

## The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The 942<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon took place on Tuesday November 2021. This was a virtual meeting.

The speaker was Sarah Ellis, Director of Digital Development for the Royal Shakespeare Company whose subject was *Technology and the Future of Theatre*.

In its work, the Royal Shakespeare Company has always considered the past, present and future, and the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death in 2016 provided an opportunity to explore what theatre might look like in the future, resulting in their production of *The Tempest*. She showed a three-minute video explaining how technology was incorporated into the production, in particular the creation of an avatar for the spirit Ariel.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on the company, both a reminder of the importance of technology as the company has streamed several past productions to audiences at home, and as a reminder that live, in-person work is still the best form of story-telling. She quoted singer David Bowie "Tomorrow belongs to those who see it coming".

With all theatre spaces dark, the RSC considered how in the future they might replicate the live event. The performance space is essential for theatre so they have scanned all the RSC's auditoria, hoping to link the theatrical "house" with the homes their audiences live in.

Just as lockdown began the RSC were embarking on a project called *Dream*. First postponed, the project was reimagined to satisfy their audience's craving for togetherness and liveness. Using facial recognition and motion technology the story of the play was told in 30 minutes, members of the audience interacting by guiding Puck through the forest. The sense of welcome that an audience would get in a real theatre was replicated, and each performance was followed by a Question and Answer session. The ten live performances were experienced by 65000 people in 92 countries, including many young people new to the RSC. Throughout all the digital work, audience research has been key to understand what works and what doesn't.

While returning gradually to live performance, the RSC uses what has been learned about digital platforms in live theatre in its planning. It aims to provide and maintain connections with people, to support both audiences and artists, to continue to collaborate and innovate, and to put people first.

The virtual meeting was viewed 93 times.