

CWWS SPECIAL

NOISES OFF

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)

"I've got this great idea" said Martin Williams in early Spring "For our next production, I want you to perform all of the 37 plays of William Shakespeare in an hour-and-a-half. Oh, and all the Sonnets as well".

"Impossible", we replied, in loud unison, then stared at our knees in a collective atmosphere of profound disbelief. But, not being a man to give up, Martin persevered and somehow persuaded us that, not only was it entirely possible, it would be enjoyable, desirable and popular with our audiences as well!

He explained that it had first been done by three Americans a couple of decades ago, and performed to riotous laughter and rapturous applause at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The Americans had called themselves "The Reduced Shakespeare Company" (RSC - geddit?) and had distilled the best bits of Shakespeare's tragedies, the histories and the comedies into 97 minutes of homage to the great man, combined with satire and hilarious comedy



sketches which had their audience in stitches.

"So we need three extremely clever people from APS to do this, then, do we? Three men? Three women? Both?" we queried. "No" said Martin. "This is the best bit. We can use as many or as few people as want to do it, and as all the roles were originally played by men in Shakespeare's day, we can exploit as much gender flexibility as we wish. In fact, let's have most of the lead male roles played by females, and all the tragic female heroines played by

a single male". And so, with a little bit of puzzlement still hanging in the air, a plan was hatched, and we decided to go ahead. He'd done it. We were convinced. Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, Macbeth, All the Henries from One to infinity. Even Titus Andronicus and King John. We were going to do them all.

We concluded that 12 players would be the optimum number on stage, but as we didn't have 12 people guaranteed to be available for the planned performance dates, this gave



us an opportunity to recruit new talent from around the area by advertising extensively and throwing the net more widely. It worked. It attracted some new blood into the group. The 12 players for what we now know as "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)" were formed from 6 established APS old-hands, 5 excited first-timers, and one very talented young man who had made his APS debut earlier this year in the highly-acclaimed spring production of Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party".

And so began a concentrated eight-week rehearsal schedule for a mixed bunch of amateur actors of all ages, to establish their multiple characters, learn their lines and moves, practise the occasional dance steps and rugby tackles, speed up their costume changes and hone their delivery of some of the finest words in the English language. In addition they had to time their snappy one-liners with comedic precision, master the Othello Rap and repeat a condensed version of Hamlet backwards. A very unusual set of demands indeed. It was tough, especially for the newcomers who were unfamiliar



with the language of the theatre, the personalities of their fellow actors and with the rhythm and cadence of Shakespeare's iambic pentameter. Martin made it clear



from the outset that all the normal rules of the theatre would be abandoned for this production. There were to be no backstage prop tables, no offstage costume changes and no dark secret corners to mug-up on forgotten cues. There was nowhere to hide. Every tiny element of the show would be undertaken in the full glare of the spotlight, and in full view of the audience. But, despite these unusual working practices, a warm camaraderie was soon established and, when something did go wrong - just occasionally - there was always a steadying hand and a whispered word of



encouragement to smooth the way. This has been a fun production throughout, without tension or argument. Irrespective of age, motivation or experience, everyone has given their best to make sure that the fun that they were having on stage was transmitted to the audience.



Martin was prepared to take on a risky production with an untried cast, but his ambitions didn't end there. He also insisted that we should perform the play over two successive weeks in Sherborne, which is unprecedented, and to take the show to the Shaftesbury Fringe Festival for one final performance to an unfamiliar audience. As testament to his powers of persuasion, there wasn't a single word of dissent from cast or crew. All agreed and promised to give their all for every performance, to make sure that the last was as fresh, energetic and full-of-fun as the first.

The peals of laughter, the enthusiastic reaction from the audience and the subsequent positive feedback suggests that we have met all of Martin's lofty aims and enjoyed ourselves enormously in the process. For any of you reading this who have seen the show, we trust that you enjoyed watching it as much as we enjoyed performing it for you. All's well that ends well. Exeunt Omnes, with party-poppers well and truly popped.

Adrian Harding



THE SHAFTESBURY
FRINGE - ADS ON TOUR!

When the initial planning was taking place for our summer production, one idea was central from the outset - wouldn't it be good to take our show, after its performances in our theatre, and present it to the wider world somehow - perhaps outdoors, perhaps as part of a bigger event? The challenge would be to find something that was adaptable enough to be presented in a different venue, perhaps without any stage lighting, and which would be equally well received in both the more formal, traditional set-up of the theatre (with the audience expecting a conventional theatrical night out), and also in a



Kate and Nick take to the road.

very different environment such as a summer festival with a carnival atmosphere, perhaps in daylight, perhaps "in the round".

The more I thought about it, the more exciting I found the prospect, although I could see it would present considerable challenges, and might not be popular with all our regular audience members. Never mind - the committee encouraged me to take the risk and go ahead. I had long been acquainted with "The Complete Works of William



The team, on Gold Hill

Shakespeare (Abridged)", originally created for the Edinburgh Fringe. It seemed to me that its bizarrely chaotic approach, combining undergraduate (even schoolboy?) humour with a genuine and sincere respect and appreciation of the work of our greatest playwright, was just what was needed to take Sherborne audiences a little beyond their comfort zone, whilst the style of the show was, of course, tailor-made for the conveniently-situated, and conveniently-scheduled, Shaftesbury Fringe Festival.

Thus was the plan hatched, and in spite of the considerable leap of faith involved, I was blessed with being able to recruit a cast who shared my enthusiasm for the concept. Even though it transpired that a number of them did not really know what a Fringe Festival is, nor what is implied by Fringe Theatre, their trust was absolute. (I think. Well, on occasions. Well....)

Preparing the show for the Sherborne run meant preparing it simultaneously for Shaftesbury. It was great fun, and extremely

liberating, to be able to throw the rule-book out of the window. But we tried never to forget our responsibilities to the paying audience in the Sherborne theatre, and thus tried to create, around the edges, the hallmarks of a conventional play. However, that play was presented in a stripped-down way, with costume changes, prop management etc all taking place in full view, and with a very blurred demarcation between actors, characters and audience. The cast had to play the part of amateur actors visibly and obviously stepping in and out of the roles of some of Shakespeare's most famous creations. This was a massive "ask" of the cast, many of whom were only cutting their theatrical teeth - and they rose to the occasion magnificently. They pulled off the trick of making it all look like almost childish fun, while actually working extraordinarily hard and professionally to do so.

The Sherborne audiences received the show with great enthusiasm, and quickly, and obviously "got" the concept. And so, we were full of confidence that we would go down well at the Fringe, where wackiness and



Linda, Marie, Michelle and Richard cooling off during the interval.

informality are much more *de rigueur*.

As there was not a suitable outdoor slot available at the best times, I had booked us to appear at the Shaftesbury Football Club at 4.00pm on the Saturday of the festival. The dimensions of the function room there are very similar to that of our theatre, and the proximity of a bar would do no harm to the atmosphere we wanted to create! Slightly away from the town centre, we faced the challenge of whipping up interest amongst the festival-going crowds, many of whom were expecting all their entertainment to be free (to cover the cost of royalties, we had to charge a nominal £5). So, in true Fringe style, the entire cast, wearing our “uniform” tee-shirts, spent the best part of the day giving out flyers, selling advance tickets, giving impromptu performances of parts of the show, twisting arms, even bearing our placards around the town in a horse-drawn carriage! The atmosphere was fantastic, the weather glorious, and we seemed to be attracting a lot of interest, goodwill and promises to come to the show. But we had no guarantees - actual advance sales numbered barely a dozen.

At 2.00pm we repaired to our venue to start preparing. We opened the doors nervously at 3.30, and for half an hour a steady stream of people arrived, filling the

room virtually to capacity. Even 10 minutes after “curtain-up”, people were still arriving and squeezing in. We knew that they were in the mood for a good time when even the introductory speech about fire exits and mobile phones was given a warm round of applause! Sure enough, and in spite of the stifling heat, the cast gave the show of their lives, and the crowd loved every minute; it really couldn’t have gone any better, and we were



Lunchtime publicity, in front of the Town Hall

given the warmest of compliments and congratulations as they left.

In true Fringe tradition, the next performers arrived to set up in the venue as we finished. Everyone pulled together, and we had the entire show dismantled and packed away in our cars inside 15 minutes.

There’s no doubt that the audience were thoroughly well entertained for their £5. And for us? I think I can safely speak for the whole cast and crew - Fringe is fun. Being part of this Fringe was a unique and unforgettable experience, and a great new addition to the APS’s lengthy and varied CV.

Martin Williams

APS MOBILE WEBSITE

Those of you who visit the APS website on your mobile phones will, I hope, be glad to hear that there is now a mobile version. The layout of all the mobile pages is simple; in all cases it’s just a single column of panels, so you will no longer have to scroll left and right and use two fingers to see the content. You don’t have to do anything; if you are using a mobile phone (or any device with a screen width of less than 750 pixels) to view the APS website you will be automatically redirected to the mobile version. This will be the case even if you have already bookmarked pages other than the home page.

Note that the Past Productions page and Newsletter Archive page are not featured in the mobile version. The Calendar is featured, but the layout is very different from the Calendar page on the desktop version of the website; it’s a single column of all events (and Caretakers) taking place within 100 days from the date of viewing (I can increase that number of days if required, but it seems enough to me). Note also that users with admin access to the calendar cannot log in via a mobile phone to add events; you will have to do that on a desktop machine.

This mobile version is quite new (it went live on April 9th) and there may be the odd glitch that needs ironing out. If you have any problems viewing it, find any links that don’t work, or have any suggestions for improvements, do let me know ASAP.

Mark Lambert

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APS OUTREACH TO LOCAL SCHOOLS

As part of our commitment to the local community, APS members are happy to assist local schools and groups with drama coaching and workshops. We love giving something back from the activity which we enjoy so much.

On one Monday afternoon in June, John Crabtree and Adrian Harding responded to an invitation from All Saints Primary School, Bishops Caundle, to share our experiences and answer questions from both teachers and pupils. All Saints have just started rehearsals for their Summer production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream". As APS had staged this award winning production exactly one year ago, we felt that it would be a good idea to share our ideas for costumes, set design and characterisation, as well as to run some fun exercises for the children to let off some steam.

Dividing a room of 50 children into the Mechanicals, the Mortals and the Fairies, we soon had them charging around the room practising their "big dumb bear", "lords and ladies" and "greedy little elf" voices, resulting in a deafening cacophony of excited trainee actors. We then moved on to Breath control with a series of number-counting exercises, and Tongue Twisters, which proved to be very popular, with several children volunteering their own favourites. The hour-and-half session ended with some fun activity to practice Projection - how to give detailed instructions across a wide main hall to someone lost in a storm, or explaining the contents of a complicated menu to a deaf customer in a very noisy restaurant.

We think that the children enjoyed themselves - the loud shrieking laughter seemed to indicate that they had. Hopefully, some of them will be knocking on the door of the Sherborne Studio Theatre in a few years from now, eager to join our group. John and I certainly enjoyed ourselves, and we departed with freshly recharged batteries!

Adrian Harding

DON'T FORGET THE A.G.M. AND SUMMER PARTY

FRIDAY JULY 12TH 7.30PM

£5 TO COVER COSTS OF FOOD AND A GLASS OF WINE!