

Globe Theatre's *The Last Wife* puts a contemporary spin on a historical tale



When asked to describe *The Last Wife*, director Anita Rochon has a quick answer.

"It's an imagining of a historical event through a contemporary lens," said Rochon about the latest main stage production at Globe Theatre.

The play, which opens March 2, focuses on the relationship between Katherine Parr and Henry VIII. Written by Kate Hennig, the production moves the characters from the correct historical time frame of the mid-1500s to the present.

While the setting changes, the issues in the marriage remain — love, fidelity, family, power and gender equality.

"You're given the space to say, 'Oh, this happened in this time,' so you're able to look at the politics in a more transparent way," explained Rochon. "The gender politics are a little more transparent because there really was a change where a female could have power with Elizabeth I taking over and becoming the Queen for so long. Because you look at through a contemporary lens, I think these characters look similar to us."

“For example, we have just seen some pretty remarkable questions about female empowerment during the U.S. election.”

Rochon, who is the co-artistic director of The Chop theatre company in Vancouver, made her Globe debut last season as director of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was her first time working in the round and she has found that experience to be quite beneficial with *The Last Wife*.

“It totally helps me. In my planning, before coming out here, because I’ve been in the space previously, I actually understand the space, how the space will match up with the piece,” said Rochon. “In my discussions with the set designer, I understand the kind of choices we can make that will have an impact in the space. For my first time here, I was really lucky to have a designer who had worked a lot at Globe so I depended heavily on him as I was going on faith and pictures.

“This time I am able to make more informed choices.”

The cast for the production is comprised of Oliver Becker (Henry), Jaire Olmos (Eddie), Donny Ready (Thom), Sabryn Rock (Kate), Robyn Sanderson (Bess) and Anna Seibel (Mary). Rochon said the biggest challenge for the cast was the large number of scenes in the production and the ensuing demands on the actors.

“It’s a play with a lot of scenes, which is very exciting. It’s very fast paced. It’s kind of like, and I don’t mean to diminish it, but it’s like *Game of Thrones* and *House of Cards* but on stage,” said Rochon. “It’s got the political intrigue, it’s got these sexy relationships, it’s got really funny characters, it’s got great writing but it’s very episodic. Right now, the challenge for myself and the actors is creating a full world — even if we’re in a scene that’s just three minutes, everyone has to know exactly where they’re coming from and exactly where they’re going to and exactly where they are at that moment.

“We want to make sure that all the scenes are rich and full so the audience knows where we are and what is at stake.”

Joining Rochon on the creative team are Laura Gardner (set designer), Mara Gottler (costume designer), Louise Guinand (lighting designer), Jeremy Sauer (composer and sound designer), Ryland Alexander (fight director), Devon Bonneau (assistant lighting designer), Liz Campbell (stage manager) and Liz King (assistant stage manager).