

All the world's a stage: Shakespeare's Globe launches 'Hamlet' tour to every nation on Earth

BY JILL LAWLESS, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS APRIL 23, 2014



Actors perform a scene from William Shakespeare's Hamlet for members of the media during a photo call to present Hamlet at Shakespeare's Globe theatre, London, Wednesday, April 23, 2014. Four centuries after his death, William Shakespeare is probably Britain's best-known export, his words and characters famous around the world. Shakespeare's Globe theater is setting out to test the Bard's maxim that "all the world's a stage" by taking "Hamlet" to every country on Earth world, more than 200 in all. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis)

LONDON - Four centuries after his death, William Shakespeare is probably Britain's best-known export, his words and characters famous around the world.

It's fitting they were first staged at a playhouse called the Globe.

Now the modern-day Shakespeare's Globe theatre in London is setting out to test the Bard's maxim that "all the world's a stage" by taking "Hamlet" to every country on Earth, more than 200 in all.

The company describes the plan as "insanely ambitious." Some suspect it's impossible, and Amnesty International has weighed in to point out the "dark irony" of taking a play about power and regicide to authoritarian North Korea.

"Hamlet" opens Wednesday — on Shakespeare's 450th birthday — with the first of three performances at the Globe, a reconstructed Elizabethan playhouse beside the River Thames.

Then the cast of 12 and its four-person crew will board a schooner for Amsterdam, beginning a journey that will take them to seven continents by plane, boat, train, bus and jeep.

Globe artistic director Dominic Dromgoole reeled off the first tour stops with an excited grin:

"Amsterdam, Wittenberg, Arctic Circle — Tromso — drop down through Scandinavia, go to Moscow, go to Kyiv the night before the election."

The tour is scheduled to last two years, finishing back at the Globe on April 23, 2016 — the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

The itinerary is still a work in progress, but Ladi Emeruwa, one of two actors playing the lead role, said his schedule is blocked out through January, with performances across Europe followed by tours of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

"It feels like I've won the lottery," said Nigeria-born Emeruwa, who trained at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. "Both are things I've always wanted to do — perform for this company and travel."

The tour's initial goal of visiting 205 nations and territories may vary, and exactly what constitutes a country is in some cases contested. The United Nations has 193 member states, while there were 204 teams in the London Olympics.

Dromgoole remains undaunted, though unspecific, when asked about war-devastated Syria or insular North Korea — both now listed on the tour's website as "details to be confirmed."

"Every country means every country," he said. "It's not easy to get into every country, for a variety of reasons. But we're quite persistent."

Amnesty International last month appeared to caution the troupe against visiting North Korea, a country where "the horrors inflicted on people who fall out of favour are worse than any fiction."

Amnesty spokeswoman Harriet Garland said Wednesday the group was not advocating a boycott, but felt the Globe "should be aware of what the situation is if they want to go to North Korea."

Dromgoole said the tour's aim was "to take culture to every country, to all the peoples of the world."

He is confident "Hamlet" — the tragedy of a prince torn between indecision and revenge — will speak to audiences in many different cultures and political systems.

"It's about somebody who is troubled by a sense of a new modernity within an age that doesn't

understand him," Dromgoole said. "And I think in many different places and many different political situations and many different historical moments, the play will still be eloquent."

The tour involves a stripped-down production with a portable set and a multicultural cast that includes Hong Kong-born actress Jennifer Leong and Maori actor Rawiri Paratene. London actor Naeem Hayat, a recent graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, alternates with Emeruwa as Hamlet.

"Shakespeare wrote these plays to tour," Dromgoole said, noting that the play travelled through northern Europe in the 17th century and was even performed aboard a ship off the coast of in Yemen in 1608, only five years after it was written.

"So these plays weren't written to sit smug and proud in London. They were written to charge around the world," he declared.

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