

**DIRECTOR'S NOTES**  
**Director Jillian Keiley Reflects On *Richard II***  
**E02 Part Two: Post-Show**

**Esther Jun**

Hi, I'm Esther Jun, the director of the Stratford Festival's Langham Directors' Workshop, and you're listening to "Director's Notes," an original STRATFEST@HOME podcast. Enter the creative psyches of this season's directors with the festival's first original podcast, "Director's Notes." Explore the artistic vision and tireless work behind each production, through the eyes of the people who bring the festival's productions to life. This intimate look at our season's play are the perfect pre-show warmup and post-show reflection.

We wish to honor the ancestral guardians of this land and its waterways, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Attiwonderonk. Today many Indigenous peoples continue to call this land home and act as its stewards. And this responsibility extends to all peoples to share and care for this land for generations to come. Whether you have already seen the production or you are currently en route, we thank you for listening in. We hope you enjoy.

**Jillian Keiley**

Hi, and welcome back. I'm glad that you came back, and I hope you saw the whole show. My name is Jillian Keiley, I'm the director, and I'm very happy to tell you a little bit. Now that includes a bit of spoilers.

For Greek tragedies like this, which I know it wasn't exactly a Greek tragedy, but the way we put it together was, I don't mind there being spoilers, 'cause I think it's kind of how it happens, not that it happens, in a lot of these plays. We know that Romeo and Juliet are gonna die. That's another one we know that's gonna happen. So it's, like, but how does it happen? But anyway, I'll share a few thoughts now that you know how it all went down. So there was a couple of things that we did when we were putting it together about how we made, how we ran the room inside, and also how we educated ourselves to be able to tackle these very interesting complex topics. And something I really believe in, you know, I kind of usually keep this just to the people in the room, but I don't mind sharing since you've been with me today. I really talk to the actors and people in the room a lot about the theater gods and whether they'll come and visit the room or not. And I've seen a lot of shows.

I used to be the artistic director of a large company, and I've seen a lot of shows. I must say in the thousands. And I see some shows that are very, very, very well put together, but they don't have that spark. And I really need that spark myself. I need it, I need it in the room, I need to see it, because theater for me is a very spiritual experience, and I find it actually painful to not have a connection with the show. So I'm really hoping that you did. So when I work with the actors, I always talk about inviting the theater gods in. And we do something at the beginning of our rehearsals that sometimes it's an induction and sometimes it's an indication, but it's the same kind of thing. It's kind of a warmup kind of a game or series of games that we do. But all of them

are, that's at the beginning of the day, every day. And all of it is about connecting the group, making sure everybody's voice is heard, making sure that everybody feels comfortable in the room. Like, they can, you know, anybody from a very, very small role to somebody who's on stage all the time. And when you have a very big cast like this that has a very big chorus, that's a very important chorus, like, our angels.

There's some roles in the play that are named, many roles in the play that are named, that are not on stage nearly as much as our angel chorus, for example. So it's really important that everybody feels like they are essential, and every single one of the people in this show are essential, even though there's 30 of them. So we had a really great room, and we were constantly in the conversation about God, about not our personal relationships with God. I don't get into that, but we talked a lot about what it is to believe that you are special, what it is to believe that you are on a mission, and what it what it does to you to lose your purpose in the world. And again, I try not to get too personal with people, but I think we we all have a similar experience in that we're kind of told or believe that we have a purpose in the world, and that we have a central why of why we're here, and the meaning of life and the meaning of our own lives. And to lose that, I think we have a very intelligent cast.

You know, Stratford really gets some of the very best in the world really. But certainly in our own country. we're so privileged to work with the cast members and costumers and, you know, designers, everybody, crew. Everybody who works at Stratford is top-notch. And we had such very good conversations. Earlier in the podcast, I told you about the garden metaphor and how, you know, the luxury of a garden that was, you know, too heavy with plums and apricots, that they were killing the roots of the trees. They were killing the branches of the trees with their prodigious weight. And we decided one time to, or I kind of surprised the cast, but we decided to make a garden that's a conservative garden, and then we made a garden that was a liberal garden. And we split the group to whoever was in the conservative group.

So, you know, Northumberland and Hotspur, certainly Bolingbrook, York go back and forth, but mostly York, the Duchess, all of these people built a conservative garden and the liberal and some of the angels went to one side and some of the angels went to the other to keep it even. And the liberal group, of course, Aumerle and Richard and of course Bushy and Green, they all went over to the liberal garden. And I just went to the Dollar Store, and I bought a bunch of Play-Doh, and I gave them two tables and I said, "Let's explore what it is to have a conservative garden and what it is to have a liberal garden." And you should see, I don't know if there's any way for people to see a picture. You have to see these beautiful gardens that the team made. And just to facilitate the conversation about what it is, what liberalism is, what real conservatism is, why is conservatism bad, if it's stopping a liberal, you know, the non-maintenance of a liberal live and let live policy. So we really tried in all of our conversations to not get caught up in personal politics but really investigate, 'cause, you know, whatever people's personal ideals are, I think we really had to investigate what really is conservatism, what really is freedom. And we couldn't put a pejorative or a negative on any of that. So we divided the group, not between conservative and liberal, after our Play-Doh garden making, which was pretty great. But after that conversation, we really decided to not split it between liberal and conservative or liberal and not liberal, you

know, so that there was nothing, you know, there was nothing pejorative happening. We didn't wanna, you know, 'cause Bolingbrook has lots of good reasons to have become king. He didn't even want to become king, and he just had to take it, because somebody had to take control in his mind. And then we decided that the divide was a much more Shavian argument. It was a much more complex argument than liberal or conservative.

It was actually freedom and strength, and what's more important? Is strength more important than freedom? Or is, you know, freedom more important than strength? And that was ultimately the battle that we see happening. And, you know, Northumberland certainly believes that strength is far more important than freedom. And of course, Richard really believes that freedom is the only way that people can live. So, and even York who was caught in the middle or Bolingbrook, who really would be comfortable with freedom as the primary ethic or morality or ideal, except for that it went too far. It just went too far. So we had some really interesting conversations in the room about all of these politics and what these moral and ethical lines in the sand were. And it really was a really exciting room to be in. I've done quite a few shows here, and it's always a thrill, because the talent that I'm dealing with are so extraordinary, and I'm always humbled. I'm always humbled with Shakespeare regardless. And that's something that I really, I've directed quite a few Shakespeares, and I went to a friend of mine who was the first directing protege in the Langham program many years ago, and she's an extraordinary Shakespeare director. And I went to her, I said, "Danielle," it's Danielle Irvine a Newfoundland director, she's extraordinary. And I said, "Danielle, I just realized I don't know what I'm doing." And I just got frightened, even though I'd directed on the main stage. I think I was the first woman to ever direct a Shakespeare on the main stage here. I think that's true.

Somebody put that in an article one time in a newspaper, and I had no idea. Anyway, but I was, I don't know, I got scared or something and I was like, "I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know what I'm doing." It was the first Shakespeare that I'd done that was in all verse, and maybe just that, and just feeling like I was at the brink of what I knew how to do with the text. And Danielle coached me, and she gave me several lessons over several months, and I read a bunch of books and did a bunch of research on top of, you know, regular research that I would be doing for the show. And I really needed to get my confidence up. I just got really humbled, I guess, humbled by the genius of it, and humbled by my inadequacy, you know, 'cause I mean, there's some of the best Shakespeare directors in the world have directed here. And I don't know, I just got scared. And so usually the coaching staff will ask you at the beginning of your term, "Who do you want us to reach out to? Who would you like us to work with in particular? We can coach this way and this way." And I said, "Oh yeah, well, I guess you should work with our lead, Stephen, and I suppose you should work with our wonderful second lead, you know, Emilio Vieira and of course, Jordin Hall," who is Bolingbrook. And of the others, of course, there are some people who could teach Shakespeare anywhere in the world like Michael Spencer Davis or Sarah Orenstein, who are in our cast. You know, there's so many of them actually, I won't even begin to list.

There's, you know maybe 10 actors in our company who are just some of the best Shakespeare speakers in the world. And then I said, "Wait, before you get somebody on Stephen or any of our other leads, I think I need a coach myself." And they said, "Oh, like, as a director." I was like,

"Yeah." I said, "I need to be coached." So I got some individual coaching from, of course, Danielle but also Tim Welham, and they have a wonderful coaching staff here. There's I think, four or five of them. And they come around, different coaches are assigned to different shows, but they come around, they work with individual actors, they try to aim for clarity, they really try to make sure that people know what they're talking about. They give me notes sometimes after the shows. But what was really extraordinarily wonderful for me was that I kind of, I don't know, got super, super humbled and said, "I need the coaching myself. I need it more than anybody here. Stephen has a way better grasp on the Shakespeare than I do." And so I got some individual coaching, and then I invited Tim to come to our rehearsals. And at the beginning of our day, one of the first things we did was Tim brought in a little Shakespeare refresher. What to do with commas, how the rhyme works, why certain verbs work certain ways, how to make things step up or step down and, you know, how to use alliteration, how to use different kinds of metaphor, how to use things that are in sentence with their opposite. And of course, "Richard II", as you just heard, is full of instances of something and its opposite, something and its opposite.

So antithesis is all through the play and how to make that sparkle. And I'm so grateful to Tim and, you know, Paul de Jong and Jane Gooderham, and really we just had an extraordinarily good coaching team who helped coach the actors, but in this case they coached me too. And I'm so grateful for that, because I came in scared and I left, I'm still humbled, but I'm less scared. So that was really great. It was also really good to work with a choreographer on a Shakespeare. I've never done that. I have directed quite a few Shakespeares, but I've never worked with a choreographer on it. And it was such a treat to create this special take on that world with Cameron Carver, who is just, you know he's just one of the most extraordinary artists I've ever met. So I think a big part of the aesthetic and a big part of the storytelling for us is in the dance. And there was a very famous book out at that time, I think Andrew Holleran wrote it, called "The Dancer from the Dance." And it's a quote from, "How do you separate the dancer from the dance?" I feel like it's Walt Whitman or something. I can't remember who wrote the original quote, but, "How do you separate the dancer from the dance?" And for me, it was how do you separate the text from the dance? How do you separate the story from the dance? And Cameron and I worked really closely, and I'm trying to make the text the dance. Trying to continue the dance with the text as its inverse so that the ride never stops for the audience. So that was something we worked really hard on, and we continue at the time of this recording, I'm not quite open yet. We're in previews, and a lot of what we're trying is trying to smooth the dance into the text and keep on dancing all the way through. This is Jill Keiley, and I hope you enjoyed "Richard II."

Thanks so much for listening to this post-show episode of "Director's Notes." Be sure to stay connected by subscribing, as we'll be releasing new episodes weekly. Thank you, and have a beautiful day.