

Redcrosse in Coventry

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On the evening of Saturday 17 November, the Royal Shakespeare Company presented Redcrosse in the magnificent environment of Coventry Cathedral for the Cathedral's 50th birthday. Described in publicity as 'a modern-day celebration of England and St George', Redcrosse was written by Professor Ewan Fernie of the Shakespeare Institute in conjunction with the major contemporary poets Jo Shapcott, Michael Symmons Roberts and Andrew Motion. It was set to music by Grammy-award-winning composer, Tim Garland.

Fernie commented, 'Redcrosse takes its cue from Edmund Spenser's whopping forgotten epic, *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser remade St George and we, like him, wanted to get beyond the image of a muscle-bound dragon slayer. We tried to imagine someone anyone—potentially everyone in our diverse society—might get behind.

Our St George is a seeker. He goes wrong and makes mistakes but all the time

remains a hero of desire, someone who wants something more, something better.'

Last year Redcrosse was put on in St George's Chapel, Windsor and Manchester Cathedral. The RSC, and Director Luke Kernaghan, did it even more dramatically. Representing different faces of multicultural England, Ariyon Bakare, Majinder Virk, Mark Holgate and Susie Trayling enacted an absorbing quest for salvation. The music was performed with passionate intensity by Acoustic Triangle and the Choir of Royal Holloway. A fifth actor, Sandra Duncan, drew the audience in to a shared poetic quest for a better life in a better England.

Fernie observed, 'The performance ended with a moving coup de theatre when Ariyon Bakare was robed and armed as St George. He then slowly walked the length of the Cathedral, as if out into the world, while the Choir sang a wistful 'Jerusalem' out of sight. I'll never forget it!'