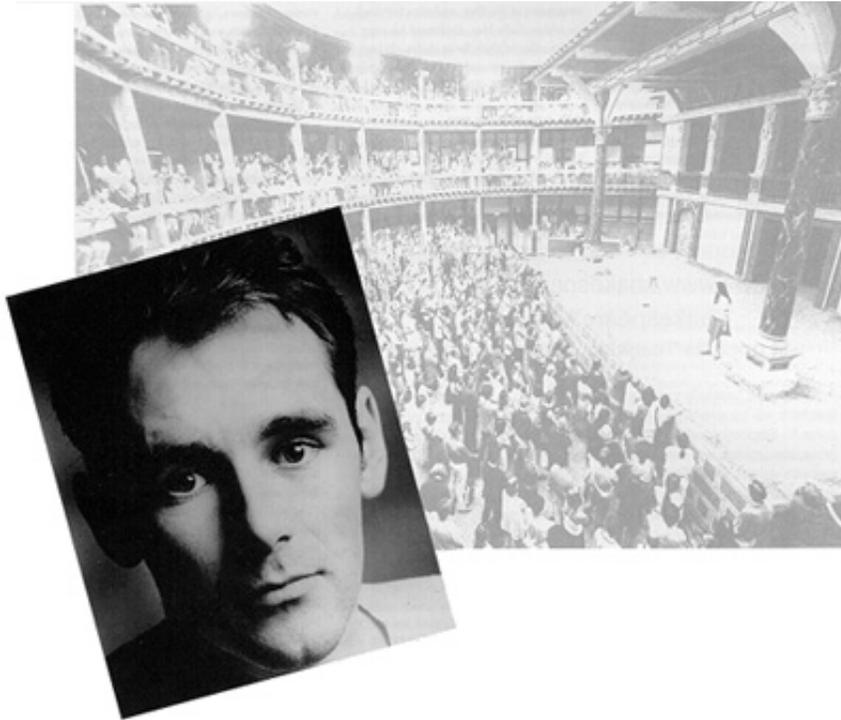




Shakespeare

A Magazine for Teachers and Enthusiasts



The Opening of the Globe

*Artistic Director **Mark Rylance** talks about the triumphs and pitfalls of bringing Sam Wanamaker's dream into being.*

The most important event to occur in the world of Shakespeare during the past 50 years, and perhaps the next 50 as well, is the opening of Shakespeare's Globe, the replica of the original "wooden O" on the south bank of the Thames. After the expense of much money, research, manpower, and most of all vision, we are on the verge of seeing the actualization of Sam Wanamaker's dream to create a space where actors and audience alike can experience Shakespeare's

plays in the same way Elizabethans did.

Not much is known about the opening of the Globe Theatre in 1599. We don't know what play was presented on that day or what ceremony, if any, accompanied it. But when Shakespeare's Globe opens in June, much of world will be watching. The new London theatre's opening will be marked with a two-week "Festival of Firsts," highlighted by a June 12th "Triumphes and Mirth" performance for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. Two plays will run in repertory from June 12 through September 21: *Henry V* directed by Richard Olivier and *The Winter's Tale* directed by David Freeman. The box office for both productions is open now.

Judging from a shakedown run of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* staged last summer on a temporary life-size model of the stage, plays in the Globe will be like no others. No theatre lights. No sound equipment. Sun shining in the faces of the audience. Actors in the shadows cast by the canopy. Groundlings contributing bawdy yells and rowdy laughter. "I expected the worst," said Mark Rylance in an interview with **Shakespeare** editors Michael LoMonico and Nancy Goodwin. "I expected that I might have to bellow and gesticulate. "But instead he found that the Globe didn't require overacting, and the audience loved it. As one reviewer noted, "Rylance worked the crowd brilliantly."

Rylance was pleased with the diversity of the audience. "You had wealthy people buying a gentlemen's box for 300 pounds, bringing their own picnic and bottles of champagne, sitting up in the chairs having champagne during the play. And below them for a fiver you had some kind of ragamuffin with dreadlocks, standing in the yard watching the play." He noticed that as the play went on, the audience members relaxed. "They seemed to say, 'we don't have to do anything, we can just be ourselves. We can eat and drink; if we are bored, we could leave; we can shout out things.' I don't think the Globe will change acting much," he said, "but I think it will change the audiences enormously."

One thing that actors and directors learned from the *Two Gents* trial run was that the stage as constructed didn't fully work for acting. "We had very strong feelings about the pillars," Rylance said. "They were too far forward and too far apart, and the actors wanted them moved back in." That dilemma called for a series of meetings between the actors, the academics, theatre historians, and the architects—the people who know how buildings were built at that time. All these disciplines had to agree, and eventually they did. "We moved them," he said triumphantly. "But we didn't move them as far as the actors wanted."

The scholars were really adamant about the roof over the stage, Rylance said. It's hard to judge from old drawings how far it extends and how

much shadow it casts in the yard. Scholars thought that the canopy should cover the whole stage. "We didn't have direct evidence, but we did keep the roof." Once the roof was painted, it gave Rylance an unexpected pleasure. It is a vibrant blue with golden suns and moons; a design based on the canopy over the tomb of Sir Gabriel Poyntz of Essex. "With the heavens above and the groundlings below, the actors have an unusual sense of their place in the universe," he said.

Consensus among the various groups did not come easily, but it happened. "It is very exciting, that process of working with the academics and the builders. They have got incredible devotion, incredible patience. The odd thing for me, and I guess for Sam before me, is to try to include lots of views and lots of people, and really my job [as artistic director] is to make the place accessible not only for the audience but also for the actors, also for the scholars."

Other points of contention have been intervals and gender. As to the length of the performances at the new Globe, "The scholars feel we should do Shakespeare's plays without intervals, and that we should cut them to get it down to two hours, which I'm a bit loathe to do." The solution? Do some performances with an interval, some without. The compromise is based on what Shakespeare's company probably did when they played indoor theatres like the Blackfriars. "To change the candle wax, they would put in a brief intermezzo, an

interval between each act, and with *Henry V* that works very nicely because of the chorus, so that you can see in a sense five plays which take you on a journey." Although directors are reluctant to agree to an all-male cast, as in the days of Shakespeare, they struck a compromise on this issue also. The *Henry V* cast will be men only; *The Winter's Tale* cast will be men and women.

To give credit to its American founder, Sam Wanamaker, and to acknowledge the vast amount of funds that Americans—from high-rollers to school children—



have invested in this project, Rylance will use a contingency of American actors in the Globe casts. To satisfy the unions on both sides of the Atlantic, Rylance took the Globe's *Two Gents* production from last summer to Broadway for a limited run this winter. "By us coming for three weeks with English actors, we were able to have four American actors come for the whole summer." Ordinarily the unions are touchy about English actors performing in America and vice versa, but in this case, Rylance says, they have been cooperative. "The two unions want to be able to say to their members that if there are foreign nationals coming in and acting in this country, there will be an equivalent given in that country."

Despite the many problems and challenges involved in bringing the new Globe into being, Rylance is thrilled to be part of a venture so significant. It's not just a new theatre, a new concept, a new way for actors and scholars to collaborate—it's the creation of a space where actors and audiences can know Shakespeare by moving around and interacting in the same way actors and audiences did on Bankside afternoons in 1599. "It should be the foremost tool of experiment in the actual space that Shakespeare invested his money into and chose to work in." ►

◀ *Shakespeare Home*

Shakespeare Spring 1997 ►

[Home](#) | [Welcome](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Order Back Issues](#) |
[News on the Rialto](#) | [Featured Articles](#) | [Teaching Resources](#) |
[Archives](#) | [The Infinite Book](#) | [Feedback](#)



Last updated March 30, 2003.

© 1996-2003 Shakespeare Magazine. All Rights Reserved.