

Q&A: Robyn Simpson

A cast of 20,000 is warming up for the London 2012 opening and closing ceremonies, which will be watched by an estimated audience of four billion. **Geny Caloisi** hears from dancer and choreographer Robyn Simpson, one of the aerial captains for the Olympics opening ceremony on July 27, which will involve a blend of theatre, dance, circus skills, acrobatics – and lots of surprises!

How did you get this job?

I had to audition twice for it. The first was a flying and "aerial silk" audition. The second was another flying one with costume. I had to go first, which I found really intimidating. Twice I somersaulted and both times my costume got wrapped around my head! No style or grace there, and I really thought I'd messed up my chances of getting the job. Fortunately, the thousands of hours I've spent in a harness, and the number of large-scale events I've done all over the world mean that I'm one of the most experienced flyers in the country – I think that helped me secure the captain role.

What technique will you use for the performance at the Olympics?

There's going to be some work in the air and on the ground. People are being trained to do some really exciting kit-specific things and I'm looking forward to seeing



the audience's expressions when some of the scenes are created!

What does being one of the aerial captains mean to you?

I've wanted to work on an opening ceremony for ten years, since I was working on a large-scale site-specific work in Cornwall. I remember London getting the games in 2005 and suddenly thinking that it was possible and might not be just a dream. I still pinch myself that all the hard work has paid off with this role and being involved.

What expectations do you have of the performance?

There's something magical

about the stadium ceremonies, when so many people are on the field of play and then there are people around the world all sitting watching at the same time. For me, it epitomises what the games are about. Everyone involved in the ceremonies, from the cast to the athletes, has worked so hard for years to get where they are. Also the idea of a four billion plus audience watching the opening ceremony gives me such a buzz.

Working in a big stadium that's full of excited people is quite an experience. The noise, the big screens, the adrenaline all hit you. I remember the first time I performed with Muse at Wembley not being able to hear the start of the music over the crowd and the rising panic that I wouldn't hear the cue.

The sound of my heartbeat was louder than the beat of the music! But you do get used to it and the audience and athletes give you so much energy back that it transforms the performance... The big screens also mean you can have intimate moments as well, as they really bring the audience into the action, make them feel a part of the whole show. It's like the best of rock concerts, theatre and fireworks all at once. ●



Top and above, Robyn Simpson