

Antony and Cleopatra

Director's note by Marthinus Basson

History seems to have a habit of repeating itself. We unfortunately seldom know or are enough to learn from the patterns that, in the best tradition of chaos theory, play themselves out daily on a minutely personal level or on a tragically global scale.

The epic tale of the Roman military genius, Mark Antony, and his doomed relationship with Cleopatra, last ruler of Egypt, has inspired countless versions and found its way into biographies, novels, plays, paintings and an opera by Samuel Barber. It has recently thrilled audiences in the comfort of their homes in the TV-series ROME.

This is the second time I am tackling Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and I consider it a rare privilege these days to have the opportunity to revisit and rethink the same material. This enables me to rectify certain areas previously unresolved through lack of insight or experience, to measure my growth and development over the past 16 years, or maybe just to test and exercise my powers of re-imagination.

The grand romance of *Antony and Cleopatra* with its obsessive and selfish love, lust, betrayal and devastation, is played out regularly on TV in the comfort of our homes in soaps such as *Days of our Lives* and *Egoli* or by real life 'idols' and 'heroes' such as Bill Clinton, Silvio Berlusconi, Joost van der Westhuizen and Tiger Woods. Its impact has, to some extent, become trivialized and commonplace through the overload of information by the gutter press and TV.

The extraordinary reality of the demise of the magnificently rich and ancient culture of Egypt and the failure of the high ideals of the Roman Republic can feel distant and foreign. However, the dissolving of democracy into the cult of personality or dictatorship and the rise of Empire can be appreciated closer to home in the Hitlers, Bin Ladens, Mugabes and Bushes of this world. Antony and Cleopatra can be read as a cautionary tale of the effects individuals can have on history, culture and lives when leaders or politicians forget their duties and responsibilities by serving their selfish agendas or personal needs.

For this production I decided not to go with a 'high concept' but rather to focus on and explore the spaces between the fault-lines of the epic sweep and drama suggested by Shakespeare's text. I have tried to give some weight to the little man, the loyal servant and follower, the slimy bureaucrat and the visionary as to the use and abuse of women.

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