



**Boston**

## BWW Review: A True King Rises with KING LEAR at Elements Theatre

[by Kristen Morale](#) Aug. 17, 2016



The truth be told, I have neither read nor seen performed Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and was therefore as unfamiliar with the plot and its characters as basically anyone can possibly be; I suppose it wasn't mandatory reading when I went to school, for what reason I cannot possibly imagine. Although, I have always loved a good play or musical with traces of a tragic story at its core - a plot that is both trying on the actors and audience and therefore

simply beautiful in how you are compelled to react to something with so much depth and significance. Having just seen *King Lear* at the Elements Theatre Company, not only was I introduced to a new theater in addition to a play I always wished to learn more about, but in such a way that created both a wonderful first impression of and precedent for this - nay, *any* - future Shakespearean production I plan to see. Even though this show is one of the more tragic ones you are ever bound to see, it really is a true king of a performance to behold.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* comes to the Elements Theatre Company, being performed in the beautiful outdoor theater at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor, now directed by Danielle Dwyer, CJ. This incredibly dark story, complete with an abundance of vicious characters who allow their lust for power to completely dehumanize them (and others), provides enough drama within its almost-three hours than I had ever anticipated. It plots the innocent of heart against the power-hungry vultures who are all tragically dealt the same fate; it is a story where the idea of retribution is brought about by the cruel hands of human beings who believe themselves to be gods amongst men, caring so little for any sort of fate that could possibly deal them what is so deserved of their malicious ways. It is a work so saturated with hate and conniving that it is difficult to find the light shed by those few momentarily good acts which occur in this show; yet, what would Shakespeare be without all that?

To explain *King Lear* in a nutshell (and it helps to look both the synopsis and the incredibly helpful character guide depicted on the wall in the inner sections of the theater), the king of Britain chooses to relinquish his title and distribute the wealth of his kingdom amongst his three daughters; the daughter who is best able to show the most affection she has towards him will receive the largest share. Goneril and Regan win his favor with false flattery while the youngest (and King's favorite) Cordelia simply states her love without wishing to participate in this contest of "love." King Lear becomes so outraged by her actions that he not only disowns his youngest daughter yet then divides her share amongst the two others and their husbands. Lear is soon mistreated by the lot of them, forcing him to flee while the Earl of Gloucester, a nobleman of Lear's court, is given the false knowledge by his son Edmund that his other son Edgar wants to take his father's life. From there ensues so, so much more that I would ruin the ending if I continued further; let's just say that these characters, whether their eyes are gouged out, they die by the sword's edge or a number of other horrible ways only Shakespeare can bring full circle in such a masterful way, this really is quite the production to see.

As I mentioned before, this is my first experience with both the theater itself and this particular work of Shakespeare's, and I am more than happy that I was invited to see this show. Everything about this production is awe-inspiring, from the intricate yet natural looking set (kind of like the idea of a French garden) to the wonder of the audience actually feeling as though it is a part of the story being told because of both the proximity of the actors and the overall "feel" of the show, there really isn't anything the least bit negative to say about this production.



I was especially amazed by how talented a cast this is, and reading the program over further I discovered that these actors are indeed masters at their craft, having trained at the Royal Academy of Performing arts and the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#), just to name a few. These actors and the extraordinary performance they gave really makes Shakespeare's words seem so easy to roll of the tongue, when in reality I can only imagine how much rehearsal goes into a production such as this - not only due to the stamina needed to get through a play of such length, but also how each actors stays in character so unbelievably well.

The costumes are perfect, the fight choreography is not only impressive but also has people worrying what would happen should an actor forget to duck while a sword is being horizontally swung, and the acting is honestly superb. Although there are too many people involved with this show to possibly list everyone, please know that this first experience of mine with Elements is really something that I will remember because of the theater's professionalism, the talent of those involved and how easy it is to see how much both cast and crew alike care for the making of a splendid production - one that people are bound to remember well. I highly recommend this to anyone who is either a fan of Shakespeare (or just of really fantastic, memorable performances in general), who has not yet ventured into one of Shakespeare's epic worlds or just truly wishes to see a performance of meaning that one can do absolutely nothing but enjoy - this one will not disappoint.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* began performances at the Elements Theatre Company, outdoors at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor on August 12th and will continue thru

August 21st. The performance schedule is as follows: this Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 8:00, with a special pre-show dinner at 6:00 p.m. on the 20th. Guest speaker [Tina Packer](#), founding artistic director of [Shakespeare & Company](#), will be the guest speaker before the August 19th performance, and August 18th is a special students' performance, offering free admission and featuring a 7:30 p.m. discussion with Artistic Director Danielle Dwyer, C.J. Tickets are \$35 (\$30 for seniors) or \$65/\$60 for dinner and performance and; they may be purchased at [elementstheatre.org](http://elementstheatre.org) or by calling the box office at 508-240-2400. Please come and see a wonderful production, and enjoy the show!  
(Courtesy Photos)

Chatham

Dark Sky.**34°**  
and rising**Flurries**

Wind: 15 mph (NW)



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## Elements Mounts Profound 'Lear' In Year-Long Shakespeare Celebration

18 August 2016

By: Ellen Petry Whalen

Topics: Local Theater



A scene from Elements Theatre Company's "King Lear."

George Bernard Shaw once said, "No man will ever write a better tragedy than 'Lear.'" Doing justice to Shakespeare's words is no easy feat. Elements Theatre Company deftly portrays King Lear's tragic life with spectacular pageantry and suspenseful swordplay befitting the grand ruler.

The almost three-hour-long story begins with the aging King Lear of Britain (Brad Lussier) abdicating from his throne. Intending to divide the kingdom between his three daughters, he publicly puts forth a challenge: the daughter who convinces him that she loves him the most will get the largest share.

As his eldest daughter Goneril, N. Kate Shannon is the first to poetically proclaim her love for King Lear. Upping the ante, Stephanie Haig is even more gratuitous as Regan. Playing Cordelia, Sarah Hale is earnest and truthful in her reply, "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth: I love your majesty according to my bond; nor more nor less."

Quick to temper, Lear not only banishes his favorite daughter for her inability to flatter him, but also his trusted advisor Kent for defending her. Christopher Kanaga is a steadfast Kent, effortlessly changing his voice to a cockney accent to conceal his character's identity, so he can continue to serve his beloved king.

As Lear, Lussier expresses a bounty of emotions fluently, as the former ruler slowly loses all that is dear to him, including his mind — going from a proud, quick-tempered king to a nearly mad, grief-stricken invalid.

Lear's sons-in-law Cornwall (Peter McKendree) and Albany (Kyle Norman) rule the newly divided kingdom. However, Lear's daughters quickly tire of the aged king's antics and his 100 knights, along with one outspoken soothsayer Fool, laudably played by Rachel McKendree. Feeling disrespected and betrayed, Lear flees running into a wild storm on the heath.

In a subplot, Edmund (Andy Talen), the opportunistic bastard child of the Earl of Gloucester, decides to get the land he desires, he must take it from his legitimate half-brother Edgar (Luke Reed), by claiming Edgar is plotting against their father. Peter Haig portrays the kindly Gloucester who, unlike Lear, is not quick to believe the ills spoken about his son. Talen is a very funny Edmund, comically delighting in his evil plan during his many asides. When Edgar goes into hiding as a madman, Reed magnificently transform from a royal into an unrecognizable creature, leaping about on all fours.

Director Sister Danielle Dwyer does not overlook a detail or subtext. The grand portrayal of "Lear" exquisitely unfolds outside, in the atrium of The Community of Jesus' Church of the Transfiguration. With a 12-foot- high wall (or more) of impressive greenery serving as the backdrop, the brick floor is mostly bare, save for a large stone altar, where most of the action takes place.

As always, Elements' fine acting is only rivaled by the intricate and authentic-looking costumes. Even in the summer heat, the actors are draped in ornamental furs, befitting their station, with oversized leather belting keeping them in place.

The energetic musical accompaniment, which includes tribal drums and fiddles, heightens the production's intensity. The realistic sword fights are the best I have seen on stage, with the imposing metal swords quickly flashing in the light.

This year marks 400 years since Shakespeare's death, and Elements has been celebrating for a year, starting with last summer's extravagant "Merchant of Venice" and ending with a profound "King Lear."

On opening night, tragedy almost struck, with rain steadily falling on the stage for much of the first act. But as the dry audience, seated under a surrounding enclosure, watched and marveled, the actors didn't miss a beat or an iamb, performing seamlessly as the storm added a realistic touch to the story's own powerfully scripted tempest.

**Details:**

**"King Lear"**

**At Elements Theatre Company, Rock Harbor, Orleans  
Through Aug. 21**

**Information and reservations: 508-240-2400**

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# CAPE COD TIMES

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## **Strong acting in Shakespeare's dark 'King Lear'**

**By Lee Roscoe / Contributing writer**

Posted Aug 13, 2016 at 5:37 PM

Updated Aug 13, 2016 at 5:37 PM

He is 80 years old. with the beginnings of dementia and dim-sightedness. He is King Lear, and at the start of Elements Theatre Company's production of Shakespeare's tragedy of the same name, he is still powerful as he seeks to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia.

Whether from age or by nature, the shortcomings in his character do not allow him to understand the difference between word and deed. His misreading of his daughters brings the kingdom to doom as he cruelly banishes Cordelia, along with her supporter, the Earl of Kent. Goneril and Regan, fearing Lear will squander the kingdom's wealth with his 100 knights and rowdy court, have righteous grievances with their father, but then they begin to plot against him for their own gain.

Lear's loyal friend, the Earl of Gloucester, has two sons: Edmund, a bastard; and Edgar, the rightful heir to Gloucester's land and title. A parallel tale of internecine sibling war and conspiracy unfolds.

Director Danielle Dwyer handles this production's huge repertory of players smoothly, as she reliably does, and illuminates hidden ironies in the text. And the acting here is strong. Nonetheless, this is one of Shakespeare's most convoluted plays, with a good deal of action taking place off stage and revealed only by characters' retelling of it. And there are inconsistencies in the plot that strain credulity, such as when Kent returns in disguise to care for Lear, and none recognize him.

Andy Talen is a wonderful Edmund, who with wit and elan dispossesses Edgar from his father's affections. His Edmund shows a motivation that makes you sympathize with him, though he is a villain, and he delivers a spoof of astrology and a view of the world's ills that seem uncannily timely.



Luke Reed's Edgar descends into bedlam, then returns to his noble grace of loyalty and love with style. N. Kate Shannon and Stephanie Haig as Goneril and Regan both have regal presences. At first, we empathize with them, then they reveal a likeness to another Shakespeare villainess: Lady MacBeth.

Brad Lussier's Lear changes from a commanding and irascible king to a sadly frail elder. Fearful of losing his powers, wandering the stormy moors with his rhyming Fool who speaks truth to power (the spry Rachel McKendree), losing his mind entirely, then reclaiming his heart as a father — Lussier's compelling performance has clarity and some powerfully emotional moments.

Also excellent are Kyle Norman's Duke of Albany, Goneril's increasingly disillusioned husband, and Peter McKendree's sadistic Duke of Cornwall, Regan's spouse.

There is some terrific swordplay and stage-fighting in the show, but also violence too dire for the very young. A live Celtic band creates atmosphere for this production.

Hans Spatzcek-Olsen's astounding Druidic set of woven flowers and trees juxtaposes the world of nature that is so much a part of the play against the civilized strength of Lear's castle set in the fortress-like atrium of the real Church of the Transfiguration. This is a perfect setting in which to hear the rich language of this very dark play about the folly and sin of monstrous human behavior.

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Entertainment & Life

## Theater Review: Epic 'King Lear' at Elements Theater Co.

**By Douglas Karlson**

Posted Aug 19, 2016 at 2:01 AM

It's exhilarating to sit in the front row of the outdoor atrium at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor watching the Duke of Gloucester's two sons, the good one, Edgar, (Luke Reed), and the duplicitous Edmund (Andy Talen), locked in well-choreographed and energetic combat, leaping across the stage, swords swinging and clanging.

The thought occurred to me, for a moment, that one false step and one of the realistic looking heavy swords might come in my direction. But I set that momentary concern aside.

The director, set designers and actors of this excellent production of "King Lear" by the Elements Theater Company know what they're doing.

To very briefly recap the play (and unless you are familiar with the play, it's not a bad idea to read a plot summary, as the cast is large and the family dynamics and back-stabbing gets complicated), this is the story of a king named Lear who decided to retire and divide his kingdom between his three daughters, Cordelia (Sarah Hale), Regan (Stephanie Haig) and Goneril (N. Kate Shannon).

But first he wants them to tell him how much they love him. Regan and Gonerill lay it on thick, but Cordelia, who does love him, refuses to flatter him with phony expressions of love.

Enraged, he disowns her and divides his kingdom between the other two daughters, who proceed to make their dad unwelcome in his former kingdom. King Lear wanders off into the wilderness.

Meanwhile, Edmund falsely accused his brother, Edgar, of treason against their father, Gloucester (Peter Haig), and Edgar flees. Gloucester is still loyal to Lear, but Edmund betrays him and Gloucester's eyes are gouged out.

Cordelia, married to the King of France, invades England and is captured. She is hanged, Gloucester dies of grief, Regan is poisoned by Goneril who commits suicide, and Lear dies of grief.

So by the end of this tragedy the cast is pretty well depleted, but not before delivering solid performances all around. This is a long play (about three hours counting intermission) that requires a great deal of preparation and dedication from the cast, and the director, Danielle Dwyer, who delivers a "King Lear" that is well orchestrated and performed from start to finish.

The rule of thumb in writing theatre reviews is to mention everyone in the cast, or just a few. Mention too many and leave one person out and injustice is done. But this is a cast too large to mention though everyone deserves credit.

Some of the roles, of course, are weightier than others. In particular, Brad Lussier deserves special praise for his powerful portrayal of the title character. Christopher Kanaga delivers a compelling performance as the Earl of Kent, and Peter Haig is memorable as the unfortunate Gloucester.

Andy Talen as the sneaky, nasty Edmund is highly entertaining, and so is Luke Reed who plays Edgar, both great roles.

Rachel McKendree delivers welcome relief as the fool. N. Kate Shannon, Stephanie Haig and Sarah Hale all deliver solid performances as Lear's daughters, and Kyle Norman and McKendree are convincing as the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall.

As we have come to expect at the Elements Theater Company, production values are exquisite. The set design has Celtic and Viking motifs, and both court and wilderness are well represented.

The costumes are beautifully designed, with careful attention paid to every stitch. The sound, smoke and lighting effects are well conceived and executed.

If you are not yet familiar with the outstanding Shakespeare productions at Elements, consider introducing yourself with “King Lear.”

### **If You Go**

**What:** ‘King Lear’

**Where:** Elements Theatre Company, Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans

**When:** 8 p.m., Aug. 19 to 21

**Tickets:** \$35, \$30 seniors; [elementstheatre.org](http://elementstheatre.org)

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