# Rosamund Pike’s use of handheld microphones signals a new era in theatre sound design



Rosamund Pike’s recent performance as a Crown Court judge in the National Theatre’s production of *Inter Alia* has brought renewed attention to a surprisingly powerful theatrical tool: the handheld microphone. Pike's dynamic portrayal of Jessica, a feminist judge grappling with her son’s rape accusation, is amplified not only by her compelling acting but also symbolically through the use of the microphone, which serves as a conduit for her character’s voice and authority amidst the portrayal of the flawed justice system. Critics have praised Pike’s electrifying presence and the play’s incisive exploration of legal and societal issues, including the complex influences of online culture on youth behaviour.

The integration of handheld microphones in theatre has become a prominent trend, spreading across a spectrum of productions from Greek tragedy to Chekhov and contemporary legal dramas like *Inter Alia*. Directors such as Thomas Ostermeier and Jamie Lloyd, known for their inventive staging, have embraced microphones to transform the dynamics of live performances. For instance, Ostermeier’s *The Seagull* used microphones not only functionally but also thematically, to explore themes of power, status, and media saturation. Similarly, Lloyd’s productions have leveraged handheld microphones to inject modern, often punk-inflected energy into classic texts, inviting audiences into a more intimate and immediate theatrical experience.

This trend is not without controversy. The theatre community remains divided on the use of microphones, particularly the visible, handheld variety which foregrounds rather than conceals the technology. While some actors—trained to fill auditoriums with unamplified voices—resist this shift as a passing "fashion," others see the microphone as a vital instrument that expands the expressive range of performance. Director Daniel Fish’s groundbreaking use of a microphone in *Elektra*, where Brie Larson’s character used an on-stage amp and effects pedals, demonstrates how amplification can transcend mere volume to become an integral, dynamic element of storytelling and characterisation. Fish described the microphone as an essential tool for the character’s assertion of power through noise, embodying her refusal to be silenced.

The adoption of handheld microphones reflects broader technological progress in theatre, particularly the rise of wireless systems that afford performers greater freedom of movement without compromising sound quality. According to industry experts, these advancements have revolutionised sound design and the actor’s physical expression on stage, marrying technical innovation with artistic creativity. Sound engineers play a crucial role in this process, acting as live mixers who balance intimacy and clarity, ensuring audiences are not just hearing but feeling every nuance of a performance.

However, as with any innovation in the arts, there is a tension between tradition and modernity. Some practitioners worry that increased reliance on microphones might undermine the craft of vocal projection, echoing concerns about technology supplanting foundational theatrical skills. Yet, voices such as theatre director Katie Mitchell suggest that a healthy theatrical ecosystem should embrace a diversity of performance modes, allowing both amplified and unamplified voices to coexist and enrich the art form.

Ultimately, the handheld microphone, far from being a mere technical device, has become a versatile artistic tool. Whether evoking the punk spirit of rebellion, highlighting the isolation of media-saturated characters, or underscoring the intensity of legal and emotional drama as in *Inter Alia*, it amplifies much more than sound—it amplifies meaning. The current enthusiasm for microphones signals a shift in theatre’s relationship with technology and performance, inviting artists and audiences alike to reconsider what it means to truly listen and be heard on stage.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike), [[3]](https://www.theweek.com/culture-life/theatre/inter-alia-rosamund-pike-is-electric-in-gut-wrenching-legal-drama), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/dc12b61b-1ecb-4f3c-bbe1-819c2b4cd817)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.soundguys.com/why-vocal-mics-are-the-theatre-industrys-unsung-hero-126372/), [[6]](https://www.shure.com/en-US/insights/wireless-microphones-changed-theatre)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/aug/04/handheld-microphones-inter-alia-national-chekhov-rosamund-pike> - An article discussing the increasing use of handheld microphones in theatre productions, highlighting Rosamund Pike's performance in 'Inter Alia' at the National Theatre. The piece explores how directors like Thomas Ostermeier and Jamie Lloyd have incorporated microphones into their productions, and the debates surrounding their use in the industry.
3. <https://www.theweek.com/culture-life/theatre/inter-alia-rosamund-pike-is-electric-in-gut-wrenching-legal-drama> - A review of 'Inter Alia', a legal drama by Suzie Miller, starring Rosamund Pike. The article praises Pike's dynamic portrayal of Jessica, a feminist judge confronting her son's rape accusation, and discusses the play's exploration of the justice system's flaws and the impact of online influences on youth.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/dc12b61b-1ecb-4f3c-bbe1-819c2b4cd817> - A review of 'Inter Alia', highlighting Rosamund Pike's commanding performance as Jessica, a Crown Court judge dealing with her son's involvement in a tragic incident. The article critiques the play's examination of the legal system's shortcomings and the influence of online content on youth.
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6. <https://www.shure.com/en-US/insights/wireless-microphones-changed-theatre> - An article detailing how wireless microphones have transformed theatre productions, allowing for greater mobility and freedom of movement for performers. It discusses the technological advancements in wireless systems and their impact on sound design and performance dynamics.
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