

Kenneth Branagh: A Life in Pictures

19 November 2011 at BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly

Francine Stock: Ladies and gentlemen, as actor, producer and director Kenneth Branagh occupies a unique position in British film, and indeed international film as well. So before I invite him onto the stage I'd like you to be reminded with this little montage about his life in pictures.

(Montage of Kenneth's work)

APPLAUSE

Kenneth Branagh: Thank you very much. Can I just say thank you Francine, thank you BAFTA and thank you all for coming. It's, very nice, very special, thank you.

FS: We're going to start then, as we have to, with the early acting experiences. So, you arrive from Belfast here in England in 1970. And then school. The accent goes?

KB: [in Northern Irish accent] Yes, I came here with a very strong Northern Irish accent which I now love. But it was funny, the first couple of days here. I guess it must have been pretty broad or at least it was broad to the people who were hearing it. I suppose that was the first bit of acting, frankly, the first acquisition of an accent was at that period trying to be understood.

FS: So then school productions, I gather; anything in particular?

KB: I played Dougal in *The Magic Roundabout* in a touring production. We toured to other schools, I was ten years old, I was covered in a brown blanket. It was not a successful impersonation of Dougal, it looked pretty ragged, but we took it to schools with younger children even than us. But we were wildly excited.

And my teacher, Beryl Levitt, Miss Levitt, who directed this and was very much part of the amateur scene in Reading where I ended up at primary school when I was about ten, was a great friend of the sister of Ian McKellen. And so the story of Ian McKellen's career was one of the first that came to me through Beryl Levitt who said 'there's a young man you know, and he was from Bolton, northern accent, came to London etc.'

He had just had, at that time, a huge success at the Edinburgh Festival playing Edward II and she

showed this ten, 11-year-old a picture of Ian McKellen. There was a wonderful gesture he had, he looked so wonderful with the crown and everything, and so I guess that was my first introduction to a proper actor as well. A grown up, classical actor, was Ian McKellen while I was still playing Dougal.

FS: So even when you were beneath the brown blanket as Dougal were you one of those children who in the performance is kind of mouthing everybody else's lines and thinking 'Actually I want to get in there and organise it.' Was that already there?

KB: Well of course I don't think so but it might have been and certainly that very thing... We've had to cut scenes and stop takes because people have said 'You've got to stop mouthing other people's lines,' especially when directing things that you're in, and it's a two handed scene.

So you'd finish and you'd be so willing them to do the note that you'd just given them. I think Olivier did it with Monroe in *The Prince and the Showgirl*. But I don't think so, all I can say is I was very interested in the brown blanket, I was very interested in how that came about and how we did Dougal's fringe. It involved pinking shears and things.

I don't know, I asked about the pinking shears and what they were, and was told they were used especially in dressmaking. The lateral thing went out from there.

My third job was a television film which I saw here, 30 years ago, of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. A very good film, I thought, by Colin Gregg. When we were shooting it, I remember saying to Ken Westbury, the DP at that time, 'What are all these fancy little train lines that you have the camera on?' He said 'That's the track,' 'And what's this machine you have it on?' 'That's the dolly,' 'What do you mean dolly, why's it called a dolly?' I did absolutely begin to ask those kinds of questions early on just because it seemed magical, and I certainly wanted to sit on the camera and ride on the little railway track, there's no question about that.

FS: And your dream came true.

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KB: And my dream came true, though later on they wouldn't quite let you 'Ooh, we need insurance for this, you need to be strapped in,' that kind of thing. But no, I loved it, and in fact I rather envy Steven Soderbergh who operates the camera on all his movies, which I think is a wonderful thing to do.

They let me do it when we're setting up shots. Some people are absolutely wedded to video village as we now call it, to the monitor, but again rather like Olivier in *The Prince and the Showgirl*, or *Henry V*, the first picture I directed we didn't have video assist so you simply didn't have playback. I guess there was, but our budget didn't support that, so I would sit beside the camera having ridden the camera, checked the shot out. I loved it, loved the feel of the camera, terrible with those wheels, but I loved the feel of it. It's the only way to get a sense of the real image. And so that kind of intimacy with what's going on was usual to me.

FS: But RADA and then the RSC, this is not obviously saying film career at this point. Was there a sense at that point that film was really not quite right?

KB: I came into a business where it felt as though the film industry in this country seemed to be going through one of its periodic troughs, it was often famine or feast – that's what people who ran studios used to tell me – and it seemed ludicrous to imagine that one could have a film career.

There just seemed to be a dearth of production, and there still seemed to be, when I started, a sort of division between the idea of whether you could become a theatre actor or a film actor or a television actor; there was almost a three way division in the same way as previous generations had told me that way back, at a time again when Olivier was directing Monroe – sorry to keep referring to it, because it's so current – in the picture there was this sort of division between a West End actor and a classical actor.

Olivier was one of the first people to bestride the two, as it were, and indeed other mediums. But it seemed impossible, and in any case I was someone who had, pre-RADA, become very interested in acting through amateur dramatics; through reading hundreds of copies of Plays &

Players that told me about Olivier's National Theatre and how people like Michael Gambon and Anthony Hopkins, and Derek Jacobi and Geraldine McEwan and Maggie Smith all started in very small parts and then went through the ranks and had leading roles. That seemed to me to be a thrilling career to even aspire to. So the idea that on top of that you might be in the films as well was fairly exotic.

FS: After the RSC you co-founded the Renaissance Theatre Company, and then think of doing a film version of *Henry V* which you'd made a great success of on stage. But there was already a very well known version of *Henry V*.

KB: Of course, of course, and it's still a very well known and very brilliant film by Laurence Olivier. But in the nature of the classics the fact that in the theatre, 400 years later one's still doing them, the fact that you don't necessarily need to listen to a Beethoven symphony once, or by one person is indicative of the material itself. So a play like that will be done again.

FS: And what did you want to bring to it, particularly?

KB: A different emphasis on, from the centre of the film, the character of the king. He was going to be younger. I was about ten years younger [than Olivier] when I played it, and in a sense a chance to **see through a different use**, specific to a contrast with Olivier's film; often he started close with the big speeches and came back out and was at his widest at the end of the speech.

He felt that the emotion in Shakespeare's speeches, like for instance the ones in *Henry V* at the end of the St Crispin's Day speech or *Once More unto the Breach*, simply couldn't be contained by the film camera. And we, on the whole, went literally the other way. We'd start wide and we'd be very close by the time you got to "Cry God for Harry, England and St George."

So there was a sort of emphasis, if you like, on the youth and on the interior life. The 1944 film had an emphasis to do with propaganda and the war effort, etc, that led to the chivalric splendour and the amazing battle sequence, the great charge. But we felt as though the play was many, many things and one of them could be about a young man finding out what it's like to be a king.

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FS: We're actually going to see an example of that now, which is from fairly early on, and we see Henry surrounded by his lords and noblemen, just about to set off to France where there will be war. But at this stage there are the noblemen, but in amongst those noblemen there is a threat.

(Clip of traitors scene from *Henry V*)

APPLAUSE

FS: They don't want to see what's in that envelope, do they?

KB: They don't, no. It's a curious scene isn't it, and it was not one that was in the 1944 film, given that there was not a desire at that point to indicate that there could be traitors in an English military force. But not only is there, in what follows as well, a sense of hurt and betrayal from Henry but also there's the display to his fellows that if he discovers treachery he will encounter it with theatricality, with ruthlessness. He plays a very convincing game there and it makes him a very complicated leader. They don't expect this kind of second guessing to happen from the king, and if he can do that in this situation perhaps he'll be the right kind of negotiator when it comes to dealing with France.

FS: And were you absolutely clear, on this your first film – about how you were going to play things on stage? One gets the sense of it being this great venture where everybody's pulling together and you're working with the actors that you knew and loved; was it that straightforward?

KB: Well it's interesting you say 'Were you absolutely clear?' I can't imagine being absolutely clear about anything at that point. I knew that I'd been given the support by David Parfitt, distinguished former chairman of this organisation, and Stephen Evans who helped bring the finance together in a way that no one else could.

I knew that I had the opportunity, but there was a great big adventure to find out about how to make films. I suppose ignorance was bliss, Orson Welles once said if you're making a film either know very little or absolutely everything, and it was quite clear I knew very little then but I had a

strong instinct about the story and was excited by it.

Obviously the opportunity was wonderful, and to have a familiarity with the play and a sense of how certain scenes played, and where there was comedy and where there wasn't; but then to take advantage of things that one had seen on stage, that one felt could be especially served in film, for instance the role of the French king, played by Paul Scofield.

It was given a wonderful performance in the show I was in at Stratford with Sebastian Shaw, a great British actor, but Paul Scofield brought his unique Mount Rushmore presence to this part, and I remember I had read about the supposed mental illness of the King of France and when Paul was having a bit of a problem with the role in the two weeks of rehearsal that we had I remember being bold enough to give him a note.

I said 'Forgive me,' I wanted to say Sir Paul, but he wasn't Sir, I said 'Forgive me Paul, would it help to know that for long periods in the grip of this mental illness the King of France thought that he was made of glass?' And you saw his eyes light up, and I never had to say another word to him.

When he first comes into the movie his fragility is so compelling that watching it, knowing that that was something that sparked his imagination was exciting. I thought the film, and he, brought a dimension and an illumination to that character that one would not otherwise have seen without film, and without somebody of that talent.

FS: Immediately offers came in, and you went to America and there was a chance to do *Dead Again* and to play with genres and styles. Did you have favourite periods in film already?

KB: I liked thrillers very much, I like the golden period of Hollywood. I'm old enough to have been in a British television life in our domestic world where there were three channels and then four; where Saturday afternoon would always give you a classic Hollywood movie including many film noirs, with Barbara Stanwyck or Rita Hayworth. Those are ones that I remember particularly. Or films like *Laura*, the Otto Preminger film.

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All of that had an impact on being drawn to *Dead Again*. But the writer Scott Frank, who's since written *Get Shorty* and *Minority Report* had a real feel for the City of Angels and the world of Los Angeles in that period in the '30s was very, very exciting and exotic. So that was like a trip into a world of filmmaking that one had watched with wonder off the telly.

I remember we were at the Paramount soundstages, but we were at what used to be the RKO end of the Gower Street side of it. Walking in the first day to our first soundstage shoot, to be told that this was the stage on which Orson Welles had begun shooting *Citizen Kane* was part of the romance of the movie, of the subject matter and going there as a theatrical type landing in that genre, in that town.

FS: So a tremendously prolific period, you have *Peter's Friends*, you have *Much Ado About Nothing*, you win the Michael Balcon Award from BAFTA and you made *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, which seems to me a wonderfully reckless picture. It's a kind of crazy film in some ways, you just really went for it.

KB: Well we did, again one was aware that a classic in the James Whale film of 1930 or '31 was there, and subsequent incarnations of the story where Boris Karloff was such a memorable monster. And yet they were very, very different from the book itself and the idea was to respond to that. The book-end piece with Captain Walton, talking about encountering Victor Frankenstein on the ice, all of it, the environment was different to begin with.

But I think that was quite a wrench for movie audiences to sort of understand, their icon; their favourite was up there and this was by contrast... I think you're probably right; it's a good way of putting it, reckless. In a way there is a madness, there's Victor Frankenstein's madness in there, madness is maybe too strong a word but a passion to defeat death, partly motivated by simple anger that God seems to have this scheme that takes away people whom one loves, too early.

And, although it might be an immature attitude, combined with his scientific brilliance, the notion that he might in fact tackle that and defeat it is

reckless, hubristic, mad, inspired. The physical movement of the camera in the film, the sort of visceral physicality of the characters, all of it had a kind of crazed energy.

We had a huge set for Ingolstadt built down at Shepperton, we were on nine of the soundstages with big sets, it was big old fashioned movie-making and I guess, maybe yeah, had the seeds of a certain kind of madness in it.

FS: And of course you're also continuing to appear in other people's films as well, including *Celebrity* with Woody Allen, in which you 'are' Woody Allen. I talked to Will Ferrell a few months ago, and he said when he was in *Melinda & Melinda* it was an unconscious thing, you couldn't help it, you just fell into the speech pattern. Here [in the forthcoming clip] it is such a perfect inhabiting of Woody Allen that I can't believe you weren't aware you were doing it.

KB: Well I'll tell you about the letter, this is how I got the part. A letter arrived one spring day. It was from Woody Allen and I was wildly excited about this. I opened it very slowly and took it out, it said Woody Allen at the top and already I felt like I was in the movies. Very exciting.

It began 'Dear Kenneth Branagh, please look at the role enclosed,' this was a big thrill, I was getting the script not just pages. 'Enclosed is the film *Celebrity*, please look at the part of Lee Simon. When I wrote this part I knew that there was only one actor in the world who could play it. Alec Baldwin. And he's not available. So I thought for a while about Mel Gibson, but in the end decided that you would be more correct.' That was the ringing endorsement, followed by a wonderful line where he said 'Lee Simon is essentially a loser, but he is attractive to women, therefore no facial hair.'

FS: Maybe we should see an example of it straight away. The only context we need to know is that Lee is a writer, but he's an aspiring screenwriter, and in the clip we're about to see he wants to persuade the young star, Leonardo DiCaprio – obviously not playing Leonardo DiCaprio – to read his screenplay or at least appear in his film. But there are complications.

(Clip from *Celebrity*)

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FS: It's the little movement of the eyes towards the girls is actually more than Allen... Allen would have done it much bigger than that and you do it in a little way.

KB: You're very kind. The thing is I think the scripts of many of his films – in leading roles that are not played by him – depend on this comic energy, which is essentially *his* comic energy. Like Will Ferrell I didn't go into it thinking I was going to try and impersonate him but when I was trying, as it were, to be Alec Baldwin for the first couple of weeks, which I tried to be with a little bit of Mel Gibson – both unsuccessfully, obviously – really he stopped [me] constantly because there was a comic rhythm to do with hesitation, a drive across scenes and a fast talking element that the comedy was dependent on that couldn't help but be in the Woody style.

And also, I suppose, as many other people do – I certainly did – if you go in there as a worshipper, it's probably impossible not to be affected by being around the guy himself, although he's very mellow when directing, and very un-Woody like. His comic persona as a persona is reserved for that venue.

FS: And talking about the rhythm of comedy, of course you are one of the great verse speakers of our time. Shakespeare, and the rhythm of Shakespeare, is something that you wanted another generation, I guess, to appreciate, with your great project of bringing so many Shakespeares to the screen. We're going towards a little clip of *Love's Labour's Lost* which is from 2000, in which you call attention to the actual verse speaking and then do something quite radical and different with it. You really wanted people to appreciate what it was about the quality of the verse.

KB: Well, I simply wanted people to hear it in a way that they hadn't in other ways. There's nothing new in it, but it was perhaps a new way to think about doing it, in a film that ultimately wasn't successful in lots of ways but at the heart of it had an attempt to gather the *joie de vivre* of the Hollywood musical; the glamour, the romance, the sort of *soufflé* quality of it, the deliciousness of it, and bring it into a play – *Love's Labour's Lost* – that in part had that also,

because it was about four young men and four young women, the men take a vow to give up women and of course immediately four beautiful women arrive, and the challenge of that and all the comedy and romantic mishaps occur.

But along the way it seemed that there was some beautiful verse, and the iambic pentameter that has us beating out 'To be, or not to be, that is the question,' that is the underpinning of what Shakespeare does. It seemed possible to indicate in the fun form of tap dancing. And so we had a little go at that.

(Clip from *Love's Labour's Lost*)

APPLAUSE

FS: I suppose the whole question of the great Shakespeare project which you were doing one Shakespeare after another, at some limit it must also have been – although very challenging – it must have occasionally felt a bit limiting. You were taking on a huge project.

KB: It's interesting. For me the opportunity to do a film like *Love's Labour's Lost* was so extraordinary. We did it with a company called Intermedia; Nigel Sinclair and Guy East, two friends and producing colleagues from way back. Guy was the sales agent on *Henry V*, so to be able to work with them was great.

And just to have the opportunity of a rarely performed Shakespeare play, to be in this experimental format, was for me not limiting. It was releasing and thrilling. Not much fun when it doesn't work and people don't go and see it. But to make it, to actually have it and even see it futzing as it was, I haven't seen that in a number of years, I'm very, very thrilled that one ever got the chance to do it. It didn't feel like a limitation, but simply an application of one's passion.

FS: So around this time, you were playing a lot of leaders on screen. There's Shackleton, there's FDR and eventually there'll be Colonel Tim Collins; do you find the leader roles come quite often through the post?

KB: Well I suppose they do, maybe they just think you're a big know-it-all who is ready to boss people around. But we were talking earlier, we just met briefly earlier with my friend Sarah who's

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here, in the boardroom at BAFTA. When I was meeting Simon Curtis, the director of *My Week With Marilyn*, and David Parfitt the producer, David and I hadn't seen each other for a while. David, I think, was still chairman at that point, and there we were in the boardroom at BAFTA and the pair of us started to giggle. Why would we be in the boardroom at BAFTA? How could he possibly be chairman? How could he possibly be talking to me about playing Laurence Olivier? We were kids, we'd walk past this place in awe...

So you know, maybe there was something when the roles of great leaders came up that was about finding that part of them if you like. Some people do but FDR didn't necessarily expect to be a maker of great speeches at profound moments of history, a life of public service and politics that would bring you nearer to that, on the whole, than most things, yes.

But every letter, every document reveals as it were some version of what I've just described. People giggling in a boardroom at being at the grown-ups table. A look at the lives of so called great men or great leaders often reveals that human dynamic and I think if those parts did come it was partly because the work that I've done has revealed an interest in that part of such lives, which is – I think – a response to what people on the whole are interested in, as well as seeing them in the great and glorious moments.

FS: But there are other kinds of leaders as well, and of course you got the Emmy for *Conspiracy* for playing Reinhard Heydrich who was the prime mover in the drawing up of the final solution, so there you have leadership of another kind.

KB: Yes, and that was a very interesting role because that was the first one where – having just said what I have – it was very difficult to find redeeming features. It's a silly phrase, he was a very, very dark individual as far as one could see and through the script itself and through all the research that was done... I suppose, friends of mine have talked about when they play the role of the Scottish king in Shakespeare, which I'm not going to say in this theatre because I'm stupidly superstitious, but anyway the Scottish fella in Shakespeare.

They would say you get dreams and you would be possessed by things, and that the experience

of playing the role however technical you might be, however resistant to that kind of notion that the role gets to you in some way, was in fact the case. This certainly was the case with Heydrich, I found it disturbing to play, I found it a very, very disturbing part. I didn't sleep well. I found it very, very unsettling in my life because I suppose on a daily basis I found it profoundly difficult to understand how he could be the way he was.

FS: But then, to have a fairly absurd change of pace, you played Gilderoy Lockhart in *Harry Potter*, the fantastically self-regarding celebrity professor. Was that riffing maybe just a tiny bit on your charm?

KB: Well, you know one of the amazing things about that job? I'll give you a couple of examples. First of all, as many of the people in this room may know if you go to work on a film and you might get a contact sheet, just a way of understanding where everybody is, maybe it's 150 names. Maybe that would be quite a lot of names.

I remember getting the contact list on *Harry Potter* when I arrived, they said 'This is in case you need to get in touch with anyone,' there were 1,500 names on it. And then I went round Leavesden and it was 'There's the visual effects place that's inbuilt, there's the prop place that's sort of inbuilt,' and in another life maybe it would have taken me four, five, six weeks perhaps to film that part. It took nine months.

And I remember one of the fun things to do was we had to create an autobiography, I believe, called *Magical Me*, which featured in the story. So we created lots of photo shoots where he was dressed as an African explorer, or as a Himalayan adventurer or as a crooner, or as a He-Man on the beach.

Thirty or 40 of these things, utterly daft, delicious things which would take a day or two to get together and we'd go and shoot them at Leavesden. This was way ahead of actually shooting, and I remember the first day then was to do a scene in front of the class, if you recall the film. He talks about pixies, which he's allegedly in control of but in fact isn't. We had a full class of 30 people and I noticed that none of the actors I expected to be there were there.

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They said 'Oh no, you won't get the real ones this morning, you've got all the doubles this morning and you'll get all the stunt guys this afternoon and you'll get Dan and Rupert and Emma about six o'clock.' I said why and they said 'They have to go to school, that's why.'

So the whole thing had a different kind of energy, and I remember walking around the desks to see copies of *Magical Me* and thought that was interesting; they'd made 30 with the covers on, because they couldn't possibly have made 30 versions of the real thing, and I looked at every single one; and every single one had every single photo, everything was a completely detailed publication of *Magical Me*.

And there were things in the desk, I felt like we were in a Fellini film. He said you had to have things in the cupboards even if you didn't open the cupboards, people needed to feel it. On the *Harry Potters* that was the same. So it was a pretty magical experience.

FS: We'll move on to another authority figure, this is in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, a film that you made with the director Phillip Noyce, in which you play the man who was the architect of this really quite sinister scheme to eradicate mixed race aboriginal children. It was kind of a eugenics programme in some ways, wasn't it?

KB: Yeah. He talked of breeding them out.

FS: I think we're going to see a clip where he lays out his ideas.

(Clip of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*)

APPLAUSE

FS: It's that chilling logic again, isn't it?

KB: Yes, very chilling. The real fellow, A.O. Neville, reported at the time as 'a good man,' [this] was how he was described by those who knew him. Wrong-headed, a product of his society, very committed, in his own family regarded as a good father and very good it seemed in his dealings with aborigines that he worked with. But under the scheme and vision of what he just articulated, represented, which was from a world that simply didn't accept how extraordinary and appalling it was.

FS: Because the programme that he initiated went on in one form or another until quite late on, didn't it, until the '60s or '70s?

KB: Early '70s I think.

FS: Did the film itself raise controversy at the time?

KB: It did, I think it was a very important film in Australia, a very important film to the director Phillip Noyce and to the screenwriter Christine Olsen. Everything about it brought so many things to the surface in Australia, it was a brave thing to do. It was a brave thing to discuss and debate. It was important because it was very, very difficult, very knotty and brought up more than single issues; it brought up issues of national identity and of what is to be done in the wake of a colonial past with colonial policies and a historical legacy which is murky and difficult.

So it was a sort of explosive picture, but finally one that was very positive in the way it moved forward a debate and discussion of that which had gone before.

FS: It's impossible to list everything that you're doing during this period, but a complete change, you do *The Magic Flute* as opera, because you haven't done it, because you've always loved it?

KB: I hadn't done it. It came in an unusual way because Peter Moores, a brilliant man and a philanthropist and patron of the arts determined that in addition to the recordings of opera that he's been presenting for years, and for all of the sponsorships of young artists in opera that he has been behind, [he had a] belief that opera could be something enjoyed as it was for him. [He's] from a background that might not otherwise have done it, and [knew] that there needed to be a way in. In his view, one way in was to do it in English, and meant that the next logical step for him was to make a film.

He wanted someone who he felt maybe understood how that transition might occur, or come at it from a different perspective. So he, I think, was encouraged by the work that I'd done with the Shakespeare films, and it was an unusual venture in as much as it was financed independently, and one was left – once one had

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produced a screenplay, which I did with Stephen Fry who did a fantastic libretto for it – we were left to get on with it.

It was really a fantastic experience to be able to cross two or three years, to learn a little more about the opera world and to get to know that opera and that music as closely as one did. It was very inspiring and a wonderful venture.

FS: So we're now getting to about 2008 and it's time to introduce a certain Swedish detective, I think.

KB: Yeah [laughs].

FS: Now there were the novels, and there was a Swedish television series as well. How did you feel about the detective to start with?

KB: Wallander himself or the genre?

FS: The whole genre.

KB: Well, I read a lot of crime fiction and still do....

FS: So you knew about him already?

KB: I did. When it came along, I was partly involved in getting together the English series because I'd happened upon him. In terms of Scandinavian fiction I'd started with an Icelandic novelist called Arnaldur Indridason who has what you might call a second cousin to Wallander as his hero in his books.

That led me to the *Wallander* stories, so I read them all, I read all the novels. *The Troubled Man* hadn't been published at that point, the so called last of the novels, but I read them all in, I suppose, a period of three or four months. They were very moreish, and I read them in order, something stuck; the combination of the mysterious lands of southern Sweden, or Skane, and of this David Lynchian town of Ystad that seemed on the surface placid and calm but seemed to have at least as many murders as Midsomer does.

It can't have that many murders, actually can it. With this, as we put it in one of the early films, poet-detective, was something that might be very unusual to present on television. So I was after the rights at the same time as Ole Sondberg

from *Yellow Bird* who's since gone on to do *Dragon Tattoo*, etc, and Andy Harries from *Left Back* here and we all got it at the same time.

FS: We're just about to show a clip but I quickly wanted to ask you, you can tell even from the opening of the first episode, they're very cinematic too. They may be television productions, but from that first episode with the yellow rape field and Anthony Dod Mantle's cinematography, that was very much part of the original concept presumably?

KB: It was to be very pictorial, to be imagistic, to understand that television procedural drama need not necessarily be photographing people talking where the denouement that was mostly verbal and through text. There is an expression in the films, we keep inviting the directors to truly author it, you know, we haven't really established – I don't think we have, because we're still making them at this very moment – a sort of style.

There's no style bible that says Wallander has to do this every episode, or he has to do that. So the invitation is for the director to respond through images, to tell the story and cut as much dialogue as he possibly can and still provide a good story, but to do it through the visuals.

FS: And in the excerpt we're about to see, this is really to do with personal relationships, it's to do with his father and in time with his daughter.

(Clip from *Wallander*)

APPLAUSE

FS: Jeany Spark is your daughter in *Wallander*. The fact that you're now in the third series, is this necessarily the final series?

KB: I don't know. The audience decides I think but this covers a couple of books, *The Dogs of Riga* and *Before The Frost*. It also has a film from a very effective short story about Wallander from Henning Mankel called *An Event In Autumn*, but there is *The Troubled Man* which we haven't done and also there's an African one called *The White Lioness* which we talk of potentially doing. So who knows, there might be three more to do.

FS: And for you, you always find more and interesting facets of him as you go along?

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KB: Well, having said that it feels a bit free form, that he doesn't have Columbo's mac etc. He doesn't have a series of things that particularly characterise him, except – one might say – misery, and in the first film of the new series which is called *An Event In Autumn*, even I put the script down at the end of that one and went 'Bloody hell, wow, that's a tough time he has in that film.'

But on the way it becomes very, very illuminating and it's quite touching in that film he says, when someone points out how tough it is to be around him, he says, 'Well I think I'm basically quite a cheerful person.' I think he thinks he is. But he does empathise, sympathise; feel the pain and the appalling nature of these violent crimes.

In our version, our version is particular, it's our response to the material, and in it he's quite an emotional person. And that, for a Swede, is sometimes a surprise. They perhaps sometimes expect not to be, in the way that he is, but I found plenty of Swedes who are.

FS: And I suppose one of the great joys of it is actually that it is the kind of series that allows you enough time to travel with him, into his reveries.

KB: Well we try to, yes, and also again through images and just watching and experiencing taking people into that landscape. It is a landscape and we're out there at the moment, I'll be back there tomorrow night. On Friday we were shooting a scene by the beach, and basically the quality of the light is very, very unusual. That autumn light really was magical.

We were, of course, finding a horribly mutilated body, but the sea and the vast landscape make you arrive as tiny figures in the landscape to this appalling act and you turn around and there's this great carpet of Earth stretching endlessly, as are your questions about this crime and the two things somehow go together, and to be there doing that adds some magic into the web of it. It really has been feeling as we've been doing it this time that you're walking into the kind of shot that you might expect in a Bergman film or something.

FS: So from that kind of contemplation, though it's certainly not without incident, to *Thor* and superhero action adventure on a vast scale. A

number of people were quite surprised when they heard that you were taking that on as a directing project.

KB: Yeah, maybe I was thinking this is my Scandinavian period; I had the Swede on the telly and the Norseman in the films. And I've played *Hamlet*, I've played the Dane on the stage a lot. Well, it was a surprise to me, but I was familiar with the character from my childhood. And was full of vivid memories of this mixture of superhero and archetype wearing brightly coloured clothes, but somehow inside all that having a very sort of atavistic kind of quality, well a Viking quality basically that was entitled and brutal.

That kind of darker energy, very primal energy, underneath this comic book material seemed like something that I was very drawn to. It didn't seem to me a vastly different world to *The Magic Flute* in a strange way. The myths that are drawn together in this case, with incidents that occur on Earth, and in one of the nine realms at least and in other parallel universes.

People fly and cross time and have superpowers, all of those things which frankly *The Magic Flute* messes around with a little bit as well, was the kind of thing that was so exotic and extravagant that it was made for cinema.

FS: It was, but in terms of the way you actually make a film like that, it's difficult to think of anything that's travelled further from *Henry V* where you may have to deal with a horse and some elements, but on the whole here you've got these vast special effects; entire elements of the drama that actually physically aren't there when you're shooting. You've got this enormous cast, it must have been exhausting in a way that nothing else is.

KB: Exhausting in a way that nothing else has been, and stimulating in quite a different way. You really had the choice of loving the fact that you were lucky enough to be in this position, having a time in Hollywood that I hadn't had, I'd visited but I'd never really stayed and worked there.

It was ludicrously exciting to walk in on the first day, even though your heart is pounding when we were on a big soundstage and we had, I

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don't know, 25 frost giants who'd been up since two o'clock in the morning being swathed in prosthetic make-up, and we had four or five camera crews, we had all of the principals in their costumes for the first time, we had one enormous soundstage half of which was a built frost giant interior with vast columns, throne rooms, etc., and the other side was green screen.

We had that gaggle of visual effects people who were there, ready to take me to my maths and physics lecture, which was 'How do you do this in 3D?' And then a lot of actors who wanted to know what the scene was about. And also the writer coming on with the script pages 'I've done it, I've got them for you!'; 'It's a bit late,' All at six o'clock on a Monday morning, whatever it was, January 11th 2010, imprinted on my brain. 'Okay, this is *Thor*, get on with it!' And I did.

FS: And you cast as Loki, the brother, Tom Hiddleston who's also being seen at the moment in *The Deep Blue Sea*. Now, he was a young actor you'd worked with before, but one gets a sense of you maybe mentoring and working with young actors in the way that perhaps in turn, before, around *Henry V* time, other actors had been towards you. Is it important to you, that kind of relationship?

KB: Well I suppose I've never felt that I was naturally a sort of teacher or mentor, but in the doing of it what I did feel was that I respected them enormously and learnt enormously from Tom and from Chris Hemsworth, and that it was eventually exciting to feel as though one could have a hand in at least offering them a way of doing things that was, perhaps, an example. It might be one that was very helpful to them, because they knew it wasn't what they wanted to do, or how they wanted to do it.

But I was grateful for their respect and their effort and their enthusiasm; they came at it with excitement about being in a great big movie – who wouldn't be? Wonderful part Loki, wonderful part Thor but they also wanted them to be rich with as much character as they could possibly have. They were wildly excited about working with somebody like Tony Hopkins, seeing Hopkins and Hiddleston square up against each other in the scenes, and Hopkins and Hemsworth, was fun.

They were genuinely thrilled by that, they were in awe of him, it was lovely to see Tony – as if I knew him intimately – Sir Anthony, as one thinks of him come on as Odin, Lord of the Universe, at the top of a big set of stairs. We shoot up this way so he always looks bigger and taller and everything else.

We give him the status cinematically, and these lads being both in awe of him but absolutely determined to score in the scene. So there was the right kind of energy of wanting to be up to speed. And actually, that quality at the centre of the film of just excitement about performance was one of the things that, because it's so familiar to me, one of my special interests, that when you were slightly overwhelmed by decisions you needed to make about a shot you had to choose because the visual effect was going to take 18 months to produce, then that kind of pressure was alleviated.

FS: And now we're going to come right up to date with *My Week With Marilyn*, which is a film set in 1957 and based on Colin Clark's memoir about a time he was working as a gofer on a film being directed by, and also starring, Sir Laurence Olivier as he was at that stage; actor-director, dealing with Marilyn Monroe as his co-star.

So presumably there is a kind of circularity about this because of course you may be sick of the comparison but people did say early on around the *Henry V* time, and of course *Hamlet* following after, that you were the Olivier for the latter half of the 20th century. And then you get to play him. There's a kind of irony in that, isn't there?

KB: Well, it was a surprise to be asked to do it, and David Parfitt in fact said they thought they wouldn't ask me because they knew I wouldn't want to do it. But then they knew what they had on the page, and on the page was not some grand biopic of the two of them, but as the title might suggest [it's] a week across the filming of the movie *The Prince and the Showgirl* at Pinewood in the middle of the '50s. It was actually one year earlier, it was 1956 I remember because it coincided with *Look Back in Anger* and Bill Haley coming over, rock and roll, Elvis, Marlon Brando, everything was particularly concentrated in that year.

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And there in this little pocket of our business was this movie going on which ought to have been a wonderful, wonderful experience. Marilyn Monroe was the biggest movie star in the world, she'd just married Arthur Miller, she was personally very, very happy. Just a few weeks into that marriage this film was being produced by her own production company, Marilyn Monroe Productions, financed by Fox for whom she'd now made some huge blockbuster movies, so she was the biggest movie star in the world.

Laurence Olivier was widely regarded as the greatest actor in the world and he had this light comedy vehicle by a great playwright, Terence Rattigan, that had been a big success on stage with Olivier and his then wife Vivien Leigh. It seemed like the perfect marriage of two artists in fine form but in fact they just didn't get on.

FS: And we're going to see one of the reasons possibly why they didn't in this excerpt with Michelle Williams, of course, as Marilyn Monroe.

(Clip from *My Week with Marilyn*)

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FS: Very poignant too, because that was her whole struggle with the method, to be a great actress.

KB: He did say it apparently [the line about her trying to be sexy 'Isn't that what you do?'] many people recorded this moment, he may not have said it exactly like that but at one moment of frustration, this is at the end of a sequence where we're on Take 5,000. She once went missing for three days, and indeed three days that were part of the *My Week with Marilyn* of the title, when she appeared to disappear with the third assistant director. But he was definitely at his wit's end.

FS: And in terms of you playing him, there are so many aspects of him that you could pick up on, what did you decide to concentrate on?

KB: Well the fun thing was to try and physically transform a bit. He didn't have facial hair, he would have been well cast in a Woody Allen film, but he did have this wonderful square chin with a cleft in it. He didn't have the large spots on my chin that I have, so we took those away, we put

a prosthetic chin piece on, we gave me a bottom lip, nice to have a lip for once in my life, and that would take about two and a half to three hours when we were also doing the hair and the very arched eyebrows. He had two looks, him as himself – he was very well turned out, he was a wonderfully handsome man – and then a rather more theatrical look for the role he played in the film of the duke.

I would listen to him, on headphones; give his dramatic reading of the Bible which he does in its entirety. It's quite something. And I watched everything, there are a couple of wonderful documentaries, Melvyn Bragg did a sensational one in I guess the early '80s on Olivier. But there's a marvellous conversation he has with Ken Tynan on the stage at the Old Vic in the early '60s on great acting.

You know, one just tried to find a bit of that voice [slips into an impersonation] he had a bit of that voice, he had a curious kind of lisp. We were talking earlier on about how he was one of those people who was very quiet when he wanted people's attention, people would lean forward. He just had complete command over his voice and he was a chameleon actor, so in the course of any one day people like Mr Hopkins and Mr Jacobi who both worked with him extensively would say that he'd be many, many parts, all of them wonderful.

But Gielgud used to say of him that it was sometimes hard to find the man himself, so in this little snapshot of their world it was interesting to play him at a moment – he was exactly the same age as I am now – and it was kind of a mid-life crisis moment for him, it seemed. That's what he wrote of consequently. He was looking for Marilyn to renew him, to associate him with the new and the youthful and the vigorous and the sexy and everything.

Not that he wasn't those things, but he felt that he was becoming a bit too Establishment. And although it didn't really work for the performance in the film, I don't think, with all humility it's not one of his best I don't think.

But he then went on to do a transcendently brilliant performance as Archie Rice in *The Entertainer*, which seemed to benefit from, I don't know, whatever the experience of

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watching Marilyn or the Brandos etc, whatever way he connected with it he did break through and the 'stuffed shirt' that the New York Times described his performance as, it was partly character, he was still magnificent to watch but just by his own extraordinary standards it maybe just wasn't the finest. But he certainly became a quite different actor after that.

FS: And what do you think he would make of your portrayal of him?

KB: When Derek Jacobi played Mr Puff in *The Critic*, and Oedipus in a double bill of characters and plays that Olivier had made famous – and daringly so in the '40s at the Old Vic – Derek did it at the Birmingham Rep just after he'd left the National. Olivier sent him a telegram on the first night which simply read 'cheeky bugger,' I suspect I'd be very lucky if I got a cheeky bugger remark from him, but maybe that's what he'd think.

FS: Well time now for me to get some questions from the audience.

Q (from the floor): We've touched on your later television career but if my memory serves me rightly the first time I encountered you was in *The Billy Trilogy* which was on Play for Today.

KB: That's correct.

Questioner: I just wondered if you'd like to say a few words about transition from television into film, and the fact that we no longer have such vehicles as Play for Today?

KB: My very first job was to be in a Play for Today. The BBC, as you probably all know, ran this strand of new writing that would play in the middle of the week, Thursday night, half past nine, it would be 85 minutes maybe 90 minutes. This was a drama about a working class Protestant family in Belfast and one of its characteristics was that it was about the family and about their internal drama, set against the Troubles but not just about the Troubles.

And that, at the time, was a fairly new idea. It introduced the accent a little more firmly back into people's consciousness, and these were plays I guess that would draw audiences of millions. This was in 1981, Channel 4 had just

arrived, but it was possible to be in a play where no one was necessarily a name, where there was no great discussion about marquee value or what would draw the audience.

It was simply about the work itself, in this case a very fine writer Graham Reid, an unusual take on a subject that was part of the news, because the violence in Northern Ireland at that time was very significant in the lives of everyone in this country. I miss that possibility; and the possibility when I was a young actor and emerging from drama school that one could go and interview and try and get a job in any number of these kinds of things.

There were a vast number of them and a key memory is walking into the North Acton rehearsal space for the BBC and seeing the room number for that particular play *Too Late To Talk To Billy*, amongst a dozen other shows all rehearsing there. Half of them were dramas and half of them were light entertainment shows, including I remember Morecambe & Wise [was one] and being very, very excited.

I mourn their passing, in the wake of the transmission of that show I remember people in the street for the first time walking up and talking about the show. Not being necessarily impressed that you were in a TV show, but talking about the impact of the play. A woman in Leeds, I remember, said the accents were immaterial and the place was immaterial 'That was just like us.' She found it illuminating.

Q (from the floor): Hello Mr Branagh, how did it feel going back to Belfast, at the Lyric, for *The Painkiller*? Any thoughts about bringing it to London?

KB: I was at the Lyric Belfast just a month ago to do this French farce *The Painkiller*, which was adapted and directed by Sean Foley. It was absolutely fantastic, the new theatre there is state-of-the-art and wonderfully designed, the auditorium is very, very friendly and very good to watch and perform in. It was a sensation.

And great to play in a farce and have a little taste of the strange mathematics of farce. It almost feels like a choreographed mathematical event to get in these two adjoining hotel rooms everything to do with the musical flow of one

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door closing, another door opening, man falls, man gets up, sound is made, joke is delivered.

All of it was quite an unusual orchestration so as an actor inside it, it was fascinating to play something that had to be so technical and then eventually, so emotional. Sean Foley did a great job. We're talking about bringing it to London. Rob Brydon did a fantastic job in it, and it was a very enjoyable experience. So I hope very much that some time in the next 12 months it will be on in town here.

FS: The plot relies on the two of you sort of exchanging identities, doesn't it?

KB: It does, it's about two men, in fact it has quite a history. Francis Veber wrote it, it was very successful on stage in France in the early '70s, it became a French movie called *L'emmerdeur* which I think literally means 'pain in the arse,' and it became a film called *Buddy, Buddy* which was Billy Wilder's last film, starring Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon.

So the essential situation which is, one man comes to a hotel to ring his wife, who's left him, and threatens to commit suicide unless she visits him. Another man comes to a hotel to assassinate the gangland boss who will arrive shortly at the courtroom outside. Their rooms are next to each other, there is an adjoining door. That's all you need to know.

Q (from the floor): I authored The Marilyn Scandal so I know a little bit about the scenario of Marilyn Monroe. It was Arthur Miller who bad-mouthed Olivier's working with Marilyn during this kind of a Terry Rattigan play that got Olivier to look for other kinds of working class dramas and things. So it was Miller who subverted Marilyn in this scenario. I think the girl who plays it; the actress [Michelle Williams] gives an extremely poor representation of Marilyn Monroe. I mean, she was a gorgeous, gorgeous woman and she might have talked like that but I don't really think she did. Did you feel that the portrayal of Marilyn in any way was as great and as gossamer as Marilyn Monroe actually was?

FS: Can I just ask, have you seen the whole film, or have you just seen that little bit?

Questioner: That bit.

KB: Ah, then I think that you will be surprised and won over by a really remarkable performance by Michelle Williams. One of the things she manages to do, I think, is to touch on many, many elements of frankly the unknowable mystery and allure of Marilyn but some of it was getting caught up in scenes like this. There's a sequence that precedes this which, to some extent, gives you the context of why she ends up talking like this. But I think you'll be quite captivated by what she does.

Questioner: Are you a fan of Marilyn Monroe?

KB: Yes, is the answer to that.

FS: It's very difficult somebody saying no, actually.

KB: Well it's a curious question, because do you know I think many would dispute that she necessarily produced any great screen work but that she undeniably was a great screen icon, if not necessarily a great screen actress.

Questioner: I think that's untrue, I think she was a great actress and a great comedienne. Do you like her?

KB: Absolutely.

Questioner: Which is your favourite film?

KB: *Some Like It Hot*.

Q (from the floor): A couple of questions really, from listening to this evening a lot of things come to you; you were offered a lot of things, are there things that you passionately go and fight for? Also, what are your burning desires for the future?

KB: Well I suppose maybe one gives the impression that things have come to one; definitely the Shakespeare films were ones that one went out and just banged every kind of drum in relation to trying to get finance or persuade actors or make it happen, basically. There was no question about that. But it's also true of things like any directing gig these days, I think, has to involve you being passionately engaged with it. So you know, the project may come to you from perhaps an independent producer or a studio, but on the whole it doesn't

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come all neatly packaged. So there's some element to which you have to go right towards the project and if it's possible – if you respond in this way – you have to feel it.

You have to be involved with it, particularly when it comes to directing, it's such a long time to be involved with something, often fraught with such dramas and pain along the way and often humiliation and lack of success that you need to be absolutely passionately involved in the sort of quality of it, and what you think of it. So even when an opportunity comes your way you have to go and be worthy of it, if you like. I think that's part of what happens.

There are some other Shakespeare films that I would like to make, for sure, and I think there is a story of some of my time in Belfast that I'd very much like to do. More writing is what I think I should like to pursue, that could become film. I suppose that's where I'm headed.

Q (from the floor): I'd just quickly like to say that I was 11 when I saw *Henry V* in the cinema, it was my first exposure to Shakespeare and it created a love of Shakespeare that I've had lifelong so I'd just like to thank you for that.

KB: Well thank you, it's very nice of you to say.

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Questioner: My question is actually about *My Week With Marilyn*, which I have seen the whole film, and you're right she is wonderful throughout it. When you were creating the film within the film, when you were Olivier playing the Duke, how much studying of the film did you have to do to capture that? I'd seen *The Prince and the Showgirl* for the first time earlier this year and it was amazing, it was like watching the film again.

KB: Well thank you, it was a process of watching it again and again, and then there were some nominated scenes that we were going to do. There were some very provocative ways in which Olivier delivers it, you feel as though he brings his knowledge of how it played in the theatre – he played it for a year, nine months here at the Phoenix Theatre in town and they'd been on tour with it – so it was a part that he'd had great success with and had a chance to practice.

And his comic gifts were legendary, so his fun with the accent, his fun with curious pieces of timing is very much in the film. Not always successful perhaps, or as successful as they might have been on stage. And then occasionally you feel as though he lets go, he does let his hair down, he can do the perspiration bit and then the inspiration bit of course, he's a great artist.

And recreating some of that fun, which frankly what is quite an outrageous mid-European accent that he parlays for its comic value, was a process of just sitting down and watching and watching. Michelle and I both did that for hours; that was almost part of your daily ritual, to come up with this inflection.

Q (from the floor): How do you think your directing style has changed over the years, and do you have two or three tips to be an effective director?

KB: I hope that what I am learning still is when to say less. I used to say much, much more. I used to worry that one had to have everything ready. Maybe experience of being in situations where you clearly didn't have everything ready and something happened, something evolved, because many other talented people are involved and your job is to direct them, not necessarily to have absolutely everything pre-planned and pre-thought out.

And particularly when it comes to talking to actors I feel as though I've understood a bit more about getting out of their way. And particularly as an actor, not trying to encourage them to do it how I'd do it, that's meaningless; but to just get the best out of them. I suppose it's that, not just actors but the entire crew, how does one create the circumstances where their best work will be available? And then to happily, happily continue to use the most useful phrase I ever discovered in directing, which I used first on *Henry V*, which is 'I don't know.'

That phrase is a very positive one, I can assure you. First of all you're honest, people see that. You don't know but maybe someone else will, it doesn't necessarily lead people to believe that you're a gibbering idiot incapable of decision-making. Sometimes you just don't know, but you will know, or you will be able to respond.

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And tips, I suppose on the either side of that being as prepared as you possibly can be in order to be prepared to throw it all out and be ready for the new and better idea. Just make sure it's better and not just new. I think *preparation* and *listening* would be my two top tips.

FS: I know we all know that we're glad we know that much more about you than we did before. So I want to thank you for your questions just now, but most of all on behalf of everybody I would like to thank you Kenneth Branagh for you're a Life in Pictures.

KB: Thank you very much, thank you.

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