

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

THE MADNESS OF GEORGE III

BY ALAN BENNETT

DIRECTED BY
ADAM PENFORD



INSIGHT
PACK

FRI 2 - SAT 24
NOV 2018

Nottingham
Playhouse

70
YEARS
1948 - 2018



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INTRODUCTION

This pack supports Nottingham Playhouse's 2018 production of *The Madness of George III* by Alan Bennett, directed by Adam Penford. The activities provided are specifically designed to support KS3-5 students, who are attending the performance at Nottingham Playhouse, or seeing the NT Live broadcast.

1788. King George III is the most powerful man in the world. This play depicts a time in his reign when his behaviour became increasingly erratic and it appears to others as if his mind is unravelling.

As the Queen and Prime Minister attempt to hide the king's illness from his subjects, royal doctors hopelessly squabble over the correct cure, subjecting him to torturous medical treatments.

Ambitious politicians and the scheming prince begin a power struggle, endangering the stability of the crown.

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INTERVIEWS WITH THE CAST

The play is a modern classic. We spoke to our leading actors Mark Gatiss, Debra Gillett and Adrian Scarborough about what it's like to take on Alan Bennett's well-loved characters:



Mark Gatiss – King George III

Why did you accept the role of George III?

I was very thrilled at the idea of it. It's a modern classic, a terrific play and I'm a huge fan of

Alan Bennett. It's got a lot of his touchstones in it because of his interest in history, the frailty of human beings and his attraction to royalty. The face behind the royal mask is something that he has always been interested in, as have I. I've played Charles I and George IV so I'm working my way around all the Kings and possibly some of the Queens too!

Can you describe the character of George III and his journey in the play?

I am very excited by the journey of it. George III starts very much in control of his family and despite his court etiquette, he was really a man of the people who knew what he was doing and had an eye on the future. The destruction of that and his disintegration is very exciting and moving. He's not just a constitutional monarch, there's a lot more riding on that because it's the health of the nation.

Why do you think the British are so drawn to the Royal Family?

Speaking for myself, I just love the theatre of it and I think the Royal Family have assumed a different role now which is a kind of soap opera. We see the same stories resonating throughout history. In this play there is the public face of the monarch and the lovely happy marriage of George and Charlotte set against the rivalries of the different political camps and the hatred of his son the Prince of Wales who waited his

whole life to be King. The idea of warring factions and children waiting in the wings to take up the throne is not uncommon and they are fascinating threads to pull out.



Debra Gillett – Queen Charlotte

As your character is based on a historical figure, is research important to your process as an actor?

I think it's really important to know

about the period detail and the courtly manners which were so different to how we are now. To understand the characters I like to know about their family life so there are definitely facts worth researching which can then be filtered down into the performance.

You've worked a lot in London but what's drawn you back to doing regional theatre and why do you think regional theatre is important?

I'm quite an old-school person and when I was in drama school my dream was to work in different rep theatres and learn a variety of skills from the amazing directors that you could work with. The goal was to gradually work up to a London theatre but the work that was happening out of town was where you really learnt your trade. I think that's coming back now and people need regional theatre more than ever. It's really exciting to do a great play in Nottingham with great people.

What attracted you to the role of the Queen?

I've never played a Queen before. I'm always the Lady-in-Waiting or something, so to be the Queen is very exciting. I love her relationship with the King and I knew Mark Gatiss was

going to be playing him. I've really enjoyed working with Mark before and last time we played a couple who really loved each other so it's nice to do that again. The King and Queen have a shorthand together and have worked their relationship out. It's quite rare to have a team like that at the centre. It's also interesting seeing the domesticity of it and finding the balance between the public and private aspects of their relationship.



Adrian Scarborough – Dr Willis

What made you want to take the role of Dr Willis and can you tell us about your character?

It was partly because I have a history with the play. Everybody thinks I did the original play but I actually played Fortnum in the film. It was such an extraordinary long hot summer of love making that film. We had an absolutely brilliant, blistering wonderful time so I'm thrilled to be coming here to take on the role of Dr Willis. My character is very forward thinking, forging ahead with psychiatric science in comparison to the other doctors.



Why do you think this play is still being revived today?

It's pure classic Bennett. He gets right to the heart of characters and emotions and the passion and the melancholy of the monarch. I love the way that he reduces royalty to humankind which is of course what they are. I think that's a lovely thing to watch and to see. There is definitely a Bennett style and a lot of his words have a rhythm and a beauty of their own I think. His sentence constructions are just delicious. You want to get them in your mouth and chew them around a bit!



THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Photos from the rehearsal room:



Jamie Armitage, Assistant Director, gives us his insights into the rehearsal room and tells us about some of the exercises the cast have been using:

Bowing

Through working with our Movement Director, we developed a standard bow which is a straight front leg with a bent back leg. Always removing the hat and putting the hand to the heart. We decided it should be kept fluid as well, to avoid characters getting stuck in their bows.

How can you show character through the way they bow? For example:

- The Prince of Wales as a more extravagant character added hand flourishes to his bow
- The more official worker, Pitt did a very stiff bow.
- Pages stand with their feet at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock, straight spine, shoulders back.

You can try this exercise:

- Is your character flamboyant or serious?
- Design a bow based on their behaviour.
- Everybody has to bow, but are there ways to bow while not being respectful?
- Are there ways to bow more if you are apologising?
- What can you show about your character through their bow?

Status Game

One thing we are very keen to create in rehearsals is a sense of the Rules of the Court. This is especially important as the rules are broken when the King becomes ill, but they must be established in the early scenes before they can be broken. A lot of this revolves around status: who is most and least powerful?

To create a sense of this, we played a game where everybody walked around the room and only bowed to those of higher status than them. The high status characters would only acknowledge those who they thought were important enough to acknowledge, for example the King may nod at a bowing politician but not at a bowing page.

You can try this exercise:

- Everybody pick a character: a page, a politician, the Prime Minister, a Lord, a Lady, a Prince or Princess etc.
- Then walk around the room with a clear sense of who is higher and who is lower status.
- Who would you stop for a conversation with?
- The higher status character is usually the person who can start a conversation.

Paintings



We used Georgian paintings as a visual stimuli to inform how characters liked to present themselves.

You can try this exercise:

- We split up into groups of 3, 4 or 5 and each group had a different painting and then had to create a frozen image based on the painting.
- Create a frozen image based on this painting.
- What does it show us about status?
- How much of a story can be created with a still image?

We then tried a variation on this where Mark (who is playing the King) would suddenly enter the frozen scene to a call of '*Sharp, Sharp, the King, the King*' and every character would have to react and bow in the direction to which the King arrived from. This helped us understand the movement of characters when the king enters. We felt the best image was like a ripple on a still pond.

Building a Status Portrait

Mark as King would start sitting in the middle of an empty space. Everybody else would line up on one wall. People would then join the scene one by one, find a position in relation to their status to the King and hold it. When this person had found their position, the next person would enter until we had a full living court painting all based on status in relation to the King.

ACTIVITIES: EXPLORING THEMES AND DEVELOPING CHARACTER

The activities below are designed to support students in exploring the themes of the play and developing character. There are also some warm up exercises to begin with.

Relations in Westminster

Loyalty & Relationships

Invite students to move around the space as individuals. Ask the group to imagine they are in Westminster in 1788. They are all MPs. Ask them to imagine the clothes they might have been wearing, how they might walk and acknowledge others as they walk around Westminster.

- Allow the group to walk around the space for a short time. Then ask the group to stop where they are and tell them someone wants to make trouble for them in Westminster.
- Invite all participants to look around the room and choose someone who will be their enemy, without revealing who this is.
- Set them off walking around the room again, this time explain that they must try to keep as much distance between themselves and their chosen enemy.
- Freeze the group again. This time explain that there is someone who's got their back and will protect them from their enemy. Invite the group to select someone to be their protector or ally, once again without revealing who this person is.
- Ask the participants to walk around the space again but this time trying to keep the protector in between them and their enemy. Continue moving around for a few minutes, you might want to play with pace here too.
- Count down from 5 and ask the group to freeze exactly where they are.
- Observe all the positions you can see. Ask a few group members to work out who their enemies and protectors were. Did they manage to keep their allies close and their enemies distant?

**WARM UP
ACTIVITY!**

DISCUSS:

What feelings did this evoke for the group?
Ask when did they feel safe?
When did they feel nervous?
How vulnerable they thought those in King George's time may have felt in Westminster.

How good a King am I?

A version of Grandma's footsteps

King George put a huge amount of value in being a good and fair King. He lived with mental health issues throughout his life. He encountered many challenges, not least his son, the Prince of Wales attempting to take power. As he lost authority, he struggled and tried to retain control as a respected King. He wanted to know how others viewed him as a King.

- Organise students into a line on one side of the room, facing the opposite wall.
- Ask one volunteer to play King George and to stand by the opposite wall, with their back to the others, placing the crown on the floor next to him/her.
- Explain to the students lined up that they need to slowly creep up on King George without

**WARM UP
ACTIVITY!**

him noticing, and attempt to steal his crown and take it back to the starting line, if he turns round they must be motionless to conceal their intentions.

- If King George spots them moving, he will ask them 'How Good a King am I?'
- If they give an answer that satisfies King George, he will agree to keep them in the game, but if their answer isn't credible enough they will need to go back to the start.
- If time, allow a few different students to be the King.

Note from the rehearsal room:

We have discovered through rehearsals that George III was suspicious of false flatterers and so perhaps if somebody gives an over-the-top assessment of how good a King George is, then he could also send them back to the start.

DISCUSS:

How did it feel to be King George?

How did it feel to be attempting to steal his crown?

What sort of answers did King George want to hear, or caused him to let people stay in the game.

What do you think people thought of King George?

The Rules of Court: Yes your Majesty

The court in 1788 would have had very precise rules for how it operated, particularly how someone addressed the King. The cast have worked with the Movement Director Lizzi Gee to establish what the rules of the court will be for this production. This ensures the company can universally create, maintain or transgress an established order for the court and accurately portray their interactions with King George.

This exercise will help students create their own Rules of Court.

EXPLORING
THEMES

YOU WILL NEED:

A crown.

- Ask for a volunteer to be King George, explain that he will have clear ideas of how he wishes to be addressed.
- The appointed King George sits on the chair (throne) and wears a crown.
- The rest of the group stand at the opposite side of the room, in a straight line facing the King – explain that they are the members of court. King George thinks of a hidden rule(s) which he/she keeps to him/herself. Examples of these rules:

No one can turn their back to you.

You must bow before you speak.

You must never look the King in the eye.

You must address the King as Your Royal Highness

Or any other rule they wish to apply.

- King George summons a member of his court one by one. Any courtier can step forward at his summon awaiting his instruction. If more than one step forward, ask others to step back into the line.
- King George now can issue an instruction, or a question i.e.
 “Well?”
 “What is this?”
 “What happened here?”
 The courtier attempts the task, or tries to answer the question.
- If the courtier has successfully carried out the task without breaking the hidden rule, they are sent back into the line (to the rest of the court) and dismissed.
- If, however, they have broken that hidden rule, King George shouts out ‘Contempt of Court’, in which case they must step to the other side of the room – as if they have been thrown out of court.
- The aim of the game is for the courtiers to work out, through trial and error, the hidden rule(s).
- If time, choose another King George and repeat the process.

DISCUSS: Which rules worked best to establish a defined court?

How difficult was it to maintain?

Do you think the courtiers maintained these rules throughout King George’s reign?

If not, why not?

Can you think of any moments in the play when a courtier does not maintain the rules of court?

What do you think this demonstrates about how they viewed the King?

Gossip at Court

This exercise helps students explore the nature of gossip and how rumours are spread and where they might originate from.

**EXPLORING
THEMES**

Note from the rehearsal room:

‘Gossip, gossip gossip’: We have discovered through rehearsals how important gossip was in the Court. The world of 18th century upper class society was very small; everybody knew everybody and everybody talked. When the King is ill at Cheltenham, everybody soon knew as Cheltenham was where a lot of people went on holiday and so all of these witnesses to the King’s strange behaviour told their friends and soon everybody knew.

THURLOW says

“Gossip, gossip, gossip. Still, we’d better hear the rest of it”

- Organise the students to stand in a circle.
- Ask everyone to clap a slow continuous rhythm.
- Once the rhythm has been established, invite one person to say the statement ‘have you heard about the King?’
- Then each person says the same statement in turn around the circle until it has returned back to the person who started it.

- Now encourage this to be done again without stopping and to pick up the pace of the clapping rhythm and send the statement around again.
- The group must try to keep the rhythm and clearly say the statement.

Further Exploration:

- Ask someone to leave the space, the rest of the group decide on a new statement that they will say.
- Set the rhythm, ask the person who left the space to return and stand in the middle of the group. Once they are there start passing around the statement.
- Encourage students to explore space and status by getting them to stand around the room in different places. Everyone sets the rhythm then someone quietly repeats the chosen statement until they find someone to pass it onto.

DISCUSS:

How did it feel to be in the middle of the circle when the group were gossiping? Could you hear what they were saying? How do you think the King and Queen would have felt knowing that the court were gossiping about them?

How did it feel passing around the gossip? Why did you pass it on to the person that you did? How could this activity be used in a scene? Why do you think people in the Georgian court gossiped?

Interpret Me - A physical version of the game Chinese whispers

Stigma surrounding mental health can lead to individuals being misunderstood and their condition misrepresented. This exercise helps students to explore how simple actions can be misinterpreted.



**EXPLORING
THEMES**

- Split the group into 3 groups and label them groups 1, 2 and 3.
- Groups 2 and 3 create an audience to begin with, while group 1 form a line in the performance space.
- Two members of group 1 face the audience whilst the rest of group 1 face the back and close their eyes (They are not allowed to see the action on stage.)
- Of the two members of group 1 facing the audience, one of them is asked to think of something they wish to portray to the audience. This must be physical and without words. They act this out – it should be a clear and simple sequence which tells a simple story.
- The other member watches the sequence carefully.
- The person who performed the sequence then sits in the audience. The person who watched it is then asked to think about what they thought was being portrayed and then perform it again exactly as they remember it.
- The next person in the line with their eyes closed is then asked to turn around and watch carefully.
- This process is then repeated until the last person in the line performs the sequence.
- Repeat this process with each of the groups and ask the first performer to create a more complex sequence each time.

DISCUSS:

What did each performer think was being portrayed? Was everyone performing the same thing?

How did the original performer feel about the following portrayals of their story?

What differences did the audience notice in each performance?

What impact do you think it might have if other people misinterpret or make judgements about their actions?

Images of a King

A prominent theme running through the play is identity. As we all do, King George has many different roles he has to play in his life. George the father, George the husband, George the King, and George the patient. As he experiences mental health challenges, the overlap between some of the different roles, the 'Man' and the 'King' become blurred. George has to grapple with his sense of his own appearance versus the reality he finds himself in. The Queen articulates this perfectly when she states:

**DEVELOPING
CHARACTER**

"It is the same with all the doctors. None of them know him. He is not himself. So how can they restore him to his proper self, not knowing what that self is? Where do they look for it? The King is not mad. He is an angel of kindness and goodness."

Note from the rehearsal room:

The Queen's speech about George's identity is very similar to what Alan Bennet's father said to him to explain why he visited his wife so often whilst she was hospitalised due to her mental health. It is moments of humanity like this which make a story about a king from over two hundred years ago feel so relatable.

- After having a whole group discussion around identity:
- Ask students to find a partner to work with and to stand in a space in the room facing their partner.
- Ask them to label themselves A and B. Ask them to imagine they are in their dressing room facing a mirror.
- Ask the pairs to take it in turns to create the following freeze-frames of King George:
 - George the father
 - George the king
 - George the husband
 - George the patient
- If A is creating the freeze-frames then B must try to imitate it exactly as if they are the mirror image.

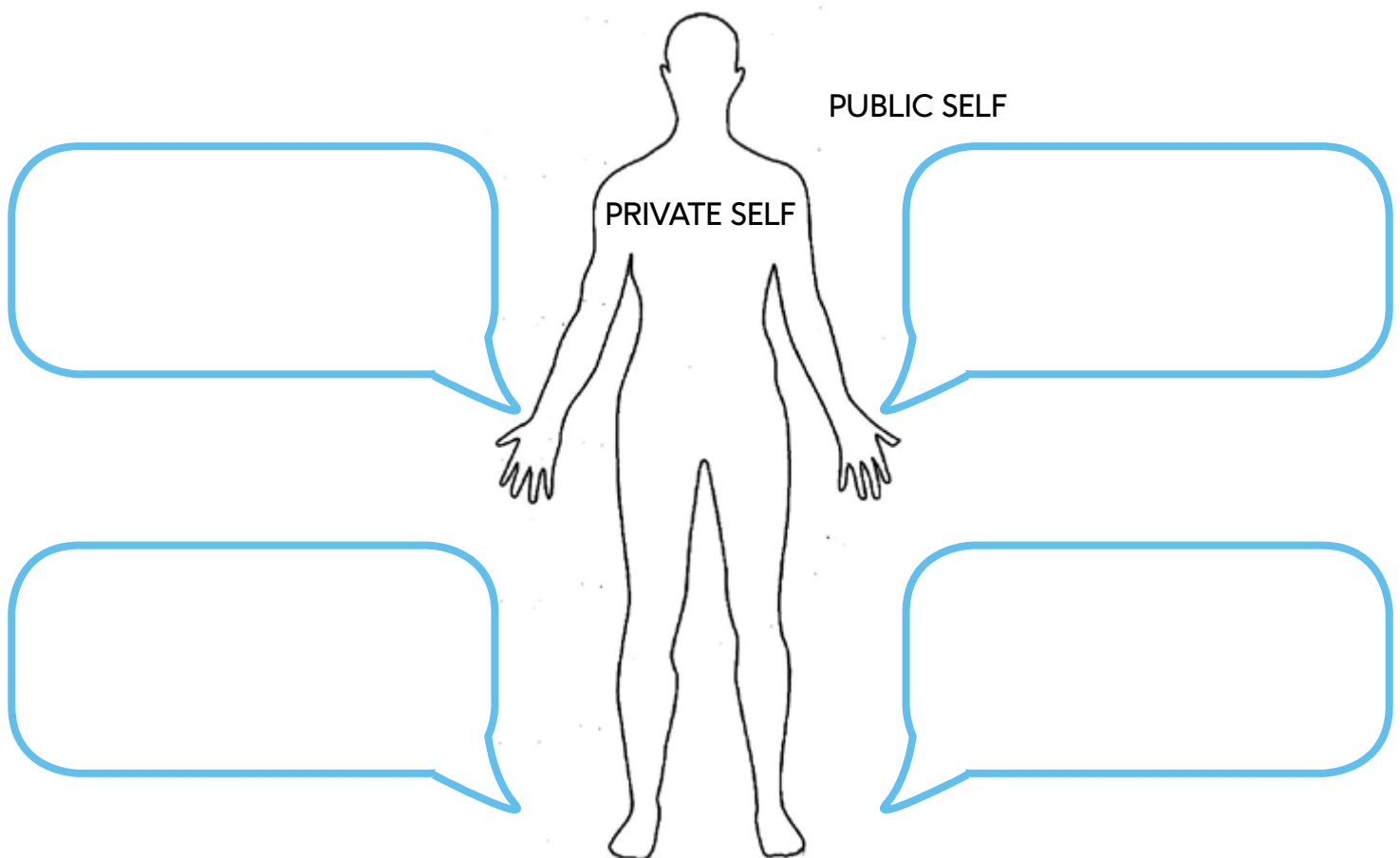


- Consider asking the students to bring to bring the freeze frames to life for a few seconds.
- Invite half the group to observe the other half in turn and see what they can notice from the gallery of images of King George.

YOU WILL NEED:

Large scale paper / lining wallpaper
Pens
Art materials (optional)

- Invite two pairs to join together to form a small group.
- Ask them to choose one person to sculpt as King George.
- Invite that person to lay on the paper and encourage the student to carefully direct their George as to how they would like them to position themselves.
- Ask them to think carefully about the position of all their fingers, legs, head ect.
- Now invite them to carefully draw round their George.
- The person can now get up and they should now have a silhouette of George left on the paper.
- Now as a group they can work together to create a full image of George.
- Ask them to write or illustrate inside the silhouette with George's thoughts, feelings and emotions. Invite them to create his inner and private self.
- Ask them to write or illustrate on the outside of the silhouette George's different roles and appearances. How does he want the public to see him? Invite them to create an exterior which is his public self.



THE SET FOR THE MADNESS OF GEORGE III

Creating the set for this production had many considerations. Director Adam Penford tell us about his aims:

“We wanted to capture the grandeur of the palaces and locate the action within the Georgian period but we didn’t want the production to feel dusty or old fashioned, it needed to have a freshness”

Working closely with the designer, Robert Jones, Adam communicated some of his ideas through an initial mood board of images. Here are some examples:



DISCUSS:

What do you think Adam was trying to communicate through these images?

See our Paintshop team working on the backdrop:



Designing your own production of *The Madness of George III*

Imagine you are on your way to meet with the director, who will be waiting to see the sketches of ideas you have for a production. Think about whether you want this to be abstract, or naturalistic, in a conventional theatre space with a proscenium arch, or maybe even in the round and why. What materials will you want to use and why.

The Model Box

Here are photos of the model of the set, designed by Robert Jones.



“We wanted to represent the fractured mind of the King, so the set is constantly rotating and a lot of the walls aren’t solid, they’re made of gauze. This transparency also allows us to give the sense of the royals living in the spotlight, with silhouettes constantly walking up corridors behind walls and people listening behind doors and spying through keyholes.”

Adam Penford, Director

DISCUSS:

Which themes can you see represented here?
What do you like about the design?
Is there anything you would change?



RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Looking after your mental health is as important as looking after your physical health.

We can do a number of things to improve and protect our mental health:

- Keep active: regular exercise can help you feel more positive [sportengland.org](https://www.sportengland.org)
- Get involved: join a club, meet up with friends, do a course, learn something new [wherecanwego.com](https://www.wherecanwego.com)
- Relax: if you're feeling down, make time to relax and unwind. It's also important to get a good night's sleep www.mentalhealth.org.uk
- Alcohol & Drugs: if you're already feeling down alcohol and drugs can make you feel worse [ixion.demon.co.uk](https://www.ixion.demon.co.uk)
- Eat healthily: it will help you feel better and give you more energy. For more information visit [5aday.nhs.uk](https://www.5aday.nhs.uk)
- Recognise the signs: being mentally healthy means being able to deal with daily pressures; if you feel you can't cope, or are turning to alcohol or drugs to get by, you may have a problem you need help with.

Organisations working locally to support people to mental health issues:



Online resources:

Mental health tips for Arts workers:

shapearts.org.uk/news/mental-health-tips-arts-workers

Healthy Young Minds

If you find yourself feeling down, anxious or would like more information for a friend or family member contact:

youngminds.org.uk

Tel: 0207 3368445