



Theatre producer Ken Campbell... taking a pidgin production to Papua New Guinea, with designs on the world PHOTOGRAPH: SUE ADLER

Mebi, mebi no mebi, that is the question

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WOL wintok insaed wan wik* — or at least that is the hope of the actor, clown, comic, educationalist and theatrical producer Ken Campbell.

In an exotic variation on taking coals to Newcastle, Campbell is to take his latest theatrical venture — a pidgin rendering of *Macbeth* — to Papua New Guinea and other islands in the South Pacific.

"Somebody from the national theatre of Papua New Guinea came to see my production of *Pidgin Shakespeare* and he's invited us to go up the Sepik River in a couple of punis.

"But he did say that some of it was incredibly rude. In English, *Lady Macbeth* says 'Unsex me here'. In pidgin we

changed that to *Seten, takom mi hambag*. That will offend your South Pacific readers. As long as we change that we should be OK. Otherwise they'll get the spears out and cut us."

The tour, which is being financed, will visit New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides. "They've all got tribal languages in Papua New Guinea, but if they want

to talk inter-tribally they *tok pidgin*," says Campbell.

"We use the Vanuatu pidgin. It grew up on the sugar plantations. The British used slave labour but separated people from the same islands so they couldn't talk to each other. It was like an experiment in loneliness. They cracked it by listening to the guards, most of whom were Irish. It became the pride of the plantation that they could

take this as his inspiration. Campbell wants pidgin to be adopted as a world language. We could all become fluent by the millennium.

"The reason I am doing this is to alert the world that it can have *wintok* by next week," he said, offering a two-day course for £25 — money back if you're not fluent by 6 pm the next evening."

Campbell has been interested in pidgin since 1965. The first pidgin *Macbeth* was

performed at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts earlier this year.

The academy's chairman, Timothy West, was so impressed that he observed: "If it can't be done in pidgin, it probably isn't worth doing."

The production has since toured the country and played a stint in the West End. Before heading for the South Pacific, Campbell will take his pidgin *Shakespeare* to some slightly less exotic locations: Bath, Brentford and Southend.

He insists that his version of *Shakespeare* is unlikely to offend scholars.

"Basically they love it. It's so much fun. It's like having one eye looking through a prism and one eye looking at the world. It doubles the experience."

* *The world will talk one language within a week.*

Pidgin Shakespeare

Shakespeare's Macbeth —
"Makbed blong Wilium Sekspia"

"To be, or not to be" —
"Mebi, mebi no mebi."

"No child of woman born can harm Macbeth" — "No pikinin kamtru hambag

blong woman killim Makbed olgeta dedfinis yeh."

"Doubtful it stood, as two spent swimmers, that do cling together and choke their art" — "Mebi mebi no mebi. Olsem tufala swim bagarap draon finis."

"Alas poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite good jest" —

"My word mi sad blong rabsman York. Mi bin save emfala tumas gud. Orasio, wan tugudala blong krismas iaft gat no tata finis."

Glaister Guardian Pidgin Tour



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