

Tulane professor meets Helen Mirren, Judi Dench on home turf

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mccross3@tulane.edu



Michael Kuczynski, professor and chair of the Tulane English department in the School of Liberal Arts, met Academy Award-winning actresses Judi Dench and Helen Mirren while visiting the legendary town of Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2016. Kuczynski traveled to the United Kingdom in order to take part in a jazz funeral commemorating the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. (Photo by Arielle Pentes, Tulane School of Liberal Arts)

Michael Kuczynski, professor and chair of the English department in the Tulane School of Liberal Arts, had two serendipitous celebrity sightings while visiting the legendary town of Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2016. Accompanied by the Wendell Brunious Jazz Band, Kuczynski was visiting the United Kingdom to take part in a [jazz](#)

[funeral](#) organized by the School of Liberal Arts as part of the festivities commemorating the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death.

While having dinner during his stay at The Arden Hotel, which is located across the street from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Kuczynski introduced himself to Academy Award-winning actress Judi Dench, who was seated close to his table.

"She was extremely gracious. I mentioned that I had seen her in a production of *Hamlet* in 1989, and she inscribed a collected works of Shakespeare that I was traveling with," said Kuczynski.

While in line to check out of the hotel at the end of the trip, Kuczynski realized that he was standing behind Dench's fellow Oscar-winner and Commencement 2017 keynote speaker Helen Mirren.

While chatting, Kuczynski mentioned to Mirren that he had traveled there from Tulane University.

"She was enthusiastic about our project. When I told her that we were there to do a jazz funeral for Shakespeare, she said, 'That's just right! Shakespeare would have been delighted,'" he said.

Kuczynski also said Mirren mentioned that Tulane offered her an honorary degree in 2016. Mirren explained that since she couldn't be present for the ceremony at that time, she had to unfortunately decline the offer but was delighted to be invited again to receive an honorary degree and deliver the keynote address at the 2017 [Unified Commencement Ceremony](#).

When asked if he was excited to hear Mirren speak, Kuczynski replied, "Absolutely, she's such a compelling presence."

Taking place in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on Saturday, May 20, Commencement 2017 will be [streamed live online](#). Or follow Commencement 2017 on social media at #tulane17.

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