

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Duke of Edinburgh Award presentation,
Cutler's Hall, Sheffield, 12th November 2007
Talk given by Samuel West – Actor and Artistic
Director – Sheffield Theatres 2005-7.



" Thank you. It's lovely to be back in Sheffield, and a pleasure and a privilege to be asked to talk to you tonight. But why am I here? And more importantly, why should you listen? I'm Samuel West, an actor and a director, and also, until earlier this year, Artistic Director of your theatre, the completely amazing Crucible. When I talk to drama students, they want to know that I've been on telly. When I talk to nine-year olds, they want to know what it was like playing Doctor Frankenstein in the film Van Helsing. But you are neither nine-year olds nor drama students. Why should you bother listening to me?

Well, in the first place, I did the D of E bronze award (though more than 25 years ago), so I know a little about the challenges that those of you who have reached that standard have faced. I know less about what it's like to go on to Silver and Gold, and I am filled with admiration for those who have achieved those awards tonight. But being an actor means being very childlike at times, and a memory of what it was like doing D of E all those years ago has stayed with me.

It's still the only time I've been canoeing – an activity that I loved, and should have done more of. It introduced me to archery, which I took up properly later at University, and I ended up shooting for the University team. And it was while doing D of E that I began bird-watching, which has been an enduring love of mine, kept me sane while running the Crucible, and takes my girlfriend and I out most weekends to various parts of the country, and indeed the world. Of course, D of E is made up of hundreds of different skills, and my favourites may not be ones that float your boat, but it's worth pointing out that as residents of Sheffield, you are very lucky.

Not only to live in a beautiful and friendly city, with a proud history of producing great steel and great music, but to be on the edge of the Peak District, so close to the best climbing in Britain, and some of the best walks, the most beautiful countryside and the finest bird-watching. There's tons to do. Plus of course, the best regional theatre in Britain, with the most exciting stage in the world. I hope you've been there. If you haven't visited the Crucible, shame on you. It's good, it's easy, and it's cheap. (You see, the nice thing is, if I say 'shame on you' to a crowd like this, I know you'll take me seriously, and not think 'what a wanker', or not too many of you, perhaps).

So, lots of superlatives. Hurray for Sheffo. But mostly, hurray for you. By getting this award and being here tonight, you are officially brilliant. Well done.

There's a reason why 'preaching to the converted' is a bad thing. It's a waste of time, and since what you have all demonstrated by being here is a good use of your time, I won't waste it. I will talk about one thing about D of E that I think is particularly good: it takes AGES.

Yesterday, me and my girlfriend (who's a playwright) took part in a thing called The 24 Hour Plays at the Old Vic, the theatre in London run by Kevin Spacey. Lots of actors, writers and directors meet at 10pm on Saturday night, and introduce themselves, and then the six writers go off and write a play for the actors they've chosen. They write all night, and at 6am they hand over a script of a 10 minute play, and at 7.30 am the actors come in and have breakfast, and get told what play they're going to be in, and at 8.30 am they start rehearsing. And at 7.30 that night (last night), the six plays go on stage. Fully staged by the directors, fully memorised by the actors, lit, with music and everything. It's absolutely the most terrifying thing I've ever done on a stage, and I've done a few. It's thrilling, and nail-biting, and it's all over by 9.58 pm, two minutes under the 24 hours. As an adrenaline-fuelled day, it's hard to beat.

But it's important to remember that most things that are worthwhile can't be completed in 24 hours. Most great plays take several months to write, some much longer than that. I played Hamlet for the Royal Shakespeare Company for a year and three days, and only really felt I'd got it right after eleven months. Some of that process was tiring, some was depressing, some was just very dull. But the day after the last performance, when I'd done it 132 times, I got a sense of exhilaration the intensity of which I have rarely experienced before. Why? Because it was a long haul. The old proverb says 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single

step', and though people think it's a mistranslation, people can't agree whether it was Confucius, Lao-Tse or Abraham Lincoln who said it, and nowadays it sounds a lot less catchy as 'a journey of 1609 kilometres begins with a single step', the point is well made. We are not mayflies. We have more than 24 hours to write and perform our own life-play. We are all, I hope, in it for the long haul.

Impossible as it is to believe at the age of 17 that you will ever be 30, let alone 41 like me, it happens to us all. I used to play the cello reasonably well, and once said to my teacher 'it's going to take me 10 years of practice to be any good – do you realise how old I'll be if I have to practice that hard for 10 years?' 'Yeah', she said, 'you'll be exactly the same age as you'll be if you don't practice'. Well, I didn't practice, and of course I wish I had. (Get used to this, those of you who play a musical instrument – all any adult will say to you once girls or boys get interesting and you start neglecting your instrument is 'don't give up, you'll regret it later'. I'll let you into a secret. They're right.)

So if we get into a time-machine now, and show you yourselves in 20 years, looking back on the photographs taken tonight and the two decades since, we can guarantee (I hope) some embarrassing memories you would rather forget, some fleeting brilliant moments of happiness, long periods of ordinary contentment. I hope, and I believe, that you will look back on all the time invested in D of E with pride and fondness.

Because that's what D of E is – investment. Not in a narrow, profit making sense – who cares? - but as something into which you have put a lot of time, energy and effort. We live in a world of the quick fix, where people rise to fame fast and fall, forgotten, even faster. We need to remind ourselves that most things that are worthwhile take time. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has time woven into it. It has the twin cables of effort and application holding it up. It reminds us that the best things in life are free, but they are also, at times, difficult. Nowadays, when children in school are tested at 11, and then again at half past, the D of E award reminds us that in addition to training the mind, it is just as important to train the body, and the will.

The Dalai Lama said (it really was him, I checked) that we should try and live a good life, so that when we look back on it, it gives us pleasure a second time. And this is another place where D of E scores. It is, of course, fun at the time. But it's also fun in retrospect.

I've visited several of the schools in Sheffield that you attend, and I want to say a word in praise of the Award Leaders, parents, teachers and school boards who support you. It sounds obvious, but schools are the backbone of D of E. The amount of time and interest your school shows in it is crucial. At my school, we had to choose between D of E and the Combined Cadet Force, and though as a pacifist the choice for me wasn't difficult, I'd hate to have been at a school where the choice wasn't available. Thanks and kudos to all those who through their dedication and effort have enabled the award-winners to be here tonight.

It's boring to say we live in a celebrity-obsessed culture, but we do. It must be difficult being a teenager today, surrounded by glittering images of talentless people who've become 'successful' through an accident of genetics and a nice frock. We must remind ourselves that there is a world of difference between success and achievement. Everyone who gets a D of E award, of any type, has shown that they know the difference. That they have put in the hours, sweated the buckets, lived through the disappointments and come out smiling. They have achieved something of lasting worth.

Keep it up. Onward!

I congratulate you all.

Samuel West

Skills: Piano, Cello, Juggling, Birdwatching, Photography.
Sports: Cricket, Table Tennis, Sailing
D of E Bronze award in 1981

Filmography

- [Edward the Seventh](#) (1975 TV mini-series) - Albert Victor 'Eddy' - Age 5
- [Nanny](#) (TV series)
 - Goats and Tigers (1981) - James Lamerton
- [Frankie and Johnnie](#) (1985 TV movie) - Johnnie Mallett
- [Reunion](#) (1989) - Count Konradin von Lohenburg
- [Prince Caspian and the Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#) (1989) (TV) - King Caspian
- [Stanley and the Women](#) (1991) (TV) - Stephen Duke
- [Howards End](#) (1991, released 1992) - Leonard Bast
- [Archipel](#) (1993) - Alan Stewart
- [Voices in the Garden](#) (1993 TV movie) - Mark
- [Alleyn Mysteries](#) (TV series)
 - Death in a White Tie (1993) - Donald Potter

- [The Maitlands](#) (1993) (TV) - Jack Maitland
- [Doctor Who: Dimensions in Time](#) (1993) (TV) - Cyrian (as Sam West)
- [A Feast at Midnight](#) (1994) - Chef
- [Open Fire](#) (1994) (TV) - Steven Waldorf
- [As Time Goes By](#) (TV)
 - We'll Always Have Paris (1994) - Terry (as Sam West)
- [A Breed of Heroes](#) (1994) (TV) - Lt. Charles Thoroughgood
- [The Vacillations of Poppy Carew](#) (1995 TV movie) - Victor
- [Carrington](#) (1995) - Gerald Brenan
- [Persuasion](#) (1995) - Mr. Elliot
- [Zoya](#) (1995) (TV) - Nicolai (as Sam West)
- [Heavy Weather](#) (1995) (TV) - 'Monty' Bodkin
- [Strangers](#) (TV)
 - Costumes (1996) - Simon
- [Jane Eyre](#) (1996) - St. John Rivers
- [Over Here](#) (1996) (TV) - Archie Bunting
- [The Ripper](#) (1997) (TV) - Prince Albert Victor Edward
- [Stiff Upper Lips](#) (1998) - Edward
- [Rupert's Land](#) (1998) - Rupert McKay
- [The Dance of Shiva](#) (1998 short) - Lt. Davis
- [Battle of the Sexes: in the Animal World](#) (1999 TV series) - Narrator (voice)
- [Hornblower](#) (TV series)
 - The Wrong War (1999) - Major Edrington
- [Notting Hill](#) (1999) - Anna's Co-Star (as Sam West)
- [Runt](#) (1999 short) - Pork
- [Longitude](#) (2000) (TV) - Nevil Maskelyne
- [Bread and Roses](#) (2000) - Samuel West - Party Guest (cameo)
- [Complicity](#) (2000) - Neil
- [Pandaemonium](#) (2000) - Robert Southey
- [Iris](#) (2001) - Young Maurice (as Sam West)
- [Shrink](#) (2002 short) - George
- [Waking the Dead](#) (TV)
 - Life Sentence (2002) - Thomas Rice
- [Akhenaten and Nefertiti](#) (2002) (TV) - Narrator
- [101 Dalmatians II: Patch's London Adventure](#) (2003 video) - Pongo (voice)
- [Cambridge Spies](#) (2003) (TV) - Anthony Blunt
- [Entertaining Mr. Soane](#) (2003) - Wightwick
- [Van Helsing](#) (2004) - Dr. Victor Frankenstein
- [Foyle's War](#) (TV)
 - The French Drop (2004) - Lt Col James Wintringham
- [Curse of the Ring](#) (2004) (TV) - King Gunther
- [E=mc²](#) (2005) (TV) - Humphry Davy (as Sam West)
- [The Inspector Lynley Mysteries](#) (TV)
 - Chinese Walls (2006) - Tony Wainwright
- [Random Quest](#) (2006) (TV) - Colin Trafford
- [Midsomer Murders](#) (TV)
 - The Animal Within (2007) - Jeremy Thacker
- [The Long Walk To Finchley](#) (2007) (TV) - [Ted Heath](#)

Theatre credits

Acting

- [The Browning Version](#) - directed by [Clive Perry](#), ([Birmingham Repertory Theatre](#))
- [Les Parents Terribles](#): Michael (February 1989) - directed by [Derek Goldby](#), ([Orange Tree Theatre](#))
- [The Bread-Winner](#) (1989) - directed by [Kevin Billington](#), ([Theatre Royal, Windsor](#) and touring)
- [A Life in the Theatre](#) (October 1989-February 1990) - directed by [Bill Bryden](#), ([Theatre Royal Haymarket](#), transferred to [Strand Theatre](#))
- [Hidden Laughter](#): Nigel (June 1990) - directed by [Simon Gray](#), ([Vaudeville Theatre](#))
- [The Sea](#): Willy Carson (1991) - directed by [Sam Mendes](#), ([Royal National Theatre](#))
- [Cain](#) (1992) - directed by [Edward Hall](#) ([Minerva Theatre](#))
- [Mr. Cinders](#) A Musical Comedy: Jim Lancaster (December 1992-February 1993) - directed by [Martin Connor](#) ([The King's Head Theatre](#))
- [Arcadia](#): Valentine (April-November 1993) - directed by [Trevor Nunn](#), ([Royal National Theatre](#))
- [The Importance of Being Earnest](#): Algernon - directed by [James Maxwell](#), ([Royal Exchange Theatre](#))
- [Henry IV Part I](#) and [Part II](#): Hal (1996-1997) - directed by [Steven Unwin](#) ([English Touring Theatre](#))
- [Journey's End](#): Captain Stanhope (January-February 1998) - directed by [David Evans-Rees](#) ([The King's Head Theatre](#))
- [Antony and Cleopatra](#): Octavius Caesar (1998) - directed by [Sean Mathias](#), ([Royal National Theatre](#))
- [Richard II](#): Richard II (2000) - directed by [Steven Pimlott](#), ([RSC](#))
- [Hamlet](#): Hamlet (2001) - directed by [Steven Pimlott](#), ([RSC](#))
- [The Master and Margarita](#): The Master (2004) - directed by [Steven Pimlott](#), ([Chichester Festival Theatre](#))
- [Doctor Faustus](#): Faustus (2004) - directed by [Steven Pimlott](#), [Martin Duncan](#) and [Edward Kemp](#), ([Minerva Theatre](#))
- [Much Ado About Nothing](#): Benedick (2005) - directed by [Josie Rourke](#), ([Crucible Theatre](#))
- [The Exonerated](#): Kerry Max Cook (2006) - directed by [Bob Balaban](#), ([Riverside Studios](#))
- [A Number](#): B1/B2/Michael Black (2006) - directed by [Jonathan Munby](#), ([Studio Theatre \(Sheffield\)](#) and [Minerva Theatre](#))
- [Betrayal](#): Robert (2007) - directed by [Roger Michell](#), ([Donmar Warehouse](#))

Directing

- [The Lady's Not for Burning](#) (2002), [Minerva Theatre](#)
- [Les Liaisons Dangereuses](#) (2003), [Bristol Old Vic](#)
- [Cosi Fan Tutte](#) (2003), [English National Opera](#) for [Barbican Theatre](#)
- [Insignificance](#) (2005), [Lyceum Theatre \(Sheffield\)](#)
- [Three Women and a Piano Tuner](#) (2005), [Hampstead Theatre](#) and [Minerva Theatre](#)
- [The Romans in Britain](#) (2006), [Crucible Theatre](#)
- [The Clean House](#) (2006), [Studio Theatre \(Sheffield\)](#)
- [As You Like It](#) (2007), [Crucible Theatre](#) and [Swan Theatre \(Stratford\)](#)
- [Dealer's Choice](#) (2007), [Menier Chocolate Factory](#)

Awards and nominations

- 1993 - Nominated [BAFTA Award for Best Supporting Actor](#) for [Howards End](#)
- 1999 - Nominated [Genie Award for Best Actor](#) for [Rupert's Land](#)
- 2001 - Won [London Critics' Circle Theatre Award](#) for Best Shakespearean Performance for [Hamlet](#)

Thanks to Wikipedia for the above list.