

SHAKESPEARE IN THE RUINS

— SPRING 2014 NEWS —

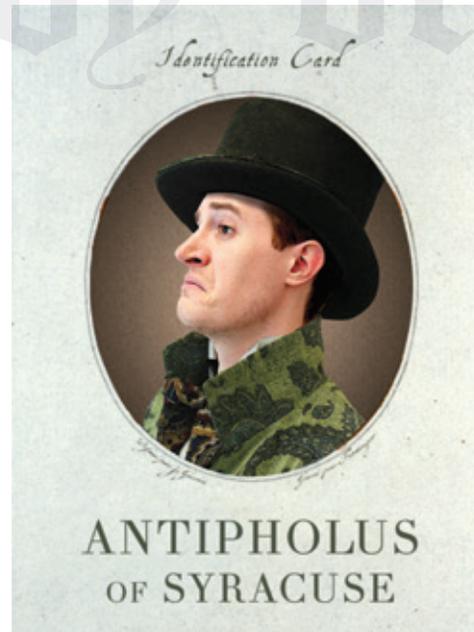
Slapstick comedy
and mistaken identity:
come lose yourself
in the Ruins



THE
COMEDY
OF ERRORS

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Comedy of Errors



Seeking POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION

by Kevin Klassen

“Known unto these, and to myself disguised!” *The Comedy of Errors*, II.2

Celebrate Will's 450th with the Bard's Birthday Deal!

April 23 Tickets go on sale!

And because it's his 450th birthday, we are thrilled to offer the Bard's Birthday Deal! Buy tickets for the first 11 performances (except for opening night) between April 23 and May 29 and receive **20% off!** Tickets will be on sale through our friends at Prairie Theatre Exchange. Call **204.942.5483** or order online right now at www.tickets.pte.mb.ca



From Jacob and Esau to Patty and Selma, the mistaken identity of twins has been a source of laughter and tears since (one imagines) the first bifurcation of a zygote. The confusion and chaos that can emerge when one person is absolutely convinced that another person is someone they are not, whether due to physical resemblance, disguise, or plain old presumption, is a bedrock of comedy and tragedy (both in entertainment and in real life), and one of Shakespeare's all-time favourite dramatic mechanisms. *The Comedy of Errors*, among his earliest plays (and likely his first comedy) might just be the mistaken identity play to end all mistaken identity plays!

It features not one but two sets of identical twins, with identical names ("Antipholus" & "Dromio"), who were paired up and separated at birth and then, for our viewing pleasure, are brought together some twenty years later (and unbeknownst to anyone), in the seaside city of Ephesus, without coming into direct contact with one another until the final moments of the play. In the meantime, hilarity ensues!

One Antipholus (along with his corresponding Dromio) was raised by his father in the city of Syracuse. Having grown curious about his long lost twin, and believing that finding him will cure him of his own identity crisis, Antipholus sets off on a (literal) journey of self-discovery, eventually landing in Ephe-

sus where (remarkable coincidence!) the other Antipholus has spent the past twenty years (with *his* Dromio) creating his own identity.

In addition to the expected hijinx, Shakespeare delivers some sly commentary on just how slippery an eel the notion of identity can be. As each new Ephesian citizen comes across the man they presume (sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly) to be the Antipholus with whom they are familiar, we gain a new perspective on his character: abusive master, neglectful husband, misunderstood brother-in-law, generous host, respected businessman, devoted soldier and war hero, etc. The more these people try to impose what they think they know of Antipholus of Ephesus onto Antipholus the stranger, the more strangely both Antipholuses (Antipholi?) appear to themselves. The message is clear: "who" or "what" each of us is lies largely in the eye of the beholder.



Directed by Canadian theatre superstar **Ron Jenkins**, and presented in the unique environs of the Trappist Monastery Provincial Heritage Park, SIR's first production of *The Comedy of Errors* is sure to be identified as the must-see event of Winnipeg's cultural calendar for June, 2014!

SHAKESPEARE IN CENTRAL PARK:



A Late Summer Afternoon's Dream

The core of SIR's mandate and values is to foster of love of theatre (particularly Shakespeare), develop an intimate relationship with our audience, and maintain a commitment to environmental staging. *A Stripped-Down Midsummer Night's Dream* in Central Park was a great way to accomplish all three, as well as celebrate 20 years of bringing world class Shakespeare to Winnipeg. Ensemble member Deb Patterson directed a cast featuring Ensemble member Kevin Klassen (Demetrius, Bottom, Puck) and SIR newcomers Andrea Del Campo (Hippolyta, Helena, Titania), Toni Reimer (Egeus, Helena, Quince) and Ray Strachan (Theseus, Lysander, Oberon). Four members of the audience were brought on stage to play the mechanicals, to heartwarming effect. The show fully and beautifully incorporated the functioning Waddell Fountain, with the actors gratefully climbing in and out of the water, to the delight of the audience: a vibrant and colourful mix of community residents, SIR enthusiasts, and many folks who had initially come to enjoy the park. An incredible amount of positive feedback, and the general sense of enthusiasm and good will that surrounded the entire event has assured us that we will be welcomed back when we return to Central Park in 2015!

Appeal for VOLUNTEERS

Though it may feel like a dream at best, summer is just around the corner and with it the opportunity to build your karma and your vitamin D at the same time...

SIR is looking for volunteers to join us in the beautiful Ruins to help keep our *Comedy of Errors* running smoothly from May 27th-June 28th!

We need ushers, merchandise sales people, and parking lot attendants (a great opportunity to catch up on your summer reading or just enjoy an evening outside). With weekend matinees, evening shows and

weekday school shows we have possibilities for every schedule! Bring a friend, bring a family member, bring a date, get fresh air, exercise, and see the show for free—then join us at the end of the run for a BBQ wrap party!

Email sir.housemanager@gmail.com today to get first dibs on your shows of choice!

NEXT QUESTION

By Michelle Boulet
and Andrew Cecon

Incoming Artistic Co-Chair (AC) Andrew Cecon asks outgoing Chair Michelle Boulet about her tenure, her co-workers, and for sage advice.

Andrew: Now that you are retired, what are you going to do?

Michelle: Well, I am currently writing music for The Fu Fu Chi Chi Choir (with fellow SIR Ensemble member Sarah Constible). I am also heading to Vancouver at the end of March to Assistant Direct for Bard on the Beach which I am super excited about.

Andrew: What are you most proud of accomplishing during your time as AC?

Michelle: There are many things that I am proud of but I suppose the two that stand out in my mind are: securing the funds to purchase our beautiful black festival tent (it took 3 years but was well worth it) and of course, the big one is the return to the Ruins. That took 10 years but was also well worth it.

Andrew: The AC position is a shared position. How did that work?

Michelle: It worked great. Sharing the position allows both chairs to take other work outside of SIR and I think that is important. Kevin and I had a very successful partnership. I taught him the value of using a desk calendar and he gave me an appreciation for all things grammatical (especially the use of parentheses).

Andrew: As SIR grows, what should my role as AC be?

Michelle: Look for money, find the money, secure the money!

Andrew: Any advice in dealing with General Manager Matt Moreau, I heard he can be difficult.

Michelle: Matt? Not at all! Just bring him a “timmies” or a Star Wars action figure and you are in.

Andrew: Do you think you’ll be back in the position some day?

Michelle: Well, I am still in the Artistic Ensemble and also serving on the board so I am not really going anywhere. Whether I see myself serving as the AC in the future who knows, but I never say never.

Andrew: Any last advice?

Michelle: Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Running an arts organization is hard work for not much money. But it is without a doubt one of the most gratifying jobs one can have.



Photo: Allen Fraser

SHAKESPEARE IN the City

By Claire Therese

My favourite time of the year has arrived! *Shakespeare in the City!* SIR is once again partnering with the *Pathways to Education* program in the North End of Winnipeg to offer this exciting program. Last year, eight inner-city teenagers performed a stripped-down version of *Macbeth*. The show was a huge success. The house was packed with Pathways staff, friends, funders, and family. At the start of this school year, my office was filled with students asking “When does Shakespeare start? Why do we have to wait until February? Can I start reading the play now?” There was great debate over the dinner table about which Shakespeare play we would do. Some argued for a comedy, others wanted romance. We finally settled on

Othello. I had no idea our students would connect so strongly with Shakespeare, but there’s something about his language, the way he challenges actors and audience, the blood and tragedy, that is truly appealing to young people! Last Sunday we had our first session. The entire group from last year returned (except for one who moved out of province and tried desperately to find a way back for the program), as well as some new faces. Everyone could relate to *Othello*’s themes – betrayal, power, manipulation, racism, jealousy. After only one session students were already thinking about which character they wanted to play. I think there will be some competition for Iago, who they all agreed is pretty much the evilest villain ever!

If you would like to attend the SITC’s public performance of Othello, please contact the office for details (and be sure to bring a non-perishable food item for the Winnipeg Harvest food bank)!



Photo: Sarah Constible

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GLEN THOMPSON 1966-2014

by Kevin Klassen



Photo: Allen Fraser

I first met Glen 18 years ago when we worked together on a PTE touring production of *A Prairie Boy's Winter*. I have far more fond memories of Glen from that tour than space will allow, but I will say that it didn't take long to realize that he was among the most decent, reliable, hard-working, befuddling and fun-loving people I would ever know.

That tour was the launch of Glen's career as a true road warrior: he toured 3 times for PTE and 4 times for SIR, and never seemed to tire of it. 3 of his tours for SIR were with *Stripped-Down Romeo & Juliet* in the roles of 'Benvolio', 'Capulet', & 'Friar Laurence', a track which he also played when the show was mounted at the Fringe in 2011. Each of these roles brought out aspects of Glen's own personality in a way that was so genuine, yet so distinct – they were all very different, and they were all 'totally Glen'. When Benvolio earnestly and urgently tried to stop Mercutio from fighting, or make Romeo forget about Rosaline, or broke the news of Juliet's apparent death, you saw 'good old Glen' being the best friend a friend could ask for. When the Friar told us about the wonders of natural remedies, or let Romeo have it for threatening suicide, or tried to get Juliet to leave her dead husband, you saw Glen the philosophical pragmatist, struggling to comprehend the illogical emotional extremes of ordinary mortals which (blessedly, like some Zen master) seemed for the most part to elude him. Then again, to watch his Capulet ping-pong between jolly good humour, despair, and insensate rage was to realize that perhaps Glen was more in touch with the flaring passions of the human heart than was his wont to let on.

It was also SIR's privilege to have had Glen play 'Demetrius', 'Bottom' & 'Puck' in our first tour of *A Stripped-Down Midsummer Night's Dream*. Once again, Glen managed to tap into aspects of his own unique personality for all three roles: Demetrius' frustration with women; Puck's anarchic sense mirth and mischief; and, of

course, the maddening, insistent, glad-handed and good-hearted 'actor as everyman' Bottom, who is no more (and no certainly no less) put off by the forcible seduction of a Fairy Queen than by the notion that small-minded typecasting should prevent him from playing 'Pyramus', 'Thisby' and 'the Lion' too!

Glen was able to participate in two SIR Main Stage productions: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 2010 and *Henry V* in 2012. It was my great fortune to direct him as 'Master Ford' in the former, and he was just as outrageously funny playing out Ford's mad jealousy, and his ridiculous alter ego 'Master Brook' (disguised in an eight gallon hat, broad Texan accent, and a preposterously fake, loosely adhered moustache) as I could have wished. To my mind, there are few things as inherently comical as Glen trying to be taken seriously in a silly situation – there was something in the way he set his jaw, combined with a confused look in his eyes that makes me laugh and weep just to think of it. In *Henry V* he managed to bring military precision, wisdom and dignity to the role of 'Exeter', with the same apparent ease with which he instilled a touching blend of wistful tragedy and outlandish buffoonery in 'Corporal Nym'. He seemed able to maintain complete command over his facial hair, dictating a different effect from the same moustache depending on what each character required of it.

And of course, beyond his work as an actor, Glen was simply an exceptional human being, and a very close friend of mine, as he was to an astonishing number of people.

Farewell, Glen.

GENE PYRZ 1958-2014

by Arne MacPherson



Photo: Bruce Monk

Gene Pyrzs, founder of Shakespeare In the Ruins, and inimitable Winnipeg musician and actor, passed away February 25 at the age of 56. He was a shining light in the Winnipeg scene, famous as the frontman for the band Combo Combo, as the man who inhabited Hank Williams in the show about his life, and in many performances on Winnipeg's stages. Fans of SIR may remember him most for his indelible roles in SIR's early days.

SIR's first production, *Romeo and Juliet*, was mounted on a wing and a prayer by a diverse group of mostly young theatre artists: Lora Schroeder, Ann Hodges, Debbie Patterson, Michelle Boulet, Grant Guy, Katie East, Derek Aasland, Matt Moreau, Maggie Nagle, B.Pat Burns, Lee J. Campbell, and Gene.

The show had a raw, exciting energy that galvanized audiences. This energy was supplied in large part by Gene. Exuding dangerous machismo and fierce intelligence, Gene's Mercutio was a biker with a poet's heart, the frontman of the band of Verona's hoods. Gene reprised the role memorably at MTC years later, but the electricity of his performance at that first show in the ruins was unforgettable.

He proceeded to play some of Shakespeare's great roles over the subsequent years, always using his magnetism and charm to make the character his own, while simultaneously using his innermost self to evoke the character's soul. For a man who was so private, with such a carefully crafted public image, it was remarkable how fearless he was in allowing all facets of his person to be revealed in performance.

He followed up Mercutio with Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a portrayal of notable depth and goofiness. Then came his fierce, haunted Macbeth. Then *Twelfth Night*, wherein he played Sir Toby Belch and the Duke Orsino. This was a hugely challenging pair of roles for one actor to play; Toby Belch alone is one of the largest roles in Shakespeare's canon. It was a feat of tour de force acting: he feasted

on the role of Toby Belch, creating a shameless, opportunistic sot whom you couldn't help but admire, and Gene invoked his poet's heart to create an affecting portrait of the lovesick Orsino.

Winnipeg then lost Gene to Toronto for a few years (it was there he landed a featured role in *The Cinderella Man* starring Russell Crowe), but he returned to play Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera*, the charming murderer who has to sing his ass off. It was a fearless, vocally pyrotechnical performance. His final role with SIR was Claudius in *Hamlet*, a compelling portrait of a ruthless villain with a tortured soul.

Legend has it that Gene was nervous at first about tackling Shakespearean text; it seems ironic when one considers how he took to it like a duck to water. Gene loved Shakespeare. His handling of the text seemed effortless, and was always utterly clear. One of the last messages he posted to a friend was the words "Shakespeare knew everything."

Gene was a gracious but guarded person who was gregarious, funny and warm, yet deeply private. He had his demons, and he apparently lived with almost constant intense back pain, which he never mentioned, let alone complained about. Those of us who had the honour of working in the ruins with him in those early days, battling the elements and the mosquitoes, working so very hard and making so little money, got to know Gene in his delightful totality the way I suspect few did. We were brothers and sisters. It was a privilege to have gotten close to Gene.

"But that a joy past joy calls out on me, It were a grief, so brief to part with thee: Farewell."

Romeo & Juliet, III.3

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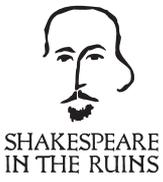
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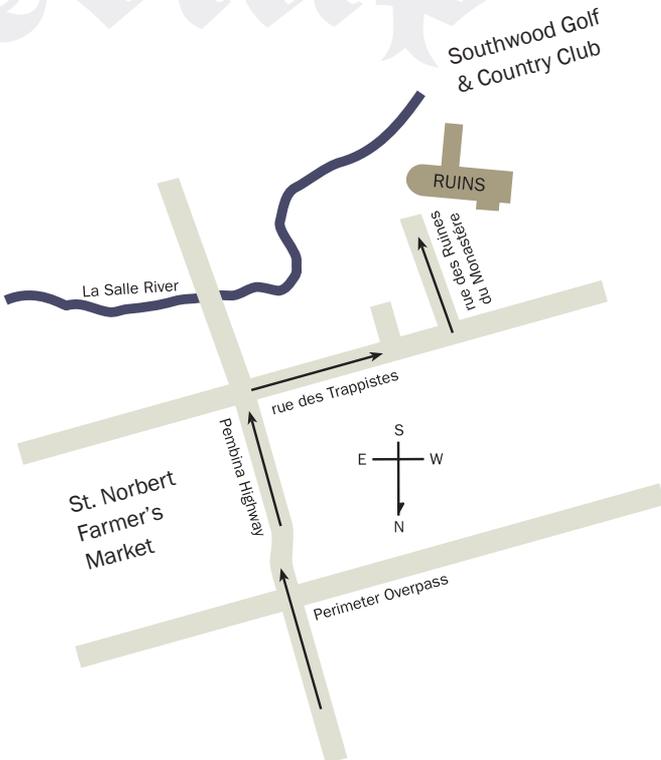
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