



# **JAMES IV: QUEEN OF THE FIGHT**

## **| RESOURCES TRANSCRIPTS**

# JAMES IV | BLYTHE AND LAURA

Dame Phemy I think when you first meet her, she's just constantly on the go she never stops for a minute, she has got a finger in every single situation that's going on she and she rules that castle, she knows everything the King does, she knows everything the Queen was doing, she knows everything that's coming in, she knows everything that's going out and she's been kind of sidestepped, she hasn't been really informed that the visitors have arrived right there and then so she's been kind of wrong footed and I think we see a wrong footed all the way through the show until, until near the you know near the sort of two-thirds of the second half but I think she's, you know desperate to kind of maintain her position in the palace and so therefore I think she finds anything new totally throws her and the fact that she finds Dunbar in the castle in the first place, he has no right to be there she doesn't know how he got in and he's already causing her grief, so she dismisses him in an instant and then she dismisses Peter, and then she comes across the two girls and that becomes problematic for her.

For Anne obviously they thought they were going to England the court of Henry VII and then they ended up in Scotland and at this point they don't understand there's a language barrier, so they think that they're prisoners until Peter tells them no you're free to work here and for Anne especially it's like the stress of seeing all these other characters looking at her and there's a conflict right at the start between Dame Phemy and Anne just because of her attitude because she, she's got all her fingers in everyone's business, she does rule the castle in a way and it's like for Anne especially because she also sees herself quite up there and meeting another woman who is up there it's a bit of a 'who are you', so yeah it's like the journey of thinking you are something thinking, you are somewhere and they've been completely flipped, your reality is completely flipped and force fed to you.

Because I was in James one, two and three I've had a really long association with the project from 2014 and when the, James IV was about to go into some kind of production and that it felt like as if it was a production that was going to happen, we had a workshop which is really nice. That's something that actors sometimes get involved in, and it's a kind of a chance for the writer to properly hear the piece out loud and just because you do the workshop doesn't necessarily mean that you'll end up doing the play and it's often that you don't, and that you may be part of that really initial process and whether the piece actually evolves into something that they can work on I think we had a very clear idea that the piece was going ahead um and the script was in a totally different shape but it was really really important that workshop turned out to be really really vital in the way that Rona could then realise the piece I think she learned an awful lot from, not only speaking with a with the researcher that she'd been really you know close to and finding out a lot of detail from him. I think we all started to realise that there was going to be it was going to be a tricky piece to send out and that it had to be handled in a really delicate way for lots of reasons, not only because we'd just come out of the pandemic and we were all slightly you know the first chance to be together, we were isolating, or we were separate, we were you know we had to keep our distance, we'd just sit in a chair it was a very very distinctive workshop and we were sitting in a circle and it was very clear that how we were feeling as people, let alone actors was really really important not only to Laurie but to Rona and I think that helped to shape how we would start to tackle a piece which is very front-footed and very bold and you know deals with a lot of issues that a lot of folks A- don't want to talk about or think they'd know what it's about or want to talk about it and have very strong opinions about it and so we had to you know we all realised that we had to tread very carefully about that and I think it was really helpful then to go and do the piece to have been part of that process and I think at that point we we realised that it had to be handled really carefully, even in the way that the text progressed but also when we come into the point of working in the room it had to be handled carefully.

I auditioned for it and when I read the script I was excited, shocked and loads loads of emotions because it was Rona Munro writing about Scottish History and a Black story and usually it's always

a difficult thing for, a White writer to write about Black stories, so I was really interested reading it and I think and because a lot of this story is, is history it's you know she's obviously added lots of drama to it but the core of the story is history I think she did a great job in making these women 3D complex characters that are just trying to survive and my rehearsal process has been going through all the history that she sent us because she sent us like a big information pack, doing my own research and also working quite closely with Danielle who plays Ellen to try and figure out where we do fit in this James world. There was a point where me and Danielle were trying to figure out our relationship and why it was so vital and so close as friends or whatever and then we were going through the subtext and we thought maybe it was more than just two women that are very close, that they actually was romantic feelings involved and then we fed that back to Rona and we were kind of like, Rona do you think maybe and she was like yes, that's completely there and then we feedback, we fed that idea back to Laurie and he was like yes.

So as soon as we started to play with different complex levels of intimacy it just made those stakes a lot more believable because I just couldn't understand why Ellen just couldn't get over the fact that we have to go our separate lives and we can still be friends but we need to now accept our life in Scotland, I just could never understand that and as soon as we broke through their sexuality and what it means to be attracted to women at that time and as well as being attracted to men at that time, lots of other things started to unlock. I think living in the court at that time would have its own complexity and therefore I think every situation that you come across in that court allows your character to be complex and I think every time that we butt up against each other we have age difference, race, gender we have everything to deal with as we do in normal life I wonder about if that maybe would be something that sits quite well with a modern audience, that the complexities that they have are actually sort of shown within the piece itself so I think it's quite easy to latch on to in that way. But I think Rona writes in a complex way and also writes in a very front-footed and slightly upfront way and I think that's why it appeals to an audience, a modern audience in particular so I think there are both things going on and to make that not appear obvious, I think you have to deal with in a complex way.

I think if you look at the scenes where like the rehearsal dinner and when Donald arrives, every night I love watching everyone else's reactions to what's going on because they're still driving their story and it's like in these court scenes we all behave in one way but underneath that is, our wants, our needs, our desires and all these conflicts and especially when there's that Archibald flight, Dame Phemy is looking back to the queen and you're trying to figure out how to sort it out and it's just so there's so many things, I think, what's really lovely about that and I think that's the really nice thing when you get a chance to play something night after night is that the the thing that you came into that scene with in rehearsals is nowhere near the thing that ends up on a night and that'll change you know that'll continue to grow and I think that's what's lovely about working in the theatre, is that every night you get a chance to play that exact moment, the moment that you know when you've rehearsed and you know but depending on how we all just come at that moment, it will change and it will just and if we're, if we're doing our job, we're listening to that, we're reacting to that, we're thinking that I've never seen that look before so therefore it allows us to fill in those characters and make them rounded and make them living and aware in the moment and I think that, that's what makes exciting theatre and I think if we're just there you know I say a line, you say a line, I say a line, and you know I think it, it will soon fall on its backside.

So it was it was done in a way to make everyone as comfortable as possible, personally for me, I'm always uncomfortable with it regardless I could hear it a billion times but that's just for me, for other people they're able to go oh this is just that part of the play, and because we've had like chats and I've spoke to Jairus, who is one of the directors and personally I've had lots of support to deal with that. I've now got a little tool box of how to deal with the poem when I'm backstage when I have to hear it, but yeah that's how I've deal with it and I think it was dealt with the right way because at the end of the day we have a job as part of the play but I did like that there was structures to make sure

tha we're able to do our job in a safe way and I hope everyone knows feels like that.

I think it came out of the workshop when originally it was Dunbar that read the poem, the complete poem, that day when we actually discussed the poem and how it made people feel was such an incredible session that I think at that point Rona perhaps wondered how it could be sent out, how could an audience actually hear that, how could, you know where would we start to send that out, and at that point you know we all went away at lunchtime and it was just a kind of a breakthrough moment of thinking well does this mean actually that we can't we can't produce the piece because it felt like that, it did feel like that, and I suddenly had a thought that if it was owned by Ellen's character, if she owned it, would it then land in a totally different way, it's different if you're hearing it but if you actually take it and see those words in a way that you go oh right it then sent a kind of uncomfortable shiver around everybody and I think at that point it was probably decided that it would be a helpful way of approaching it, because you know Dame Phemy you know intrinsic and how that you know she Dunbar writes it but she certainly, you know she could have taken that poem from Dunbar and said oh I don't think it needs to be as strong as that and she didn't she went yep that works great that's fantastic, do you want to see it yep there you are, you're gonna have to do this and she works up a whole routine as to why that poem has to get read out or something has to happen to change the situation we need an heir that's it so she can work that out in her head she's going 'I'm doing this for the greater good' so she can give herself her reason as to why she thinks that's totally fine and I think that that's a lot of the time how people go about their business, I think they think well you know and I was doing it for other reasons and I think it allows them to sit with feelings that most people go 'oh that's not nice' and it's only way I think I can get through doing the scene and at one point I think it was the second night at the Festival Theatre when we opened and I suddenly during this scene I thought, oh I wonder if Dame Phemy throws Dunbar under the bus whether she turns around and she goes 'that is horrific you know oh that's that's so horrific to hear that' and she could easily have done that and then Rona said 'nah, she wouldn't let me and I was going but do you not think that- and she was going 'nah, you can't get out of it Blythe, Phemy can't get out of it and I think it's right and it really annoyed me but I think it is right I think she's, and therefore now I've kind of gone on further with it where I think she just thinks what is all the fuss about and the way that Dunbar says it's just a joke and she goes 'yeah come on get over yourself' which I think is a very modern response and I think that, that's why it continues to land with an audience in a way that they go 'oh I recognize that'.

For Anne it would be when her and Ellen have the big breakup argument where she says you're not a child Ellen, and that's when Ellen is heartbroken and she then decides to embrace the life of the court and the King and all that and when Dame Phemy kicks Lady Anne out of the Queen's rooms after the baby dies they're like two main points for me anyway because at that point when I end it with Ellen, that's me choosing Queen Margaret saying I'm, I'm sound over here you need to do you and I'm riding this high wave, I'm living with the queen and then when Dame Phemy switches my fate again, that's when I'm like oh my God, I actually needed Ellen, I need to figure out what to do and my answers are with Ellen so I would say those 2 bits.

And the same for Phemy, I think she, as soon as she publicly says you've never ever taken to me and she you know she sends Anne off I think that for the audience is a moment of going 'oh all right okay', we know we're we're playing with something different here, that she's going to have an influence in the way that the story plays out from here on in. I think that's a really pivotal point and I think that then moves her into and actually the scene we were talking about earlier the dinner party that the rehearsal dinner scene, you know at that point she thinks 'oh Dunbar is very good at catching this audience', I think that's when she sees entertainment and the way that that sits and she thinks that's helpful, and therefore she goes right okay I know how to make this work and I think that that's when you might not see it. I think you've said you spotted it but I think that's when you see Phemy going, because originally in the first couple of nights when we played it I was just playing this is you know this is a really important thing that Margaret is being completely undermined here and I

need to go and support her but I suddenly realised when does that thought come, it's very very quick she comes back and she said to the queen I'm going to sort this comes back and says to Dunbar the Queen wants a word with you, the Queen doesn't even know what it is she's going to be saying, but she's manipulate she's going to just go with me in this we're going to play this situation, so I think she's constantly manipulating every situation that she can find so I think that that scene from from the moment that she sends Anne out I think she thinks 'oh back in' she walks back into the to the rehearsal room she's like that 'yep I'm here remember me I used to stand next to Queen' and you know so I think I think she sees that as being I'm back in again I'm fine.

There's a moment where after this the [ ] speech and after I speak to Donald Dubh, Lady Anne in the speech is going I don't know what to do I have to begin again, I don't want to and then after she deals with Donald Dubh, she then decides I'm going to ask for marriage, I'm gonna knock myself a couple pegs down and marry a man yeah so I would say those three.

There was a point in rehearsals where we were about to leave Glasgow to come through to Edinburgh to start to work and we hadn't blocked anything out we hadn't actually you know said, you're going to stand here, you're going to enter here, you know that day we were going to do a kind of final read-through of the script, it was kind of like if you want you can stand up when you're about to speak and we did do that. What it did was it it made extraordinary moments that we hadn't even realised were in the piece but the one standout moment of that was the scene with Anne and Donald Dubh where you know Donald speaking in Gaelic and you're speaking in Scots but we stood up literally when we had to speak and at that point the beauty of what that scene was about and it's stripped back two people standing in a room in broad daylight just, you could have watched that you wouldn't have had to see anything else and it was mesmerizing in and Rona's writing came to the fore at that point, more than anything, yeah it's just it's exquisite.. It's beautiful, it's like delicious to say it's satisfying.

Yeah, very satisfying to hear. So, she's so good.

# JAMES IV | DANIEL AND DANIELLE

So we find Ellen just arriving in Scotland from Spain they were fleeing the plague that took over Spain and specifically in Bilbao her and the lady that she attends Anne, have fled and they've got a boat and they're expecting to get to England and serve at the court of Henry VII but they were intercepted by pirates, Scottish pirates that took them up to Scotland and now they've arrived here and they're not quite sure where they are, they've lost their husbands that they were with, Ellen lost a child that she had and they've taken just whatever little wealth that they have and brought it with them to this new land.

Because they are both Black women the husbands that they were married to were White Catholics and because they died they didn't have any right to their wealth or their home, hence like another reason why they just had to get out of there as soon as possible-

Because was that I know we're not talking about James but this is a really fascinating like state of play in Europe at the time there was a thing called 'Sangria Azul' which is where the term, which means blue blood in Spanish that's where Blue Bloods that term comes from and what they would do is they would check people at borders or check people in different parts of Europe and pull their wrists out and if you could see the colour of their veins then they were considered to be pure or proper or like people that belong there and if you didn't you were like Danielle was saying you were exiled, all your wealth was taken off you, your homes, your property, your titles was all stripped from you so there was this huge exodus of people from that part of the world fleeing.

At the start of the play you meet James kind of mid-reign he's already he's taken over from his father's reign and he's been doing it probably for about a good 10 years or something now and he's moving into what it was known as personal rule like he would go around each individual country or province or part of Scotland himself with the Justice Circuit and the Justice Corps and he himself would administer judgment and punishment and reparations personally rather than it being a sheriff or a deputy or or any equivalent of the time.

So when you meet James for the first time not only is he in the middle of doing that because that's how he's run the country and that's what made him so popular is that he would be very much attached to the idea of justice or of fairness or of a much more hands-on royal than what you would have a royal now, like the royals now you would, would, could only ever dream of having the kind of power that James' would have not just James IV but the subsequent ones as well the actual direct impact on how the country is run and how the people live and the quality of life they have but also it's interesting to remember that James is in the middle of a Civil War when you meet him he's currently suppressing, Highland Insurrection or the Rebellion from the the Highlanders because what James is trying to do is unify all of Scotland but the Lords and the Kings and the Isles and the Hebridean Isles or the more the Gaelic-speaking regions have always been independent of the lowlands the highlands and the lowlands have always been really independent of each other, so James is trying to unify Scotland right where you see at the start of the play and he leaves to go do that or to finish that and it's interesting to note at that point that the idea of segregation or the idea of oppression isn't just from the people fleeing this these horrific events in Europe it's actually happened in-house in Scotland as well people are treating each other in division or segregation everywhere it's not just about the colour of your skin or where you're from it's it's the ideas that you have or the willingness you have to accept to be ruled so James is in the middle of quelling and a rebellion from the Highlanders and trying to unify Scotland. So he happens to be in Edinburgh on the day that the Barton Brothers the Pirates have liberated this ship expecting to find like gold or silver, spices or something just kind of monetary valued cargo but instead they find these Royal attendants and entertainers and obviously not knowing what to do with them, they bring them to James and James is like great this is fantastic because James was also a really renaissance driven King he was known as the renaissance King of the time he was big into the Arts because he believed in culture and believed in science and he believed in enriching everyone's lives which made him really popular within the Rome, and the



Vatican stuff, as well this enlightenment or this King of culture really.

When I first read the script was, when I was auditioning for it so I got the whole script through and that was amazing because then you get to plot the character's entire journey and what I did was I looked into her backstory and her culture and where she came from, what her heritage was and just researching about Granada where she was born in south of Spain and I watched documentary on YouTube called 'When Moors ruled Spain' I think it's called and music as well and art and like medieval Moroccan Andalusian music, that playlists on Spotify and just I found like having different ways into the character and especially because it's a real person it was a really helpful way to just make them feel like alive and in rehearsals I think a lot of it was about figuring out like what her relationships were to other people, specifically to Anne who's her soul mate and her life partner and we had a lot of discussions with Rona about what their relationship was at first because they don't ever explicitly say like we are in love, I was asking Rona questions about how Ellen felt about her and first I thought well maybe it's an unrequited love or but I feel that Ellen really cares about her because the image of when she talks about her past in Granada in Spain with Anne she mentions when they were married and how there's this image of them standing next to each other in their wedding dresses side by side, married ladies and there's very little mention of their husbands, so I said to Rona, is Ellen in love with Anne and Rona was like yes definitely and and I just think that's such a core, like that is the core of Ellen is especially when she arrives is how she is with Anne and what if she sees herself as one half of a whole and she's her other half when that's taken from her, it's the journey of like her finding herself.

It was a great kind of revelation that we all made through this and exactly what Danielle was talking about is the way we see today the way we see Black history in Europe or Black history in Scotland or LGBT history or representation in Scotland the way we think about it now is a very it's like a horrible hangover from a really Victorian mindset of it and a Victorian approach to it in terms of like we think it's always been like that like it was during that time and really it wasn't like the idea of being a member of the LGBT community or being from a different place of birth that that was just how everything was, it wasn't it wasn't something that you had to admit or talk about it was just accepted.

I think for me it's a it's a strange one because I've grown up performing in these plays very much my formative years of being a drama student who's very much ingratiated in doing the original James one, two and three and then the third one being James as he was a kid, when I was a kid, I think now growing up away from the plays and then coming back to the plays and having this really unique experience of having James's memories of when he was a kid with his parents and how that informs who he is now and the kind of person he wants to be and the reactions to the mistakes that he makes because he was so determined not to be like his father, that he ends up becoming like his father in a weird way. So the rehearsal process was interesting because I I felt like I already knew him, I felt like I already, because I remember him and I remember the story and I remember the world and the way it works in my head is that this play is happening in what feels like a week after the third play finishing do you know what I mean, it still feels really immediate so the feeling of connection to the the story that Rona is trying to tell over all these chapters is really strong in my head so it was a really it was a really mad experience because in rehearsals Rona, I remember I asked Rona at one point I was like what do you, how do you think he feels about that and she said well how do you feel about it because you are him so however you feel about it's going to be the right way you feel about it, which is usually the other way around when you're an actor you're trying to come up with the imagined circumstances or come up with a justification for the decisions that you're making whereas having such strong roots in him, in his childhood made the rehearsal process almost easier for me to understand him.

James as a fighter is really important to me as well because he was really well known as that and historically accurate he was very proficient at war so being able to tap into that and having the mindset of someone who is capable of things like that is really key to me because the temper that he has or the the strength and power that he moves with, has to be rooted in something, that can't just

be a choice in isolation so and it's really good as a performer because you get to not only act that and perform that emotionally you get to see it in the play physically, you get to see how capable he is at that part of his job because that is ultimately what Kings back then were for really it was to wage war and to keep peace when it suited them.

So in rehearsals from my experience of it, when we looked at the poem we had a discussion asking me what I needed personally from the scene because it's my character that's obviously being attacked and if Danielle needed to for example have a conversation about boundaries and if she wanted, if I wanted to talk about it or not, which changed from day to day so, the most helpful thing that we did was let ourselves be uncomfortable and it wasn't a no that it wasn't just me that was uncomfortable or Laura or whoever was in the room but it was everybody that was sharing it and that, it was just to take the pressure off of me and it was it was something that we had to kind of figure out because I was learning what I needed and other people were learning what was useful and what wasn't, so yeah conversation, keeping that open and it meant some days that we we didn't do the poem, like we just top and tailed it and then other days we would stop before we go into that scene and check in and see if we're ready to go for it and then other days, it was easier to just let it flow and then you've got the safety of being in that story and in that character and then it doesn't reflect back into real life, so yeah keeping that flexible and knowing that's not a one size fits all especially like day to day as well and then you've had a like a talk or a workshop-

Yeah she came in and she was like an advocate for inclusivity and for awareness and she came in and spoke to us all and just let us all articulate how we were all feeling about it because the last thing that all of us are I mean I can only speak for me personally but the last thing that I want to do is to make a problem worse or to give more power to something that is already so damaging and so offensive and inflammatory so just having this space like that Danielle said like having the ability to communicate that and just to put everything out and open to quote Danielle said something incredible she wanted to take the power from it and just to make it something that is just so powerless because it was so powerful at the time, to kind of reclaim that and to take that away from it and to have that open forum and foundation set and the understanding built around all of us that we are all on the same page here, we all agree that this has to be approached, people need to be protected and conversations need to be had about it made us all feel strong enough and capable enough to support it and to send it out in the right way. It's something that is really really difficult, it's the hardest part of this job is to sit and hear that for all of us like I can't speak for Danielle but like I find it impossibly difficult to listen to speech like that not just in a production but in the real world setting as well and my priority as an actor and as a now as a friend to Danielle was to protect Danielle with whatever she needed in that time not in an overbearing or like, I don't know like an overprotective way but like if Danielle wanted to come and sit beside me in silence for five minutes then that's what we do, if Danielle wanted to talk to me about something completely tangential then that's what we would do, I would just constantly make myself available to support in whatever way was needed at that time and I think that embodies this whole company that we all understood the job and we all understood the undertaking that we were having to go through and we just had to protect each other at all times because it's all very well and good saying like Keith's character says it's just a joke or it's just words but it's not it embodies and it carries the weight of so much and I've been really inspired and really proud if you forgive me for saying it of Danielle and how Danielle's handled this it's it's been an exemplary reclamation of power and of heritage and of of character, to watch Danielle and Laura go through something like that and to be a part of that or even just be in the room to witness it was phenomenal and I think you've done not just yourself and Laura but you've done everyone so proud in how you've managed to navigate such a difficult thing. I don't want to live in a world where people can say things like this and do things like this but then also the only way you can start the change of that is by having these conversations and by having these examples shown to you.

It's just to reiterate the fact that this is a real poem that William Dunbar wrote and that's part of



his story and if we're talking about keeping the characters complicated again he's a very likable character he's funny, he's he swears a lot, people relate to him him trying so hard and never getting anything back and and we really we care about him like we want him to be able to perform his poems and share his art of the world and everything and then this happens. Is it unexpected, like who knows, but I think, I think that's what's so important about it is that the point of this all of it is that it's real and that was part of the the story and the poem it's not written as like a characterful description of this woman, it's written to be insulting, it's written to hurt and I think that's what's good that they they don't shy away from that.

When Ellen learned Scots that's very important because it helps her navigate to the court. When her and Anne break up because she's got nowhere else to go. When she takes part in the tournament, the first tournament, that's like a big switch for her in recognising her power and the command that she can have on so many people and the connection that she finds with James performing and the love that she finds for that that sets her on like a new path and the poem scene at the end which leads to her leaving.

Key moments for James the first scene with Margaret talking about the consequences of being Monarch or being a part of the monarchy and how the private world that we all rely on doesn't exist for us and it's really difficult not to have that privacy especially when you can't really talk to and be understood by the only person who understands that which is his foundation with Margaret. Bringing Donald back to the court represents the victory and the peace that he's managed to achieve through war and the military campaign that it was on the tournament in act one, and after the tournament really discovers the thrill of escapism and how he then starts to attach Ellen to that and make Ellen and his relationship with Ellen a representation of that kind of escapism, which he's always wanted to get to get away from his history and get away from his past and just not be physically weighed down by it and emotionally weighed down by it and act two it would probably be the conversation he has with Phemy about the poem and the reminder of what his job is as king is to produce an heir to secure peace it's not to be a performer in shows and to spend your whole life showing off at how good you are at certain things it's about keeping peace and keeping the people around you happy and the only way to do that is to kind of allow this horrible thing to happen because it's been positioned in such a way that he can't say no to it, because if he does say no to it he's not getting an heir and then the whole country's at risk so the conflict in that is of your big moment for him, but the one that really stands out to me is talking to you after the tournament, in tournament two and to guard you as much as possible against what's about to happen and trying to explain all of that in such a short amount of time because we've got like seconds before everybody comes in and trying to preserve that relationship with Ellen, yeah and a really really bad ham-fisted adrenaline filled conversation, the struggle of trying to keep her on side with him and keep her a part of his life is another key moment I think.

# JAMES IV | LAURIE

So after we produced 1, 2, and 3 back in 2014 we were very aware Rona and myself that there were three other James Kings to be dealt with so I encouraged Rona to start thinking about four, five, and six and before I left National Theatre of Scotland, I commissioned Rona to write 4 and write treatments for James 5 and James 6 which is a short precis of the idea in the story. I left shortly afterwards and Rona and I carried on talking about the ideas and it's taken us seven years to get to this point and to get James IV on and I think that's for various different reasons but it wasn't until we put a partnership together with Raw Material who are independent producing company, Capital Theatre who own and run amongst other theatres, the Edinburgh Festival Theatre where we first produced James one, two and three and the National Theatre of Scotland as well, as associate partners so once we put that together we could start developing the idea, developing the script.

Well so the first part of it is Rona really sharing her idea what what she wants to write the play about and I suppose at that point I'm a sounding board more than anything else in that, we also walked, we walk a lot to talk about, the plays, I made trips to to go and visit her and Selkirk in the borders and go on some long walks while we just chatted about everything, nothing and then often talked about the play and we went to Flodden, which is of course where James IV drove the Scottish Army down a ditch to its calamitous death at the hands of the English and ends the play and try to imagine what that might have been like and talked about how the play which is really centred around two Black women from southern Spain who are brought into the court and their relationship and their position within the court how that connected with James's character the nature of Scotland at that time and with the propensity for all these Scottish men to follow James down to their certain death so, that became the beginnings of the play.

The process for James IV was slightly different to one, two and three only because we had a bit more time and we had five weeks in the rehearsal room, it feels a bit of a luxury, you know it's still a big old play and it's 11 actors and there's fights and there's there's songs and there's dances, so there's a lot to rehearse it meant that we did spend the first week and a half talking through the script around the table discussing it and Rona produced a new draft at the end of that process, through that process what you're doing really is you're trying to make sure the story is clear, that it's resonant that the psychological arcs of the characters make sense to us all and you're sharing ideas so that your, your perception of the story and the play and the characters changes as you talk to the other members of the company some actors really respond to that process and it's a really important part of their process, some actors want to, want to explore it all on his feet and find the process of talking about it too much, quite limiting so you do have to balance the needs of a very diverse group of people.

We were trying to do some practical work at the same time we're doing quite intensive warm-ups with Neil Bettles, the movement director to get people ready for the fights. We started learning the fights immediately because, their long, as fights go on stage there's a six minute fight which doesn't sound a lot but actually six minutes of stage combat is takes a lot of time to rehearse and two minutes a tournament in the second half so that begins immediately the training of those actors in certain skills for the fighting and the making and choreographing of the fighting, so you're kind of keeping several balls in the air until you're at a point where you're up and you're staging.

For me the staging process is a one of exploration, in that I don't see it as my job to tell everyone where to stand which I think is like an old-fashioned version or perception of what directors do, what, what I'm really doing is steering the process so that we're making the most interesting choices to make the scene come, come to life and feel real and serve the story, so you're on your feet talking about what the character's intentions are although you've probably decided that already, during that process of table work reading the play you together have discovered what the intentions of the

characters are scene by scene and then when you're making it what I'm encouraging actors to do is try different tactics so you can imagine that you're in the first scene between Queen Margaret and King James in the bed chamber you're making a decision about what each of them wants. What does James want when he's in that scene and what does Margaret want, that's their intention, what's their intention moment by moment and then the fun bit for me is, oh but what's their tactic? How are they trying to get it? Are they being seductive, are they being defensive, are they being aggressive, are they being sarcastic? It's like the more tools you have to make them behave like real human beings behave in those situations and we do all of those things all the time without thinking about it, then the more the scene can be alive in the moment, then you're getting those actors to a point where they're not doing any of that consciously that's in their body it's in their, is hardwired into their brain if you like and their voices so that then they're playing the scene and they're just listening to each other and if they're doing that then they can be totally in the moment and when the audience watch it it's like that is happening for the very first time and, you sometimes get there and you sometimes don't, to be really frank, if you've dropped any of the balls along the way then it you might never get there but my intention when we're in theatre, putting the technical stuff and doing the final tweaks is to then try and get out of the way of the actors so that anything that's a block or a problem or a something that's stopping them from being in the moment I'll try and work that out and get rid of it so you might be asking them to wear a certain costume or to have a certain entrance or exit or to do something in a particular time and if you start to feel as the director that there's something uncomfortable about that for them or there's a beat that's wrong or, then you start to make those changes.

At many points in the play characters are actually speaking in something other than Scots. So the two women Anne and Ellen who arrived their first language is Spanish. We have a Gaelic prince who's being brought to the court. The royal language that everybody shares the courtly language is French, you have an English Queen who doesn't know Scots and you have people deliberately speaking broad Scots so that other people can't understand them, so all in all you've got a court and a world where there's a lot of languages going on. James famously spoke at least five languages including Gaelic, including Spanish. but not everybody did in the court. We got ourselves quite caught up with this early on and that it seemed very important that the audience knew what language everyone was speaking even though they were hearing it in English or Scots and, so every single scene we decided that in every single scene we needed to start it in the language that they were actually speaking before they started speaking in Scots, we realised that after a while the audience really don't care and it's not important to the plot later on, it's important to the plot at the beginning because it's important for what happens that the two women Ellen and Anne are not understood by Dame Femi who's the housekeeper and that they can speak to Peter who's the king's right-hand man who's also from Spain. So until they learned Scots which is like nine months in which is the middle of the first half it matters who can understand each other and who can't after that we realised it doesn't matter anymore so we stopped so they may be speaking French together, they two people might be speaking Spanish, they might be, but actually if they're both speaking the same language it doesn't, why do we need to even bother the audience with it so we kept our convention going for the first part of the play and then we dropped it as as the two women began to understand everybody and what they were speaking. There's also a, we did do something right at the beginning though where we bring in a slight underscore when the Spanish, the three Spanish characters start to speak. English even though, we're, they're actually speaking Spanish so they're speaking English so the audience understand them but other characters don't understand them, so we sneaked in a kind of underscore underneath and then it comes out again when they're, when they've stopped speaking Spanish and it seemed to help just just give people an indication that there was something slightly different going on there was a new convention.

The prime challenge was how we treated and rehearsed and presented the poem written by William Dunbar that is spoken in the second half. It's a really nasty poem full of racial slurs against one of the characters, we did a workshop before I mean maybe a year before we went into rehearsal and

probably the most important thing we did was explore with a diverse company how that poem made us all feel when the words were spoken. How we could present it, whether we should be presenting it, how we could present it without doing harm to people who are hearing it that's quite hard when it contains some racial slurs, if not impossible and we had to make sure that we're being very responsible taking a lot of advice and opinion from a lot of different people including Onyeka Nubia who's our historian and including the actors we have a wonderful actress playing Ellen called Danielle.

We improvised what would happen in the speaking of this poem to the other characters and it was actually Blythe who plays Dame Phemy, Blythe Duff who after we'd tried this and it felt really difficult in the room for us all to sit back and listen to this and even to speak it to the audience, Blythe suggested that what if, when this poem is spoken by the Makkar, the poet that if Ellen comes and takes it off him and finishes it herself before responding to it and that's survived into the play, that's how it works now and it was some of the words that the actress Danielle spoke on responding to this poem, Rona then took and framed them and fashioned them into the speech that Danielle makes in the final production so that was one of the challenges, we had to deal with it very sensitively in the room because actually however much you, you know the context in which you're speaking the poem and how it will be presented on in the show, it doesn't stop it having some having some power if you let it in the room, so we had to be very sensitive to how it felt to hear it, talk about it we'd check in with each other and check out again at the end of the day, also sit in that uncomfortableness of talking about how this kind of racist language made us all feel so yeah we found our way through with everyone being very honest about their opinion on it and how we treated it. Right at the heart of the play is the theme of how power performs itself, how does it display itself. The tournaments are acts of spin in that they're presenting a version of Scotland and a version of the crown and it's particularly for the French ambassador, the English ambassador to show that Scotland and the King is powerful and wealthy and cultured and this was very successful in 16th century Scotland there was an impression of a much wealthier country in court than was actually the case and a much more powerful court and country than was actually the case and this served to keep both the French and the English at Bay for a long time. So the play investigates that and puts that on stage and that's that's one of the big themes by also showing the backstage and the rehearsals so you you have a flip to the first tournament which is backstage and suddenly the dead bodies are getting up and and congratulating themselves, they've cut over one of Dunbar's poems they've, by mistake he's furious so you see what's happening behind the behind the curtain if you like and then you're seeing them rehearse the next one and that's quite disarming, it's quite disarming for critics as well who expect their history plays to be epic and earnest and dignified, well actually you know there's nothing dignified about the structures and the levers of power so that's one of the the things because of course what happens in the play is that those levers of power in the end are sometimes employed to do real damage to people who are less powerful and that's what we watch in the play, so you see this poem bring down a young woman or try to bring down a young woman, it doesn't succeed through words and that's another one of the big themes is, about forgotten moment of History. There's lots of contradictory accounts of the Moorish lasses as they're known in historical record and it's clear that there were people of African Heritage in the Scottish Court from very early, in positions of great power and status and wealth and one of them became Queen of the Fight and presides over the tournaments all of this is historical record. The lazy assumptions that some commentators and historians have made in the past have been well these people must have been slaves or they must, even though this is way before organised you know mass slavery from Africa or that they can't have had influence whereas actually it's pretty clear and Onyeka Nubia, our historian who worked with us on it, his assumptions around these women are that they were incredibly cultured they were they'd probably been to all the major European Courts at least some of them. They were bringing probably as sophistication to the Scottish court that was lacking in the Scottish court so that's another big theme is the the kind of emergence of a piece of social history and political history that gets lost when the, the powerful are writing the history and and also it's a part of Scotland's history that doesn't really get taught very much so, and certainly the the history of early Black Scots, I don't think has been taught at all so that's another really important theme in the play.



# JAMES IV | JON

I really wanted to retain the same identity as those original James plays, which which essentially had quite a strong IP. We developed this like you know it's kind of slightly amphitheatre like shape to the set and looking down like a bear pit or a, or a stadium into a kind of playing space below which served as you know castles and, Sterling Castle and it served as like performance spaces and it serves as grand hall, great halls and all sorts of things battle, battle arenas and the play that Rona had developed clearly asked for kind of like a stadium space, like a tournament space. In the first drafts which are no longer in this new, in the new, kind of final iteration that it also asks for like a ship at the beginning so these people arriving on a ship into Scotland they've been kidnapped from Spain and they're kind of being dragged across they were meant to be going to England and they've kind of been pulled into Scotland by James IV and they arrive and that initial scene was them getting off a ship, so there was all of this kind of flavour that I was taking in as where the design might go I was also from the outset really interested trying to create a kind of a sustainable set. A set that had a very kind of low carbon footprint or as low as we can make it, it also, ideas of just like the practical things that I were given like, like, touring it in terms of the space that we could tour it, the money we had, which is a lot less than James one, two and three so all these kind of factors were immediately in my head and the way I was kind of trying to form this form it, and it, what it, what it therefore created was this interesting kind of conversation about how much, how important it was to retain that initial sense of the James one, two, and three sets so it's there in the in the audience's imagination and they can see that evolution. Just as the court was even you know evolving like you know, Hollywood was just being built and and so essentially it's this new this new evolution of a court that James IV is presenting in terms of what he wants to show the world, and so that that was where those ideas came from and wood was very important to me you know the ideas of shipbuilding but also tournament spaces. This idea of creating like stadiums but like, like you would with the Highland Games effectively something that goes up and comes down like, like a modern gig but with wood and scaffolding you're putting up and down for just you know two nights of of like grand spectacle and then they're taking it all down again so it would be it'd be a kind of essentially a temporary space and it would have been built like scaffolding out of wood.

Laurie's very visual, he's a really great director to work with in that respect because he really, he really gets it and I think again a week, early doors we kind of, we did really decide to to make a make a decision for me to use the the kind of as semblance of that original James one, two and three plan. Now it's smaller, it's slightly different geometry it doesn't have a lot of the stuff that it had there before but it's got this echo it's like a ghost image of the original plays it was like trying to simplify that and trying to distil that in a way, that he because he knew how to use that set because he'd done three shows on it so immediately he could see the the advantages of like adding a staircase in the centre, or or reducing the space but still having that upper walkway level that we've got in this in the set itself now that was there originally but he you know there were things that we knew how they worked and there were kind of sweet spots to it, so we knew what they were and we've kind of retained those things and even in the initial draft Rona was talking about the tapestries of the James IV court so James was quite famous for bringing Flemish and commissioning Flemish tapestries and using them essentially as as kind of like luxury wallpaper in rooms to show off when people visited and they would literally be moved around, almost like almost like moving around for a camera so that you you only ever saw the same thing readjusted but essentially he, he had commissioned these tapestries so when people came from, like the Kings of Denmark came he got these sets of tapestries and they would be essentially put into rooms and to make the rooms look quite magnificent because otherwise it'd just be bare walls. The thing Laurie and I evolved was was particularly was this idea of the I looms and the tapestries and how they how they worked through the show and because he was so strongly you know working with Rona on the dramaturgy of the play, they were evolving what the language of what that show meant and how to tell that and some of that tapestry stuff's gone in the play, some of the original kind of conversation, words about tapestry that were in the original play has disappeared



but the flavour I think is still there and so we evolved that idea quite a lot. So the set is made of a load of looms like leaning looms. Looms like being the stretches that you make a tapestry on and with the threads to kind of warp that you you have kind of vertically down the threads, you have vertically down that you then weave a weft through effectively in and out horizontally and then you pull it tight to create that kind of image and it was kind of quite important to us that we were evolving a history of the James of James IV because they're inventing themselves they're it's like the modern day Instagram kind of presentation. If they were inventing themselves to the world he was basically putting on a show and going I'm as important as any other King in Europe, I might, you might not know who I am, and it might be in early early days to my history this is my history and he was basically creating kind of image for himself like invincible, strong, good, good, kind of artistic, cultural, kind of well-rounded, well knowledgeable and I think that this is quite interesting in terms of what he was showing to a kind of modern, he was like the first kind of modern King in that respect he's like he's, he's thinking about it in a completely different way and he's creating this sense of like modernity and like freshness to the way that he sees things and it's, it's rivalry, it's rivalry with the King of England who he hates and he's married the future King's sister, Margaret and they're already there's this sense of like rivalry going on there and so he's trying to make himself look better and so it's all knitted into the story and it was kind of knitted into the set, this initial kind of bare canvas that he's basically kind of knitting in and kind of embroidering over to make it to make himself look impressive.

So we had to go through this slightly complicated, like process where we were just trying to work out what was, what was a good thing to be using what was not a good thing to be using. So the set itself doesn't actually use anything from the original show it was all my intention to basically try and use everything and we've ended up using nothing after a bit of a calculation, more sustainable to not be doing that, which is hard and it's one of the most complicated things about what we're doing at the moment, is we're wrestling with this recycling or reusing new or kind of semi-virgin materials in a way that we can, we can be and and yet we're thinking about the kind of longevity of what that is and and how green it is after five weeks of touring etc. So it's it's a really complicated process and Chris Hay and I, the production manager we've done quite a lot of work on that. So I was involved in creating the green book originally as a design consultant and then Chris and I in in the kind of early days of creating that green book designed and created a touring theatre together for ETT and a lot of those questions, we pondered a lot of those problems then, it's like petrol you know lorries, where the cab of that lorry is joining that trailer, how it's doing it, how, how, you've got to think about all these patterns it's not just creating the set in the first place. So it really was the intention but what what came out of that was an interrogation of the things we were using so underneath the set is a load of componentry, modular componentry, that does belong to NTS essentially that we've pulled out off shelves so like steel deck and essentially with clad, clad steel deck so although there's quite a lot of stuff there there's not a lot of new stuff there, it doesn't belong to the old show but it does belong to a store of stuff, that can be reused and reused and reused so it already exists. Now that's great for budget because it saves you a lot of cash but it also means that we've created something that does when you when you strip it all of its, what I call the skin there's actually a lot of components that will go back on a shelf and will have a much you know a further life, had a previous life that will now have a further life. So that's was, that was quite important and then the other thing is a lot of that stuff is reusable so all that wood that I've got on that set, essentially hasn't really been touched, it's not got layers of texture on it or or other things on it that mean that another carpenter, another designer can't literally turn it around and they've got a nice plain clean surface with not very many screw holes in it but they can reuse it. So it was a massive factor, huge but it, the way, we kind of have progressed it through that initial kind of I want to reuse the entire set from the James, James one, two and three it's interesting how that's evolved.

I think the play is very much about tournaments there's a lot, there's these tournaments are run all the way through the, through it and I think what was important is creating a space that could land pieces of architecture like rooms in a castle, like Hollyrood, as well as like a space where fights could happen so what I'm trying to create is a sense of like a stadium like a temporary stadium, as well as

creating a space that can create a chambered place where two people can have a scene because there's 11 people in the cast and we go from big scenes to small scenes and sometimes there is only two people on the stage so it can't feel, they can't feel dwarfed, they've got to feel like it's a sense of like enclosure and that maybe somebody's listening in, or maybe someone can enter at some, at some moment and or maybe they feel trapped, there's a chamber quality to the piece that at times that I think was really important, and I didn't want to remove the audience too far from them so it couldn't be too big, it couldn't be too far away from them because they want to, you want to draw them in and and feel the delicacy of like a bedroom scene and the kind of voyeuristic sense of like being there for this kind of slightly awkward moment between King, you know King James and his wife, his young, very young wife so that was kind of very important to me. The other thing I think is in terms of the spaces is it's moving from, this is a tour and it's moving from theatre to theatre so it starts in in Edinburgh, it started in Edinburgh Festival theatre, moved to the Kings in Glasgow- oh sorry the Theatre Royal in Glasgow and then it moved to Dundee and it's kind of shape-shifting all the time it's getting smaller, bigger, mostly smaller and the audiences are getting kind of closer and closer like in Dundee, they're very close there's an intimacy to that theatre which I love and it's got a kind of it's got a kind of amphitheatre kind of wrap around quality to it so essentially this is an inverted shape to that space, so when it was in Dundee I wasn't there but the the head of stage, head carpenter sent me some photos and it looks beautiful, looks exactly as I'd intended, no masking like really really beautifully, hope you know, I think it was really beautifully kind of connected to that to the audience so that it feels like they're at one in this amphitheatre, they're completing the amphitheatre rather than it's a set and they're an audience there's a there's a kind of connection to that and I'm really interested in that kind of immersiveness to the way that the scenery is. You know theatre is an amazing thing, we're lit it's literally four-dimensional we're like in, we're in that space it's it does things that television and cinema can't do because you're basically you can breathe, you're breathing with them and you can feel the heat and and it's really important to kind of break that frame that sometimes proscenium arches give you, but cinema and TV obviously give you, and try and pull it in into that space and so the set was is also trying to do that it's got that sense of breaking through a kind of a surrounding structure and the sets pushing in and there's a few little tricks in there there's a little bit of false perspective in the floor there's there's lots of things that are trying to basically push it, push it into the audience.

So the set is made of a kind of outer walkway which is raised up by essentially just over two meters that create, so you can basically create two doorways underneath it and the centre of it is the stairs that takes you from floor level up to that to that upper walkway and against that walkway are leaning six looms so medieval looms made of warp and weft like the there's essentially horizontal strings or vertical strings that that you then run a weft, run a kind of wool through effectively to create the tapestries that you would see in nowadays in kind of Sterling Castle and Hollyrood and those, those were kind of big winding structures that have got wheels on them that effectively you mean, you can create tension and and they provide our kind of walls effectively, which means we can light through them, so they've got a sense of kind of transparency or like a gauze when you light a gauze it's got, when you light them from the front they create more of a solidity and opacity you can really feel that there's a kind of there is a piece of structure there.

The the walkway is made of scaffolding which underneath it is some steel decks and some essentially some steel legs and some steel roster and then it's kind of cleverly clouded by the builders, Pretty Scenic, they've essentially collared each one of those steel scaff poles 48 mil diameter scaff poles and they've kind of over the top of that it's slotted a piece of wood on each one of those, and kind of very carefully constructed so it looks like everything's made out of wood. The original intention was to make everything out of wood but when you're when you've got actors and people on stage, you know moving that and it's got to go up and down in a day it's a very hard thing to make those things sit structurally stably and stable so that's why it ended up being a steel structure underneath. The floor is made of a wood, simple wood sheeting like essentially untreated wood, timber, it's made of a timber called WISA ,particularly timber called WISA which means it's got a kind of moire grain, in it

it's got like a kind of watery grain, in it so it's not a flat thing, like Birch ply which is very hard but it's also very even very kind of cool looking and very kind of like coffee bars, modern day coffee bars look like, are made of it but essentially it doesn't have that kind of grain in it that I was interested in WISA is also more sustainable as a, than Birch it's quicker growing as a piece of wood so it made sense to use that. And then around the outside of that a series of poles that provide essentially, pickup points for some pulleys that sit at the top of it, that mean we can hoist flags effectively, banners up and down to create a sense of tournament and we can create the kind of royal coat of arms, appearing six times around it and in the rear of all of that, it's slotted between an upper walkway, quite a kind of the stairs up to the upper walkway and the stairs that go down, is essentially a big drawbridge that sits underneath the set and then is pulled up from the Flies up with a with a with a portcullis dropping down at the same time to almost create a kind of shutter effect. That means we can create a portcullis and a set of doors quite easily without flying them in and out, so I was quite interested in well I am interested in the way that we use we use things kinetically in scenery so that it's not just a series of things that are flown in and out in a kind of old Victorian way but things can surprise you from coming from different places and, you know reimagine and re kind of imagine the space.









