

RTST, Anthony Almeida: “The Work Has Got To Cost And It Has Got To Matter To Me”

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Anthony Almeida has won the 2019 Royal Theatrical Support Trust (RTST) Sir Peter Hall Director Award, which will see him helm a full-scale production at Curve in Leicester.

The accolade is open to anyone making the transition from smaller stages into larger-scale productions with a grant of £50,000 being applied towards costs of staging the Production.

This RTST promotes theatre nationally – in the regions beyond London and is presented to an up-and-coming director who demonstrates exceptional directing skills in a competitive process. Almeida’s chosen show will open next year at Curve, and will subsequently tour the UK as a co-production with the Rose Theatre Kingston and English Touring Theatre.

We are huddled at a table at Shakespeare’s Globe, London. Upstairs, theatrical royalty Vanessa Redgrave and Sir Ian McKellen are hosting a reception for invited guests and industry figures. Almeida finds it difficult to talk about himself, although he engages generously, he is visibly nervous. This is his first interview.

So, we talk about his shiny black outfit: “Ha! Wearing all black is about escaping I suppose– the reason I direct is so people can look at other stuff and not me,” he explains.

“I feel excited. I feel ready. It seems like it’s taken a long time to get here because I’ve only ever done the jobs that I want to do, as opposed to work that I feel that I have to do. As a director, first you’re referred to as emerging then you are called fledgling and then you are called up and coming. Now, though, I’m ready to go.”

Has it sunk in? “Yeah. I just feel ready,” he says. “The process was so demanding; This year’s selection panel included Curve’s Nikolai Foster, RSC deputy director Erica Whyman, designer Grace Smart and director Lindsay Posner. There was a written application, a workshop that involved me directing a scene with actors and then a long formal interview. It was like being on *The Apprentice*,” he says, laughing.

Who did he share his award win news with first? “I rang my dad. He didn’t say anything, he cried. My parents have always been tremendously supportive. I don’t come from any theatre stock; It’s a privilege to be here tonight.”

He continues: “I’m a Bristol boy, but it is interesting this distinction between theatre and regional theatre; it’s just theatre isn’t it? But when it is talked about it isn’t about geography, it is what is London theatre and what is non-London theatre.”

So how might a director in Shetland achieve that goal of making work on minimal resources? For Almeida, it has to do with fostering the balance between making interesting work and exploring the civic responsibility of theatre. His work to date has been all about “community focussed work,” whether that be in pupil referral units, working with people experiencing homelessness or in refugee’s detention centres. He adds: “The work has got to cost and it has got to matter to me. This kind of work isn’t additional – for me it is the work, that’s why I do this” states Almeida with admirable, if idealistic, conviction.

I ask which theatre directors inspire him most. “I would say Amit Lahav, Ivo Van Hove and Sally Cookson,” he says. “Sally is all about the work and the art and it’s her work that has taken her on the journey. Her work is completely joyful. Ivo for his dramaturgical rigour but how theatre is about ideas. And Gecko Theatre’s work is visceral and his sculpting of image and body in space just gets my pulse racing.”

How will he know he’s achieved what he wanted to? “Two things – that people leave the theatre and that they keep the conversation going and reconnect as a result of watching the play and long-term success would be that I’m still working, Carl, and that we are still having a conversation about it,” says Almeida.

Almeida sums up his advice for any up-and-coming theatre director. “I’d say find your tribe,” he says, “they might not be on your doorstep but go out and find like-minded people – people have said to me in the past: if you like it – do it – you’ll find a way, but it doesn’t quite work like that. That’s why opportunities like today are so vital.”