



Lopez's Shakespeare fall festival: a season of greatest hits

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In the most ambitious undertaking in their six year history, the Community Shakespeare Company (CSC) of Lopez Island will stage two of William Shakespeare's most popular plays this fall. For the first time, the cast will include adults in some roles, stage fighting, sword play and the depiction of death on-stage. Both of this year's productions will include music, lavish costumes and a staged fight scenes. The audience will be seated in a three-quarter circle in and around the stage to enhance the experience of theater-goers.

A Midsummer's Night Dream

Students from grades one to eight will present "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The play portrays the adventures of four young Athenian lovers and a group of amateur actors, their interactions with the Duke and Duchess of Athens, and with fairies who inhabit a moonlit forest.

The script is an adaptation by CSC director Richard Carter whose earlier adaptations of four Shakespearean plays are now widely used in middle schools throughout the United States and Canada.

Breton Carter, an eighth grader who plays Helena says, "The play has many characters and multiple leads. The fairy world and the human world are intertwined and the mortals are unaware of the fairies. I love performing it. It's hard work but a great accomplishment."

Sixth graders Derek Cram (Oberon), Fletcher Moore (Lysander) and Sam Heller (Thespeus) say that memorizing lines, knowing their entrances and exits and learning to speak slowly are the most challenging parts of performing. They also enjoy "hanging out with their friends at rehearsal" and performing in front of a lot of people.

Brother and sister Matthew and Maya Haber, eighth- and sixth-graders who play Gregory and Puck, are veterans of many CSC productions. They find Shakespeare's story lines and language interesting.

Eighth-grader Jamie Cummins who plays a page, a servant and a dancer took a stage combat class over the summer and looks forward to acting in a fight scene.

"The kids gain a sense of confidence and an unbelievable sense of community from participating in a experience like this," says Richard Carter who is directing both productions. "It is obvious to me how it enhances their lives."

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet will be performed by students from grades eight through 12, and by adults from the community. Shakespeare's tragedy about two teenaged "star-cross'd lovers", whose untimely deaths ultimately unite their feuding households.

"The inclusion of adults in the 'Romeo and Juliet' production brings the concept of 'Community Shakespeare' to fulfillment," said Carter. "We have cast young people in teenaged roles and adults in parental roles."

Terrell Carter and Arielle Wilson, high school seniors who have played characters in every play that Carter has staged over the past 10 years, will play "Romeo and Juliet." Wilson says, "This play is still relevant today. The parallels of racism, segregation and feuds show people how it can all end in tragedy." Terrell Carter says, "Being in plays has helped my presentation skills at school and made it easier to speak in front of the student body." He says bringing out emotions is the most challenging thing, and that "Arielle and I hope to bring the audience to tears in the death scene."

Another young veteran actor, junior Sebastian Lasbo who plays Mercutio, says, "I can't pass up the opportunity to be in a play – there are so many interesting characters to be. It's worth the homework back-up and getting home after 8 p.m. every night." Lasbo has ambitions for later in life as an actor. "If I hadn't gotten involved when I was in the fourth grade, I wouldn't have any idea what to do."

Senior Sam Barr, who plays Tybalt, is a first-time Shakespearean actor. "Richard taught an English class I took and encouraged me to read for the play," he says. "Learning to use body language and re-act rather than act is the most challenging. I enjoy being able to let go of myself as a person and yell and fight on-stage."

Joining the young people in the cast this fall are several adults. Larry Cochran acted in college and has played many roles in community theater but has never done Shakespeare. Cochran, who will play Montague, says, "I have the bug – it's a very fulfilling way to express another side of myself." Cochran says theater has helped him in other aspects of his life – as a musician and parent. "On stage you have to trust the other actors. I've met and bonded with people I might never have met otherwise."

Colin Goode, who was recruited to play Friar Lawrence, says, "It's fun working with the kids. It comes so quickly for them; they are fearless. The vitality is exciting." Goode directed high school plays as an English teacher before becoming an Episcopal priest but has never performed Shakespeare. He says, "I've learned a tremendous amount because Richard is such a good director."

Associate director Susan Wilson says there are 52 actors in the two productions. "But we couldn't do the plays without all of the parents and adult volunteers. There is something for everyone to do: snacks for rehearsals, programs, publicity and readers to help the cast practice their lines on and off stage." Volunteers with special talents are also an integral part of the production. Designer Tracey Cottingham and her team of volunteers are responsible for the lavish costuming, teacher Greg Ewert and his team are assembling two sets and local realtor Brian Treece comes to the production with over 35 years experience in theater production and lighting all over the Pacific Northwest.

Gordon Carpenter an actor and fight director from the Seattle Shakespeare Company is directing the fight sequences. Lopez resident and professional musician Celia Rosenberger is scoring the musical accompaniment.

"It's an amazing community theater," says Wilson. "The confidence and awareness the kids take into their everyday lives is incredible."

Junior David Hellman who plays the Chorus and Balthasar (in "Romeo and Juliet") says, "I hope as many people come out to see the plays as possible. We've put a lot of energy into the productions and it is well worth your time."

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Romeo and Juliet" open Nov. 7 at 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. respectively, each with an open dress rehearsal that is free of charge. (Donations are accepted) Regular performances are Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 8-10 with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at 4:30 p.m. and "Romeo and Juliet" at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and are available in advance at Islehaven Books or at the door.