



## INTERVIEW WITH JO MORRIS

Actor playing 'Regina' in *The White Divers of Broome*



**Black Swan:** You have been treading the boards and been a tutor for Black Swan for a while now. Tell us about your journey with the company.

**Jo Morris:** Black Swan has been such a wonderful company to be associated with over the years. The first show I performed in, *The Laramie Project* directed by Adam Mitchell, was kind of a pilot for the beginnings of the HotBed Ensemble, which was officially initiated the following year, and which I was also lucky enough to be a part of. With the program I was given the opportunity to really stretch the parameters of my acting experience by playing roles that I normally wouldn't be cast in, for instance one of the characters I played in *The Laramie Project*, Reggie

Flutey, was a tough, down to earth policewoman in her mid 50's! They provided such incredible challenges, which I think ultimately helped to make me a more courageous and creative performer. *The Crucible* was the first main stage show I did with Black Swan, and that was an experience all unto itself...to have the privilege of being part of such a vast ensemble of extremely varied experience, and in such an epic production was truly humbling, not unlike *The White Divers of Broome!*

**BS:** What has been your most memorable moment on a Black Swan stage and why?

**JM:** Probably playing Abigail in the courthouse scene in *The Crucible* - the sheer drama and incredible stakes of that scene was just mind blowing, and I remember being vaguely aware of the huge amount of actors onstage all at the same time contributing to that heightened state...it was so thrilling!

**BS:** Your character in *The White Divers of Broome*, Regina, is a headstrong and determined reporter who doesn't always do what the people around her expect her to do. Would it have been normal for a young, unchaperoned female to be a reporter in 1912 Australia? What do you imagine about your character's life before she turns up in Broome to cover the hot story?

**JM:** Regina is definitely a pretty extraordinary woman. In 1912 Australia, women's suffrage was still a fairly new and revolutionary concept. She is obviously a highly intelligent, educated woman, and even though she would have faced many challenges because of her sex, I think that it would also have been an incredibly exciting time to be alive. She is standing on the precipice of great change, and with that comes a determination and vitality and courage that inform everything she does. Having said that, to arrive in Broome at the height of its lay-up, into a world dominated by men - from the divers to the master pearlmen - and into the rich cultural tapestry of life there, after the bustling 'White Australia' metropolis of Melbourne, would have been profoundly shocking and confronting. It's not enough however to dampen her innate sense of curiosity and fierce independence, she is an extremely courageous woman!

**BS:** Do you have a preference between performing in a new play and performing in an existing classic? Why? What are some of the different challenges you would face?

**JM:** I think right now my preference would be for new works. There is something so simultaneously terrifying and wonderful about embarking on a story that has never been told, inhabiting characters that have never been explored, and there is an enormous element of risk, which I just love. On the one hand it could all fall apart at the seams, but on the other it could reach out to people and seize them and sock them in the guts and take them to new heights and challenge them in new ways! There's also something really exciting about telling stories that appeal to now, that can potentially in some way shape our culture, and force audiences (and artists) to ask and address important questions and issues. New works reflect the present climate, and as such force us to challenge our own belief systems and actions.

**BS:** What's on your acting bucket list?

**JM:** Oh my goodness, where do I start? Having just expressed my love for new works, there are so many classic, celebrated roles I would love to have a stab at! Ophelia from *Hamlet*, Viola and Mariah from *Twelfth Night*, Hedda Gabler, Sonia from *Uncle Vanya*, Nina from *The Seagull*, basically anything by Chekhov, anything by Tim Winton, Catherine from *Proof*, Medea, anything by Pinter, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, May in *The Accrington Pals* by Peter Whelan – and all the wonderful roles that are still to be written! I could honestly go on and on. Hopefully I'll get to play a few of them before retirement age!