

JACK: I think there is a connection between the poetry of Shakespeare and the poetry of rap in this context.

AARON: When I'm writing from an intense emotional place for a particular character and so that momentum just kind of naturally carries me and the character into rhyme speech, into rap because rap is all about momentum, how one rhyme one word play leads to the next. As the emotion pulls the character forward the words also acquire a momentum and identity that both reflects and propels the feeling of the moment. For that reason it just makes sense when I'm writing theatre to be writing rap.

JACK: Why did you identify the gang in *Kingdom* as The Latin Kings rather than a fictional gang?

AARON: If we are living in a dangerous time or difficult time or a violent time, I think we have a responsibility as theatre artists to explore that. I grew up going to a lot more theatre and you know repertory theatre in New Haven which, like the Old Globe, is part of the regional theatre movement and which exists in an urban environment, but whose audience often consist of people who do not have to encounter or deal with first-hand a lot of the problems and wonders of that specific urban environment. Ever since then I was interested in bringing those very specific problems and specific assets and wonderful things about New Haven to folks who might want to avoid that.

JACK: *Kingdom* takes a microcosm of a very specific group of people and speaks very universal themes.

AARON: Yes, hopefully.

JACK: You don't have an axe to grind. We can infer what you think by seeing your story.

AARON: It has evolved over time. That has been one of the interesting things that has changed over time about *Kingdom*. When we started, we did have a little bit more of an axe to grind and it was more about this political parallel and allegory, with the gang banger, the guy who takes over the gang, being a parallel to George Bush. What we found is that it made it impossible for us to be really true to the really specific characters in the specific moment in the specific situation and so the characters themselves demanded to be liberated from that axe we had to grind. So I think the story began to be more character driven over time as a result.

INTERVIEW WITH RON DANIELS

JACK: It is a pleasure to talk to you, Ron. My first question is what drew you to *Kingdom*? Why did you choose this of all the things you could do.

RON: The wonderful thing about the piece in my opinion is that rap allows for an attention to language and to poetry which I find very, very interesting and tallies very much with all my interests in Shakespeare and the use of language in theatre and bizarrely that is what Aaron Jafferis is doing with this piece. Its use of language I find quite stunning so that's one thing that attracted me to it. It's kind of like street Shakespeare in a way. It's colloquial and at the same time it has images and aspirations which are not just prosaic, not just pedestrian, but which soar just like I think Shakespeare's language soars.

JACK: And it deals with very elemental themes on a grander scale that Shakespeare also would deal with.

RON: Exactly. And the story to me is quite tragic. I think what the story is actually dealing with is the second thing that I find very attractive. It is the vision of the Latin Kings we have at the first half of the piece and before the death of the leader. I find enthralling the notion of an organization which is not just simply a gang but is an organization that is a community organization which has philosophical, religious and community roots which are actually something I didn't know about the Latin Kings. And I find everything they represent in the first half of the piece very attractive and the sense, though obviously there are contradictions, which begin to corrode it. The descent into criminality and violence, literal criminality, I find very tragic. That narrative arc, which Aaron and Ian succeed in telling through their poetry and their music I just find unbelievably invigorating.

JACK: The darker aspect of the Latin Kings isn't immediately apparent.

RON: That's right because in theory everything the Latin Kings represent in the first half of the play is what the characters wished for. It's an organization that supports its members, that gives its members identity. It reminds them of their history. It offers specific community services like unemployment benefits, like cleaning of the parks, almost like a sort of a shadow government if you like, shadow public services. It is

THE LATIN KINGS



CAST OF *KINGDOM* PERFORM AT THE SEPTEMBER 6 NYMF PRESS CONFERENCE

very important this notion of identity and history and it's very interesting that in the text itself in the Latin King's meeting, the quotation (used) comes from Nelson Mandela. And I think that is very indicative of what historically the Latin Kings were in the late 1990s before they plunged into disarray. I think it was very specific and universal.

JACK: I think that is the basis of most of the best theater pieces. As soon as you start being very general it loses a texture, it loses the immediacy. That's what I think is great about this piece. It is very, very visceral and real.

RON: It is so rewarding to be working on a piece that goes beyond just simple psychology, that actually does take in a wider social perspective and I love that again that is very much my background. Shakespeare is essentially my landscape and this fits very much into that. I find that very exciting and it reminds me in a way too of my very young days in Brazil.

JACK: How did you meet Aaron and Ian?

RON: I did a play at Intar by Michael John Garcés, *Points of Departure*. Aaron saw it and asked me to start working with him and Ian on *Kingdom*. What I find quite wonderful about Aaron is that he is so willing to listen to everyone. It was wonderful to see him at the feedbacks genuinely engaged to hear what people had to say.

JACK: Thanks so much, Ron.

AARON JAFFERIS AND IAN A. WILLIAMS TALK ABOUT COLLABORATING

AARON: When we are together in the same room, which is kind of ideal you know — at NYU we could do this — we would bounce ideas off of each other. He would play a little lick of music and I would start to do my crazy writer thing, writing some rhymes to it or whatever and then I would go off and write a full lyric, a full song lyric. We would decide together, based on the moment of the show about whether it called for a rap or called for a spoken word piece or called for song. Depending on if there needed to be a very aggressive kind of confrontational thing it might turn into a rap. If it were a more introspective moment, it might turn into a song. Once we decided that, maybe Ian would come up with a little lick on the bass or the guitar and I would go off and write the complete lyric for the song, give that to Ian. He would come up with a little something, run it by me and we would sort of go back and forth until we hit something musically that we both really liked and then he would go write the whole song musically.



IAN WILLIAMS AND AARON JAFFERIS

IAN: I grew up as a band kid and played places with a lot of jazz, rock. And then when I got into college I started to get into more hip hop and more avant-garde rock and indie rock and a lot of world music and a lot of Mexican music and Cuban and salsa music. Actually we have the rock, hip hop Latin music and they all have a specific area of emotion that each one sits in. When you're composing a show or just writing a song, you want to match the emotion of what the character is singing and if it's anger, you want an anger sound. You want a harsh guitar and heavy drums so that rock tends to be what I would lean to. And then with the Latin that tends to make you want to dance. It's like a celebration. It's when people are having fun. I think when you define each of these to just match the emotion and if there are lots of emotions going on, once they combine with the music, then they match.