

Such Stuff podcast
Season 2, Episode 3: Love and Hate

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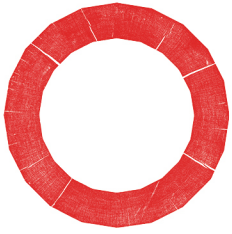
Imogen Greenberg: Hello and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

During the winter season here at Shakespeare's Globe, the Globe theatre itself is closed for performances, and we head inside to the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. With one very important exception... Every year, for a 4 week run, we welcome around 25,000 schoolchildren through our doors and into the Globe for Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank. Its a fast-paced 90-minute production, loud, energetic and made especially with a teenage audience in mind. For many of our audience members, this will be their first experience of seeing Shakespeare performed.

Warming up our audience this winter is a fiery and passionate production of Romeo and Juliet, exploring how generational divides affect the lives of young people.

So this week on the podcast, we go behind the scenes with the cast and creatives and ask... is there such a thing as making Shakespeare 'relevant' to young people? Why should Shakespeare be seen and performed, and not just read? And are love and hate two sides of the same coin?

Stick with us to hear from some of our teenage audience members on what they make of Shakespeare, and to hear a sneak preview of this year's production.



First up, we sat down with some of the cast and company to ask about this distilled 90-minute version of the play. So, what's at the heart of Romeo and Juliet for director Michael Oakley?

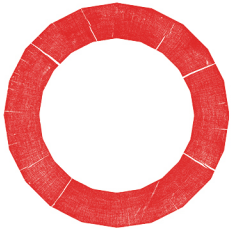
Michael Oakley: I suppose I'm not the first person to say this but it's definitely a play about the gap between the generations, the divide. The old generation is very much sort of indoctrinating the young with their prejudices, their views of the world, and I suppose that feels particularly urgent in society at the moment. And rather than merely focusing on the love, we're looking at everything else around... the love is just one facet of this play I think. And you know, you can often get swamped with hearts but we're not sort of doing that. It's definitely not an anti-love production, but that's not the main concern. I think it's this notion of love and hate being two sides of the same coin and so I suppose there are lots of moments of hate in this place which are just as passionate as the moments of love, sometimes more so.

IG: We also chatted to Nathan Welsh, who is playing Romeo, and Charlotte Beaumont, who is playing Juliet...

Nathan Welsh: I think in this play, the hate within it comes from the love, so the love for themselves, the love for each other's families.

Charlotte Beaumont: Yup, and the protectiveness, you know, Tybalt as a character is fiercely proud of where she comes from, and from that pride and love springs the hatred from the people she feels are threatening that and threatening her position.

You know we've gone for the Italian heightened drama of it all. Because that's what this story is, it's death, it's sex, it's love, and fighting. It's all the things that everyone finds fascinating. So we're kind of going to take that and run with it, and give them a show. I just hope that they watch it being like 'Oh my god, that's



awe[some]...' and see it as a story full of colour and glamour and are inspired by that and excited by it, you know?

[Rehearsal reading]

NW: If I profane with my unworhiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

CB: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this,

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

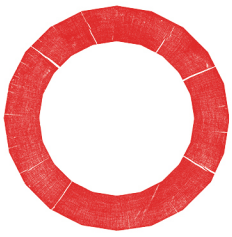
NW: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

CB: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

NW: O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

CB: Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.



NW: Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

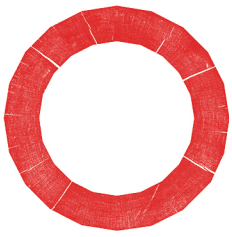
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IG: When performing Shakespeare to young people, its often asked how to make Shakespeare 'relevant' to them. For Michael in particular, it's something he's resisted. So how are our company tackling this question?

CB: Michael said he didn't want to make it the knife crime version of Romeo and Juliet, so what he's been focusing more on is the generational difference, which is something I think kids can relate to these days, and how the parents are the people that let down the kids. And I think the generational shift at the moment is quite huge and feels like a very noticeable thing, so that's what we've focused more on, it's more on the divide...

NW: Yeah, because it's kind of relevant to a lot of things that are going on, that have been going on recently in recent years, in terms of like choices being made by people without thinking about the generations below so I think that's sort of like an important running theme.

MO: I don't think you should dumb down a play. I'm trying to avoid doing anything that I think will appeal to them, because I think that's fatal. How do we know? Everyone's different. So it's not about saying 'How can we make this production relevant?' I think the story is quite relevant itself, so I don't think we need to gild the lily and try and be cool. I think that would be horrific. I mean obviously there are going to be some moments, some modern references that are more hopefully immediate to our audience but then you want... anytime you do a play that's written four hundred



years ago in 2019, you want it to be immediate, or there's no point in doing it. So I suppose it's trying to resist any clichés of dumbing down and making it appeal to them. I think we've just got to tell the story as honestly and as clearly as possible, and really make the characters very clear. I think for this project it's not about trying to appeal to young people. I think it's about making sure they know what's going on, and they know who these people are that we're representing. Shakespeare's a good enough playwright for us not to dumb down, or for us not to try and mould into our own shape. So as long as the people know who that character is and the characteristics of that character, and the situation that character finds themselves in, or the conflicts those characters find themselves in, I think that's hopefully job done.

IG: Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank is all about giving young people the opportunity to see Shakespeare in performance. So we sat down with some of our audience members, the teenagers who will be coming to see Romeo and Juliet, to ask them what they think of Shakespeare, and what the difference is for them between seeing Shakespeare performed and reading the plays in school.

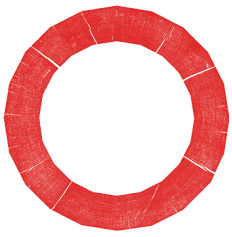
Teenager: Personally, I don't like Shakespeare...

Teenager: Why don't I like Shakespeare? I don't like Shakespeare cos... I don't wanna say boring...

Teenager: It's boring!

Teenager: I find it boring.

Teenager: At first I never really liked Shakespeare cos I didn't understand it, but as we've been learning it a lot, I've grown to like it.



Teenager: Personally, I don't mind Shakespeare but the language that they used to speak is a bit confusing but as I continue learning about Shakespeare, I'm understanding it bit by bit.

Teenager: I haven't really thought about whether I like Shakespeare or not, but I think by seeing Romeo and Juliet, I'll grow to like it.

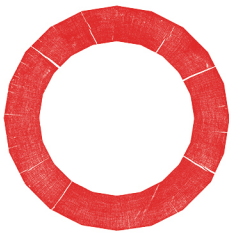
Teenager: I feel like the difference between reading and seeing Shakespeare is big. Reading it just plainly is boring, but when you perform it and interpret how you think it's supposed to be, then it's more enjoyable and I feel like watching the performers is more thrilling and alive.

Teenager: I feel like there's a big difference between reading Shakespeare and watching Shakespeare. When you watch Shakespeare, you understand it more and it's more eye-catching, more enjoyable, but when you read Shakespeare it's like you don't understand the language being used sometimes, it may come across as boring.

Teenager: Personally, when I read Shakespeare I feel like sleeping because I find it boring, but once you act it out you find more things about it, and you understand it more, because the language may be confusing.

Teenager: Personally, I think the difference between reading Shakespeare and watching Shakespeare, is that reading it is just on a book and it's kind of boring but when you watch Shakespeare it's more lively and people put their whole body into being their character so it's more understandable.

[Music plays]



IG: For Nathan and Charlotte, it's actually a very similar experience. Performing Shakespeare, much like seeing Shakespeare in performance, brings the play to life... How have they found the experience?

CB: I haven't done a Shakespeare before...

NW: I'd only done it once at drama school, this is my first professional Shakespeare...

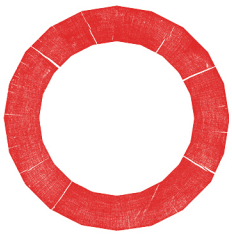
CB: Yeah, so we were both really nervous so having the week before rehearsals just to familiarise and be like 'Oh this is totally accessible' because I felt pretty... defensive, and felt a bit like moody that I felt like maybe I was not gonna be smart enough to get it. But I think that's cool, like us coming into it almost fresh is quite nice. You know, they'll feel kind of similar to how I felt on the first day of rehearsal and now I'm three weeks in and going 'Oh my god, there's so much to this'. It is so easy to understand and so beautiful. We can try and get them on board, and make it a welcoming thing and not something where they think 'Oh Shakespeare's just posh and inaccessible for us'. You know it's bringing them in to our space and making it their space and going 'This is easy and you can be in this world too and it's not exclusive'.

NW: Different understanding comes from seeing it and doing it, than reading it.

CB: And it's interesting we've been learning about... the way it's written, if you just read it on the page, you can get into a little habit and a rhythm where the meaning disappears.

NW: Yeah completely...

CB: If you're just reading it...



NW: You can skirt over so many things.

CB: You can skirt over it. But when we do it, getting it up on its feet...

NW: It's really visceral, colourful and like the imagery is amazing. When it is on its feet, you can really play with those kinds of things and like chew on them in a way. Is that a...? It's a weird way to describe it...

CB: Oh I love that, chew on them!

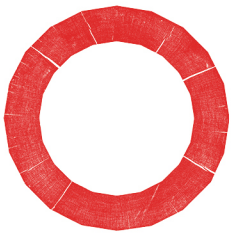
NW: It's true! It's kind of way more tangible than anything, than when you're reading it... And I don't know why that is? Well because it was written to be performed.

CB: Yeah. That's the thing. Shakespeare wrote it for actors to play with.

NW: I think when you're reading as well, you can come at it from an academic point of view, and a lot of actors aren't academics. I'm certainly not.

CB: No, I'm not.

NW: And so I think if you try and sort of pick it apart too much and try and decipher the code within it, you can come unstuck. Whereas if you just say the words and pick out the points that make sense to you and that you understand... mainly the imagery I think, the amount of imagery in this play especially, that you can relate to because it's there, it's around you, it's there everyday.



IG: For some of our audiences, it will be the first time they've seen Shakespeare. So what difference can seeing one performance of Shakespeare make? Well I asked some of our company what their first experiences of Shakespeare were, and how it affected them...

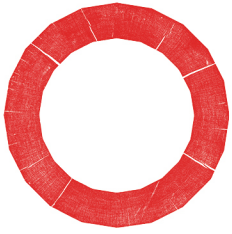
NW: I have memories of seeing Shakespeare and not knowing what was happening.

CB: Was that quite excluding, did you feel a bit like...

NW: Yeah. Although actually the one time I really remember is when I went to see something at the RSC when I was about 18 because I was doing English Lit as an A Level which I did not pass... [laughter]... and I remember being, really enjoying it as a production, but not really knowing... not really understanding what was being said.

MO: I didn't know anything about Shakespeare really. I went on a school trip to see a production of Richard III, when I was 12 and a half I think? And I just remember being very struck by it. And I didn't really understand it all, and I was sort of slightly disturbed by it, because it was a very sort of chilling production, but I was completely intrigued and sort of wanted more, so it was through seeing Shakespeare that really got me into Shakespeare and not everyone has that luxury. You know, most people's, I suspect, first encounter with Shakespeare, is at school, when you're being told to read it or analyse it and it's terribly difficult.

But the wonderful thing about theatre, isn't it, is that it's happening there in front of you, you're breathing the same air as the actors. If you really let your imagination go, you really believe they are those people and it's happening right in front of you and that's really thrilling and actually, I think when you hear and see something, it's often much easier to absorb than when you're trying



to look at very odd and complicated words on a page. And I know this is an age old mantra, Shakespeare intended his plays to be performed rather than read, but it is so true. And I think seeing a play, and actually probably a better word for it, is experiencing a play, it's not just about your sight is it, its about what you hear and what you feel, I think is the most important thing, it's what you feel and so that's what makes it very exciting and very unique. So I just hope our audiences will get something from it, and will be encouraged, perhaps like I was at the age of 12 and a half, to then see more...

[crowd noise]

IG: Romeo and Juliet runs in the Globe Theatre from 28 February – 27 March.

Since the first production in 2007, over 190,000 children have watched a Shakespeare play as part of Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank. Each year, a large proportion of the tickets are given away for free – this year is no exception, and over 18,000 free tickets have been allocated.

More information about this production – and Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank – can be found on our website.

You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg.

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