

Alton  
E fringe  
Theatre

# KING LEAR

William Shakespeare

## Note on the Text

The writing of *King Lear* began in 1605, two years after James VI of Scotland had become James I of England as well. As yet this dual monarchy constituted only a personal linkage between the crowns, and James was now seeking to achieve some fuller Union (of the kind not actually formed until 1707). It is therefore understandable why Shakespeare, as a member of the new and royally-patronized acting company of the King's Men, should have devised a play tracing the tragic consequences that might stem from a realm left partitioned. Though the initial performances were probably undertaken in 1606 at the Globe Theatre, we do know for certain that the work was also staged privately for James himself in Whitehall Palace during December of that year.

*King Lear* was then published in the Shakespeare Quarto of 1608, and in the posthumous First Folio of 1623. These two editions of the play show substantial textual differences, due principally to changes likely to have been made around 1610 in the light of experience gained from the earlier performances. For the present production we have followed the usual modern practice of developing a script that conflates the two versions and then delivers the outcome in a suitably abridged form.

*“O! Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heav*

## Getting into the Plot

The ageing Lear, wishing to relinquish his powers but not his royal title and honours, proposes to partition his kingdom between his three daughters. Goneril and Regan respond with cunning flattery. However, Cordelia declines to express her genuine love in such hollow terms. This causes Lear to banish her, so that her betrothal to the King of France carries no dowry at all. For defending her honesty the Earl of Kent is similarly expelled. But he then disguises himself as a servant so as to stay close in protecting Lear from the conduct of Goneril and Regan who, with their husbands the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, are proceeding to abuse their father's trust and to render him effectively homeless.

As Lear succumbs to ever more furious anger, he has yet another loyal supporter in the Earl of Gloucester. Yet the latter is falling victim to a second tragedy of family betrayal, through being misled into believing that Edgar, his own heir, means to murder him. The source of this lie is Gloucester's other and illegitimate son Edmund, who has his own designs on usurping the earldom and is now also implicated in the misrule of Goneril and Regan. Edgar is forced to flee and seeks to escape capture by pretending to be demented "Poor Tom". Under that guise he eventually encounters the outcast Lear who, with his Fool, is now wandering across a storm-tossed heath in an increasingly disordered state of mind...

*en; keep me in temper; I would not be mad!"*

# Cast

KING LEAR <i>ruler of Britain</i>	Tim Guilding
GONERIL <i>his first daughter</i>	Sarah Castle-Smith
<i>Married to</i> DUKE OF ALBANY	Simon Applegarth
REGAN <i>Lear's second daughter</i>	Barbara Rayner
<i>Married to</i> DUKE OF CORNWALL	David Waltham-Hier
CORDELIA <i>Lear's youngest daughter</i>	Jo Foulkes
<i>Soon married to</i> KING OF FRANCE	Mike Biddiss
FOOL <i>servant to Lear</i>	Alison de Ledesma
EARL OF GLOUCESTER	Rod Sharp
EDGAR <i>his legitimate son</i>	Stephen Dunne
<i>later disguised as Poor Tom</i>	
EDMUND <i>his bastard son</i>	Nigel Dams
EARL OF KENT	Douglas Brown
<i>later disguised as a servant</i>	
OSWALD <i>Steward to Goneril</i>	Peter Cox
DOCTOR <i>to Cordelia</i>	James Willis

## SERVANTS, OFFICERS, KNIGHTS, ETC.

Simon Applegarth	Mike Biddiss
Penny Cushing	Ian Dussek
Morris Hopkins	David Waltham-Hier
Lesley Willis	James Willis

*“Thou shouldst not have been*

# Production Team

Director	Chris Chappell
Assistant director	Catherine Gerlach
Text editor	Mike Biddiss
Original music composed and performed by	Steve Gerlach
Sound and lighting design	Andy & Matt Stickland
Stage Manager	Lesley Willis
Assistant Stage Manager	Penny Cushing
Fight Director	Tim Guilding
Costume	Company, and loans from AODS
Regalia	Ann Noon

Pre-performance music :

*"Parce mihi domine" Christobal de Morales - performed by the Hilliard Ensemble with Jan Garbarek on soprano saxophone. (Officium, ECM 1994).*

***There will be one 20 minute interval, two thirds of the way through the play***

# Acknowledgements

Bar / Front of House	Morris Hopkins
Poster/programme image	<a href="http://www.kareneamesart.co.uk">www.kareneamesart.co.uk</a>
Publicity	Sue Hubbard & Lesley Willis
Rehearsal / Performance Space	Amery Hill School Wessex Arts Centre
Wardrobe & props	The company Alton Operatic & Dramatic Soc. Steve Marsden
Rehearsal photographs	Ian Dumelow
Box Office	Waterstones, 41 High Street, Alton

*old till thou hadst been wise."*

# Conversations

**Chris (Director):** *What led you to set this 17th-century play in a modern context?*

“Shakespeare speaks to every age. His characters, their pain or joy, triumphs or tragedies are the same today as they were in his time. We started to study this play about two years ago, and from the very beginning I wanted to stage it in modern times. I feel it really helps an audience to connect with the story and with the life of those on the stage. And I love the impact you can portray with modern dress. For example, we put the Duke of Albany in a tweed jacket, to emphasise his conservative nature. These nuances are lost in more traditional dress. Shakespeare talks to the moment and I hope we have captured that in our interpretation of this great and very human story.”

**Catherine (Assistant Director):** *How are you using modern technologies to draw out the intense humanity of this play in the music and staging?*

“Our Lear divides his kingdom, like some corporate executive, using a laser pointer and a projected map of the UK, inviting audiences to make comparisons with the divisions which may follow from this June’s Brexit vote. Our music, newly-composed for electric guitar, reflects the discordant decisions which will fragment Lear’s kingdom, his family and, crucially, his mind. In our deliberately spare production we have resisted complicated props and costume, confident that Shakespeare’s words will resonate as clearly as ever as our characters speak to us about power, family and relationships.”

**Tim (playing Lear):** *Many actors who have played Lear think that they didn’t get the character right. Can there be a ‘right way’ and how have you approached this huge role?*

“Lear will be my fourth attempt at a major Shakespearean role, having played Macbeth and Orsino as a student and Leontes

“Striving to better, o

in the 2005 Fringe production of *A Winter's Tale*. My aim has always been to challenge the audience's perception of the character by trying to bring something new to my interpretation. Apart from being ludicrously too young for the part (!) I have been able to draw upon my experiences as a full-time carer for my partner who, two years ago, succumbed to dementia. This cruel disease can take many forms and sufferers can exhibit wildly different symptoms. Therefore, to suggest that there is a 'right way' to play Lear is, to my mind, misguided. Provided the audience are by turns appalled, angered, aggrieved, saddened, and finally sympathetic towards Lear, the actor has done his job."

## Alton Fringe Theatre

In September 1988 around 20 people, all of whom had been involved in the Alton Arts Week production of *Murder in the Cathedral* earlier that year, met to discuss the possibility of forming a new drama group in Alton.

In the 28 years since that inaugural meeting Alton Fringe Theatre has presented a total of 51 characteristically low-budget and intimate productions, including 38 plays by 34 different playwrights. From Alan Bennett to Euripides, from Ostrovsky to Dennis Potter, from Bernard Shaw to Schiller (twice) and of course to Shakespeare - this one, our third, marking the anniversary year.

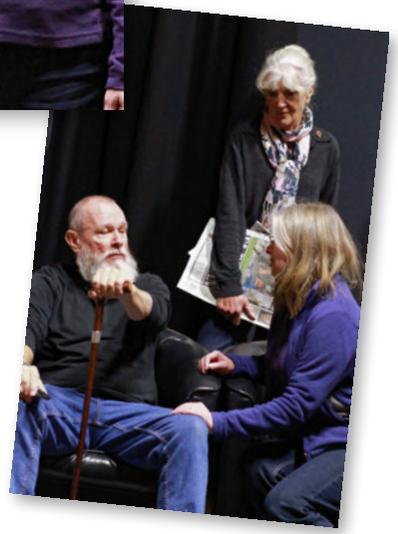
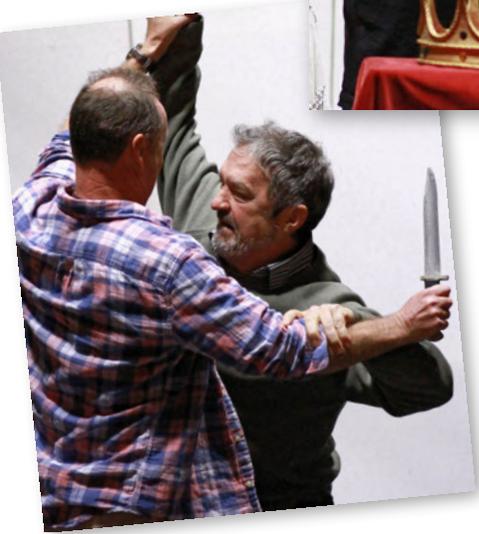
In 2008 the Fringe took Oscar Wilde's *Salome* to the Edinburgh Fringe, to critical acclaim, and recent productions have included *Moll Flanders - the Musical*, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (translated in-house by Mike Biddiss) and, earlier this year, *Wind in the Willows* (an adaptation specially written for us by Simon Applegarth) and readings of Eliot's *The Waste Land* staged in Hampshire libraries.

New members are warmly welcome. Contact details and other information is on our website at:

[www.AltonFringe.com](http://www.AltonFringe.com)

*ft we mar what's well."*

*King Lear in rehearsal - pictures by Ian Dumelow*



And for our next production - watch this space...

[www.AltonFringe.com](http://www.AltonFringe.com)