



Interview Transcript

Jeff Alexander

Ryo Tabusa: Thank you very much for joining us. If we could just start off by you introducing yourself and who you're playing.

Jeff Alexander: I'm Jeff Alexander and I'm playing...Friar Laurence and Lord Montague. It took me that long to answer the question because I've been in two previous productions of Romeo and Juliet and I've played different characters. So [in the] last one, I played Prince Escalus.

RT: Well before we get into your experience with Romeo and Juliet as a play, what has been your experience with Shakespeare's Globe as a theatre before?

JA: This is my first time here. And I remember when I was training as an actor many, many years ago seeing Sam Wanamaker on Open University on BBC 2 talking about the Globe theatre and wanting to build it. And I remember thinking at the time, "Wow, it sounds such a fantastic project and it's a monumental task and I'd so love to be involved and play there, if it was ever built". And now, 27 years later here I am.

RT: That's great, that's great to finally be able to perform on there.

JA: Yes!

RT: Have you been on the stage yet?

JA: We walked it in the first week. It's fantastic, I'm looking forward to having an audience there and saying some lines.

RT: Great. Tell us a little bit about your past with Shakespeare, from studying it in school to [now].

JA: We never had it in school. I went to a comprehensive in Birmingham and my first experience or knowledge of Shakespeare himself was my family moved to a house in 1977, and the previous owner had died and a lot of the stuff was left in there. And she must have been to Stratford [-upon-Avon] at some point, because she had a tea towel as a wall hanging and it was a depiction of Shakespeare himself. And it had his birth date and his death date, which I noticed was the same date. And that kind of hung on our wall for at least a decade. So that was my first experience with Shakespeare.

RT: Oh right!

JA: And then in the early 80's, the break dancing and body popping scene came along and I got into that. And that was my first experience with being in front of an audience, because at night club we would just dance and a circle would form around us. And I kind of just got this bug of performing in front of people.



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JA: And then in the early 80's, the break dancing and body popping scene And when that dies down or it kind of got saturated in 87, and my brother who was in the group that we'd formed, he went off to train as a professional dancer and he said, "Why don't you try acting?" So I phoned up a couple of schools in Birmingham and eventually started doing the evening classes on a Tuesday night, and then I took LAMDA exams and I even got a place at drama school. So I handed in my notice at the job which I was doing, and I remember my father thinking I was crazy at the time, because it was a very well-paid job. But I remember my drama teacher saying to me at the time when I got the place, she said, "You should bone up on your Shakespeare". Because I hadn't been reading for years, and she said the rest of the students will be coming from university and they'll know Shakespeare and the rest of it. So once I'd left the job, I then spent those eight weeks in the Birmingham city library studying Shakespeare. So by the time I got to drama school, the only Shakespeare that I hadn't read were the Histories. And so when I got there I thought, "Oh I'm going to still be behind!" Because I hadn't got to the Histories. And I got there to discover that most of the students knew two, maybe three Shakespeare's.

RT: Right, so you were ahead of the game now!

JA: Yes! And I just loved it, I just loved it. It was at first, getting my head around the language. But you know, once you kind of study and see the words and what they mean, you start to see the poetry behind it.

And then my first job doing a Shakespeare play was doing a school and community tour with the National Theatre. [It was] *The Tempest* and I played Stephano and Trinculo combination of characters.

RT: Right, okay.

JA: And then after that, it was *Romeo and Juliet* at the Swan in Worcester, where I played Mercutio.

RT: So what were your first impressions of *Romeo and Juliet* and then your new impressions now, with the perspective of your characters for this performance?

JA: Um, it's interesting playing one of the young characters that is feeling the heat of the summer: Mercutio. And knowing that there's a rival family there, the violence could break out at any time. And I remember in our production, there was a lot of bright lights on the stage and it was period costume. It kind of just had a different energy.

RT: Right.



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JA: And it's early in rehearsals here now, but now playing it from the perspective of Lord Montague, even though you're aware of this feud, there's like a tired-ness about it. Like it's still going on and if it does break out, we still have to get involved but it's almost like, "Oh no, here we go again!"

RT: Right!

JA: Rather than Mercutio's, "Oh come on!" It's hot and if anyone comes along then it is going to provoke a fight.

RT: What have been some of your highlights in rehearsals so far? And what are you most looking forward to?

JA: Sitting around the table and reading it and getting to know the edit that Michael [Oakley] has done, it was exciting. And then the dances and the fights are quite exciting as well. I was wielding a sword, which I didn't think I would be doing but yes that is quite exciting as well. And then I suppose next, I'm looking forward to when I'm free of the script and can really discover the other layers and the beat and the rhythm of the piece.

RT: Great and we look forward to catching up with you again when you have. Thank you so much for joining us today.

JA: Okay, thank you for having me!