



## THE *Director's Notes*

Due to the measures taken to deal with the novel coronavirus pandemic, so many of us in the film and TV industry were suddenly left without work, and to a large degree, purpose. You build your life around the work and so when it suddenly stops, you don't know where to put yourself. I had another series about to go into pre-production and a theatre production about to go into another round of workshop performances and development work, both of which had to be shelved. Add to that the uncertainty of when work might be able to start up again and the financial pressures you're suddenly facing due to loss of income and the outlook is somewhat grim. So this stand-alone season of Shakespeare Republic has really served as a way to keep connected and keep exploring who we are now, from a global perspective, using pieces written by someone who experienced his own fair share of lockdowns due to plague, which makes the text even more relevant.

This was also a chance to go beyond Australia's shores and work with actors that I might not normally have had the opportunity to collaborate with before – and it's been an extraordinary process that I'm so grateful for.

But it was certainly a challenge creating the season this way! I would be on Zoom on their laptop or computer, directing them in real time from Melbourne while they recorded their performances on their phones across town or in London, Los Angeles, Glasgow or wherever they were based. Rehearsals worked the same way. Some actors were advantageously in lockdown with filmmakers, but the majority were their own crew, as was I, which presented a new set of challenges we wouldn't normally face when filming. It was a huge learning curve, but they embraced it all brilliantly.

From the beginning of doing this series, back in 2015, I have kept firmly in mind what my Honorary Patron for Incognita Enterprises (my production business) Sir Nigel Hawthorne said when he first lent his name to my work back in 2001. "Keep grounded. Keep real. Play the person, not the part. Be true. Find the Real Person."

All good advice when directing (and playing) some of the most famous roles in English theatre.

The decision to release this stand-alone version of the series in black and white, as opposed to colour was based on several artistic and technical choices. From an artistic perspective, it gave the footage an archival feel, it also gave it an historical feel, despite it being set in the 21st Century (which fits with the Shakespeare theme, as well as the fact we're living through history right now) and it also gave a sense of the world losing its colour somewhat right now from a psychological point of view. The technical reasons were due to everyone filming on different cameras with different lighting, so choosing black and white gave it a more cohesive look. But really the artistic reasons are what won the day for the black and white choice.

As far as how we undertook this work - I would say that working this way is totally doable, but due to us working on essentially no budget has meant that I've been working upwards of 80 hour weeks since April with the adapting, rehearsing, filming, editing, producing and all the other jobs I've taken on to save costs. My two co-producers, Billy Smedley and Christopher Kirby have provided such great assistance, and I have my fabulous post-production team, but it isn't an ideal working set up overall. I see people sharing their latest baking creation on social media and feel a sudden surge of FOMO because I forget to eat some days, let alone have time to actually be in the kitchen long enough to bake something!

That said, if we had a budget, I'd definitely consider filming in this way again – I feel an incredible bond with all the actors and my production team – we really have been in the trenches together through this and I couldn't ask for better colleagues to work alongside creating a series during a pandemic.

*Sally McLean, Director  
Shakespeare Republic  
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