

# Three Patch Podcast – Episode 106

*Davey Nellist Q&A*

July 1, 2020

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## Davey Nellist Q&A

Consulting Fans: Science, Fox, Chase, Fin Amour, and Cumbercookie, Producer: Fox, Editor: Emma Grant

– Our May 9, 2020, chat with Davey Nellist, in which he talks about playing Mike Stamford on Sherlock, his acting career, and what he's been up to under lockdown.

*(Music intro: Matt Daniels: Brush Up Your Shakespeare)*

**Male voice singing:**

*Brush up your Shakespeare*

*Start quoting him now*

*Brush up your Shakespeare*

*And the women you will wow*

*Just declaim a few lines from Othella*

*And they'll think you're a hell of a fella*

*If your blonde won't respond when you flatter 'er*

*Tell her what Tony told Cleopatterer*

*(Music fades)*

### Science

Hello, everyone. Welcome to our live q&a with Mr. Davey Nellist. Thank you for joining us. My name is Science and I'm here with

### Fox

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Fox.

**Chase**

Chase.

**Fin Amour**

Fin Amour.

**Cumbercookie**

Cumbercookie.

**Science**

All right and we also have some fans joining us. Thank you everybody for joining us. We can't wait to get into these. We'll start out, since we're a *Sherlock* podcast, let's start with the character that we're all very fond of, the brilliant Mike Stamford, who realized that John and Sherlock would make perfect flatmates.

**Fox**

So we were wondering how were you cast as Mike Stamford? Can you tell us about the process and how you prepared for the role?

**Davey**

Absolutely. I was called up by my agents to go to the audition. I'd seen old Sherlock Holmes with Victorian London and pea soup fogs and all that, so I didn't know quite what to expect from this. Got the sides - they didn't send the whole script, just sent the sides - and then I went and met with Mark Gatiss and Steve [Moffat], and I think Sue Vertue was there. And I knew Mark a little bit through a mutual friend of ours called Mark Benton, an actor. He was very lovely and immediately put everybody at their ease in the way that he does. And we just read the scene. I was aware that Sherlock was a sort of genius character, so I was trying to make Mike Stamford as normal as possible, that he was the counterbalance in the scenes. I thought he was a, you know, a family man. I put his backstory that he was a normal guy. He had been in war, but he hadn't really been affected by it in too great a way. He was just there. He was doing his job. And that was really how I tried to prepare it by just looking at what was good for the scenes in terms of a balance. When you're in a scene with a genius, you don't want to try and top them. You know, I think with someone like Stamford, there's no way that I could have lived with Sherlock, but I saw in John somebody that had the attributes. He could cope with Sherlock's intellect on the same level.

**Fin Amour**

That is a really good segue into our next question, which is about which is about Mike's backstory. So we were wondering if you had any sort of backstories that you created for Mike, if you could tell us maybe about how you think he met Sherlock, what his uni years were like with John, or what you think he's up to now?

**Davey**

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It's interesting, because in the pilot, we shot a scene in Stamford's house where he had a wife and a golden Labrador dog, as I remember. [Aww...] I know! My favorite dog. I thought, oh, this is good. This is nice. We got a dog and all that, and then, of course, the way that filming is, they were running over. So that scene was edited out. But I sort of saw him as quite a regular guy, you know, married, two kids with a dog and living just quite a quiet life really. I think he's quite an industrious character, quite a hard worker. And he met Sherlock and I think being impressed by Sherlock's work ethics and being curious about his methods. I don't think he would, Stamford would ever get a riding crop out and look at the effect on a body. More do it through the lab and through science, but I think there's something in a character like that, that you admire. You see the results that they get, and the quick-wittedness of a character. And there's a good heart there, I think, in Sherlock, despite this brusque nature that he sometimes has. I think he's quite a loyal person. And I think that would be attractive to Stamford. Ah, he probably keeps his dog well away from Sherlock, in case he sees him in the operating theatre.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

It's interesting, if there'd been further episodes, it's interesting always to find another look at a character, You say, that bit is obvious about them. What's the odd thing about them? Everybody has something odd that no one can guess: oh, I wouldn't have thought that of you. And it's about sometimes finding those little things that make a character sort of more three dimensional.

### **Fin Amour**

So speaking of character, backstories and such, we have a question from our Discord server from Alice Nox, and they were asking about your costuming and how it might have informed your acting, specifically in regards to the iconic Stamford tie.

### **Davey**

The Stamford tie, which I believe is from the Mercian Regiment. The Mercian Regiment, so, Mercia was an old name for part of Britain. The tie comes from regiments of five different counties. The fact that he still wore that after his army days, it gives us a little insight into what sort of a person that he is. He's quite, I think he is quite ordered, quite regimented, you know, in the way that my wife - in real life my wife studied science, a zoologist. Isn't any more, but she's very meticulous. She's very ordered in a way that I'm certainly not, and most actors -- I don't think most actors are very mathematically or science based, but it's just that sort of order and finding the right results by process of elimination. I tend to be a lot more sporadic than that. So I think yes, there was something about somebody who wears a regimental tie. It's a bit like somebody who goes to a specific university, and years later, they're still wearing their tie. Not everybody would guess it. But I think it's a little chord that somebody may be sitting in a coffee house or something and someone says, "Oh, were you in the regiment?" And then they would have a connection with that. And I remember I asked for the glasses. There's something about-- I quite like looking in the

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mirror when you're in the trailer and not seeing completely yourself. I suppose it goes back to dressing up as kids. It's play acting, and I quite like, quite often in characters I play, I ask for glasses, because I think it just changes your face in quite a quick way.

### **Fox**

So you were also in the Christmas special. So how did you compare the preparation of your role in that special with how you prepared for the first episode?

### **Davey**

It's interesting because, although we hadn't seen that much of him. I suppose, because we'd seen the series, it just gives you more of a flavor of what they're doing with the program. And so we knew the language of the series. We knew the humor that Mark and Steve are so brilliant at. So it was lovely because it was just little hints in the language that we were back in Victorian times. You know, when Sherlock says, "two hundred and twenty-one B" rather than what we would, "two two one." It was more about, for me, going back and studying the original scene, and making sure, because I, you know, I've done so many jobs since then. I remember I was in the middle of doing a play you might know called *Billy Elliot*, I was in *Billy Elliot*, and they were hemming and hawing about whether they would release me to do the filming because I had to get back in the evening show. So my preparation was mainly in convincing the company manager of *Billy Elliot* I'd be back in time for curtain.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Chase**

I have someplace to be!

### **Davey**

I have a place to be, and there's gonna be a big hole in the play if I'm not there. When it comes to those things, it was just so interesting to be back. It was such a much bigger beast when we got back to it and so, a lot more secrecy in the filming. Everybody was under umbrellas just being sort of guided to the set, and security people. Going back to when we shot the pilot and nobody knew who we were, you know. They knew... I guess even Ben wasn't that well known. Martin was known from *The Office* more than, probably more than anybody was. He was the most recognizable, I guess. But then, you know, fast forward to the Victorian special and they're mega stars and everybody wants them, so it was interesting to see. It was good that they hadn't changed. I was sort of waiting. I thought, oh, well, how are they going to be on set? Are they going to be different on set? And they weren't, you know, they were just - you know, they're on their phones a lot because there's lots of other work stuff going on for them. But all the way through -- I can honestly say this -- they were so easy to work with and very giving, you know, not-- I've worked with far lesser actors who demanded the director that the final shots of them have their close up, and they're not there to do their offlines with the other actor. And they're certainly not like that at all. So I've always said to everybody that's asked that they get everything that they

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rightfully deserve because they go about it in the right way, from an acting point of view.

**Science**

That's great.

**Chase**

That's great to hear.

**Cumbercookie**

So, sorry to take a bit of a different line of questioning, but we were wondering, if Stamford had a blog, what do you think it would look like?

**Davey**

Ah. It's going back to his sort of interests outside of the job, but I sort of saw him as being part of a crossword club. I know those guys and you see them on trains and they're just very methodical. They like the battle of doing a cryptic crossword. I've tried to do them. I've got books on trying to solve them but so far, they're beating me. I see him as a chess club man sitting in a dusty library playing scrabble, playing online scrabble. Not gambling or anything like that, just for the sheer brain battle of it all.

**Chase**

That fits really well.

**Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

**Science**

If you think about the series as a whole, is there a moment that Stamford wasn't involved in that you feel like maybe he needed to be there, or maybe just a scene that you really would have wanted to be a part of?

**Davey**

Well, this story: in *The Sign of Three*, in the wedding, I was supposed to be there. And I was doing another play, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. They tried and tried, and I tried and tried, and then they wouldn't release me because-- If it had been filming in London, they would have released me, but they just couldn't trust the trains to get me back each night. So every time I watch that, and I think, there's the note, telegram read out from Stamford. And that's why that came about. It just looks so much fun because everybody was there. And you look at it thinking, oh, that looks a great laugh. Not so much from an acting point of view, but everybody would have stayed over and it would've been a really nice time to get to know those people that you didn't have any scenes with, like Amanda or Una Stubbs and-- You know, Una Stubbs, a legend since I was six. Even at the read through, you think, wow, that's Una Stubbs!

**Multiple speakers**

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[giggles and laughter]

**Davey**

So yeah, the wedding is the one that I always go, oh, that's somewhere I'd like to have been in. But in terms of favorite scenes in the series, I think from the way it was shot and the way it was acted, the swimming pool scene with Moriarty. What episode is that again?

**Multiple speakers**

The Great Game, third one, season one, yeah, The Great Game.

**Davey**

Oh yes, yes. I think that's so beautifully shot and played by Andrew and Benedict. It's just fantastic, right at the top of their game and [unintelligible]. I'd heard of Andrew Scott a little bit around the theater scene, around the National Theatre, and then I suddenly watched that and thought, wow, this guy's - yeah. He's good. He's going places. Yeah, and again, a nice lad.

**Cumbercookie**

So, um, what were some of the major differences between the production of the pilot and A Study in Pink, because there's some major differences between those two.

**Davey**

Well, I think in terms of going on set, the biggest thing that we realized was, there was a lot more money going into the series. They realized that this was good, what they had on their hands. It was that sheer sort of unknown quality about the pilot. Nobody quite knew that it was going to work. They were very worried that the audience wouldn't take to it, that they had their view of what Sherlock was and that a modern updating of it wouldn't quite sit well with an audience. I mean, I really liked the pilot episode and Coky Giedroyc, who directed it. Fantastic director. The biggest thing, making it the 90 minutes, was a stroke of genius. Rather than to have four or five 50 minute episodes to have the three hour-and-a-halves, basically three feature films. That just sort of elevated it to event television, if you like. People were talking about it. And then because it was all over within three, you were desperate for the next series. It's like now, occasionally there'll be a series on and you realize that you can't watch it all as a whole block on Netflix. You've got to actually wait till the next week or wait till the next series. It somehow makes you invest in it a lot more because it's because it is an event. I think Paul McGuigan coming on as director for the first few episodes of the series. I mean, he's a very strong character. I remember, he just said, "Right, clear the room for the actors." And normally what that means is, clear the room for the actors and, but the writer and the director and the producers can stay and Steve could sit. And he said, "No, did I not say clear the room for the actors?"

**Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

**Davey**

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Wow. But as an actor you go wow, that's good. I like that. More like being in a rehearsal room for a piece of theater where you can, you know. I guess that the less people in a room, the more you can really go for something or feel the confidence to try out something. It's when it gets to 50 people in the room and it becomes technical and about angles and about lights and close ups and all that that it becomes harder. So yeah, Paul, I thought, with inspired choices as director, really shaped the look of so many things that we came to know and love about the series.

### **Fin Amour**

And we love both versions of those. So, you've talked a bit about some of your favorite scenes of the series and some of the scenes that, a couple things that you wish you were in. We were wondering if you could think back to the actual filming and the set. Is there a specific day or specific moments that stood out to you during filming?

### **Davey**

I see it was the iconic scene in the lab, where it was the first time that I'd seen how Benedict was gonna approach the character. I didn't know he was gonna be so fast with his lines. So it was really-- I don't think we'd rehearsed it that many times, or certainly not at that speed. And so my reaction, my reactions were quite real.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

Yeah, not only is Sherlock an impressive character but that was an impressive bit of acting. Just, normally if you have a list of something, most actors will put in a "um" and an "er" and this and that. And to really just fly at it, it tells you so much about that character. You're aware of how quick his mind is working. We're on a different level here. And it was that, that I thought - oh, just the chemistry of those two. I suppose when you have such an iconic series, you're always thinking, oh, who would I have cast? Who would've been my Sherlock and would have been my Watson? And within a day or two, you couldn't imagine anybody else playing those parts. That's what was brilliant about it. I think Benedict was cast first, as I recall, and they looked around for a few Watsons and it's just that lovely sort of normality, I guess, that sort of everyman character that Martin plays so well. That is that counterbalance to Sherlock. You just think, yeah. They're very different in their characters, very different in their acting styles, I think, but I think they enjoy working with each other. And I think that, that certainly comes across, that there's a real trust there.

### **Science**

Going back to the source material, did you read any of the Conan Doyle stories before? Or after you were cast? Do you have any favorites? If you did...

### **Davey**

I read obviously the *Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I'd read that a long time ago when I was, you know, a young 19 or something like that, and loved that. And was

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always wondering how they were going to update that. I find it's such a brilliantly sort of spooky story, and whenever I'm out that way around Dartmoor, there's something about-- It's a real spooky place. And to think, how're they gonna do this? And then, I don't know about you guys, but I could never ever guess, even when I was at the read through. I mean, two thirds of the way, I wouldn't have a clue who'd done it, how it was coming together. Even sometimes, after we'd finished the read through, going, can I just ask a question?

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

Can you explain about that to me, about the two kids? So yeah, I'm always a person who's got to have about five books on the go. But um, I would like to come back to Conan Doyle, because yeah, they do stand up. I think that was what was attractive to Steve and Mark, that the stories still hold up as classic tales. They're real good page turners.

### **Science**

Absolutely.

### **Fin Amour**

Agreed. And I know that we would all love for you to continue speaking about *Sherlock* all day. But since *Sherlock*, there have been some other great work that you've been in. Can you tell us a little bit about this series *A Confession* from last year and what it was like to work with Martin Freeman again?

### **Davey**

Yeah, it was interesting because I played football with the director, Paul Andrew Williams. So he'd said at the beginning of the year, "Make sure you keep from September free. I've got something for you." Great. And if you look in the scene, there's about -- I think he broke the record -- has eight or nine members of our football team in the series.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

But we didn't -- so we knew we were cast and I didn't know it was gonna be played by Martin. So when he said oh, Martin's doing it, I said, "Ah, brilliant. Fantastic." And it was interesting working with someone on such a different project. There was a real pressure because we were playing someone's real story, someone's tragic story. And I remember early on in the rehearsals, we went out for a meal with the detective, Martin's character, the detective, and he was telling us the real stories about the mother who lost the daughter. And suddenly you think, ah, there's a real responsibility to get this story right because someone's trusted the writer and my friend the director to tell their story. And it's not a piece of fiction. So there was a lot more to prepare in terms of, I was able to ask questions of him about what was he like, the background of him. Was he a family man, does he... What

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does he do for fun? Does he drink? There was a lot less laughter on that, I think, because we all took it so serious, the responsibility that we had to the two families who were still grieving. And it was going to be very, very hard for them to watch the series. And when it came out, and I remember talking to Paul, the director, and he passed on through the producers that the families were very happy with what we've done with it. That was better than any five star review. Just to know that if they'd been upset by any aspect of it, or thought that we tried to just make it as a piece of entertainment, that would have been really quite upsetting, I think. I've played real people before, but I'd never played somebody who was, in a series, which was affected by a real murder. Not to say there weren't laughs. It was interesting working with Martin now that, you know, he's a huge star. Because people were saying to me, oh, you work with him? What's he like? And I said, well, I remember him as being lovely, you know, and to hear my friends from football saying, "Ah, you were right about Martin. What a lovely bloke. What a great lad he is." You know, he's not sort of starry in any way. You know, I think if you ever hear Martin say anything, raise his voice or whatever, it's always for the good of the scene. Somebody will be talking in the background when the actors are trying to rehearse and he will just ask for quiet, but it's not out of being sort of a big shot, where-- it's just because he cares about the work. And, you know, I think that's why directors enjoy working with him because you probably, you know, he's gonna challenge you on how you're shooting it and, and how he sees the character. Which is what you want as a director, but you're gonna get hard work. That's what I would always point out to young actors, you know, actors just entering the profession. There's lots of actors with talent. There's loads of actors with talent and you've always gotta... A friend of mine said something brilliant yesterday. He said, "All the actors that you act with, were all the best actors in their school." And you go, "Ah, yeah, right." And then they will go to drama school, and they're suddenly not the best actors. And then when you enter the profession, you've just got to think, everybody's as good as me. What else can I bring to the party, through either being a nice person to work with, or just being a hard worker, being on time, knowing your lines? You know, it's nothing worse than coming on the scene where, you know, Martin's got five scenes, that morning, he's got five scenes. You don't want to be the one to mess up your - you've only got five scenes to prepare. He's got 50. Just facilitate him. Don't slow the pace because you haven't prepared. You see some young actors, because they've been told they're the best thing at drama school or whatever, and they come out in the profession and think - and you think, no, you've got a lot to learn. I sound very old now, don't I?

## **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

## **Science**

The word is experienced.

## **Davey**

Yeah, it's a bit blessed, isn't it?

## **Cumbercookie**

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That's really fascinating to learn about, um, working on the set with Martin. So I know that working on screen and on stage has a lot of challenges. So I was wondering if you could speak to the challenges and opportunities of the current digital theater efforts that have been happening?

### Davey

Yeah, it's been a big change. I think people that are creative will always find a way to be creative. This afternoon, I had a play reading, a Zoom reading of *Comedy of Errors*. And yesterday, we did-- We're going through the whole chronology, a director friend and about a dozen of us, through the whole of the Shakespeare chronology. So we did, we did *Richard III* yesterday, and then we did *Comedy of Errors* today. It's been a bit like that. And it sort of works, you know? It's good because on Zoom, unlike a conversation, you know in a play who's going to be speaking next, because you've got the script open. And I've been impressed by what people have managed to do with the monologues. I directed a monologue for-- a friend runs the Coronavirus Theater Club, and I'm going to be acting in one I think, week after next. And that'll be good just to-- It's just about keeping your, for want of a word, muscle warm, you know? You don't know when this is gonna end. It could end soon as, you know, hopefully sooner rather than later. But you've got to be-- I always use the terrible analogy about putting your bike in the shed. And you don't want to get it nine months out and it's completely rusty. You want to keep it nicely oiled so that you're able to say, right, I'm fit, I'm ready. I'm prepared. I've been keeping my brain active. I've been quite impressed with how I've coped with it in terms of-- I've been quite proactive. I've been doing a lot of writing with people and a bit of directing and my ukulele. And so I've been, yeah, I've been quite strangely surprised at myself, how proactive I've been, really. My secret is I've got a shed, and I go into the shed and nobody else comes down the bottom of the garden. And so I just keep out of the way in there.

### Chase

I wish I had a shed. I don't. I have a small Brooklyn apartment. So actually, our next question was about the Coronavirus Theater Club. Could you tell us your involvement and, or if you have any plans to do other projects like that?

### Davey

Yeah. I was in a play about five years ago called *War Horse*, and one of the actors in that, a good friend of mine called Brian Lonsdale, he set up Coronavirus Theatre Club. He's someone who always needs to be busy. He's got a couple of twins. I think they're about five or six now, so he's very busy in the house, but he always needs a project. I was very impressed that he set this up. And there's quite a few now, monologue clubs. And I had a little bit of work on, so I didn't want to learn a five page monologue. So I said I would direct one. And that was nice because he just, I got paired with a young actor who I didn't know. And so we had a few Zoom chats and I thought, ah, he's really good, this guy, and it was quite interesting because you-- I've directed on the theater floor before where you can change things up by introducing a new character or getting someone to move around. So on a fixed camera, there's not a lot you can do. So you're just trying to shape the actor in the way that they want to go in terms of their motivation more than spacing and, yeah, speed of

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delivery, things like that. Because they can't see how it looks to the viewer. He kept looking off stage which wouldn't have been a problem at all. And I kept saying, when you do that on screen we need a cutaway to what you're looking at. Otherwise we feel left out. We do. You know, in a film, you'd just have a close up of the actor, then a close up of what he was looking at, then back to the actor. And so it's just stuff like that. I really enjoyed working with someone I didn't know and then yesterday, yesterday or the day before, Brian phoned me and said that he'd wrote a part that I would be good for and would I be interested in doing it? So he sent it to me yesterday. So I've now got five huge pages of monologue to learn. We were gonna do it next Sunday, but I said, "Can I be the Sunday after?" Otherwise I, yeah, as you get older, line learning becomes-- It just gets harder and harder. So yeah, that's, that's gonna be on two weeks tomorrow, that'll be on.

### **Fin Amour**

As you said, you've had a lot of experience, and you've done so many different types and varieties. You've had so many different types of roles. You've worked on the stage and screen, on period and modern pieces. And we just wanted to take a moment to hear from your end, what it's been like working on all these different types of projects. So first of all, what are some specific elements that draw you to a project? Do you have a preference between any of these types of work?

### **Davey**

That it's something I've not done before is always very attractive. You know, as an actor, you get seen as one thing. So if I read a script and think, ah, I've not played that or have not played that for a while, or they haven't seen me as that, that's always very attractive. I think a lot of it comes back to the writing. You know, you read a script-- I've done a lot of Shakespeare in the last four or five years. And you know that that works. It's about finding your particular angle on your Macbeth or your Lear or whatever. I was brought up watching a lot of new, sort of inspired by a new writing company in Newcastle where I'm from, so I like working on a new play because quite often you'll have the writer in the room with you. So you can, if they're a good writer, they'll listen to the actors. You can share a bit. It's more of a sort of collaborative experience. Quite often you read a weak piece of writing and they've wrote the lead roles very good. But the people around the side are just really sort of two dimensional. And you think, well, there's no point in doing it. I don't care that it's in the West End or whatever, especially because a lot of the West End plays are quite long, you know. It can be up to a year contract. You think, I can't do that eight shows a week, for 50 weeks of the year. I don't care how many, you know, you could have 1500 people in the audience, but you're just bored stiff after 20 performances. You've done it, you know exactly how to play the character. So that, yeah. I guess in the past when you're younger, you go, ah, it's the West End or money's great or whatever. After all that, I think, no, I've got-- That's a year. That's a long time. I need the right-- I need something to-- I work with a lot of actors who, their performance can be the same every night. And I don't mean that in a derogatory way. It's just, it's so solid, but I sort of like to throw stuff around or just deliver a line with a different person on the, just to keep it fresh for me and keep the scene fresh. And if you get to a piece of writing where you can't do that, you think, ah, no. So now I'm better at spotting those and going, no, I'd rather not go for that. I think it depends

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after this, after lockdown. We don't know what state the industry is going to be in. So never say never. You know, I could be signing up for a year in the West End, three lines after this.

### **Chase**

So we're curious, what's the first thing that you ever acted in? And what's been your favorite role or one you'd like to play?

### **Davey**

First one professionally was... I did a telly when I first came on. It was a cop series called *Spender*. An actor called Jimmy Nail, who I've worked with again. We did the workshop of the Sting musical, *The Last Ship*, that's just been on tour. And I worked with him again. It was interesting recently working with somebody after 30 years and you've come out and you're a young kid who, you know, wouldn't ask a single question on set or anything like that. We didn't do much at drama school. We did an awful lot of theater but we didn't do much television technique. I remember going on the first day and trying to deliver the line like it was a piece of, and the director's going, no, no, just just take it down. You don't have to project. "My lord!"

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

You know, you're trying to play it really cool and have to be found out on your first day. You see all the other people in the room going, oh, right. That's a first-timer here. So yeah, that was my first telly. I think, there's gotta be something on YouTube, where it was a picture of me. It was like, oh my god, at this. Cause I'm only sort of, I guess I was only five years older than my oldest daughter is now, you know. It's bizarre to think, wow, I've been around a long time.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

Roles I've wanted to play, was that the second question, or was that the favorite role?

### **Chase**

Favorite role or ones you've wanted to play?

### **Davey**

I did a play called *Pitmen Painters*, which was wrote by a guy called Lee Hall, who wrote *Billy Elliot*, again. And it's set not far away from where I'm from. The original production ended up on Broadway with a lot of good pals of mine. So I missed out on that because I was doing something else. So I'd always wanted to play one of the parts and they're all really, really good parts, great ensemble piece. But the lead character, Oliver Kilbourne, strangely, I hadn't seen myself playing that part. And then someone said, will you come in

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for a meeting? And at the meeting, they offered me the Oliver Kilbourne part, which is quite unusual to be offered it actually in the audition. And then to be offered that huge lead. It was thrilling, you know. It's such a brilliant play, and I guess it follows a lot of things which I'm interested in. How the working classes can be taken out of their situation by art and the power of art. Lee Hall's writing, if you watch *Billy Elliot*, that's his sort of motif. He was a working class lad. We went to the same school. He ended up going to Cambridge University and, just through being involved in the arts, he now hangs around with Elton John, and he's writing a musical with Paul McCartney, and, you know, his life was completely transformed through the power of art. So the play was about that. Even if it wasn't to play the same part, I think I'd love to just do the play again, because it throws up so many brilliant arguments about who has the right to art. Who owns, not only in the physical sense, but why do some people walk into a gallery and think, oh, yes, this is exactly where I should be, whereas some people walk in and go, oh, no, no, this isn't for the likes of us. You know, so I like that argument. And parts I'd love to play... I'd love to do the play *King Lear* and either play the fool in Lear or play Lear himself one day, in about another 30 years, when the beard's a bit longer.

### Multiple speakers

[laughter]

### Davey

It's my favorite Shakespeare play and also my favorite play. Every time I watch it, I see different things in it. You watch it as a young person and you see the rivalry between the two brothers, Edgar and Edmund. And now, when you watch it having elderly parents, it's about an elderly guy losing his power as he fades and becomes mentally ill. Superb piece of writing. He's quite good, Shakespeare, isn't he? He knows what he's doing.

### Multiple speakers

Yeah, he's all right. [laughter]

### Fox

So we were wondering, when the pandemic and the lockdowns happened, were you in the middle of a project? And if you were, how did that change the production? Do you know what's going to happen to that project?

### Davey

Yeah, I was in the middle of doing *Macbeth*. We were on tour with *Macbeth*. Luckily, we'd done sort of two thirds of the tour, and things were happening in the news. We were sort of waiting. We'd get to a new venue and think, oh... Every time we would come in and "Can we have all the actors to the stage?" We're thinking, this is it. This is it, we're going to be told we can't go on because there's 500 people, 600 people gathered in a theater in close proximity, when we're hearing on the news that people have to socially distance. So we were in Ipswich in the east of England, and it was right at the beginning, about seven weeks ago now? And we were called in and they just said, yeah, it's off. We can't get the-- I think it came down to insurance in the end. If anybody gets it, the government's advised that it

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doesn't take place, theatre. At that stage they hadn't banned it. They hadn't said they must close, but they said it was strongly advised. Which was, I think, was worrying for the theatres because they couldn't claim back on their insurance if it was just advised, because it became their decision to go ahead or not, or to pull it. It was their decision. So as soon as the government said no, we're closing all theaters, West End closed. It was just bizarre. You know, I drove home and nobody knows when they'll next work. You know, I've a bit of waiting on a two or three pieces of telly that I'd done self tapes for, whether... I think with the telly, they're more likely to pick that up when we get going again, because there's so much work goes into telly before the cameras roll. They've already spent so much money on it, on a project. They're more likely to go ahead, but with a theater tour, I think other things are booked into the theatres. I felt more sorry for friends of mine who'd just started six month tours and things like that, or were in the last week of rehearsal, and something about not being able to go on-- At least we had, we'd completed our circle. We'd rehearsed it, teched it, and we'd seen it in front of an audience. There was a completion which, people who didn't have the chance to do that, I think it probably takes a lot longer to get over that. You know, it's like being pulled out of the marathon after doing 25 miles. You just need, for your own headspace, you need to be able to complete it. So yeah, who knows what will happen and whether people will be allowed back in the theatres or if it is, whether they have to not sell every other seat and keep lots of space. And yeah, I think it's about watching other countries to see how... Spain were two weeks ahead of us and Germany. To see how their theatres do it and whether we can possibly use... I know I saw something in South Korea, they were using -- you went into the theater and you were... your temperature was taken by a machine. If you were over, you couldn't enter the theater, and if you were okay, you were okay. So yeah, I'm trying to keep... Some days, you go, oh god. [groan] So it's like Groundhog Day.

## **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

## **Fin Amour**

Yeah, we are about to wrap this up. But we just have one more question and that's about the silver linings in all of this. So can you tell us a little bit about some of the silver linings, for you personally in all of this? And how is your ukulele playing going?

## **Davey**

I think this is the silver lining. All joking aside, it's been how the community has come together. I'd seen on the telly from Italy that when they clap on a -- we do on Thursday over here -- you clap the key workers and the NHS and all that. And I was a bit skeptical about it on the first night, thinking, well, it just seems we're copying other countries. And then it was so moving to just open up doors and people are coming out with pots and pans and banging and. It was really, I really look forward to that now. And you say hello to people in your street who you haven't, you didn't really know. And so I hope that that's something that we keep, that spirit in the community. London's sort of quite famous for people keeping their head down and not talking to each other and everything's so busy. I think it's given people a chance to realize what they've got and what's important. What they can live

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without. And what's actually important to them is their whatever they're missing. That you missed out on a beer with your friends or you're missing all the theater or you could go to cinema, or just having a hug. My nieces came over. They're five, you know, and they sort of get it, but they couldn't-- We couldn't give them a hug and it's just heartbreaking. I bumped into a friend of mine, an actor, in the supermarket and he is someone I don't see that often. But we're very tactile when we see each other and the fact we couldn't even shake hands was just heartbreaking. I'm quite good at telling people I love them and I'm unashamed of texting someone just saying, just been thinking about you, man. I've just really missing you at the moment, love you. And so hopefully that we keep that going. Ukelele-wise, I'm better.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

I'm better. I'm sticking at it. I'm doing me 40 minutes a day. And that's why I've been in the shed, because my wife banishes me to the shed.

### **Multiple speakers**

[laughter]

### **Davey**

I'm trying to get that [sings] Let it be, let it be...

### **Fin Amour**

Yeah, that's one of the favorites!

### **Davey**

Yeah, as you get older, it's so much harder, but I find it really relaxing because you have to be in the moment and you've to just live with your own mistakes. It's quite therapeutic. So I shall persevere.

### **Fin Amour**

Absolutely, and we look forward to hearing that during our next meeting. Maybe you'll play a little bit for us?

### **Davey**

Well, yeah. [laughter] Ambitious, ambitious!

### **Science**

Put you on the spot.

### **Fin Amour**

We have a lot of time, though.

### **Multiple speakers**

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[laughter]

### **Science**

Well that's it for today for all of our questions. But we wanted to thank you so much, Mr. Nellist, for taking the time to join us today. Our second go round on this. We really appreciate you taking the time and we've really loved chatting with you. Thank you so much.

### **Multiple speakers**

Yeah, thank you. Thank you so much.

### **Davey**

Stay safe and keep looking after each other, and try and keep patient and keep smiling. And we'll see each other all soon.

### **Multiple speakers**

Excellent, thank you. Goodbye!

*(Music outro)*

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### **Transcription Team**

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>, produced and edited by Emma Grant.

### **Contact**

Other consulting fans are encouraged to contribute to the discussion by posting comments on our various social media outlets, sending email, or leaving voicemail. Here's where you can reach us:

Web: [Three Patch Podcast web site](#)

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### **Music**

**Davey Nellist Q&A** – Matt Daniels: Brush Up Your Shakespeare ([YouTube](#))

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