

(MUSIC)

ANDREW SMITH: From The Shakespeare Theatre Company, it's the Young Professionals Podcast.

(MUSIC)

HANNAH HESSEL: Welcome to STC's Prosecast, the final Prosecast of our 2012-2013 Season. We are going to be discussing "The Winter's Tale" today. "Winter's Tale" runs May 9<sup>th</sup> through June 23<sup>rd</sup>, and we are going to talk about all sorts of things, but before we do, I want to let you know a little bit of an update about these Prosecasts podcasts. We now are on iTunes.

DREW LICHTENBERG: Woo hoo! Yay!

HESSEL: So, you can go, and you can search for us in the iTunes store. Search for "Shakespeare Theatre Company," and you will find us, and, if you like what you hear, please judge us kindly and leave comments and spread the word, so—

LICHTENBERG: —and subscribe.

HESSEL: Yeah, and totally subscribe!

SPIRO: That's really scary that they can comment on us.

HESSEL: Yeah, yeah, so, comment on Marcy because she's scared.

SPIRO: Be nice.

HESSEL: And, you know, we'd love to have conversations with you also in real life about the things we talk about on the Prosecasts, so, you can find out on [asides.shakespearetheatre.org](http://asides.shakespearetheatre.org) for all sorts of other information on the plays and opportunities to come and talk to us in person about the plays. So, now, we are going to say hi. My name is Hannah Hessel. I'm the Audience Enrichment Manager here at The Shakespeare Theatre Company, and—

SPIRO: I am Marcy Spiro, the Community Engagement Manager.

LICHTENBERG: I am Drew Lichtenberg, the Literary Associate.

HESSEL: —and our special guest today is Danielle Mohlman, and, Danielle, would you mind introducing yourself to our listeners?

MOHLMAN: Sure, my name is Danielle Mohlman. I'm the HR Coordinator at the Shakespeare Theatre Company, and I've been with Shakespeare for about 9 months now, doing payroll and assisting the HR Manager. I'm also a playwright and the Artistic Director of Field Trip Theatre.

LICHTENBERG: —and an Arena Stage—

MOHLMAN: Oh, yes, um, I'm in the Playwrights Arena at Arena Stage.

HESSEL: Yay!

LICHTENBERG: The subject of a profile in The Washington Post.

MOHLMAN: Yes, that's right. Thank you for getting that that came out.

HESSEL: All of those things.

LICHTENBERG: Very impressive person.

HESSEL: Um, and one of the wonderful things about working, I think, in an arts organization is you tend to be working with a lot of artists, both in arts-related jobs and tangentially-related jobs. I mean, without Danielle, we can't get paid, so we appreciate her for that, but we also appreciate her for her artistic abilities and sensibilities, and we're really glad that's she gonna be able to jump in and join this conversation today.

MOHLMAN: I'm really happy to be here.

HESSEL: Yay!

LICHTENBERG: Danielle's always writing plays, and, like, asking me to read them, and, then, I'm really amazed—

MOHLMAN: —not during work.

LICHTENBERG: —that, that somebody's, like, that productive while doing a day job. And, also, you see tons of theatre.

MOHLMAN: I do.

LICHTENBERG: I feel like you see theatre almost every night.

MOHLMAN: I try to see probably about four shows a month.

HESSEL: That's awesome. That's the way to do.

LICHTENBERG: And your Twitter's very active, too.

MOHLMAN: Yes.

SPIRO: Do you stalk Danielle, or what's going on?

MOHLMAN: He can follow me @daniellemohlman—

LICHTENBERG: We work across, we work across the hallway from each other.

SPIRO: So, you just shout back and forth?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: So, you're just, like, "What are doing now, Danielle? What are you doing now, Danielle?"

LICHTENBERG: Well, her nickname for me is Nerd, Nerd Town, right?

MOHLMAN: No, that's your nickname for me!

LICHTENBERG: Oh, that's my nickname for you.

(LAUGHTER)

MOHLMAN: Nerd Town, Nerd City.

LICHTENBERG: I'm Nerd City. You're Nerd Town.

MOHLMAN: Oh, that's right.

SPIRO: 'Cause you're bigger and better or what?

LICHTENBERG: I am, like—my hand is, like, more than twice as large as hers.

HESSEL: This is true. We can take a picture of that—

MOHLMAN: Oh. We can see it, folks. It's true.

HESSEL: —and put that up with the, um, with the show link, so everyone can see—

MOHMLAN: Nerd Town vs. Nerd City.

HESSEL: —the hand differentiation.

LICHTENBERG: Mostly, mostly, my interaction with Danielle is that there's a coat rack near my desk and she comes and hangs her coat, like, uncomfortably close to me every day.

MOHLMAN: I don't have a coat rack at my desk.

LICHTENBERG: I know, and then, like, we'll talk, and, inevitably, it will lead to me Googling weird things and showing them to her.

MOHLMAN: This is true.

LICHTENBERG: That sounds really filthy, but it's—

MOHLMAN: It's weird things, like History.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

MOHLMAN: Not, like—

HESSEL: History is a weird thing.

SPIRO: ‘Cause you’re nerds. Nerds have—

LICHTENBERG: Like, the other day, it was Polish pottery.

MOHLMAN: Polish pottery vs. Czech pottery is what the conversation was about.

LICHTENBERG: Czech pottery totally sucks. I think I can say that. And Polish pottery is the bee’s knees.

SPIRO: Drew’s opinion.

HESSEL: Interesting.

SPIRO: What—how did that come up?

MOHLMAN: He was showing me where he keeps his paper clips.

(LAUGHTER)

LICHTENBERG: In Polish pottery mugs ‘cause Polish pottery is awesome.

SPIRO: Okay.

HESSEL: Well, now that we’ve established that very important fact about Polish pottery, we hope that you do your own Googling at home, um, so you can compare Polish and Czech pottery.

LICHTENBERG: There is an awesome shop at the flea market at Eastern Market of a Polish guy who gets his stuff straight from Poland, and he’s like “Look at the bottom.” It says “Warsaw” on the bottom, or “Warsawa.”

HESSEL: Excellent.

LICHTENBERG: I’m not lying.

HESSEL: (laughs) I believe it. So, one opportunity that you, the listener, could possibly have for stimulating conversation and good cheer before coming to see “Winter’s Tale” is by attending the Young Pros event.

SPIRO: So, “The Winter’s Tale” Young Pros Night event is Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>. Uh, it is going to be a post-show event. We’re gonna have Peroni beer and then Black Stone chardonnay and merlot, and all those drinks are part of the deal. It’s, I believe, twenty dollars for the show ticket and then the after party after, redundant, and all that’s taking place at the Lansburgh Theatre: 450 7<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest. The show begins at 7:30 and then, I think, it’s running about two and a half hours, and then the post-show event will be in the lobby, so, we hope that you all can join us, and it’s our last one of the season. We usually do a giveaway or a raffle for tickets for next season, so it should be a good time.

HESSEL: Um, and just as a reminder, the Young Pros tickets are available for people thirty-five and under.

SPIRO: Yep, thirty-five and under, and we would like to thank Constellation Wine and On Tap, who help sponsor all of our Young Pros events.

HESSEL: Awesome. Alright, moving on to “The Winter’s Tale,” um, so, the interesting thing about “The Winter’s Tale” is it’s actually been in production up in Princeton, New Jersey, at the McCarter Theatre for, basically, the past month. That production just closed, and then, it will be coming to us; however, it is, um, a pretty evenly-split co-production, in terms of production expenses and in terms of, uh, personnel, so, in addition to some of the actors being our local favorite friends, Drew was able to go up and work on that production and be a part of it, so Drew has some insight into the show that the rest of us are lacking right now, so that’s very exciting; however, I believe all of us—and Danielle, you can correct me if I’m wrong about this—but, I believe all of us have seen Rebecca Taichman’s work before—

MOHLMAN: I have not, so this will be my first.

HESSEL: So, everybody but Danielle. So, we can tell Danielle about the work of Rebecca Taichman that we have seen. Um, so I would love to start talking about previous work both at STC and around the DC area perhaps, what people have seen, what has struck them about her very, very visual and unique take on theatre.

SPIRO: The first time I was introduced to her was actually when I worked at Round House Theatre. Um, she did “The Book Club Play,” and then here, I’ve seen her productions of “Twelfth Night” and “Cymbeline,” and I would describe her aesthetic, I guess, as just extremely lush and magical and things always coming from the sky, whether it’s rain or rose petals or anything, and it’s just extremely vibrant and just really helps, kind of, encapsulate the audience into the environment.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I think I also saw “Twelfth Night” actually at McCarter because that was a previous co-production with McCarter Theatre.

SPIRO: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: I was talking to another director about that production of “Twelfth Night,” and he said you know, it’s the, it’s the show I’ve seen at the Harman that has actually worked best there, of all the shows we’ve done.

HESSEL: Mmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and it’s part—

HESSEL: What about it?

LICHTENBERG: Well, Rebecca is really good at thinking with her brain, but also, I think, emotionally, with her heart at the same time, and she has a way of visualizing that way shows move in space and time that, I think, the great directors all have, so, at the end of a Rebecca Taichman show, you’re sitting there, and you’ll think, “That was a complete experience,” you know, that every element of theatre: the

set, the costumes, the sound, the music, the performances all fits into this beautifully-shaped hole. It's like an egg; there's no cracks at all in it. And I think there's something similar about this production of "Winter's Tale," where, not to get too far ahead of myself, but, it's a certain experience halfway through, and then after you finish the second Act, you're like, "Oh, my God, the whole thing now makes complete and perfect sense."

HESSEL: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: She also is really good at thinking big picture. Her ideas can be deceptively simple, but, then they feel really deeply true.

HESSEL: Do you think it's possible to put our finger on what, where that uniqueness comes from? Is it her training? Is it that she is of this new kind of play world where there's been a lot of discovery and a lot of opportunities to create magical work, and then, she's able to take what she learned there and then apply that to classical work? Is, is it because she's a woman? Is it, I mean, some combination of the above? Does anyone have any thoughts?

LICHTENBERG: I think part of it is that she does approach classic work from the mindpoint of somebody who works on a lot of new plays, and, like, her collaborators are drawn from the vibrant contemporary arts world. One of the, the composer for "Winter's Tale" is Nico Muhly, who is a nationally decorated, internationally decorated composer. He's writing an opera for the Met. I think he's, he's performed with, like, Björk and, uh, at the Benjamin Britten Symposia, you know, so he's—

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: He's a really decorated contemporary artist, and she approaches, she approaches Shakespeare from the lens of somebody who works with new playwrights and new artists, and wants to bring that sensibility to theatre—

HESSEL: —and it really strikes me, as you're saying that, is that she is his peer, you know—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: She is an artist. Not that our other directors aren't artists, but, they don't necessarily embrace this kind of creation process within contemporary—within classical work the way that she does, that she really is trying to create a new lens into the plays when she decides to focus on that.

LICHTENBERG: Right. Yeah, and the costume designer for "Winter's Tale" is David Zinn, who, I think, did "Light in the Piazza" and billions of Broadway musicals, new plays, new works. The set designer teaches at NYU, and is turning out a whole generation of students as well as doing a lot of leading work in the profession, so Rebecca's rooms are filled with, like, young, creative professionals sort of, like, at the top of their game, and she's, she's able to attract those collaborators and make them buy into the work as well, buy into the sort of project of the show, so, it sort of feels like it riding on everyone's shoulders instead of being Patrick Page as "Coriolanus" —

HESSEL: —that we love Patrick Page doing "Coriolanus" —

LICHTENBERG: Yeah—but, it feels, it feels like she builds an ensemble, and she makes everyone buy in as a member.

SPIRO: I also really appreciate her storytelling, uh, not just production-wise, but also, she, every time that she has done a production here, she has come and spoken to the Education department, not for “Winter’s Tale” because that’s a different story, but she’s really come to us and talked to us about how we can teach this production, and she’s just extremely intelligent, and just her vision is amazing.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and I think, you know, this, this may be going out on a limb, but I think maybe having being a woman maybe has something to do with it. She’s always interested in the women, the female characters in Shakespeare, some of whom, most of whom are silent at the end of plays or who have really ambiguous things to say about the patriarchy. I mean, in “Winter’s Tale,” the play, there’s horrible treatment of women by the central character, Leontes, but there are just as strong and strident people standing up and object to that treatment, and saying that women do have a place in the world, and they shouldn’t be abused.

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: So—

HESSEL: Well, and on that, so this week, on the journal “HowlRound,” which is a theatre journal, they’re talking about gender parity in the theatre, so I thought that this would also be a great opportunity to talk about gender parity within our theatre. For this season, Rebecca is the only female director. We rarely and will probably very, very, very rarely see female playwrights just ‘cause there aren’t as many female classical works. What do you think as a female Artistic Director, Danielle, putting you on the spot a little bit? Where, do you think, in a classical theatre one can find room to create more gender parity and more opportunities for female voices?

MOHLMAN: The first step is always just equality in casting male verses female actors, and, and, you know, going across the board for designers and directors and all that, I feel that throughout our season, we rarely will bring in a female director, so just, like, upping that is key.

HESSEL: Yeah, we, we currently have one next season—

MOHLMAN: Oh, that’s great.

HESSEL: —as well. I actually really enjoy in “Coriolanus,” some of our female ensemble members are—

MOHLMAN: —are playing men.

HESSEL: Yeah.

MOHLMAN: —and I love that.

HESSEL: Mmm hmm. It’s really, it’s really exciting to see them on—

MOHLMAN: Mmm hmm. Yeah. That was—

HESSEL: —the battlefield as well.

MOHLMAN: That was awesome watching them fight on the, on the stage there

HESSEL: Yeah, so, I think that there are, there are opportunities to address it in that way. So, if we talk about—we all get very sensitive talking about whether or not a women would have a uniquely female approach because, of course, all women don't share the same uniquely female approach.

MOHLMAN: —and what does that even mean?

HESSEL: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Also, the fact that most theatre audiences are made up of, predominantly, of women.

HESSEL: Right, well, that's a great point. I think that, actually, much of the research has shown that women are the ticket buyers.

LICHTENBERG: Right, or they're the ones dragging their husbands to see theatre productions.

SPIRO: They're the decision-makers as far as arts and culture.

HESSEL: Right, and if it's not about providing an opportunity for a female point of view, it's just about providing opportunities for multiple points of view—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

HESSEL: —from multiple different directions, and some of those of which should be female, rather than having a single female point of view—

SPIRO: Well, what's the, the process here? I know sometimes, we have directors who come and say, "I want to direct this play," and, then, at other times, is it just us, like, "Oh, we're doing 'Coriolanus.' Hey, David, do you wanna do it?" Like, do we have a set process for how it works? Like, do we have a list of women? I mean, 'cause we have Maria Aitken, who did, um, "As You Like It," and then she's coming back next season, so, does anyone know?

LICHTENBERG: Mary, Mary Zimmerman has directed here.

SPIRO: Mmm hmm.

HESSEL: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: Maria's directed here in the past.

HESSEL: I mean, there certainly isn't a fear to put a woman in that position—

LICHTENBERG: No.

HESSEL: —in this theatre.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I mean, Michael, I think, would say—I'm not gonna speak for Michael—but, I think he judges all directors sort of equally, and he goes with what he finds most appealing. Sometimes, that's a pitch by a female director, and sometimes, it's a pitch by a male director, I would say.

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Our Assistant Director is Jenny Lord, is a woman who has assisted some of the most male directors. (laughs)

HESSEL: Right, and I think that that's true that Jenny—that having actually an Assistant Director whose female provides an opportunity for another set of eyes in the room—

LICHTENBERG: Oh yeah.

HESSEL: —and can be looking at multiple points of view, and she's fantastic at providing that.

LICHTENBERG: It's the kind of thing where we love Rebecca, we love working with her, we love being able to bring her back, we see her as a Director—

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: —you know. Period.

MOHLMAN: Yeah, absolutely.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's just an interesting contrast. When I was at McCarter, I, I looked around, and I noticed that Emily Mann, the Artistic Director, Mara Isaacs, her Associate, Carrie Hughes, the dramaturge, pretty much the entire staff at McCarter is made up of women, and it's pretty similar, in many respects to Shakespeare Theatre. That's why, I think, we can co-produce so many productions with them. They're the same size, they have similar seasons, they attract the same kind of actors, they're interested in doing classical work. There is something different about being in a room full of women. It's, in some ways, it was really liberating (laughs) and, and nice, you know, because—

HESSEL: What was liberating for—

LICHTENBERG: What was liberating?

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: I don't know. It felt more democratic. It felt like anybody's idea was valued, no matter how good it was. You know, the only thing that was important was, was the quality of the idea, and, you know, the Stage Manager, if they had an idea during table work, they would share it. So, I don't know if it just comes down to being a room full of women, but, like, I feel like Rebecca creates that atmosphere in the rehearsal room, and it's what she's—she's interested incentivizing collaboration.

HESSEL: Well, that's actually a great transition for our next topic, so, I'm gonna hop right on over because within this idea of collaboration, she's created this ensemble that is using a small cast to perform a large play of Shakespeare's, that they are nine actors doing a combination of—

LICHTENBERG: —and three musicians.

HESSEL: —and three musicians, doing a combination of probably around almost twenty—

LICHTENBERG: —playing around seventeen or twenty roles.

HESSEL: Yeah, which is a rarity to see Shakespeare cut down to that size on our stage. We very rarely consolidate—

SPIRO: —the lead roles.

HESSEL: Yeah.

SPIRO: Like, we do that all the time with ensembles parts of “You're there in one thing and then you're the butler in the other,” but, yeah, with the lead roles—

LICHTENBERG: Right, yeah, I mean, usually, “The Winter's Tale” is done by drama schools because it's a perfect drama school show. It has twenty-five characters or whatever in it. It has this long section of the play with all these new characters are introduced and then they disappear. So, it's perfect to do at a school where there's lot of free labor—

(LAUGHTER)

LICHTENBERG: —and lots of students who can be, like, dancing satyrs in Bohemia. It's a more difficult show to produce by a professional company, especially to do in a new and exciting way.

HESSEL: Because of the size? Is that what—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, the size is part of it. Also, the—it's such a, it's such a weird play. Like, this play was, was considered so weird, it was almost unstageable until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when Peter Brook did a really famous production in the '50's with John Gielgud—

HESSEL: Isn't that just always the way it goes? Things are unstageable, and then Peter Brook does them—

SPIRO: (laughs)

HESSEL: —and all of the sudden, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, people are like “I wanna do it, too!”

LICHTENBERG: Well, that's what happened with “Coriolanus.” That's what happened, sort of, with—

HESSEL: “Midsummer.”

LICHTENBERG: “Midsummer.”

HESSEL: Or maybe that's just the story of this season at Shakespeare Theatre.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: I feel like every podcast, we're going back to—

SPIRO: Peter—

HESSEL: Peter Brook.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, it's been a theme this year—

SPIRO: Just like money.

LICHTENBERG: —is that we're doing all of the plays that Peter Brook made you see in an entirely new way. Or maybe that's just a cliché that I try out all the time. (laughs) But, this play was considered, this play was considered so tonally jarring and full of strange shifts and emotions. I, I think Rebecca, or one of the things I was trying to get Rebecca to be invested in was to not doing a kind of fairy tale version of "The Winter's Tale." It's such a, it's the kind of play where a guy gets chased offstage by a bear and eaten, so, there's an impulse to—

SPIRO: Spoiler alert.

LICHTENBERG: —see it as happening in some heightened fairy tale world. But, it's also a much more intimate play about life and sort of what happens to you as you grow older and the kind of relationships you—

HESSEL: Well, before we delve into themes, I'd love to just go back to this idea of doubling.

LICHTENBERG: Oh, sorry, sorry.

HESSEL: You can talk about whatever you like. I'm just gonna gently guide, um, but, I would love to go back to talk about—we're actually recording on, um, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, which is Shakespeare's birthday—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and also Floyd King's.

SPIRO: Really?

HESSEL: Happy Birthday, Floyd Shakespeare.

SPIRO: Oh, interesting.

HESSEL: But, I would love to return to Shakespeare's time. Let's travel back in time to Shakespeare's time, um, because there are theories that the productions were probably performed with doubling, uh, perhaps similar doubling to some of the things that we are attempting.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, that's right. Shakespeare's company—scholars sort of debate this, but they sort of agree that there about nine shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's men in Shakespeare's company, which means that there were nine full-time members, and that they would add, sort of, actors, freelance as they could afford them and then drop them from the company. So, when they would go on tour, when the theatres were closed for plague or for whatever reason, to raise money in the provinces, they would have to do doubling.

HESSEL; Danielle, you've got this, this smile. Please share.

MOHLMAN: I was just like, "Closed for plague."

LICHTENBERG: "Closed for plague."

MOHLMAN: I just wanna see that sign on a theatre.

HESSEL: (laughs)

MOHLMAN: "Come back later."

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, exactly.

HESSEL: "Closed for the plague."

LICHTENBERG: It was—it would be more like there would be, like, an edict from the Queen: "Closing the theatres," you know, those—

SPIRO: "This theatre is now closed from our Shakespeare's—"

LICHTENBERG: So, yeah, they would be forced, they would be forced to double and it's been a mystery to scholars ever since, how these plays were actually staged. How were they cast? How were they performed? You know, how was "Midsummer's Night Dream" done? Was it done with child actors playing the fairies? Was Puck played by, like, an older actor, which means that, like, Puck would be twice the size? How were the romances done? These plays that he wrote at the end of his career with all these magical elements and dance numbers and huge casts and huge changes, changes of scenery? So, one of the theories is that they doubled, that there was a more theatrical or meta-theatrical way of staging these plays in Shakespeare's day than we often do nowadays.

HESSEL: Mmm hmm, and there certainly is some meta-theatricality to "Winter's Tale." We've got this character of time—

LICHTENBERG: Right.

HESSEL: —who transforms the stage eighteen, sixteen years, some large number of—

MOHLMAN: Sixteen.

HESSEL: —years, yeah, just by saying, "We are now moving ahead sixteen years."

LICHTENBERG: Right, yeah, Time walks out and gives a speech and is, like, “We’re just gonna skip all this boring stuff, and fast-forward sixteen years.”

MOHLMAN: —and, I mean, that’s a doubling I’m actually most excited about seeing because that’s, um, Perdita/Time, right?

HESSEL: Mmm hmm.

MOHLMAN: And kind of just illustrating how she grew up from a baby to sixteen years old, by just like, “And now, I’m Perdita

HESSEL: —and it’s actually.

MOHLMAN: I’m sure it’s more graceful than that.

HESSEL: No, but it’s a larger thing than that. She’s not just Time and Perdita, but she’s also playing Mamillius—

MOHLMAN: Right.

HESSEL: —who is the um, her brother, and—

MOHLMAN: Oh, right.

LICHTENBERG: Whoa.

HESSEL: —who dies.

SPIRO: There’s a lot happening.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: That’s kind of Spoiler Alert, but not really—

MOHLMAN: He dies early.

HESSEL: —‘cause it happens early.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

SPIRO: Well, and the play’s been written for a little bit. (laughs)

HESSEL: Right, it’s true.

MOHLMAN: I don’t think we can say Spoiler Alert on anything by Shakespeare.

HESSEL: Statue. Life. Bear. Running you offstage. Okay, there you go. “Winter’s Tale.”

LICHTENBERG: Right, and this is also a play in which someone is supposed to play a statue, right, and, like, the statue is meant literally. It is really a statue, but it's also really an actor standing there onstage, so there are, there are all these questions, when you do "The Winter's Tale," of how are you going to stage these really theatrical moments? Are you going to present them illusionistically? Are you going to try to get us to buy into the illusion, or are you going to like, be reminding people that we're in a theatre, these are actors playing these roles and doubling these roles.

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Etcetera.

HESSEL: Well, so as a number of people who go to see a lot of theatre as we are in this room, when you see—not necessarily in Shakespeare, but in any play—when you see doubling, what does that do to your experience of the play?

SPIRO: So, my most recent, it's not even doubling in the same show, but, it's our Reparatory productions of "Coriolanus" and "Wallenstein." I saw "Coriolanus" first and then when I saw "Wallenstein," I was so distracted by them now being with longer hair and I just, like, spent the first twenty minutes being like, "Wait, who were you in 'Coriolanus?'" So, it totally affected the way I looked at it, so, I imagine it will be somewhat similar for me when I see the "The Winter's Tale." Like, "Who were you in before? Oh, you were that person. Okay, now, you're this person," and trying to make the connection of why that doubling was chosen.

HESSEL: Right, so, there's a time when you get pulled out of it—

SPIRO: Mmm hmm.

HESSEL: —where you're trying to, kind of—

SPIRO: —to, like—

HESSEL: —intellectualize it.

SPIRO: Yeah. Mmm hmm. We'll see what happens.

HESSEL: Yeah.

MOHLMAN: But, then, there's something like, our production of "Midsummer," where you, as an audience, are piecing together as you go on that these people who are in the "real world" are also fairies, are also, like, in the mythical, and, as you go, at least for me—

HESSEL: Mmm hmm.

MOHLMAN: —as I was going through, watching the show, I was, like, "Oh, yeah, okay, that—okay, that's good."

HESSEL: Yeah, that's true because at the end of "Midsummer," there's this wonderful moment of discovery when they take off their royal—

MOHLMAN: —when they just change clothes on the stage, yeah.

HESSEL: —they become Titania and Oberon, and, all of a sudden, it's like, "Oh, you were them all along!"

MOHLMAN: "Oh, right."

LICHTENBERG: Right.

HESSEL: Whether or not they were, but, it allows you to superimpose, kind of, your own imagined world on top of it.

MOHLMAN: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, I think, in that case, the doubling changed the way I understood the play. All of a sudden, Oberon and Titania or Theseus and Hippolyta become, kind of, the protagonists in a weird way of "Midsummer's Night's Dream" —

SPIRO: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —because it's about this couple whose not in love falling in love, or coming to an new understanding of love by the end of the play, and, I think, similarly, in this production of "Winter's Tale," there's doubling that changes the way you understand the way some of the characters function, both the characters who do double, and there's one very significant example of an actor who doesn't double anybody else.

HESSEL: Right, so, it seems to me that doubling does either one of two things: It either helps support the, uh, storytelling and support the themes of the play by giving you a new lens in which to see the characters, by seeing them from being another character, or it provides a kind of Brechtian step back, where you're able to reflect on the actual theatricality in front of you, where you're able to say, "Oh, right. That's an actor. I'm in a theatre. I'm watching this transformation that's not a magical transformation, but is a physical transformation, which provides its own, kind of access into the story," and, so, also, and I right, Drew, that, in this production, they're sitting on the stage the whole time?

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: Or, is that—

LICHTENBERG: Yes. Yes. All of the actors are basically onstage for the entire show.

SPIRO: So you—sorry—so, you see them transform?

LICHTENBERG: Yes, and there are moments when they are literally just sitting on chairs the very extreme stage, bottom of the stage, at the footlights, looking out into the audience and talking, so, there's actually not just doubling and not just meta-theatricality, but there's a directed dress quality to some of the scenes, which is actually in Shakespeare, too. Shakespeare, in "The Winter's Tale," has these weird scenes that are entirely in prose between characters we never meet before or since, saying "Did you hear what happened offstage? This crazy thing was happening just offstage, and I'm gonna tell you

about it now.” So, there’s a switching between a more theatrical mode of storytelling and a kind of narrative or a kind of narration—

HESSEL: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —that’s also interesting.

HESSEL: So, it seems that this production is playing with all of these different levels.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, no, it’s asking you to think about the theatre of what you’re seeing as well as just telling the story. When we were talking about “The Winter’s Tale,” we were talking about how to do these two worlds of Sicily and the Bohemia, where the action is set, and instead of trying to create a fake version of this world, instead of trying to illustrate them, we wanted to show them two different sides of the same journey in the same life because, you know, this play has a famous description of the sea coast of Bohemia, and there is no sea coast of Bohemia.

HESSEL: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Bohemia is the Czech Republic. It’s land-locked. It’s mountainous. It has rivers. It’s not off the ocean.

HESSEL: I mean, what did they know in England at the time?

LICHTENBERG: Right, and, you know, a lot of critics made fun of Shakespeare for hundreds of years because of this description of the sea coast of Bohemia, but, it’s, it’s a kind of perfect description of that place, that imaginary world in which we’re all young, we’re all starting our journeys, we’re all in a, in a world of nature and flowers. It’s a, it’s a perfect distillation of the pastoral ideal, you know what I mean?

HESSEL: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: So, there’s this sense in which Shakespeare—the romances, Shakespeare’s late plays are these theatrical metaphors, these metaphors for understanding our journey through life rather than a kind of fairy tale landscape.

HESSEL: Yeah, well, and I think—

LICHTENBERG: Does that make sense?

HESSEL: I think that does make sense—

LICHTENBERG: Okay.

HESSEL: —and I think that actually, once again, today, you are providing me excellent segues because we can go from these two worlds to talk about, kind of, the seasonal themes that go through the play. I mean, the play is obviously called, “The Winter’s Tale.” It starts in a cold environment. So, I’m just curious how these kind of themes, the seasonality of these themes relate to, um, the storytelling of the play, and, in particular, to the idea of transformation, right, because seasons transform.

SPIRO: People transform.

HESSEL: People transform.

LICHTENBERG: Danielle has notes on this.

MOHLMAN: Quite, literally, transforming.

SPIRO: Mmm hmm.

LICHTENBERG: I'm reading Danielle's notes.

SPIRO: Okay.

MOHLMAN: I have really good notes, 'cause, up until a week ago, I hadn't actually read "The Winter's Tale."

SPIRO: (gasps) Ever?!

LICHTENBERG: That's amazing!

MOHLMAN: —ever—

SPIRO: Wow!

MOHLMAN: —which makes me feel like a bad person.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

HESSEL: No, no, but it is interesting, though, coming to it with fresh eyes and with a playwright's eyes, what did you see in it?

MOHLMAN: I mean, I'm really excited to see how all this doubling works, and the transformations and everything. I am very excited for Bohemia. It looks like a cool place.

HESSEL: (laughs)

MOHLMAN: I will hang out there.

SPIRO: (laughs)

MOHLMAN: They probably won't let me. But, yeah, I hadn't read the play before. I didn't really know much about it, and now, I'm just really looking forward to seeing it.

HESSEL: So, what did you learn from it? What are the, kind of, seasonal or these kind of transformational themes as you saw them?

MOHLMAN: Well, I mean—I don't know if this exactly relates to transformational themes, but one thing that I was really interested in was the, um, the friendship between the two kings and how easily that was broken—

HESSEL: Hmm.

MOHLMAN: —and how quickly they, they created their own stories for what could have happened with Hermione. It's, like, so sad because I was, like, "People are dying because of hearsay in this," and it's just, like, it makes you think about, like, gossip today and, like, how people talk, and they make up stories about other people, and it's not something that we fixed in all these years and years and years.

SPIRO: (laughs) Ah, relevancy.

HESSEL: Yeah, jealousy is something that never seems to go away as a theme is storytelling or as a, a motivator or catalyst for action.

SPIRO: It's just reactionary people who just hear something and then respond immediately without thinking it through or listening, and, then, it screws—and that's why everything happened. It screws everything up.

LICHTENBERG: Well, and also, it's, like, Shakespeare, he only shows you the moments of the most intense pain and intense happiness in this play. Like, he shows you the most painful way of destroying a relationship with your best friend in the world—

MOHLMAN: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —and your wife and your children. And, then, he says, "Let's jump forward sixteen years, and see that person dealing with the knowledge that he's ruined his own life."

SPIRO: But you don't necessarily see that sixteen years of transformation.

HESSEL: Right.

LICHTENBERG: Right.

SPIRO: Like, you see, you see the sadness and then you see, all of a sudden, how it's changed.

MOHLMAN: Like, you see that he's still living with it.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESSEL: Right. So, what, what gets us from this, this man who done something that is so dreadful, that ruins his relationship with his wife, ruins his relationship with his children, ruins his relationship with his closest friend, and, yes, I guess we do feel some pity for him throughout it, but you still have to kind of think he's a jerk.

MOHLMAN: Oh, absolutely. You're like, "You did this to yourself."

HESEL: Right. So, how do we get—

MOHLMAN: —but also, you’ve destroyed yourself.

HESEL: —to the end.

LICHTENBERG: Right.

HESEL: How do we get to the end where he’s back where he is at the beginning, where the transformation comes—

LICHTENBERG: —comes full circle.

HESEL: —full circle—

LICHTENBERG: Yeah.

HESEL: —and we’re ready to move forward again.

SPIRO: But who, who are you meaning when you say, “we?” Like, whose ready?

LICHTENBERG: Audience.

HESEL: The audience.

SPIRO: But, the audience might not be, right? They might not—they still might have pity for him and think he’s a jerk, but—

HESEL: But, then, the ending doesn’t work, you know? If, if you’re looking at this as, if you’re looking at this as a happy ending. I mean, if you think that he’s a jerk all the way through, and Hermione comes back out of being a statue—Spoiler—

MOHLMAN: I wasn’t sure if we were going there.

HESEL: Um, yeah.

MOHLMAN: That’s why I was holding back.

HESEL: Yeah. Sorry. Um, but, if that happens—

LICHTENBERG: It wasn’t the most famous of Shakespeare—

HESEL: —and she goes back to him—right—we, as a contemporary audience, look at that, and be, like, “Why are you going back to him? He’s an abusive husband.”

MOHLMAN: Right.

SPIRO: Right.

MOHLMAN: Yes.

HESSEL: That's not the story—well, I don't think that's the story Rebecca's trying to tell.

LICHTENBERG: But, I think Shakespeare—one of the reasons his plays are, I think, still attractive to us, and why he's such a genius is that he just does not judge. He's, he's so interested in unexplainable, awful behavior, you know. If you look at "Measure for Measure," which we're doing next year, the things that happen in that play are so awful, and yet, he doesn't judge those characters, really. He just shows their behavior, and, to me, when I watch "The Winter's Tale," I feel implicated in the drama, you know. I don't feel like those are alien feelings that Leontes has in the beginning or at the end. It feels to me, when you watch this play, that you've suffered for sixteen years and then been reborn, and I can't compare it to anything else in theatre. It feels like actually living a life and getting to the end of life and having all this regret and longing and pain, and also—

HESSEL: —and then being given a second option—

LICHTENBERG: —the joy of happiness, and it's, it's something—I don't know of any other play that suggests the scope of an entire life of feeling. Does that make sense? And I think this why the romances are such interesting plays because they're tragic comedies. They have tragic elements, they have comic elements, the push you away, they pull you in, they pull you apart. There's just a lot there to deal with, and it—

SPIRO: Well, and it's like when we did "All's Well that Ends Well."

LICHTENBERG: Right.

SPIRO: Do you—do people really think that Helena and Bertram—yes, they got married at the end; that's what makes it—

MOHLMAN: Oh, that made me so angry as an audience member—

SPIRO: Right.

MOHLMAN: — 'cause I was like, "He's actively pushing you away. I think you should maybe just stay away."

SPIRO: Right, but it's considered.

HESSEL: And on the other hand, you look at her and think, "You kind of just raped him."

MOHLMAN: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: Right, and I think, in so many ways, the romances are like Shakespeare's—

HESSEL: Marcy brought this up, and Marcy wants to finish her point.

MOHLMAN: Okay, Marcy. Go ahead.

LICHTENBERG: Sorry, Marcy.

SPIRO: (laughs) No, but it's considered a romance or what a problem play comedy 'cause it ends, it ends in a wedding—

LICHTENBERG: —and it's—

SPIRO: But, yeah, everyone has strong responses of, like, "You're an idiot, Helena. Like, he's doesn't want you" or yeah, "You attacked him, and none of this was done honestly." So, it's kind of the same issue. It's that, yes, it can be considered a romance or a comedy because there's a marriage or a tragedy because there's a death at the end, but what happens in the middle doesn't necessarily fit that. Like, "Romeo and Juliet" is kind of a comedy up until the end.

MOHLMAN: Right.

SPIRO: So, yeah, giving it the genre title doesn't necessarily mean that you have to agree with it and be happy that they're together.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and this is, you know, in some ways, the romances are Shakespeare's attempt at re-doing the problem comedies, and grounding them an actual human life. Like, Angelo in "Measure for Measure," Bertram in "All's Well," they never have moments where you believe that they have suffered and are repentant, and in "The Tempest," you know, Prospero's a pretty awful guy, and yet, you sympathize with him. You, you feel like you can relate to his suffering and his misanthropy, and Leontes, I think, is similar. He, he does such awful things, and yet, you feel his interiority, you know. You feel you're on the same page as him at least, even though you can't understand why he's doing what he's doing. And, you know, this is the way in which Shakespeare's a male writer because I don't think there's the same kind of relationship to Hermione. I feel like Hermione's always opaque. She's always kind of removed. You never hear her soliloquies really in the play.

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: So, it's harder to understand what she thinks of Leontes, and I think that's the most—

HESSEL: —and she's quite quiet in the end, so you do—

LICHTENBERG: Oh yeah.

MOHLMAN: She's quite, literally, a statue.

LICHTENBERG: She's a statue.

HESSEL: True.

LICHTENBERG: She's a beautiful object to be gazed at—

MOHLMAN: Right.

LICHTENBERG: —which is sort of Shakespeare’s embodiment of, like, the male patriarchal privilege position of art, and also his critique of it, in a way. It’s very Hitchcockian, the way that works. It’s like women are only something to be gazed at or done violence to. Ugh, it’s all the male gaze—

HESSEL: Hmm.

LICHTENBERG: —and she only talks to her daughter.

HESSEL: Yeah.

LICHTENBERG: She never talks to Leontes after she transforms, and that was the trickiest thing to stage, I think, for Rebecca.

HESSEL: That’s really interesting. I, I can’t wait to see it, and I do think that there is, there is room at the end of the play to hold conflicting thoughts—

LICHTENBERG: Yes.

HESSEL: —and that’s kind of the exciting thing, I agree, about the romances.

LICHTENBERG: Yeah, and, arguably, a female director understands that in a way a male director never could.

HESSEL: Arguably.

LICHTENBERG: (laughs)

HESSEL: That could be an argument. Um, one which we won’t get into right now because now, we are going to go around, and everyone’s gonna say what they are most excited about in this production. Marcy, will you start us off?

SPIRO: Sure. I’m excited—I was telling Hannah earlier, that I think “Winter’s Tale” is the play that I’ve seen the most productions of, um, so, like for “Midsummer,” I saw our production several times, but I’ve seen “Winter’s Tale” —where did I say the first one was?

HESSEL: Folger.

SPIRO: Oh, right. I saw it at Folger, I saw our Academy for Classical Acting perform it, and I saw our Advanced Camp do a 90-minute version, and it is the play that I am still so confused by, so I’m extremely excited to see Rebecca’s version because I have a feeling that doubling is actually going to help me fully understand it, and I’m also really excited for her production, just all of the visual elements and her concept and everything like that, so, I’m hoping to understand it and remember “Winter’s Tale” after this production.

LICHTENBERG: Next time I see it—I just saw it a week ago for closing—the thing that I love about this production is the design, the way the whole design works, and I was trying to describe it to somebody, and I said, “If you can imagine, like, a, a Robert Wilson staging of ‘The Winter’s Tale’ or, like, a Philip Glass staging of it, it feels that way. All of the silhouettes are all modern. They’re wearing suits and,

like, sort of 1980's clothing in a way, like, Nancy Robinette looks just like Laurie Anderson or somebody. It feels like there's this contemporary mythic, minimalist quality to the design that's very downtown New York in the 1980's, and it gives it this, this fine art sheen that makes everything look beautiful. It's a really beautiful production to look at, and it makes you think about it in a different way.

MOHLMAN: I'm really excited about just seeing "Winter's Tale," and, like not having it on the page anymore for myself, and this is gonna sound maybe a little superficial, but I'm also really excited to see Hermione's dress in person.

HESSEL: (laughs)

MOHLMAN: It looks gorgeous from the sketches and production photos I've seen, and I just, I'm excited for that.

HESSEL: You kind of want it.

MOHLMAN: I kind of want it.

SPIRO: Maybe, it will be in a costume sale in five years.

MOHLMAN: I was gonna say, costume sale. Costume sale 20/20.

HESSEL: Yeah, exactly. Keep your eye on it. So, I think, for me, I'm really interested in following the, kind of, Leontes track, and seeing how that functions. I'm really interested in, in, kind of experiencing it, and going on that journey with him, and I tend to love small cast work, and this idea of theatrical transformation. So, thank you all, again, so much for listening. Thank you all so much for participating and chatting. Once again, a reminder: We are on iTunes, so you can find us and subscribe there if you just search for "Shakespeare Theatre Company—"

SPIRO: —and a remind about the event: It's Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>. The performance begins at 7:30. The event will be post-show with Peroni beer and—oh, am I boring you, Drew?

LICHTENBERG: Sorry, sorry.

SPIRO: (laughs) There will be Peroni beer and Black Stone chardonnay and merlot, and tickets are available online—

HESSEL: —and the Prosecast will return in September, though, I'm gonna talk to Andy about maybe doing a special summer something, so you might get a little summer something in the middle of the summer.

SPIRO: A little somethin' somethin'.

HESSEL: A little somethin' somethin' to get your through the summer.

(MUSIC)

HESSEL: Alright. See you at the theatre! Bye!

SMITH: You have been listening to The Shakespeare Theater Company's Young Pros podcast, episode number eleven, featuring Hannah Hessel, Marcy Spiro, Drew Lichtenberg, and, special guest, Danielle Mohlman. Tickets can be purchased by calling our Box Office number at (202) 547-1122 or simply visit [shakespearetheatre dot org](http://shakespearetheatre.org).