**MD:** Why is Oscar Wilde’s masterpiece still relevant in the 21st Century?

**IS:** When you read it, it doesn’t necessarily feel like it was written 100 years ago. It feels very fresh and contemporary.

**NF:** I’ve been thinking about doing a production of Earnest for years. I think it’s a truly great play and a play with real political guts and relevance to the world we live in today, whether it’s dealing with equality and issues around women’s rights within society, or the surface of things and what lies beneath. There’s still a long way to go in making sure there is true equality between the sexes. Obviously it’s completely different now from how it was in Wilde’s time but women are still objectified, you still have Page Three, you still have in certain cultural sectors women treated as objects and judged because of the way they look. I think also there’s a feeling of being trapped within a society. All of these characters seem trapped by their circumstances and trapped by their class. Although our class structure is very different, I think the theme of people feeling incarcerated because of their circumstances at birth still feels very relevant. The idea of origins and heritage – all of these themes remain important.

**MD:** What led you to the idea of mirrors for the design?

**NF:** I’d always kept coming back to mirrors and how they might work within the world of the play. We want to create a production which serves the genius of Wilde’s writing and don’t want to do anything pretentious whereby the concept usurps the brilliance of the play, but we did think we’d like to give it a contemporary feel. I found this image online of a fashion show and it was literally a rectangular shipping container, the entire interior of which was decked out in mirrors. It created this most startling effect of people just going on for ever and disappearing into infinity. So there’s the idea of the model looking at themselves in the mirror and this idea of beauty and being presented to society, and what lies beneath. When Isla and I started playing with it, it felt like it was a really valid way to look at the play in a contemporary context. It feels like having the best of both worlds.

**IS:** We’ve made the furniture art nouveau and of the period of 1895 so that we’re still structuring it within that world but it’s got a very fresh, contemporary feel. At the same time, the audience will be part of that world because they will be reflected within the mirror, so hopefully it draws them deeper into the space and also makes them think about themselves a bit more as well.

**MD:** How do the Director and Designer work together to get a shared result without compromising the vision?

**IS:** You have to get along really well with your Director – it’s definitely a very close relationship – and I think what’s most exciting is when you both come to something in the same way: you feed off each other. I usually start with a whole bunch of images and we’ll go through them and choose what we like. We went in quite an art installation sort of a way, so the garden, for example, is a whole bunch of flowers hanging from the ceiling, not a physical garden. I brought Nikolai pictures of formal gardens and pictures of art installations and I said, look, I know this is a bit out there but it’s really exciting. He really loved it, so we went forwards with that. Similarly with costumes, I’ll sketch it and send it over and we’ll chat and maybe change a few things before I colour it. So it’s an ongoing process, but you have to work very closely together to create that world.

**NF:** Even if it’s an empty space with just a chair in it, somebody has to design that chair, and that chair will suggest something about the concept and the theme of the production. Therefore I think probably one of the most important relationships for a Director in the theatre is that with the Designer because it’s so collaborative. It’s a completely immersive marriage. Before you even start work you have to be in agreement that this is the direction that we want to take the production and we are committed to this, to our version of the play. It’s not my vision, it’s not my concept: Isla and I have developed this together and then we share it with the actors and they take ownership of it.

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