

FOREWORD

The Royal Court Theatre has been an authors' theatre right from its very beginning and its cultural politics have made it one of the liveliest places on the British and European theatre scene.

It was in 1956 that Devine opened his first memorable theatre house in Sloane Square, and in that same year, Samuel Beckett started what would become a lifelong collaboration there with *Endgame*. From the ashes of the Beckettian word Devine found further proof that there was a hidden energy within British society, which needed to be given the tools necessary for self-expression. The time had come to infuse a new vitality into the native theatrical tradition and to give more space to playwrights and their words. In his theatre authors would be part of the planning of creative phase, they would be able to discuss everything with directors and actors, and, together with other playwrights, they would be able to experiment in ensemble works.

Since then, the major playwrights of our time have debuted and worked at the Royal Court, and their contribution has been an important influence on the offspring of a rich production of drama that has become increasingly involved in today's social problems. Both of the theatre rooms are very often sold out and most of the audience is the same age as the young writers who use those stages to give voice to the suffocating and frustrating reality of life for their generation. In 1999 the Royal Court received the "Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities" for promoting the work of young British writers.

In October 2006, at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs, there was a very special event to inaugurate its fiftieth anniversary celebrations:

Harold Pinter, in the role of Krapp, narrated Beckett's extraordinary text to the audience while playing the *Last Tape*. Thanks to the collaboration of the Europe Theatre Prize and of the Royal Court Theatre, represented by Diane Borger, at that time the Court's general manager, the film of the performance was shown for the first time in Italy at Sapienza University of Rome, in November 2008.

It was on that occasion that scholars and critics had a conversation, which is reported in the Appendix, with two of the most representative contemporary writers of the Royal Court: Mark Ravenhill, an internationally acclaimed dramatist, and Polly Stenham, whose first play *That Face* is still enjoying enormous success all over the world.

Such an interesting conversation, nevertheless, needs an introductory focus on at least some aspects of the long stream of successes and innovations of the Royal Court, which is here given by eye witness accounts of Michael Billington, theatre critic of *The Guardian*, of Keir Elam, professor of English Literature at the University of Bologna, and of Gianfranco Capitta, theatre critic of *Il Manifesto* and *Rai Radio 3*. Natalia Koliada and Nikolai Khalezin, the founders and artistic directors of the Belarus Free Theatre, offer a perspective on Pinter's plays that we believe conveys a peculiar glimpse of what 'being Harold Pinter' means.

Their reports give us an idea of the sparks and fireworks that have electrified the audiences at the Royal Court since it first opened its doors.

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