

## Interview with Marianne Elliott

*Director Marianne Elliott was interviewed about her production in a Platform event at the National Theatre, shortly after the original production had opened*

*On the jacket of Mark Haddon's book, it says that Christopher has Asperger's. In Mark Haddon's article for the programme he says that he wishes that wasn't written on it because he wants it to be vaguer and less diagnostic than that. Did you get someone in to advise you about Luke's performance? Or did you just go with your instincts?*

We did get a lot of advice – not about the performing of it – that would make me very nervous, 'cause I would feel like I didn't have the control. We got a lot of advice about autism and Asperger's syndrome, and we went to various schools and spoke to consultants. Two adults with Asperger's talked to us individually and as a group. I thought about bringing somebody into the rehearsal process but after a while I realised Christopher is probably not completely accurate because he has too many traits on the spectrum. He is his own individual character and Luke was creating him, and I felt that was a very delicate, embryonic growth. There was no one else commenting on the performance, except for Mark Haddon. He came to the first day of rehearsals, cried – in a good way – and then said he didn't want to come again! Then he saw the first preview performance.

*Did Mark Haddon say what he felt about it? It must be a strange thing to see your novel become a piece of theatre.*

He has been through quite an interesting process with this book, as you can imagine, because I think it is probably the nation's favourite book. A lot of people love it and I think that has been wonderful for him, though I would have thought it is possibly quite difficult to move on. He has given so many interviews about it with journalists that he doesn't know what else to say; it has sort of died for him, in a way. He did say that when he came to the first day of rehearsals, it had come alive for him again, because it was out of his domain I suppose and other people were speaking his words.

*You only had six weeks to rehearse, which seems such a tiny amount of time to create something from scratch. How does it work?*

Six weeks is a luxury: most theatres don't have that. Everybody works differently. I go into rehearsals very prepared; I know what I want to get out of the day. Me and Bunny [Christie, the designer] designed it over a long period of time. Then we worked on model boxes for a long time, and then we devised a story board where we took a photograph of the model using little model figures for every scene. We had worked out a lot in the workshop. Rehearsals had very structured days.

*Who directs the director? Who do you go to?*

Usually it is the designer, I would say. Usually I am in the rehearsal room, trying to galvanise the troops and the designer is in the workshop (the workshops at the National Theatre, where they build and make things), trying to galvanise his/her troops. We'll come together at the end of the week to talk about how things are going. The other thing is that my husband is really good, so I can come home from work every evening and scream and shout, and then look very composed the next day! Unfortunately I couldn't do that on this show, because he's in it, so I had to lie a lot at home, too! To be truthful, I thoroughly enjoyed this process. I have not really enjoyed the process so much in the past two years, because the show is everything to me, it means so much. I am sure anybody who tries to be creative feels the same way. But I have loved this: I love the script; I really like the book. Working with choreographers is really illuminating and makes you feel like you're working with a cohort in the room because they're developing stuff and trying things out as much as you are. We went into rehearsals very prepared, but there are also lots of ideas in the show that the actors came up with during rehearsals.

