

(GUITAR MUSIC)

ADAM LEFEVRE: You're listening to The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast.

HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Welcome to the Prosecast for the National Theatre of Scotland and the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of "Dunsinane" that we will be presenting at the Shakespeare Theatre Company from February 4th through February 21st at Sidney Harman Hall. My name is Hannah Hessel Ratner. I'm the Audience Enrichment Manager here at the Shakespeare Theatre, and I'm being joined by Drew Lichtenberg, the Literary Manager, and neither of us had anything to do with this production because it's one of our presented pieces.

DREW LICHTENBERG: Well, we—I know I read it.

RATNER: I read it, too. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: We both read it, and we were, like, we talked to Michael, and said, "It's really good—"

RATNER: Yes.

LICHTENBERG: —and also, "The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart" was here.

RATNER: Well, and "Black Watch—"

LICHTENBERG: —and "Black Watch."

RATNER: So, we've had this ongoing relationship with the National Theatre of Scotland for the past few years, and they've been bring us amazing productions, and, as Drew mentioned, "Prudencia Hart" was written, actually, by the same playwright who wrote "Dunsinane," David Greig.

LICHTENBERG: And it was great because it was in a bar, and it was a combination of Faust with Scottish oral tradition and the Scottish drinking tradition.

RATNER: And it is nothing like "Dunsinane."

LICHTENBERG: Nothing at all, but, it was all—it was brilliant.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It was the same in the sense that it was a brilliant night of theatre, and it was sold out every night, and it was here for, like, a week and a half.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And not enough people saw it.

RATNER: It was fantastic, and David is just an incredible—

LICHTENBERG: Very talented, yeah.

RATNER: —playwright, who's putting out play after play in Scotland and across the world, and, luckily, we will be joined by him later for a little Skype interview, so, looking forward to getting the chance to talk to him.

LICHTENBERG: Hearing his Scottish brogue, which, I'm sure, will be adorable.

RATNER: (LAUGHS) But, before we get to that, let's set up this play a little bit, and give a bit of the background. The play, actually, is related very closely to the work we do here at the Shakespeare Theatre Company because it is a sequel to the Scottish Play. It is the sequel to "Macbeth."

LICHTENBERG: It's not just a dramatic sequel. What it's part of, what I like to call, answer plays or plays that needed to be rewritten from another perspective.

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: So, Paula Vogel's "Play About a Handkerchief," which is a kind of Desdemona perspective on "Othello." But, this idea of not just, not just a play that takes up the narrative, but one that fundamentally shifts the perspective 180 degrees. It's that you look at history from the bottom up or from the outside in, which is just one of my favorite genres of anything.

RATNER: Yeah, and it's interesting: With this play, we call "Macbeth," of course, the Scottish play, but, it's a play written—

LICHTENBERG: By an Englishman, right?

RATNER: Yes, and so, here it is an opportunity for a Scotsman to reclaim the story.

LICHTENBERG: Well, in the end of "Macbeth" is all about the evil Macbeth, who's, you know, a very complex figure with whom we identify and relate to in various ways, but, he's still a bad person who does terrible things, and is killed, and then, "Hey, the English are here," like, "Let's crown a King, and England," like, "England and Scotland are now united, and everything's going to be great for the next thousand years," and it's funny that we're doing this in the wake of the referendum vote—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —in which Scotland, you know, came very, very close to separating from its part of the United Kingdom, from England, so, this is history that is—remains contemporary, right, the idea of Scotland as part of United Kingdom is this very contested thing.

RATNER: Yeah, and the ability to self-govern and to say "We are a people who has ownership over ourselves and our land, which is really at the heart of this play.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. What does it mean to be a Scot when you speak a foreign language, right?

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: What does it mean to be a Scot when Gaelic has been killed off?

RATNER: And the play certainly has Gaelic as part of it.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, which I'm actually not sure how it's going to function in the play because there are characters who speak Gaelic in the play, and when you read the script, you know what they're saying.

RATNER: Yeah, I think we're just not going to know what they're saying, which, I—which adds to that feeling—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. We should all just go home and learn Gaelic.

RATNER: (LAUGHS) Yeah, but, it adds to that feeling of "What's going on here," and "Who has control over language and power," and "How are the two things related," which is certainly at the heart of this play.

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: But, before we even start delving into that—if we wanted to delve into that—what do we need to remember about "Macbeth?" It's been a while since it's produced at the Shakespeare Theatre, so, to remind audiences—

LICHTENBERG: Well, also, you know—

RATNER: —what they need to know about how that play ends, coming into the start of this play?

LICHTENBERG: I think what's been surprising to us is that we say, "Oh, 'Dunsinane's' coming in," people are like, "Dunsi-who?"

RATNER: Right. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: "Is that like a Dr. Seuss novel or something?" It's a reference to the Battle of Dunsinane, which is the castle, right, in which Macbeth is slain, where he fights Macduff and kills young Seward, who is the son of the Earl of Northumberland, and that's also the battle in which the prophesy comes true: The English-invading army—

RATNER: Birnam Woods comes to Dunsinane.

LICHTENBERG: Right. What are the three sisters say, "Macbeth will be King until blah blah blah, until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane," right, so, the English camouflages themselves in leafs and tree-like appendages, and it is seen as this—in the Shakespeare play, it's almost this symbol of nature rebelling against Macbeth himself, of nature expelling this evil forest from within it.

RATNER: Mmm, and then we get to—there's overlap in this storytelling here because "Dunsinane" starts out watching the English troops take on that form.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and it's fascinating because instead of, instead of a series of battles between Macbeth and these various avatars, instead of the great man version of history, we just see warfare

from the grunts eye view. We see the English crawling through the mud and the muck, putting branches and camouflaging themselves. It's horrifying. It feels extremely modern.

RATNER: Right, there's a lot of "Every Man" in this. A lot of this story is told by these young boys who are, who are off at war, who are out of their country, who are in this foreign landscape, and, I think, when we talk to David, we should return to that, and talk about what he was attempting to do, what he, I think, succeeded in doing, in comparing battles then and war then to war now, and the experience.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I mean, what's also interesting is that they never refer to Macbeth by his name.

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: He's just the man, right?

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He's just the tyrant. He's just somebody who they're coming to kill.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It's very, it's actually very similar language to the kind of dehumanizing language we use for tyrants in other countries that we go to war with.

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: Right? We take away their humanity in order to justify killing them and displacing them and setting up a new government.

RATNER: But what this play does do is provide a name for someone we never had a name for—

LICHTENBERG: Mmm.

RATNER: —which would be Lady Macbeth.

LICHTENBERG: And I think part of this is informed by Greig knowing his Scottish history. Lady Macbeth, or Gruach, as she was named, right, that's her name in the sources, was actually more of a powerful political figure than Macbeth himself. She was from one of the principal royal families of Scotland, and she did not die. She did not go mad and kill herself. She had a son. She had children even before she married Macbeth.

RATNER: Mmm hmm. Right, Macbeth killed her husband in order to take power.

LICHTENBERG: —and then she— Macbeth, right?

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And actually, after Macbeth kills Gruach's husband and marries, he reigns peacefully for 17 years. He was actually one of the best Kings that Scotland ever had before the English came and

chopped off his head, so, there's this very fascinated destabilizing sense of history turned upside down in this play.

RATNER: Yeah, and one of our eyes into the play, one of the pivotal characters is Seward, who you mentioned young Seward dies at the end of Macbeth—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: —and so, we're seeing, from this Earl of England, his perspective coming into Scotland and trying to figure out these battling clans, mainly the relationship between Gruach and Malcolm, who we also know from "Macbeth," who is crowned King—

LICHTENBERG: Right, right.

RATNER: —and trying to figure out how to bring peace when he doesn't really understand, and they keep reminding him. Everyone keeps reminding him, throughout the play, "You just don't understand."

LICHTENBERG: "You don't get it." Yeah, yeah, in some ways, actually, Seward is the hero of this play, I think, more of a figure who we feel we can identify with and understand than Gruach, who remains kind of mysterious to us in a certain sense, I think, or, like, at least we never know what Gruach's trying to accomplish in the play. She's unpredictable in a way that remains foreign to Seward. He's trying to figure out her. He's trying to figure out Malcolm. Macduff is sort of his right-hand man, but, Macduff keeps on telling him, like, "Dude, you just don't—you're not doing the right thing here," like, "You should be doing it differently," and he's come into this country trying to do the right thing, "Waging a war for peace," he keeps saying, and everyone's like, "Why are you waging a war if it's peace that you want," which, again, feels like a very modern kind of idea, we, you know, America and United Kingdom's foreign policy.

RATNER: And he's not quite understanding—he doesn't understand the language. He's there for months, and he doesn't learn the language. He still remains and outsider, who thinks he can use what he knows from how things work in England, and put that on top of a very different system that exists in Scotland.

LICHTENBERG: Right. "Instead of learning about the native culture, let's just kill everybody, and put a new figurehead on top, on top of the throne," and a lot of the play is actually about what we should do tactically in order to, like, prevent more bloodshed from happening, which, ironically, only leads to more and more bloodshed. In some ways, it also reminds me of "Game of Thrones," where you have these crazy reversals.

RATNER: Well, it also feels like that physically. It's just cold and dark. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Winter. I think they actually say, "Winter is coming" in the play.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It's written in four movements, each of which is a different season, which reminds me of the line from the Scottish play, "My life has fallen into the sear and the yellow leaf, that I am in the autumn of my days," so, winter does come. They're very, very literally in this, in this play, and you never

realize it until they point it out, but, like, “We have to stop fighting once winter comes,” like, “It’s Scotland. It’s cold.”

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: Like, “We’re not going to be able to keep on waging war because we’re going to die of frostbite if we haven’t wrapped this thing up by October,”

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: So, there’s a ticking kind of time bomb going on, too, in the structure of this play. It’s really, really interestingly written and structured and put together.

RATNER: Yeah, and we mentioned language and the use of language in it, and it seems that’s something that David keeps making very clear in the writing, that this ability to understand each other, the ability to use language to influence opinion or to use language to connect with someone emotionally or the flexibility of language, the English language and the Scottish language do two very different things.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, there’s a great speech, which I’m not going to paraphrase here, because I can’t remember it well enough, but, you know, Gruach talks about how English is a language that —oh, you have it.

RATNER: Yes! It says, “Your English is a woodworker’s tool, simple matters, a soldier’s language set up to capture the world in words, always trying to describe.”

LICHTENBERG: And then, she says “We, long ago, gave up believing in descriptions. Our language is the forest.”

RATNER: Yeah, so, you have the idea that the English language is trying to articulate very specific things and how they function and what they are, and the Gaelic language is mysterious and has depth.

LICHTENBERG: It reminds you of, what is it, the Eskimos have 27 different words for snow, and there’s a saying that they have in England, which is, “Up north, the sky is very close to the Earth,”

RATNER: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: That, like, the landscape kind of predominates, in a way, that changes the way you look at the world, and there’s a lot of beautiful descriptions of—very Shakespearean actually—descriptions of nature and of just how Scotland looks, how it feels to be in Scotland.

RATNER: Well, it will be great to pick that up with David, our voice from Scotland, and, so, he’ll be with us shortly.

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RATNER: Well, thank you so much for talking with us. This is for a podcast that we put out for every show, giving an opportunity to check in with the artists, and it’s really wonderful to be able to have our first international guest.

DAVID GREIG: Wow. No, really, it's a privilege. Thank you for having me.

LICHTENBERG: It's an honor and a privilege to speak to you, David. I'm Drew Lichtenberg. I'm the Dramaturg here at the Company.

GREIG: Okay. Hi, hi.

RATNER: Yeah, I'm Hannah. I'm the Audience Enrichment Manager.

GREIG: Great.

RATNER: So, we just want to talk a little bit about "Dunsinane—"

GREIG: Yeah.

RATNER: —and hear a bit about your thoughts on when you wrote it, and, particularly, I think, the contemporary political ramifications of it.

GREIG: Yeah, well, it came about, like most plays, they have a mixture of moments of birth, different ideas that seem to belong to a play, but, you don't really necessarily know what play, so, I had been thinking about Iraq, the war in Iraq in the early 2000s, and I had also been thinking about Scotland and very subtle themes. I'd been thinking about people who do good, try and do good, and that leads to bad, that seemed interesting, but, one of these thoughts were really anything until I was watching a production of "Macbeth" in Dundee, which is a smallish town in Scotland near where I live, and I suddenly had this very strong feeling where I thought that this play stops just at the important bit because "Macbeth" stops when he's overthrown, and I suddenly thought, "I want to know what happens after the, you know, what happens after the tyrant's been killed. That's the interesting thing," but, also, Dundee—to drive to Dundee from my house, you have to pass some of the places that get mentioned in the play, in particular, there's a line in the play that talks about Saint Colme's Inch, which is a small island near my house, and then, there's various other places, Birnam and so on, which are very near, they're really actually quite near when I live, but, for some reason, until this production, it never occurred to me that, you know, these places were real, and that there was real, there was, yeah, I don't know, that it was, this was a real landscape that had—so, I sort of had this sudden thought where I realized that the most—the play was just called the Scottish Play, was written by someone who'd never been to Scotland—

RATNER: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: Hmm.

GREIG: —and didn't know anything about Scotland at all, so that—I thought, "That's funny," and then, there's a sort of final moment when I suddenly had this very strong—driving back in the car, I had this very strong picture of a kind of a general arriving at Saint Colme's Inch, this island off of Forth, which is where, in "Macbeth," it says that Seward landed, and I had this very strong vision of this soldier sort of getting off a boat in front on an army, and he's in Scotland for the first time, and he doesn't know it, and he's there to depose a King, and I just sort of had this picture, you know, it sort of seemed as this character looked into the kind of, the murky, foggy depths of Scotland that he didn't know, I just

thought he was interesting, and so, really probably that moment, that drive home is probably the birth of the play in a sense because I sort of—the questions really the play then asks all sort of come from that, which is basically “What happens after you remove a tyrant,” and also, “Who writes, who writes the history of things,” and perhaps, they write in, you know—does it—then the old story, I suppose, of, you know, history is sort of written like that, as you win—Is that completely true? Yeah, so, there was just sort of that, but, I, yeah, that’s probably the starting point, but, the play actually took another four or five years. I don’t think I even knew then that it was a play. It was just sort of—it began to develop from that point.

LICHTENBERG: We were talking, David, about how there’s a, there’s a tradition, at least in this country, of answer plays—

GREIG: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —like Paula Vogel’s “Play About a Handkerchief,” in response to “Othello.”

GREIG: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And, was that in your mind at all, of being a Scot, and writing a play that’s in response to the Scottish play? It’s—you’re writing the real Scottish play in a sense.

GREIG: Well, there was—once I started doing it, there was an element of cheekiness that enlightened that. I didn’t know that was actually a tradition as such, although, I did it, myself. My very, very, very first play, which was like a baby thing, was a monologue written for Caliban—

RATNER: Hmm.

GREIG: —to be spoken after everyone else has left that island.

RATNER: Oh! We just produced “The Tempest,” so, I’m very curious.

GREIG: So, this monologue was Caliban talking to Ariel and because Ariel’s a spirit, I had him being invisible, so, there was a sort of—so, I—in my mind is always the room for that, I guess, and I didn’t think of it as a tradition, but I’d always thought it was a present possibility, but, I think it was definitely a cheeky thing for me, which was that I think I thought it was in—so, I think I thought there was something interesting about responding that there was this play called the Scottish play, if you like, and it was just a sort of—just to give a different perspective on it just seemed cheeky or funny or you know—I must admit that it only seemed kind of light or cheeky, and then, there was this—we were about to premiere in London, and I remember I suddenly felt sick, I mean, I just felt sick—

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: —because I thought the hubris of this astonishingly—you know, you sort of—people would say—some newspaper thing that says “It’s a follow-up to ‘Macbeth,’” and I suddenly had this feeling of “What have you done?! How can you—Why have you, you know, set yourself such a high comparative, you know—” and I became very terrified, but, actually, I think it’s fine because really, it’s just like, I think, like the Greeks used to do, and they would write stories that people saw new, but each author would bring their own perspective, and, in a way, Shakespeare’s plays are our sort of myth, you know. Everybody

knows the story of “Hamlet” or “Othello” or “Romeo and Juliet” or “Macbeth,” and I think—so, you know, in the end, I don’t think it is holy, as hubristic as I had felt as it might appear. I think it is a sort of legitimate, it’s a legitimate grand to look at, I guess, and it’s fun, you know, it’s a pleasure. I think from the audience, you do know and enjoy the play, there’s an extra pleasure, but, you don’t need to. I mean, you can watch it and you don’t need to know about it all, and it still works fine, I think.

LICHTENBERG: Well, it reminds me: We did—a couple years ago, we did a production of your “Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart—”

GREIG: Oh wow, right, yes.

LICHTENBERG: —and it seemed, to me, like that play was an answer play or re-telling of “Faustus—”

GREIG: Oh okay.

LICHTENBERG: —and a very successful one, and one of the most successful versions of “Faustus” that I’ve seen.

GREIG: Oh, thank you.

LICHTENBERG: —and, you know, it was—

GREIG: I mean, that wasn’t sort of subconscious, although—that was more with folktales, really, that the—well, not folktales so much as ballads. Those plays were a collection of ballads, and a lot of ballads, Scottish border ballads, in particular, talk about the sort of realm of the undead or world below, where devil, where the devil can take you, where the fairies live, or there’s all kinds of supernatural elements like that, and that was really engaging, I guess, all those, but “Faust” per say, hadn’t occurred to me, but, I guess, it’s a common thread.

RATNER: So, our audiences, as Drew said, have seen both plays. How do you think that those plays represent your full body? I mean, you have—you’re very prolific, so, there are a number of things that we haven’t seen, as American audiences. Where do these two plays sit in your work?

GREIG: Well, there’s sort of—in a funny way, they’re peculiarly Scottish. I mean, I suppose that would be the heir of line aspect of them, that, like, some people have joked—some truth—that my titles are geographical, so, I have plays, called “Damascus” and “Kyoto” and “Pyrenees,” “Outlying Islands” and so on and so on, and—but, “Dunsinane” and “Prudencia” aren’t explicitly not just set in Scotland, but, in their ways, both of them are quite about Scotland, they’ve got quite about—Scotland’s part of what they are, really, in their fabric, so, that’s unusual, I think, for me, in that I tend—my plays very often look at, particularly, questions about identity and always about disassociation in the modern world, so, the way we sort of—we find ourselves sort of floating almost un-rootedly and that normally almost varies, so, I half-jokingly said, but it’s true that, you know, I could write—a great many of my plays are set in hotel rooms, you know, or airports or train stations or spaces which are somehow not quite ever fully rooted, but, “Dunsinane,” on the other hand is play that is kind of about rooting, about the inability for someone to be uprooted, the way in which rootedness kind of—you can’t, you can’t—poor Seward wants to world to be rational, and he wants to sort be able to make a clean slate almost, where everyone behaves more sensibly, but, he sort of comes up against a kind of gnarly organic shapes of people in the ground, and, so, that is unusual. Then, “Prudencia” takes it from a sort of other angle, of

being more a dialogue between a woman who would sort of love everybody to be rooted and who's love of fold balladry is to do with that, but who sort of comes up against people and modernity and so, the two sort of clash, and you find that the mixing of rooted and un-rooted, but in a very sort of supernatural and poetic way, and that's possibly the other connection between the two plays is that they're both written in quite heightened language. "Prudencia's" written in verse, in rhyme and "Dunsinane's" not written in rhyme, but, there is quite high—the language is not naturalistic, so, you know, not straight-forwardly naturalistic at least, it's not in verse, but—so, I think, where the play fits in my work, is that they're sort of, yeah, they're sort of the more Scottish, and, possibly, the slightly more self-consciously, linguistically interesting ones, I think, but, you know, it's difficult for me, right. I don't really—I mean, each play I'm trying to do is always trying to be—it always has to be something new for me to be able to do it, really, and, so, it's sort of funny: When I look back, I always feel odd talking about it. It's not really me, you know, who wrote them anymore. It's a different person.

RATNER: Well, what are you working on now?

GREIG: I have a number of different things, but, I'm doing an adaptation of a Scottish novel, called "Lanark" for the Edinburgh Festival this year, that's taking up my time for the moment, and I have a range of plays that want very much to be written, and a kind of jostling for position, and as soon as I've got "Lanark" done, it's kind of a question of which of those plays most like, you know, like chicks in the nest, you know, with their beaks open (LAUGHS)

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: You know, one will be more demanding, then, the one that's more demanding will get written.

LICHTENBERG: You wrote this play a number of years ago—

GREIG: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —and the political situation is different now. I think it's possible to look at this play, and think about Scotland's relationship to England in a whole new light.

GREIG: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but, that was a surprise for me. I mean, the truth is that wasn't on my mind at all when I wrote the play, which might sound odd because when you see it and you listen to it, it seems full of very explicit, direct references to the relationship between Scotland and England, but, I think that's one of the interesting things about both theatre and about, I suppose, in particular, the Scottish referendum, you know, there's a story that people were saying, or they'll say, often people will say things like, you know, writers, like, they tap the zeitgeist and they get the spirit of the times, and I think what that often means is that writers don't know what they're writing. They don't know what they're writing—

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

GREIG:—is the spirit of the times until the times sort of catch up and show you, so I think a bit that, and that wasn't even remotely on my mind that there would be any Scottish politics to be dealt with in the near future when I was writing "Dunsinane," but, obviously, if you're Scottish and you've lived within the culture that I've lived in, how you relate to the more powerful makers to the South, is like it's just in your bones or blood, I suppose. You just have to know, you have to know that, so, then, you've got to—

any Scottish Queen, that's what she'd have to be working with all the time. It would be full—it is Scottish politic really in a way and probably always has been since such a country has existed, so, I suppose, in a way, what happened with "Dunsinane" is that "Dunsinane" by sort of speaking the obvious, when the politics changed—so, suddenly, we have to talk about that, we had to discuss it, and maybe try to be rational about it—suddenly, this play existed, which talked about it in a sort of subconscious and emotional way, I don't know, so, yeah, it was the other way around. And the other connection, which is slightly different is that I had been reading a lot about Afghanistan and the war in Afghanistan because people will very often, and I don't know if they do this in America, but, certainly in Britain, people talk about Afghanistan as being full of clans, clans and tribes and warlords who live in mountains, mountainous clans and warlords and tribes, and they have this sort of thing of, you know, uncivilized, hairy bearded clannish people, and it's pretty difficult not to think, if you're Scottish, it's very hard not to feel a tiny bit "Well, we weren't—"

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: "It wasn't that long ago that we were hairy, clannish people living in that," so, one always has a notion of double-ness, so, with a place like Afghanistan, and, so, for example, warlords, the idea of warlords, which can seem, you know, a very distant and uncivilized and barbaric from London, you know, we still have, I mean, the castles of Scotland, you know, all these castles of Scotland, that's where warlords used to, that's where they, that was their house. (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: And clans is what we all have—"I know what clan I am," all that stuff. Now, a lot of that is obviously romantic bullshit, but, I suppose what I mean is our national mythology is not so different from what was being bombed or kind of condemned as barbaric, so, I suppose there's a thing where I've often felt the Scottish-ness by not being the dominant mode of identity, but by being a kind of "to the side" mode of identity, I think it has allowed me, a little bit, to have a, maybe the ability to view how the world looks when you're the person people are describing as hairy and bearded, rather than, you're the, you know, "You're not the norm, " if you like, of "You're not the powerful, central position," so, I think that there's something about the politics in the play that sort of odd. The politics is sort of accidental, but maybe all the better for it. It was deliberate, really, but, it ends up being both possibly helpful and interesting as we think about countries where British and American forces have recently invaded, you know, that "Dunsinane" helps sort of get a handle on how that kind of can appear from the other side, but, also, didn't talk a lot about Scotland and England, but, in both cases, I think that happened, where it was a sort of by-product and it wasn't the aim of the play, it was just a by-product of speaking about the situation.

RATNER: Great.

LICHTENBERG: It reminds me of the speech about the English and the trainspotting.

GREIG: Yes, yeah, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Not to, not to, I don't want to ascribe influence by Irvine Welsh to you, David, but—

GREIG: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —it feels like it could have been written in the Middle Ages as well.

GREIG: Yeah, well, I think that probably the thing is that, in the end, it's like sort of, there's some things that are just brute fact, and we're a tiny, small, we're a small, rocky, not-very-good-farming country with a lot of mountains next to quite a huge world power, and we sort of have been—so, that just is, that it just is, that's your sort of—that's your shape really, and what writers end up doing is constantly around, constantly all day, give voice to that being, so, when you're giving voice to the being, like put it this way: If there had never been a referendum of independence “Dunsinane” wouldn't seem to be about Scotland and England, I don't think. It's to do with, it's only when the politic—and I suppose another way of putting this would be “Dunsinane” seems to be about Iraq when it was first put on in the mid-2000s, but, now, when it's been on, and, most recently, in Britain, it has seemed to be about Afghanistan, because, obviously, that was a conflict in which our soldiers were, at that very moment, fighting and dying, but, I have, you know—there aren't any British troops in Afghanistan anymore, but, I don't doubt that they will be somewhere soon. Do you see what I mean? So, it's sort of like, it might not always be about Libya, let's say, but, how, you know, maybe it will end up being Libya.

RATNER: Yeah.

GREIG: You're not in control of that.

RATNER: These things then become universal for better or for worse.

GREIG: One really, you obviously—that's what you hope, yeah, and it's one of the advantages of history plays is that if you write a history play, then, it's always relevant. It's sort of ironic.

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: Yeah, yeah, so, I think it's as much of a function of that than anything else.

RATNER: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today!

GREIG: That's a pleasure. Yeah, no, well, I'm so happy it's going to be seen, and, yeah, I can't wait to find out what—because, of course, you know, it's not going to be a Scottish or an English audience, is it? It's going to be an American audience.

RATNER: Yes.

GREIG: So, I—it might end up being about something completely different.

RATNER: And a Washington, D.C. audience at that.

GREIG: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It may be about—

GREIG: Or yeah, right, so, that's going to bring a whole, that's going to bring a completely different slant.

LICHTENBERG: Or it becomes about a West Virginia or mountainous clannish.

RATNER: Yeah, we'll see.

GREIG: Do you have—You do have clannish bearded people who are—

RATNER: Oh, we certainly do. Mmm hmm.

GREIG: Yeah, yeah, well, I think most of them were actually Scottish. (LAUGHS)

RATNER: (LAUGHS)

LICHTENBERG: (LAUGHS)

GREIG: That's my rough history of the Appalachian, but, I seemed to remember something about that, but, anyway, I'm sure that—well, I hope the people do get something, and I'm almost as interested in what new things the audience bring to it as anything else.

RATNER: Well, we'll send you an update as we go through.

GREIG: Thank you.

RATNER: Alright. Have a great afternoon!

GREIG: Thank you. Bye bye.

RATNER: Bye.

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LICHTENBERG: You know, we've talked a lot about politics of the play, which, I think, are going to be fascinating and resonate for people, but, it's also worth just pointing out the sheer beauty of the play's language—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and the beauty with which it's put together. It's kind of an indescribable form. I'm been trying to figure out how it operates. There's these sections of odes, almost like a Greek chorus in between the action, in between the war. There's a lot of monologues, poetic language. It's written in four acts like the four seasons. As I said before, four movements, like a sonata, so, it is a really fascination play aesthetically as well as politically.

RATNER: Yeah, and this is one of those interesting podcasts where we're talking about the play based solely on the text.

LICHTENBERG: Hmm.

RATNER: I mean, we haven't—neither of us have actually seen more than a clip here or there, so, I'm sure there's an entire visual language as well. I know there's—certainly in the materials that we're seeing—the snow onstage, and I think we'll all discover, together, kind of effect of the visual.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and as I was saying to you off camera or off mic, we, we have been presenting a lot of international work the past few seasons, and we're really, I think, one of the only theatres in Washington that does that. There are theatres in New York that do it a lot, but, like, BAM or St. Ann's Warehouse, but, there's the Kennedy Center, when they have a festival and then, there's us, and it's really exciting to be able to share this work with Washington, and to just go, as a fan, and see something that comes from halfway across the world, across the ocean.

RATNER: Well, it was wonderful talking with you, Drew—

LICHTENBERG: As always.

RATNER: —about this play. Look forward to more conversations to come!

(GUITAR MUSIC)

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