ACTING SHAKESPEARE: A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2016 Production of *Much Ado About Nothing*

Michael Don Bahr
Utah Shakespeare Festival Education Director

Featuring: David Ivers (Director), Leslie Lank (Hero), Ben Livingston (Benedick), Karen Martin-Cotton (Beatrice)

Bahr: Welcome to the 2016 Actors' Roundtable session of the Wooden O Symposium. We are grateful to have with us—as we do every year—the director of our featured production. David Ivers directed this year's *Much Ado About Nothing*. We're also very grateful for Leslie Lank, who is playing Hero; Ben Livingston, who plays Benedick; and Kim Martin-Cotton, this production's Beatrice. One of the advantages of an intimate setting like this is that we have a chance to talk about how the production was put together and about their processes of creating memorable characters and relationships. I'm going to pass the microphone to David, then we'll open this session for questions from you, the audience. I'd like to start, though, with a question directed to our guests, starting with David.

Several years ago, David Ivers presented a paper at the Wooden O Symposium, in which he talked about the

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importance of scholarship and research in the roles of actor and director. I'd love to hear about his perspective, and you other actors' perspectives, on your own personal processes as you prepared for this production.

Ivers: I hope you don't expect me to remember why I thought scholarship was important. It was so long ago. I love that we do Wooden O here. I think it's an essential ingredient in the relationship between the plays and studying the plays. Of course, most of us up here believe that the plays were meant to be heard and seen, not necessarily read and debated—an emphasis on the performance element. However, I say that because that's the discipline we're in. I don't expect you to feel the same way, but I have always felt—especially the actor part of me—that structure in classical plays, particularly Shakespeare, is the key to unlocking meaning. Because of that, all actors worth their salt carry a bit of the dramaturg in them, sometimes to an overwhelming extent. John Oswald, who is playing the Friar in *Much Ado About Nothing* and has his PhD, is a man I went to school with. He wrote his dissertation on "nothingness" in Shakespeare. We were in grad school together and used to go to Buffalo Wild Wings in Minneapolis and play Shakespeare trivia, where he'd pulverize me, and when we weren't playing trivia, we'd debate the finer points of "nothingness" in Shakespeare. Currently, building a production as the director of *Much Ado,* we still did that in the middle of rehearsals. I welcome it and love it because what I believe, and what I believe the Wooden O does, is to teach us the value of exploring meaning. *Much Ado About Nothing* was really pronounced, and probably received, as *noting*. So what does that mean? And how does that inform this production, and how does that inform the actor? I spoke a great deal in my paper here about *The Tempest*. I happened to be playing Caliban at that time.

My feeling while I was studying Caliban was, "Why all the *M's* with Caliban?" Why *mother, murder, Miranda?* Why? Over and over? When you start to analyze the history of

that character and what's most important to him, you figure out that's really what's on his mind—his mother, Miranda, and murder. That became a very active thing for me, and I stuttered on those letters. That was an active choice based on scholarship, then based on interpretation, then based on character.

Bahr: Leslie, would you please talk about the importance of scholarship based on Hero in the creation and connection to Hero? What type of work you did to prepare for Hero?

Lank: I think that Shakespeare always comes down to the text and figuring out that puzzle. That's what I like about it, in those initial stages delving through the text and figuring out why—as David was saying—why these word choices? Why is this scene in verse and the other one in prose, and all these questions that we talk about during the initial text read-through. Everyone is their own little dramaturg, and it's really fun to bring it all together during rehearsal when we exchange ideas. What's fun about Shakespeare is that it's all right there.

Livingston: As an actor its crucial to get the research you need in terms of playing a character. Sometimes we rely on different types of research. There's research in the literary sense and there's research in the performance sense. A lot of actors will do a lot of performance-based research on other people who have played the role, how it's been done before. I tend to shy away from that because I don't find it helpful to me. But the literary research is absolutely essential to someone like me, who just wasn't a very good student as a kid. I was a biology major in college, and I should have spent more time studying plays and books. But since I didn't, I rely on people like David. We have an awesome dramaturg on this show—Isabel Smith-Benstein. A lot of this research will inform your character. On the basic level, you have to know what you're saying and what it means—not just what it means on the surface, but what it meant to Shakespeare, perhaps, and what it would have meant to Shakespeare's

audience, which can sometimes be very different from what it means to our audiences today.

So you have to know what you're saying, and then you have to figure out why you're saying it. In most modern plays you can figure out, for example, that I'm saying this because I'm jealous or I'm this or that; but because Shakespeare is usually deeper and more complex and written in a language that's a little different from our own, it does take some scholarly help to say why am I saying this. Also, as an actor, listening to what other characters say and how you hear what other characters say—is crucial. I'll give an example in the wedding scene: When Don Pedro calls poor Hero "a common stale," I thought, "That's kind of a lame insult, 'a common stale.'" But our dramaturg told us that that's probably the harshest thing said about Hero in that entire scene, among some very harsh things said. So that informs you as an actor; if I didn't know that, I would just watch him and go, "Oh, common stale, sure, yeah," but thanks to people smarter than I, I now know to listen for that.

Martin-Cotton: Once I have a good understanding of what I'm saying, one of the kinds of investigation I do is what the language does to me physically and emotionally. As David was saying, if it's about *M's* or about a particular consonant or a particular kind of vowel, to me that's a huge amount of information. A lot of what my process looks for is, once I know what I'm saying and what other people are saying, how to activate it in my body so that I'm not just having an intellectual experience about it. I need to know why in a particular section—why, for example, after saying nothing in the wedding, Beatrice launches into an outpouring of language—what does that do to my body and what does that do to this relationship. So a lot of the focus in my study is to find out what the language does—what information there is in the sounds of the language and the structure of the language.

Bahr: Great. Any questions from the floor specifically about the production?

Audience Member: I'm not as familiar with *Much Ado* as I am with some of the other plays, but one of the things I really enjoyed about the performance was how physical the comedy is, even a bit of slapstick. So, for David, and then the actors too, was that something you had already had in mind going into it, or was that something that you added in as you went through?

Ivers: I think it's a bit of both. By design I had it in my mind that that's the fabric of this production. It seems to me that it's the fabric of many productions of *Much Ado,* not something that would be identified specifically with me. But it certainly developed, mostly through the grace and generosity and great skill of this cast. My job is to be open to the room, lay a foundation, and say I don't know, what are we doing? The manure and all that stuff came from the actors. That's just brainstorming and trying to figure it out. All I knew is that the set was meant to locate us in a very specific place, and I wanted to make sure that anything that happened in the play, physically or otherwise, tried to come out of that place. It was born of the soil of this, what I call now, my farm-to-table restaurant. If you stand back, without preconceptions, and just look at the set, my hope was that there's a small hint that this could be a tree fort, this is like a jungle gym. That was definitely part of my thinking. How it manifests itself was a terrific collaboration between me having some ideas and the cast coming with some ideas. But we weren't shying away from a physical production at all. I think it's necessary.

Bahr: Anybody else want to comment on the physicality?

Livingston: I'll just say that this space [t*he Englestadt Shakespeare Theatre*] is quite large visually, and I don't think this space accommodates a physically subtle performance. You have to be expansive, both vocally and physically, for

people to get across that space. Also, I've known David for a long time. We both have a kind of goofy sensibility, and I knew from the beginning that as an actor doing a comedy, I always worry, is it going to be funny enough? And I knew, well its David, so he'll make it funny. I know he will!

Ivers: That's a lot of pressure.

Livingston: Exactly. And then as David said, we get in the room and say, what if we did this, what if we did this, and there were a lot of different choices for things. But it was the kind of room, the kind of cast, the kind of collaboration where anything was possible—including being buried in manure.

Martin-Cotton: David also said something before we even started that was sort of a launching place in my thinking that helped create a robust sort of world. Here is this group of women, older men, younger men, who've been waiting for everybody else to come back from the war. At the moment the play begins, the information arrives that everybody is returning and safe. So it was like a cork—like something being uncorked and releasing this passionate outpouring of emotion and celebration, which let us go to the highs and the lows of this play. I do think that entirely informs this physical world that then gets built on that joyful relief.

Audience Member: How early in the process did the tree become integrated in the set? Was that from the very beginning?

Ivers: There were two features about the design of the tree that I was very clear about early in the design process. It's going to end with a swing. That I knew. The entire production for me was predicated on this kind of daydream I had about Beatrice swinging over the audience. Worked backwards, I started researching Messina, Sicily—the whole region. I found a picture in my research of an olive tree; a lot of olive trees wind themselves around each other like an embrace. I thought, that's Beatrice and Benedick and Claudio and Hero and Dad in a way. All of a sudden, it made sense

to me that this was Leonato's orchard. If we're going to have a swing, we have to have a tree. Then I started thinking, a tree! Kids climb on trees. From there it started to develop very quickly. The two things I said to the design teams were, "Budgets are tight, so I'm just asking for a tree and a swing." Originally, I wanted the tree to go through the roof, to find its way through the O, and through that little top window up there. But we didn't have a theater at this point—it was still being built—so we didn't dare engineer that. Then the new theater got behind and the tree wasn't completed for the first preview—I mean, there was pink foam on the tree. But this cast, particularly these two [*indicating Livingstone and Martin-Cotton*] were such stalwarts, just discipline and joy. In the rehearsal room we had a six-foot A-frame ladder, and when we'd work these scenes, everything, literally, was predicated on my saying, "Now, in theory." Outside of run-throughs, we ended up with maybe 12 hours of rehearsal—total—with all that climbing action on the tree. These two just went for it! We had big ideas for the tree that just weren't physically possible, but still, I think, we got a lot out of it.

Audience Member: I thoroughly enjoyed the play. The scene of Beatrice swinging is something I will remember for the rest of my life. I also enjoyed the choice to have Beatrice and Benedick sit silently in the space throughout the play. I've never seen that before. That was beautiful. It's also during the scene when they talk about when they fell in love with each other, I wanted to ask the actors who play these characters, do you have an opinion about when Benedick falls in love with Beatrice and vice versa?

Livingston: It's an excellent question. It's kind of *the* question for these two characters in rehearsal. I'll let you go first.

Martin-Cotton: We talked a lot about what's referred to in the earlier scene, about "You've lost the heart of Signior Benedick": "Indeed, my lord, he hath lent it me a while and I gave him use for it." The reference to the relationship

obviously had some history. We talked about what it was that went wrong, because clearly something did go wrong: "He won it of me with false dice." We talked a lot about what that could be because it could be so many different things. Did one of us really do something that upset the other? Did one of us do something that made the other feel not chosen. What we ended up talking about was that these are two very prideful people and, just as we see in other moments of the play, their "skirmish of wits" can escalate. David talked a lot about that hurt, what is underneath there, what is the thing that lingers with them. There is this wonderful skirmish of wits the first time they encounter each other that ends with something rather sharp at the end. We talked about the idea that something happened where both were so prideful that, instead of giving way to any kind of coming together on whatever it was that happened, they both stormed off and held a grudge—which I think is pretty human, not being able to admit any allowance for the other person's perspective. For me, though, I am still in love with him at the top of the play. Even if I think he's an impossible person that no one should ever try to be in a relationship with, I do think I'm still in love with him because when I see him, when I hear that he is alive, that ignites something in me that's relief; and then when I see him, I think, "Oh my God, there he is!" and I have a kerchief on my head and I'd better get myself together before I can approach. But I think it takes the wedding scene, where everything is completely falling apart, to plant the idea that the other person is in love with you or me. When I hear that, that also ignites something; but it isn't until things are falling apart that there is room for the admission of love in both directions. [*To Livingstone*] Okay, now you.

Livingston: It's about the same with Benedick, I think. I think they definitely are in love with each other from the beginning; otherwise, they wouldn't be so passionate about their skirmishes. I think Benedick is one of those people that we probably all know, who had a love go wrong and

decided to harden his heart and go through the world not trusting anyone. More than Beatrice—Beatrice gets talked about a lot in terms of pride—I get talked about a lot in terms of not trusting women, and I say some awful things about women in the first part of the play. It's that gulling, that incredible gift—one of the things I love about the play is the people who construct the gulling—it's a lark for them. It's an entertainment for them, and it's a complete game-changer to us. Being gulled, there's a line that always sticks out after the gulling where Shakespeare writes these very, very short, simple sentences that make it timeless; he just says, "Love me." That, to me, for my interpretation of the character, is a watershed moment of, "Wow! I haven't allowed anyone to love me for so long," and it just kind of cracks his heart open and allows all those old feelings to come up. That's my interpretation.

Bahr: I want to consider the wedding because you talk about how important it is. I would love to hear from you, Hero—Leslie—about why can you go back to loving that man after what he did.

Lank: That's the question I've always had. It's the question that everyone has about Hero. Certainly the first question I ask is why she chooses to go back. It's hard to reconcile our modern sensibility with that choice. The wedding is tragic and there's not much I can say about that. It's just a horrible event. I think that Hero is the personification of heart. She's this extremely good and forgiving person. In terms of choosing to forgive Claudio, it's like this universal experience we've all encountered. Someone you love is hurt and because they're hurt they act out. You can either choose to hit them back or to forgive them. Hero, after all of the initial shock, anger, and heartbreak, in those scenes where we don't see her for a long time, and especially after she witnesses the tomb scene, I think she's a good enough person that she can step back from the situation and see that Claudio is wounded and extremely hurt—and mistaken—and that's why he behaves

so badly. That's why she is able to forgive him instead of holding a grudge.

Bahr: Where in the rehearsal process did the choice of having Hero onstage during that scene first come in?

Lank: I think that was always what we were going to do, right? That's quite common in productions for a modern audience to have Hero witness the ritual. Hero isn't onstage for most of the second part, so to have her witness Claudio's grieving and mourning and regret builds her character and also helps the audience to understand her choice.

Ivers: There's another component of this issue that I've spoken about over the summer at other seminars, and it's coming clear to me that it absolutely does not help the actor in terms of trying to figure out that sticky situation for a modern audience with a different world view from when it was written. Here's what I find fascinating and contradictory—which I relish—about the irresponsibility of our human nature: Hero is a willing participant in using the same device on Beatrice that was used when Claudio receives the information about her own honor. Hero says, "I will help perpetuate hearsay. I will be a purveyor of hearsay in order to effect change." Claudio has come apart at his wedding because of what? Hearsay. How is it okay to sit in an audience and be a willing participant in the very same device that makes you feel so lovely about a comedy, and yet you reject it when it comes to Borachio and Hero and Margaret? They're operating under the very same device. Shakespeare knows it—he's a genius—and he throws the mirror back to you when a director points it out, or if you've already discovered it for yourself. But if you go back to the play, *Much Ado about Noting,* nothing is said in the action, but it would be an exception if these men arrived home without someone saying, "I heard the prince. . .," or "Did you hear she's. . ." The inference is not direct. It only becomes direct in the second instance. I think it doesn't help the actor because then you'd have a meta-performance. But it helps structurally in

understanding and directing. I think I was a broken record on the noting thing because having been part of this play several times, but never directing it before, I found it surprisingly immediate for me this time. It's something to think about because there's a great contradiction there. Especially now when you think about Hero saying, "I'll do anything. I'll do anything to help my cousin."

Audience Member: This part was great fun. I think what made it so interesting, though, was your emphasis on the body of Hero's relationship. We all love Hero, but your emphasis on the Claudio and Hero relationship, just jumped out at me.

Ivers: I'm so glad to hear that. Thank you. It's mostly because of Leslie and Luigi [*Sottile, who plays Claudio*]. I'm grateful for the comment because it is something we talked about from the get-go—that it's their play. This is sub-plot over here [*indicating Beatrice and Benedick*]. It's a good one, but it's sub-plot. What Leslie and Luigi brought to their story was such heart and conflict—and generosity which is great because I feel the play doesn't receive its whole balance without that.

Bahr: Other questions?

Audience Member: I want to ask how you arrived at the age difference. Very often Benedick and Claudio are not that different in age, but in this production its stark, which I think is wonderful because it justifies a lot of the language in the play. He has been a bachelor for a long, long time, so this is really a celebration of long deferred love, which is especially terrific. Did that offer any gifts to you—challenges—as you were producing it?

Ivers: You just said it all. Truly, that's how I feel about it. From the outset I said I wanted a mature Beatrice and Benedick. I wanted a generation between them and Claudio and Hero because I think there's something about the younger two witnessing what happens to love at first sight, which Beatrice and Benedick must have experienced, and

how it can go in a direction that makes one say, "Do we really want to—do we really want to be on that path?" Also, I'm at a certain place in my life: It wasn't just about the generation thing; it was also about these two actors whom I love and wanted to work with, and it all just seemed to make sense—the approach to the production and what it meant for people "of a certain age" to be climbing over trees and climbing up ladders.

Audience Member: I thought they were a lot younger.

Livingston: As an actor, you can't really play age. I can only play the play and be my own age. I would like to think that these roles are timeless. There have been a lot of famous productions, James Earl Jones and, and—

Bahr: It was Vanessa Redgrave.

Livingston: Anyway, he did it in his 70s. There was a famous Derek Jacobi production, when he was in his late 40s. He probably dyed his hair; I don't. Still, I can't worry about the age or play into it in any way, but I hope that there's something poignant about people *this* age, that it's never too late to allow yourself to be in love.

Audience Member: Could you talk about how Margaret functions in this production? It seems to me that that added moment, that reconciliation, changed the women's relationship, and I wondered if you could talk a about that.

Ivers: Changed the women's relationship? How?

Audience Member: Margaret was included in the wedding scene, and she's not always. I think that moment where she tries to speak and Leonato stops her was very revealing. I wondered about what that does for Hero in that scene.

Ivers: There's no prescription for Margaret being in the scene or not. There's no road map there. I think it's seriously troubling if she's not, actually. If she's not, one notices that it's completely obvious who isn't there. Then one wonders, if you start to put two and two together, if Margaret escaped. Then what happens when she comes back? What if she doesn't appear at all later in the play? Kelly Rogers, who plays

Margaret, felt very strongly that we should find a moment for her to have a chance to say, "Whoa, this thing, like all the other things, all the other devices, went too far." It's all the same kind of idea: people overseeing, over-hearing. That that might go a long way with a modern audience to validate this larger family. After all, the whole play is about watching how information affects people to change or not. I have to believe in the choice because I believe it gives someone voice, potentially, that doesn't have one.

Lank: Kelly and I have also found a moment at the end where Leonato says that Margaret was a part of the deception, but she didn't know what was happening. Then Kelly comes over to me and we have a little silent moment of forgiveness. I love it. We kind of just hold each other, and sometimes she says, "I'm sorry." If that moment didn't exist at the wedding, if she stood away from me, and I obviously don't know what's happening and why she's avoiding me, it might be harder for me to forgive her. After all, the girls always have each other's backs, and that's a truly important relationship.

Martin-Cotton: I also love that in this production, David has Margaret woven in closely as one of the girls who are almost part of the family. This is a play that talks a lot about women's chastity, and Margaret clearly is not living that life, but she's still entirely part of the family. I like the dynamic of a world in which women can live different ways. For some women, it is part of what they're expected to do to be chaste, but other women certainly can make their own choices.

Ivers: We talked early on about what it means for these characters to live with reckless abandon. If you think about the track that you took the characters on and you imbed that into the performance of Don John, what does it mean for him to live fully in three dimensions of reckless abandon? It means he is on this train and people are going down. What does that mean for Hero? What does that mean for Beatrice and Benedick? This notion of uncorking at the top of the play—bringing that three-dimensional technicolor

into existence—ends up with a pastiche of family that has different versions of loud voices and the need to speak and the desire to be heard. And we're in Italy, right? So a certain amount of fire and passion comes culturally from the depth of family relationship and the relationships of the land and commerce and everything else. That informs some of these choices as well.

Audience Member: Along that same line, did you ever consider putting in the scene where Benedick and Claudio and Don John view Borachio and Margaret?

Ivers: It was never an option for me. Never would I even consider it, and the reason is this: This, right here [pointing], in your brain, in your mind's eye, is far more potent than what I can stage about those kinds of events. Thank you, every great film maker. Thank you to the Greeks, thank you to violence off stage. What you can conquer in your mind's eye will immediately take you to a place of context and understanding in your life about scenes like that, that is far more potent than anything I can create for you. Not to mention, I'm not going to stop the play and say, "Here comes a dumb show!" I'm sure there are better directors than I who can create that, but I never considered it.

Audience Member: I think the genius of not doing the scene is that it makes the audience complicit in the hearsay. Now we are also buying into that Facebook idea of anonymity: When you say things anonymously, you have no accountability. Is that a fair statement?

Ivers: I think you're essentially supporting what I just said, which is that you have the ability—you will find a place of context immediately. And I think you're right.

Livingston: Leonato doesn't see it.

Ivers: The play is contingent on people believing on both sides of the equation very quickly. If you don't do that, it's not going to go well.

Audience Member: We've been told from the beginning of the play that Don John is going to set up this betrayal, and

we also know that Borachio has volunteered that he knows Margaret and can arrange for her to come to the window and blah blah blah. That's a done deal. And then we have those magical nincompoops who capture the villains. We see that before the wedding scene, so—

Ivers: Yes, if Leonato were to listen to that first scene, before the wedding, there'd be no problems. It'd be a much shorter evening.

Bahr: We haven't talked about the magical nincompoops.

Ivers: There's only one. And he founded the theatre [*referring to Fred C. Adams*].

Bahr: Do you want to talk about the role of Dogberry and the Constables?

Ivers: Yes, it's a great device. What I love about this group is that they push it just enough for me. It doesn't go over-the-top stupid. It's got enough humor, enough bite, and I think they're great together. I'll tell you my original idea, and someday I'll work in a theatre that has the resources to do it. I had hoped, at one point very early on, along with a 50-foot tree, that the watch would be entirely made up of 70- and 80-year-olds. My reasoning is that the generation that should be in it are gone. Where? At the war. The only people left here are women, children, and —Fred Adams! May it be ever thus! We just couldn't afford, frankly, to do that. My thinking, again, was, how do you locate this group? Are these migrant workers? Are they olive pickers? Who are they? The watch was a real thing, volunteer fire department, made up of the community. We took our watch-word from the old adage in the theatre, KISS: Keep it Simple, Stupid. They are a great device to set the world right. They are the chaos that turns chaos into order. That's not an old device, but it's employed in an especially nifty way here.

Livingston: An observation I've heard is that the great thing about being an actor and doing a run of a show is getting to hear the show multiple times. There's never a night where you don't hear something and say, "Oh, yeah, I've

never noticed that before." One of the things I've always thought was that Dogberry was one of those clown roles that make you go, ugh, as an actor. These arcane jokes. John Plumpis is amazing because, if you can make that role work, you are an amazing actor. I was listening to something in the watch where he's instructing his men, and they say, "Well, if this happens what do you do?" At every turn, Dogberry is the antithesis of a hard cop. He says, "Just let him be." If you find somebody drunk, just let 'em drink enough to go to sleep. Or if somebody does this, what do you do? And it's the opposite of what all the "smart" characters do. The smart characters get a piece of information, and they overreact to the point of endangering people's lives. Then there's that Shakespearean wisdom in the dummies. If everybody had a little more Dogberry and just chilled out a little bit and forgave people for their faults, none of this Much Ado could happen. It's interesting that Shakespeare puts that with a guy who can't even string a sentence together.

Audience Member: In my experience with the show, I've found that in this production the characterizations of some of the supporting characters, especially Don Pedro and Don John, were delightfully different and fantastic. I was just wondering how much of that was directorial? How much of that came from the actors? Also, did that radically change the way any of you approached your characters with what they were giving you, or were you surprised by it.

Livingston: I like to do theatre because I think it's the most collaborative art form. You're not sitting in a garret painting a painting by yourself. The joy of collaborating is the people you work with, and the great thing about David and the great thing about this theatre is—I've worked here five separate times over the span of 27 years, and every time I come back it's better and better in terms of looking to your left and right and the people you're working with. This cast is one of the best casts yet, when you get down the cast list and have actors like J. Todd Adams. Don John is a great part,

but I've known J. Todd forever and you couldn't find anyone better for that part. Then you look around at Margaret, for instance. Usually in summer Shakespeare festivals, you're down to student interns with some of those roles. But here you have someone like J. Todd . . .

Ivers: Our Boy is a student intern—Keaton. He's a student at SUU and he's amazing.

Livingston: Yes, but here you have people playing Don John who can play Benedick at other theatres. You have people playing Margaret who can play Beatrice at other Shakespeare theatres. Just the depth of the company here makes doing plays so much more satisfying and fun.

Martin-Cotton: I think when David was thinking about how to put this cast together, he picked some wonderful people who can, in a position of being unleashed and uncorked, run fully with the idea into Don Pedro's delight in becoming cupid. Larry Bull, whom you see as the Chorus in *Henry V* doing a beautiful and sober job, is delightfully wicked in a variety of ways that you don't always get to see in Don Pedro, and I do think David knew what he was doing.

Ivers: I love this cast so much and I love Larry. I've directed him before, and that experience was the one thing that convinced me I should cast him as Don Pedro. It's against type in the way he has moved with it, but I directed him in a production of *Twelve Angry Men* here a few years ago. The secret about that play was that you knew everyone's profession; and if you know their professions and what they do, it tells you everything you need to know about where to go. For instance, a guy owns a messaging service, so everything is in service to somebody else; of course, he's the loudest guy in the room. Larry Bull, Juror #1, gets picked as the foreman. He gets picked as the guy who's got to lead. He said, "How do I do this?" I originally said, "What's your job?"—you know, what's your job in life? He said, "Football—football coach." I said, "Ah. Assistant." That's what he is in the play. He's not the head coach; he is the assistant head coach. So

I said, "Now, you're the head coach." With Don Pedro, if we can find that same entrance, his light goes on. This isn't me imposing a role on him; this is me saying, "Oh, you're cooking with cilantro. I love cilantro. More cilantro! Load it up with cilantro." I'd see him get this goofy stance and say, "That. That guy." It lets us in, and it speaks to a prince who has done his duty for over two years in the war and has come home and does not have to be in that leadership position anymore. He's allowed to be in a place to serve others rather than lead others. There's a different kind of service there. I'm glad that it spoke to you because I find it delicious and suiting to my humor. I also find it oddly real, you know? When those guys are mucking around, and the ladies are mucking around, and they're in a place of sheer delight, you can't beat that.

Bahr: In prior years, the play selected for discussion has been the Henry V, which is a great production, or *Richard II,* the *Lear*, the *Hamlet* —the serious play, because we want to get that type of discussion into the ether. But a year ago, the board got together and said, "I want to talk about *Much Ado*"—because it has some genuinely remarkable depth. Why do we think that the comedies don't have that same beautiful depth? Look again. Those wonderful moments of darkness intensify the lighter scenes, and the glorious light helps us go deeper on the other side.

I'm very grateful for your comments, your questions, and for what you brought for this production. So, thank you very, very much. Please give a round of applause for this great *Much Ado* community. [*Applause*]