



GRAHAM BURKE

A scene from *Pericles* on the roof of the Drama department. The performance was staged by students during the Centenary Alumni Weekend

## Alumni support summer school

A generous alumni donation enabled students to take part in valuable extracurricular activities during the 2008/09 session.

The department took undergraduates to see two prestigious productions, one by the UK's leading experimental theatre company – Forced Entertainment's *Spectacular* – the other the multi-Tony-award-winning production by Chicago's Steppenwolf Company of Tracey Letts' *August: Osage County*. As the first extracurricular whole-group visits in recent years, these opportunities were very much appreciated by the students.

For the first time in many years, the department held a four-week summer school for 20 students. It was led by director Jonathan Munby (BA 1998), whose latest production is a new version of *Life is a Dream* at the Donmar in London. The summer school culminated in a promenade performance

of Shakespeare's *Pericles* during the University's Centenary Alumni Weekend, using not only our two theatre spaces, but also the Brandt cinema, rehearsal spaces, a roofspace and a cellar.

The generosity of our alumni donors has enabled an all-too-rare experience in higher education – the chance to work with a professional director outside of the constraints and pressures of the curriculum, alongside a professional sound artist and stage-manager, supported by the department's own production tutors. This was particularly appreciated by the final-year students who have just graduated and are starting out in their careers.

For the 2009/10 session we look forward to inviting back several Drama alumni to share the benefit of their experience, by supporting a series of masterclasses by screen professionals, covering many aspects of working in the film and television industries today.

## Welcome

The department is sad to see so many colleagues retire at the end of this academic year. We wish them happy and productive retirements (see page 2).

However, we still have much to celebrate; as you will see from this newsletter, 2008/09 was full of highlights.

Notable successes include two Tony Awards and a BAFTA conferred on three of our alumni, the Theatre Collection's newly acquired museum accreditation, the wonderful insights into directing offered by the RSC's Greg Doran (BA 1980) in his Wickham Lecture, Professor Sarah Street's successful conference *Colour and the Moving Image* held at Arnolfini on Bristol's Harbourside and our undergraduates' innovative production of *Pericles* staged as part of the University's Centenary Alumni Weekend celebration.

With best wishes,

### Professor Simon Jones

Head of Subject, Department of  
Drama: Theatre, Film, Television

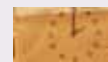
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Theatre Collection



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## Farewell

We have recently celebrated the careers of three colleagues who retired this summer. We will miss their wonderful company and inspiring work and we wish them well in the next stage of their lives.

JOHN ADAMS, PROFESSOR OF FILM AND SCREEN MEDIA PRACTICE

John joined the department in 1980. His interests in early cinema and landscape, and his links with creative-industry partners, were brought together in his creation of the joint Master's programme with Archaeology, working with the production company behind *Time Team*. John also pioneered the development of practice-led research into screen media as a founding editor of the *Journal for Media Practice*.

JENNIE NORMAN, THEATRE PRODUCTION TUTOR: DESIGN

As set-design tutor since 1984, Jennie inspired generations of students to produce the most imaginative designs for the Wickham Theatre. From Dadaist cabaret, through contemporary multimedia performance, to the reconstruction of a 17th-century theatre, Jennie applied her exacting eye for detail and rigorous research into the contexts of production.

ISOBEL PIERCE, LIFELONG LEARNING ADMINISTRATOR

Isobel first started work in the department in 1998, introducing a rich variety of short courses, day-schools and certificate and diploma courses, attracting over 1,000 students each year. The department is very proud of its work in lifelong learning and Isobel was instrumental in successfully integrating the activity into an already busy building: she ensured its smooth running and contributed significantly to its growth.



Two portraits of Vivien Leigh by John Vickers

## Vickers archive donated

The Theatre Collection is delighted to receive one of its most significant and important archives in recent years. The John Vickers archive portrays some of the very best of 20th-century British theatre and its notable personalities.

The archive comprises around 8,000 prints, 20,000 glass-plate negatives, 20,000 roll film negatives, 1,800 colour slides and 25 boxes of articles, teaching manuals, monographs, correspondence and business papers. Unusually, Vickers continued to work with black-and-white glass-plate negatives until the mid-1950s. This has resulted in an archive of exceptionally fine, high-quality images which are, worryingly, very vulnerable to physical damage.

John Vickers began his career in the 1930s. In 1939, he established his

own studio where, years later, Mario Testino worked as his assistant.

However, it was Vickers' portraits of actors including John Gielgud, Alec Guinness, Vivien Leigh, Lawrence Olivier and Ralph Richardson at the London Old Vic in the 1940s and 1950s that gained him his excellent reputation, and which are still used today as some of the defining theatrical images of their time.

The archive was donated, with copyright, by Norma Campbell Vickers and Sarah Vickers. The Theatre Collection is currently seeking funding to ensure the long-term protection of this wonderful resource and to make it available online for all our users. For further information, please contact Jo Elsworth, Director, Theatre Collection on 0117 331 5086 [jo.elsworth@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jo.elsworth@bristol.ac.uk)

## Thumbs up for Theatre Collection

The Theatre Collection was awarded full Accredited Museum status by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in April 2009.

Over 1,800 museums take part in the MLA's accreditation scheme, a commitment to managing collections for the enjoyment of all communities. Out of around 100 university-based museums, two

– the Theatre Collection and the Geology Museum – are based at the University of Bristol.

As an Accredited Museum, the Theatre Collection is open to all, and regularly receives visitors from home and abroad. It has a regular programme of small public exhibitions; *The Life and Work of Arnold Ridley* displays from November 2009.

## 'Pyramus, you begin'

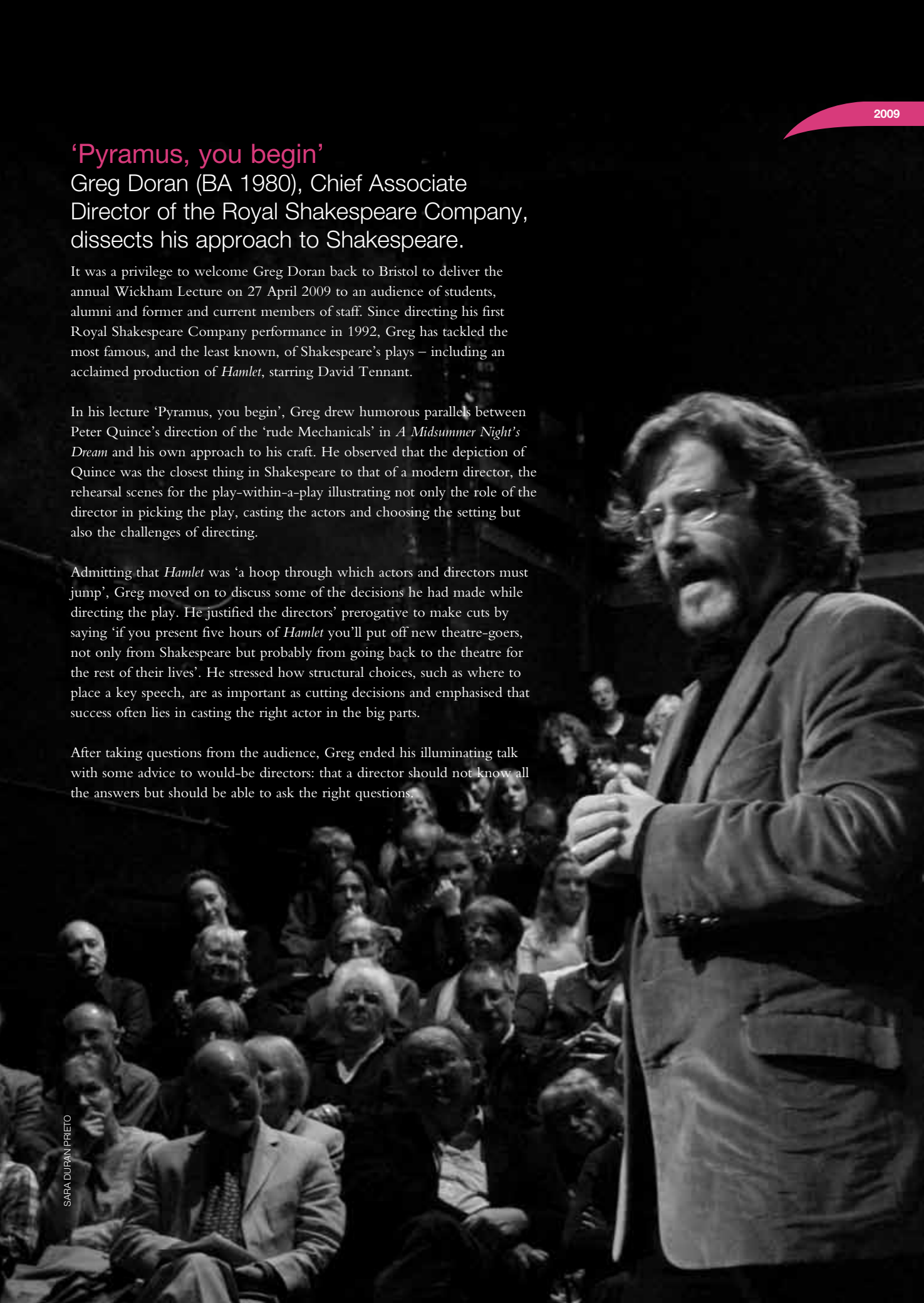
Greg Doran (BA 1980), Chief Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, dissects his approach to Shakespeare.

It was a privilege to welcome Greg Doran back to Bristol to deliver the annual Wickham Lecture on 27 April 2009 to an audience of students, alumni and former and current members of staff. Since directing his first Royal Shakespeare Company performance in 1992, Greg has tackled the most famous, and the least known, of Shakespeare's plays – including an acclaimed production of *Hamlet*, starring David Tennant.

In his lecture 'Pyramus, you begin', Greg drew humorous parallels between Peter Quince's direction of the 'rude Mechanicals' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his own approach to his craft. He observed that the depiction of Quince was the closest thing in Shakespeare to that of a modern director, the rehearsal scenes for the play-within-a-play illustrating not only the role of the director in picking the play, casting the actors and choosing the setting but also the challenges of directing.

Admitting that *Hamlet* was 'a hoop through which actors and directors must jump', Greg moved on to discuss some of the decisions he had made while directing the play. He justified the directors' prerogative to make cuts by saying 'if you present five hours of *Hamlet* you'll put off new theatre-goers, not only from Shakespeare but probably from going back to the theatre for the rest of their lives'. He stressed how structural choices, such as where to place a key speech, are as important as cutting decisions and emphasised that success often lies in casting the right actor in the big parts.

After taking questions from the audience, Greg ended his illuminating talk with some advice to would-be directors: that a director should not know all the answers but should be able to ask the right questions.



## in brief

### COLOUR AND THE MOVING IMAGE

Colour and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive attracted more than 100 delegates from around the world in July 2009. The conference was part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project based in the department and led by Professor Sarah Street. Experts, including representatives from the BFI National Archive, the Netherlands Film Museum and Aardman Animation, introduced each film.

### TONY AWARD-WINNERS

Two Bristol Drama graduates have won Tony Awards. Peter Darling (BA 1985) won for Best Choreography in a Musical (*Billy Elliot*) and Matthew Warchus (BA 1988) for Best Direction of a Play (*God of Carnage*). Matthew Warchus was also nominated for his production of *The Norman Conquests*, the first time since 1942 that a director has been in competition with himself for the award.

### BAFTA SUCCESS

*September* by Esther May Campbell (BA 1995) won Best Short Film at the 2009 BAFTA Awards. The 22-minute film was made on a limited budget with a cast drawn from Bristol's underground cinema collective the Cube Cinema and circus troupes, and edited by *Portishead* collaborator John Minton.

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## Student spotlight

Final-year students produce two independent study projects, which allows them to focus on topics of particular interest and gives them the opportunity to engage with the world of work. Two graduates reflect on their choices.

### My hometown: Karl Dixon (BA 2009)

“Welcome to my hometown, Coventry, so you know. I don’t know if you’ve been here ... or ... if you’d ever go. It’s the place where I was born, and apparently where I’ll die. To tell the truth I like it here ... but I don’t know why.”

So begins *cv1*, the film I created for part of my independent study. It is an exploration of my birthplace, featuring a scaled-down, 3D cardboard recreation of its blitzed and rebuilt city centre (which I slowly built in my Bristol flat over four months), framed in a state of semi-fictional crisis, as scores of unexploded WWII bombs found beneath the ground have forced its immediate evacuation. Through a personal and anecdotal monologue, supported by vox pops from fellow Coventrians, I venture into the issues surrounding this working-class concrete jungle.

The film is a personal testimony to a place that will forever be my

‘home’; a kind of backhanded love letter affectionately written through wearily gritted teeth. Coventry is not an attractive or vibrant place, but I was born there and lived there for 18 years before going to university. It has an aura which no other place will ever have for me; hopefully this film goes some way to explaining that.



*Mutiny* – part of the model Karl constructed for his film on Coventry

### Working knowledge: Max Johns (BA 2009)

As a joint honours student, I took every opportunity to get involved in practical work, both in and outside of the Drama department. The independent study unit gave me the perfect chance to do something hands-on that would be part of my degree course.

My year abroad took me to Berlin and I’d been waiting ever since to return and delve back into its exciting performance scene. When the department opened up industrial placements to joint honours students, I seized the chance to return, this

time working as a set and costume design assistant on an opera. So much was new and daunting to me – I’d never worked on an opera before and although I had set design experience, my knowledge of costume design was limited. But that’s what an industrial placement is all about – learning about professional practices through first-hand experience. It’s also a chance to establish contacts and connections that might lead to employment after graduating, which, in my case, worked. I’m now heading to Germany again, to take a job with my previous employer.