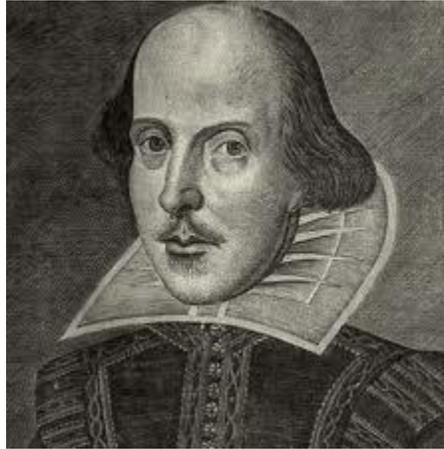


York Shakespeare Project Newsletter



September 2009

*"All places that the eye of heaven visits
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens."*

Richard II

Director Hugh Allison on the grand excitement of the Edinburgh Festival...

As well as 2009 being the first year I have extended my theatrical muscles in York (being Cranmer in YSP's *Henry VIII* and director of their forthcoming *Richard II*), it was also my first time "doing" Edinburgh.

Performing at the latter site was for the thousand pounds I was offered (although in the end I saw less than a third of that) as opposed to for the love of the writer - which is my true reason for doing these shows in York.

Obviously, I love the city too. Actually, both cities are remarkably beautiful, full of friendly people with (to a Southerner) bizarre accents/phrases and lots of warm friendly pubs.

Many YSP stalwarts have done Edinburgh too. For the sake of padding out this article, I asked some of those involved in **Richard II** for their opinions on the Festival.

Nicki Martin-Harper (costume designer for **Richard**, who gave me a flier whilst in Edinburgh) says she "enjoy[s] working for Fringe shows because [she] always feel[s] that the Fringe is surrounded by pure passion for Theatre". She adds: "I presume that is because a lot of people work voluntarily, but I certainly enjoy being up there and being immersed in new theatre that is so accessible all the time".

Esme Kaim (Isobel in **Richard** and Antony's Servant in **Caesar**) who I saw perform in **Dr Faustus** in Edinburgh had this to say: "I believe it is unfair to draw comparison between theatre in York and Edinburgh. Edinburgh being significantly richer and more diverse in opportunities,

culminating each year with the worlds largest arts festival; The Fringe."

Kaim concedes that "it is worth considering that whilst Edinburgh provides variety on a grand scale, York allows actors an intimate environment in which to create compelling pieces of theatre, with markedly less emphasis on ticket sales, and more on quality".

Alistair Carr, editor of this very newsletter, has been to Edinburgh three times. The first time he recalls spending one night playing to an audience of two; he met his future wife on his second visit (when she saw him playing Jaques in **As You Like It**) and the third time he co-starred with a Giant Peach.

As his experiences seem the most "typical" of that great city, I shall let Carr have the last word: "I can't speak highly enough of Edinburgh.. For those of us who do not have to make a living from the theatre it is a glorious opportunity to live how one imagines a life in the theatre to be, sleeping in, doing a show, drinking and dancing and total freedom and no responsibility, hurrah!"

YSP AGM

Just a reminder that the YSP AGM takes place on Wednesday 16 September at 8.00 pm in the Black Swan at Peasholme Green. As well as discussing where we're been, where we are and where we're going, this is your chance to get involved in the running of the YSP, and becoming a member of the committee. The following positions are available for anyone who wants to take an exciting role in the future of the project;

Chair
Project Secretary
Treasurer
Membership Secretary
Minute Secretary
Website Secretary
Newsletter Secretary
Holding Trustees

If anyone wants any further information about the roles, they can contact Raymond, Sally or me.

Chair's Report

The Shakespearian year 2008/09 has been for me a very steep learning curve – and I can confess that I am not at the top of it yet. But it has also been a very stimulating and exciting year, and I am pleased and proud to have been so closely involved with the project this year.

When we started with the new '08/09 committee we were already committed to our winter production of "The Merchant of Venice" to be directed by Cecily Boys and for the first time we were using the theatre at Monkgate. This production was particularly challenging as we had been playing "As You Like It" in the Minster gardens until the end of July, and so to move almost straight into Merchant of Venice meant we were working to a very tight timescale. As I hope most of you know in spite of some of the difficulties and tensions it was a stunning production in

wonderful Edwardian dress and more than maintained the high standard the project is committed to. It also more than broke even and had excellent audiences.

In January we had a planning meeting with the Executive committee to try to think our way ahead and decide how we wanted the year to proceed. We agreed to tackle Julius Caesar (our first Roman play) and after some debate decided not to go for an outdoor production this summer, but to stay with the Monkgate theatre for both the summer show and the winter one. Mark Smith was chosen to direct Julius Caesar and was able to attract an outstanding cast. The production went well, but sadly did not attract the audiences we had hoped for; the inquest for that is still progressing, but the month of June has been considered a poor month for Shakespeare (or for theatre) and we will probably need to review our scheduling of plays to perhaps take that into consideration. But artistically in every way the play was a great success.

With barely a gap your committee then plunged into organising a director for our final play of this year, Richard II, and has appointed Hugh Allison to take on the job on the basis of a very exciting proposal for a modern focused Richard II.

But we have not just been organising plays, hard work though that is. In April, as close as we could get to Shakespeare's birthday, we had a fundraising day outside St. Michael le Belfry in the shadow of the Minster. Starting with a dawn sponsored read of Cymbeline and then moving on through the day with a number of different songs, speeches, and plays we promoted YSP to the city and raised money, and had a good (though chilly and windy) time. Buoyed up by the experience, we have booked April 24th for another Shakespeare fundraising day, only this time hope to be in Kings Square (slightly better footfall, and perhaps not quite so windy), so book the dates in your diaries. Also, we have booked St Crux for fundraising for Saturday August 7th. Moreover, we have performed excerpts from Henry VIII in the Minster, as well as appearing as part of the Minster Nights event, more of which later.

May I thank all the members of the 2008/09 committee for their wonderful support to me as chair this year – and I have to say in particular Ray Baggaley who has been such a support as secretary knowing more about the project than anyone, and also Anna Sharp who has kept such a fantastic eye on our finances and dealt with everything so promptly. Both of them are standing down from their current roles but I do thank everyone who works so hard to make the Project such a vibrant and worthwhile affair.

Janet Looker

Chair York Shakespeare Project

Five questions for....

Sam Valentine, the Duke of York, and a far better job he does than Prince Andrew quite frankly.

Hello Sam, please tell us something about the part you're playing in Richard II.

I'm Edmund of Langley, Duke of York.

As last surviving child of Edward III I ought to be one of the most powerful people in England, but it doesn't feel like that.

Instead of being in command of events, I'm blown about by forces beyond my control, while one of my nephews, Bolingbroke, rebels against another nephew, Richard II, and eventually replaces him as king and has him murdered.

York is not a very impressive character, but believable, well-intentioned but ineffectual.

What are you most looking forward to about Richard II and why?

I've only met the director once, and know less than half of the cast, so the first thing I'm looking forward to is just getting to know them all.

I trust it's going to be a great production, but it's too early to anticipate the details.

For those of us simpletons who go 'ooh, the hunchback one', tell us something wildly exciting about the play.

It hasn't got anything I'd call "wildly exciting". It isn't a bundle of laughs, in fact the only near-comic scene is where I argue with my wife about the treason of our son, in the presence of the king. This has its grimly funny side.

There's some memorably poetic bits, like the "this England" speech and some of Richard's long speeches about what a bitch life is.

It's interesting and significant because it deals with the events which caused the Plantagenet family to get going on the serious business of killing each other, otherwise known as the Wars of the Roses.

Which part in Shakespeare are you most ambitious to play and why?

I haven't really got any obsessions of that sort. I recently saw the London production of "Hamlet" starring Jude Law, and was very impressed with him but also with Ron Cook as Polonius. I'd like to do Polonius as well as he did.

I've been in "The Tempest" twice, but never as Prospero. I'd love a crack at that.

And there are one or two fools I'd like to be ...

Professor Francis Longbottom famously described Richard II as being 'Shakespeare's Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'. Have you any idea what he was on about, and do you agree with him?

Absolutely not, to both questions.

Thank you Sam!

Minster Nights

YSP took part in the recent Minster Nights event, Jamie Searle, live from the pulpit...

YSP makes West End debut!

West end of the York Minster that is, when on a special 'Minster Nights' event on Sunday 30th August, YSP had a half-hour opportunity (big thanks to Jeremy Muldowney) to present some of the Bard's work.

This included a two-hander on the Scottish Play with Jeremy and Krystal Evans, Ged Murray as Shylock with a court-room piece from the Merchant of Venice and a selection of Sonnets from Jamie Searle and Jennifer Aitken, a founder member of the YSP who was making her very first stage appearance with the project.

The audience of about 100 were appreciative, though the Minster acoustics do not lend themselves to the spoken word, nonetheless the performances were certainly good value for money- free to York residents!

York Takeover

Robbie Swale on the York Takeover Event...

Hello all,

Just a quick TakeOver update. There is more stuff appearing on the TakeOver web site all the time, so keep checking it for the latest news. To appear there soon - there are going to be some great workshops in the first week of the festival at York St John, so keep your eyes peeled for that.

Other than that, tickets are selling nicely. Get booked in for *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale* if you haven't already. Not forgetting the other stuff - we have Belt Up back from their wild successes at Edinburgh (*The Trial* is nearly sold out already; *The Tartuffe* has space left, but is also selling rather frighteningly!). *The Man Who Planted Trees* has a couple of shows sold out already, and the rest will fill up on the days at the latest, so get in there. And we have a variety of excellent Talkbacks for *A Five-Star Werewolf* including the cast, writer, director and a couple of special guests to be announced!

And don't forget you can get five shows for £50, which is bargainous. But not as bargainous as getting all tickets for free if you're under 26... (which you can also do!)

See you there, and get in touch if you have any questions,

Robbie robbie.swale@gmail.com

I Keep Mine Hidden

Thank you all for your contributions.

If anyone wants to sponsor me in the Great North Run, I'm raising money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association, which provides support for and research into this wretched disease, which, of course, has touched YSP most cruelly. Donations can be made at www.justgiving.com/captaincarrzi2009

Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow