

Short biography

Emma Rice is a modern theatre director who, until recently, was the director at The Globe Theatre in London. Her particular focus is on community theatre and creating performance work that unites divided and fractious communities. "Her bold and innovative productions, creativity, gift for storytelling and frequent disregard for purism have made her one of the most important and acclaimed directors in contemporary theatre." (<http://www.theheroinecollective.com/emma-rice/>) Her work mixes many different performance styles, including music, song and comedy. She is influenced by circus, physical theatre and ensemble storytelling of companies like Theatre de Complicite. Her work now in Bristol is with her own company called Wise Children, a strong part of which is training the next generation of actors.

Her style of work

Her work is focused on lifting plays from its original context and finding a fresh, innovative and creative new way of performing them for a contemporary audience. Her work often starts with a psychological interrogation of the story, asking why. Why this story? Why these characters? Why are they doing what they are doing? What she is doing is trying to find a way that connects us, the audience, with the stories that she is telling. Her work is highly emotional in that respect. She brings her cast together, creating a tight ensemble which drives the production forward to become more than a group of actors performing. It becomes something much more. Listen to Emma Rice explain that herself when talking about her most recent production, Wise Children:

[Making A Show with Emma Rice](#)

Key features of her work

- community theatre
- mixed performance styles
- new approaches to old stories
- music/songs
- comedy
- circus tricks
- physical theatre
- Projection and technical theatre
- ensemble work
- Education / training new actors

Notable productions

Her work at Kneehigh Theatre included some hugely influential productions, including The Red Shoes and Brief Encounters. Both highly important in theatre history and toured both nationally and internationally.

More recently, her production of Wise Children has enthused and excited audiences. The play, which is a combination of stories, tales and flashbacks is centred on two 75 women reminiscing about the past and how they made their own way in life by "brushing off adversity with a touch of rouge, a bit of glitter and a soupçon of Champagne." (<https://thebathmagazine.co.uk/interview-with-director-emma-rice/>).

Activities

Activity 1

Find a short fairy tale or nursery rhyme that you are familiar with. Write it down on a large piece of paper so that there is a lot of space around the outside. Find the characters of the tale or rhyme and begin to ask about them.

- Why are they there?
- Who are they?
- What is their life story?
- What has brought them here?
- Where are they going next?

Build up an informed and engaging background to the characters involved in the tale or rhyme that allows you then to fully answer this final question: What is their complete and full motivation for what they are doing in the tale or rhyme?

Activity 2

A key element to the work of Emma Rice is reimagining a text to a new and contemporary context. This is a process called transposing. Transpose the tale or rhyme into a new context, with a contemporary setting, content and meaning. Be sure that you are aware of what that meaning is before you finish this activity. It is easy to transpose little red riding hood into a gritty inner city location, but you must attempt to understand how you intend to help the audience to connect to the story.

Activity 3

Find a way of telling the story that you are comfortable with. Examples could be two characters talking to each other about the past or a character/s talking directly to the audience. The focus needs to be on the telling of the story and how we hook the audience into the engaging way we, as humans, like to tell stories. Try to involve the whole group in telling the story.

Activity 4

Once you have the story told, identify how you could add action to the performance without losing the essence of the storytelling element. This might mean a section of the storytelling could be acted out but the characters give direct audience address whilst the scene is taking place. Or it could also be a movement sequence with a piece of music chosen to help continue to carry the meaning. Don't aim to replace all of the story telling, it is important that these elements remain as well.

Videos

Here is a curated YouTube playlist on Emma Rice:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCt_Olq6e24TjZSHYnpworBhodGcoot_-

Useful links

Interviews and biographies

[BIOGRAPHY: Emma Rice – Theatre Director - The Heroine Collective](#)

[Interview: Emma Rice - The Bath Magazine](#)

Associated theatre companies

[Kneehigh - Award-Winning, Creative Theatre Company Based in Cornwall](#)

[Welcome to Shakespeare's Globe | London \(shakespearesglobe.com\)](#)

Her work

[Emma Rice \(2019\) | Directing and Composition \(wordpress.com\)](#)