

Billy Budd

Director Biography: Michael Grandage



Michael Grandage, (born May 2, 1962, Yorkshire, England), English theatre director who created critically and commercially successful productions of a diverse variety of plays in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Grandage grew up in Penzance, England, and at age 18 he enrolled in the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. After graduating in 1984, he embarked on an acting career. Eventually, however, he realized that he had “become obsessed by other people’s roles in the process. I was just as interested in the sound, the lighting and other people’s performances as I was in my own.” He began to seek directing opportunities, and in 1996 he got his chance with Arthur Miller’s *The Last Yankee at Colchester*. It was a triumph, and he was soon in demand as a director.

In 1999 Grandage became associate director of Sheffield’s Crucible Theatre, and the following year he was named artistic director of the Sheffield Theatres. He quickly began to attract major names to this regional theatre complex; in 2001 Joseph Fiennes played the title role in Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*, and in 2002 Kenneth Branagh starred in William Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Grandage continued working at Sheffield until 2005. Meanwhile, he became involved with London’s Donmar Warehouse, becoming an associate director in 2000 and succeeding Sam Mendes as artistic director in 2002.

Grandage’s programming was diverse, including popular musicals, challenging European classics, and modern dramas. He won directorial awards for Peter Nichols’s *Passion Play* (2000) and Albert Camus’s *Caligula* (2003). His revival of Stephen Sondheim’s *Merrily We Roll Along* (2000–01) won multiple awards. In 2005 and 2006 he directed revivals of *Guys and Dolls* and *Evita*, which ran simultaneously in West End theatres.

At the Donmar, Grandage mounted his first productions of new plays in 2006, directing Sir Ian McKellen in Mark Ravenhill’s *The Cut* as well as *Frost/Nixon*, a play written by Peter Morgan that dramatized the 1977 television interviews in which British writer and broadcaster David Frost induced former U.S. president Richard Nixon (played by Frank Langella) to express regret for the Watergate scandal. In 2007 Grandage directed three of the six plays staged at the Donmar, managed the transfer of *Frost/Nixon* to Broadway (his debut there), and announced major business plans for the Donmar organization. The company bought the lease on its theatre property, and it established a one-year residency at the Wyndham Theatre in the West End. That year Grandage also prepared a critically lauded production of *Othello* (2007–08), starring Chiwetel Ejiofor in the eponymous role and Ewan

McGregor as Iago. He later directed *Red*, a drama that centres on painter Mark Rothko and his fictional assistant. It premiered at the Donmar in 2009 and made its Broadway debut the following year. Grandage won the Tony Award for best direction of a play for it in 2010. That same year he announced he would be leaving the Donmar, and at the end of 2011 he stepped down as artistic director.

He went on to start his own London-based theatre group, the Michael Grandage Company. The new ensemble, which he cofounded with former Donmar executive producer James Bierman, kicked off its first 15-month season in December 2012 with five productions, including Peter Nichols's *Privates on Parade*, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the last of which starred Daniel Radcliffe as Cripple Billy. It went on to debut on Broadway in 2014.

Source: Britannica