

American Theatre Magazine:

“... the last Elements production was a robust, bloody rendition of *Julius Caesar*, staged in the stately courtyard to the church – which should indicate that neither the church community nor the audience is full of shrinking violets.”



CAPE COD TIMES

BEHIND THE SCENES *FIGHT* *CHOREOGRAPHER AIMS FOR REALISM IN* *ELEMENTS' 'JULIUS CAESAR'*

By **KATHI SCRIZZI DRISCOLL, CAPE COD TIMES**

August 07, 2014

For fight choreographer Nick Sandys, stage combat is about far more than just steps and actions – it's also about character.

"I teach people what it's really like to be involved in violence, and not only give violence, but also receive it," says Sandys, who is also an educator, actor and director. "I'm talking to actors about making it real. In 'Julius Caesar,' every character has a name. You're killing people who you know, and that changes everything. It's a cruel war, brother against brother." So he wants the audience to feel the visceral reaction that the actor does when violence happens, and he wants to make sure "those emotions carry through for the rest of the play."

Sandys talked about his methods while in Orleans for three days last month working with the Elements Theatre Company cast of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar." He had already trained several of the actors in the basics of stage combat when they traveled to his workshops in Chicago, and this intense summer time was to address the specifics of this play in this space.

The show is a struggle between ambition and loyalty, power and love, in 44 BC Rome, with the Elements interpretation inspired by the myth of battling brothers Romulus and Remus. The show is being performed Friday through Aug. 14 outdoors in the stone atrium of the Church of the Transfiguration. The area by the ocean includes columns, large bronze doors and massive fir beams, and there will be pillars of fire surrounding the stage.

"The weight of the structure itself, and the sheer mass of the stone, add a certain gravitas to the story," assistant director Christopher Kanaga, who plays Mark Antony, said in a press release. "After all, these are weighty subjects being explored – life and death, murder and revenge, republic vs. monarchy – and the decisions that these men make will last for decades to come. This structure is built to take that kind of weight."

The outdoor setting, though, makes it even more complicated to make fight scenes realistic, notes Elements spokesperson Jennifer Lynch, because it's so hard to hide tricks when audience members are close by on different sides of the action.

But solving such problems is what Sandys does as he travels around the country to help theater companies. He's largely based in Chicago, where he has been involved with Remy Bumppo Theatre Company for 12 years and artistic director there for two. As an actor, he's performed in more than 150 theatrical productions nationwide, including off-Broadway and Texas; he's also directed many others.

Early athletic training, though, led him to stage combat, and Sandys is a certified fight director with The Society of American Fight Directors. His credits with those skills include more than 35 productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago and more than 25 at Goodman Theatre in that city, as well as on Broadway (Steppenwolf's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"), and at The Metropolitan Opera.

Sandys, who has masters' degrees in English literature from Cambridge University in England and Loyola University, likens Shakespeare to opera in its storytelling scope and how it tests so many of an actors' skills. And both opera and Shakespeare improve, he believes, when actors are excited about having swords in their hands. "The energy of what we're doing brings the play alive in a very different way," he says.

The weapons being used for Elements' "Julius Caesar" are very specific. The Roman swords, daggers and shields are replicas of the real thing from the Roman Empire, though the blades are constructed specifically for use on stage and screen, Lynch says.

Such attention to detail is important, Sandys says, because the play is set in a time that is a transition between ages, between "a culture that was barbaric and a culture that deems itself republican and that is facing its humanity is a different way. ... The story is universal and the weapons help to ground it in a specific time and place."

The weapons have an added dimension for the Elements show – the actors use them almost as musical instruments to create an original acoustic background. The shields and spears are used for percussion to create a dissonance, he says, for "battlescape" scenes and others.

The "Julius Caesar" production begins at the end of a five-day Shakespeare retreat for actors and Shakespeare enthusiasts in Orleans. As part of the group's yearlong celebration of Shakespeare's 450th birthday, the retreat has offered intensive theater immersion, including lectures and discussion, voice and movement workshops, scene study classes, and master classes with guest instructors.

The Barnstable Patriot

LEND YOUR EARS TO ELEMENTS' JULIUS CAESAR ORLEANS CHURCH A FINE SETTING FOR ROMAN TRAGEDY

Written by John Watters, **Barnstable Patriot**

Shakespeare's tragic play Julius Caesar purportedly was the Bard's first at his famed London Globe Theater in 1599. Likewise, the Elements Theatre Company of Orleans is also currently staging Julius Caesar in a new space, the magnificent atrium of their Church of the Transfiguration at the Community of Jesus. The imposing courtyard setting serves as a perfectly stunning backdrop for the company's truly inspiring production. With its lavish costuming, sharply honed acting and august theatrical space, this Elements Theatre Company production of Julius Caesar instantly makes it one of the Cape's most memorable Shakespearean performances of all time. Shakespeare penned Julius Caesar when his career was red hot. In the same year, he wrote As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing and The Merry Wives of Windsor. But arguably, JC's iconic lines "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" and "Et tu, Brute?" remain some of the Bard's most quoted lines 414 years later.

Under the able-handed direction of Sr. Danielle Dwyer this Julius Caesar soars with sight and sound. Dwyer is able to combine the intimacy of the columned setting, the sound of the slap of the sandals on the stone floor, the dance of burning torches, the rich acting and the beautifully composed music by Rock Harbor Academy's Alex Pugsley, into not just a play for the audience to view but more like the transport of actually being there.

Element's repertory cast is deep with talent, but Brad Lussier as Marcus Brutus and Chris Kanaga as Mark Antony lead the way. Lussier's multi-layered portrayal of Brutus, a complex conspirator wanting to bring forth the demise of the self-centered dictator Julius Caesar, is near perfect. Clearly torn between the respect of his leader and the state of Rome itself, he becomes an instrumental tool in the demise of Caesar. Kanaga brings forth a robust impersonation of Mark Antony, who must create an air of damage control for the people of Rome, who are ready for blood lust in reciprocation for the assassination of their leader. Kanaga's powerful performance ripples with strength and stoicism.

Peter Haig ably wears the laurel wreath of Julius Caesar. His portrayal builds in strength from the beginning of the play until the curtain, with some of his most effective moments coming as Caesar's ghost.

Another stellar performance is turned in by Rachel McKendree as Cassius, who draws the audience's focus each time she's on stage. Other notable performances are Lindsey Kanaga as the Soothsayer, Heather Norman as Portia, Kyle Norman as Caska and Dwyer as Calphurnia.

In a play that has so many wonderful elements, a special note needs to be addressed to the costuming by Michelle Rich. The accurately designed costumes are simply spectacular.

If you are a Shakespearean scholar or have never been exposed to the Bard's work you could do no better than catching this shimmering production.

Elements 'Caesar' a powerful production

By **LEE ROSCOE**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ORLEANS – In the Elements Theatre Company production of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," Cassius, a born soldier, is filled with choler against Caesar whom he perceives as a tyrant. Like Iago or Lady Macbeth he seduces his best friend, his brother-in-arms,

Brutus, by using Brutus's own honorable conscience to convince him to lead a conspiracy against Caesar. It is true that Caesar was offered a crown by the Roman Senate and Mark Antony, his "limb," his close ally – but nonetheless Caesar turned it down, thrice. It is true that Caesar has the hubris to defy fear itself and the warning of the gods through dreams and portents. But is he an ambitious tyrant worthy of death?

There is nothing in the play to tell us the answer. Instead we see Caesar through the eyes of his enemies and his friends, and in the process complexities of human souls are revealed through those explorations so delicious in Shakespeare. Brutus is gentle to his wife and his servants, loving to his friends; he loves Rome; he serves Rome. He wants to sacrifice Caesar for

its good, not to murder him. But blood-filled murder is done, and it reaps the vengeance of Mark Antony.

Staged outside in the imposing atrium of the Church of the Transfiguration, with braziers burning as they may have in ancient Rome, from the moment the specially composed music begins, this is a powerful production. Brad Lussier is an outstanding Shakespearean actor; we are lucky to have him on the Cape. As Brutus, we grieve and tire with him; we think of the consequences of his actions with him. Mark Antony played by Chris Kanaga is stellar; when he projects words out like

ON STAGE

What: "Julius Caesar"

Written by: William Shakespeare

Presented by: Elements Theatre Company

When: Aug. 8-10, 14-17, 8 p.m. Pre-show dinner on Aug. 15 and 16 at 6 p.m.

Where: atrium of Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor, 5 Bay View Drive, Orleans

Tickets: Show: \$30 (\$25 seniors, free for students and youth ages 18 and under)

Dinner and show: \$60 (\$55 seniors, \$18 for youth ages 18 and under)

Reservations: 508-240-2400, <http://elementstheatre.org/tickets/>

a lance such as, "Cry havoc, and unleash the dogs of war!" you want to cry; when he orates of Caesar, he makes the famed words his.

Most of the ensemble is terrific, taking their time to live

the roles thanks to Danielle Dwyer's direction. I'm not sure the spooky solo singing works – it's a bit melodramatic – but the battle scenes are niftily theatrical. Some especially good performances are Portia, Brutus's wife, portrayed by Heather Norman, strong-willed but soft unto her husband's woes, bemoaning her limited ability, as a woman, to act. Andrew Mitchell and Phoenix Catlin ride high in their multiple roles; Kyle Norman is persuasive as Caska.

Peter Haig's Caesar is a proud peacock – and Rachel Lussier as Cassius, who puts the play into motion, is an irrational force of chaos set on the Roman world.

As Michael Sexton, director of New York's Shakespeare Society, said in a pre-show talk there is no message from the Bard as to what is right or wrong; he only raises questions. But for me seeing the play in a

present time so violent, is a terrifying, sorrowful reminder that those who rise to power by the sword may die by it, no matter how beneficent their alleged purposes.

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KENO **Doule's**

Elements Presents Spectacular Rendition Of 'Julius Caesar'

by Ellen Petry Whalen

Shakespeare can be Greek to many, but a great theatrical troupe can make it accessible to all. Elements Theatre Company's elaborate "Julius Caesar" is a tour de force, a feast for the senses on all levels, grandly bringing the acclaimed historical drama to life.

There are many details and pageantry that make this production spectacular. But the most obvious one is the impressive staging, in front of The Community of Jesus' Church of the Transfiguration. This is the first time Elements has performed in the commanding outside space of the Roman basilica's atrium. Enveloped in the action, the audience is seated on three sides of the stage, under the covered part of the atrium, between large stone columns. With the heavens open to the stage, as the sun sets, and the surrounding lit braziers glow, the ancient-looking space is ideal, filled only with simple constructs of faux marble platforms and spiral staircases wrapping around the columns. This unique and architecturally rich setting is perfect for the famous senate-house assassination scene and the high-energy battles. The set's only

challenges are cool evenings and rain. For the former, be sure to bring a jacket, and for the latter, an alternative time would be made by the theater.

Specializing in Shakespearean plays, members of Elements' theatrical troupe have trained with many impressive teachers, including ones from Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Shakespeare Company and London's National Theatre. Under the precise direction of Sister Danielle Dwyer, the actors' fully nuanced understanding of the Elizabethan language comes across in their approach to the drama, making the tragedy all the more powerful.

Peter Haig is a charismatic Julius Caesar, who is accused of being too "ambitious" by declaring himself a god and becoming dictator-for-life of Rome, and for this is murdered by his senators, some of whom he considers brothers.

The conspirators, who claim they are doing what is best for the people, are led by a manipulative and determined Cassius (Rachel McKendree), who wears his indignation for all to see, and the "honorable" Brutus (Brad Lusier), who is initially conflicted, but ultimately

convinced that Caesar must be stopped.

Sr. Danielle Dwyer is Calphurnia, the loving wife of Caesar whose ominous dream foretells Caesar's betrayal, while Heather Norman is Portia, Brutus's wife, who worries herself sick over her husband's ill-fated plans.

Chris Kanaga portrays Caesar's devoted friend, the great and persuasive orator Mark Antony, with true conviction, especially in the famous speech, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears..."

As is often the case at Elements Theatre, the exquisite, hand-made costumes are worth the reasonable price of admission (which also happens to be free for those 18 and under). The authentic-looking Roman soldiers' helmets and uniforms are very realistic and truly imposing, especially during the battle scenes, with the clanging of metal-on-metal ringing out as swords clash. The varied refinement of the characters' clothing, from fine, sheer linen to rough-hewn tunics, perfectly mirrors their stations in life. With fake blood to mark Caesar's multiple stab wounds, the violent murder scene is all the more convincing. With the aid of the original and dramatic music (Dr.

James Jordan and Alex Pugsley), the suspense of the psychological drama is measurably heightened.

This fabulous production of "Julius Caesar" rounds out Elements' year-long celebration of Shakespeare's 450th birthday, and with that, there is the option of a lovely al fresco, pre-show dinner, on a patio nestled in a marsh-side setting by Rock Harbor. (Sunglasses can be helpful, depending on the direction you face.) Using many items from The Community of Jesus' gardens, the three-course meal starts with crisp garden greens with a tangy lemon-herb vinaigrette and still-warm, fragrant, homemade herb bread. The entrée has one skewer each of tender, teriyaki-marinated steak tips and tasty shrimp with a subtle hint of smoked paprika, along with a varied mix of delectable, roasted vegetables. The meal is finished off with a refreshing summer fruit tart of peaches and blueberries, covered with a subtle glaze of apricot jam and Amaretto over a thin layer of cheesecake-like filling with a graham cracker crust.

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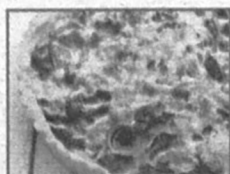


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450 YEARS LATER

Elements Theatre Co. stages a big birthday bash for the bard

By Debi Boucher Stetson

It would be hard to name a playwright who's had a more lasting, profound influence on society than William Shakespeare, whose plays are produced and studied constantly throughout the world four centuries after his death.

So it is no surprise that the anniversary of his birth would spark celebrations across the globe. Here on Cape Cod, the Orleans-based Elements Theatre Company is throwing a "Birthday Bash for the Bard" honoring the 450th anniversary of the birth of the playwright known as "the Bard of Avon."

The nonprofit company, which has produced numerous Shakespearean plays since its founding in 1992, will present a series of performances, lectures and celebrations around Shakespeare on Friday and Saturday, April 25 and 26.

The focal point of the celebration is an original play titled "Labyrinth: A Legacy of Language" that explores Shakespeare's influence on playwrights. The play features scenes by playwrights Henrik Ibsen, Richard Sheridan, Tom Stoppard, Tennessee Williams and Shakespeare himself.

The weekend also includes lectures by medieval literature scholar John Clark of Eastham, a gallery display of Shakespeare's life and times, brown bag lunch events and a birthday dinner, plus opportunities to record sonnets for Elements Theatre Company's "Word Made Flesh" online sonnet project.

It's part of a three-year celebration by Elements Theatre Company, which has already taken "Labyrinth" on tour with productions in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In August, Elements will host a weeklong Shakespeare Retreat of classes, workshops and performances.

SHAKESPEARE continued on Page 49

Spotlight on Shakespeare

Born: 1564

Died: 1616

Plays: 37

Sonnets: 154

Words or phrases

he coined:

fashionable

sanctimonious

lackluster

in a pickle

one fell swoop

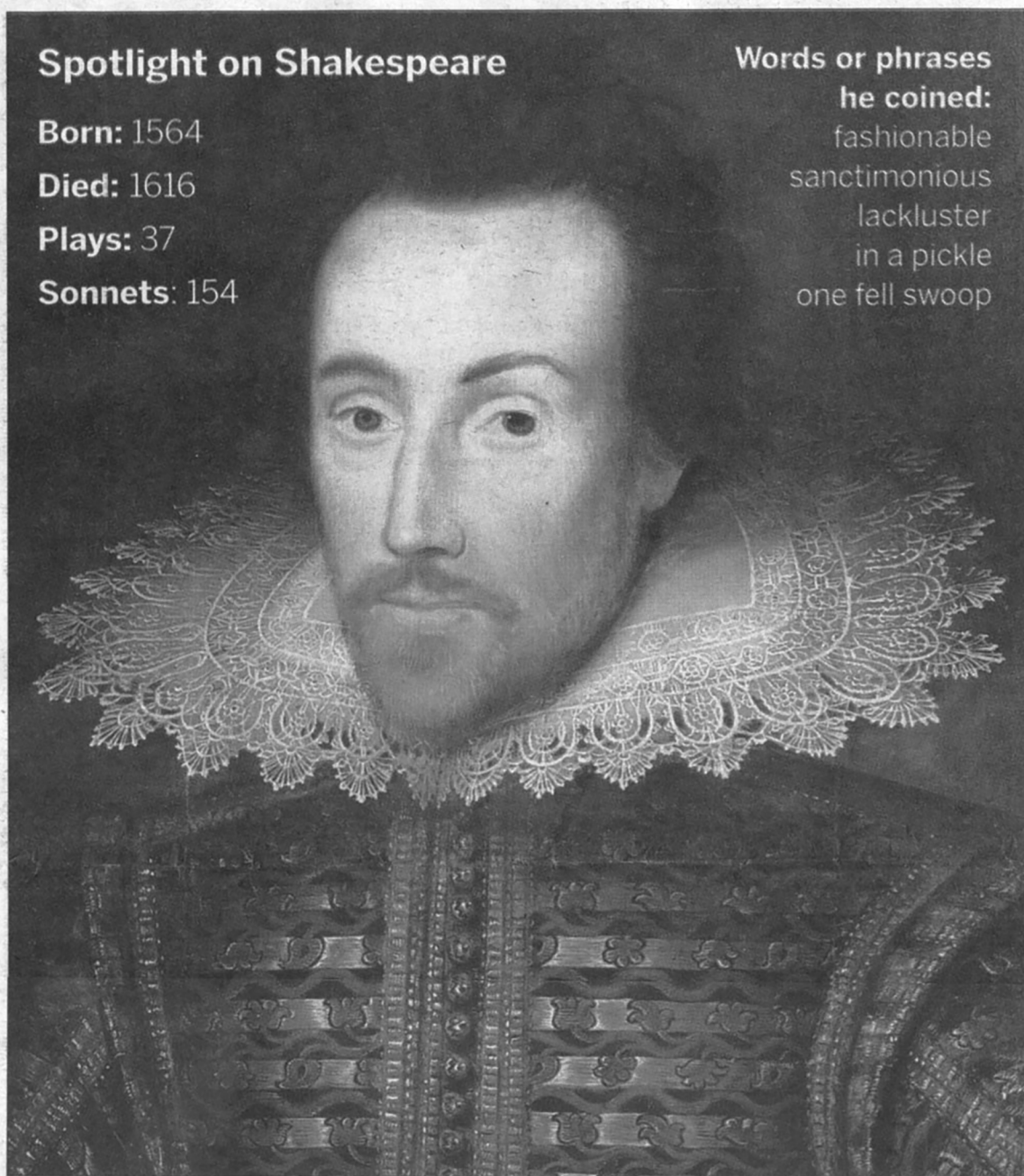


Photo courtesy of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



The cast of 'Labyrinth: A Legacy of Language.' Courtesy photo

If you go

What: 'Birthday Bash for the Bard' weekend of Shakespeare lectures, performance and exhibits including two performances of 'Labyrinth'

When: Friday, April 25 (lecture 7 p.m., play 8 p.m. followed by reception) and Saturday, April 27

(brown bag lunches noon-2 p.m., lecture 2 p.m., matinee 3 p.m., choral Evensong 5:15 p.m., birthday dinner 6 p.m., play 8 p.m.)

Where: Paraclete House at Rock Harbor, Orleans

Tickets: Show only, \$30, \$25 seniors, free for students and ages 18 and younger; dinner and show, \$60, \$55 seniors, \$18 ages 18 and younger. Call 508-240-2400 or visit elementstheatre.org

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Shakespeare

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Assistant director and actor Chris Kanaga said the various works represented in "Labyrinth" explore the themes of revenge and forgiveness central to so many of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's legacy is "the poignancy of the language and the incredible insight into human nature," Kanaga noted. "It's so enlivened by the language in a way we don't see a lot these days. The text, by itself, is so rich and full of meaning and imagery that it basically plays itself."

He and the other actors in "Labyrinth" have had extensive training in Shakespeare. "We really love it," he said. "We really love the language, and the text."

Shakespeare "had such an ear for

phrases... he just says it in a way that stays with you," said Clark, who will conduct two lectures as part of the Birthday Bash weekend. One aspect of Shakespeare his talks will explore is "the fact that he was maybe the first to seek such a psychological depth in his plays that other playwrights had not."

Clark's "The Inquiring Mind" recently offered a six-week course on Shakespeare's "Hamlet," and it could easily have run much longer, he said. "Just the psychological detail — instead of making it an external revenge play, an eye for an eye, it is a psychological drama."

He added: "Someone who doesn't know Shakespeare is like a person who hasn't discovered ice cream because they

think it's too cold for their tongue. You give them a few small helpings and it becomes a delicacy they'll enjoy for the rest of their lives."

Jenny Lynch, publicist for Elements, said Shakespeare had "an incredible grasp of what human beings are capable of — there's so much depth to his work."

Lynch said the theater company's recent tour included a panel discussion on how Shakespeare can be transforming for both actors and audiences. Noting Shakespeare has been used successfully in schools and in prison programs aimed at transformation, she said, "It has been life-changing. It really does truly reach everybody."

FILM Times

Friday-Thursday, April 18-24

Water's Edge Cinema, 237 Commercial St., Provincetown, 508-413-9369. *Under the Skin* 5, 7:30 p.m. daily; 2:30 p.m. Saturday, Sunday. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* 4:30, 7 p.m. daily; 2 p.m. Saturday, Sunday.

Wellfleet Cinemas, Route 6, South Wellfleet 508-349-7176. *Rio II* 1 p.m. (3D), 4 p.m. (2D), 7 p.m. (3D) daily; 10 a.m. (2D) Tuesday. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* 1:05 p.m. (3D), 4:05 p.m. (2D), 7:05 p.m. (3D) daily; 10 a.m. (2D) Tuesday.