

# Wise Children's Lockdown

## Tea & Biscuits with Emma Rice and Gareth Snook

Emma:

Hello, I'm Emma Rice, the Artistic Director of Wise Children, and you're listening to Wise Children's Lockdown. Our Lockdown Project is about us finding ways of staying close to each other. On this show, I call up an old friend, play some records, and most importantly, get to chat and reminisce.

Come and join us for Tea and Biscuits.

Hello and welcome to Wise Children's Lockdown Tea and Biscuits, and today, I'm having tea and biscuits with Gareth Snook.

Gareth:

Hello.

Emma:

It's so lovely to see you, Gareth.

Gareth:

You too.

Emma:

So, first and most important question is, what is your virtual or real biscuit of choice?

Gareth:

Oh, right, okay. Well, when I was young, as a treat, I came from a bit of a large family, five children and my mom and dad, and as a treat we used to get the orange club. Do you remember them?

Emma:

Yeah.

Gareth:

And that was a treat, so my biscuit of choice, if I could afford it, would be the orange club, but since we're on very hard times at the moment, I'm going to select the humble custard cream.

Emma:

Oh, is an orange club an expensive biscuit? Does it still exist?

Gareth:

It still exists, yes. You can get them, not everywhere, but you can, but they're not cheap.

Emma:

So a custard cream. A classic choice.

And tell me, how is your lockdown going? Paint me a picture. Where are you?

Gareth:

Well, I'm in Battersea, in London, and on my own, in my flat, and it's funny really, because I'm pretty good at self-isolating. I do it quite a lot. You'll understand that, working in the theater, it's a very very social business, isn't it? Whether you're rehearsing or doing a show, there are loads of people around you all the time, so I rather enjoy self-isolating, because you need that time on your own, I think, to charge your batteries and go back and do it all over again, but, having said that, this is hard.

Emma:

It's just too long, isn't it. It's too long.

Gareth:

Yeah. I get out once a day, maybe, do about five or six kilometer walk. I'm lucky here, because I've got Battersea Park, I've got Wandsworth Common, Clapham Common, so I'm really lucky but, you know, that's only a couple of hours, and then you're back home. Nightmare.

Emma:

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Have you been doing any DIY? What have you actually been doing? Writing, because you do a lot of writing, don't you?

Gareth:

I do quite a bit of writing. Hal and I, well we finished our first screenplay-

Emma:

Excellent.

Gareth:

... finished that in March, so that was pretty bad timing.

Emma:

Because everybody's wanting new projects now, aren't they?

Gareth:

Yeah, exactly. So we'll have to bide our time with that a little bit, so we're discussing our next one.

The germs of an idea of the next one. Yeah, so that's what we're up to.

Emma:

Well, it's very nice to see your lovely face-

Gareth:

Thank you, and you.

Emma:

... and to see you. It is hard. It is hard. There's moments when you think this is fine, because we're used to working hard as well, and as you say, a lot of socializing, which is tiring in itself, but yeah, this is too long, isn't it?

Gareth:

Far, far too long.

Emma:

Right. Let's talk about happier things, which is the very first time I met you. So, I met you when you were at The Globe, but not being directed by me. You were at The Globe in Daniel Kramer's amazing version of Romeo and Juliet, playing Capulet, and you blew my socks off.

I have to say, the whole production blew my socks off. The level of play, and what I mean by that is, it was the most unnaturalistic production anybody put on at The Globe. It was so not Stanislavsky, it was so bold, it had such a huge, vigorous physicality. It was intoxicating, and what I remember most, although I loved the show, was I remember seeing the final run in the rehearsal room, and I thought you were all amazing.

I've never cried at Romeo and Juliet, like I cried in that rehearsal room. I thought the sophistication of play and, as I say, the theatricality in that small space. I often love rehearsal room runs, but that run in particular, I was inconsolable with grief at the amazing leads.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

But you shone out, and I'm going to say something that I hope is a compliment, but I can remember thinking, "I haven't seen another performer since I met Mike Shepherd, with that much physical precision and fizziness." I thought you were on fire, and I can remember thinking, "I want to work with him. He is amazing."

Gareth:

Thank you, thank you. Well, I was-

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Emma:

Tell me a little bit about that production, because it was nutty, wasn't it?

Gareth:

It was absolutely bonkers. Daniel, who I've admired for years and years and years, of course, when he asked me to do it, how thrilled was I? Not only to work with Daniel ... Well, to work with Daniel, to work The Globe, hello, for the first time, which I thought, "Oh my God, I'm beside myself," and then, I thought, "Oh, maybe I'll meet Emma Rice when I'm there." I'd been a fan of yours for so many years, so there you are.

As it all went, and Daniel didn't disappoint, of course. I thought it was a superb interpretation of Romeo and Juliet-

Emma:

Me too.

Gareth:

... and of course he gave me one of my best entrances, probably I'll ever have in my life, where he dressed me in this Godzilla outfit, which is about eight foot tall, with my head poking through, and he put me on a huge glitter ball, and flew me in, as I was singing YMCA.

Emma:

You see, the competitive director in me thinks, "Surely I've given Gareth as good an entrance," but I haven't. Nothing beats that, does it?

I thought it was a T-Rex. Was it Godzilla?

Gareth:

It was a T-Rex, yeah.

Emma:

It was a large lizard on a glitter ball.

Gareth:

Yes.

Emma:

And it was the ball, wasn't it, the costume ball. Oh, it was just fantastic. Ed Hogg on a ladder in the yard-

Gareth:

Amazing.

Emma:

... amazing, just amazing. And it was the first time I'd felt the tragedy really hit me, because often it's annoying, isn't it. You're just like, "Oh, come on, just don't die, you two, and life will be better," but it was the first time I really felt their internal pain.

And as I say, saw you, and then I found out that you could sing, and I thought, "Oh my God, he's perfect," and, Mr Snook, I believe you are.

Gareth:

Oh thank you.

Emma:

So, in the wake of that Romeo and Juliet, I snapped you up for my ... Actually it ended up being my final production at The Globe, Romantics. But before we talk about Romantics, talk about your first record choice, and why you've chosen it?

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Gareth:

Right, well my first record choice is Macy Gray, I Try, for several reasons. One, I love the song, and b, it's a song about longing. It's about losing something or someone that you love, and I thought, "Well, that's very appropriate for this period of life," because I have a love affair with the theater, and I'm no longer in it, and God knows when we'll ever get back to it, so there's that.

And also it was quite funny, because when we were rehearsing Romantics Anonymous this time round, just before Christmas, suddenly it came on somebody's phone, I think, or something, and everybody started singing along to it, and everybody loves that song. And I thought then, it occurred to me, I thought, "Isn't this wonderful," and I thought about the song, I thought, "Wouldn't it be awful if we didn't have this," and here we are.

Emma:

Here we are.

(singing)

Oh, that's made me want to cry and laugh at the same time.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

My world crumbles when you're not here.

I'm still holding on to hope, Gareth, we're animals that love to gather and tell stories, and we will find a way back to that, I'm sure.

Gareth:

Yeah, for sure. Absolutely.

Emma:

Some days I'm sure, some days I'm not, but-

So, Romantics, that was the first time we were in a rehearsal room together, and I really hope you feel the same, but I just feel that we got each other. We're both creatures that love to show off and be shown off to. I just love the broadness of your spirit and how brave you are, and what a lot you bring to the room, and I feel like we've laughed from the minute we met, in a good way.

Gareth:

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. It was, of course, a whole new experience for me, because working with you was something I'd wanted to do for years, and never found a way to you, because for years, for most of my 40 years doing this theater, it's been quite a conventional route. It's been with scripted plays and musicals, and the creative input has been limited to really just developing characters or bringing the script off the page, until I met you, and you opened a door for me to a making theater that I'd never really done before, and I'd always been a bit anarchic in my career, and I've been aware of it, and I've had to really really put the brakes on that a lot in the kind of work that I've been doing. But then, suddenly, I can take my foot off the brake, and suddenly find myself in this wonderful world that I thought, "Oh my God, this is where I should be."

So, thank you for that.

Emma:

What a brilliant analogy, because I don't want anybody with their foot on the brake.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

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I sort of feel the reason we do it is to free wheel and imagine ourselves at our best and our craziest and our wildest, and of course, there's discipline, but in many ways, that's the easy bit. I feel like that we're all professionals and you are an amazing professional, so you can always put the boundaries in, but just having that spirit of play in the room.

So in *Romantics*, you played three characters. One of which was Mercier, who was a rather dashing chocolate maker, one of whom was a guy that couldn't really speak, which I thought would be a tiny part. We just called him the mumbler, didn't even have a name. And then also a small cameo of Madame Marini and, can I say, that you took all three and wiped the floor with them, to the point that the mumbler, who didn't speak, used to get rounds of applause in the middle of scenes.

Gareth:

Well, it was a weird thing, wasn't it, the mumbler, because I thought, "What on earth, who is this," I never really understood for weeks and weeks, and I was just kind of making it up, and everybody seemed to be nodding and not really saying anything, and then suddenly, I thought, "Who is he?" Because then he had to speak, didn't he, at the very end-

Emma:

Yes.

Gareth:

... when he finds his voice, and I thought, "Who is he?" Because he's got to be someone underneath this inability, this terrible, terrible kind of thing that he's got. I thought, well what's the opposite to somebody who can't really speak and nobody can hear? I thought, "Well, he's a Shakespearian actor who's lost his nerve," and that's what I played.

Emma:

Which was so marvelous. There's this character incapable of stringing any words together, being like the ex-great actor was fantastic. It was one of those that we all hear about, that has him crawling round the house unable to go out. It was just so funny. And then Marini, she lives on. Marini's got a whole spinoff in *All of Our Lives*, hasn't she?

Gareth:

Well, it was quite funny, do you remember? Because when you booked me to do the show, I said, "Oh what am I going to be playing," and you said, "Mercier, but we don't know what else until we get in the room." I said, "Naturally, of course."

So they came about during the first few days-

Emma:

Yes.

Gareth:

... I think, in rehearsals, and fortunately when you said that you wanted me to play Madame Marini, I thought, "Oh my God, she's going to regret this."

Emma:

Well, it was unleashing a beast, wasn't it. Marini, she's a force of nature.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

She likes a martini, doesn't she?

Gareth:

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Yeah.

Emma:

Doesn't suffer fools.

Gareth:

No, no, no, no, no, no. Not at all. She's fabulous.

Emma:

And again, rounds of applause in the middle of the scenes. You're such a consummate show-off. You started doing these really long high operatic notes, which of course, delighted me and would bring the house down, and then you realized you had to do it eight times a week.

Gareth:

Yes. Talk about making a rod for my own back. Yeah.

Emma:

And I said, "Oh, don't worry, you can put it down an octave for the odd matinee."

Gareth:

Yeah, exactly.

Emma:

But let's hear a little bit of that. We've got your fantastic Mercier song, Wings, which I thought was quite appropriate, because it's about enabling people to be brilliant, which hopefully we'll all be doing again in the very near future.

(singing)

The wonderful Gareth Snook, singing Wings in Romantics Anonymous, which was about to go to America. It was literally, how many days away were you from the flight?

Gareth:

Oh gosh. It was a Tuesday and we were flying on a Sunday.

Emma:

Yeah.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

It felt so cruel, and it's amazing, isn't it, how the story has unfolded, because we felt unlucky, didn't we. We felt like we were the only people being canceled at that point.

Gareth:

That's right. Well, I think we were the first, really, of any of the theaters, certainly in this country, to shut down. The Los Angeles theater shut down before anybody, and everybody was quite mad about it, thinking, "Oh my God, that's a little bit over the top, isn't it," but of course then the whole deck of cards crumbled-

Emma:

Came down. And the only thing to be thankful of is that you could have all got stuck out there.

Gareth:

Yeah, that's-

Emma:

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If we had actually got you on the plane, which is secretly what I always think. I'm such a pusher. I think, "Oh, if we could get them over there, then the minute we're ready to open we can," but, in fact, you would've been in lockdown in Beverley Hills, which sounds better than it would be.

Gareth:

For sure. Exactly. Absolutely.

I know, it's such a shame. Maybe, one day.

Emma:

And I remember, we had ... Because we were so upset, Poppy and I at Wise Children, we called a company meeting, just to look everybody in the eye, and say, "We're sorry and we're thinking of you, and we're here," and as I got on the train from Cheswick to see you, I started to get the fear. It was like the reality of the situation, and I remember, we were trying to navigate whether we kissed each other to say hello on that day, and I feel that was the day for me that the penny dropped.

Gareth:

Yeah, yeah, for sure. I think, naturally, the default for us all is to be in a bit of denial about it, because we don't want it to happen.

Emma:

Yeah.

Gareth:

Deep down, I thought, "Oh, this does not look good."

Emma:

No.

Gareth:

As the rest of the world, deep down, knew as well.

Emma:

And the word, distancing, just doesn't exist in our life, does it.

Gareth:

No.

Emma:

We're inappropriate and transgressive. Consensually, but from the minute we walk into the room, aren't we? We're exchanging everything that we shouldn't be exchanging, and that's why we do it.

Gareth:

Yeah, it's just so alien to our profession, the two just don't go together at all.

Emma:

No. Tell me about your second song choice and why?

Gareth:

My second song choice is an old favorite of mine, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Me and My Shadow, only because it brings me joy, and whenever me and a few of my friends, whenever in the past, over the years, I've been asked or somebody says, "Will you sing? Will you two sing something, sing something," we always used to sing this number.

And again, it's a little bit like reflecting the world we live in today, Me and My Shadow. Little bit of that as well, but it just brings me an enormous amount of joy. I love it.

(singing)

Emma:

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Sensational. What joy.

So, then it all went pear-shaped at The Globe. I set up *Wise Children*. I knew that my first show was going to be Angela Carter's *Wise Children*, an adaptation of that amazing novel, and I knew that I needed to find Nora and Dora Chance, who are my narrators. In the book, they are two 75-year-old twin showgirls from London, and the thing I knew was it was going to be you playing Dora Chance, and Etta Murfitt playing Nora Chance. Ludicrous, given that you're a Welsh bloke-

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

... and Etta's usually my choreographer. But I felt that between you, Etta was the real deal, in that she's a hooper. She has devoted her life to the grind and the blood, sweat and tears of becoming a professional dancer, and she's got that London authenticity, but I knew that you had the theatricality and the absolute precision, the technique that I needed for my Dora, because she carries the absolute weight of this amazing bit of writing.

And then it crossed my mind that it wasn't okay to give one of the greatest female characters ever written in literature to a man, and then I thought, "Well, that's all right, because the whole story's going to be mixed up," like a strange gender and everything snow globe, that humanity would be thrown up in this show, and anybody could play anything.

And by knowing that I was going to work with you, really made me stick to that as a theme. So all the way through, women are playing men, men are playing women, people from all different races and backgrounds are playing everybody, and the audience just goes with it, because we play it with such passion and truth, that it's irresistible. Those choices are irresistible. It became a bit of casting that I'm so proud of, because I think we, in a tiny way, changed the world in that.

Gareth:

Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. I was quite overwhelmed when you asked me, because I remember when we finished *Romantics Anonymous*, and you said that you were doing *Wise Children*, and ashamedly, I'd never read it. I'd never read it. And I'd take myself away somewhere, I can't remember, on a beach for a week, because I was exhausted, and I read it and of course, fell in love with it. Thought, "How on earth have I never come across this before," and then I thought, "Oh, Melchior. Oh, I'd love to play Melchior," and then, days after I came back, my agent called, and said, "Emma wants you to be in *Wise Children*." I said, "Oh my God, can't believe it. I'm so overwhelmed and thrilled." And she said, "She doesn't know what," and I thought, "Melchior, Melchior," and she came back and asked me to play Dora.

I've never been so gobsmacked in all my life. Fabulous. Fabulous.

Emma:

But you didn't say no. Thank goodness, you didn't say no.

She's such a gift, she's amazing.

Gareth:

What a part. What a role. Oh, God, every minute of it.

Hard, a really tough nut to crack, but what a joy. What a joy.

Emma:

And it was a joy, but you had to really push that boulder up the hill, because an enormous amount of text, and really detailed, and one of the things I don't think I ever said to you, because I'm so busy doing all the big things that I sometimes forget the small stuff, but you learnt it in such respectful



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detail, that you had every rhythm Angela Carter wrote, and you really committed to that, and I really thank you for that work you put in.

Gareth:

And of course, with the wonderful, wonderful Etta Murfitt by my side. What's not to like? Fabulous.

Emma:

Yeah. And all the wigs and the Deirdre Barlow glasses.

Gareth:

Oh-

Emma:

That kimono, it was magic.

Gareth:

I miss that sequinned mini skirt and top.

Emma:

Another mid-scene round of applause.

Gareth:

Yes.

Emma:

But we also got a chance to really ... because it wasn't a musical, so it was a bit less formal ... to really enjoy all the developments together, and all the workshops, so my next choice is going to be Inchworm, which is a really unusual track from ... isn't it Danny Kaye in The Hans Christian Andersen Story?

Gareth:

I think it is.

Emma:

It's a really unusual track, which has haunted me for years, and I knew that I wanted to use this as an inspiration for the sex education song, which I'll talk about in a minute, but this is a strange song, which sits in the back of my psyche, and has done for years, but we used it in the development process for Wise Children.

(singing)

Gareth:

I was just saying, it seems so innocent now, isn't it, until Katy Owen had got her hands on it.

Emma:

I know, so I thought it was like a teaching song, because we had this scene of sex education, which is in the book. Grandma Chance teaches the young dancing twin girls about sex-

Gareth:

Yes.

Emma:

... and I just thought I wanted to have that sense of childlike learning, which you have in that amazing, weird Inchworm track. We ended up with the most amazing montage of our own version of that. We wrote our own children's sex education song, which we all sang quite prissily ... shall I say that? Katy Owen, who did filthy things with bagels-

Gareth:

And rubber gloves.

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Emma:

... and rubber gloves and some sticks of rock, filthier things than you can possibly imagine, and then you sang Lady be Good, over the top. And I felt that it's that's when I love what I do so much. All the layers.

Gareth:

Yeah, yeah.

Emma:

And a bit of you's laughing, a bit of you's gasping. It's bawdy, but it's also full of soul, and you brought ... because you were older Dora looking back at her life ... you brought such a pathos to that.

(singing)

I love the fact you can hear the girls sort of corpse singing. We can't see what Katy's doing any more, but it will have been something so rude.

Gareth:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Emma:

So, I very, very much hope that both of those shows will be back-

Gareth:

Me too, me too.

Emma:

... before we know it. They're not finished, either of them.

Gareth:

I hope not. I really do.

Emma:

And, of course, I got to play Nora next to you. I got to act next to you.

Gareth:

Yes, I know. I know. Just when I thought that I'd got myself another sister with Etta Murfitt, then I got myself another sister.

Emma:

I know. Sisters coming out of your ears.

Gareth:

Sisters.

Emma:

You were so kind to me though, because I hadn't acted for 10 years, and I'd gone into a weird, almost competitive mindset, where I just thought, "I don't want to trip up the show," so I just learned the lines until they couldn't go wrong, and then was trying to learn the blocking, and you used to just push me round gently. I just used to feel your hand on my back going, "Come on dear, come on," and you'd just-

And then sometimes you'd go-

Gareth:

"Come over here, dear. Go on, come and stand over there. Go on."

Emma:

"Take your skirt off." That was my favorite, because I always forgot the quick change, because I hated it. "Go on, go on."

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Gareth:

You were brilliant. You so quickly got into that role. Oh my God. I don't know how you did it. Amazing.

Emma:

Well, I don't know, it kind of went as a blur. It made me realize that I am much happier directing than I am acting. Happy's the wrong word, but I get more of a buzz from directing, whereas I think I just went a little bit tight, acting. I kept thinking, "Good, I haven't messed up that cue, or I haven't spoilt anything," but I think that's also what happens-

Gareth:

I thought that every night.

Emma:

But when you come into a show, it's quite stressful, especially when it's your show, and you think, "This is so perfect," this would be the worse thing I could do is to-

But it was bloody funny, though.

Gareth:

Yeah.

Emma:

And it was funny, because everyone was very respectful to me. Didn't Katy say it was like having her mom on stage? Everybody was really respectful to me for about two days, and then the goosing, messing about, all the rest of it happened. But it was really wonderful.

Gareth:

Yeah, it was, wasn't it.

Emma:

So, before I say goodbye to you, and send you back into your exciting world, tell me what your final choice is, and why.

Gareth:

Right, well my final choice is a bit off piste. It was the best birthday present that I'd ever had in the world. When I was 60, my daughter, who is a rather very clever musician and singer, wrote and recorded this song for me, and there were about 15 of us out at a very posh restaurant ... I can't remember where it was now ... And she got out her iPhone and speaker, and started to play this song at the table, which of course reduced me to a complete mess, to the point where the waiters were coming over and asking if I was all right, but it was so beautiful and it was ... Anyway, I thought why not?

Emma:

Give us a shout out, your daughter's name and the name of the song.

Gareth:

Laura. Laura, and it's called Dad's Song. And she-

Emma:

Amazing.

Gareth:

... wrote it and sang it.

Emma:

So, before we play out with Dad's Song, can I just say thank you, Gareth, I'm so happy that we found each other. I look forward to a long life of working with you, because we've got so many more

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adventures to have, and thank you for your showmanship, your seering talent, your generosity of spirit, your professionalism, and you're downright good fun. I just love it. I love being in a room with you. You light up my life, and you light up the stage, which is why people can't help but clap when you walk on.

Gareth:

Oh thank you. The feeling's mutual.

(singing)

Emma:

If you have a memory or connection you'd like to share on Tea and Biscuits, leave us a message on our phone line, 0117-318-3846, that's 0117-318-3846. Keep checking our social media for details of our next show.

Tea and Biscuits is part of Wise Children's Lockdown. Thanks for hanging out with us. Bye.