

NAXOS  
AudioBooks

CLASSIC  
DRAMA

William Shakespeare  
**King Lear**

Read by **Paul Scofield**

with **Alec McCowen • Kenneth Branagh** and full cast



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- 1 **Act 1 Scene 1**  
King Lear's Palace  
*Enter* KENT, GLOUCESTER, EDMOND  
KENT I thought the king had more affected the  
Duke of Albany than Cornwall... 1:34
- 2 **Act 1 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter* KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERILL,  
REGAN, CORDELIA  
LEAR Attend the lords of France and Burgundy,  
Gloucester. 3:22
- 3 **Act 1 Scene 1** (cont)  
LEAR Now our joy, Although our last and least,... 6:47
- 4 **Act 1 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER, FRANCE, BURGUNDY  
CORDELIA Here's France and Burgundy,  
my noble lord. 4:45
- 5 **Act 1 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Exeunt* LEAR, BURGUNDY, CORNWALL,  
ALBANY, GLOUCESTER, EDMOND  
FRANCE Bid farewell to your sisters. 2:19
- 6 **Act 1 Scene 2**  
The Earl of Gloucester's Castle  
*Enter* EDMOND  
EDMOND Thou, Nature, art my goddess;  
to thy law My services are bound. 1:36

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- 7 **Act 1 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER  
GLOUCESTER Kent banished thus? and France  
in choler parted? 6:28
- 8 **Act 1 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* EDGAR  
EDGAR How now, brother Edmond, what  
serious contemplation are you in? 1:52
- 9 **Act 1 Scene 3**  
The castle of Albany and Gonerill  
*Enter* GONERILL, OSWALD  
GONERILL Did my father strike my gentleman  
for chiding of his fool? 1:16
- 10 **Act 1 Scene 4**  
The Great Hall of the castle of Albany and Gonerill  
*Enter* KENT (*disguised*)  
KENT If but as well I other accents borrow... 0:32
- 11 **Act 1 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* LEAR [Knights and Attendants]  
LEAR Let me not stay a jot for dinner. 1:58
- 12 **Act 1 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* OSWALD  
LEAR You, you sirrah, where's my daughter? 2:50

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- 13 **Act 1 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* FOOL  
FOOL Let me hire him, too; here's my coxcomb. 3:41
- 14 **Act 1 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* GONERILL  
LEAR How now, daughter! What make that  
frontlet on? 3:43
- 15 **Act 1 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* ALBANY  
LEAR Woe that too late repents! 5:38
- 16 **Act 1 Scene 5**  
Outside the castle of Albany and Gonerill  
*Enter* LEAR, KENT (*disguised*), FOOL  
LEAR Go you before to Gloucester with  
these letters. 2:25
- 17 **Act 2 Scene 1**  
The Great Hall of Gloucester's castle, at night  
*Enter* EDMOND, CURAN  
EDMOND Save thee, Curan. 1:01
- 18 **Act 2 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter* Edgar  
EDMOND My father watches: O sir, fly this place. 0:58
- 19 **Act 2 Scene 1** (cont)  
*ENTER* GLOUCESTER  
GLOUCESTER Now, Edmond, where's the villain? 2:34

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- [20] **Act 2 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter* CORNWALL, REGAN  
CORNWALL How now, my noble friend,  
since I came hither,... 2:26
- [21] **Act 2 Scene 2**  
The entrance to Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* KENT (disguised), OSWALD  
OSWALD Good dawning to thee friend.  
Art of this house? 2:14
- [22] **Act 2 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* EDMOND, CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER  
EDMOND How now, what's the matter? Part! 7:17
- [23] **Act 2 Scene 3**  
Open countryside near Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* EDGAR  
EDGAR I heard myself proclaimed,  
And by the happy hollow of a tree 1:41
- [24] **Act 2 Scene 4**  
The entrance to Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* LEAR, FOOL, GENTLEMAN  
LEAR 'Tis strange that they should so depart  
from home And not send back my messenger. 4:22
- [25] **Act 2 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* LEAR, GLOUCESTER  
LEAR Deny to speak with me? 2:30

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- 26 **Act 2 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* CORNWALL, REGAN, GLOUCESTER  
LEAR Good morrow to you both. 3:18
- 27 **Act 2 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* OSWALD  
REGAN Is your lady come? 0:14
- 28 **Act 2 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* GONERILL  
LEAR Who stocked my servant? Regan, I have  
good hope Thou didst not know on't. 7:42
- 29 **Act 2 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER  
GLOUCESTER The king is in high rage. 0:51
- 30 **Act 3 Scene 1**  
Near Gloucester's castle  
*Storm still. Enter* KENT (*disguised*), GENTLEMAN  
KENT Who's there, besides foul weather? 1:56
- 31 **Act 3 Scene 2**  
The heath near Gloucester's castle  
*Storm still. Enter* LEAR, FOOL  
LEAR Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! 2:41
- 32 **Act 3 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* KENT (*disguised*)  
LEAR Who's there? 4:10

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- 33 **Act 3 Scene 3**  
A room in Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER, EDMOND  
GLOUCESTER Alack, alack, Edmond. I like not  
this unnatural dealing. 1:42
- 34 **Act 3 Scene 4**  
Outside a hovel on the heath  
*Enter* LEAR, KENT (*disguised*), FOOL  
KENT Here is the place, my lord. 2:51
- 35 **Act 3 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* FOOL  
EDGAR (within) Fathom and half; fathom  
and half; poor Tom! 5:15
- 36 **Act 3 Scene 4** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER (*with a torch*)  
EDGAR This is the foul Flibbertigibbet; he begins  
at curfew and walks till the first cock. 4:00
- 37 **Act 3 Scene 5**  
A room in Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* CORNWALL, EDMOND  
CORNWALL I will have my revenge ere I depart  
his house. 1:02

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- 38 **Act 3 Scene 6**  
Inside the hovel on the heath  
*Enter* KENT (*disguised*), GLOUCESTER  
GLOUCESTER Here is better than the open air;  
take it thankfully. 0:28
- 39 **Act 3 Scene 6** (cont)  
*Enter* LEAR, EDGAR (*disguised as a madman*), FOOL  
EDGAR Frateretto calls me, and tells me Nero is  
an angler in the lake of darkness. 2:15
- 40 **Act 3 Scene 6** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER  
GLOUCESTER Come hither, friend. Where is the  
king my master? 0:42
- 41 **Act 3 Scene 7**  
The Great Hall of Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* CORNWALL, REGAN, GONERILL, EDMOND  
CORNWALL [*to Gonerill*] Post speedily to my  
lord your husband; show him this letter. 1:09
- 42 **Act 3 Scene 7** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER  
CORNWALL Who's there – the traitor? 4:17



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- 43 **Act 4 Scene 1**  
Near Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* EDGAR (*disguised as a madman*)  
EDGAR Yet better thus, and known to be  
condemned, Than still condemned and flattered. 0:36
- 44 **Act 4 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER, OLD MAN  
EDGAR But who comes here? My father,  
parti-eyed? 4:24
- 45 **Act 4 Scene 2**  
A room in the castle of Gonerill and Albany  
*Enter* GONERILL, EDMOND, OSWALD  
GONERILL Welcome, my lord. I marvel our mild  
husband Not met us on the way. 1:58
- 46 **Act 4 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* ALBANY  
GONERILL I have been worth the whistle. 0:23
- 47 **Act 4 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Enter* MESSENGER  
MESSENGER O my good lord, the Duke of  
Cornwall's dead,... 1:34

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- 48 **Act 4 Scene 3**  
The French camp near Dover  
*Enter with drum and colours* CORDELIA, GENTLEMAN  
CORDELIA Alack, 'tis he: why, he was met even now,  
As mad as the vexed sea, 1:43
- 49 **Act 4 Scene 4**  
A room in Gloucester's castle  
*Enter* REGAN, OSWALD  
REGAN But are my brother's powers set forth? 2:23
- 50 **Act 4 Scene 5**  
The countryside near Dover  
*Enter* GLOUCESTER, EDGAR (*dressed like a peasant*)  
GLOUCESTER When shall I come to th'top of  
that same hill? 6:19
- 51 **Act 4 Scene 5** (cont)  
*Enter* LEAR (*mad*)  
EDGAR But who comes here?  
The safer sense will ne'er accommodate  
His master thus. 7:37
- 52 **Act 4 Scene 5** (cont)  
*Enter* GENTLEMAN  
GENTLEMAN O here he is: lay hand upon him.  
Sir, Your most dear daughter – 2:13

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- 53 **Act 4 Scene 5** (cont)  
*Enter OSWALD*  
OSWALD A proclaimed prize! most happy!  
That eyeless head of thine... 4:04
- 54 **Act 4 Scene 6**  
The French camp near Dover  
*Enter CORDELIA, KENT (disguised), GENTLEMAN*  
CORDELIA O thou good Kent, how shall I live  
and work To match thy goodness? 1:14
- 55 **Act 4 Scene 6** (cont)  
*Enter LEAR [asleep] in a chair carried by servants*  
GENTLEMAN Ay, madam: in the heaviness of sleep  
We put fresh garments on him. 4:31
- 56 **Act 5 Scene 1**  
The British camp near Dover  
*Enter with drum and colours EDMOND, REGAN*  
EDMOND [to an Officer] Know of the duke if  
his last purpose hold,... 1:04
- 57 **Act 5 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter with drum and colours ALBANY, GONERILL, Soldiers*  
ALBANY Our very loving sister, well bemet. 0:37

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- 58 **Act 5 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter EDGAR (dressed like a peasant)*  
EDGAR If e'er your grace had speech with man  
so poor, Hear me one word. 0:39
- 59 **Act 5 Scene 1** (cont)  
*Enter EDMOND*  
EDMOND The enemy's in view; draw up  
your powers. 1:10
- 60 **Act 5 Scene 2**  
The countryside near Dover  
*Alarum within. Enter with drum and colours LEAR,*  
*CORDELIA, soldiers over the stage and exeunt*  
*Enter EDGAR (dressed like a peasant), GLOUCESTER*  
EDGAR Here, father, take the shadow of  
this tree... 0:25
- 61 **Act 5 Scene 2** (cont)  
*Alarum and retreat within. Enter EDGAR*  
EDGAR Away, old man! Give me thy hand; away!  
King Lear hath lost... 0:48
- 62 **Act 5 Scene 3**  
The British camp near Dover  
*Enter in conquest with drum and colours*  
EDMOND; LEAR, CORDELIA *as prisoners*  
EDMOND Some officers take them away;  
good guard,  
Until their greater pleasures first be known... 2:39

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- 63 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Flourish. Enter ALBANY, GONERILL, REGAN*  
ALBANY Sir, you have showed today your  
valiant strain, 2:53
- 64 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Enter a HERALD*  
ALBANY A herald, ho! 6:34
- 65 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Enter GENTLEMAN [with a bloody knife]*  
GENTLEMAN Help, help, O help! 0:28
- 66 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Enter KENT [as himself]*  
ALBANY Produce the bodies, be they alive  
or dead. 1:40
- 67 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Enter LEAR with CORDELIA in his arms*  
LEAR Howl, howl, howl, howl. O, you are men  
of stones. 3:23
- 68 **Act 5 Scene 3** (cont)  
*Enter a MESSENGER*  
EDGAR Very bootless. 3:40

**Total time: 3:06:03**

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William Shakespeare  
**King Lear**

**CAST**

**The Royal House of Britain**

King Lear	<b>Paul Scofield</b>
Gonerill his eldest daughter	<b>Harriet Walter</b>
Regan his second daughter	<b>Sara Kestelman</b>
Cordelia his youngest daughter	<b>Emilia Fox</b>
Duke of Albany married to Gonerill	<b>Peter Blythe</b>
Duke of Cornwall married to Regan	<b>Jack Klaff</b>

**The Gloucester Family**

Earl of Gloucester	<b>Alec McCowen</b>
Edgar his elder son and heir	<b>Richard McCabe</b>
Edmond his illegitimate son	<b>Toby Stephens</b>

**Other characters in the play**

Earl of Kent (later disguised as Caius)	<b>David Burke</b>
Fool (both in the King's service)	<b>Kenneth Branagh</b>
King of Burgundy suitor to Cordelia	<b>John McAndrew</b>
King of France suitor to Cordelia	<b>Simon Treves</b>
Oswald Gonerill's steward	<b>Matthew Morgan</b>
Curan a courtier	<b>Steve Hodson</b>

**Knights, Gentlemen, Messengers, Servants, Soldiers, Attendants**

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Director	<b>John Tydeman</b>
Recording/Editing Engineer	<b>Mike Etherden</b>
Engineer	<b>Mark Smith</b>
Stage Manager	<b>Peter Novis</b>
Producer	<b>Nicolas Soames</b>
Scribe	<b>Beth Hammond</b>
Manager	<b>Annette Hales</b>

Recorded at Motivation Sound Studios, London, August 2001

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William Shakespeare

# King Lear

*King Lear*, perhaps Shakespeare's most profoundly searching and disturbing tragedy, is the story of a foolish and self-indulgent king who learns, late in life and after terrible suffering, the value of self-knowledge. The play asks the ancient questions about God and the meaning of pain with uncompromising directness, but provides no reassuring answers...

*King Lear*, probably dating from 1605, was first printed in a quarto version in 1608 and in a different form in the First Folio of 1623. It is the third in Shakespeare's great sequence of four tragedies: Hamlet (1600–01) and Othello (1602–1604) precede it, and Macbeth (1606) follows. It possesses the widest emotional and thematic reach of them all, occupying a space which achieves an almost abstract, symbolic quality while at the same time offering a painful concreteness of experience: it is both intensely personal and impressively universal, tackling the great questions of suffering and morality ('is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?') within the context of a social conscience ('O! I have ta'en too little care of

this') and an anguished questioning of God (or the gods, who, it seems, 'kill us for their sport').

## SOURCES

The plot of *King Lear*, it has often been remarked, has something of the quality of fable or fairy tale (Cordelia as Cinderella?), and in fact the story seems to be of very ancient origin. Geoffrey of Monmouth tells it in his twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, albeit with a happy ending, but Shakespeare's chief source was undoubtedly his well-thumbed copy of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577). Again, the end of the play differs significantly from the source: Cordelia, for example, commits suicide in Holinshed but, of course, is murdered in Shakespeare. One or two details were borrowed from *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1574) and from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), while the sub-plot of Gloucester's story derives from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590). Finally, Shakespeare was almost certainly familiar with *The True Chronicle History of King Lear*, and his three



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daughters, Gonerill, Ragan and Cordella, probably dating from 1594. This has many general similarities but is clumsy in verse and characterisation. In none of these sources do we find, for example, the crucial factor of Lear's madness, so powerfully developed in the play. Thus we are reminded of the breadth and culture of Shakespeare's reading, and also of his ability to transmute sometimes fairly base metal into gold.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Act 1, Scene 1: The play is set in an ancient, seemingly pagan, Britain. Kent and Gloucester discuss the King's imminent 'division of the kingdom'; Gloucester introduces his illegitimate son Edmund to Kent. Lear enters and initiates a contest in which the daughter who most convincingly pleads her love for him will gain the largest portion of the kingdom. Gonerill and Regan make false and extravagant speeches, but Lear's youngest and hitherto favourite daughter, Cordelia, refuses to play this absurd game and is, as a result, furiously disowned. Kent, interceding on her behalf, is abruptly banished. Cordelia's two suitors, Burgundy and the King of France, enter and are asked if they still wish to marry the dowerless daughter. France, undeterred,

claims Cordelia as his bride. Left alone, Gonerill and Regan, who have been given everything by Lear, agree to 'sit together' against their now powerless father.

Scene 2: Edmund, in soliloquy, delivers a powerful defence of his imminent treachery, and then tricks his credulous father Gloucester into believing that his other son, Edgar, intends to murder him. Gloucester having left, Edmund then warns Edgar to beware of his father who is inexplicably angry with him.

Scene 3: Lear is now staying with his daughter Gonerill, who encourages her steward Oswald to provoke Lear into some indiscretion so that he may be humiliated and his entourage reduced.

Scene 4: Kent enters, disguised: intent on protecting his king from the evil purposes of his two older daughters, he persuades Lear to take him on as a servant. Kent quickly picks a quarrel with Oswald, while Lear's Fool (or jester) makes some pointed allusions to what he sees as his master's folly. Gonerill enters and demands that Lear control his retinue's behaviour and reduce its number. Lear, enraged, calls down a fearful curse upon her and departs in search of Regan's hospitality. Gonerill sends Oswald to warn her sister of Lear's imminent arrival.

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Scene 5: Lear sends Kent ahead with letters to Gloucester. In conversation with the Fool, he begins to acknowledge his own folly and fear of madness.

Act 2 Scene 1: Edmund hears that Regan and her husband Cornwall are expected soon; there is also a rumour of coming war between Cornwall and Albany, Gonerill's husband. Edmund uses this information to suggest to Edgar that he should flee the Duke of Cornwall, who believes him to be an enemy. Edmund then tells Gloucester that Edgar was trying to persuade him to join in murdering their father. Gloucester, believing these fabrications, promptly disowns Edgar and promises to leave everything to Edmund. Regan and Cornwall, arriving, commiserate with Gloucester and explain that they have left their own home in order to avoid entertaining Lear.

Scene 2: Kent and Oswald appear simultaneously outside Gloucester's castle: Kent is busy beating Oswald when he is found by Cornwall and put in the stocks in spite of Gloucester's pleading.

Scene 3: Edgar, pursued, decides to adopt the disguise of a filthy and demented Bedlam beggar: 'Poor Tom'.

Scene 4: Lear is furious to discover Kent in the stocks, and is further incensed by the

initial refusal of Regan and Cornwall to come down and speak with him. Regan receives her father coldly; Lear repeats his curses upon Gonerill, who then herself appears. The daughters combine to refuse Lear any of his own retinue; Lear, beside himself with fury, rushes out into the night, in which a storm is brewing.

Act 3 Scene 1: Kent hears from a Gentleman that an army from France is soon to arrive, determined to restore the King.

Scene 2: As the storm rages, Lear, accompanied only by the Fool, urges the elements to destroy this world in which moral values and family loyalty no longer exist. Kent joins them and leads the King to a hovel where he can find some shelter.

Scene 3: Gloucester confides in Edmund that he now wishes to help the King. Edmund, alone, determines to tell Cornwall of Gloucester's decision.

Scene 4: Lear urges the Fool to seek shelter first; the Fool is terrified to find the apparently mad Poor Tom (the disguised Edgar) already there. Lear, himself now almost mad with grief, feels drawn towards a fellow-sufferer and is moved to acknowledge the pitiful vulnerability of man, the 'poor, bare, forked animal'. Gloucester appears and leads them towards a place

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'where both fire and food is ready'.

Scene 5: Cornwall thanks Edmund for his information. They set out to find Gloucester.

Scene 6: Lear, his wits having deserted him, shelters with 'Poor Tom' and the Fool, who has his last line in the play 'And I'll go to bed at noon.' This is usually taken as a foretelling of his death. Gloucester re-enters to warn the King that he must leave at once for Dover if he values his life.

Scene 7: Gonerill and Edmund leave Regan and Cornwall to deal with the now-apprehended Gloucester, who is tied to a chair and blinded. A servant, prompted by righteous disgust, wounds Cornwall mortally but himself is killed in the attempt.

Act 4 Scene 1: Gloucester, now aware of Edmund's treachery and Edgar's innocence, is being guided by an old tenant of his; Edgar (still acting the role of Poor Tom) offers to lead his father to the cliffs of Dover.

Scene 2: Gonerill, warned by Oswald that Albany now favours the King, asks Edmund to take over her husband's position, and then sends him to Cornwall to request a rapid muster of his army. Albany enters and delivers a withering denunciation of Gonerill's behaviour. They are interrupted by news of Cornwall's death.

Scene 3: Cordelia, concerned for her

father's health, sends out attendants to bring him to her tent. She confirms that the army from France is intent solely upon restoring her father's position.

Scene 4: Regan, in conversation with Oswald, reveals her own love for Edmund and consequent jealousy of Gonerill. Oswald is sent off with a note for Edmund, and instructions to kill Gloucester if he should see him.

Scene 5: Edgar persuades his father that he stands on the edge of Dover cliff. Gloucester, wishing to commit suicide, falls tamely onto his face, but is made by Edgar to believe that he has indeed fallen and has survived by a miracle. Lear enters; not yet recognising Gloucester, he acknowledges his own folly and goes on to attack all forms of hypocrisy and misused privilege. As Cordelia's attendants approach, he flees, convinced that they intend him mischief. Gloucester and Edgar (now posing as a 'most poor man') are attacked by Oswald, who is killed by Edgar. Edgar then reads the love-letter from Gonerill to Edmund.

Scene 6: Lear is brought into Cordelia's tent, asleep. As he wakes he expresses his shame and contrition: Cordelia seeks to comfort and reassure him.

Act 5 Scene 1: The two sisters openly

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compete for Edmund. Edgar appears, disguised, to issue a mysterious challenge. Edmund confirms in soliloquy that, once Cordelia and Lear are in his power after a victorious battle, he will defy Albany's authority and have them executed.

Scene 2: Edgar has difficulty in persuading his despairing father to flee after Cordelia's forces have been defeated.

Scene 3: As Lear and Cordelia are led into captivity, Edmund sends a soldier after them with instructions to kill them. Albany and Edmund vie for control of the prisoners, which Edmund refuses to give up; meanwhile Regan complains of sickness, having been poisoned by Gonerill. Albany declares that he will fight Edmund to the death if no other champion appears to do so. The trumpet having been sounded, Edgar's mysterious challenge is read out. Edgar – still disguised – emerges to fight Edmund. Edmund is mortally wounded; Edgar reveals himself and recounts the tale of Kent's heroic deeds; news arrives of the deaths of Gonerill (who has committed suicide) and Regan (by poison); and Edmund, repenting of his evil, confesses that he has ordered the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. He has spoken too late: Lear enters carrying the dead body of Cordelia, who has been

hanged. Believing – falsely – that she still breathes, the King dies. Kent, it seems, will follow very soon in his master's footsteps, while Albany and Edgar are left to sustain the 'gor'd state'.

## **THE PLAY**

For contemporary readers and audiences, *King Lear* is probably the most powerfully and unbearably moving of the tragedies. From the mid-twentieth century to the present day it has acquired a remarkable relevance and seeming modernity: for generations reared after the horrors of two world wars it seems to be tackling the key questions about evil, suffering and the role of God. When Lear cries out to Cordelia 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life/And thou no breath at all?' we surely cannot answer, whatever our religious belief, or lack of it; when Kent and Edgar ask 'Is this the promis'd end? Or image of that horror?' we might think of Hiroshima; at the blinding of Gloucester and the hanging of Cordelia we, like Lear, demand to know what 'cause in nature ... makes these hard hearts?' Shakespeare, of course, cannot answer his own questions, which resonate in our minds long after the performance or reading have ended.

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Critics have shared this sense of profound disturbance: Samuel Johnson, editing Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, relates that 'I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor'. Johnson was used to the standard version of the play then performed: Nahum Tate had rewritten *King Lear* with a happy ending in which Cordelia marries Edgar. Keats and Shelley, in the next generation, both celebrated the bitter-sweetness of the play, Keats in his sonnet 'On sitting down to read King Lear once again' and Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*, where he praises the sublimely effective blending of comedy and tragedy. G. Wilson Knight in the twentieth century brilliantly analysed the surreal comedy of the play, pointing to the scene in which Gloucester imagines himself falling down Dover cliff but in fact merely falls on his face: the comedy succeeds because it is simultaneously exquisitely painful, ironic and appropriate. All of this, together with the savagely pointed exchanges between Lear and the Fool, looks forward to twentieth-century theatre of the absurd, in particular the plays of Samuel Beckett. In *King Lear* one feels always that what is being said and what

is happening resonate universally: the very heath itself, where Lear confronts the storm outside and the storm in his own mind, suggests a kind of cosmic wasteland where all meaning and faith have been lost.

It is interesting that Shakespeare paganises the old story: it is the gods, not God, who must be questioned, and perhaps the key word of the play is 'nature': human nature, the nature of the divine (if it exists), the nature of things, the 'natural' world of 'unaccommodated man', man without his clothes ('Off! off! you lendings!'), man as a 'poor, bare, forked animal'. Shakespeare asks, as we living after the Holocaust must also ask: how much is our civilisation really worth if we can behave to each other like 'monsters of the deep'?

This brings us to what is perhaps the crux of the play and how we understand it. Modern critics (roughly speaking) are divided between the Christian apologists and what we might call the nihilists. The Christians point (for example) to Cordelia as a kind of sacrificial Christ figure, and believe that Lear's deluded belief that Cordelia still breathes is an image or suggestion of a better life to come. The nihilists (to which group I belong, I must confess) see the whole play as a demonstration of existential despair: there is

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no God, merely a combination of cruel misfortune and human malignity, and all we can hope to do is to survive, promoting where possible the good over the evil. Albany fears that 'If the heavens do not their visible spirits/Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,/It will come/Humanity must perforce prey on itself,/Like monsters of the deep', and even the most optimistic reader of the play can hardly claim that the heavens do indeed prevent such excesses. True, by the end the powers of evil are in abeyance; yet what is left? – two exhausted men will struggle to sustain the 'gor'd state', as the curtain comes down over the dead bodies of Lear and Cordelia.

### **Notes by Perry Keenlyside**

This recording uses the First Folio version, which departs from the quarto at several crucial points. Both versions are available from Cambridge University Press.

#### **LEAR FOR THE EAR**

"The role of the King is always seen as one of the most formidable challenges open to an actor, one that can crown a career" writes the Shakespeare scholar, Stanley Wells. On

the stage the part also requires considerable physical stamina and emotional energy in its trajectory from proud authority, through selfish irritability, rage, suffering, senile madness, hopeful reconciliation, to heartbreak and death. Consequently the role is often played by an actor much younger than Shakespeare's rather precise "Fourscore years and upward/Not an hour more no less". And it is not just a question of having the strength to carry on the body of his youngest daughter towards the very end of the play. "Get a light Cordelia" was the only tip a famous actor could give on being asked for advice about the role!

Garrick was 24, Gielgud 27 and Burbage under 40 when they first played Lear on stage. Scofield was 40 when he first played the King in Peter Brook's 1962 Stratford production and was acknowledged as one of the finest Lears of the twentieth century. Now, 40 years on and all but a few months off the "fourscore years and upward", he interprets the role for a second time. This time it is for the ear alone without the exhausting demands of a continuous stage performance.

Paul Scofield is the supreme actor for the ear. He knows how to mine a text for every nuance of meaning. He is blessed with a

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voice of the widest range which experience has taught him how to exploit, control and modulate. He has a thinkingness, an interior quality, which is part of the mystery of things. This the microphone detects and conveys.

Playing a man whose age is closer to his own, he has no need to 'age up', i.e. to act age. Nor does he have to act authority. That he has through course of nature. Besides, a king should never play a king; he is a man who happens to be a king. In the theatre, as in life, it is the other actors who create his authority.

Forty years after the first stage performance as Lear I felt that it might be time for Paul to revisit the play and re-inhabit the old king. I suggested this to Paul and he confessed that he had had similar thoughts. Happily, Naxos and the Cambridge University Press came together to make this present production happen. I had previously worked with Paul on two other major Shakespearean roles, Macbeth and Othello, for BBC Radio. We explored these two characters in a sound studio some time before he played them in the theatre (RSC and RNT respectively). Now, with Lear, the situation is reversed and the sound production follows the theatre one – but at a considerably greater remove of time.

Like Ibsen's "Peer Gynt", *King Lear* is, in a certain sense, an extended, dramatic poem. For several centuries the complete original text was thought too intractable for the stage as well as being reckoned to be too painful for audiences to bear. Hence it was much cut and considerably rewritten. Nahum Tate's 1681 version, with a happy ending in which the good all live and Cordelia marries Edgar, was the one which was used for nearly 200 years.

At a recent production of the play at Shakespeare's Globe I was made to realise how Burbage and his company must have been forced to bang out the words into a large, open space. In Shakespeare's day there could have been no room for vocal subtlety. The actor would have to fight the volume of the thundersheet in the storm scene; there could be no intimacy in the mad scenes, no sweet quietness in the reconciliation scene and no hushed whispering of 'close-up' lines. But in audio a play takes place within the human skull. That is its theatre. It occurs within the mind and imagination of a listener. It happens in the very place in which the author originally conceived and composed his work – his head. Moreover, full focus is necessarily upon the poet-dramatist's language and sense, without the distraction

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of any mise-en-scène.

The fact that Paul Scofield, probably the most admired and loved actor in the profession, was to play Lear again attracted a fine company of fellow actors. Shakespeare's works belong pre-eminently to actors and to audiences, rather than to scholars and directors. There is always a handed-on continuity in the cast of any one of Shakespeare's great plays. Most of the actors in any given play will have acted in it before, usually in a different role. Hamlet will graduate to Polonius, Edgar to Lear.

In the current production out of a cast of fifteen actors, only three actors have not appeared in the play before. For instance, Kenneth Branagh (Fool) had played Edmond in a radio recording with Gielgud as well as having directed the play in the theatre (with Richard Briers as Lear); Sara Kestelman had played Gonerill more than once, but never Regan; David Burke recreates for sound his recent brilliant performance as Kent given in Richard Eyre's RNT production; whilst Peter Blythe (Albany) and Alec McCowen (Gloucester) had both appeared (McCowen as the Fool) with Paul Scofield in the Peter Brook production those forty years ago.

Forty years of living brings its own wisdom and perhaps an even greater understanding of human nature and old age. I think it is to

those qualities of enrichment through experience that Shakespeare refers when he says that "ripeness is all".

## Notes by John Tydeman

### John Tydeman

John Tydeman played a key role in BBC Radio Drama for nearly four decades, as producer, Assistant Head and then Head of Radio Drama. During that time he directed most of the major plays in the classical repertory, from Greek drama to Shakespeare, Chekhov and Shaw. He was also active in contemporary theatre, directing works by Osborne, Stoppard, Albee, Pinter and many others. Directing for television and the stage has been a regular feature throughout his busy career. He has worked with Paul Scofield on many occasions, including radio productions of Macbeth and Othello.







**PAUL SCOFIELD** **King Lear**

In the 1940s Paul Scofield played at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and at Stratford-upon-Avon. He has appeared in innumerable plays in London, seasons with Sir John Gielgud and with Peter Brook and starred in *A Man for all Seasons* in London and New York; for its film version he won an Oscar. He first played King Lear in Brook's 1962 Stratford production. Appearances in films, television and radio. CBE in 1956. Companion of Honour 2001.



**ALEC McCOWEN** **Gloucester**

Award-winning actor Alec McCowen has appeared in numerous productions for the Royal National Theatre, RSC and the Old Vic Company. He has also starred in various Broadway productions. His films include *Cry Freedom*, *The Age of Innocence* and *Gangs of New York*.



**DAVID BURKE** **Kent**

David Burke played Kent in the widely praised production by Richard Eyre at the Royal National Theatre. Among his many other theatrical credits was the extended London run of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*. He has also appeared in *Richard III* and *Coriolanus* for the Almeida Theatre at the Gainsborough Studios and on tour in Japan and the USA. He has been seen in numerous film and television productions.



**HARRIET WALTER** **Gonerill**

Harriet Walter is best known for her two BBC TV roles as Charity in *The Men's Room* and as Amy in *Unfinished Business*. But she has an extensive and successful stage career, winning many awards on the way including Best Actress by the Sony Radio Awards and a Laurence Olivier Award for Actress of the Year in a Revival for roles in *Twelfth Night*, *Three Sisters* and *A Question of Geography*. Her film credits include *Villa des Roses*, *Onegin*, *The Governess*, *Bedrooms and Hallways*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Sense & Sensibility*. She also writes about the theatre, contributing to academic journals. Her first book, *Other People's Shoes*, is based on her theatrical life.



### EMILIA FOX **Cordelia**

Emilia Fox trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Her film appearances include *The Pianist*, *Blink* and *My Name is Sabina Spielrein*. Her television credits include *Randall and Hopkirk Deceased*, *David Copperfield*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Her Shakespearean roles include Isabel in *Richard II* and Virgilia in *Coriolanus* for the Almeida Theatre. She has also been heard on various BBC Radio productions.



### SARA KESTELMAN **Regan**

Sara Kestelman is a familiar figure on British stage and screen. Among her extensive work for the RSC and the Royal National Theatre and in London's West End have been performances as varied as *Three Tall Women* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Nine* and *Cabaret* – for which she received Oliver and Clarence Derwent Awards. She is also a published poet.



### KENNETH BRANAGH **Fool**

Kenneth Branagh, a leading figure in film, television and on stage, is equally at home with classic and contemporary subjects. However, as director and adaptor, he has made a particular contribution to Shakespearean performance with his films such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. His productions of Shakespeare in the theatre have included *Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost* (RSC), *Romeo and Juliet* (Lyric), *As You Like It*, *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Renaissance), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear* (World Tour) which he also directed, and *Coriolanus* (co-production with Chichester Festival Theatre). He has also played Iago in Oliver Parker's film *Othello*. Among his other films are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Peter's Friends* and *Theory of Flight*. He has won numerous awards for his work on stage, film and television as actor and director. He has also recorded *King Richard III* for Naxos AudioBooks.



**RICHARD McCABE** **Edgar**

Richard McCabe trained at RADA. His Shakespearean roles include Puck, Tranio, Autolycus, Thersites, Apamantus and Iago at the RSC, where he is an Associate Artist, and Frank Ford at the RNT. Richard played Hamlet for Birmingham Rep and on a national tour in 2000, and recently reprised the role at Kronborg Castle in Elsinor.



**TOBY STEPHENS** **Edmond**

Toby Stephens' theatrical Shakespearean credits for the RSC include *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Coriolanus*, for which he was awarded the Sir John Gielgud Award for best actor as well as the Ian Charleson Award. His film and television appearances include *Camomile Lawn*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Twelfth Night*.



**MATTHEW MORGAN** **Knight/Oswald**

Matthew Morgan was a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company, appearing in *The Archers*, *The Starving Girl* and many other programmes. His theatre appearances include *How The Other Half Loves*, *Bedroom Farce*, *Barnaby*, *Old Boys* and *An Enemy of the People*. His many television credits include *The Bill*, *Hollyoaks*, *The Brittas Empire*, *Eastenders*, *Grange Hill*, *Perfect Scoundrels* and *Trail of Guilt*.



**PETER BLYTHE** **Albany**

After winning a scholarship to RADA, Peter Blythe began his career with the Living Theatre Company, Leicester, then Nottingham Playhouse under the direction of John Neville and Frank Dunlop. He has appeared in numerous theatre productions, including Graham Greene's *The Return of A J Raffles*, a World Tour of *King Lear*, *Comedy of Errors* (RSC); at the Globe Theatre his performance in *The Chairman* earned him the Clarence Derwent Award. He has appeared in most major television series including *Rumpole of the Bailey* and recently *Dalziel & Pascoe*.



### JACK KLAFF **Cornwall**

Jack Klaff's theatrical roles have included Foppington, Trigorin, Atahualpa, Gulliver, di Maggio, Macbeth, Iago and Theseus/Oberon. On film he can be seen in *Star Wars*, *King David*, *1871* and *Pasternak*. His radio work stretches from the *Sea Wolf* and *Oscar Wilde* to *Quasimodo*. Television appearances include *Road Rage* and *Vanity Fair* as well as his own plays. He is a prolific author and solo artist.



### JOHN McANDREW **Burgundy**

John McAndrew trained at LAMDA. He has spent several seasons at the RSC where productions have included *Peter Pan*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Edward II* and *School of Night*. In seasons at Manchester Royal Exchange he appeared in *The Voyage Inheritance* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He won the Carleton Hobbs Radio Award and has since appeared in numerous radio plays, including the highly successful adaptation of *Lord of the Rings*.



### STEVE HODSON **Curan**

After training at Central School of Speech and Drama, Steve Hodson joined Michael Elliot at the Exchange in Manchester for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Peer Gynt* and *Catch My Soul*. The next stop was Yorkshire Television for a three-and-a-half-year stint on *Follyfoot*. This was followed by television series such as *Angels*, *The Legend of King Arthur* and *All Creatures Great and Small*, all interspersed with hundreds of radio plays. He has directed plays by John Crowen, Schiller and Bulgakov. On stage he has appeared in *Death and the Maiden*, *The Railway Children* and as George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*



**SIMON TREVES France**

Simon Treves' recent theatre appearances include *The Magistrate*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *Charley's Aunt*, *A Man For All Seasons*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *A View From The Bridge*. On television he has been seen in *Soldier Soldier*, *Boon* and *By the Sword Divided*. His numerous radio performances include *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Love of a Good Man*, *Peter Pan*, *The Russia House*, *Riddle of the Sands* and *The Wooden Horse*.

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Rose Consort of Viols

(8.554284)

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**Music programmed by John Tydeman**

Cover picture:

King Lear, A Reminiscence of Henry Irving by Thomas Heath Robinson (1865-1950)  
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The New Cambridge Shakespeare

William Shakespeare  
**King Lear**

**PAUL SCOFIELD**

with

**Alec McCowen • Kenneth Branagh**  
**David Burke • Harriet Walter • Emilia Fox**  
**Sara Kestelman • Richard McCabe**  
**Toby Stephens** *and full cast*

King Lear	<b>Paul Scofield</b>
Gonerill	<b>Harriet Walter</b>
Regan	<b>Sara Kestelman</b>
Cordelia	<b>Emilia Fox</b>
Duke of Albany	<b>Peter Blythe</b>
Duke of Cornwall	<b>Jack Klaff</b>
Earl of Gloucester	<b>Alec McCowen</b>
Edgar	<b>Richard McCabe</b>
Edmond	<b>Toby Stephens</b>
Earl of Kent	<b>David Burke</b>
Fool	<b>Kenneth Branagh</b>
King of Burgundy	<b>John McAndrew</b>
King of France	<b>Simon Treves</b>
Oswald	<b>Matthew Morgan</b>
Curan	<b>Steve Hodson</b>

This recording uses the text of *King Lear* established by Jay Halio for the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of the play (ISBN 0521 33729 1) and also printed in the Cambridge Schools Shakespeare edition (ISBN 0521 46697 0), both published by Cambridge University Press.

*"Shakespeare's verse, as interpreted by Paul Scofield and his supporting cast, made my heart and spirits soar. This is a definitive production of a magnificent play."*

THE TIMES

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Technical production and sound dramatisation by Mike Etherden  
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