

**Q&A with Ranjit Bolt, the lyricist of
MERRY WIVES – THE MUSICAL
part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's
Complete Works Festival 2006**

Merry Wives – The Musical

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

2 December 2006 – 10 February 2007. Press Night: 12 December 2006

Box Office: 0870 609 1110 or www.rsc.org.uk

Directed by Gregory Doran

Music by Paul Englishby

Lyrics by Ranjit Bolt

Can you tell us a bit about your background?

I was born in Manchester of Anglo-Indian parentage, educated at The Perse, Cambridge, and Oxford University, where I read classics. I worked for eight tedious years as a stockbroker after leaving university, before translating Corneille's *Le Menteur* as *The Liar*, performed at the Old Vic 1989/90, directed by Jonathan Miller.

Not long after that I gave up my job to concentrate on stage translation, and a partnership with Peter Hall followed which, together with a very successful RSC show - *The Venetian Twins* - enabled me to pay off my moderate mortgage and achieve the degree of independence necessary to be a freelance translator/writer.

Apart from the many translations, and the *Merry Wives* lyrics, I have published a verse novel, *Losing It*.

How did you come to be involved in *Merry Wives The Musical*?

Greg (the director) asked me to write the lyrics. I'm not sure why. You'll have to ask him. But I'm very glad he did!

What's it been like collaborating with Gregory Doran (the director) and Paul Englishby (the composer)?

Collaborating with Greg and Paul has been without question the most rewarding experience in my theatre career to date. Not merely is it so much more fulfilling to be writing something that is entirely one's own at last, but they are such talented individuals. Greg has an extraordinary vision, and a knowledge and

understanding of Shakespeare that can have few equals. Paul has that rare gift, the ability to write real melodies that stay in the head long after one has heard them.

Your uncle was the playwright Robert Bolt, famous for *A Man For All Seasons*. Do you think you have inherited your writing ability from him?

If you mean, is literature in the genes somewhere, perhaps. But my background is equally relevant. (Chicken and egg question, of course.) My father is a brilliant literary critic who has published many books, including a best-selling guide to James Joyce. My mother has also been a big influence. She was an English teacher in her working life, and it was she who came into mine and my brother's room after *A Man For All Seasons* had become a smash hit in the West End, and suggested that we both try to follow in our uncle's footsteps and write a play. We both did, but whereas my brother left it there, I went on writing plays, stories, poems, from then on.

Apparently one of your greatest heroes is Alan Jay Lerner, the lyricist of *My Fair Lady*. What is it about him that you admire so much?

I think the way he manages to make his lyrics accessible without "dumbing down". Anyone can grasp them, yet at the same time they are urbane and sophisticated.

You are well known as a translator. Is this your first musical?

This is in fact my second musical. I have collaborated with John Caird on a musical version of *Hard Times*, which is currently in pre-production.

How does this project differ from your translation work? (Have you used Shakespeare's words or adapted them?)

I have taken my cue from Shakespeare's text in each, or most, of the lyrics, but the words are basically mine.

How involved are you in the rehearsal process?

Not a great deal thus far, though I know there are some lines that have proved hard to sing and will need sorting out at some point.

What other projects are you working on?

At the moment I am working on a translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* for the Bristol Old Vic, scheduled for I think next Spring (2007).