces -- I really got to know the players both in the acting company and on the staff, on the board. I was able to jump in very quickly, because of that.

Geoff Riley:

How different of a Shakespeare Festival do you leave from the one you acquired?

Bill Rauch:

Well, that's a question for you and for all of you [*the audience.*] I've tried to honor the tradition of innovation. When I think about what Angus Bowmer did, and what every Artistic Director since then has done -- I feel like there was always great love and great respect for all that had come before, and a keen sense that your responsibility as an artistic leader was to take the organization to the next place. I have tried to do that in my own way over these twelve years. As some of you may have heard me say in the past, I know where Angus's ashes are. I've many times just gone and had a quiet moment, knowing where those ashes are, just to check in and see how I'm doing.

Geoff Riley:

Do we know where they are?

Bill Rauch:

No. But I think that it has been a responsibility to try to innovate within the tradition. That's been the goal.

Geoff Riley:

Let's talk about the things that you wanted to do, how the Shakespeare Festival is different now. We can talk about bigger budget, modernized facilities, the warehouse in Talent, OR where a lot of the scene shop stuff is done, the costume —

Bill Rauch:

The production center.

Geoff Riley:

Yeah. Those are the basic physical things, but how psychically and emotionally different [are] the offerings that the Oregon Shakespeare Festival puts out now from what it was putting out twelve years ago?

Bill Rauch:

I think we certainly do more new work. OSF had done remarkable new work for years before I came, but we've accelerated the amount of new work. We've introduced classic musicals on a more regular basis. Certainly, looking at classics outside the Western canon. The Green Show has probably changed the most radically, in terms of that very eclectic festival experience that people have now that's both community-based and professional, both local and artists from far away. I think the focus on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion -- which has been part of OSF's culture for decades and decades -- we've tried to continue to amplify the importance of that work in terms of being a theater of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and not only reflecting who we are as a nation, but who we are becoming as a nation. That's been very important. You talked about some of the organizational strengths—the facilities, the production building in Talent, the Hay-Patton rehearsal center, the renovated bricks, and the greater access that the bricks created, the patron elevator in the Bowmer theater, was very, very important to us in terms of access. Those are some of the things I'm proud about.

Geoff Riley:

When we get to the diversity and inclusion aspect of the job: were you concerned at all about pushing the envelope from where it had been when you arrived? How did you accept it yourself and then be able to get other people to accept what you were doing? Because it didn't come without some resistance, I presume.

Bill Rauch:

Absolutely. All progress comes with resistance in this world, in this country. I will say that, like so many of us in the room that consider ourselves white allies when it comes to trying to create true equity in terms of race in this country, I've been mentored by extraordinary people of color, some of whom are on my team at OSF, and some of

whom are in the larger fields. I've tried in any way — any way that I've tried to create a more progressive agenda at the Festival, it's through listening — deep, deep, deep listening, and trying to open my heart to thoughts that I haven't thought and perspectives that I haven't had.

I think that's the unbelievably beautiful thing about theater, is that theater invites all of us to witness other people's stories, and to recognize our own stories and to open our minds and hearts to new stories. That's what I love about theater. I feel like we have to model that in the work that we do — not only the stories that we choose to tell, but how we go about telling those stories — who interprets the stories in terms of creative team, who embodies those stories as performers, and who is creating the infrastructure for sharing those stories with everybody in the audience.

Geoff Riley:

Has anybody gotten really blunt with you and said, "I don't like what you're doing, I don't like some of the efforts you've done, particularly the Shakespeare plays, I like the words as they are, don't mess with them"? Have you gotten some of that?

Bill Rauch:

Every day. [*Audience laughs*] But, honestly, I will say that the faith of the audience in the organization is so profound, and so beautiful. Of course, there are the very, very occasional, "That's it, I'm done, I'm leaving this organization as an audience member because I hate this thing or that thing," but that's very, very rare. Most people, when they're thrown by a choice or challenged by a choice, in my experience, most people want to have the debate. They want to say, "Look: this is how this landed on me, and I want you to know that, and I want to hear what you were thinking and I want to talk about it." I feel like, in the process, we grow together.

When people say to me, at opening night, "What did you think of that show?" I often say, "Let's wait and talk about it after closing." Because I learn — I have my own taste, my own feelings about a work of art, but I learn from the audience and how the audience reacts to a work of art so much more. By the hundred-and-twentieth time we've done a performance, and I've been able to listen to the audience response or get letters, get emails, have people grab me in a restaurant or on the bricks to tell me what they think, I learn about how what we've created is really landing. That's part of what I love about the job.

Geoff Riley:

So, Bill Rauch, over the course of those hundred-and-twenty performances (to use your example), how many times will you check in and sit through the whole thing?

Bill Rauch:

It depends on if I directed it or not. If I directed it, I go back more often, because it's part of my job to give maintenance notes. If I haven't— I would say when I direct a show, I try to go back every four to six weeks. If I haven't directed a show, it's not quite that often, but I will go multiple times over the season. I will also just stop in if I'm having a hard day, if I've had a stressful meeting, I'll just stick my head in the back of the Bowmer or in back of the Elizabethan or in the vom of the Thomas, just for two minutes, three minutes, just to hear a little bit of the play, just to hear the audience respond. That inevitably resets my emotional compass and I remember why we do what we do and I'm so happy, and I go right back into whatever the stress of the day might be.

Geoff Riley:

Particularly with the plays that you direct, have you gone back sometimes for those four-to-six-week check-ins and sat there and thought, "This is not what we planned, but it's really good"?

Bill Rauch:

Honestly, often. Often. The stage managers are so at the heart of the matter at OSF. I cannot say enough about the stage managers. We directors are anywhere from six to eleven weeks with a show, and then most directors—I live here, so I'm able to go back a lot – most directors are from out-of-town. They leave town, and the stage managers then maintain those shows for anywhere from six to eight [or] nine months. So, the stage managers are really at the heart of the process of maintaining and allowing the shows to grow. I think our stage managers are exceptional at holding the shape of a show in terms of what the director and the cast and the creative team built, but allowing it to grow. The fact is, when you've done something fifteen times, fifty times, you learn new things. The shows do grow, and they do deepen, and they get faster where they should get faster and they take a little more time where they need to take a little more time, and there are breakthroughs.

One of the things that I face in my job is that a stage manager will reach out to me and say, "An actor has a new idea" or "An actor is approaching a moment in a new way, and I don't know if it's within the framework enough. Can you come and check it out? Do you think we need to reach out to the director about this?" Maybe somebody could do something physically at opening, and maybe because of an injury or for some other reason, it can't be repeated for the hundred-and-nineteenth time. The shows do grow. You know, all of you who see shows more than once: they grow. They change. That's part of the beauty of the long runs at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.



Geoff Riley:

You mentioned those moments of emotional reset, when you get to get in there and check in and before you move on to the other things you have to do. How do you, as a director, maintain focus on a particular work when you've got all the other stuff hanging over your head -- dealing with the budgets, and smoke, and cracked ceilings, and all the things that are thrown your way in the dozen years you've been here?

Bill Rauch:

Rehearsal is the oasis for me. Rehearsal is a place of peace and joy. I love rehearsing. I absolutely love it. I'm in rehearsal right now for *La Commedia of Errors*, which you're all going to come see, right? Please, please? [Audience laughter and applause] Those anywhere from five to eight hours a day...it's fantastic. It's never hard to leave whatever else I'm doing to go in to the rehearsal room. I race to rehearsal.

Geoff Riley:

Talk about some of the major initiatives you've created at the Shakespeare Festival and the reasons for them: American Revolutions and Play On!

Bill Rauch:

Yes. American Revolutions was an idea that I began to develop when I was a candidate for the job. I think part of leadership is to hire people who are smarter than you are. Certainly, in the case of American Revolutions, asking Alison Carey to come and oversee that program was the single best decision that I made when it comes to American Revolutions. I had a whole idea about a cycle of plays that would parallel U.S. presidencies and that we would have one play for every presidency. Alison, immediately, when she was hired, said, "That's a terrible idea!" [Audience laughs]

Geoff Riley:

Especially with William Henry Harrison!

Bill Rauch:

Yes! There you go. She said, "You don't want to set up a parallel between the power of kings and the power of presidents. It's completely the wrong spirit. But," she said, "let's talk about what moves you about American history, and what moves all of us on artistic staff about American history." We began to talk about this country being born in an act of revolution, and that so much of the struggle for the heart of the country is: what do we preserve in terms of earlier acts of revolution, and what are the new acts of revolution that we need in order to move the country forward? That frame of moments of change of past American revolutions, to look at how we shape the country in the future, was born, through Alison's insight.

From day one, the board was excited, funders were excited, the audience was excited, members of the company were excited. It was an idea—it felt like it was the right time and the right place. Almost all of those plays have gone on and been produced elsewhere, all the ones that we've produced so far. The majority of the plays have not yet been produced, which is thrilling, because that will be a gift (hopefully) to OSF and other theaters for many years to come--all those many plays that we've commissioned that are still being written, that are still being developed, that you'll be able to enjoy for many years to come.

Geoff Riley:

Let's then consider the fact that some of the things you're talking about doing in terms of representing the changing America, potentially represents, if not in fact, an American revolution of its own. Perhaps a slow-rolling one...and, of course, at this moment in history it certainly feels like there's a counter-revolution, as well. I guess you can pick and choose which is which. What is it like to work—to try to represent an America of the future at a time in history when there is a strong backlash from an America that has been in the past?

Bill Rauch:

I think that our job, as artists, always is to offer possibilities. Every time we create a work of art and we bring it in our hands [*extending an upturned hand forward*] and we say, "Here" to the audience, that gift, that transaction, is living in possibility. I don't care if you're doing a period production set 400 years ago or 2,500 years ago and you're trying to be as historically accurate through it as you can about a past era— you are in active dialogue with the present, and you are actively considering what might be in the future. To me, that is the nature of art. That's why I love being an artist. That's why I love running an arts organization. I think it's just a given.

Geoff Riley:

I stayed with American Revolutions, but I do want to hear your thoughts on Play On! and what the intention is there and what the reception has been, for that matter, too.

Bill Rauch:

Absolutely. I think Play On!—like so many interesting things in life—Play On! was misinterpreted at the beginning. I think there was some really unfortunate press mishandling of the intention. I think that some of the fear that existed in the field when the program was first announced was the misperception that we intended to, from this point forward, only mount modern English translations of Shakespeare and never mount productions with Shakespeare's original language. No matter how many times we tried to explain that that was not the case, that these were companion translations,

that were meant to deepen understanding of the original texts, that they were meant as a tool for actors, directors, writers, educators, for the lay reader, at home, as well as—there was, of course, also intended a performance component where people might want to, if one of these translations turned out to be a very strong work of literary merit, on its own, that we could share those with audiences. *La Commedia of Errors* is the first production at OSF that is based on a Play On! translation. Of course, when we announced Play On!, we also announced the commitment to the entire canon in ten years – the shortest time we’ve ever done the thirty-seven-play canon.

I was frustrated (I’ll be honest) about the misunderstandings about the program. I have unbelievable gratitude that Play On! happened. Lue Douthit led it so brilliantly. I am so happy that thirty-nine Shakespeare plays—that thirty-nine writers had a deep dive with a Shakespeare play. Like, really dove deep, rolled up their sleeves, and verse by verse, line by line, theme by theme, character by character, rolled up their sleeves and dug in. I think all of those playwrights are better playwrights for that experience.

The program has been so successful, as some of you know, that it has spun off into its own non-profit. I am very proud that we were the home for the program to be birthed. But now, Play On! Shakespeare is a separate non-profit. Dr. Lue Douthit is running it, and they will continue to go. Meanwhile, next month we are doing a reading series of all thirty-nine plays that resulted from Play On! Those are happening at Classic Stage Company in New York City, off-Broadway. Classic Stage Company and OSF are co-producing this, so it’s going to be quite remarkable, because anyone who happens to be in New York during any of that time, is going to be able to go and actually hear wonderful actors – many, many actors who are OSF alums, in fact (it’s kind of a “who’s who” of OSF from the past ten years) – are the company that are going to be reading these plays. I think it’s going to be very special.

Geoff Riley:

Over what period of time are they all going to be read?

Bill Rauch:

It’s about a month.

Geoff Riley:

Okay, so – not like going to see *The Ring Cycle* or something over a fortnight. Let’s talk about some of the stuff you have to do as a director of a play. When you decide you’re going to do it, is there already a treatment in mind? Do you commit to the play and then think, “well, maybe we could do it in modern dress, maybe we could do it this way...”? What leads to those decisions?

Bill Rauch:

I am a director – and I am a theater artist in general, but a director in particular – because I can't do anything by myself. I'm useless on my own.

Geoff Riley:

So, acting is just out?

Bill Rauch:

Well, no, because acting you do do with other people. What I mean is: I could never be a painter or a composer or even a writer by myself, because I thrive on collaboration. I often say, as a director, that I'm an editor of other people's good ideas. I think that's absolutely true. So, for me: I may have an impulse – as everybody knows, *Oklahoma*, I didn't just want to do *Oklahoma*, I wanted to *Oklahoma* looking at those characters through the lens of same-sex relationship – so I may have an impulse like that, in terms of why I want to direct a piece.

But in terms of the moment-by-moment choices – what does the set look like, what do the costumes look like, who should be in this play -- all those millions of micro-decisions that a director is ultimately responsible for, I find that in collaboration with designers, with actors, with producers on the artistic staff. That's where I thrive, that's where I learn, and that's where I feel like I can contribute. If I can hear ten ideas, I suddenly realize, "Oh, I feel very strongly that it's idea number seven, and it's not one through six and it's not eight through ten, it's number seven, and this is why." But I would never have been able to come up with number seven on my own. It's because we're all talking about the ten ideas that I'm able to begin to understand why a certain choice is the right one.

Geoff Riley:

So, in the artistic sense, certainly, a lot of collaboration -- but when you're the Artistic Director, a lot of decisions end up just on you, or shared, certainly, with the Executive Director. Talk about getting used to making decisions about things like, "What do we do when the roof in the Bowmer theater cracks and you can't use it for a couple of weeks—"

Bill Rauch:

A couple months, but who's counting? [*Audience laughs*]

Geoff Riley:

What was it like to grow into the role of having to make these momentous decisions?

Bill Rauch:

I became an Artistic Director when I was twenty-two, so in many ways I've been shaped – probably warped, as well as shaped – by being in artistic leadership for my entire adult life. I'm used to having responsibility, and I recognize it as a tremendous privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. But again, in even those leadership moments – it's not that I'm not willing to make hard decisions, I have to make hard decisions all the time – but I make better decisions collaboratively, I really do. That includes those Artistic Director-Executive Director moments, those moments with the Board of Directors, that are about very far-ranging issues.

Geoff Riley:

As you move into the new job at the Perelman Center in New York, are you going to be moving a little further away from the artistic end, given the kinds of venues you have there and the kinds of things they'll be doing?

Bill Rauch:

You mean you don't want to see me choreograph a ballet? Is that what you're saying? Is that what you're telling me? *[Audience laughs]*

Geoff Riley:

*[Jokingly looking around]* Can we do it now? Do we have—

Bill Rauch:

If you'll do a *pas de deux* with me, right now, I'd do it. All right.

*[Both do comical ballet arm imitations]*

No, the Perelman Center hired me understanding that I'm a working artist, and I will continue to direct theater, absolutely. But you're absolutely right that it will be different being the Artistic Director of a multi-disciplinary performance venue, because I don't know as much about music. I don't know as much about dance. I don't know as much about opera. Part of what excited me about the possibility is to learn more. And, again, like with Alison Carey and *American Revolutions*, to hire people who are smarter than I am about all of those disciplines, and to learn from them and to collaborate with them as well.

Geoff Riley:

Are you going to take some of the people from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival with you, do you think?

Bill Rauch:

I am making no decisions about staffing until I live full-time in New York in the fall.

Geoff Riley:

As you look back on twelve years at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival—you clearly love what you do. Is there any one moment, above all others, that makes you go, “Wow, this is when I feel like—Ttis was my time at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.”

Bill Rauch:

Honestly, there have been so many. If not every day, every week has moments where I think, “Yep: this is it. This is why I’m here. I am so lucky.” I really feel that. I would love to give you some beautiful, specific—I will just say—I’m not saying this is the highlight, I will just name an example of a time that was extraordinary.

All the way back in 2012, we were closing Mary Zimmerman’s *The White Snake*, which was a beautiful, beautiful work of art (some of you will remember) – powerful production. The same weekend we were opening *Troilus and Cressida* in the Thomas with production parallels to the Iraq War. We had students from Iraq (college students), who had never been outside their home country, who were doing Shakespeare on the Green Show stage. Closing *The White Snake*, opening *Troilus and Cressida*, having those students on the Green Show stage – there have been so many moments like that of extraordinary juxtapositions because of the rotating rep, the power of the Green Show, the audience...just the emotional whiplash of the different kinds of work, the different kinds of stories, and seeing the work through the audience’s eyes, again and again and again.

Geoff Riley:

Are there any major regrets? Things that you either did, or had to deal with that you wish you hadn’t, or things you didn’t get to do, just because you’re trying to fit a whole bunch of things into each season and hit a lot of bases?

Bill Rauch:

I have a lot of regrets, of course, because I’m a human being. It’s very hard to accept our mistakes and to be at peace about them and to move forward. I am very human in that way. I struggle with regret. But I’m also, at my core, an optimistic person. I do try to learn from the mistakes that I feel I’ve made. Hopefully, I’m making new mistakes every day, and not just the same old mistakes. That’s the hope.

In terms of things that I didn’t get to do that I dreamed of doing: I think that’s part of the sadness I referred to earlier, is that I’m overseeing this final season, and I’m so

proud to do it, and I'm collaborating with Nataki on her first season, but I'm very aware that it's now a whole series of letting go.

I will say, speaking of *La Commedia of Errors* again, that I've tried to pack into this one project as many things as I possibly could that I cared about that maybe I hadn't gotten to. It's our first bilingual work of art -- about fifty percent Spanish, fifty percent English. It's the first time we've paired a classic play and a new play with the exact same cast of actors. Octavio Solis's *Mother Road* and *La Commedia of Errors* share an acting company. It's the first time that we've shared a Play On! translation. It's the first time we've toured a project to community centers -- to low-income community centers -- across the Rogue Valley, as well as performing it on our campus. So, there are a lot of things we're doing with one project. It felt right; it felt quite magical. But, there's probably some "it's my last season and I want to cram a lot into one project" -- a phenomenon of that, as well, to be honest.

Geoff Riley:

As an optimistic person and a theatre professional and a theatre lover: how optimistic are you about the future of theatre in general, especially at a time in history when there are ungodly numbers of entertainment options and a movie about a bunch of people in tights can make two billion dollars in its first weekend? They're nice tights, don't get me wrong!

Bill Rauch:

It took me half a second, and then I knew which movie you meant. Yes, look: we will always need to gather in a room together to share stories. I love going to the movies. I love -- my husband and I binge-watch any number of TV shows with the best of you. But nothing quite replaces the experience of being in a room with other human beings sharing a story -- nothing. That will always happen.

I am heartened by many developments in our field. 2020 is called -- for those of you who heard me and Nataki talk about the 2020 season -- we're part of the Jubilee Movement, which is a national movement to get theaters to proactively think about whose stories they are telling, and to look specifically at: more stories by women, more stories by people of color, more stories by queer artists, more stories by disabled artists, etc. Of course, that's the work that OSF has been involved in long before I came, that we have (hopefully) accelerated and amplified in my years with the company. So, to be thinking about that in 2020 and seeing how many other theaters around the country are being more thoughtful about whose stories they're telling and how they're telling them and who's interpreting those stories -- that gives me tremendous hope for the future of the American theatre.

Geoff Riley:

What was the first bit of advice you gave Nataki Garrett? “Don’t park there”? Anything?

Bill Rauch:

[Laughs] I’m trying to remember the very first thing. I think the very first conversation that I had with her after congratulating her -- I’ve known her for seventeen years, so she’s a friend, so I was able to congratulate her from the bottom of my heart. But the first thing was to talk about 2020, honestly. The first thing was to say, “Look: we’ve been working since last August to come up with a season that’s balanced, that we think will fit within our resources and that we think will appeal to the audience. With that said: change anything and everything you want about it. But I want you to understand why we feel these choices are balanced, and then you rebalance it in the way that you see fit. So that was the first conversation that I had with her.”

Geoff Riley:

What advice did she give back to you, as you depart from here and head off to New York City and—Will there be a season at the Perelman in 2020?

Bill Rauch:

The Pearlman will not open—The building will not open until very late 2021 or very early in 2022. Here’s the weirdest thing: I have known what play I’m directing next since I was twenty-two years old -- always. I’ve always known what my next show is. We’re taking *Mother Road* to the Arena Stage in Washington D.C. in February, which I’m very pleased about. But after that, I have no idea what I’m directing next, for the first time in my life since I was twenty-two years old, and probably even younger, because I directed so much in college. It probably goes back to since I was eighteen/seventeen. I’m a little...intrigued by that, and a little panicked about that, to be honest.

Nataki has been so generous with me about wanting to hear my opinions about everything. I think we have a lot of mutual trust and mutual respect. I think she knows that I can offer thoughts without her feeling pressured to take them and that I will never be hurt by her not wanting to follow advice that I gave, because she’s got to make it hers. Libby Appel said to me again and again and again, “Follow your passion.” And she would tell me, “Bill, I hate that idea, and you absolutely have to do it, because that’s what’s in your heart.” Libby was so remarkable that way, and I really want to channel her as I pass the baton to Nataki.



Geoff Riley:

So, we don't know what your first play is going to be, your next play.

Bill Rauch:

No, we don't. I may end up directing as a guest artist in other people's theaters during these couple years as we ramp up the Perelman. But I can certainly say I will direct something in the inaugural season at the Perelman Performing Arts Center, for sure.