Audio Transcript: King Lear, A Conversation

Alex Poots:
Thank you all for coming. Welcome to The Shed. It's wonderful to see you all. My name's Alex Putz, I'm the artistic director here. And it's a thrill to have you all here and to have this distinguished cast. Maybe you'd like to introduce yourselves to the audience.

Kenneth Branagh:
I am Kenneth Branagh, and I play King Lear and direct the production.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Hi, I'm Melanie-Joyce Bermudez, and I play Regan.

Deborah Alli:
Hello, I'm Deborah Alli, and I play Goneril.

Jessica Revell:
Hi, I'm Jessica Revel, and I play Cordelia and the Fool.

Alex Poots:
So we're going to kick off with you, Ken. From a young age, Lear has been a very influential work for you. I've heard that from many folks. Now it's your time to realize Lear. Could you share your overarching vision and instincts for this work, please?

Kenneth Branagh:
Right. Okay. Big question to start with, isn't it, on a Sunday morning? I first saw King Lear when I was 17 years old, and all I knew about it was that it was a big, fancy name of a big, fancy play that seemed like it was important. That's about as much as I knew, that when people said it, if they knew anything about it, they talked about it like it was Mount Rushmore or something, or Mount Everest or something. It was big and thick and important. And it seemed rather forbidding.

I went to see a production and I was amazed at how familiar and recognizable it was. For me, those things dropped away and it didn't feel like I needed some special ticket, some special background. I came from a working class background, a non-literary background. So I was a bit intimidated going in, but I came away thinking, well this is about...

Well, first of all, there's lots of incident, there's lots of plot, there's lots of story, things go on, I can understand them. There's a beginning and middle and an end. And in the middle of it, there's a family that is undergoing this tremendous change in their fortunes. So its size and its so-called importance fell away, but its urgent, familiar, recognizable story about human beings was what I carried away with me.

And I suppose it's been since then, a way of seeing how can one… and I've been in the play a few times and directed it a couple of times since then… how can one find one's way back to that feeling I had, which was at 17, that it was immediate, that it was powerful, it was surprising. And I was 17, so if it was supposed to be a play about age, that had no impact on restricting my interest. I was as passionately interested in it at 17 as I am at 63.

Alex Poots:
Ken, thank you. So just building on that, throughout your career you found ways to create Shakespearean productions for the stage and the screen that bring the genius of the Bard to a much wider audience. For this new production of Lear, what were your original desires in terms of the text, the production, the pace, the kinds of performances you want, and then the cast ages, which is particularly prominent?

Kenneth Branagh:
The idea was to be as urgent as possible. We live in a world where we have to be very, very reactive. We are very fastly reactive on our devices. There's a moment which Deborah and MJ share early in the play after the initial events where the kingdom is divided up and it's safe to say that it doesn't go quite the way everybody thought it might. So as a result of that, which of you? It's after, "We must…"

Deborah Alli:
"We must do something, and i' the heat."

Jessica Revell:
Good.

Kenneth Branagh:
So we must do something. That's a kind of key thing. These are people, this is a circumstance in which we've chosen to emphasize the idea that people must do something. Before that, the line before that is…

Deborah Alli:
Kenneth.

Kenneth Branagh:
Yah. But we rehearsed this. We rehearsed it.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Okay. Um…

Jessica Revell:
I leave. I go off.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
You go off.

Kenneth Branagh:
You go off. And then what happens?

Deborah Alli:
Kent, remember banished.

Kenneth Branagh:
Banished.

Deborah Alli:
He's banished. Remember, Kent's gone. That line.

Jessica Revell:
We were just saying.

Deborah Alli:
Something banished. Banished. Remember, banished.

Alex Poots:
It's been four months.

Kenneth Branagh:
We're going to rehearse before we come to New York, I promise.

Deborah Alli:
It's been a while. That line.

Kenneth Branagh:
It's not a trick, honestly, it's not a trick.

Jessica Revell:
They're fired. They're out.

Kenneth Branagh:
They say, or somebody says, "We shall further think on 't. We shall further think on 't."

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
That's weird.

Jessica Revell:
If Ken can remember the line.

Kenneth Branagh:
This is what it's like every single day. It's a nightmare. So, we say, "We shall further think on 't." And then we say we must do something. So you ask me what's the approach? The approach is a bit like that, is that people don't further think on it, they just do it. We must do something. So they just do something. And what they do ultimately is catastrophic. It's catastrophic. Because people do not have enough time to think.

So, I wanted a production where we didn't give you as the audience enough time to think. So two hours is the complete running time of this production. There's no intermission. Many productions, many brilliant and great productions, I might add, finish the first half at two hours. But we chose — it's just a choice; it's not better, worse, wrong, right, or anything, I don't believe — to emphasize this idea that what somebody describes about Lear's behavior at the beginning when he divides the kingdom in the way that he does. Some would say foolishly, some would say it's his right to do it this way. But one way or another, it does not go well when he divides the kingdom.

And what then happens is described in terms of his behavior as hideous rashness. And it is in the spirit, as it were, of hideous rashness that the production proceeds with a pace that doesn't give the characters much time to think, doesn't give the audience much time to think, but does invite everybody to feel.

Alex Poots:
Beautiful. Thank you. MJ, as Regan, can you talk to us about your experience of making this new production, from the rehearsal room to the London run, which was last autumn, fall in American? And now obviously you're coming back in the autumn, so there is a year gap there.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
I don't know if I will be coming back. I just want to say the line is, "Such unconstant starts as this are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment."

Kenneth Branagh:
Thank you. Come on. Come on.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Thank you. So sorry about that, guys.

Alex Poots:
You might want to say that you're also doing another play right now, aren't you?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
I am doing another Shakespeare at the moment, so my head is absolutely fried in Shakespeare.

Kenneth Branagh:
At the Royal Shakespeare Company in England.

Jessica Revell:
Yeah. Right.

Alex Poots:
Yeah. Woo!

Kenneth Branagh:
Playing the Princess of France in Love's Labour's Lost.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
To answer your question, I think from the off, Kenneth and everyone involved set a standard for how we were to approach this production. Before we even entered our fourth round of auditions, we were expected to be off-book. And I think, thusly, when we moved into the rehearsal process, the words had life in our bodies, in our minds. They had history. So we had time in ways to reflect on the text without actually doing anything, which was really, really lovely.

So from the rehearsal process into that... I mean, just based on Regan, it was really lovely to experience her on the page, spend time with her in the body, and as the actor, remove myself from falling into the trap of judging my character, which I think we can often do, especially when you're playing people who, in quotation marks, are considered "the evil sisters." It's finding their humanity. It's finding their drive, their passion, their need, which I think are things that are so important in this play.

So I think that was the main thing that I did when I approached the rehearsal process at first. We begun rehearsals with basically entirely a choral-based, fight-based first week, which I think, considering where we've chosen to set King Lear in our production, was integral in the way that we found ourselves connected to our bodies. We were meeting the physical demands, or close to the physical demands, of what the characters we were playing would probably be experiencing. Connecting to the elements. Connecting to our own spirituality.

And just all of that coming together and forming, in a way, and causing the company to join in that essence was really, really beautiful and something quite rare, because usually in other rehearsal spaces, you would have a table read or something, and then you'd approach Shakespeare, as it often is, in an analytical way. Which is absolutely fine, just like Ken, if I come from a very working-class background, so none of that works for me. It just goes in one ear and comes out the other. I need to feel it. I need to experience it.

And then I guess going forward, one thing that I really loved to explore while on the West End was Regan's relationship with love and what that meant to her, especially in the absence of it. Of course, that's subject to interpretation. But yeah, this feeling that she considers could be love, what she believes her relationship with Edmund is. Is it a survival instinct? Is it a genuine desire to feel close to someone? Is it a way of dealing with her daddy issues?

Kenneth Branagh:
What daddy issues?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
There's none. So I guess I'm excited to see how that evolves and how I interact with that with a different audience, with a new perspective.

Alex Poots:
Thank you.

Kenneth Branagh:
It's worth saying... Sorry to interrupt. But it's worth saying that the start that MJ talks about was us saying, look, we are in an ancient Britain. This is a world where the experience of the characters is much more one linked more closely to survival. So, we are not living in massive castles. We are a society that is still just emerging from being nomads, if you like. So, we haven't domesticated animals yet. We don't have tools yet.

So the experience of life is survival, is what do you kill? Where do you get your shelter? We, in fact, resisted stuff. So you won't see in the production thrones and crowns even, but you'll see moor and the opening sequence of this sort of warrior ritual that appeals to the elements and to the pagan relationship to the gods. It's not really a Christian play, it's something a little more primitive, was what we chose to address. That this was a play where basic instincts, desires, and human needs would be at the forefront. We were deliberately less sophisticated, just a little less civilized than the play might perhaps be set in some instances.

So, it was trying to find in our bodies and in a relationship to the earth something that was a little more sort of primal, and that's where we began the investigation.

Alex Poots:
Thank you. Deborah and Jessica, would you have anything to add to MJ's answer about the experience of making this new production, from getting on book to rehearsal, through London, and now looking to New York?

Deborah Alli:
Yeah. I think for me, I had never began a production off book, actually, because usually some directors ask us not to, they want to discover together. And so, I think immediately that demand, it just gave so much room to play immediately, like to not seek permission in any way. You didn't need the blocking. And eventually, of course, you need to block a show. But it was just so much freedom in that sense and I think it really did help to inform the way that we wanted to play it as well, where it is in that place of urgency as well. I just feel like it was a beautiful experience in the way it was set up for us to get to the West End and still continue to discover and to continue to play. I think it was just a wonderful experience and very much looking forward to continuing in New York.

Alex Poots:
Thank you.

Jessica Revell:
Yeah, jumping off that, I think when we'd finished it in London, I was really excited immediately to do it again, and I think it didn't feel like saying goodbye

to it quite yet, and I feel like the place for me personally that I got to towards the end of the show, things were finally landing. And so, I'm really excited to be able to have the opportunity to do it again here.

Alex Poots:
Thank you. Ken, I remember in early conversations that we had the importance of casting actors, the whole cast are actors from not only from RADA but who are recent graduates, which I'm not sure has been done before and I'd love to hear more about that. But forging this partnership both as the chairman, as the exiting chairman of RADA, but also yourself as a former graduate of the school, why was that significant to you, that choice, for this production in particular?

Kenneth Branagh:
Well, it's worth saying that RADA is not a cult, by the way. It's just a drama school. And we are very chuffed to be in the presence of students from some of the great drama schools of the world. I know this for a fact because I've worked with many of the alumni from the various places that are represented here today. It's also worth saying that Shakespeare is for all. I believe it's for all. I believe entry is free for all. It doesn't belong to any of those institutions or indeed any other way in which you can become an actor, which is all, as far as I'm concerned, they are equal in terms of what you bring to the process of engaging with this work. So, whatever way you come at it is fine by me. If you're lucky enough to have some of the experiences we've had, then that's great, and if you have your good fortune come another way, that's terrific.

But one thing that I felt clear about was that the idea of a very visible and vibrant youth inside the production was important. It was part of what the play seemed to demand. At the center of the play are some issues that are... they are universal and current, I suppose, around the world of age and competence. Is there a moment when people are no longer fit to do the job that they are doing? They may think differently to those who are in receipt of their performance of that job. The age-old issue of the point at which, either in an organization or in a family, responsibility is handed out to the next generation to take care of things.

So, something about the appetite, the energy of a youthful group would start to do some of what was also intended, which was try to blow away from the experience of King Lear. It's what I started talking about. When I went to that first production, I suppose I felt I was potentially walking into a very impressive cathedral in which I would have to speak very quietly, because it was so intimidating and big and vast and represented this sort of grand thing. Whereas I've always wanted with Shakespeare to feel as though, from my background, that one could come in and it could be very direct. You didn't need any qualification, basically. Your qualification to watch a Shakespeare play was to be a human. That's really all you... So that's the price of entry.

I noticed, I happened to notice, through being at RADA and auditioning all of my distinguished colleagues here as they were emerging and seeing some of their work in plays, that there just seemed to be a really good feeling of a place and

people who practiced technique. They were trying to find all the ways in which you gather technique to do work like this and still be playful. So the two things were always in parallel. You were trying to be heard so you could be heard, and the D on the end of "heard" could be heard, but you were not starting to talk like that because then you would sound like somebody who does a Shakespeare. And so you tried to lose that. You tried for all of that technique to be invisible. And you tried the goal for any particular performance, and a run of performances, was recreation, not repetition.

Now, you can acquire that just through any particular position in relation to the work, but one noticed that it seemed to be very much part of what the school was producing, that kind of actor. And so it seemed a great way to focus on something, I think, that the production required, which is that it should be youthful, relentless, unforgiving and impatient, but also literally brilliant in terms of the kind of crispiness and the kind of clarity with which it was delivered, but that you were never aware of that at all.

I saw a great show here. If you haven't seen, it's on for another week, isn't it? Your show here.

Alex Poots:
The Effect.

Kenneth Branagh:
The Effect. Terrific. And terrific, terrific acting. You can't see the acting. Just can't see it. You can't see it. But it's really quick. People are... Technically, it's very, very impressive. And again, you don't even think about the technical stuff. That was our goal. And I found that my experience of the people I was watching at RADA all looked like they had a capacity for that and an interest in that. So it seemed like a great way to focus on getting all those things attacked.

Alex Poots:
Thank you. Just building on that intergenerational point you made, I'm going to turn to Jessica. Just to remind folks that Jessica plays Cordelia and the Fool. When we revisit the classic works of Shakespeare, we often find certain ideas and themes can have different emphases in our times that struck you. Were there any that struck you in this story such as intergenerational power dynamics?

Jessica Revell:
Yes. I suppose the beauty of being able to play both Cordelia and the Fool is that they're both characters that I think are the most honest with Lear. And Cordelia is particularly punished for it. And the Fool can kind of get away with the honesty through humor. And I suppose there's a lot of that that you can relate to now with family feuds. Is it that thing at Christmas where someone maybe has a drink and then says something a bit too honest, and then... That kind of a dynamic with families is still happening consistently everywhere, and you don't even have to stretch too far into, look, our monarchy for example, and

our royal family and the dynamics there. So, the text is still relevant today as it was back then.

And I think also we've often spoken about the relationships as the three sisters and that kind of competitiveness between them as women. And I think that's sadly something that's still quite apparent today, is the sense of women, because of the patriarchy or God knows what, the inability to support each other. Or it's always competitive. It's always like, "Oh..." And I think we are kind of shifting into a time where women are supporting each other more, which I'm so pleased with.

And I think our looking at the sisterly relationship, and I don't have any sisters, and so then I had to sort of reflect and think about a lot of my friendships with other women and bring that into this. And also I spoke to my mum a lot about her. She's got a lot of sisters.

And so it was sort of, you know, this text that was written so long ago was still just as relevant and, as Ken was saying, it's just human. And I think what Ken does so well in particular with his productions is that he makes it for everyone. He makes it for those that have never watched Shakespeare or are just interested in coming to see something new and something different. And it's so cinematic as well as a production. And that was something that friends and family that came to watch, when I sort of went, "Oh, I've been cast in a Shakespeare."

And they were like, "Okay, fine. Yes, sure, that'd be nice to come see."
And I was like, "No, please, please, please. It's too..." I think it was...
And the main feedback that we got, in particular, was that it was so clear. And that for me was such a great goal to achieve, because of what Ken was saying, is that all that text work that we did, and the amount of times that Ken would go, "Jessica, it's 'and.'"

I was like, "And-d-d-d-d-d-d." But you're sort of there and you're going, oh, but does that sound silly? But actually the amount of those tiny tweaks I think are so important to do, and it's just a gift then for the audience and it makes it so much easier for them to comprehend. And I know as an audience member, I want a show where I'm sat at the edge of my seat, but also I'm able to understand what is going on and not get completely swept up and lost in the text. And I think that's what's so exciting about this one is that we've done all that work, and still doing the work and will continue to do it, for allow it to be a great exciting two-hour show.

Kenneth Branagh:
The thing what you all did excited me about was the way in which we occasionally... And the audience obviously a complete part of this. They make what we want to try and achieve or we aspire to, anyway, which is that each show is an event, that it's a live event. I always felt as though this was —despite feeling as though it carried this big cultural collateral, King Lear, you feel as though it's got a drum beat behind it all the time — was that it's what I'd call a

kind of kitchen table play because it's an argument that can go… I always make up silly subtitles for the play, like, "King Lear, or I Overreacted." Or, "King Lear, or Count to Ten." Because so much of it is to do with the kind of things you were suggesting at, I don't know, Thanksgiving or holidays where people just say whatever, "Move the salt."

"No, you move the… You never move the salt."

And then it kicks off and it's like nought to 60 and then an hour later people aren't talking to each other. It's not really about the salt. And so, that sort of massive jump that then unleashes, "You never liked my homework. You always preferred her. You did this stuff," that is triggered and ignited by all of this. That's the meat of it. So we don't want any of the stuff that's to do with old-fashioned language to get in the way. Our job is to scrub that clean so the communication is as clear as possible.

Alex Poots:
Wonderful. Thank you. Ken, I had the enormous pleasure of working with you on the Scottish play—we're very close to the theater, so we'll call it the Scottish play—as your producer and presenter and the former artistic director in Manchester. That show, which we did in the UK and NYC was both… It felt contemporary and classic. I've always said to you, I thought it drew from theatrical and cinematic practices. So my question is, how have the canons of both of those formats of theater and cinema inspired your unique Shakespearean stage practice both past and present?

Kenneth Branagh:
Well, thanks to you. Alex invited us for what he refers to as the Scottish play because we're not allowed to say the name of that play about the Scottish king in a theater, otherwise it'll bring us bad luck. So of course, I'm not superstitious, but I'm not saying the name of that play.

Alex Poots:
Nor am I allowed to.

Kenneth Branagh:
Just in case.

Jessica Revell:
I'm fairly sure that, Ken, you made me… I once accidentally said it on stage, and Ken went… And I thought I was going to get fired. It was during tech and Ken went, "Leave." And he made me… No, you did make me.

Kenneth Branagh:
What, no-

Jessica Revell:
But no, not superstitious, of course not, Ken.

Alex Poots:
No, just turn around. You just have to turn around three times.

Jessica Revell:
But I had to... He went, "You have to go outside the theater and turn around three times." And I was sort of-

Kenneth Branagh:
And then knock to get back in.

Jessica Revell:
Yes. And I sort of in joke went, "Yes, very funny, Ken."

And he went, "No, seriously, go."

And I went, off I go. So that was that. So sorry, Ken to do it, but no. It's the Scottish play.

Alex Poots:
But it's real.

Kenneth Branagh:
But we're not superstitious anyway.

Jessica Revell:
No, no, no, not superstitious.

Kenneth Branagh:
The thing is... So you have invested both creatively and, indeed, financially in people like us. Thank you very much. And you've allowed us, to answer your question, to spend time, which we did with the Scottish play and we've done with this, marinating. I've found it's really good to come to it, go back. So this is I think the fourth time that I've come back to King Lear and it feels fresh each time. But unquestionably, you have some value from the experiences you've had. Some of those are in the cinema.

And I'd say that what informs, at least in my limited experience of it, the work in the theater is that we, via the cinema, value the interior lives of the characters. We are aware that that's a very potent thing. And so again, part of our technical work is to allow us to, as it were, be heard clearly and naturally, but still feel as though you are eavesdropping on the hearts of the individuals.

In terms of the way we present the play, the cinema also influences our idea of quick cutting and a sort of speed and pace that doesn't give the audience, as I say, time to think. If you want them to immerse themselves in the feeling of the play, which is a feeling constructed by a great poet, so that when that is working, when we are on song, something other happens, something mysterious happens and, like a great piece of music, you are transported. So you are literally understanding what's going on, but there is some other

experience beyond words that you are very grateful for because it's unique to the theatrical experience. So you try and fuse those things.

Alex Poots:
Like a form of transcendence. Did you want to add anything to that? No, we're good?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Well said.

Alex Poots:
So, Deborah, as Goneril, what have you absorbed this production and what was it like to act alongside Ken and the rest of the cast?

Deborah Alli:
Goodness. I'll go back to front on this question, actually. And I think in the midst of absorbing a lot, I had to really get the greatness of Ken out of my head. I think we all know how amazing he is. And I think sometimes you are just literally blown away. You're performing with somebody, but you're literally watching one of the most greatest performances sometimes.

And so I think I immediately had to realize... Or I say immediately. It took me a while. Quite a while. But yeah, I think whilst working, I realized that I also have something to bring to the table. And I think because Ken as well as a person is not just great, but human — he is just warm and generous — he enabled that to happen. And so working with him became collaborative. It wasn't just a take, take, take, and wow, how many things can I note down of wow? It just actually was, okay, this is happening, this is my father saying something to me, and how am I going to react?

And I think those were wonderful moments that I really will keep going forward in terms of just knowing all the time, in reacting to those different things that... Yeah, all I have to do is listen and give, was one of my major takeaways.

Another thing was that we had really, really good shows. There were some really, really great shows. And I had to learn to not try and make that happen again. And I think the beauty of working with everybody here who kind of brought their best every single time was that you also didn't know what that looked like. And so rather than refining my Goneril to this is how she is, I had to allow her to breathe constantly to, on this Wednesday matinee, in this moment, it's very different to what happened last night, and actually I just have to be here. And I think that for me, going forward, that's one of my major takeaways, absolutely.

But there was just... I think most of all just realizing that no matter how far the text can be, I can always bring myself to it. Shakespeare always felt very far away from me. It's my second one outside of school. And I always kind of felt semi-detached in terms of, the language is here, and I am here, my body is here, but my voice is there. But it was amazing to be able to collaborate and

bring that all together and realize that just because the language is this way, it doesn't mean the life that I've experienced can't be shown in that. And that for me, I think was a major breakthrough with Shakespeare.

Alex Poots:
To finding yourself in-

Deborah Alli:
Yeah, absolutely. And especially because she's villainous as well. Well, she has some villainous moments. You kind of don't want to say you can see yourself in the character because, yeah, I guess we kind of want to paint ourselves... Well, I wanted to paint myself in a certain way, but actually, the more I allowed myself to see that I can do that and I can become that and this is a response that I can actually make. And then bringing my truth to that, it was... Just not judging, as you said earlier, that was really important not to do. And that's another thing for me to take away.

Alex Poots:
Thank you.

Kenneth Branagh:
That was a critical thing, sorry to interrupt, about the nature of the production. As you'll see, it's pretty spacious. And the cut of the text that we've done is to do exactly what Deborah was talking about, which was definitively an intention and a hope of mine, which was that I want these individuals, these terrific, terrific actors to bring themselves to the roles. That's where this production hopes to take off each evening, God willing.

When I was a younger actor, the notion was put to me of how if you do all this technical work and if you're in a great play, if you're in great writing, if you are in something that can take off, it can sing, then ultimately the part will play you. And I feel as though I saw that happen in various ways. But I did see necessarily encouraged and was so grateful for MJ and Jess and Deborah to bring themselves to it bravely, vulnerably, necessarily. Because we all have our experiences of, whether it's with a father or whatever, some sense of disappointment.

It seems a critical central part of this story. As simple and simplistic as it might seem, is the issue of people being heard and people being seen. King Lear, although within this very simple story, which has... Well, I did a film of Cinderella and was reminded of King Lear. A father, a widowed father, and three daughters. This story starts as simply as that, almost like a fairy tale. We are so quickly, we're a minute into the play when it all starts to go wrong. And it's the once upon a time, a father decides to divide his kingdom and he will give one part of the kingdom to each of his three daughters, "And the only thing that requires to happen," he says, "is for each of you to tell me how much you love me." Well, you know...

And that is a cue for whatever reaction, whether you say, "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. This is a ridiculous way to divide anything. It is conditional and it's not fair and we're in front of everybody else." But it is the cue for responses that have him thinking, well, I'm not being appreciated. That may have you thinking all sorts of things. You're being triggered, manipulated, forced, et cetera, et cetera.

But by the end of the play, one feels more and more, and it's part of what you were talking about. And I've felt as though your own personal spins, your own personal connection of soul to the piece, would yield this feeling more and more in the play, particularly as miscommunication intensifies about how and in what ways and why it is important to be seen or to be heard by people you care about or people you might even say that you love. And yet what appears to be coming from them is the opposite of that quality. A misunderstanding at least. Possibly hatred. But all of it requiring this connection and engagement with the actors, which is very naked, very real, requires to be quite open, I would say quite scary acting to do, because in theory, you're going to lose yourself. Not be lost in the wrong way, because you've still got to drive that big technical car that means you can all hear and understand, but you've still got to give yourself to it because you're asking all of you to do the same thing.

So at best, on a big technical journey, you end up raw and vulnerable and scared, and night to night, which was definitely the case, and loved working with each of my distinguished colleagues here because in the best possible way, you never quite knew what was going to happen. That's what I felt anyway. What about you MJ? In terms of that night to night, how it changes thing, how was it for you?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Oh, massively. It's invigorating when things go wrong. Because it really catches you off guard.

Deborah Alli:
Mm-hmm.

Jessica Revell:
Mm-hmm.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
It makes you so aware of your listening capabilities. And I think there were so many opportunities, especially in the big row, the famous big row between Father and myself and my sister, different elements of your character come out that you just cannot predict. And when that happens for you, when an actor who you are playing with enables you to find something inside of yourself that you just never would even imagine was there, you find different flavors to your character. You find different qualities and different ways of moving. And especially when you're in your fourth week and you're like, okay, what else is there to discover? You find that there's endless possibilities. And also discovering together without even having to say anything with one another,

our relationship, our physical relationship with one another, how swift it was able to change from one thing to another.

Kenneth Branagh:
What I enjoyed… Sorry to interrupt. But what I enjoyed very, very much, particularly there's this big sort of… I don't want to say set piece because it's just another scene in the play, and there are no casual scenes, there are no casual moments, no casual lines, and no casual characters. Nevertheless, in terms of the arc of the story, there is a moment where the business of what he feels he's been denied is argued about intensely. And one of the things I admired a lot and was grateful for, and whichever direction it came from, was particularly from the pair of you who are in the most director confrontation, we had it lots in other scenes of ourselves, was moments when the scene would play very quickly, passionately, very loudly, and then maybe even in the course of the same day, that night, for whatever reason, because that's how it landed there, became quieter or whispered or full of pauses, the blocking would change.

And what I was really grateful for, back to your question about why would I go with this particular group of actors, it would be the case whether I was working here or wherever I was working in the world, I mean looking for people who are ready to let go of what they loved last night or even this afternoon. And particularly with stuff like that — as an actor, I speak only for myself — you can get very carried away with, ooh, I was rather effective in that shouty bit. Yes I did. And I looked over there and I think they were hanging on my every word. I think I was rather good.

By the time you've done that the second time, you're phony-baloney and they can see through you and they can smell the schmacting. And so, when you're with a group of people who are going, yeah, it was fantastic this afternoon. Because also we were riding this other mad beast called Shakespeare who was making us look pretty good. We thought we were quite good, but he really was making us look very good, and it was brilliant. We should do that again. Let's just copy that.

And what you didn't do, ever, it seemed, and that what I was so grateful for, and I don't know whether this is just that's part of who you are as individuals or that's what you've arrived at or it was part of what we came up with, but people were ready to chuck it all out as long as it was real in that moment, that moment with this group of people, this evening, as opposed to trying to crowbar that in. Did you feel that? Do you agree with it?

Deborah Alli:
Absolutely. I mean, we used to have little tiffs as well, didn't we?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Yeah.

Deborah Alli:
We actually... Well, not like that, guys. It wasn't method. But no, I think every day was different in life and it really did inform the start of the show and the way the show was going to go. It definitely was. I remember there was a time... We have a little thing. I won't say it. It's our little thing, how we start the show, the three of us. Oh, you're doing it. Okay. But we have our sticks, don't we? And I think it was just extremely cold one night and we were not in our position with you, and somebody got a little bit annoyed.

Jessica Revell:
[inaudible 00:44:20]. Yeah. Yeah.

Deborah Alli:
I think so. And just before, I remember us just going, "Oh, let's do the stick thing there." It was just like... Do you remember that night?

Jessica Revell:
Yeah.

Deborah Alli:
But it was one of the best shows. One of the best. It was so odd because we do that to join, but it just literally... I didn't know how we were going to be because we've got our thing that's going to happen, and then obviously we're about to send you off, so it just was like... We took it on there, in the best way. That was a good example. But yeah, so I think every night you just never knew and you were never the same, so of course I can never be the same, and neither are you and neither... So it was contagious.

Kenneth Branagh:
The big exciting thing for us is that we bring, I hope this doesn't sound wildly self-indulgent, but we are bringing all this humbly and excitedly to the great city of New York, where for us, it's the next stage in the process. My own sense in watching The Effect last night was to be reminded of, I'm not just saying this because you're here, but that New York audiences are very, very quick. My God, they're quick. They're so quick. They're very smart. And they're very emotional as well. In the best possible way. So at least, that was my experience.

And so we're bringing, I hope, we hope to bring this sort of unfinished but highly developed thing that is volatile and is waiting to chemically interact with that passionate force that I was a member of last night. That was a very exciting group to be amongst. And my experience of being up the road doing the Scottish play was very much that from the school's audiences that we had that were wild, absolutely wild, to frankly the same unpredictability in terms of reaction as we are trying to career through on stage ourselves.

Alex Poots:
Thank you. Ken, one of the many things that brings this play to life is how you've paced the work, both in terms of the length you've made, but also

the kind of performances that you've brought out from the cast. It sits at just under two hours and it does accentuate the cinematic and contemporary interpretation of your Lear. Can you talk more about that interpretation please?

Kenneth Branagh:
Well, it's more about... As we've been discussing, we choose not to give too much time to consideration. And I think it's an interesting question as to whether when you experience the play, whether you think that with more time for people, if people took that breath, whether the events of the play would be positively influenced, or whether, in fact, as difficult as it is to handle what happens in the play, people reacting in the heat, hotly with their emotions, is to, however difficult, experience a painful and difficult truth, which is ultimately valuable in a different way.

I always think that we should bring as much intelligence as we can to our analysis of the work. But I don't... It's my own view that it's dangerous for me to be sitting around a table talking about Shakespeare, because I'd start to feel as though I ought to be smarter than I am and I ought to be quoting... I remember first reading volumes of Shakespeare and seeing in the Arden Shakespeare, God love him, but you'll have a page like this, but there's like three pages of text there and the rest the page, it's all footnotes. And there are people like Q. Well, first there's Q and F and I didn't know what they were, but they refer to the quarto of Shakespeare, the folio of Shakespeare. QC, Quiller-Couch. Who's Quiller-Couch? I don't know what that is. He's an English academic from 1930, and he had a very particular view about the play, et cetera.

And so, we sit round a table. We can't just run at it like... These are clues. They're more than clues. There are 400 years of scholarship that you'd be mad not to engage with, at least up to the point that it helps you. But I think my goal is that we try and do all that ahead of time.

And as we were saying, the minute we got in the room, the play begins, without giving the game away, with this sort of ritual that involves a physical engagement with the actor. And the audience feel it. They're close to it. It's noisy. It's in your face. And it sort of tunes you into the temperature. It was more important. And one of the reasons to start with that. And one of the reasons I asked... I don't know whether it filled every aspiring actor in this room with dread to think the idea that we learnt all our lines ahead of time. For what it's worth as an ancient dinosaur of an actor now, my experience is that there is nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing to lose by doing that. There really isn't. And there's quite a lot to gain.

I have many memories of being in rehearsal rooms where, although I have been kidded to suggest that the opposite is happening, I can't learn my lines until I know what I'm doing here, because he moves over here. Why does he do that? I won't say that unless I see the glass. And then I suddenly see an actor who is stuck into, oh my God, he can't ever say the line. What if the glass isn't there? What if the glass breaks one night? What are you going to do?

And there's a kind of an attempt to... It can be dressed up in all sorts of other ways, but you are slowly landing the plane. Whereas I think, what... So, "I'll get my lines when I've got everything else sorted out." I feel as though as soon as I'm starting to hear that, I'm nervous, I'm really nervous, because I'm feeling this is somebody who wants to be so much in control, even though they'll tell me no, that's because then I can...

I would say, well, I respect that, but I think that maybe if we try and find a way to get that happening earlier in the process, and if you believe that, then the rehearsal room is not a place where I stand while you try to learn how to memorize. Because then I'm not rehearsing, I'm waiting until you've remembered it. And that process is one where it just starts to stick a bit late in the day. Everybody will do it at different process.

But then they said, "But you go away and it's going to be so boring. It's going to be mechanical. You're going to hear me doing it. So how do you do your lines?"

Well, any number of ways. I put them on tape. I write them down. I like to write them down a lot in order to get them, go down with a card, et cetera, et cetera.

But I reckon I haven't found anybody who didn't sort of, once in the room, even with it learned, make it their own. But especially with this stuff, it's so difficult. I want actors to arrive so they can then be more brave and more free. Definitely more free. Have the glass. Don't have the glass. The glass falls over. Somebody comes on and does a triple backflip one night, and you can still cope with that because you're already miles down the road and you haven't associated, you haven't locked your learning into some kind of physical thing, that once it goes, throws you. So I don't even know what question I was answering actually. I've just gone on. Sorry, I just banged on. That's all I did. I banged on.

Alex Poots:
Spot on. Spot on. I can say that the play we're running right now, The Effect by Lucy Prebble, the director insisted, Jamie Lloyd insisted on having all the actors, all four actors, off book from day one. Had exactly the same and had very similar feelings to what you've just described. And that's a very different kind of play. It's 400 years later.

Kenneth Branagh:
The other thing-

Alex Poots:
But he wanted the freedom of what you're describing because everyone was on the page and knew it.

Kenneth Branagh:
The interesting thing that you bring up there is that what I'm after in doing that is to empower the actors.

Alex Poots:
Exactly.

Kenneth Branagh:
It's not that they've now joined my cult, but simply that they go, "That's all done." So now if we choose to talk about it, and on the whole, we choose to explore it through doing, it may not literally be, "Let's start blocking," but it might be. But with that in the tank, I found people, should they need to talk about it, if we want to talk about it, are able to do so.

So the goal is you've arrived with a ton of stuff for me already, and my goal then, my goal is to try and direct you to be the greatest Deborah's Goneril that you can possibly be in the way that you'd like to be, so that it's more about getting the maximum out of you. So it's trying to find a way to do it that allows that to happen as soon as possible. But it's definitely to get the most out of the actors, and also have the actors own it earlier and be alive and right there in the collaboration from day one.

Alex Poots:
Thank you. Before we move to some questions which you've received from the audience, I'd like to end with a question for you, Jessica, and just to remind everyone, as Cordelia and the Fool, how did playing your roles change or solidify your perceptions of these roles?

Jessica Revell:
That is a good question. How did it change? I think it definitely was playing the Fool in particular. Ken and I had a few conversations about comedy in general. And I think in the rehearsal rooms playing the Fool, there was only a certain amount of people that was obviously able to see it, and so it kind of... The jokes or the things that you found funny in the first week, you sort of thought, well, that will work this week as well, but obviously it's the same people looking bored back at you, like, "Yeah, that's fine."

And so, I think it got to a point where the show was really ready for an audience, and I think it needed that. And I think it took some time, especially as the Fool, and there was times where I thought, I'm going to do something completely different tonight. It wasn't necessarily thought. It'd be like... I don't know, you and I would be playing and something would happen, and then I'd get a laugh and I thought, smashed that. Yeah, great.

And then I had to learn pretty quickly, as we were saying earlier as well, is that then that evening or then the next day, is that not doing it with that same intention or just because it worked because I said it that one time in that certain way. So that changed for me as an actor.

But I suppose as characters as well, I really started to, I think, pity both the characters, and in particular Cordelia and that relationship that she has with her father of... I'm a believer that they all love their dad. But yeah, that banishment scene at the beginning and how thrown away she is just so sad

for someone that obviously loves her father so much, but is maybe just as stubborn as him.

And so when asked, “Tell me how much you love me,” I’d sort of think, well, I’d like to ask Dad that same question, see what he would respond, because I think it would be a similar outcome. And I think the pity for Cordelia, but then also the… I won’t do any spoilers.

But then the pity for the Fool as well of the absolute undevouted loyalty that the Fool has to the King is a similar one to Cordelia. And just bit by bit, everyone was kind of saying, they were like, “Oh, I really feel for the Fool.”

And I was like, “Me too.”

But we sort of said it was quite pet-like, their relationship as this sort of like the Fool felt like the King’s dog in a bizarre way of complete undevouted love and constantly sticking by him in the midst of storms and everything. And both those relationships, I think, with the King, towards the end it’s interesting of what Ken was saying earlier of if maybe they’d just… If Cordelia and the King had maybe just had a quick conversation before the whole… What did we do? We gave out the kingdom. If they’d maybe had that conversation before, would the whole play have happened? But then we wouldn’t have the play, so…

Kenneth Branagh:
That’s such a Shakespearean thing, the missing scene or the interrupted scene or the delayed scene. It seems sometimes when I’m working on Shakespeare, I feel that the simple… It sounds a bit cliche. But a simple plea is to consider, whether in the heat or more coolly, is to talk to each other, particularly as it relates to the great life passages like loss. And I often think… I think you’re right about what you say. I mean, one different conversation with the three of them individually or perhaps as a trio before this enforced public division of the kingdom perhaps would’ve made all the difference.

In the play Hamlet, at the beginning of the play, Hamlet appears to be an outcast because he is not able to accept with a sunny disposition the swift marriage of his mother to his uncle in the wake of his father’s death. And by the, time two-thirds of the way through the play, it takes, maybe it’s even three-quarters, before Hamlet and Gertrude, his mother, actually have a scene together where they discuss the loss of her husband, his father.
It feels as though the entire play might not need not to have occurred if instead of the immediacy with which the marriage takes place, but perhaps entirely legitimate reasons for the two people who are getting married, it just didn’t happen to suit Hamlet. But this constant cry in Shakespeare, it seems anyway, for a moment where people, to repeat myself, can be seen and heard in moments of crisis or in moments across the big life things, the birth, marriages, and deaths that sort of hit us in the solar plexus, that need time to process, time to consider, time to speak with those that you love or who may understand you, who may even just give the space for you to speak. They don’t need to do the other things, perhaps. Here, I feel as though when

the play works, the audience, I feel when I watch it and this happens, wants to get involved and say, "Wait," or you heard she said that, but you heard this. It's not what she meant. If we could somehow find a way for the hearing to be different, and I think that tension lies underneath this play, which is unsaid as well as that which is said.

Alex Poots:
Right. Those are my questions. Is Jamie Nicole Riggs here? Hello, Jamie. Thank you for your question. Let me read it out. "I'd always assumed at some point in your career," and this is to Ken, "I'd always assumed at some point in your career with Shakespeare that eventually you'd find your way to playing Lear. How did you know it was time to tackle the role now and was your approach different than for other plays you've done?"

Kenneth Branagh:
Thank you very much for asking. Thank you. It's a combination of instinct and then opportunity, because obviously, it doesn't all happen by itself. People like Alex and Tamar who works with us have made this possible. Yeah, you find creatively, it's one of those ones, I don't know, I saw it at 17. I feel two things about it. One is I've always resisted the say that sort of drumbeat, "Now, in a performance for the ages, we give you Sir Kelvin Bananagun in King Lear." I don't like all of that. That's no good, and you can get self-carried away with all of that. I wanted to be the next part that I'm fortunate and privileged to be able to play.

There's a bit of a cliche with actors and King Lear. It's a superficial one. One is that you've got to do it when you're young enough to have the vocal and physical requirements to play the part, but you shouldn't play it so young that you don't give the sense of what Lear's age does to the story. Another daft thing is that somebody once said to me, "You have to be very careful about who plays Cordelia because if you choose as Lear to pick them up at the end of the show to carry them on, make sure your back is in good shape, et cetera, and that you have a good, that everything works in that regard." It was more about wanting to come at it with the most directness at a time when it seemed the play was speaking loudly.

It's always been a very immediate and urgent play for me. When I first saw it, I opened the program, I got a student standby ticket for the Royal Shakespeare Company's production directed by Trevor Nunn in 1977 with Donald Sinden playing King Lear. And I opened the program and the first big headlined quote I saw was, "When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools." I remember thinking, Christ, that's a bit depressing, isn't it? But at the same time, it got under the skin a little bit, and I wondered why that affected me.

As I've gone on, it's always been ... I mean, one of the reasons that we move at the speed we do is that when I've read things about the play and the character, some people say it is Shakespeare's greatest achievement as a playwright, but it's his least good tragedy. They say, why? Well, if you look at the Scottish

play, it's got more plot. It's a thriller. It's got a fantastic central relationship. If you look at a play like Othello, you've got another triangular relationship at the beginning, and you have this incredible character in Iago, perhaps the greatest villain in dramatic literature. Hamlet is a more direct revenge melodrama. But in King Lear, as some would say unkindly, you've got this idiot at the beginning of the play who says, "I'm going to give everything up. You've got to tell me how he love you. Tell me how much you love. Tell me. How much I'm going to give the most to the person who said they love me the most," which doesn't seem very mature, does it? So you think, what's the great tragic arc there that takes a pillock all the way through to being wise? And it seems to be that that journey, could this be the journey for human beings, please say it isn't, is that we need to lose everything.

We need to lose everything before we understand what is valuable and who we love and who loves us. I wanted, I suppose, without looking for some just simple, vain, glorious attempt to make the audience like you, we remove quite a lot of the text around the beginning that also slightly underlines Lear's age itself. He bangs on less here about crawling unburdened towards death. We are simply saying in this world, ancient Britain, you're past 40 and you're ancient. It's time to move on. So 63, you're absolutely ancient. But he doesn't think that, of course, he doesn't think it. I wanted to have him more understandable earlier on.

I resisted also trying to make him have visible signs of dementia or Alzheimer's or other conditions of the brain because I wanted us to be uncertain as he is about whether in fact that might be part of why he is, if it is true that he is making poor decisions. All of it then became ultimately decision to do it. Why do it? What Peter Brook, the great late of this parish, international theater director said is the uninformed hunch. So the uninformed hunch was that it was time to do it.

Alex Poots:

Back to you, Ken. When we first worked together on The Scottish Play, you collaborated and co-directed with Rob Ashford, who we later started preliminary discussions about King Lear for The Shed in 2020. Now that this reunion is possible for The Shed, could you talk about your collaboration and how you both approached Shakespeare's productions?

Kenneth Branagh:
Well, thanks to you, Alex. I mean, I've had now a 12-year creative relationship with Rob Ashford. We've co-directed a number of Shakespeares together, The Scottish Play at the Park Avenue Armory, and Shakespeare's Winter's Tale and Romeo and Juliet, and a conversation about many Shakespeare plays has ensued, including the one you were kind enough to offer us to come and work on at The Shed in 2020. We know that things changed for the world at that point.

But it's always been a conversation that is ongoing, and now it's an exciting triumvirate between Lucy Skilbeck, who was a phenomenal associate director with us in the West End when we did the show, and Rob's ability to now join us free from his other commitments means that I think we've got three very, very concentrated minds that look to develop what Lucy in London and Rob across many productions has now done, which is defined this immediate and urgent and evolving way, an emotional way, to tell the stories that Shakespeare gives us, concentrating, I think, on the emotional center as far as we can judge that, but particularly with Rob's special gifts, the visual staging of the plays, I think, is something that we've developed a really good language for that fuses my history in cinema with Rob's incredible choreographic gifts. So I think a punchy, visually exciting show is now going to be further enhanced with Rob coming back to his natural place amongst us as we continue to try and find the most real and most immediate versions of Shakespeare.

Alex Poots:
Thank you, Ken. I think we've got time for two more questions. I've got one for you, three. Why did you want to be involved? I beg your pardon? This is from Joseph Cutler. Hello, Joseph. Hi. Thank you, Joseph. And you're an acting student, correct? Yep. Why did you want to be involved in this production and what has been the most challenging and rewarding part about bringing this script to life? It was directed at your three daughters. Who would like to go first? Shall I pick one?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Yeah.

Alex Poots:
Okay, MJ.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
And this is why I should keep my mask. No, the idea of playing Regan didn't even spring to mind. I just graduated barely from drama school. Regan seemed someone who I probably would embody in 10, 15, 20 years. I think to link back to the choice of being selected in a younger cast of people, I can only speak for myself, but I think often young people are viewed as flimsy and careless. But the women that I grew up around are nothing short of empowered, concise, direct women who are in survival mode all of the time.

I think to approach that as a young woman from where I come from and show what it is for someone who is younger, to have to deal with the difficulty of being a middle child, the difficulty of not feeling like she's ever had enough, the difficulty of not being the youngest and the cutest, but not being the oldest and not having the responsibility, feeling a lack of love, this is not strictly true. This is a vast generalization, of course. But it was deeply meaningful to do that looking the way I do. I think often, not to bring into it, but I think often, Southeast Asian women are seen as very subservient. I think we're put into boxes, and that is just not my experience. It's just absolutely not.

I believe myself and my mother and my ancestors and all the women who came before me to be such deep, deep thinking, strong, complicated women who often need a bit of love. I think that's what Regan needs, but there's no time for it. There's no time for love, there's no time for feeling, there's no time for sitting. You just need to eat, otherwise you get ate. And she's not trying to get ate. She is trying to eat. She's trying to build her empire and have for herself what she always feels like she has been denied. That was really, really exciting and important.

I can only speak for myself, but I know that Deborah and I, when we often came out of stage door, people would go, "They're so evil, so evil." You're like, "I think they're just trying to survive. I think they're doing what any other person would do given the circumstances that they've been dealt." I think it's really important to do that. I think the separation between the sisters, and of course, we have our own philosophies about our characters, and like Jess so rightly put, they do love their dad. They love their dad immensely, and they're just not receiving the love the way that perhaps they want it. We all love languages, and this is a difficult one. It's a very obvious sign of miscommunication. I think that's a difficulty of a family is that we often want to love in a way that we think we're giving love, but that's not how the person receives. I don't know if I answered your question, but that's-

Alex Poots:
No, it's a luminous answer, actually. Anything to add?

Deborah Alli:
Yeah, just like you, I initially auditioned for Cordelia. Yeah, there it is. I didn't see Goneril at all as someone that I could actually play. Being able to have that opportunity to me was similar to you as well. I feel like I went to theater, aspired to be in it, but didn't see myself in it. Playing Goneril was just such a big deal to be the big sister of the pack and go on this journey of showing strength, and yet so much vulnerability. I think Goneril is, goodness me, I really do feel she didn't want to do half the things she did. But she just didn't have that one thing, which was in my interpretation, she really just wanted Daddy to love her. I think it led her down this spiral of destroying everything around her, including her sister.

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
Spoiler.

Deborah Alli:
Oh, yeah. It's a classic play, ain't it?

Melanie-Joyce Bermudez:
It's a classic, yeah.

Deborah Alli:
Sorry. Including herself. The journey of self-destruction, it was just such an honor to play. I don't know if I answered it either, but, yeah.

Alex Poots:
Good. Do you want to add anything?

Jessica Revell:
Yeah, I really remembering wanting to work with Ken, and our first audition was in a room at Radha. I just remember, I came in and I did the bit from Cordelia in the first scene, and then Ken went, "I'll read in the other lines." I thought, "Oh, my God." I was like, "Okay, I'm ready. Yeah, I'm fine." Obviously, on the outside I was probably feeling really cool, Ken, and was like, yeah, whatever. Anyway, and then I remember you read it or you just did the bits with me, and I don't think I'd even learned the cues at this point. It was like the nothing bits. I just remember, it felt so playful and free and I left so excited and I sort of thought, "I would love to have even a go at doing that." Even at the recall, I was just chuffed that I got the chance to work with you again. As the recalls kept on coming, I was like, "This feels special." But amongst all the other things to work with great, Ken.

Kenneth Branagh:
One of the things that you remind me all of, and partly what we've been talking about in terms of why we did it this way and why it's the length it is, is because it happens to be called King Lear, and I don't say this with any sort of sense of false modesty or anything, but I was as directorially, I've always been interested in the ... The play is about the whole group of people. It's immensely about the family. But the excitement of being in the production is all of the characters being in stereo, in 3-D. I didn't want to get locked myself into in the wrong way. There was a question somebody I think had mentioned earlier or a question I saw that had been submitted about do you concentrate in your own role? Do you have a sense of the larger picture?

I think of course, you concentrate on your own role, but you do keep an eye on the larger picture to see not only how it can inform what you do, but what it's giving you, but also what you can give to it and keep you out of being too much sort of blind. I did not want that to happen with King Lear. I don't say for a second that I don't take the process of playing him as something that has occupied me and preoccupied me in a disturbing way for a long time. But in terms of the larger sense of what we hope we bring to New York here, it's the ensemble of the play. It's every character in the play where we're trying to make that clarity and full-blooded, fully human kind of connection.

When all of that happens, it's way more than the journey of a man who makes a fatal mistake and it becomes about a family, at least two families, the Gloucester family, with equally difficult challenges in their story through the play, but then through the family of Britain as the events cause catastrophe. But it's a thrill, and I've been so grateful to these three. For me, it's been a joy to work with and act with. I can't wait to act with in front of a New York audience, and foreign and New York audience to try and develop and deepen the journey of the play and for all of the characters in the play. We are wildly excited to come join you.

Alex Poots:
I'm being signaled that we're out of time, but that's a wonderful place to stop.
I'd like to thank you all, every one of you for coming. May I thank Jessica.
Please, thank Jessica, Deborah, MJ, and Ken.

Kenneth Branagh:
Thank you. Thank you.