



King Lear, Shakespeare's Globe (U.S. tour)

This portable production brings all of the thunderous power, passion and theatrical glory to Shakespeare's lyrical tragedy.

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Bill Buckhurst

[Shakespeare's Globe \(http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/whats-on/globe-theatre-on-tour/king-lear-2014\)](http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/whats-on/globe-theatre-on-tour/king-lear-2014), U.S. Tour (September through Dec. 6, 2014)

Stages around the world are observing Shakespeare's upcoming 450th birthday, and what better way to join in than to be able to catch a sterling production of one of his masterpieces by Shakespeare's Globe. At Philly's Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, the tour brought all of the thunderous power, passion and theatrical glory to its production of "King Lear." (The East Coast leg of the tour kicks off the 2014-15 Annenberg Live series in Philadelphia.)

King Lear is aging, weary and driven to erratic behavior. When Lear abdicates his throne and divides the kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril and Regan play to his vanity with false love. Once given power, they completely turn on him. His youngest, Cordelia, loves him unconditionally, but she does not deceive him with insincere affections, so he shuns her. He does not see the plots the older sisters are hatching, as he lavishes his affection on them and as they wage war on Cordelia. There is intrigue all around as loyalties divide and calamitous Shakespearean fates visit them all.

The acts are condensed, and six of the eight actors take multiple roles. Voice coach Martin McKellen orchestrates an array of British Isle dialects, deftly appropriated by these actors. Shakespeare's meter pulses through no matter how East-End thick, Northern-provinces lilting or Dover-briny they get.

Joseph Marcell (of "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" fame) has actually been an accomplished stage actor for 40 years. As Lear he has so much command from the start, his raspy voice thundering or whispering, full of lucidity and befuddlement, he calibrates dimensions of the part with lithe virtuosity and makes this one for the books. Meanwhile, Bethan Cullinane's tour de force as Cordelia, the defiantly true daughter, unfairly banished, reveals her lion heart in forgiving her father and shielding him from attack. She is equally fine as the mocking, most wise Fool at Lear's side.

Daniel Pirrie gives Edmund swagger and wry villainous charm, manipulating everyone for his own gain. Alex Mugnaioni, impressively popping in and out of several roles, just captivates as Poor Tom, scrambling around the set, in near-naked griminess. When he appears wretched and crazed in front of Lear, Marcell delivers every subtlety to one of Shakespeare's most profound speeches about the fragile and pathetic dicey state of man.

Later Mugnaioni is equally mesmerizing in the lyrical passages as he guides the betrayed, tortured Earl of Gloucester, who goes to the edge of the rocky cliff poised to end it all. John Stahl plays Gloucester with seething intensity, but appropriating heightened period tragedy by not overdoing it. As scheming daughters Goneril and Regan, Gwendolen Chatfield and Shanaya Rafaat give straightforward, if a bit underpowered, performances.

This portable production is conceived to travel anywhere, ideally outdoors, but indoors the theater's house lights are kept on for audience engagement, harking back to Elizabethan authenticity. The skeletal octagonal mini-Globe theater set, with mise-en-scene curtain and period sound effects, is joyous, unfussy stagecraft. Jonathan Fensom's WWI-era-evoking costume design is a muted-color collection of theatrical garb that could have been pulled last-minute from backstage trunks.

Director Bill Buckhurst's busy stage business and character switching can make some plot details hazy, but his scene focus and pace are sharp throughout. Kevin McCurdy's fight choreography could have had a little more refined attack, but that is nit-picking. As Shakespeare's final cut of "Lear" instructs, there is to be music. The actors sing Alex Silverman's troubadour tunes and play flute, horn, drum and palm and flap accordions.

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