SHAKESPEARE!

By Squire Fridell

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STORY OF THE PLAY

SHAKESPEARE! offers an enjoyable, approachable introduction to William Shakespeare. In Scenes 1 through 4, we discover his world and his realities, his life and his times. In Scenes 5, 6 and 7, we are treated to an abridged scene from "Romeo and Juliet" and two abridged scenes from "A Midsummer Night's Dream." All together, the man and his works come alive for both the actor and for the audience.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

This is a one-act version of a longer play, THE BARD!, which was first performed in The PlayBox Theatre, Sonoma Charter School, Sonoma, California on July 18-21, 1996. The original production was produced by Suzanne McDermaid Fridell and directed by Squire Fridell. Additional scenes were directed by Roy Jimenez and Georgette Ward.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
For Scenes 5, 6, and 7
(Scenes 1-4 have flexible casting.)

A Midsummer Night's Dream *From Act III, Scene 2.*
NARRATOR: Male or female
LYSANDER: In love with Hermia, but due to a love potion, thinks he loves Helena.
DEMETRIUS: Also in love with Hermia, but due to a dose of the same potion, thinks he loves Helena.
HERMIA: A petite brunette in love with Lysander.
HELENA: A tall blonde in love with Demetrius.

Romeo and Juliet *From Act III, Scene 1*
NARRATOR: Male or female.
MERCUTIO: Male. A Montague and hot-headed friend to Romeo, wears a saber.
BENVOLIO: Male. A Montague and friend to Mercutio, Romeo and the Montagues.
TYBALT: Male. Juliet's cousin, a Capulet and enemy to all Montagues. He carefully chooses his words, has a temper and a saber.
ROMEO: A Montague in love with a Capulet.

A Midsummer Night's Dream *From Act V, Scene 1,*
PROLOGUE: Male or female Narrator. Wears a toga.
PYRAMUS: The hero. Wears a toga, carries a fake dagger.
THISBE: The ingenue, wears a toga.
WALL: Male or female. Wears a painted sheet that looks like a wall when arms are outstretched.
MOONSHINE: Male or female, holds a stuffed dog, a bush and a lantern.
LION: Male or female. Wears a lion headpiece.
THESEUS: The Duke of Athens playing "himself. Carries a hand-held mask and only uncovers his face when talking to Hippolyta.
HIPPOLYTA: Queen of the Amazons and betrothed to Theseus. Carries a hand-held mask and only uncovers her face when talking to Theseus.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Casting is flexible. The show can be produced with as few as a dozen cast members and as many as your facility will allow. The original production used a cast of 28 actors.

SETTING

A stark set with three parallel, black, 8x8 flats on stage, flat to the audience. Two are USR and USL respectively. One is CS with the top-center cut out and scrimmed for rear projection. Rear slide projection can be effectively used with two elevated side-by-side carousel projectors (50mm lenses) and a "dissolve unit." Color images can be created by taking 35mm slides of photos and drawings that you find in books and magazines. *Be sure to obtain permission first from the respective publishers.*

MUSIC

Both the Renaissance music and the Gregorian chant referred to in the opening can be obtained from any larger music store.

PERFORMANCE TIME: About 60 minutes.

Scene 1
OPENING

(AT RISE: Pre-recorded Renaissance MUSIC plays as the audience is seated. Rear projection screen is black. WIND sound fades in and a SLIDE of a distant galaxy appears. A GOD-LIKE VOICE thunders through the theatre as SLIDES continue to dissolve to ever-closer views of our solar system. The last slide in this sequence is our magnificent earth and is the only illumination on stage.)

GOD-LIKE VOICE: All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

(WIND fades out as a pre-recorded GREGORIAN CHANT begins in the darkness. The live voices of our CAST join in as they slowly descend through the audience to take their various places on a dimly lit stage. As the chant finishes, the stage LIGHTS go out and earth slide dissolves to black. CAST exits backstage. Three NARRATORS remain DSR, two NARRATORS remain DSL.)

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Area LIGHTS up on our NARRATORS. SLIDE dissolves to antique world map.)

NARRATOR 1: 1564. Four hundred thirty-three years ago.*
*(*Depending on your date of production.)*
NARRATOR 2: Three centuries before someone is to touch a switch in a room and magically fill it with light.
NARRATOR 3: One hundred twenty-four years after Gutenberg created the printing press.
NARRATOR 4: And seventy-two years after Christopher Columbus sailed West headed for a Brave New World.

NARRATOR 5: 1564. Four hundred thirty-three years ago.
NARRATOR 1: Twenty-four years before Philip II of Spain is to sail The Great Spanish Armada against England ...
NARRATOR 2: ... and meet a resounding defeat.
NARRATOR 3: 1564.
NARRATOR 4: The year Galileo is born.
NARRATOR 5: And Michelangelo dies.
NARRATOR 2: And a year in Europe of a scourge known as...
ALL NARRATORS: ... The Black Plague.

(SLIDE dissolves to dark red as NARRATOR LIGHTS fade out.)

OFFSTAGE FEMALE VOICES: Ring a ring of roses.
A pocket full of posies.
A 'tishoo, A 'tishoo.
We all fall down.

(An eerie WIND SOUND is accompanied by offstage moaning. SILHOUETTES of a mass of bodies and clutching hands are seen in the scrim.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE 1: Our heavenly parts are plaguey sick!
OFFSTAGE VOICE 2: And there such leprous spots do stick!
OFFSTAGE VOICE 3: That God in anger fills his hand ...
ALL THREE VOICES: With vengeance, throwing it upon this land!

(SILHOUETTES disappear. WIND and moaning fade. SLIDE dissolves to a plague scene. NARRATOR LIGHTS back up.)

NARRATOR 1: The Black Plague.
NARRATOR 2: In an instant destroying whole towns and entire villages.
NARRATOR 4: The Black Plague.

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