

## Arriving at Everest

On a Monday morning in February in Niagara-on-the-Lake, director Molly Smith and Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell christened the Shaw Festival's 2007 season with the first day of rehearsal for *Mack and Mabel*. The cast was present, the designers, stage managers, assistant stage managers, apprentice stage managers, and I – the intern director. For the next seven months I would be allowed the great privilege of walking through the looking glass, and observing the creative process in rehearsal from behind the scenes, and then from in front.

The word "rehearse" derives from the Middle English *rehercen* and the old French *rehercer* "to repeat," originally, "to harrow again". To harrow is to drag over already ploughed land in order to break up clods of earth, pulverize and stir the soil, uproot weeds, and eliminate air pockets that prevent soil-to-seed contact. To think of rehearsal as a harrowing – a fine breaking down of the play's text in preparation for performance – is the perfect illustration of my daily observations of the work in process. Constantin Stanislavski has said of rehearsal: "*Seventy five percent of what we do at rehearsal does not enter the performance. If we could retain a hundredth of everything, which we find during rehearsal, then in a hundred rehearsals we would have a splendid performance. But to our regret it does not always work that way.*"

To observe rehearsals is a delicate undertaking. It could be an intrusion upon, or a repression of, the condition necessary to rehearsal. I am speaking about the trust required for an actor to feel safe enough to take risks, to be spontaneous, and also of the relationship between director and intern which, to work well, is both deferential in nature and supportive – even if days go by when you never say a word.

Some days watching rehearsals can be a bit like watching a snail move from one side of a room to another. It seems as though very little happens until, upon closer observation you realize that the snail did, in fact go from point A to point B. It wasn't magic. It wasn't by osmosis. It happened through the creative process, which is as mysterious as it is slow. Rehearsals, I have learned are also a bit like a volcano, which having lain dormant for so long suddenly erupts. Once the dust settles you see so clearly for the first time what was in the mind of the director all along.

My journey to the Shaw Festival really began when I was a little girl and my mother took me to see *Mrs Warren's Profession*. My feet didn't touch the floor and I couldn't see over all the heads in front of me, but there was a kind of magic in the air. That night I fell in love with the theatre and with the Shaw Festival. For me that first rehearsal for *Mack and Mabel* was marked with the kind of joy felt by a mountain climber having reached the

top of Everest.

Watching some of the finest directors in this country work on sublime texts, it occurred to me that the director takes on many roles. Among them, director as teacher, as parent, as invisible presence, as third eye, as critic, as author, as trainer, as partner, as lover and as psychoanalyst, but always, always, as collaborator. I have never worked anywhere so creative, so inviting, so supportive and so inspiring as I have here in the presence of the actors, designers, stage managers, and directors.

It has been a privilege to watch the creative process under the mentorship of so many talented artists. Their energy and commitment to text have left me with a strong and lasting impression, which I will carry with me always into rehearsals of my own.