

THE SUPPLIANTS

AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Tring Park School for the Performing Arts puts on a huge number of shows of all kinds across the year. Each of our main courses – Dance, Acting, Musical Theatre, Performance Foundation, Theatre Arts and Commercial Music – create a variety of shows including classic musicals (the next is Thoroughly Modern Millie), Shakespeare, tragedies, comedies, rock and pop concerts, original dance shows and much more.

This year Dominic Yeates, one of our Drama directors decided to create something a bit different and arguably more daring: an adaptation of a Greek tragedy recreated in a migrant camp and set outside.

The Suppliants is the first and only surviving play of a trilogy by Aeschylus put on in 463BCE and is one of the strangest and most strangely beautiful of all Greek tragedies.

In one sense the play is quite straightforward. It is about helplessness and need and what it means to stand up for those who are defenceless.

It is really important that, in a school such as ours, we should be willing to take creative risks and it was a great opportunity to take students out of, what we call, the Tring ‘bubble’ and take a close look at one of the key issues affecting the world – that of refugees and migration.

The director decided, quite riskily, as it was November, to set the play outside in the courtyard behind the mansion where they recreated a migrant camp with the audience seated around and amongst the camp.

As part of the preparation for the show, acting students went to see the award winning play “The Jungle” at the Young Vic, a portrayal of life in the now-bulldozed Calais migrant camp and had the opportunity to take part in a Q&A with a member of the cast.

The immersive production of The Suppliants’ camp was included tarpaulins, oil drumfires and a makeshift café from which the audience could sample simple North African dishes. The audience were encouraged to sit in the midst of the action and to move around if they so wished (although the English, on the whole, are not terribly comfortable with this!) On arrival, the public were held in groups and escorted to the site in groups by students dressed as camp security, which further enhanced the immersive nature of the show.

In the interval of the show representatives of Oxfam, World Vision, Medecins sans Frontieres and War Child were invited to present to audiences to put some of the subject matter contained in the play into a 21st century context. They talked about poverty, working with vulnerable children, delivering emergency medical aid to people affected by armed conflict and natural and man-made disasters.

Just one statistic: in 2017, more than 300,000 people risked their lives attempting the deadly Mediterranean Sea crossing – 3,116 died.