

For some unknown reason, I've been fortunate enough to explore the story at the centre of this musical many times during my career. The *York Passion Plays* in 1996, the same plays in Coventry Cathedral in 1998, a 1,000-strong cast in London as part of the Millennium celebrations. I've explored the stories in a UK prison, in a church in Oregon, in a theatre in Liverpool and at the Royal Albert Hall in London. All very different experiences and all a privilege.

So when renowned playwright Robert Schenkkan approached me about working with him and his composer Neil Berg on *The 12*, I looked back on all those previous experiences and wondered if I was ready for a new exploration. And a new exploration is certainly what it is. What excites me is that this story, told daily in churches throughout the world, is somehow different. Fresh. A new angle.

Between the moment when Robert invited me and the reality of a production, much happened. Our world was rocked by a cataclysmic event that touched us all. A pandemic. Plenty of time to contemplate. As I'm sure happened for many of us, that difficult time gave me the gift of considering how I wanted, if fortunate, to use the creative time left to me. It focused me on only telling stories that mattered to me. Stories that remind us of what we are here to do.

I come from the highlands of Scotland. When I was growing up, you went to church whether you wanted to or not. I heard those great stories every Sunday. They became a

THE 12

A NEW MUSICAL

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

BY JOHN DOYLE



focus for why I went into the theatre. The relationship between religion and theatre has always interested me. The rituals and explorations have always felt closely linked. As I've grown older and life has offered unexpected opportunities, I've seen that ritual and storytelling are at the root of all explorations.

At one part of my life I was lucky enough to spend a lot of time living in a small town just outside Rome, Italy. There, church and community are entwined. Indeed, one of the characters in our musical founded a big old church there! The art that is so readily available in Rome has most certainly influenced my work. Visual art always does influence me, as I hope you will see in our production. What has been wonderful is working with trusted collaborators like Ann Hould-Ward our costume designer to create a visual world that is contemporary

but reflects the artists of long ago.

One is always happy when any artistic director of a theatre offers an opportunity to work in their space. Donna Lynn leads a beautiful and welcoming space. However, it's a risk to invite artists that you haven't worked with before into your home. I know—I've

led five theatre organizations during a long working life. Making change is hard. Challenging audiences and artists is hard. However, it's important to remember that without the "new," there is no future for our art form. The musical is a powerful form. Music has been used to communicate important stories for as long as we have walked this earth. All the stories we love, all the musicals we listen to again and again, were once "new."

The 12 aims to tell this perhaps familiar story "anew." It's told by contemporary people, now. It's told for you. Not to evangelize. Not to put any one religion, faith or belief above another. Rather it asks us to see and hear afresh. I can't legislate for that to happen. My job is to tell it in a way that honors the writers and makes theatrical sense to me. The core message of the story, surely central to all religions and philosophies, is as important now as it ever was. As I approach the winter of my life I think it ever more important. We have a responsibility to each other. To love one another. When I think back to the boy in the highlands of Scotland who sometimes had to be dragged kicking and screaming to those endless church services, I feel lucky that I did in fact hear words then that I'm still lucky enough to be exploring today.