

Craig Edwards in conversation with Ruth Myers



Craig Edwards during rehearsals in the Garden Hall at the Greenway Centre, Southmead

What role do you think heritage plays in Meadows to Meadows and for you as a director?

"What I've really enjoyed about working on all the Meadows to Meadows shows is how much women's voices are heard because, as we all know, a lot of women's history on all levels, whether they're queens or women who just work in laundrettes, their history gets lost. It just gets lost because they're not men and they're not whatever.

So, what brings me back and what I so enjoy, and I think the audience enjoy it too, is just hearing the women's stories. And it just so happens that this particular group is sort of dominated by women in a really good way. And I think so many of the stories are about the women and about, you know, ordinary women's lives and how rich those stories are and they're funny and

they're tragic and they're important and they're political and sometimes all those things in one story.

And how much, and how, as usual, how women's stories are overlooked and taken for granted. But when you actually start telling those stories, you go, wow, these are great stories, they should be told all the time."

So, are there any particular women's stories that might otherwise not have been told were it not for Meadows to Meaders?

"A story that was told to us, by an ex-male worker at BAC, he told us a story about when *Page Three* came out [The Sun newspaper began printing pictures of topless women on page three of their daily tabloid in 1969] and the women took umbrage to this [photos from Page Three being put up on the factory walls] and went, "Well, why can't we have pictures? Why can't we have a male equivalent of *Page Three*?" And when it was brought up, that the male shop steward forbade the women from putting up pictures of male pinups, we coupled this with [another true story] a scene where the mayor and the lady mayoress came on a visit and the lady mayoress was wolf whistled.

This was seen by the male shop steward as being a really embarrassing moment. And then a female worker at BAC said, "Well, I get wolf whistled all the time and no one does anything about that." So, just in that story, we had some quite complex sexual politics being discussed in front of an audience by people who weren't politicians or MPs or Germaine Greer.

They were women on the shop floor talking about what it is to work in an environment where men can put up pornography and there's a double standard about who can be wolf whistled at. And I thought that was brilliant. So, that story just in itself would never have been told if you saw a documentary about the history of how Concorde was built."

From a director's perspective, can you talk a bit more about the participatory element of directing?

"I try to make their experience of rehearsing and performing as enjoyable as possible, and meaningful as possible. And I don't take it for granted that they're just here for the benefit of me directing them and putting on a play.

"So for me, the experience of making the play is as important as the performance. I mean, I want the performance to be great. And I want the

performance to reach the audience and for them to be able to tell their stories.

"But I'm also very, very aware that I want the rehearsals to be as enjoyable as possible. And to that end, when I'm directing a scene, I'm very mindful of some of the older members of the cast, that they physically can't do some stuff that I would normally ask an able-bodied, younger, for want of a better word, actor to do.

"And I go, okay, this scene's going to have to be, they're all going to have to be sitting down. Or if I do have them moving, I've got to make that movement really, really special and limited to a very short amount of time."

And what about the audience experience, thinking about them as participants, learning about heritage and some of them hearing their stories?

"The aim is to make the show as accessible as possible, both physically and in terms of how they see the show.

"So I'm always very wary of the space we're in and where the audience will be because there's been a number of productions we've done where I've done it in the round. Because I know as a theatre professional, when you do something in the round, the audience are in the play, because everyone can be seen.

"For the last one we did, I was really aware of performing it underneath Concorde in the Concorde hangar at the museum. It felt right that the action should take place with Concorde very much there. The audience could listen to the actors, they could look at the actors, but above them was this massive aeroplane that all these characters had worked on, and that felt very important."