**Notes for Guards at the Taj**

Welcome to these pre-show notes for ‘Guards at the Taj’ by Rajiv Joseph. The sound and music are by George Dennis, and the lighting is by Richard Howell. The set designer is Soutra Gilmour, and the play is directed for the Bush Theatre by Jamie Lloyd.

The audio described performance takes place on Saturday May the 6th at 2.30. There will be a touch tour at 1 o’clock that day, to give us a chance to visit the set and explore the props - we may be able to meet the actors too. Please let the box office know if you’d like to come on the touch tour, so that we have an idea of numbers. These notes will delivered live through the headsets at 2.20 with any changes, to allow you to refresh your memories and check your headset’s working.

The play lasts for an hour and twenty minutes with no interval, and there is infrequent strong language as the story unfolds. The audio description will be given by me, Jane Brambley.

For this production the acting area stretches the full width of the space, faced by a long block of tiered seating, with another block at right angles, on its left. The seating is now allocated, with individual flip-up seats.

As we enter the auditorium, the space is dim and misty, the air filled with the sound of tropical birds: we are in Agra, India, in 1648.

A long wall spans the back of the space, curving slightly forward on the right. It’s shoulder high, broad enough to stand on, and bathed with dim dappled blue light which makes it appear textured, like stone. One of the concrete pillars of the theatre rises in the centre of the wall, and behind, the back wall is lost in shadow.

On top of the wall stands Hamayun *(hoom-a-yoon),* on duty, facing us. He’s in his early twenties, with deepset eyes and a firm set to his mouth. He has black hair and brown skin. Hamayun wears a simple uniform of knee length tunic and narrow trousers in dark blue-grey cotton: his feet are bare. The hilt of a long curved sword is cupped in his left hand, the blade rises up, propped against his shoulder.

In front of the wall, the floor is bare. Two long trenches are dug into it. They form a right angle, with one pointing away from the guard to the block of audience seating directly in front, and the other running parallel to the wall, from the centre to the left.

Hamayun is thin and bony. As he stands looking out at us, his mouth is tense, his eyes watchful. His movements are controlled and disciplined, but the trace of nervousness in his eyes makes him seem very young. Hamayun is played by Danny Ashok.

He is soon joined by another guard, Baboor. The same age as Hamayun, Babur is a little taller. His face is long, with a full mouth and large expressive eyes, his black hair is neatly trimmed, and he too is dressed in uniform. Unlike his friend, when he moves Babur is inclined to throw his arms and legs about, as if he’s unable to restrain his free spirit.

Babur is played by Darren Kuppan.

As the two guards reveal their story, the lights sometimes warm to hot orange, but these moments are brief. On the whole the lights stay dim, with a hint of blue or later, just a hint of orange.

To conclude, the theatre website sets the scene.:

‘It’s 1648. Agra, India. Imperial guards and best mates Humayun and Babur keep watch as the final touches are put to the mighty Taj Mahal behind them. The emperor has decreed that no one, except the masons, labourers and slaves who exist within those walls, shall turn to look at the building until it is complete.

Now, as the building nears completion and the first light catches on the pure white domes behind them, the temptation to steal a glance at the most beautiful monument the world has ever seen grows stronger. But beauty has a price and Humayun and Babur are about to learn its true cost’.

And that’s the end of these pre-show notes.