

NEW AUDIOBOOK

Tina Packer’s final interview captures her lifelong love of Shakespeare

'Tina Packer and the Sonnets' offers a rare, unfiltered conversation with Alison Larkin

By Jennifer Huberdeau, The Berkshire Eagle Sep 11, 2026



Tina Packer, seen here performing "Women at Will," can be heard in her last interview in "Tina Packer and the Sonnets."
KEVIN SPRAGUE

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LENOX — Alison Larkin had been bouncing around the idea of recording an audiobook conversation about Shakespeare's sonnets with Tina Packer for about a year when, last December, she suddenly felt the need to get her friend in the studio.

Packer, founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company, agreed to the recording and spent three cold December days in Larkin's Stockbridge studio, talking about sonnets, Shakespeare, love and death, and laughing with her friend.

Listen To It

"Tina Packer and the Sonnets: In Conversation with Alison Larkin," narrated by Alison Larkin and Tina Packer

Published by Alison Larkin Presents

2 hours, 41 minutes

\$20

"We had planned to do a little bit more. She was going to write an introduction. There were a few little tweaks to be done. And then, she died," Larkin said in a recent interview with The Eagle.

Packer, 87, died of organ failure Jan. 9, just three weeks after the recording sessions. Larkin realized she had what is most likely Packer's last interview. It was then she decided to move forward with the audiobook, "[Tina Packer and the Sonnets: In Conversation with Alison Larkin](#)," with the full interview, unedited. Twenty percent of the proceeds will go to Shakespeare & Company's Tina Packer Legacy Fund.



"Normally, I would have cut out all the in-between bits and the bits about the heating pad [she asked for] because I thought, let's give everybody a chance to really be there for these extraordinary conversations," Larkin said. "I'm just very glad to, at least, have brought it into the world and to catch her just in time, saying things she normally wouldn't have because we were friends. This wasn't an official interview; that's not what I do. I think that's why she is completely candid. She said, 'Alison, do whatever you want with it. I trust you completely.'"

The idea for the audiobook was simple. Larkin asked Packer to choose her favorite sonnets, then they would talk about "why she chose them, what they meant to her, how they lived in her."

"And from there, somehow we would capture a little of her brilliance on audio," Larkin says in the book's introduction. "... Over time, she became not just this towering artistic presence in my life, but a friend. She was wildly encouraging about my solo show and follow-up book, 'Grief ... A Comedy,' championing it and me with the same fierce generosity she brought to everything she believed in."

In talking about the sonnets, their conversation was wide-ranging: from true love to whether or not Packer believed in life after death to the founding of Shakespeare & Company. And, of course, Packer shared her vast knowledge of the Bard of Avon.

"I thought, for me, the most interesting part of the interviews was at the end of Chapter 1. We were talking about the meaning of love. She had just read a sonnet on the meaning of love. And she said, Alison, I think you had with Bhima [Larkin's husband] and I don't think I did," Larkin said. "I pushed back. I said, 'I think you did. I think you devoted your entire life. I think you had a very passionate love affair with William Shakespeare all your life.'"

Packer, who was married twice, spoke lovingly about her late husband, Dennis Krausnick, who died in 2018.



Tina Packer recorded her last interview with Alison Larkin just three weeks prior to her death in January.
SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

"I loved Dennis, but it was a very quiet love and a love I could depend on. But it wasn't ever a passionate love ... I think the closest I've ever gotten [to what you had] was on stage," Packer says in the interview.

That passion and love for Shakespeare and his work, Larkin said, was Packer's life's work. It's a passion that can be heard in Packer's voice as she reads the sonnets and talks about Shakespeare, as an actor, playwright and director.

"The spirit of the human being is always in the work. He was one of the greatest artists who ever lived, and she immersed herself, not just personally. She has brought his art and spirit and teachings to thousands and thousands of people," Larkin said. "It was an extraordinary life and an unusual one. She was always bringing it into the now. It's the same reason why I love teaching the classics: fashions change, technology moves on at a pace, but human nature remains the same. And that's what she knew deeply about all of Shakespeare's plays. That was the way she taught Shakespeare."

Packer, who began her career working alongside John Barton at the Royal Shakespeare Company, moved to the United States to direct Shakespeare plays. In 1974, she founded the first iteration of Shakespeare & Company — which performed in both the U.S. and England — with funds from the CBS Foundation and Ford Foundation.

In the interview, Packer tells of how she walked into the Ford Foundation without an appointment, "which you weren't supposed to do," and walked out with the funding for the company. She said the failure of that company was that it was totally democratic, with input from every member.

In 1978, she began the process of creating a new company, with the same name, Shakespeare & Company, that was based on Shakespeare's own theater troupe.

"I didn't want to be in New York or London. I wanted to be in the countryside because I was bringing up my son. I also hated the effect living in NYC and London had on me because I'd become extremely competitive. I'd get indignant if I thought people who were less talented than me were getting breaks. I wasn't generous at all. So, I didn't like the effect the big theater cities had on me," she said in the interview, explaining how she came to the Berkshires. "I was with my programming officer, Dick Kapp, in Westchester County, and he invited somebody to sit in on our meeting — who I thought was the plumber."

That somebody turned out to be Mitchell Berenson, a trade union organizer who had become a developer in Westchester County. He called Packer the next day, offering to help her start up the theater company.

"He said, 'We'll do it in the Berkshires. There's classical music up there, the BSO; there's classical dance at Jacob's Pillow. We'll put it in the middle, and we'll get an audience. I'll come and pick you up next Saturday, and we'll go and look at places.' That's how we got The Mount," she said.

The interview, which lasts 2 hours and 41 minutes, is candid, vulnerable and unfiltered.

"The lovely thing is," Larkin said, "we get to listen to her voice, forever, because audiobooks will be around forever. So, there she is ... It's like the person is in the room with you."

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