

(GUITAR MUSIC)

DREW LICHTENBERG: You're listening to The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Prosecast.

(GUITAR MUSIC)

HANNAH HESSEL RATNER: Hello! Well, welcome to the Prosecast for Shakespeare Theatre's "The Tempest," which is running from December 2 to January 11 at Sidney Harman Hall. This is our second Prosecast of the season. You can listen to the "As You Like It" Prosecast online, but, we have "The Tempest" starting, and "The Tempest" will be running through the winter, and what's better than in the middle of the cold DC winter to go see a play set on an island with sand! I'm Hannah Hessel Ratner, the Audience Enrichment Manager here at The Shakespeare Theatre, and I'm being joined by Drew Lichtenberg. Say hi, Drew!

LICHTENBERG: Hi, everyone.

RATNER: (laughs) And we're going to talk to you about "The Tempest." There's a lot to talk about in this play, and I think, over the series of the production, there are a number of conversations planned, so, we hope you can join those in person and online, but, we hope that the things we talk about now give you a little bit more insight into the play, and help shape your experience of seeing it. So, let's just get started by giving a little bit of backstory for people who aren't familiar with the play. Drew, can you do a quick plot summary, or at least a "How we get to the beginning of the play: Where are we, and who are the main characters?"

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, well, "The Tempest" is probably the most interesting of Shakespeare's plays, just in terms of a plot perspective, because most of the plot has already happened by the time the play begins. Usually in Shakespeare, we see the complete Act story, from beginning to middle to end, whereas here, Shakespeare's kind of like—he's trying to do something like Sophocles maybe, or like the Greeks, where most of the plot has already happened. Prospero, our hero, was the Duke of Milan, and he's been banished by his brother, exiled. He's put on a boat with his young daughter. There's no mention of a wife—

RATNER: Not that rare for Shakespeare plays to get rid of the wife.

LICHTENBERG: Not uncharacteristic of Shakespeare. He's not a big fan of moms for some reason. And Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, end up washed ashore on this island with nothing with some "stuffs and necessities" is the line. Usually, directors interpret that as he has a magic staff, he has a book, his small library, and he has some garments. And on this island, Prospero becomes a magician, and has magical powers. He can wield the elements of nature. He can manipulate spirits. And, all of a sudden, his brother, who banished him, as well as Alonso, the King of Naples, who helped his brother banish him, pass by their island on a boat, and Prospero creates an enormous tempest, which is where the title of the play comes from—

RATNER: And where the play starts.

LICHTENBERG: And the play starts with a humongous storm, one of the most famous storm sequences in all of Shakespeare. It's up there with "King Lear," and they mention a storm in "Twelfth Night," but, as our director, Ethan, likes to say: Shakespeare is saying "Nah, I will show you the storm! I will actually

stage a storm because I'm taking advantage of my new theatre in Blackfriars." And that's how the play begins, with Prospero causing this storm, washing all of his enemies onto the island, and he seems to have a plan to punish them. The play seems to start out as some kind of revenge tragedy.

RATNER: Right. It seems like the stage is now set for either revenge or reconciliation—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

RATNER: And the whole play guides us towards one of the other.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and, in a sense, the whole play is about this final reckoning. All of the backstories just kind of setting the table for this final confrontation between Prospero and his betrayers, and also between Prospero and the various people he's encountered on the island, and what he's going to do with them. There's the character, Ariel, who is a spirit, who seems to embody the four elements of nature. She can flame distinctly on the ships, she can be the wind, she can be the water, she can be the earth. And there's also a character named Caliban, who's a native of the island, who's not magical, who, Prospero, at first, tried to teach language and civilization, and ended up enslaving and using him for manual labor.

RATNER: And we'll dive a little bit deeper into the character of Caliban later in the podcast.

LICHTENBERG: Usually in a play, you'll have multiple plot reversals, and, here, a lot of the plot reversals have already happened before the play even began, you know, Prospero already being banished, them landing on the island, Prospero enslaving Ariel and Caliban, making them his servants. All of the reversals have already happened, and the entire play is kind of like one long, what Aristotle would call a "recognition scene." It's about recognizing the other characters in the play for who they are in relation to Prospero.

RATNER: You had mentioned—I just want to give a little bit of background as to when this play was written—you had mentioned that it was, presumably, first presented at the Blackfriars Theatre, which was the indoor space created late in Shakespeare's career.

LICHTENBERG: In the Jacobean Theatre, after Shakespeare's company had become The King's Men, they were King James' Players, we know that there was the theatre built, called Blackfriars, and it was unlike The Globe, where most of the Shakespeare's plays were performed, which was an outdoor theatre. There was just natural sunlight. Usually, the play would be performed in the afternoon because that was when the sun was in the air, and, actually, one of the interesting things about this play is that they identify what time it is in the play, like, at the beginning of the play, Prospero asks Ariel, "What time is it, Spirit," and Ariel says, "Two in the afternoon," and, then, at the end of the play, he asks, "What time is it now," and Ariel says, "Six, six in the evening." So, the entire play actually takes place in real time.

RATNER: Our production will not be four hours. Don't get too scared. But, yeah, the plot unfolds in a linear fashion then.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, which is really unusual. I think "Comedy of Errors" is the only other play that happens with a similar unity of time. But, I was talking about Blackfriars. We know the play was performed at Whitechapel, which was the King's Court which was an indoor theatre, and had painted backdrops, artificial lights, candles burning. You were able to use much more elaborate scenery.

Scholars believe that created they created the thunder sound effect by rolling a cannonball underneath the stage, and banging on pots of tin. So, yeah, Shakespeare writing for a new indoor special effects theatre that allows you to have a lot of songs, a lot of spectacle, it's kind of like Shakespeare going to Broadway in a certain sense.

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: And most scholars believe this is the last play actually written by Shakespeare.

RATNER: The last complete play because we do know that Shakespeare helped out added text to a couple of others.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, he may have co-written "The Two Noble Kinsmen" and "Henry VIII" with John Fletcher. But, yeah, he actually retired and moved to Stratford, and then, he sort of, he may have un-retired a couple years later in 1614 or -15—

RATNER: And then died not long after.

LICHTENBERG: And then died pretty soon after, and the Globe actually burned down, which I think, scuttled his second coming-out-of-retirement phase.

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: His Michael-Jordan-playing-for-the-Wizards phase. Another one of the reasons you can fix this play to a specific time period is because it is unique in the canon for not have source material that's another work of art. Usually, Shakespeare was a magpie when it came to plots, and he would steal or re-appropriate from Romances or from Italian sources or from whatever was flying around.

RATNER: Sure, and would patchwork numerous sources together.

LICHTENBERG: Right. He was a great fan of Plutarch. Plutarch inspired a lot of the Roman plays, but here, we can't find a source. There's no original Prospero, there's no err-Hamlet that Shakespeare's basing his play off of.

RATNER: And also, the setting is not—you know, in a lot of Shakespeare's plays, we see settings as some place in Europe or as Verona, you know—

LICHTENBERG: Here, we're on an island.

RATNER: Yeah, and an unnamed island.

LICHTENBERG: It's not exactly clear where the island is. Alonzo and his lords were on a trip from Tunis in North Africa to Naples, so, according to that—

RATNER: We assume it's in the Mediterranean somewhere maybe.

LICHTENBERG: It's somewhere between North Africa and Italy, but, then Ariel, when he's talking, references the Bermuda's, which had just recently been discovered across the sea. This is the age of sea voyages, of explorations, Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, Amerigo Vespucci.

RATNER: And there was stories of shipwrecked—people being shipwrecked and then left on islands.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, 1609, there was a group of English settlers heading for Virginia, so, heading basically towards us in Washington. They were going to the Jamestown Colony, and there a terrible storm at sea, and they shipwrecked actually on the Bermuda's, and that's where they were stuck until they were able to build themselves a boat, and get back to safety. So, one of the survivors published an account of this shipwreck. In fact, there were a number of accounts, ballads, pamphlets, it was sort of like the Twitter of its day. It was all about—it was all afire about with this story of the shipwreck. And there's a lot of similarities with the account of the shipwreck in the Bermuda's by the Jamestown Colony settlers and this play. And, in fact, Shakespeare may have known William Strachey, the author of the account because his patron, the Earl of Southampton, who he wrote all of his sonnets to, turns out to have been an investor in the Jamestown Colony, and Strachey, himself, lived in the area where the Blackfriars Theatre was in 1609, 1610, 1611.

RATNER: So, yeah, there's a lot of connection. One would then assume that people coming to this play, upon seeing the first scene of the shipwreck, would have a reaction right away to, "Oh, this is contemporary. This is something we know about. This is people we know may have been on this ship, or may have—"

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. Shakespeare had never been to the New World, but, this play, "The Tempest," is sort of his attempt to imagine, to dramatize, to embody what the New World may have looked like. I mean, this is also the play. Miranda, Prospero's daughter—at the end of it, she says, "A brave new world that has such people in it," which is often used by people to be Shakespeare's description of America or the New World—

RATNER: —which is interesting because it's actually the opposite.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: It's someone from the New World's view of the existing world or the Western World.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, she's seeing all of the lords at the end of the play, right? She's, like, all of the—Alonso and all of those people have been revealed to her, and the line after Miranda's that's not often quoted is Prospero's response, "Tis new to thee," right?

RATNER: Right.

LICHTENBERG: It's new to you, but these are the people who screwed me out of my dukedom, and banished me—

RATNER: And if we could take that then as the opposite, you know, that's, what one assumes, natives of many of the discovered countries wished they could have said—

LICHTENBERG: Right. Yeah.

RATNER: —to the Westerners coming to them. “Well, you know, the Americas are new to you, but we’ve been here for a while.”

LICHTENBERG: Right. This place is paradise, but, we’ve been living here for a while, and it’s not paradisiacal at all. That’s just your mis-cultural associations.

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RATNER: So, we’re now joined by Clifton Duncan, who is playing Caliban, and, of course, Caliban, as we mentioned before, is one of the pivotal characters, especially for audiences today, and we wanted to talk to Clifton both about the character of Caliban and all of what that means and how he’s approaching it, but also to hear what’s happening in the rehearsal room, and where they are in the process, and this is one of the few opportunities we get to talk to the actors while they’re in process because they get pretty busy.

CLIFTON DUNCAN: Yeah, a little bit.

RATNER: (laughs)

DUNCAN: Just a scosche.

RATNER: Right, and right now, you are just a week out of tech, so you’re nearing the end of the time in the rehearsal room.

DUNCAN: We had our second run-through last night, and—

LICHTENBERG: For Michael Kahn, the Artistic Director.

DUNCAN: —and Mr. Kahn was there, which, you know, to be frank, it’s kind of freeing because I didn’t really worry about that. You know, when you focus on what you’re doing and trying to accomplish, then that takes precedence—

LICHTENBERG: Right. Of course. Obviously.

DUNCAN: —over whoever else is in the room, and so, then you learn, “Okay, I need to really focus on this before I enter this scene, or focus on that before I can, you know, even start the run.”

RATNER: And it seems like so much of this production will have to come through in tech because—

DUNCAN: Mmm hmm.

RATNER: —and I guess we should probably talk about this at some point in the podcast. There’s so many unique production elements that Ethan and the designers have included.

LICHTENBERG: There’s a lot of puppets and special effects and songs.

RATNER: And the ground is sand. (laughs)

DUNCAN: And the sand.

LICHTENBERG: And also, I think, because the play is so short, we spent a long time at the table. We spent the whole first week doing table work basically, and then all of Week 2 and Week 2.5, dancing and fighting, and it was scene work, but there was also a lot of other stuff you guys were doing.

DUNCAN: It was really bizarre because, I mean—

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

DUNCAN: —and I'm not the only person that felt this way, but, it was like, "Am I rehearsing right now" because we would be called—and, I mean, and Caliban's kind of a weird role in a way because he comes out in his first scene and a half, and you're like, "Oh, I see what this guy's journey's going to be. He's going to fight for his freedom," but, then, these two clowns come in—

RATNER: (laughs)

DUNCAN: —and it takes a whole sort of left turn.

RATNER: He's like, "Oh! Alcohol! Oh! People!"

LICHTENBERG: He becomes, like—we were saying it's like a "Family Guy" episode almost. It becomes this comedy of—

DUNCAN: We have referenced "Family Guy" several times in the process, but, yeah, so, for a while, we would maybe meet maybe for an hour/an hour and a half, and talk about nailing the comedy or at least getting it in the right direction or getting some kind of structure for some of things that we're doing, but, then, we wouldn't really—and then we'd be done for the rest of the day, but, meanwhile, they were working with the ensemble—they're working so hard learning choreography and learning all of this music, and, apparently, these puppets, which look amazing from the design aspect, but, apparently, they're really sort of heavy, and so a couple of the ensemble are starting what's called a Push-Up Club—

RATNER: (laughs)

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

DUNCAN: —and, so, they're all trying to do, just to get strong, so they can handle these puppets, but, so, yeah, there's a lot of technical stuff, and then Sofia Gomez, who's playing Ariel, you know, she's over at the theatre all the time, you know, learning how to navigate the flying system and stuff like that, so—

RATNER: It's a lot of pieces.

DUNCAN: A lot of pieces. A lot of elements go into it, and, now, we're really focusing in on getting the acting stuff together, so, it's been a kind of weird process.

RATNER: Well, through all of this, how have you been approaching Caliban in the moments that you have gotten to work on the character?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, maybe we should talk about a little bit about who Caliban is.

RATNER: That would be great.

LICHTENBERG: What do you know about Caliban from the text?

DUNCAN: The first time you see Caliban, you know, he—there's that scene between he and Prospero and Miranda, and there's, you know, of course, that disputed piece of text, which is sometimes given to Miranda, but, you know "Abort slave! I taught you language," yada, yada, yada.

LICHTENBERG: This is a big speech, where either Prospero or Miranda sort of gives it to Caliban really hatefully.

DUNCAN: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: And it was assigned to Miranda in the Folio, but people have often assigned it to Prospero because they just think it's out of character for her to say.

DUNCAN: Yeah, yeah. So, but, what I learn from this scene, what the audience learns from this scene is that it's sort of a domestic tragedy in a way because you have this character in Caliban who was on this island as a child, and his mother, Sycorax, was a witch—and, you know, from my point of view, everyone else calls her a witch. I don't think she was the most loving mother, but I don't think she was terrible, but, you know, she died, you know, when he was young, and then, he spend some years on the island on his own with the aid of the spirits of the island, which he seems to have a great relationship with. And then, these strangers come to the island: Prospero and his child, and Prospero, in that first scene, talks about how, you know, "I took you in. I lodged you in my own cell," and, so, you begin to figure out that they had formed this family unit. And, one day, Miranda's of age and Caliban is obviously of age, and, you know, something happens, where, I think Caliban was fulfilling his primordial instincts, and Prospero reacts as any father would, and he's like, "No! You get the hell out of my house," and he enslaves Caliban, so, for me, that first scene, you really get to hear all that backstory about how Caliban—how Prospero really took pains to—I don't like to use the word "civilize," but it's the best sort of term I can think of right now, but, you know, he teaches Caliban, you know, about—

RATNER: Even just to bring him up.

DUNCAN: Well, just to rear him. He taught him how to speak their language, and teaches him things about astronomy, and, in exchange, Caliban, teaches them how to survive on the island, and he teaches them where they can grow food, and you can't go the brine pits, you can't drink water because you'll get sick and you'll die. You know, he hunts for them, he finds them food, and you learn later on that he washes their dishes and he gets them firewood and stuff like that. So, he's really—and he says, you know, "When you came to the island," (he's talking to Prospero) "you stroked me, you made much of me," so, there was affection there, and that's all gone now. And now, you know, Caliban is a slave, and he's subject to horrendous torture, where Prospero is filling his bones with cramps, and he's pinching him, and he's making him see scary monkeys are biting at him. And you really get a sense of just how, in that first scene, how fractured this sort of family unit has become. So, for Caliban, I see somebody who's actually quite generous and can be very trusting, and, you know, Ethan said something that I thought was very true, that Caliban doesn't really dissemble. So, I think one of the challenges for me is that even though he's not, you know, subjectively speaking, civilized, because he doesn't have the social

filters and the social masks that we do, in a way, he's more purely human and more purely alive and present in a way that nobody else in the play really is. And that's—it's kind of tough to think about that sort of level of pure intentionality, I guess. Like, when you see any kind of animal onstage, they're just there, and they're present, and you can't take your eyes off them because you don't know what they're going to do, even if they're not doing anything. So, getting that level of, I guess, purity of being is a challenge, and he expresses himself freely. And, you know, he doesn't—there's no really artifice about him, I feel, and that's definitely a challenge to try to get to in a world where we are "civilized," and there's certain things that you can't say, and if you feel a certain way, you should probably tap it down a little bit, so you don't, you know, offend anybody, and, you know, that's not who Caliban is at all, in my view.

RATNER: Yeah, and then on top of all of the stuff that you're finding that really grounds Caliban, we, of course, have all of these assumptions coming in, as a contemporary audience, about what Caliban is and what his role is, both in this play and in, kind of, our trajectory of understanding colonialism and racism and all of these things that he's become a symbol for over the years, and, Drew, you were saying that when you run into people and you tell them that you're doing "The Tempest," their question is always about Caliban.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and, Clifton, you had asked me, I think, early in the process, for some research as a way of trying to get around or away from these sort of modern presuppositions—

DUNCAN: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —that we may import upon the character.

DUNCAN: Yeah, I actually, I have a bit of a relationship with Ethan, and I asked him specifically, you know, I was like, "Do you have a Caliban yet," and, you know, I'm a Black American male, and I—and even some of my friends, when they've found that I'm playing Caliban, they're like, "Ooooh—"

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

RATNER: (laughs)

DUNCAN: "Do they know the implications," and this goes into a larger, I guess, sort of a personal thing about where I am in terms of race and ethnicity and everything. I mean, I spent three years at grad school at NYU, and I was very much in the minority in my own class. It was 18 people, and I was the Black male, and there were two other Black women—

LICHTENBERG: Which is also the way it is at Yale, and like most drama schools.

DUNCAN: Yeah, often times, and, you know, but, what I began to learn is that if I approach everything from, you know, "Well, as a Black person, you know, XYZ," then, what I'm doing is I'm forming a barrier between myself and other people and other experiences and everything, so, it, at that time was really a challenge for me to break out of that line of thinking, and so, with this character, I mean, I know, coming in, that I'm going to be called a "savage" and a "slave" every night, and I know that people are going to—and the character and the design, to my mind, is actually really cool, but, I mean, he's in chains, and so people are going to be like, "Oh, whoa," and there's already some friction—I'm going to call it friction, but, I guess, some positive tension between, like, myself and the director and the costumer



about “Well, we don’t want to use all chains,” or like “We want to be sensitive to,” and, in my mind, it’s like, “No, man. Just go make the proposal, and go full force.”

RATNER: It’s interesting because when they showed, at first rehearsal, one of the inspirations, there’s a picture of a Black man who’s bound—

DUNCAN: Yeah.

RATNER: —and there was a, like, hush that went over everyone looking at it because it’s such a violent image and a provocative image, and it’s like, “Oh, we’re going there!”

DUNCAN: Yeah, and, I mean, I think you have to go there. I think you can’t avoid, you know, what’s in the play. You can’t avoid our American history, and you can’t avoid race, which is such a hot button topic, but, for me, this a human being, who has had a very unique experience, and, you know, some things happened, and, you know, I think any father would, you know, try to protect his family, and try to protect his daughter, and that’s what goes on. And, so, you have this man who wants to fight for what he believes is his. He wants his island. He thinks the island is his domain, and, you know, he tells Prospero, in that first scene, “You know, when you came here, you stroked me, you took me in, you made a lot of me, you made me water with berries in it, and you taught me this and you taught me that, and Prospero’s like, “You know, I taught you language,” and I don’t think Caliban was an easy student. I think, you have you approach it from the human element. What really irritates me is when people try to back off from that, or when that cultural and emotional baggage begins to impede people’s ability to invest themselves in the story that’s taking place in front of them, which is about people, and I know it’s unrealistic to expect everybody to come in and not see that because that is definitely what is there, and it’s going to evoke that imagery, but, I really think that we can’t afford to be afraid of offending people because, otherwise, you know, we’re not going to be able to express ourselves as fully as we can, and I think Ethan kind of covered himself a little bit because there’s a wonderful guy, named Avery Glymph, who’s playing Ferdinand, who’s also African American, so, you know, there’s this representation of the slave of the island plus, you know, this noble who comes in and is pure and he just is wonderful, and he falls in love with the girl, and it’s a great little love story. So, you know, we do have both sides of that equation, but, you know, I mean, I could go on for hours about, you know, the burden of representation, and how, if you’re a non-White actor, somehow, for some reason, it seems that you sort of represent, or, I guess, any sort of minority.

LICHTENBERG: Mmm hmm. Stand in for—

DUNCAN: Yeah, you kind of represent everybody, which isn’t fair to the people that are actually, you know, onstage, you know, performing—

RATNER: Because you’re acting a character. You’re creating a person.

DUNCAN: Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Well, and also, just, like, from an outside perspective, watching you in rehearsal, what comes through really strongly is your utter fearlessness, and how game you are for trying things that, I think, most other actors would be burdened by the responsibilities, the weight of representation. It can be kind of anathema to just creating moments that are interesting and maybe even a little bit scary or chaotic, you know.

DUNCAN: Yeah, there's been a few—I mean, I won't go into specific—but, there's been a few moments where I've been actually disappointed. It's like, "No, let's fricken do it, man! Let's go! Who cares what they think?! It's just in the play" because ultimately, that's not what the play is about, you know what I mean? It's a play about, you know, forgiveness. It's one of those—it's like the strong theme running through the play. It's not about subjugation. It's not about colonialism, to me anyway. It's not about that. It's like when people try to make "Othello" about racism. You know, people say racist things in the play. They might have racist attitudes, but it's not what the play is about, you know, and if you make it about that, then you diminish the totality of the story. You know, Caliban is sitting there, thinking, "Oh, man," you know, "this isn't right. This White man came in, and took over, and he, you know, all White people are the devil, and they're evil." It's like, no, he's thinking, "I want my island back."

RATNER: Yeah.

DUNCAN: "I deserve what's mine," or something like that. There's a claim to his right to the island and to happiness and to fulfillment, to autonomy, you know.

LICHTENBERG: Have you had Caliban circled as a part on your list of parts for a while, or what make you approach Ethan, and—I'm just curious—and say, "Hey, do you have a Caliban yet?"

DUNCAN: Well, you know, we—I met Ethan in—was it 2009. I mean, I worked at Chautauqua as a company member up there, which is, you know, if anybody can get a chance to go up there in the summertime, it's a wonderful place to go. There's—they have this amazing gathering of dancers and painters and singers and actors, and it's just this beautiful, seaside, sort of gated community that's really hard to get to, but it's totally worth the trip, and I think I was there 2007-2008, and, so, he knew me from there, and I did a solo show, which was very hip hop-based, and Ethan saw it, and we worked together a little bit on it, and ever since—and, you know, he's been trying to get me to do stuff, and getting me—and wanting me to audition for other things that he's doing down here, and also, we were talking about working on another solo piece in that same vein, and I said, "You know, what if I did something about solitary confinement and what happens to someone who experiences that, which is, you know, it's a very hot political debate right now on whether or not it constitutes torture, and it was really about what happens to somebody when they are imprisoned and when they're subjected to torture, and that was originally what I wanted to answer, and then—but, then it's, again, it goes to that left turn about "Oh, then these clowns come about."

RATNER: (laughs)

DUNCAN: And you're, like, "Well, how do we deal with these people?"

RATNER: That's one of the Shakespearean complexities, right, that you have to be able to bounce from a dark place to a light place.

DUNCAN: That's exactly what it is, but, that's also why it's kind of rich and fun, and that's one of the things that I took away from last night, and something fun came out of that, which I'm not going to spoil.

LICHTENBERG: Oh, yeah, the solution is amazing! It's amazing.

RATNER: Well, I'm excited to see it. I think we could probably talk to you for another hour, but you probably have to get to rehearsal, and we have to—

DUNCAN: Well, not yet, you know.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

DUNCAN: I've got some time. No, I'm joking.

RATNER: Yeah, I think—thank you, first of all, for spending this time with us, and I'm looking forward to seeing the production, and, hopefully, we'll have more chances to talk to you as the production goes on.

DUNCAN: Well, thank you for having me.

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LICHTENBERG: Clifton!

RATNER: Clifton just left, and—

LICHTENBERG: —and they're setting up the potluck next door.

RATNER: So, it's getting really busy, but it was wonderful. I mean, I feel like this interview went on a little bit longer than a lot of the interviews we do on these, but, it really could have just kept going because there's still so many layer to this production and to the character that are worth exploring.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, Clifton's a very intelligent actor, who is also able to be very uninhibited physically, and has tremendous emotional access, so, it's a pretty rare combination of things, and—

RATNER: Yeah, so, he's only one of a number of actors, of amazing actors in this production—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RATNER: —taking on these kind of complicated and difficult characters.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah. I don't know what to—I don't know how to wrap all this up, Hannah.

RATNER: I know. There's so much. So, we have a couple of other things we wanted to touch, but, I think we kind of talked about a lot of them. There are a lot of places that the conversations will go, in terms of how we think of the New World and the political ramifications of these relationships, and how this play relates to Shakespeare's other plays. And we talked a little bit about that the Neo-Classical return—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and, I think, you know, Ethan, when he talks about this play, he directed "Midsummer" a couple years ago, and he called that play "a three-ringed circus" because he these three different plots of the lovers, the mechanicals and the fairies, and this play similarly has three different plots that are going on simultaneously, with Prospero and Ariel kind of above all of them, and yet, it's so compressed—

RATNER: Ariel literally above all of them, so, she'll be flying—

LICHTENBERG: Ariel literally flying about them, but it's—there's such a—Ethan calls it a kind of purity of line and form and function in this play. It's more like a tightrope balance act, where you have to keep all these, all the dramatic tension going to this big ending, and all of these sort of spectacular acts, all of these plots that are very provocative in a very short amount of time. And Shakespeare's at the peak of his virtuosity as a playwright, and I think that's one of the reasons why people often think this is Shakespeare's final play because he just nailed it. Every single scene is almost perfect.

RATNER: Well, I have a very soft spot for "The Tempest" in my heart. It was the first Shakespeare play I ever saw, and actually, I saw the Shakespeare Theatre Company's production when we were still housed at the Folger. I remember where I was seated in the house. I remember watching that storm, and just being engrossed by it, and amazed at the language and the action and the story, so, it's always kind of lived in my heart as a really special play.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, no matter how we may feel politically about the play now, as Clifton was saying, there's a number of different perspectives that you can have. There's this movement towards forgiveness and graces that feels almost metaphysical or mystical at the end of the play. There's this great quote by the Shakespeare scholar, Harold Goddard, who says, "Whatever meanings we have to import upon 'The Tempest,' they're secondary to the beauty of the object itself, and I think that's true.

RATNER: That's beautiful.

LICHTENBERG: I think that seeing this play is something special in the theatre.

(GUITAR MUSIC)

RATNER: Well, that's a great place to end. Thank you so much for listening to us. Thank you, Drew, for, as always, your smart commentary, and thank you, Roc Lee, for editing and doing the sound engineering. Bye!

DUNCAN: You've been listening to the Shakespeare Theater Company's Prosecast for "The Tempest." You can subscribe to the Prosecast series on iTunes by searching for "The Shakespeare Theatre Company" or listen at asides.shakespearetheatre.org. Tickets to "The Tempest" are available online at shakespearetheatre.org or by calling (202) 547-1122.