

'Soul Without End'

written by Martin Paul Roche

Playing dates: 6 – 11 February 2017

Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester (May 2016) – script feedback

“SOUL WITHOUT END was an ambitious, epic and theatrical piece of work which connects on a number of levels through its exploration of the universal theme of struggle between good and evil in the complexity and contradictions of human life. The theatrical structure is operatic and grand and has an ambitious sweep across the narrative. It is a thought provoking piece in terms of its exploration of conflict and human barbarism which resonates with so much of today’s world news.”

Overview

The play concerns the story a young French couple who in 1940, are escaping the ravages of the second world war and destruction of their tiny French village. Fleeing the atrocities and the death and loss of all they hold dear, they run as hard and as fast as they can across the country, eventually finding themselves in the remains of Chateaux Tatar. It is inhabited by the last remaining member of the family who owned it. But they also find it is the home of a small group of soldiers from apparently different sides who appear to be seeking refuge from ... what?

The young couple soon come to discover that with the chateaux, its owner and the soldiers there are many unanswered questions ... and secrets. Old secrets. Dark secrets. Secrets which, as they are disclosed, will shake their relationship, their faith and all they hold dear. More importantly, secrets which will challenge their understanding of good and of evil; of life and death, of love ... and of Chateaux Tatar. For they soon come to realise that it is not only people who have memories. So do places. And the reasons are darker, much darker than they could possibly ever think.

Staging

The piece is conceived with one main set which does not change and which represents a ruined chateaux with the main action/story taking place during the 1940’s (World War 2) in France. However, the story begins in an antique shop in 1970’s Paris some 30 years after the end of the war. The main character (Paulette) basically recounts her story and the events which happened to her during the period she took refuge at the chateaux. For this purpose, she has an area to the side of the stage, completely separate to the main action, in which she tells her story within her antique shop whilst the story switches between there in 1970 and war-torn France in 1940.

There is a great reliance in the staging on lighting and sound effects to create the required atmosphere and texture. The ruined chateaux must provide visuals of shapes, levels, shadows, character. Combined with the lighting/sound effects, it presents a very dark, moody, atmospheric texture. To assist with this, a gauze is used up stage to add an extra dimension to the characters and their nature.

Casting

Two female, six male

Accents are a matter for discussion and agreement. Either all use them or none.

Older Paulette: 50/older. Age is a function of the time period decided on and the age of the younger Paulette. French accent. Composed, dignified, passionate, elegant. Vitally a good story teller and able to paint vivid pictures for the audience (*lines shown in script as 'Paul'*). Because of the static nature of the playing, it needs detail, mannerisms. If she is a smoker then all the better.

Younger Paulette: 20's. Fiery, passionate, questioning, inquisitive, attractive. Sister of Antoine. Devoted to each other. Is attracted to Claude. Casting needs to bear in mind that she is the younger version of older Paulette. (*her lines are shown in script as 'PAUL'*)

Antoine: 25/30. Priest. Brother of young Paulette. Slightly older than his sister. Composed, has his faith challenged by the rigours of war and the secrets of the chateaux. The voice of reason, devoted to each other. Uncomplicated and honest.

Claude: 25/35. Remaining member of the family that owned the chateaux. Good natured/humoured. Strong, balanced, attractive, immediately attracted to Paulette, youthful vigour and passion; thoughtful, honest.

Captain Howard: 30/50. British Army Officer. English, well-spoken but not overly; more educated, articulate. Initially, he is approachable, business like. But he is cold, unfeeling, ruthless, takes delight in pain and inflicting it. He is the lynchpin to what takes place and the secrets disclosed and he evidences the evil within him in an almost matter-of-fact way.

He is also 'The Man' at the opening and end.

Klaus, Geneux, Carter: 20/60. German, French and English soldiers respectively. Carter should have a strong regional accent. Probably Cockney or Lancashire. All are initially nervous, reasonable, 'ordinary' soldiers with the camaraderie that would demonstrate such. However, they soon become dark, foreboding, acolytes of the Captain and all he represents.

Wardrobe

Uniforms need to be kept simple but accurate. Battle dress for the soldiers. It is not imperative that nationality is represented. Uniform trousers, shirt/vest, braces, boots would be sufficient for the three soldiers, more formal for the Captain. The weapons mentioned comprise three rifles and one sidearm for the Captain. Sound effects will accommodate their use in act 2.

One costume per character throughout and representative of the period.

Younger Paulette, Antoine, Claude are, as a function of the story, dishevelled, unkempt. Older Paulette is smart, elegant, refined. The Captain's outfit at opening/end is simply achieved by the addition of an overcoat and hat.

Martin Paul Roche (May 2016)