

(MUSIC)

ANDREW SMITH: Welcome to The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast for "Henry IV, Part 1."

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HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Welcome to the Prosecast. This is Episode Four of this year's series of Prosecast discussions. I'm Hannah Hessel Ratner, Audience Enrichment Manager here at The Shakespeare Theatre Company, and I'm joined by:

DREW LICHTENBERG: Hello, I'm Drew Lichtenberg. I'm the Literary Associate at STC.

RATNER: That was my excited voice because I'm very excited that Drew and I get to talk about the "Henry IV" plays, and we're doing two podcasts, not one, so, even though both plays are part of the same story, since it's two plays, you get twice the number of listening minutes. And we're gonna be joined, later on in this episode, by our Prince Hal, Matthew Amendt, um, and we're really excited to have him join us. We've been able to talk to him a couple of times about this "Part," and about the show, and it'll be really fun. And then, in the second episode for "Henry IV," so "Henry IV, Part 2" podcast, we'll be talking to Mistress Quickly, uh, the actress, Kate Skinner, so that will also be very exciting. Um, but before we get to chatting with actors, we assume that some of you who are listening are familiar with these plays. They're certainly plays that we have done before. They're plays that are constantly in the circuit of, uh, Shakespeare that gets frequently produced, but for those of you that haven't, we do want to give just a little bit of background, particularly, because the start of the play can be confusing to those without the knowledge of English history, since it does deal with things that happen before we, um, join the action onstage. So, Drew, would you be interested in giving us just a little run up to what happens before the play starts, and then where we are at the start of the play?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, well, the play is called "Henry IV," but it's actually sort of more about Henry IV's son, Prince Hal. Henry IV is the character, Richard Bolingbroke—Henry Bolingbroke,—in Shakespeare's other play, "Richard II," who disposes Richard, the sitting King, and, eventually, has him murdered, or, you know, he doesn't murder him himself, but says, "If somebody else wants to murder him, I won't stop you," but then the murderer comes to him, and he's like, "Hey, you did a really bad thing, and I'm not gonna have anything to do with you." So, he kind of has this guilty conflicted, conscience over what is, not just treason, in a, in a legal sense, but is a cardinal sin, you know, killing—murdering the representative of God on Earth. And as a King, Henry IV is a really conflicted man, he really wants to be a good King, he wants England to be at peace, but, because he is not born to be King, he is beseeched throughout his reign by rebellions, uh, and in this play, "Part 1," the rebellion takes the form of those people who helped him become King in the first place: the Lord Northumberland, his son, Henry Hotspur, and the Welshman, Owen Glendower, and I think there's a Scot, named The Douglas, as well, so, he always refers to himself as The Douglas, which is very entertaining.

RATNER: I'm going to refer to myself as The Hannah.

LICHTENBERG: The Hannah? (laughs) The Hannah. So, so, it's a very, you know, it's a very, uh, it's a turbulent time. It's a, it's a, it's a country that's plagued by Civil War. It's a King who has a guilty and conflicted conscience.

RATNER: Right, and then, on top of that, we have young Prince Hal—

LICHTENBERG: —and he have his son, Prince Hal—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —who, you know, didn't ask for this. He didn't say, "Dad, you know, can you kill my Uncle Richard and make yourself King and make me the Prince," and he is, kind of, sowing his wild oats. He is spending all of his time, at the beginning of "Part 1," hanging out in bars in Southeast London in Eastcheap with a character named Falstaff, who becomes, when these plays are produced, not just the most famous character from these plays, but the most famous character that Shakespeare would ever create, arguably, the most famous character in all of world drama, or one of the most famous characters.

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: Um, Falstaff is a fat, old, drunken, lying, cheating, swindling, cousin-ing, whoring, you know, you could use as many adjectives as you want, and you would still not have enough to describe how complex and multivalent this character is, Falstaff.

RATNER: And, of course, um, audiences were so taken by Falstaff that Shakespeare created Falstaff into another world in "Merry Wives of Windsor" that we did a couple of years ago.

LICHTENBERG: Right. Not only did he write "Part 1," but he wrote "Part 2"—

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: — maybe as a sequel to "Part 1" because it was so successful, uh, and then he has him killed offstage because he can't have him screwing up "Henry V."

RATNER: Right, and that's in "Henry V." Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: Uh, and according to legend, Queen Elizabeth wanted Shakespeare to write a play where Falstaff falls in love, so Shakespeare wrote, in maybe less than six months, the historical record show, "The Merry Wives of Windsor," uh, which then becomes an opera by Verdi. I mean, Falstaff is this character who just, he just spreads his wings and flies over centuries in multiple adaptations and—

RATNER: I think one of the interesting things about Falstaff, and I, I believe that, in one of our scholar articles in Asides, it talks about this, in David Scott Kastan's article, you know, he's this character that, as you say, spreads out and takes over the world, and yet, he never does completely take over the world of this play, that it, that the play is written is such a balanced way. We get to, of course, you know, fall in love/hate with this character, um, but we also get to see all of these other worlds woven in.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, the play has this, it has three worlds, sort of. It has the court of Henry IV, it has the world of the rebels, who are trying to defeat King Henry, and it has this underworld of Falstaff and his merry gang of pranksters, kind of like a Robin Hood-type world, except it's one where you have drunkenness and, uh—

RATNER: I mean, Robin Hood was probably drunk.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, Robin Hood did some drinking as well.

RATNER: Friar John, I mean.

LICHTENBERG: Friar—Yeah.

RATNER: He's really just Falstaff.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: Sorry.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, well, Falstaff, I mean, he's also this kind of comic character who seems like one you've seen before, right? He's, he's this big, fat man, um, so he seems kind of like a Miles Gloriosus from the Roman Comedy crossed with a bragging soldier from the Comedia dell'arte, you know, he's a, he's a parasite, Ben Jonson would say. He, he, he kind of checks all these boxes that comic theoreticians get really excited about. Uh, and in this production, he's being played by Stacy Keach, who has been at Shakespeare, I think, three other times:

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: As Lear, as Mackers and as Richard III—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —in really landmark productions for this theatre. He has played Falstaff before, but this is the crowning, I think, performance.

RATNER: He played Falstaff at the age of 27, and now, he is 72, so—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: —he's coming to it from a little bit of a different place right now.

LICHTENBERG: Right, so like, 40, 48 years in between—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —something like that. When, you know, when this play was performed, you're absolutely right, Hannah, they said "'Henry IV', showing the humorous, capricious—capricious games of Falstaff and the swaggering of Harry Hotspur." You know, Hotspur was just as big a star—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —in the original production as was Falstaff, as was Henry IV and Hal. It's actually kind of hard to pick, like, a lead protagonist—

RATNER: It's an ensemble piece in some ways.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, because it keeps, the wheel keeps on turning, and you just have one amazing famous rousing scene after another, and you just get swept up on this tide of excitement.

RATNER: Yeah, I mean, I fell like that play is so good, there's really not much to talk about.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

(MUSIC)

RATNER: We'll be joined by Matt shortly, and be able to have a conversation with him about the play and his part.

RATNER: So, here we are with Matt Amendt, and, Matt, thank you so much for joining us!

MATTHEW AMENDT: Hey, thank you, guys! This is so fun!

RATNER: Great! So, we wanna just know what's happening in the Rehearsal Hall. We're curious—

AMENDT: Yeah, what's happened in rehearsal? Boy, it's, you know, it's been really great. I mean, it's such an unusual thing to have, like, almost two months to work on plays, and we did our first stumble through of "Part 1" last week, I think, and that was, kind of, really thrilling for everybody in the sense that I didn't feel any ego in the room, like everybody seemed so into, kind of, figuring out where to tell the story and throwing in as much energy and specificity at it as we could, and it ended up being really great, I mean, everybody was really thrilled and kind of humbled to be around such great people.

LICHTENBERG: Didn't Michael say it was the best stumble through he'd ever seen?

AMENDT: He did, he did say that, and I keep knocking on wood—

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: —and being like "Oh, my gosh, when is the other shoe gonna drop, like, what's the, oh no."

LICHTENBERG: (laughs) Did he mean, like, for any play he's ever done or, like—

AMENDT: He said something like that. He start—when he says stuff like that, I turn up—I sing a song in my head and I think, "Don't listen to that," yeah.

RATNER: Well, it's like when a director's like, "Oh, at the first read, you really understood it," you're like, "Well, I'm never gonna get that back again."

AMENDT: I know, exactly. It's like, you know, I'm a big football fan, and it's like, when a coach sort of picks somebody for the Pro Bowl in training camp, you're like, "Oh no, something awful's gonna happen to him," you know what I mean? He's cursed. I don't want the curse.

LICHTENBERG: Right, or like the actor we have playing Bardolph. I went up to him, and I was like, "You are so funny, man," and he was, he was like, "Get away from me."

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: Yeah, Brad, he is amazing. Yeah, he is amazing. He's really incredible. I can't imagine anything being better as Bardolph than he is. It's so fun to watch he and Stacy together, like they should take that on the road. It's really great.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

AMENDT: Yeah, it's really great.

RATNER: Uh, speaking of going on the road, so you toured doing "Henry V."

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah, that's kind of how I moved to New York. I played, um, "Henry V" for The Acting Company in the Guthrie—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

AMENDT: —in a joint production that played in Minneapolis, uh, for a couple of months and then went all over the country, to, like 24 cities, I think, maybe, with Kelly, who's playing Lady Hotspur, um, so, she and I go way back, and I got to do that for, I think, over 100 performances, and I went to Times Square, and it was, yeah, it was amazing, amazing time.

RATNER: So, you spent a lot of time with this character who, now you get to go and investigate his back story, so it's—

AMENDT: Yeah, you know—

RATNER: Yeah—

AMENDT: —and I get to answer all of these strange questions. I mean, that, that play is such an interesting play because it's kind of this weird photonegative of "Hamlet" in that "Hamlet's" all private moments and "Henry V" is all public moments, so you never, kind of, know, you know, when is he being honest, except for this one huge scene right before the battle of Agincourt, when he's completely alone and has these, you know, it's called the "Upon the King" scene, kind of, that's what people say about it anyway, and, uh, there's a moment in that when he breaks down and prays, and immediately, when he prays, he starts apologizing for his father, and I always thought that was so interesting, and I thought, "Boy, I hope I get a chance to do 'Henry IV,' and see what that's all about, and it's been really helpful in rehearsal to kind of have that, to know that direction that we're angling to in "Part 1," which is so much about not really about how to be a King, but just how to be a son, how to be a Prince, you know, and it's really fun to work on the text, and I keep, like, when we get to the big fight scenes, and I say "I'm the Prince of Wales," like, seven or eight times just over and over and over again, and Hal's like "I am the Prince of Wales. I am the Prince of Wales," and there's some beautiful thing about trying to be a good son, like, leave out the King stuff, just how to be a Prince, if that makes any sense.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and there's a similar moment actually in "Part 1," where Hal's alone and has a soliloquy.

AMENDT: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I think it's the only soliloquy in the play, right—

AMENDT: Yep, yep, yep, yep.

LICHTENBERG: —or the only soliloquy he has.

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah, and that's a real—that's a really tricky bit of business that all, sort of, actors and directors are always like, "Oh, I wish we could just cut it."

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

AMENDT: —'cause, you know, and it's really tricky to figure out because, you know, he's sort of planning what he's gonna do, and, you know, it's been really fun to work on in the room in the sense that, you know, basically, the gist of the soliloquy is, you know, "I'm gonna, I'm gonna be better soon, but not now," and that's been really fun to work on with Michael 'cause Michael's really keen on, on having it being a sense of discovery 'cause it's not interesting to watch somebody say they're gonna do something, and have them do exactly what they say, and, uh, that's been really fun because, you know, when you think about, when you break it down, it's like, it reminds me a lot of people I know that have, kind of, substance abuse problems or, or, or alcohol programs or something, and they say, like, "I'm gonna stop drinking, but not this weekend," you know, it's that kind of vibe, where it's like, um, you know, "I'll go to rehab next week."

RATNER: So, in some way, Falstaff is his drug of choice or, or—

AMENDT: I think absolutely.

LICHTENBERG: Or it's like, "I'm good. I'm good. I have a plan. I have a plan. I'm not gonna have an overdose."

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah. "I have a plan. Trust me," and, you know, you don't believe those people, but, you know, it's like, it's like "Romeo and Juliet" thing, it's, you know, where we all know they're gonna die, so how—and when you do the production, it's like how close can you get the audience to feeling like they're gonna live, and, you know, in this play we know Hal's gonna become Henry V, and we all know that. So, how close can we get them to thinking that there's no way this is gonna work out? There's no way that guy's gonna—that guy can't be that guy. He can't, he can't make that distance. So that's fun, that's really fun to work on, and, you know, and, yeah, be around Stacy, who's so easy and generous and elegant in everything that he does and he is, he's a drug—he's a drug dealer. He's my drug dealer.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: Yeah, it's pretty—it's pretty fun.

LICHTENBERG: What has it been like, uh, working with Stacy, I guess?

AMENDT: Yeah, well, you know, it's been a joy, that was you know, kind of, one of the great things about this life as an actor is, is getting to meet people like that, and be close to these, you know, incredible, kind of, titanic artists in your life, and, you know, he couldn't be better, he couldn't be kinder and more gentle and more patient with me, and very insistent upon, you know, "We're not gonna run before we can walk, and we're gonna tell the truth. We're gonna talk to each other, and if a moment's really false, I'm gonna say that with no ego or, you know, guile." It's all very just, he just wants to play, and, uh, you know, I've learned so much from him technically and artistically already, and we've just gotten started, so I can't wait, and, hopefully, I won't screw it up. (laughs) That's the plan: Don't screw it up. Yeah.

RATNER: So much of your character is about being pulled between your father, or your two father figures, between—

AMENDT: Yeah.

RATNER: —the King and Falstaff.

AMENDT: Mmm hmm.

RATNER: How, in the rehearsals, have you dealt with that, that push and pull?

AMENDT: Yeah, you know, it's been really interesting in, in the sense of, you know, we haven't, at this point in the rehearsal process, you don't, kind of, have an overarching sense of, of things, which is, you know, a great boon and kind of really where we are right now—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

AMENDT: —so, I haven't quite felt, I mean, in the stumble through, you started to see things stacking and adding up, and how those inform each other, but, you know, the, the two relationships are really different in the sense that, you know, it's easy to say, sort of, well, they're both fathers and there's a son, and it's more difficult to see, like, what, you know, what am I missing from each of them that the other one gives, and that's been fascinating to see, kind of, what I get from Falstaff that I don't get from my dad—

RATNER: —which is:

AMENDT: —you know, which is, kind of, a personal relationship. I mean, you know, when you chart the play, I mean, the first thing my dad says is that he wishes the babies had been switched at birth, you know, that, you know, he doesn't see me as a, as a person really, he—at least, I haven't seen that, and so, when in, when in the play he does reveal that to me, that there's a great deal of love and affection there and that he's as much of a prisoner of this decision that he made to become King as, as I feel I am, that that cracks something in our relationship, and, you know, Ed playing my dad is such a good, uh, such a good strong Italian—

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: —and there's a real kind of Italian father-son thing going on that "We gotta smack each other around a little bit before we can tell each other the truth," you know, and we've been feeling that together, which is really fun, you know, he, he's such a brilliant artist, Ed, and, you know, to be bouncing back and forth in those scenes between Stacy and, and Ed is, I mean, I just keep counting my lucky stars, I mean, it's been, it's been glorious, and, you know, Falstaff provides kind of a—he's warm—

LICHTENBERG: —love, it's love.

AMENDT: You know, the first scene—it's love—the first scene's waking up, and it's love, and it's truth, and we can call each other terrible, terrible names and laugh about it, and, uh, you know, and there's also a real desire to reform each other. I think Stacy and I are finding that there's a real tension about—you know, I really believe that he's gonna—when I become King (clears throat)—excuse me—that he'll, uh, he'll come with me and help me. I have no plans to get rid of him, you know, that he's, uh, he can change, the same way I'm gonna have to change. We'll change together. We're gonna stop robbing people. We'll still drink a little bit, you know

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: —and he's—I think Hal has very specific plan about how you're gonna do that, and Falstaff has a very specific plan as well, which is, you know, "You're giving me carte blanche to do whatever I want," I think. I don't wanna speak for Stacy, but that's how, how, feels about it. So, there's this huge tension about the number of times we talk about robbing ending and hanging and "You're gonna get yourself hung," you know, "Stop doing that," and, uh, you know, that's really beautiful to watch the two of them, the tension in trying to reform each other, you know, that "You should be more like this," "Well, you should be more like that," you know, that's scary, and there's a, there's a fear in that, in that, when you love someone, but have to change them, it's like that's the classic relationship that ain't working—

LICHTENBERG: Mmm.

RATNER: Yeah.

AMENDT: You know what I mean?

LICHTENBERG: Mmm, yeah, or when you have a parent who is struggling with those kinds of problems, right?

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah, and how do you do that, and, you know, there is, that's the question, right, always when does the child parent the parent—

LICHTENBERG: Mmm hmm.

AMENDT: —and when is the parent parenting the child, right, and there's so much of that in this play, and, you know, Hal's pretty resentful, you know, I think, his misbehavior is targeted at his fathers.

LICHTENBERG: And, there's another thing you mentioned earlier that, uh, I think you talked about this in table work, and it's so interesting to me that Hal did not—he was not born the Prince of Wales.

AMENDT: Right, right, right. This is this thing that, you know, it's shocking to me that how much academic work doesn't take that into account—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

AMENDT: —that he, he didn't think he was the Prince. He wasn't born to be the Prince. He was a guy, and then, all of a sudden, everybody took him to a different bedroom and gave him better clothes and told him to start behaving himself, and, you know, he's totally unaware of that, and I think he thinks, you know, deep, deep, deep down, you know, I think he thinks it's a huge mistake his father made. I mean, that's what "Henry V" tells us, that's what, you know—

RATNER: Right, because if you want to believe in divine right, there's nothing—

AMENDT: Right. It's—

LICHTENBERG: It's cardinal sin. Cardinal sin.

RATNER: —like, how do you believe that you're supposed to do this. Yeah.

AMENDT: —Yeah, and, you know, I think, personally, I think Hal really liked Richard.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

AMENDT: You know, I think, I think when his dad says, "You're like Richard, you're just like Richard"

LICHTENBERG: "You killed Uncle Richard?!"

AMENDT: Yeah, I think that's how he feels.

RATNER: So, you have this whole, kind of, subplot in your head of your relationship with Richard—

AMENDT: —yeah, which, you know, which bubbles up in "Henry V—"

RATNER: Yeah.

AMENDT: —at the worst moment of his life. I—what I know from that tour is, I know that the darkest moment of his life when he's sure that he's a complete failure, he looks to God, and says, "I'm so sorry for what happened to Richard, and I'll do anything to fix it." And, so the gift of that is to go backwards and say, "Yeah, I think this behavior is, like, you know, this is a disaster. It's your fault, Dad, so, I'm gonna, you know, I'm not, I'm not taking any responsibility for this." It's like classic rebellious adolescent behavior—

LICHTENBERG: —and we see in "Part 2"—not to get too far ahead, but, like, he's confronted with the crown—

AMENDT: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He's confronted with this choice his father made, this straightjacket—

AMENDT: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —you know—

AMENDT: And, you know, that's—one of the things I love about the way we're approaching these plays—I just came from a 90-minute costume fitting, and, you know, our costume designer has found this incredible way to make things Medieval but Contemporary and sort of hip and, you know, it's like the cultural movement in our culture right now. It's like "Vikings" on the History Channel or "Game of Thrones" on HBO—

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: —and, you know, and everybody wants—we don't want allegories, but we want metaphors of, of ways to—

RATNER: Yeah.

AMENDT: —ways to, like, be a good person, especially in, you know, now that we're all, kind of the "Children of the American Empire," it's like, how do you—"Children of the 20th Century," it's like, how do you, how do you be good, and that's very much what these history plays are about, you know, being—inheriting this crown that you don't—you're deeply uncomfortable with, and think might be evil and perhaps alive, and it's eating your father.

LICHTENBERG: Right.

RATNER: How do you move forward?

AMENDT: Yeah, and how do you wear that or take that it into yourself without losing everything that you are, and I think it's a much bigger metaphor than just about, you know, the Monarchy as an institution.

LICHTENBERG: Right, and, you know, Falstaff's morality becomes very seductive when you ask yourself about, like, what does it mean to be good, right?

AMENDT: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —'cause Falstaff is near you saying honor is not really a thing. Honor is what dead men have, right?

AMENDT: Yeah, right, right. "Who had it? He that died on Wednesday."

LICHTENBERG: Right.

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Uh, in that way, it's very similar to "Mother Courage" and it's interesting to—

RATNER: Hmm, interesting

AMENDT: Yeah, Michael was talking, in rehearsal, that he always wants to do those in Rep. It is, it is very interesting, you know, and I think that's what, like, Shakespeare was after. It feels, you know—it's always interesting to me to look at, like, the chronology of these plays as we understand them, that he kept coming back to this period, The War of the Roses, you know, and I love—I was just reading last night in some of my research I'm doing, that, you know, the Rose was this Chaucerian image of the soul—

RATNER: Mmm.

AMENDT: —and that, uh, you know, it's like he was fighting this War of the Roses with himself literally, like, "What, what kind of man do I wanna be," or "How—what kind of person do I wanna be," and he finishes it, and then, it's, like, "Hamlet," "Twelfth Night," "Lear," like it just explodes—

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: into, into that, and, you know, I love that feeling and that tension, and, I don't know, like, how do we be good, you know, these are the stories, these are the stories we picked to figure that out. You know, my best friend has a two-year-old daughter, and I went over and visited them, and she's playing princess, you know, like, she wants to, she wants that, that kind of metaphor, like, that fairy tale thing—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

AMENDT: —and I love that about these plays, so hopefully, that'll pop for everyone that comes to see it.

LICHTENBERG: Well, that, that leads us to an interesting question, which is: Is Hal good at the end of these plays?

AMENDT: Boy, you know, I don't know. It's, you know, it's, it's a really good question. I don't know that Shakespeare knew it—

LICHTENBERG: Hmm.

AMENDT: —do you know what I mean—

RATNER: Mmm hmm.

AMENDT: —like, I know that it's interesting, you know, it's—you know, not to get too far ahead of ourselves, but, you know, there's an epilogue in "Henry IV, Part 2," right, where he talks about you come back and see Jack Falstaff go to France, and when he writes "Henry V," he kills him offstage in the first Act, and sort of says, "I can't deal with him anymore. He's too, you know, he's taking over all my plays," it's like a Mercutio complex kind of thing, I think, and, uh, you know, I think he's a man in danger for me, I mean, it, you know, it's easy, it's very easy to tie up the play with a bow and say "Here's this, here's this

Prince, this reprobate who came—the prodigal son has returned, and now, he’s the King and we’re all gonna win France,” but you know, I think he’s a man in tremendous danger—

RATNER: Mmm.

AMENDT: —at the start of “Henry V,” and the journey of that play is, like, how close can he get to becoming a monster before redeeming himself somehow? Yeah, so I don’t know, I don’t—he certainly hasn’t put the pieces together. I mean, starting a war is not a good way to create peace, really—

RATNER: (laughs)

AMENDT: —and that’s kind of what his agenda is, you know what I mean? That’s the message that he takes from his dad.

LICHTENBERG: Right, right. It’s all that his father wants is peace, right?

AMENDT: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He never, he never gets it.

AMENDT: He can never find it.

RATNER: Right, so he kind of continues a rebellion in a way.

AMENDT: He does, yeah, I think he does, he keeps, he keeps building on that and stacking it, and I think he’s just so deeply, deeply intimidated and feels so—he feels—he’s such a fraud, I mean, it all comes back to that he’s not a, he’s not a Prince. He’s Harry Monmouth. He’s a—he’s supposed to be, like, the third cousin of the King that gets to eat for free, you know. He’s supposed to, like, sit at the kid’s table and drink as much as he wants, and, sort of have some minor responsibility somewhere, and he gets thrust into this thing, and he knows, I mean, he knows that it’s not right and that he’s a fake, and that it’s just a matter of time before he, before he screws it up. I think, ultimately, that kind of becomes one of his greatest strengths—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

AMENDT: —is that he’s not afraid to lose.

LICHTENBERG: Right, and I think it’s because he sees the crown from an outsider’s perspective—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —that he is a really good King actually.

AMENDT: Yeah, yeah, you know, I think that’s, I think that’s, and I think it’s a Falstaffian thing that lets him, lets him kind of create a synergy with the, with the crown that the other Kings miss. I mean, in every one of these plays, each of the Kings has a moment where they’re left alone with that thing—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

AMENDT: —and they negotiate it in incredibly different ways: Richard and Bolingbroke and Henry V and Henry VI, you know, all of the—Richard III—I mean, all of those guys have some moment when they have to face this thing, this living—I always think of it one of the face huggers from “Alien,” you know what I mean?

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: —like, it’s this thing that’s skittering around and is gonna get you, and they all have some slight variation on it I think, you know, ultimately, it’s Hal’s ability to move between levels of society and really love those people, really love them in a way that is really tangible and real to them that lets him lower himself in some way or give up that idea of being this cyborg from Heaven that’s gonna save everyone’s life.

RATNER: Well, great, thank you so much, Matt, for joining us. It’s been a lot of fun.

AMENDT: Oh, thank you guys.

RATNER: It was really great.

AMENDT: Thank you, guys. Take care.

RATNER: Bye.

(MUSIC)

LICHTENBERG: God that guy is—he is unique. He really is unique.

RATNER: He’s great. Well, one of the things that we didn’t have him talk about that we could have is his own version of the plays that he’s been writing.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: I mean, one of the things I think is really exciting is that he’s not only an actor, he’s also a playwright.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: I mean, he’s someone who thinks—and a scholar. I mean, he really is thinking about these characters and this world

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and Matt’s written a really lovely essay for us in “Asides” about his own personal connection to these plays. You know, he suffered from partial paralysis as a child, and the only thing that really could comfort him was reading these plays, these Shakespeare plays and—this character who has two faces and two sides, so he, he’s a very, very gifted actor, and, you know, when he was, when he

was doing stuff from “Part 2” in rehearsal that Michael was just speechless by, in a good way, so he’s gonna be really, really exciting to see.

RATNER: Yeah, can’t wait to, to see him, and I’m glad he’s so game to talk about it. I think we’ll have some really great post-show discussions with him.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and you know, he raises a lot of interesting questions about these plays—

RATNER: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and I think answers a lot of questions about why they’re still performed why they’re still so popular, you know.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It, it is more than just the royal family.

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: It cuts to the heart of what it means to be a moral person, a moral leader, a moral character in society.

RATNER: Yeah, I mean, I think that’s definitely right, but one of the, the things that is also interesting that he brought up is how much these are in a trajectory with all of The War of the Roses plays. I mean, we start with “Richard II” and keep going through “Richard III.” We have this entire trajectory of English history, British—of Royal history.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and Shakespeare had written the “Henry VI” plays and the “Richard III” earlier in his career those are very bloody plays, and, of course, “Richard III” was deposed by Elizabeth’s grandfather, Henry VII, so, it’s interesting that Shakespeare goes back deeper into history to write these plays later in his career, and, in some ways, he’s seeking to answer questions that are gnawing at him: About why this country is the way it is, why, why, what kingship is really like, what does it take to be a good King. It’s significant that he never wrote another history play, and I don’t count “Henry VIII,” really. He never wrote another history play after “Henry V,” and I—it’s because he couldn’t do a better job—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: You know, he had reached—he had done the best he could do.

RATNER: Yeah. I think it’s also why it’s so worthwhile to be doing these in Rep, to have the opportunity to see, over time, these characters, and it makes me almost wish we could do a full season of, you know, all of those plays, so we could experience that whole thing, but, but having just the small glimpse allows you to see so much more. I mean, “Part 1” is obviously done more frequently than “Part 2,” historically, at least, and it just seems that it does it a disservice to not be paired with “Part 2.”

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Looking at them both, you, you get a complete picture, and looking at “Part 1,” it feels like it ends halfway through, and Michael’s talked about these plays as one big play—

RATNER: Yeah.

LICTENBERG: —performed over two nights, and I really think that’s true. It’s got a, an organic rise and fall. It’s about life. It’s about death. It’s about triumph. It’s about loss. You know, it really has both sides of the coin.

RATNER: I’m looking forward—we’re gonna do “Twitter Night” over one of the weekends when both plays are being performed in succession—so, it’ll be “Twitter Day” into “Twitter Night”—and I’m excited about seeing them one after another within the course of a single day. So, Stacy Keach did this production, um, where he played Falstaff in Shakespeare in the Park, and I believe in 1968, and they did one performance, so they were doing it in Rep, just like we are, but they did a performance that was an overnight performance, where they started out with “Part 1,” and they just kept going, taking an intermission in between the two plays, and he said that when, um—and this a spoiler alert for “Part 2” —when Hal banishes Falstaff at the end, the sun was starting to rise. I was like, “Ohh! I wanna go back in time and see that production.”

LICTENBERG: Yeah, and, you know, that’s also why we do, why we do this, right? We did this play, these plays in Rep 10 years ago, we’re probably gonna do them in Rep 10 years from now, and somebody will probably be in that production that knows somebody who was in this production and can tell stories about it.

RATNER: It’s all a trajectory of production and history.

LICTENBERG: It’s about keeping this tradition alive, ‘cause otherwise, these stories would be forgotten, and these plays would not be done. (laughs)

RATNER: On that self-important note ... (laughs)

LICTENBERG: No, but, I mean, it’s true, it’s true.

RATNER: It is true.

LICTENBERG: We are participating in the tradition.

RATNER: That is certainly—it is definitely true, and it’s, it’s great to, um, have the opportunity to talk about these plays. So, this, as you know, who’ve been listening, has been a podcast about “Part 1,” of the “Henry IV” plays. We will be having another podcast about “Part 2,” so, we hope that you download that and give it a listen.

(MUSIC)

SMITH: You've been listening to the Shakespeare Theater Company's Prosecast, Episode number 15, featuring Hannah Hessel Ratner, Drew Lichtenberg, Andy Smith, and, special guest, Matthew Amendt. You can find additional episodes and subscribe to the podcast by searching iTunes for “Shakespeare Theater Company Asides” or visit the “Asides” webpage at shakespearetheatre.org. Tickets can be purchased by calling our Box Office at (202) 547-1122, or simply visit shakespearetheatre.org.