ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER: ORIGINAL PRACTICES AND THE ACTORS' RENAISSANCE SEASON IN STAUNTON, VA

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The American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA prides itself on a history of producing the plays of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries in a manner that borrows certain staging conditions of the Early Modern period. With the inception of the yearly Actors' Renaissance Season in 2005, the ASC has taken a significant step further into the world of original staging conditions by allowing its company of veteran actors to produce the plays of the season without directors or designers in only a matter of days. While the Renaissance Season is built on a scholarly foundation and must carefully juggle claims of producing "authentic" Shakespeare, it is ultimately striving towards its own interpretation of authenticity. This thesis asks what the contribution of the Actors' Renaissance Season is to the broader conversation about Original Practices Shakespearean performance techniques and examines its unique combination of OP preparatory and performance style.

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER: ORIGINAL PRACTICES AND THE ACTORS' RENAISSANCE SEASON IN STAUNTON, VA

By

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the all the actors who have been a part of the Actors' Renaissance Season since its inception. Thank you for producing theatre that has been the cause of great excitement and inspiration over the years. I can't wait to see what next year will bring- save me a gallant's stool.

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Introduction

In the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, there is a small town named Staunton with a population of just under 24,000 people at the time of the 2000 census.[1] It was the birthplace and former home of President Woodrow Wilson and is the current home of Mary Baldwin College, a small women's liberal arts college with a student body of under two thousand undergraduates and graduate students. It is also home to the world's only attempt to recreate the Blackfriars playhouse, once used by the acting company to which William Shakespeare belonged. This new Blackfriars is the home of the American Shakespeare Center, an ambitiously named group that began twenty-two years ago as an experiment started by a group of students and their Shakespeare professor. The ASC's mission statement emphasizes their desire to promote an interpretation of Shakespeare's play that "recovers the joys and accessibility of Shakespeare's theatre, language, and humanity by exploring the English Renaissance stage and its practices through performance and education."[2]

The ASC prides itself on its ability to produce Early Modern plays using certain staging practices of Shakespeare's day, the most important of which are universal lighting and a playing style that directly engages with the audience. Such techniques are not unique to the ASC, and indeed have been explored at the rebuilt Globe theatre in London since its opening in the late 90s. Since 2005, however, the American Shakespeare Center has taken its mission to use Early Modern practices

[1] Staunton Convention and Visitors Bureau, "About," http://www.visitstaunton.com/about.htm (accessed January 30, 2010).

[2] American Shakespeare Center, "About: Mission Statement," http://americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=5 (accessed January 30, 2010).

one step further in their "Actors' Renaissance Season" in a striking move that separates them from other theatres that offer audiences a return to Elizabethan staging. Renaissance Season productions not only attempt to use staging techniques, but certain conditions of the rehearsal practices of the Early Modern period as well. The program of the 2010 Renaissance Season offers a description of the purpose of the ARS to its audiences:

> During these four months, we raise the stakes even higher by taking out the middlemen and putting up shows Shakespeare's way. Gone are the directors, the designers, and the months of group rehearsals that Shakespeare's company never knew. They produced exciting, unhinged, flying-by-the-seat-of-their-pants entertainment that was fresh from the quill of the writer – and that's what we're after. Veteran ASC actors mount these shows in just a matter of days, gathering their own costumes, their own props, and not having full scripts, just their own lines and their cues.[3]

The support and guidance of a production team are removed and the actors are given the sole responsibility for preparing the show, introducing an atmosphere of elevated risk into all Renaissance Season shows. Furthermore, the inclusion of the cue scripts is a new level of incorporating a practice used by actors in the Early Modern period, one that likewise affects the way in which the actors approach the production of each play in the Season. Each of these elements has an effect on the preparation process, which in turn influences the actors' final performances, and it is this emphasis on the actors' preparatory practices that makes the Renaissance Season such a significant endeavor. However much other companies attempt to invoke the Early Modern stage, the ASC makes the claim that without also returning to an earlier mode of rehearsal,

[3] American Shakespeare Center, *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program* (Staunton, VA: American Shakespeare Center, 2006), 4.

such endeavors will ultimately fall short of the authenticity that the Renaissance Season is able to achieve.

The Actors' Renaissance Season (ARS) makes a series of bold claims to its audience: that by producing plays without directors, designers, or long rehearsal periods, they are producing plays that are more "authentically Shakespearean" and contain a less staid and more exciting experience for their audiences than even their typical repertory of shows. The program notes continue: "By daring to throw away a few more of our 21st century norms, we hope to create an even more intense bond between performer and audience, and an even deeper level of fun and excitement for an audience experiencing the raw energy of the Renaissance stage."[4] The ASC promises its audiences will receive the genuine experience of Renaissance theatregoing by revising its preparatory practices.

The American Shakespeare Center has built a name for its performances through more than two decades of nonstop touring across the country and internationally, and the framework that it has developed for the Renaissance Season merits scholarly attention. Over the past century, Elizabethan theatrical practices have been increasingly utilized in Shakespearean production, but very few attempts have been made to extend Early Modern staging techniques to rehearsal practices as well. The American Shakespeare Center has managed to build a process for producing theatre that draws explicitly upon an Early Modern model and this framework of conditions have sustained six seasons' worth of theatre with no sign of stopping.

[4] *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program*.

My initial curiosity about how such a process functions has led to an intensive exploration of the Actors' Renaissance Season and the ASC itself, and what the Renaissance Season contributes to the growing international body of work that engages with Early Modern practices. The ARS explores the Renaissance stage not only in its staging conditions, but also in its mode of preparation and rehearsal, setting itself apart from other theatres engaged in Shakespearean performance. My thesis asks, with this unique emphasis on both preparation and performance, how does the Actors' Renaissance Season contribute to the broader conversation about Original Practices Shakespearean performance techniques? Further questions have naturally arisen from this fundamental inquiry. I have sought to establish for my readers what the American Shakespeare Center is, and what its guiding principles of production are, which the ASC claims are rooted in Early Modern practices. I have asked what further strides in this direction does the Actors' Renaissance Season actually takes and how has it evolved over its six years. The ARS claims to produce an exciting, authentic experience of Early Modern theatre, but how does it attempt to meet these two goals, and does it achieve them? What sort of authentic experience does the Actors' Renaissance Season ultimately seek, and what does it provide to its audiences?

To answer these questions, my research first explored the staging conditions of the Early Modern theatre through the research of scholars such as Andrew Gurr and Tiffany Stern, while also examining the contemporary application of this research in what has been called "original practices Shakespeare." With this historical background and understanding of its contemporary applications in place, I was able to

turn my research towards my specific subject: the Actors' Renaissance Season of the American Shakespeare Center. To conduct this phase of my research, I traveled to Staunton, VA during January of 2010 in the early days of this year's ARS. My visit was timed to the two weeks of rehearsal for *The Alchemist*, and I was able to observe first-hand its rehearsal process from the first read-through until opening night. Subsequent visits in February and March allowed me to see multiple public performances of each play that comprised the 2010 ARS repertory. During my initial research trip in January, I also consulted the ASC's Renaissance Season archives, which consisted of promptbooks, actors' scripts, handbooks, promotional materials from the first ARS to the present, as well as the online message board used by the artistic staff and company during the 2008 Renaissance Season to discuss issues from textual cuts to dramaturgical discussions. Furthermore, I conducted formal interviews with Artistic Director and co-founder Jim Warren, Associate Artistic Director and inventor of the Renaissance Season Jay McClure, and company actors Doreen Bechtol and John Harrell. I have made use of the sources of information that the ASC provides the public by attending talkback sessions with company members and audiences, and also availing myself of available interviews and podcasts conducted with current and former Renaissance Season company members. While little scholarly attention has thus far been paid to the Renaissance Season, I have utilized the texts that are available in the form of performance reviews (both in newspapers and academic journals) and articles written on the subject of the ASC's Blackfriars theatre. The final phase of my research concerned the scholarly debate on issues of authenticity, in which I explored the debate as it played out in the Early Music

movement (which has distinct parallels with the original practices movement of Shakespearean performance) and in Shakespearean studies with the work of scholars such as W.B. Worthen and Jonas Barish.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I present an overview of the original practices movement from its roots in the Elizabethan Revival of William Poel to its articulation in the 1990s by Mark Rylance, the founding artistic director of the rebuilt Shakespeare's Globe in London. The spectrum of theatrical production that falls under the auspices of "original practices" is broad, and offers a context within which to examine the Actors' Renaissance Season. In Chapter 2, I have produced a history of the American Shakespeare Center from its humble origins in 1988 to the present day. Most importantly, I have detailed the creation of the Actors' Renaissance Season and its reception and evolution over the years, concluding in a close study of the production of a play during the 2010 ARS: Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Finally, with Chapter 3 I have engaged directly with the question of authenticity that the concept of the ARS invites, drawing upon both the scholarly debate over the definition of "authenticity" and the historical research to which the methods of the Renaissance Season answer.

Ultimately, I suggest that the ARS offers a type of authenticity that is rooted in a type of experience, rather than in a meticulous devotion to historical detail, one that is audience-based but, crucially, obtained through the actors' off-stage preparation. Through its devotion to working within a framework of possibility, the Renaissance Season produces theatre that connects with modern audiences while offering an engagement that stems from Early Modern conditions. No other company

that explores original practices matches what the ARS has achieved: a functioning framework of Early Modern preparatory and performance conditions that consistently produces a uniquely engaging theatrical experience for both actors and audiences. This continued devotion to both rehearsal and performance conditions sets the Actors' Renaissance Season apart and creates an important case study in the possibilities of original practices Shakespeare.

Chapter 1: The Origins and Case for Original Practices Shakespeare

On August 3, 1998, the newly rebuilt Shakespeare's Globe in London was in its second full season and in *The Times*, theatre critic Benedict Nightingale took its Artistic Director, Mark Rylance, to task. Nightingale claimed that Rylance forced audiences "to pretend they are Elizabethans," which he believed resulted in "self-consciousness, phoney role-playing and confusion." Rylance responded in that newspaper on August 14, defending his theatre's efforts to cultivate a different kind of playgoing environment within the Globe:

> What I encourage at the Globe is careful research into original playing practices, daily class in movement, speech and verse-speaking during the rehearsal period for the actors, live music which becomes a powerful tool in the absence of lighting and sets, and beautiful, hand-crafted Elizabethan clothing.

With those words, Rylance had coined a term for all such self-conscious attempts to capture elements of Early Modern staging techniques in modern performance: "original practices." The motivations behind original practices (or OP) work were not invented in the 1990s; rather, the "Elizabethan Revival" that began in the nineteenth century was founded on the same principles.

The most visible practioner and most infamous advocate of the Elizabethan Revival in its day was the actor-manager William Poel. Poel was driven by the desire to produce Elizabethan plays in an Elizabethan style, or at least, such was his expressed ideal. On April 16, 1881, Poel gave his ideas their first demonstration, presenting the text of the First Quarto of *Hamlet* to an audience in St. George's Hall in north London. The stage was bare, there was no interval, and elements of the text

which had not been played in years (such as the Players' dumb-show) were once again included.

The First Quarto *Hamlet* was received with little fanfare and met with even less acclaim, only given as a prelude to a talk he was to give two months later for the New Shakesper [*sic*] Society, and was intended in part to illustrate Poel's belief that Q1 was a representation of the play as the author had seen it performed, and thus more closely linked to the theatrical world of Shakespeare than the heavily edited texts of the modern day.[5] The current state of the English theatre, particularly the accumulated stage traditions for playing Shakespeare, was frustrating to him; in his book, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival*, Robert Speaight commented that Poel "was convinced that Shakespeare and his fellow-Elizabethans could not adequately be contained within the limits of the proscenium stage; that they were harmed by realistic scenery; and that the rhythm of the plays was destroyed by the intervals that these accessories imposed."[6]

Over the next fifty years, Poel developed his system for producing Shakespeare in a manner that ostensibly borrowed more from the original Elizabethan acting companies than it did from the elaborate style favored by most of his contemporaries. He claimed that to understand Elizabethan plays, they must be staged with elements of Elizabethan theatrical practices. Poel and his Elizabethan Stage Society advocated a return to the full text of the plays, rather than the heavily altered texts of the day (although his own productions often cut and rearranged scenes

[5] Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1954): 48.

[6] Speaight, 43.

to suit his tastes). Costumes should be Elizabethan and actors should speak their lines at a faster pace than one normally encountered in the professional theatre. Poel's stages were kept bare with a permanent architectural set of two levels and a traverse curtain, and whenever possible, his productions did their best to mimic the geography of Elizabethan thrust stages. A fit-up stage was created for an 1893 production of *Measure for Measure* and was designed to be adaptable for performances inside different, pre-existing theatre spaces.[7] The series of curtains on Poel's stages created numerous playing spaces within the stage that were intended to make transitions between scenes move quickly, rather than creating the final tableaux that were common to the Victorian theatres and which Poel vehemently opposed.

This element was crucial to how Poel viewed the plays; as Caris Glick notes, "Of the greatest importance to his productions was his theory that of Shakespeare's plays, only *The Tempest* had been divided into acts and scenes by the author and that the plays, therefore, should be acted straight through without intervals, although he did occasionally use one interval in a production."[8] Altering the speed and rhythm of the play was one of Poel's greatest departures from the mainstream theatre of the day, and one of the most influential for later theatre practitioners. Finally, Poel was a proponent of the use of period incidental music in his productions, as he was "closely associated with the contemporaneously emergent early music movement. Arnold

[7] The design of Poel's fit-up was based on the contract for the building of the Fortune playhouse of 1600 and the recently discovered drawing of the interior of the Swan Playhouse of 1596. Although known commonly as the "Fortune fit-up," the design had more in common with the Swan drawing. Franklin J. Hildy, "Reconstructing Shakespeare's Theatre," in *New Issues in the Reconstruction of Shakespeare's Theatre: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Georgia, February 16-18, 1990*, edited by Franklin J. Hildy (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1990): 9.

[8] Claris Glick, "William Poel: His Theories and Influence," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.1 (Winter, 1964): 21.

Dolmetsch, who provided music for Poel's first production and all those which followed until 1905, was one of the most significant advocates of the rediscovery of music and of instruments from the pre-Baroque period."[9]

Unfortunately, Poel also had a number of quirks that detracted from his productions. Poel believed that the speaking of Shakespeare's text was the most important element of the production, such that the voices of the characters created the atmosphere of Elizabethan drama more than any other element. Accordingly, he spent a great deal of energy in teaching his (amateur) actors, each of whom had been cast according to their vocal type, to speak the melodies of the text. This emphasis on voice over physical type contributed to Poel's peculiar habit of often casting women into men's roles in order to better fit his conceived orchestration of the text, which proved infuriating to his critics. As Speaight summarizes, "He was indifferent to the sex of the performer and the sense of the play provided that the actor or the actress spoke in tune."[10]

To his contemporaries, Poel was often regarded as an eccentric fanatic. His consistent use of amateur actors often meant that his productions simply weren't very good when measured by his contemporaries against the commercial stage. William Archer, a critic of Poel's, once commented, "Can nothing be done to make the Elizabethan Stage Society a useful, instead of a ridiculous, institution?... There is not another man in London who could do what [Poel] does- and there is scarcely another

[9] David Lindley, "Music, Authenticity and Audience" in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*," edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 91.

[10] Speaight, 101.

man who, from the artistic point of view, could make such a hopeless mess of it."[11] No one else had the fanatical drive to continue to pursue this vision of Shakespeare as the Elizabethans would have seen it, but Poel's own shortcomings damaged the product of his vision when he tried to bring it into reality.

Despite the harsh criticism of productions that rarely met Poel's own exacting standards, Poel's work had a great influence on the ways in which we understand and produce Shakespeare today. His productions gave audiences an encounter with Early Modern texts outside of the accumulated stage traditions of the day and helped to demonstrate that there might well be something to the idea of returning to elements of Shakespeare's own stagecraft. As J.L. Styan observes, Poel's true legacy lay "in a more authentically Elizabethan regard for the play; not in the new rapid delivery of the verse, but rather in the permanent stage set which revealed the musical structure of the play; not in any return to a full text, but rather in his working towards the original rhythmical continuity of scene upon scene."[12]

Poel had a lasting influence over some of the most important practitioners of his day, most notably his relationship with Harley Granville-Barker; "Barker had been an actor for Poel- had played Richard II and Edward II for him- and in his *Prefaces*, one of the most influential critical works on Shakespeare of this century, he incorporates almost every one of Poel's principal theories."[13] The *Prefaces* of Granville-Barker, which lay a Poel-like stress upon the primacy of the text and an

[11] William Archer, *Study & Stage: A Yearbook of Criticism* (London: Grant Richards, Inc, 1899), p 231-232, http://books.google.com/books?printsec=toc&dq=william+archer+study+and+stage&client=firefox-a&id=JXgS861I40kC#PPP1,M1 (accessed February 20, 2010).

[12] J.L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 48.

[13] Glick, 23.

understanding of the Elizabethan values of stagecraft that shaped the plays, exerted a profound influence upon producers, directors and actors of his day.

With his eccentric quasi-Elizabethan stagings and his Fortune fit-up, Poel made an interesting, if not always convincing argument that there was something to be gained by considering Early Modern plays within their contemporary context, and that these gains could be captured in performance. In more recent times, the work of Mark Rylance and his artistic team during his ten years as the Globe's Artistic Director made a new claim for the value of OP work, one which met with similar early scorn, but which has often earned critical and popular support. Most obviously, the Globe's most visible sign of original practices is in its very structure. While scholars today believe that some architectural details are incorrect (for instance, the diameter and number of sides of the polygon), and there is much that we may never know for sure, the Globe possesses many key elements shared by the original structure: it is open to the elements, it features a large standing audience with freedom of movement in close proximity to the stage alongside a seated audience at three levels, and its stage thrusts out into the audience. Although many productions at the Globe stray far from original staging practices, these elements remain consistent no matter what happens on (or off) its stage.

Given that the Globe's space already makes a strong OP statement, it is no wonder that productions have also enjoyed using other OP elements. The first full season at the Globe was inaugurated with a production of *Henry V* which featured an all-male cast, painstakingly created Elizabethan costumes, doubling of parts, music of the Renaissance performed on period instruments, and unwieldy rushes scattered

across the stage floor.[14] Several Globe productions over the years experimented with all-male casting, such as the 1999 *Antony and Cleopatra* with Rylance as the Egyptian queen or the 2002 *Twelfth Night*, which premiered at Middle Temple Hall, the site of the play's first recorded performance. The costumes designed by Jenny Tiramani were a separate element in many productions that otherwise featured more modern staging practices. Tiramani's costumes were meticulously hand-crafted, using materials, techniques, and designs taken from the Early Modern period.[15] Claire van Kampen oversaw the music used in many Globe productions, which strove for "accurate period reconstruction using carefully sourced evidence and referenced material."[16] The rushes of *Henry V*, however, have not been seen again.

The Globe has utilized certain original practices many times over the years: casting, costume, and music. All productions at the Globe must of necessity share the OP qualities of shared lighting between audience and actors and the architecture of the Globe itself, although productions in the Globe often stray from the idea of shared *natural* light: performances also occur at night, using artificial lighting to recreate the level of light on a typical afternoon. Given these universal staging conditions of Globe productions, several plays in each season are given reign to stray far from OP ideals; Rylance called these productions "free-hand work," in which "theatre artists of

[14] Pauline Kiernan's *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* includes a detailed description of the process of creating this production, including a comprehensive list of the ways the production deliberately engaged with original practices (to the best of their ability and/or knowledge) and the ways in which they consciously strayed from Elizabethan practices.

[15] Jenny Tiramani, "Exploring Early Modern Stage and Costume Design," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 61-62.

[16] Claire van Kampen, "Music and Aural Texture at Shakespeare's Globe," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 80.

our own day apply their unchained modern instincts to the building."[17] Both Early Modern plays and contemporary commissions have been played in this style at the Globe; the very first production of the 1996 Prologue Season (during which the Globe was still under construction) was one such production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

From time to time, however, the Globe has also experimented by translating certain OP elements into something quite different. While many productions featured music of the Elizabethan age that would have been well-known to Shakespeare's audiences, others used the same period instruments to play modern compositions. Rylance had played Cleopatra in 1999, but in a nod toward the complexity of gender portrayal on the Early Modern stage, the next season would feature Vanessa Redgrave as Prospero in a production of *The Tempest*. A few years later, all-male companies were answered in the 2003 season by an all-female company, which performed *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Directors and designers have occasionally rebelled against the permanent decoration of the Globe's stage; its elaborately painted *frons scenæ* has been obscured with hangings, such as in 2001's *Cymbeline*, or with rough wooden palings, as in the *King Lear* of that same year.

Productions such as these at the Globe and even some of Poel's work from a hundred years before demonstrate an important aspect of OP performance: the ability to identify certain elements of the Early Modern stage and appropriate them as a

[17] Mark Rylance, "Research, Materials, Craft: Principles of Performance at Shakespeare's Globe," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 105.

director chooses, either in their original or a translated form.[18] Rather than creating a production which explores every opportunity for original practices work, or making such explorations a primary goal of the company's mission, many theatre companies have chosen to work with select OP elements at certain times for specific reasons. There have been any number of acclaimed professional productions over the years which have chosen to explore the original practice of a cast composed entirely of male actors, a number of which have originated in England. The company Cheek by Jowl produced an all-male *As You Like It* in 1991, but chose to exploit the possibilities of that casting in a very self-conscious investigation of the gender and sexuality issues within the play at a heightened level.[19] Director Ed Hall's Propeller Theatre Company uses more OP elements than most: an all-male ensemble of actors, with many core members who have remained consistent over the years, who create music and sound effects themselves live during each performance and who typically use doubling in each production. Propeller's productions, however, come across as strikingly modern, as they generally preserve the distinctions between actors and audience in performance spaces, use eclectic, modern costumes, and make no attempt to disguise the maleness of actors who portray female characters.

One of the most striking examples of OP production has been the work of Patrick Tucker and the Original Shakespeare Company. Tucker is an advocate of

[18] I use the term "translated" to signify instances in which an element of Early Modern theatre is highlighted, but altered somehow from its true original form. For example, having identified the gender of performers as an important element of the Elizabethan stage, the previously mentioned *Richard III* used an all-female cast. Inaccurate to the true original practice, but an interesting way to remind audiences of the convention of having actors play characters of the opposite gender.

[19] James Bulman explores these issues of the production at length in his article "Bringing Cheek by Jowl's *As You Like It* Out of the Closet: The Politics of Queer Theatre" in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, edited by James C. Bulman (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2008): 57-78.

what has been termed "Folio acting," which is founded on the idea that the compilers of the First Folio of Shakespeare's works edited the texts with an intention to record and preserve a system of performing the plays through its spelling, punctuation, and other such bibliographic elements. As these features of the Folio have been regularized or modernized over the years by later editors, they have altogether disappeared from the most common reading editions of the plays and, Tucker believes, valuable clues to the playing of Shakespeare have been lost.[20]

Tucker also pioneered the concept of returning to Early Modern preparation methods. In the 1980s, Tucker served on the theatre committee for the Globe project as plans were being developed for the different spaces the Globe site might include beyond the theatre itself (such as prop and costume shops). When the topic of rehearsal space was proposed, Tucker suggested that "since we were rebuilding the Globe and hoping to replicate some of the original conditions in which these plays were first performed, perhaps we should rehearse for the same length of time that the Elizabethans did."[21] When it became clear that other members of the advisory council, composed of several leading authorities on the Early Modern stage, had no clear answer for how long a rehearsal process Elizabethans had, Tucker began to seek the answer for himself.

By 1990, Tucker had pinpointed several elements of Elizabethan preparatory procedure with which to experiment. He deduced, from the sheer volume of old and

[20] I must also note the work of Neil Freeman here, who has likewise been a proponent of Folio acting and thereby created the Folio editions of Shakespeare's plays, as published by Applause. While Freeman's work is very important, it is Tucker who has primarily been able to make a public, performative demonstration of Folio acting.

[21] Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 2001): 3.

new plays that constantly cycled through an acting company's repertory, that "an actor's life would consist of relearning lines in the mornings and performing in the afternoons, with no time left for what we call rehearsal."[22] Most hired actors would never have had access to the full text of a play and would rather be limited to learning their roles from "sides," which contained only one character's lines and cues. Their only other guide would be a "Platt (or plot), hanging in the wings, which would outline briefly what happened in each scene, who was in it, and who played the parts."[23] In 1990, Tucker started to use these Early Modern elements in performance, first with graduate acting students, then in a performance on behalf of the Save the Rose Campaign, which was attempting to raise the funds necessary to preserve the recently uncovered foundations of the Elizabethan Rose Theatre from being re-covered by a high-rise office block. After the success of the cue script performance, the Original Shakespeare Company was founded.

The OSC gave Tucker a chance to continue to produce Early Modern plays using these techniques of preparation, which he refined into a system over the years. OSC actors first learned their roles exclusively from sides Tucker prepared and then met with Tucker individually for sessions he termed "verse nursing," in which the actors received a measure of guidance on how to get the most out of their lines, using Folio techniques. As Tucker describes them, "The actors go over all their lines with only their cues being given to them, and they are <u>never</u> [Tucker's emphasis] told how to act, and certainly not given any attitudes of emotions, but are simply challenged

[22] Tucker, 9.

[23] Ibid, 12.

with, 'Have you found this clue?' and- crucially- 'What are you going to do about it?'"[24]

OSC actors first met as a company two weeks before the day of the performance, where they learned the roles of each company member and had a chance to organize any work that must be undertaken, such as costuming. A week later, the company convened for a workshop which included playing scenes off sides together in a rehearsal room marked to mimic the performance space. Importantly, these scenes were never from the upcoming play; Tucker was adamantly against his actors even running those lines together. Although the company would not rehearse the actual play to be performed, the workshops were still valuable as their one chance to develop "group-playing dynamics, to sharpen skills at giving and taking cues within the cue-script format, and to practice creating on their feet in an actorly way in response to their fellows."[25]

The day before the performance, the actors would assemble once more for what Tucker called a "Burbage," named after the leading actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (the company of which Shakespeare was a member). The Burbage was a chance for Tucker to give the actors basic staging rules regarding entrances and exits, and for any difficult staging business (such as fight scenes) to be addressed, while avoiding any actual scene-playing. "In this way, the Burbage becomes the combination of a first rehearsal, full show blocking rehearsal, first technical rehearsal and first dress rehearsal, all rolled into one, while avoiding

[24] Tucker, 39.

[25] Don Weingust, *Acting from Shakespeare's First Folio: Theory, Text, and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2007): 154.

becoming full rehearsal of the sort one might expect to find in modern western theatrical practice."[26] The culmination of all of this preparation was a performance in which the actors had never rehearsed any of its scenes together and had to react spontaneously to the performances of their scene partners in the moment of the performance.

Missing in this equation are the long rehearsal periods of most of today's professional theatres, as well as the position of a director. Although he exerted influence in the verse-nursing sessions and in the Burbage, Tucker strove to refrain from influencing his actors' performances, much less impose any sort of concept outside of the text. The modern director simply did not exist until much later than Shakespeare's day, and Tucker did his best to keep OSC productions free of directorial interference.

Original practices can be explored along a spectrum. While Tucker's methods do produce a particular excitement and danger in performance, few actors are willing to prepare and perform in this manner; Tucker was unable to sustain a steady company of actors over the years, and the OSC eventually disbanded. Not every theatre has the time or resources to painstakingly recreate Elizabethan costumes with the attention to detail that Jenny Tiramani is able to achieve, but a healthy percentage of Shakespearean productions continue to be played in Elizabethan dress. A theatre may not have been created to be a replica of the Globe, but performing Shakespeare's plays on a thrust stage rather than behind a proscenium creates a different relationship between an audience and a company of actors. Many smaller companies continue to use doubling for budgetary reasons, so that whatever the motivation, audiences are

[26] Weingust, 156.

afforded the pleasure of experiencing what Stephen Booth calls "the epistemologically thrilling experience of seeing one thing as two things: actors in the same room as us/people in a fiction in a place and time variously distant from ours," or more simply put, "the full joy of seeing that actors act."[27] Original practices are a tool to be used, at whatever point along the spectrum a company chooses to encounter them, and single OP elements can be utilized without engaging in what might be termed a full original practices production.

In his article "A Partial Theory of Original Practices," Jeremy Lopez analyzes the articulated goals of a number of theatre companies who rely on OP work, such as the Globe, Shakespeare & Co. of Lennox, MA, the New American Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, GA, and the American Shakespeare Center. Speaking as an academic, Lopez discovers a tendency toward pedagogical rhetoric within OP companies that he believes echoes the desires of scholars to explore Early Modern playing practices. He finds that,

> Original practices theatre fulfills some widespread needs, or at least desires, in our academic community: the need or desire for embodied (rather than abstract, mental) experience; for the application of theory to practice; for a broad (even popular), receptive audience; for imaginative, creative engagement with artistic material that ordinarily must, of professional necessity, be dealt with coldly, or at a distance. The energy that goes into original practices productions is, like the value that comes from them, personal and emotional, and always has the potential to become powerfully, beneficially communal.[28]

[27] Stephen Booth, "The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43, no 4 (Winter, 1992): 482, 483.

[28] Jeremy Lopez, "A Partial Theory of Original Practices," *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (December 2008): 315.

By using combinations of OP elements in production, companies hope to capitalize upon what Lopez terms a "simultaneous immediacy and timelessness"[29] that, ideally, accompanies the use of these elements in performance. By turning to the theatre of four hundred years ago, original practice productions of Shakespeare hope to find a way of producing arresting and fresh theatre for today's audiences, simply by using the tools of Shakespeare's own day, from Poel's Fortune fit-up to the extra layers of theatricality when a male actor plays Rosalind in *As You Like It*, performing as a man playing a woman playing a man playing a woman.

Alan Dessen spoke for many when he stated his hope for the new Globe, then in the process of being built: "For both the academic and theatrical community, one of the attractive possibilities inherent in this project is that the new Globe may serve as a laboratory or testing ground where actors and scholars working together can investigate how Elizabethan plays could or would have been staged."[30] Oftentimes, the rhetoric of original practices emphasizes this perceived benefit of attempting to stage plays in ways that approximate their Early Modern origins, in what Farah Karim-Cooper termed "a body of practice as a body of research."[31] Original practices provides a way for actors, audiences, and scholars to come as close as we can to the theatre of Shakespeare's day via the medium of theatrical performance, rather than research and scholarly conjecture. It is true that Patrick Tucker largely invented the

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[29] Lopez, "A Partial Theory of Original Practices," 309.

[30] Alan C. Dessen, "'Taint Not Thy Mind…': Problems and Pitfalls in Staging Plays at the New Globe," in *New Issues in the Reconstruction of Shakespeare's Theatre: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Georgia, February 16-18, 1990*, edited by Franklin J. Hildy (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1990): 135.

[31] In interview with Mark Rylance, "Research, Materials, Craft: Principles of Performance at Shakespeare's Globe," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 114.

preparation procedures of his Original Shakespeare Company, and it may be no closer to the actual practices of Shakespeare's company than our modern director's theatre accomplishes; his productions, however, allow for an evening that not only asks the question of "What if?", but finds one possible answer.

At the heart of the American Shakespeare Center's mission in producing theatre is a fundamental belief in the merits of original practices. As co-founder Ralph Alan Cohen phrases it,

> We are arguing that original practices- the old bottles- promote rather than obstruct the plays' accessibility. We are even arguing that the simplest efforts to retrofit the plays- to put them into new bottles- backfire by removing them from the very virtues that make them great. And, further, we argue that those virtues are a fundamental joy of theatre and that Shakespeare's plays are not the only casualty of a chronological chauvinism that assumes every technological invention will improve theatre.[32]

For Cohen, scholarly inquiries and experiments certainly have their place, but for a commercial theatre, original practices has also been billed as a way to excite audiences about four hundred year-old plays in what Andrew Gurr has termed "the experience of the shock of the old."[33] The American Shakespeare Center puts it another way:

> Theatre has endured through the ages because it is one of the best means of exploring the human condition we know as joy… In the Blackfriars Playhouse, we have painstakingly and lovingly reproduced the setting for which Shakespeare wrote his plays… We do all of this and much more to help you **Rediscover the Joy of Theatre** [original emphasis].[34]

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[32] Ralph Alan Cohen, "Shenandoah Shakespeare and the Building of the Third Blackfriars Playhouse," in *The Theater of Teaching and the Lessons of Theater*, edited by Domnica Radulescu and Maria Stadter Fox (New York: Lexington Books, 2005): 144.

[33] Andrew Gurr, "Foreword," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): xviii.

[34] American Shakespeare Center, *2006 Actors' Renaissance Season Program* (Staunton, VA: American Shakespeare Center, 2006): 3.

Theatre companies, scholars, and audiences alike have found something of worth in OP performance, whether is the acting challenge of universal lighting, the opportunity to study the effect of Early Modern clothing on actors' performances, or the enjoyment of a different kind of theatregoing experience.

Chapter 2: The American Shakespeare Center

From Inspiration to Institution: 1988-2004

The American Shakespeare Center was founded on the collaboration between two men: Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen and Jim Warren. Cohen had begun teaching at James Madison University, in Harrisonburg, VA, after earning his doctorate in English at Duke University in 1973, studying there under Dr. George Williams.[35] Cohen and Warren met while Warren was an undergraduate at JMU and their paths repeatedly crossed during his education there. While still a student, Warren was cast in Cohen's very first venture as a director, a production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which Warren played Enobarbus. Later, Warren also studied with Cohen's mentor Dr. Williams while participating in a study abroad program in London (a program recently founded by Cohen). [36] It was during Warren's final year as an undergraduate that the first true milestone of their collaboration would occur.

Cohen had become increasingly attracted to the idea of returning to staging conditions that would have been used by Shakespeare's own company, and in particular, the aspect of universal lighting. On a trip to London with his JMU students, two events occurred that affirmed Cohen's growing convictions. First, Cohen met with Patrick Spottiswoode, who would later become the education director of the rebuilt Shakespeare's Globe in London. Spottiswoode agreed with Cohen's

[35] Joan Leotta, "Back to the Bard: Ralph Alan Cohen A.M. '69, Ph.D. '73," *Duke Magazine*, 88 No.6 (September-October 2002) http://www.dukemagazine.duke.edu/dukemag/issues/091002/depmini-cohen.html (accessed January 24, 2010).

[36] Jim Warren, interview by author, Staunton, VA, January 22, 2010.

growing conviction that using Shakespeare's staging conditions led to a kind of production better suited to unlocking the original power of the theatre for which Shakespeare wrote and acted.[37] Second, on that trip, Cohen accompanied his students to a number of different productions of Shakespearean plays by the Royal Shakespeare Company that bored both the students and their professor. Later, the group attended a performance of Cheek by Jowl's *Midsummer Night Dream* at the Donmar Warehouse, in which

> the staging was thrust with three sides and two levels. Eleven actors doubled all the parts. The show's traffic of the stage took two hours. Although there was no intent to perform before an illuminated audience, the light spill and the thrust configuration meant that the audience could easily make out one another's expressions. In other words, that production benefited from many of the staging conditions that obtained for Shakespeare. My students loved the show.[38]

The following fall, Cohen held a semester-long seminar on Shakespearean staging conditions and in the spring, the students involved produced *Henry V* using the conditions which they had learned from Dr. Cohen. With Warren as the English king, the production emphasized speed, universal lighting, and used no sets.[39] The performance featured only fifteen actors (which was the greatest number of characters needed on stage at once during the play) and took place "in the university's black box theatre, which theatre department instructor Alan Lyndrup had tricked up to look like an Elizabethan inn yard."[40] The cast felt enthusiastic about the production after its

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[37] David Skinner, "Shakespearetown," *Humanities* 28, no. 6 (November/December 2008) in the *Humanities* online archive, http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2007-11/Shakespearetown.html (accessed January 15, 2010).

[38] Cohen, "Building the Third Blackfriars," 149.

[39] Warren.

[40] Cohen, 150.

run ended, and wanted to continue to produce theatre under similar conditions. Warren then approached Cohen about the idea of extending that success by founding a professional company that would continue to stage Shakespeare's plays using the same techniques. Why not, he argued, try to bring their ideas about Shakespearean staging conditions to as many people as possible?[41]

In 1988, Shenandoah Shakespeare Express was founded with a group of twelve young actors in a production of *Richard III*, which toured to fourteen locations throughout Virginia. The budget for the production was only $500, and did not include salaries for the actors. In the spring of 1989, they would perform *The Taming of the Shrew* and visit five new states. As before, the company was concerned with using staging conditions of Shakespeare's day as much as possible: the lighting was universal, the parts were doubled, and the pacing was brisk. In these early days, all company members were JMU students or recent graduates, and tours were carefully planned to not conflict with college semesters, limiting the opportunity to perform to spring break and summer vacation.[42]

In their attempts to utilize Early Modern conditions, they encountered a problem: they were aware that in Shakespeare's day, costumes were a large part of any acting company's budget, and extravagant amounts were spent to create the actors' costumes.[43] The SSE simply did not have the funding to create elaborate costumes for its actors, whether in period or contemporary style, but did have a slim

[41] Warren.

[42] John Harrell, interview by author, Staunton, VA, January 29, 2010.

[43] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 103-104.

justification for their lack: in their estimation, Early Modern companies would never have risked bringing their entire stock of costumes on the road while touring.[44] As a solution, SSE performed in basic modern dress: jeans, turtleneck sweaters, and Chuck Taylor high-top sneakers, a wardrobe chosen because the actors themselves owned these items already.[45] Groupings among characters or differences in status were signaled by simple costume accessories. This would be the pattern for all of the early SSE productions, with only a few slight changes: by 1992, performers varied their shirts for each show in the repertory, from red turtlenecks for *Macbeth* to white button-down shirts in *Merchant of Venice*.

By that 1992 season, several significant changes had occurred for the company. In 1990, the company first prepared multiple shows to play in repertory, a practice which they continue to this day. Also that year, Cohen brought the SSE to the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America for a performance of *Julius Caesar* before the participating scholars, which built their reputation outside of Virginia and increased their bookings. Warren, who had taken a year off to pursue other projects, returned to the SSE and had the task of guiding the company into a more truly professional operation that was no longer tied to student schedules.[46] In 1992, Stephen Booth wrote a glowing review of the company based on performances he had seen at the Folger Shakespeare Library for the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, in which he stated, "I first saw The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express perform in Washington, D.C., in July of 1991. I haven't thought the same since about

[44] Warren, interview.

[45] Harrell.

[46] Warren.

Shakespeare or the theatre."[47] The following season, Warren's efforts to expand the company led him to begin hiring non-student actors for the first time and the company began to expand. Subsequently, actors were hired for year-round contracts and two separate touring companies were organized; the SSE was also able to visit more states outside of Virginia and even travel overseas.

By the mid-nineties, the signature performance style of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express was largely set in a pattern that remains to the present day. The hallmarks of the company were still based on Cohen's conceptions of Shakespearean staging conditions and were essentially the same as he and Warren had fixed upon a decade before. A program from a performance stated the Cohen's goal clearly: "The idea for the company was simple: Shakespeare wrote his plays for a specific set of conditions, and, assuming that this greatest of all playwrights understood his own medium, the best way to enjoy his work is to reproduce those original conditions."[48] Of primary concern was the concept of shared lighting between the audience and the actors, but other factors were key to the SSE style. For one, Cohen and Warren had taken to heart the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*, which referenced "the two hours' traffic of our stage." As Cohen explains,

> In today's pronunciation of English, it takes an actor one minute to read twenty lines of a Shakespeare play- a little less for verse and a little more for prose. The average length of a play is fewer than 2,700 lines. At a normal reading pace, it would take contemporary actors two hours and fifteen minutes to say the words of an average Shakespeare play in its entirety.[49]

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[47] Stephen Booth, "The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43, no 4 (Winter, 1992): 479.

[48] *Shenandoah Shakespeare Express Program*, quoted in Stephen Booth, "The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43, no 4 (Winter, 1992): 479.

With these calculations in hand, the plays were carefully cut if the full texts were much longer than 2,500 lines and intermissions were rarely taken.[50] According to Booth, all that was missing were "the pauses we are used to on the modern stage. The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express demonstrates spectacularly that pauses are neither necessary nor missed when they are omitted, that the theatrical pauses we are used to in modern productions of Shakespeare are only hysterically pregnant."[51] As with its first production of *Henry V*, doubling was utilized in all productions, keeping the company members to around a dozen actors.[52] Performances used no sets, only a few black wooden cubes that could fit in the back of a passenger van.[53] The company had also begun to incorporate what would later be another tenet of the group: performances of live music. While always present when called for in the text and always performed live, company members with musical skills began to play and sing before performances and during intervals, simply because a number of actors had the inclination and the talent.[54] Finally, it is also important to note another aspect of the company's staging, present since its first performances: although Early Modern companies would have been limited to male actors, SSE shows have always had women in their companies. Warren and Cohen have been, of course, well aware of

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[49] Ralph Alan Cohen, "Directing at the Globe and at the Blackfriars," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*," edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 216.

[50] Harrell, interview.

[51] Booth, 480.

[52] Booth's article says much in praise of this technique, and heaps praise upon the skill of the SSE actors who demonstrate the artistic benefits of doubling and the repertory format.

[53] Harrell.

[54] Ibid.

the inconsistency such a practice holds with Shakespeare's own conditions, but do point out that most other companies who strive for an Original Practices approach are likewise inauthentic in their choice to have adult men (rather than boys with unchanged voices) play female characters. Because of the dearth of well-trained boy actors and the surfeit of skilled actresses, the SSE chose to steer its productions toward gender-blind casting.[55]

With these tenets in place, the mid-nineties saw a major shift in the ambitions of the company. The SSE received sizable grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities that brought together scholars and actors (such as the 1995 Center for Renaissance and Shakespearean Staging) and the company evolved into a nonprofit organization with a strong emphasis on educational programming.[56] While previously content to tour from a general base in Harrisonburg, offers came in 1998 from both Richmond, VA and the small town of Staunton, VA to potentially become involved as the resident company of a new theatre building. The Richmond offer was for a replica of the Globe, but when that project fell through, focus shifted to Staunton's offer. While the Globe project was being developed, Warren and Cohen had begun to plot the natural complement to Shakespeare's famous outdoor theatre: the Blackfriars, the indoor playhouse built and eventually used by Shakespeare's company.[57] With Richmond no longer an option, focus shifted fully to the Staunton

[55] Celia Wren, "They Do It Like the King's Men- Almost," *American Theatre* (February, 2006): 46.

[56] Skinner.

[57] The original Blackfriars playhouse was located within the city walls of London, and in 1576, Richard Farrant first rented the hall for performances by a company of boy players (the first Blackfriars). James Burbage, owner of the Theatre and father to actor Richard Burbage of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (the company that also listed William Shakespeare among its shareholding

project, with the hope that in the future, a Globe theatre could also be built in the same city.

Staunton, in many ways, was an unexpectedly ideal location for a Blackfriars. In arguing the move for the SSE's Board, Cohen made a presentation that stressed the similarities between Staunton, VA, and Ashland, OR, home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the largest of its kind in America. While in many ways the towns were similar, Staunton held a key advantage: "within a four-hour drive of Staunton there were ten times as many high schools, colleges, and people as there were within the same distance of Ashland."[58]

As they moved towards that goal, in 1999 Shenandoah Shakespeare Express officially changed its name to Shenandoah Shakespeare, dropping the "Express" as indicative of their move into a more settled, stable operation. Artistic Director Jim Warren spoke frankly about the name change: "We dropped the Express as we were building the Blackfriars, because 'Express' was a great thing for a bunch of teenagers, or twenty folks going around the country in a pickup truck with Chuck Taylor high-tops. It was right for that moment, but as we got bigger and had more ambition, it felt right to drop the 'Express.'"[59]

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players), purchased the building in 1596 and renovated it to include a true indoor theatre space, which became known as the second Blackfriars. Unfortunately, the Privy Council of the City forbade Burbage's company from playing in their new theatre space, which forced the company to build an alternative, outdoor theatre: the Globe. While the Lord Chamberlain's men were stuck in the Globe, they rented the Blackfriars to another boys' company. Finally, in 1608, the company (newly renamed the King's Men) were able to take possession of both theatres. The second Blackfriars playhouse was torn down in 1655.

[58] Cohen, "Building the Third Blackfriars," 153.

[59] Warren, interview.

The Blackfriars Playhouse of Staunton, VA began construction in 2001 and was opened that September. The project was led by architect Tom McLaughlin, who faced a challenge in creating a historically accurate design: the original Blackfriars had been demolished in 1655, and no plans or drawings of the original building have remained. Instead, McLaughlin's work was based in a combination of both research and speculation, and included

> consultation with experts on Elizabethan theater design and construction; review of such documentary evidence as court records, leases, contracts, and contemporary commentaries; visits to similar surviving Tudor structures; study of surviving plans for lost performance venues; and analysis of stage directions and play texts for potential clues to playhouse configurations.[60]

The resulting theatre is the closest approximation possible to the original playhouse, and featured natural oak and white plaster, a hammerbeam ceiling, a balcony above the stage, and a trap door to the lower depths. The audience can seat three hundred patrons in rows of benches along three sides of the stage, or on so-called "gallants' stools" onstage, underneath the shared light provided by a series of handmade candelabras.[61] In 2002, the Blackfriars played host to its first Resident Company, while sending out a second touring company to continue to the original mission of bringing their particular brand of theatre to as many audiences as possible.

The company then took several seasons to adapt to playing in the new space. As the touring Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, there was a decidedly guerilla feel to how the actors approached each new performance space, one in which they took pride. As Harrell recounts, "We felt like we could play anywhere. We could scope

[60] Barbara D. Palmer, "Shenandoah Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse," *The Early Drama, Art, and Music Review* 24 no. 2 (2002): 153.

[61] Admittedly, the light is provided by electricity, but is kept slightly dimmed at all times to approximate a candle-lit room.

out the place for ten minutes, set up our black cubes, and then we could do a show. That was the aesthetic then."[62] Having a set space like the Blackfriars was an adjustment; actors had to take time to learn how best to use its most basic elements. The actors had to discover how to enter and exit from solid oak doors during a battle scene, or how to use the discovery space between the doors.[63] Doreen Bechtol, an actress from the first years of the Blackfriars era, recalls the time it took to understand how to navigate the clearly differentiated space between the stage and the audience space. While "the touring troupe had found that it was more energizing, more engaging to work the crowd by entering *their* space,"[64] audience interaction functioned differently within the Blackfriars. A 2003 production of *King Lear* highlighted the problem for Bechtol when Lear entered the final scene bearing the body of Cordelia through the audience: "It's always such a memorable moment and it lost something because the audience had to readjust, turn in their seats, or some people couldn't see. Space and the story go hand in hand, and we had just completely altered the space and included the audience in a very private moment."[65] More and more productions began to stick to the stage and the three entrances it offered, but the impact of such decisions took time to understand.

The playing style remained otherwise intact from the touring company. Lights remained on, timing was fast, and acting companies were small in number. Performances at the Blackfriars also began to find their most natural rhythm as the

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[62] Harrell, interview.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Doreen Bechtol, interview by author, Staunton, VA, January 15, 2010.

[65] Ibid.

company learned to navigate certain elements; Harrell recounts that it took time to decide,

> where music should be, and how long people could stand to sit on a wooden bench… [Over time, it became] pretty set- people come in, there's a little bit of music, there's a little speech where we tell people things they already know, then maybe there's a little more music, then we have a play, then we do a break- but it took awhile to develop that.[66]

Shenandoah Shakespeare was an established presence in Staunton, even as it continued to build its reputation for stripped-down touring productions of the work of Shakespeare and other Early Modern playwrights. Since its early days performing in high school auditoriums, education had been an important part of Shenandoah Shakespeare's mission; the very first grant earned by the company was for their educational ventures, given by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, to fund "Bringing Shakespeare Home- a Seminar for Teachers."[67] They continued to work with schoolchildren, college students, and teachers at all levels, and once their move to Staunton and the building of the Blackfriars was complete, they were able to take their goals in this area one step further. In 2001, Shenandoah Shakespeare hosted the first Blackfriars Conference for Shakespeare scholars. "The event featured Andrew Gurr as the keynote speaker, short papers presented with the assistance of [Shenandoah Shakespeare] actors, workshops on the Blackfriars stage, and a different play every evening (*The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*)."[68] These conferences have

[66] Harrell.

[67] American Shakespeare Center, "History," http://americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=50 (accessed January 30, 2010).

[68] American Shakespeare Center, "Conferences," http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=122 (accessed January 30, 2010).

continued to be held at the Blackfriars every two years since their inception. In the same year as the first conference, another step was taken to further the educational mission of the company: Shenandoah Shakespeare partnered with Mary Baldwin College in Staunton to create a Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance. Participating graduate students have served as dramaturgs or taken small roles in productions as unpaid company interns.

As the mission statement quoted previously states, the goal of the company has always been to explore the Early Modern stage through both performance and education, celebrating the origins of the SSE in both realms. With its permanent home in Staunton, the company was able to spread its roots and develop its educational programs, which continue to expand today. Actors entering the company are instructed, "Education is our touchstone. Performance and education must be equally important to our actors and staff. All ASC actors assist with education programs, including school matinees, workshops, special performances, demonstrations, and other programs throughout the contract period."[69] Cohen and Warren held fast to their belief that the best way to connect an audience with an Early Modern play was to use Early Modern staging conditions, with the primary lesson that Shakespeare and his contemporaries knew how to make exciting and enjoyable theatre, and they argued their case with the continued success of their companies on tour and at home in Staunton.

[69] American Shakespeare Center, *2008 American Shakespeare Center Actor Handbook* (February 6, 2008): 12, http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=175 (accessed February 12, 2010).

The Birth of the Renaissance Season

Jim Warren cites the origins of the Renaissance Season to 1993, when he decided to take a step similar to those taken by Patrick Tucker in England and experiment with Shakespeare's preparation techniques. Tucker had faced a difficult task when he became interested in the same area, as there had as yet been no serious research performed into Early Modern rehearsal; when he began his work with the OSC, Tucker had based his ideas on his own research. It would not be until 2000 that Tucker's niece, Tiffany Stern, would publish *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* and bring the historical rehearsal process to scholarly attention. As Tucker's work began to attract attention, Warren decided that a similar experiment in rehearsal might benefit the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express.

Just as Tucker had found, Warren was interested in the speed with which Shakespeare's company was able to produce a play and the ability of Elizabethan companies to function without an outside director. Warren initiated the practice of what came to be known as the Renaissance Run, in which the first rehearsal of a new play would be an eight-hour period in which the actors (already off-book) came together and worked to create a playable version of the show based on their individual work, to be performed before their director and a small invited audience that same evening.[70] Actors did not typically have a chance to meet outside of the eight-hour rehearsal period and begin any sort of illicit preparation, simply because of the busy schedules the company actors kept.[71]

[70] Warren, interview.

[71] Harrell, interview.

The Actors' Handbooks originally kept to the most basic description of the Renaissance Run: "SSE COMPANY MEMBERS should be prepared to perform complete run-throughs of the plays on the first days of the contract period without direction or help with cues."[72] Over time, the process evolved and the reasoning behind it became more transparent to the actors. As the 2008 Handbook states:

> Typically, American Shakespeare Center Actors must be prepared to perform complete run-throughs of each play on the first days of rehearsal. These are called Renaissance Runs, designed to simulate how Renaissance troupes put up shows very quickly, without directors. This aspect makes us different from most theatre companies. Getting to think about your characters so concretely that you can perform the shows without direction allows actors to have a stronger influence and impact on the shape of the shows. Our directors will get a lot of ideas from these run-throughs and you'll get a taste of what it was like when companies rehearsed very few days and without directors. Renaissance Runs can be terrifying to some actors, however they are a remarkable rehearsal tool and they give actors great power to influence directors and the production.
>
> The overall goal of the Ren Runs is to put on the best show possible with very little rehearsal and no direction from the director [original emphasis]. Choices for costumes, props, music, and EVERYTHING are made by the actors with this goal in mind.[73]

The Ren Run has been in place since its inception in 1993 for each show of the touring company and during the regular season at the Blackfriars and remains part of its standard rehearsal procedure.

Jay McClure joined the artistic staff as the Associate Artistic Director of Shenandoah Shakespeare in 1999 and quickly became familiar with the Renaissance Runs and the other ways in which the company strove to use Early Modern staging conditions. Once the Blackfriars opened in 2001, it quickly began to fall prey to common pitfall of any resident theatrical company: January, February and March are

[72] *1998 Shenandoah Shakespeare Express Actor Handbook*, 2.

[73] *2008 American Shakespeare Center Actor Handbook*, 18.

notoriously difficult months in which to sustain an audience, particularly with shows that have already been running for several months. Once the Resident Company was established at the Blackfriars, it became standard practice to extend the Fall Season through the slow months and simply adding a new play into the repertory in January.[74] Unfortunately, with so long a run, audience interest was dropping along with ticket sales and a few actors were also beginning to chafe under the long contracts. McClure began trying to brainstorm alternative programming ideas that might attract audiences while also saving money during what he cites as "the weakest part of the year."[75] The theatre was dedicated to the idea of producing shows throughout the calendar year, rather than dividing time between an artistic season that produced new shows and a summer season that went without new artistic output.

McClure's general evaluation of the company's practices led him to reexamine the existing tradition of the Renaissance Runs. With the Ren Runs and their abbreviated group rehearsal work and emphasis on prior preparation, company actors were already accustomed to experimenting with the ideas of Early Modern rehearsal techniques and they served as an important facet of the theatre's dedication to exploring Shakespearean staging conditions. Ren Runs had been held for more than ten years by 2004, and although the company had a healthy turnover of actors in each season, there were also a fair number of actors who returned for many seasons that held a wealth of experience.[76] McClure had faith that Shenandoah Shakespeare

[74] Jay McClure, interview by author, Staunton, VA, January 22, 2010.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Such as John Harrell, who had performed in the earliest days of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express (touring in 1990-1992) before rejoining the group in 1996 and then working

actors could translate the experience of the Renaissance Run into something that could be performed for a paying audience, a theory supported by his own years of experience acting in summer stock, producing a new show every week. McClure, remarking on the experience, notes that summer stock "is hardly ever done anymore, because we feel that's not enough time, you can't put up a good show in very little time, when I know for a fact that yes, you can."[77]

McClure had stumbled into an intriguing possibility for the theatre's programming, one that both addressed a financially difficult period of the year and furthered Shenandoah Shakespeare's dedication to discovering the strengths of Renaissance staging practices. Why not build on the possibility of the Renaissance Run by creating a Renaissance Season? Ren Runs were by their nature unpolished and cobbled together quickly, due both to the actors' limited preparation time and the understanding that their director would soon step in to guide them into a more coherent production. With a little more time, however, there was no reason to think that a group of Shenandoah Shakespeare actors could not produce theatre that could stand on its own alongside a more conventional season. Actors would only be chosen who had experience working at the Blackfriars in past seasons, who could be trusted to do the necessary pre-rehearsal preparation, and who had the desire to take the risk.

The first Actors' Renaissance Season was cast with eleven actors in 2004, with its first performance (a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*) scheduled for February 2, 2005. A mission statement for the season was formulated, which gave

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steadily with the Resident Company since 2002, or Miriam Donald, who first joined the company in 2000 and has returned for the Actors' Renaissance Season in every subsequent year since 2005.

[77] McClure.

the purpose of the endeavor: "To further explore English Renaissance rehearsal and performance practices in order to challenge, to surprise, to delight our audiences and actors. To continue to do work that makes us all- actor and audience- feel more alive."[78] This statement was given to the actors along with a prepared list of precepts and promises from Warren and McClure. The promises were simple: there was no interest "in producing museum theatre," nor in "phasing out directors and designers," but rather in "exploration… discovery" and "the promise of renaissance."[79]

The precepts were more complex, as they were a guide for how the actors should generally approach the season. Actors were told that they would be responsible for their own decisions regarding their roles, but that the text was the ultimate authority for character, stage directions, and props. There would be an initial meeting with Cohen or Warren to discuss the season and "we will have resources available to help with our manifestation/interpretation of the text (dramaturges)."[80] There would also be important physical changes made to the performance space of the Blackfriars. Since its opening in 2001, the oak of the playhouse interior had been finished in its natural coloring, from the benches at the rear of the house to the stage and the *frons scenæ*. The effect was somewhat overwhelming, as Doreen Bechtol, an actress in the 2005 Renaissance Season, recalls: "When you consider a whole room of that warm wood, when you consider the skin tone of actors- all of a sudden, it becomes washed out… there was a way to become lost on stage."[81] Accordingly, the

[78] American Shakespeare Center, *Actors' Renaissance Season 2005*, http://skent0611.webs.com/backgroundmaterials.htm (accessed January 20, 2010).

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

decision was made (and promised in the precepts) that the *frons scenæ* would be painted in keeping with Renaissance tradition of decorating wood to look like richly colored marble, just as it was believed the *frons scenæ* at the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses would have been.[82] Artist Jeff Stockberger was brought in to do the work, which was completed before the start of the season. As Bechtol relates, there was an immediate impact: "The painting offers relief and clarity for the eye… I think with a painted backdrop, you simply have more options. If you decide to make a choice, you have more options to play with. If you're hiding in shadows, the columns are now painted black and have a little more story potential."[83]

Other important precepts were given that directly impacted the way that the actors entered their two-week rehearsal period. The decision had been made that, like Tucker's OSC, "We will provide actors with roles (sides)- not complete scripts."[84] While sides are essentially unknown in today's professional theatre,[85] there is extent evidence from which to reconstruct typical Early Modern actors' sides. Dulwich College of London contains the papers of Philip Henslowe, the theatrical entrepreneur of Elizabethan London whose diary is one of the most valuable sources of information on the Early Modern professional theatre. Within them is a cue script belonging to the actor Edward Alleyn, lead actor of the rival company to Shakespeare

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[81] Bechtol, interview.

[82] Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 37, 56.

[83] Bechtol.

[84] *ARS 2005*.

[85] Don Weingust's *Acting from the First Folio* does recount the story of an elderly British actor who was given a cue script due to budgetary constraints at a particular theatre at the start of his career (146), but even this counterexample is presented as an unusual and unexpected incident in twentieth century theatre.

and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, for the part of Orlando in Robert Greene's play *Orlando Furioso*.[86] Following this example, sides for the ARS were prepared by Warren and McClure for each character in a given play, containing only that character's lines and the last few words of the cue that precede each line, left unattributed.[87]

Another notable aspect of the Renaissance Season was the inclusion of a prompter, also called a book-keeper in the Precepts.[88] Prompting outside of the rehearsal process had never been used by Shenandoah Shakespeare, and its inclusion here was as much as nod to the reduced preparation time as to the historical precedent of the Early Modern stage. Nevertheless, it was deemed necessary for the first Ren Season, with the unusual modification that actors would call for lines with the phrase "Prithee," rather than "Line," a practice more typically heard in twenty-first century rehearsal rooms than in performance. The prompter for each production would be placed just off-stage, within the side gallery at stage left for each performance during the Renaissance Season.

The Precepts called for a series of intervals during the plays, stating that "For English Renaissance plays, we will maintain the five-act structure used in the indoor playhouses by having musical interludes between each act. We will have a half hour

[86] Patrick Tucker's *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare* includes a transcription of the side, as well as discussion of how this part would have been created and used (9-12). The side was the basis for his own preparation of the OSC's cue scripts.

[87] Sarah Enloe, "Re-making Shakespeare," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Dallas, TX, March 2008): 10.

[88] The OSC had also utilized a prompter for its performances, although notably, the prompter would be seated on-stage, in full view of the audience throughout the play. The OSC's prompter (a position typically know as the Book-Holder and filled by co-founder Christine Ozanne) often functioned as a conductor as well, confirming actors' impulses to pick up cues or remain silent (as in Tucker, 59).

of music before each play."[89] Music before plays had been the company's habit for many years, but taking four interludes was not the norm. In the days of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, plays had been performed with no break at all, attempting to keep the runtime as close to two hours as possible.[90] As Harrell stated, it had taken a few years to develop the rhythm of a performance at the Blackfriars, but it usually included one or two short breaks, no more than 15-10 minutes each, generally featuring a few songs performed by the cast as the audience talked, stretched their legs, or bought refreshments in the lobby. Breaking between each act certainly seems to have its historical precedent, but was not a technique employed previously at the twenty-first century version of the Blackfriars.[91] Nevertheless, the company would make the attempt and learn how it would affect the performances.

Costumes were the final element addressed by the Renaissance Season Precepts, which stated:

> We will perform in clothes that help indicate status, place, age, etc. We may choose to pull costumes from stock. We may choose to purchase or make some items. We may choose to perform in mufti. Whatever we choose, the clothes will help tell the story, will be based on the text, and will look cohesive and attractive. Remember that Elizabethans and Jacobeans loved color.[92]

Typically, productions at the Blackfriars did not rely heavily on the work of a design team, as productions used no sets, relied on universal lighting, and the actors

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[89] *ARS 2005*.

[90] Harrell, interview.

[91] Tiffany Stern's *Making Shakespeare* notes that as a fire-preventing measure, candles at the historical Blackfriars would have needed to be trimmed at half-hour intervals. She further notes that any Shakespeare play written after the King's Men began to use the Blackfriars theatre is written in five acts, leaving space for four intervals of candle-trimming (30).

[92] *ARS 2005*.

themselves produced all sound effects and music during each performance.[93] They had, however, featured costume designers for many years at this point, once the company had an operating budget to support a move beyond the early uniform of jeans and black high-top sneakers. Costuming would now be placed entirely in the hands of the actors themselves and the actors would have full control of both aesthetic presentation and the period conveyed by actors' clothing.

The Precepts also contained a few general guidelines to help organize the rehearsal process. Actors were instructed to "think of the time they learn their lines as rehearsal"[94] and that rehearsal time once the company convened would be primarily focused on scene work, so that "at the end of the rehearsal period the entire troupe will rehearse to put everything together."[95] The book-keeper would set a general schedule for each day, but the actors were free to change the plan as their work demanded. So that all aspects of the play could be attended to within the preparation period, the Precepts also noted that "Actors who are not working in scenes will prepare music, clothes, and props."[96] Finally, the Precepts expressed the desire to "rehearse the plays concurrently, whenever possible."[97]

This intention was framed as only a possibility because before the Renaissance Season got underway, it was difficult to anticipate how the rehearsal process would actually operate. It might not be possible to rehearse two plays at once

[93] If the play featured a storm, actors used a thundersheet backstage at the appropriate moment; effects, just like music at the Blackfriars, are never prerecorded.

[94] *ARS 2005*.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

and it was uncertain how each day's rehearsal could best be planned and structured. As Harrell notes, a chief problem was that "We didn't know what we had to figure out- that was something that took awhile to understand."[98] Provisions and precepts were made for likely issues, but until rehearsals got underway, no one was entirely sure what to expect from the process. Nevertheless, the actors convened in January of 2005, unsure of what was to come and hoping that they would be able to create productions that could withstand the scrutiny of an audience and the length of a season's run.

The 2005 Renaissance Season

The actors had two weeks to rehearse each of three plays in the season, which opened with *The Taming of the Shrew* on February 2, added *The Tamer Tamed* by the Jacobean playwright John Fletcher on February 11, and completed the repertory on March 4 with *A King and No King*, a collaboration between John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont. *Shrew* was placed first as the play most well-known to the actors with the hope that this would ease their trepidation and help them to feel as though they were starting from familiar ground. Although less familiar, as a sequel to *Shrew*, *Tamer* would build again on the performance of actor René Thornton, Jr.'s portrayal of Petruchio, which would carry over and again center the production. The final play was the biggest gamble, featuring entirely different cast members at the center of the production and using the least familiar of all three texts. Accordingly, the play was

[98] Harrell, interview.

entered last into the rotation, so that it would play far fewer performances than *Shrew* would have accumulated over the four weeks of its run.

As rehearsals began, the company of actors met each morning to decide the schedule for the day and to address any issues that had arisen. Sometimes these meetings grew lengthy and took away from valuable rehearsal time while the actors learned to make decisions without the single, authoritative voice of a director present to guide the process.[99] One issue in particular preoccupied the early days of rehearsal: costuming. Whatever help they might have been given by the resident costumer of the company, Jenny McNee, was unavailable, as McNee was on maternity leave from her position at the start of the Actors' Renaissance Season.[100] As was the original intent, the actors were entirely on their own for costuming. As Harrell describes, "We had epic meetings about costumes… if we would make period choices, which is simply one way to organize visual information, or we could just as easily make color choices… We were hung up on it- should it all be one period, or should it not, or does it matter?"[101] The decision was eventually made to generally stick to the Renaissance period, with only a few costumes or costume accessories that strayed outside the period parameters, while still staying true to the characters created by actors.[102] As the actors assembled their costumes from those already present in the company's stock, they held costume parades for the company, giving the other actors

[99] Bechtol, interview.

[100] Harrell.

[101] Ibid.

[102] A set of production photos from this production is available online, although the photographer only seems to have captured moments from the first two acts of the play. The set is available alongside others from the company's productions, photographed by Tommy Thompson, at http://www.flickr.com/photos/jaymcclure/sets/72057594078399350/ (accessed January 31, 2010).

the opportunity to voice opinions and to try and build a cohesive look for the production with costumes that worked well when put onstage alongside each other.[103]

The actors were also hesitant to trust each other's work in the beginning of the process. As Bechtol relates, "We would assign an outside eye- in effect, a director- to each scene. We might work on our own scene, and then someone would come in to give feedback, but we felt really hesitant to take a leap and say that whatever you do is your own work that you bring back to the group."[104] It soon became clear, however, that this way of working was inefficient and its fundamental practice of holding the actors accountable to an outside eye, even from within their own company, went against the spirit of the Renaissance Season. Actors continued to give each other feedback as rehearsals for the later plays that Season began, but never again to the same extent.[105]

As work on *The Tamer Tamed* and *A King and No King* began, the process began to grow easier for the company. Just as they dropped the practice of assigning other actors to approve their scenes, concern about the costumes began to fade to a more manageable level. While still a concern and an important task to be dealt with, less time was spent in group discussion and worrying about presenting a unified vision. Harrell recalls, "By the time we got to the second show, we had wildly different costumes on the stage in the same scene and it didn't matter. It was kind of neat."[106] Rather than being concerned with periods, the actors costumed *Tamer*

[103] Harrell, interview.

[104] Bechtol, interview.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Harrell.

according to groupings of characters within the play. Each group would confer with each other about costume choices, which was all the cohesion deemed necessary. As Harrell puts it,

> "The two or three people who are supposed to be from the same planet in the play are all sort of dressed alike, and then they encounter a group of people who are different, and it doesn't exactly matter… You see one actor wearing a lot of red, and you are too, so maybe it would make more sense if I weren't. You're taking in the information, but you're not worried too much about it beforehand. We wasted a lot of time worrying about that in the first season."[107]

The actors learned to quickly evaluate each other's costumes and make any necessary adjustments from what they had already taken time to prepare, rather than laboriously plan costuming as a single group.

A good deal of time was being spent preparing the four interlude performances that the actors had been encouraged to include in each play. Because of the volume of interludes, the company made the decision to move away from only performing music and to instead expand into other realms of entertainment during the four short breaks between acts. Besides music, *Taming of the Shrew* featured a dance between three of the actors: Eric Shoen, Jason Guy, and Doreen Bechtol. Bechtol, who played Bianca in the production, describes the dance that preceded Act 2, scene 1 of the play (a scene in which Kate has bound Bianca in order to confront her about her many suitors):

> I decided to make an interlude that would lead right into that scene, called 'Bianca's Dream Ballet.' I came out, fell asleep, and the two suitors entered the dream and had a dance off. One guy was an old Broadway hoofer and the other was a hip hop artist, so I would dance with the hoofer, then dance with the hip hop artist. We had a trio and then there was a big struggle. Baptista

[107] Harrell.

> came out to rescue me, but in the midst, I was tied up. Whoever had the rope was replaced by Kate, then I would wake up and we'd be in the scene.[108]

Other dances were featured in *Shrew*, such as one performed by the actors playing servants just before the fourth Act, choreographed in the style of the off-Broadway play *STOMP*. An interlude in a later play in the season offered the audience its own choice of entertainment: tumbling, juggling, or modern dance.[109]

Notably, one interlude during the season came about as a direct result of the Blackfriars Conference. Tiffany Stern presented a paper at the 2003 conference that was concerned with interactions between actors and the audience in the original Blackfriars playhouse.[110] One section of her presentation centered on the abundance of feathers that decorated the garments of Blackfriars patrons, due to the proximity of feather sellers in the neighborhood.[111] Bechtol and other actors in the Renaissance Season company were familiar with her presentation of two years before and chose to incorporate the idea in another interlude. During a song, the actors came onstage balancing feathers on fingers or other body parts; actor Thadd McQuade entered carrying a long pole with a feather balanced on the top.[112] While there is no way of knowing whether any historical entertainments at the Blackfriars contained such feats, the example is an interesting way in which the actors chose to engage with

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[108] Bechtol.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Published under the title "Actors and Audience on the Stage at the Blackfriars," in *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage*, edited by Paul Menzer (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006): 35-53.

[111] Stern, "Actors and Audience," 42.

[112] Bechtol.

scholarly research and historical fact for the purposes of entertaining their modern audiences.

It is important to note that there were two Precepts that went unfulfilled from the first season. While the plan to paint the *frons scenæ* went through on schedule, there were other elements intended to be included in performances. The Precepts stated that "We will use some natural candle-light in all performances" and "We will use painted hangings, rather than modern theatrical curtains."[113] Both of these elements were included in the Precepts as one way in which the company might experiment with more of the atmosphere and effect of an Early Modern theatrical performance, but neither was ultimately deemed necessary to explore. Subsequent seasons have followed suit and neither natural candle-light nor painted scenic hangings have been used in performances.

Popular Responses and Critical Reactions

The first Actors' Renaissance Season was generally met with wide support from its audiences. Local newspaper *The Staunton News Leader* responded enthusiastically to the three plays in the season and seemed to reflect local opinion as well. A review of *A King and No King* from March 17, 2005 stated boldly that "if you've not yet seen *A King and No King*, you've got plenty to be ashamed of - particularly for denying yourself an amusing evening in the company of a good story, top-notch staging and 11 of Shenandoah Shakespeare's most talented actors." The review has praise for each member of the cast and speaks highly of the production,

[113] *ARS 2005*.

particularly noting the commendatory efforts of a director-less cast and calling the effect "stage magic."

The *News Leader* also took into consideration the audience response toward the season, finding it to be overall very positive towards the productions. In an overview of the season from March 13, reporter Alice Mannette recounted the experience of Rich Jarvis, a visiting student from Schenectady County Community College in upstate New York, who went into a Blackfriars performance with a skeptical mind.

> "When he came to speak with us at the end of the show, he was so thankful," said Rene Thornton Jr., who plays Petruchio in two of the shows. "He was so moved."
>
> "I love it and cannot understand for the life of me why modern theater has moved away from such a beautiful art," 19-year-old Jarvis said. "I think the most beautiful part of the experience is that because complete control of the performance is in the hands of the actors, the true personalities of the actors shine through. They were able to pull it off so naturally."

While it behooves Mannette to include experiences that support her article's positive report of the season, Jarvis's experience does not seem to be an isolated case. Each actor interviewed in the piece speaks of the enthusiastic audiences the season received and the article states that Dr. Cohen had already dubbed the season a success and had chosen plays for the next year's Actors' Renaissance Season. Thornton and actress Sarah Fallon spoke warmly of their experiences during the season:

> "I learned what are my strengths and weaknesses and what are my buttons, and what used to be my buttons," Thornton said. "Sometimes with a director you try something once and he says no. In this process we really got a chance to work our ideas."
>
> Sarah Fallon, who plays opposite Thornton in *The Taming of the Shrew*, was at first terrified with this experiment.

> "I had to keep an open mind. It became exhilarating. We've just gotten better and better," Fallon said. "We put up three plays that audiences are really enjoying. It's amazing that 11 actors found a way to work together."

Critical reaction to the Actors' Renaissance Season among the scholarly community was more mixed. The *Shakespeare Bulletin* carried performance reviews of each play in the 2005 ARS and praise was granted alongside some serious reservations. Sarah Wiley and Drew Colenbrander were mostly enthusiastic about *Taming of the Shrew*, calling it "a remarkably successful demonstration of how skilled, experienced actors can collaborate to produce an innovative, cohesive performance." The review is largely concerned with the ways in which the production addressed issues of character and how individual performances shaped the play, but it does also offer some revealing comments on costuming.

In one instance, the costuming is praised for its reflection of the characters. Wiley and Colenbrander highlight the differences between the costumes for Bianca and Katerina: "[Fallon] glowered as the suitors admired Doreen Bechtol's Bianca, dressed in a short, frilly white dress, holding what became her signature royal blue parasol. Katherina [wore] an elegant gold and white full-length gown, which heightened the emotional contrast between the two sisters."[114] Here, the costumes served their function to reveal character and to help the audience quickly identify and understand the differences between the sisters. It is also worth noting that these costumes showed the actors' willingness to choose costumes based on character, rather than strictly keeping within a chosen period.

[114] Sarah Wiley and Drew Colenbrander, "The Taming of the Shrew," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 23 no. 2 (Fall 2005): 107.

Elsewhere, however, the reviewers found the costumes lacking. In the text of *Shrew*, costumes are brought to the foreground as the servant Grumio prepares listeners for the imminent arrival of Petruchio for his wedding. He describes his master's outrageous apparel in some detail before Petruchio arrives onstage; in the Blackfriars production, the reviewers found this moment fell short of their expectations.

> The imaginative costumes usually worked to accentuate a character's personality. However, some clothing seemed chosen for fit, rather than effect. Thadd McQuade's flamboyant Grumio, clanging large cymbals and prancing on stage in a blue hoop-skirt, seemed to prepare the audience for an outrageously clad Petruchio… Petruchio's disappointing entry in a simple black hat and cloak with matching black boots, completely missed an opportunity to take advantage of an often highly comic moment. Katherina's simple modern white dress and heels contrasted oddly with her earlier, more formal and elegant costume. Difficult to envision as a wedding gown, the plain dress contributed nothing to Katherina's sense of disappointment and betrayal.[115]

Costuming was deemed inconsistent throughout all productions, and even the local paper seems to imply that it was at times distracting. The previously quoted review of *King and No King* by Charles Culbertson contains a reference to John Harrell's costume choices (although apparently failing to recognize that the actor himself was responsible for all the most recent costuming decisions):

> Someone at Shenandoah Shakespeare obviously thinks that slapping the most outlandish costume imaginable on John Harrell is funny, because they do it in play after play after play. And they're right. The get-up Harrell wears as the cowardly braggart, Bessus, elicits guffaws nearly every time he walks on stage, and what makes it even more funny is that he wears the costume with a certain haughty pride - sort of like a 6-year-old who thinks he looks good in cowboy boots, underwear and a towel for a cape.

[115] Wiley and Colenbrander, 108.

Culbertson may find the costume effective for eliciting laughs, but it is likely debatable whether the costume might not have taken attention away from Harrell's performance of the text, which was the ostensible goal.

Stronger, more general criticism arose from Jeremy Lopez, who reviewed *King and No King* and *Tamer Tamed.* Lopez begins his review by citing the promise of the program notes (quoted in the Preface), but laments the ways in which the company has fallen short.

> Would that making theatre were as easy and as much fun as this paragraph makes it sound! It is particularly disappointing, as one who has been a fan of Shenandoah Shakespeare since I saw their marvelous *Love's Labor's Lost* in a hotel ballroom in 1997, to have to say that what this energetic and innovative company most needed this season, at least as far as their non-Shakespearean offerings were concerned, was a director and a few long rehearsals.[116]

Lopez was happy to admit that the production of *Shrew* most closely approaches the goals of the season, noting that,

> The elaborate, fluid business the actors were able to come up with for even the most banal moments in Shakespeare's play ('Knock me at this gate,' for example) suggested that their familiarity with that playwright's dramaturgical rhythms, habits, and possibilities was probably analogous to that of sixteenth-century actors working in close proximity with Shakespeare's quill.[117]

Unfortunately, it is difficult to expect any actor to have the same level of experience with texts by Beaumont and Fletcher, and Lopez found the non-Shakespearean productions to be noticeably lacking, calling them "two confused, unfocused shows characterized by frequent missed opportunities and a tendency to keep the audience at a wary arm's length."[118]

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[116] Jeremy Lopez, "*The Tamer Tamed/ A King and No King,*" *Shakespeare Bulletin* 23 no.2 (Fall 2005): 110.

[117] Ibid.

Lopez also took issue with the casting of the three plays of the season. He praised the work of Thornton as Petruchio in *Shrew*, and was grateful to have the performance carry over into *Tamer*, but was disappointed that Sarah Fallon was not cast opposite him a second time. He complains that "A notably twenty-first-century theatrical norm played an important part in this production's disappointing handling of its central plot-line: the desire to distribute three shows' worth of parts equitably among eleven actors."[119] Instead of Fallon, who played several small parts in *Tamer*, Miriam Donald played the part of Maria, the woman who ultimately succeeds in taming Petruchio; Donald had played the much smaller part of Biondello in *Shrew*. Lopez lamented the casting decision:

> I realize that fairness is not the only thing at issue here—that giving a single actor three leading roles and only a week to rehearse each of them is rightly considered unreasonable. But I also think it is worth being a little pedantic and insisting on the rules of the game Shenandoah Shakespeare has decided to play. If we accept, as I think we do, that Richard Burbage played Hamlet and Brutus and Henry V in 1599, or Lear and Volpone and Vindice in 1606-7, *are* we being unreasonable if we hope to see the same excellent actor as two Petruchios and King Arbaces in this twenty-first century experiment in theatre history?[120]

In the final play of the season, Thornton relinquished the largest role to Eric Schoen and took his turn playing smaller roles.

Lopez was most critical of *King and No King*, stating that it "was clearly the lowest priority of the three plays in the Actors' Renaissance Season, for entirely understandable reasons: it was certainly the least popular of the three plays, and its audience probably (this is just a guess) consisted mainly of the most loyal core of

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[118] Lopez, 110.

[119] Lopez, 111.

[120] Ibid.

Shenandoah Shakespeare's very loyal following."[121] It is unclear how Lopez reaches his conclusions regarding the audience and upon what data he makes this claim, but he furthers his argument, claiming that "it did not seem like the actors knew what to make of this play, and as a consequence the audience did not either."[122]

Lopez displayed ambivalent feelings about the interludes performed during the plays. While the reviews in the *Staunton News Leader* mentioned above specifically cited the interludes as a source of enjoyment and a great success for the company (Cohen and the previously quoted Jarvis also lent their praise), Lopez was less certain. He quickly recounts that at both performances, "intervals are given over to other activities: a song, or a display of acrobatics, or a dance, or (most frequently) all three."[123] While he conceded that the interludes were certainly entertaining and demonstrated the many skills of the company, he also finds that "It is not good that the stage and costumes and voices were more interestingly used during *King and No King*'s four interludes than at any time during the actual play."[124] Lopez found that the frequency of the interludes broke the momentum of the play and served to jar the audience out of the world of the play just as soon as they had begun to reenter it. "Unfortunately, this disengagement works in the actors' favor; audiences can go away thinking that the plays are kind of a mess anyway and that the actors have done all they could to make an otherwise dull experience relatively entertaining."[125] Lopez

[121] Lopez, 112.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Lopez, 113.

[124] Ibid, 114.

[125] Ibid.

concluded his review by musing if perhaps his expectations were too high because we hold today too idealized a picture of how Early Modern professional theatre truly was. Perhaps performances did suffer from being quickly cobbled together and interludes were always distracting.

> But if they *were* the case, that is surely not the experience we ought to hope to replicate. Unlike actors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, modern repertory actors do not *need* the works of Beaumont and Fletcher in order to survive; if modern repertory actors have the luxury of performing those works, they should take as much time as they need in order to do them, and their new audiences, justice.[126]

Lopez's criticism of the Actors' Renaissance Season was strong, finding fault with not just certain performances, but with elements from the fundamental structure of the season.

Of course, there were also voices from within the company that were not blind to the faults of the ARS. Actor René Thornton was often frustrated during the Season over the company's decision making process and quickly discovered that most actors fell into two personality types, followers or leaders, which complicated the process at times. Leaders pushed for their own scenes to be worked, while followers' scenes could often fall by the wayside until the last minute.[127] Group decisions were particularly strained at times, as Thornton recalls:

> When we did *Taming of the Shrew* in the first Ren season, we were working on Kate's speech in the final scene of the play… And we had actors who wanted to be doing things during her final speech, things that she did not want to be happening, but things that they continued to do in the entire run of the show. Even after the entire company participated in this excruciating, painfully long conversation about who has the right to decide what happens

[126] Lopez, 114.

[127] René Thornton, Jr, interview by Christine Parker, January 2009, Staunton, VA, http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=335 (accessed January 7, 2010).

> here. The person doing the talking had to suffer through a run where other people were doing things while they were talking… That's one of the things that can happen in the Ren Season.[128]

Such problems among the company returned from time to time, although this was the most blatant occurrence in the 2005 Season. Actor James Keegan found himself wishing for a director eventually and ultimately found the process overlong, according to the season review from the *Staunton News Leader*. "He discovered that it was hard to be mindful of his fellow actors' right to speak, and he came to realize that each person housed 'a little director or a big director inside of them.'"

In some ways, this idea of actors consciously taking on a directorial mindset was helpful to the progress of the season from early disorganization. As rehearsals had continued, a system had organically developed whereby the actor with the most stage time in a play began to have the final say. There was, however, another side to such a mindset. With director-based theatre, there is a danger of straying into "concept Shakespeare," which Jim Warren and Jay McClure felt was strongly against the spirit of the Actors' Renaissance Season (as well as often counterintuitive to the spirit of the Shenandoah Shakespeare mission).

Warren and McClure had a delicate balancing act before them. As Artistic Director, Warren technically had the final say over all Shenandoah Shakespeare productions. Ideally, the ARS would foster an environment that would allow the company, as McClure describes, "to work on full creative force. They are all hopefully really thinking about their own work in whatever scenes they're in, but the music and everything else as well. They should all really be working towards that,

[128] Thornton, interview.

and not just showing up and doing their scenes as they're told."[129] In the first Actors' Renaissance Season, Warren, McClure, and Cohen decided to err on the side of the actors' creative freedom, and did not interfere with any of the company's staging decisions.

Unfortunately, in their opinions, the company did make a number of decisions that were not in keeping with the text to the extent that they had hoped. As McClure recounts,

> You want them all working at the top of their creative ability. However, the work they're doing has to be based on the texts, and in our experience, sometimes actors will want to ask first, "What is the concept for this show?" and to stop looking at the text and to stop looking at Shakespeare's staging conditions. We believe there needed to be rules or precepts to give them, and we did the first year. Which they ignored. Instead of immediately saying, "No, you have to do this," I feared that in doing that, it would stifle creativity.[130]

Warren witnessed a tendency in the company to approach each play in the season not as actors focused on their roles, but as a group of directors, each with their own take on the play. Warren wanted to find a better way in future Renaissance Seasons to refocus the actors into "being eleven actors trying to put on the best play they can, focusing on their character, their scenes, their scene partners, and not going to the place of, 'Gee, if I were directing this play, what kind of concept would I want?'"[131] Warren believed that this approach is probably closer to how Shakespeare's own company may have worked; actors could certainly take on leadership positions within the show, but if their focus was primarily on their own performances, the rest would

[129] McClure, interview.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Warren, interview.

slot naturally into a good production without the trappings of a concept superimposed upon the whole. The first season, he wryly noted, felt at times "more like a bunch of actors getting together in a space in New York and deciding on their naked *Macbeth* show."[132]

Warren's concern is strongly worded, while most of the causes of concern seem relatively minor; nevertheless, they did disrupt the intentions of the Renaissance Season, to varying degrees. McClure found that actors often strayed from textual intentions in their use of props; the Precepts had clearly stated, "We will use props called for in the text."[133] Actors did not always follow this precept, often making choices for comic effect over strict adherence to the text's requirements; Warren recalls an actor using a badminton racquet in the place of the sword called for in one instance.[134] The other chief concern of the artistic staff was the use of the stage's trap and balcony. The Precepts had gestured toward this generally, with its note of "We will follow original stage directions."[135] While in many cases, this was followed quite naturally by the actors, it was less easy to only use the trap and balcony when they were explicitly called for in the text. Warren acknowledges the temptation, saying that "It's completely understandable, because it's available, so where would it be cool to use the trap or balcony? But we want them to focus on the question of what

[132] Warren.

[133] *ARS 2005*.

[134] Warren.

[135] *ARS 2005*.

does the text call for? As you explore Shakespeare's plays, he doesn't call for the trap and the balcony very often."[136]

Lopez's reviews note the use of both of these elements and his reactions to them varied. In *Tamer*, he cites with pleasure the use of the two stage spaces: "the entrenched women, for example, residing in the balcony, received their provisions (represented by plastic fruits, vegetables, and meats) on a long rope passed up to them by another actor in the center-stage trap."[137] While the text of *Tamer* does specifically place the women above the stage in the balcony, the actors' use of the trap in this moment was not likewise specified in the original stage directions; the moment was an actorly innovation that the audience enjoyed, but it was not necessarily true to the text in the way that the actors had been urged. Lopez also notes an inconsistent use of the trap in *A King and No King*. Throughout the production, the trap door was fixed open and a low wooden barrier was erected around its four sides, giving the appearance of a square of foot-high benches around a central well. For the majority of the show, the open trap was meant to represent the prison in which the character of Tigranes was kept. During one scene, however, the trap's function shifted into a more symbolic mode, as incestuously minded siblings Arbaces and Panthea share a kiss. Lopez describes both the potential of the moment and the frustration that arose from the staging:

> Holding hands, they stepped up on the benches surrounding the trap, their arms spanning the empty space beneath. As they walked the length of the trap one had a sense for the first time of the potential danger in the playing space itself—the scene seemed headed toward blocking that would compromise the actors' physical footing just as the action of the play compromises the

[136] Warren.

[137] Lopez, 111.

> characters' moral footing. But when Panthea and Arbaces reached the front edge of the benches along the trap, they simply let go of one another's hands, stepped down, and continued the scene on the flat part of the stage. The trap was not revisited. Actors and audience were let off the hook.[138]

The inconsistent use of the stage space was as trying for Lopez as the unfulfilled tension of the scene. These concerns echoed those of the artistic staff, which would play a part in how the Actors' Renaissance Season would change before the next year.

One significant change did occur after the inaugural ARS that would have an impact on the entire company: on the 23 of April, 2005, Shenandoah Shakespeare officially changed its name to the American Shakespeare Center. Many different names had been discussed over the years, with other terms like "Festival" being debated alongside "American" and "Center." Warren felt that there were strong differences between what each term implied, and that the goals of the company were best suited to those terms, noting "The 'American' is geared toward our national audience and national identity, and 'Center,' as opposed to 'Festival' or 'Theatre,' says we're also one of the world's foremost learning centers for Shakespeare. What we do onstage every night is part of us being a Center, and not just a Theatre or Festival."[139]

The name change to "American Shakespeare Center" had been brewing for years, but in the summer of 2004, Jay McClure began to push the board into taking the final step before any other group claimed it, which was a possibility at the time.[140]

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[138] Lopez, 113.

[139] Warren, interview.

[140] McClure, interview.

His belief, eventually shared by board, was that the company already had the aspects implied by the name, so it was foolish to not stake their claim on a name that described both their current state and their goals. As McClure saw it,

> We had at that point been one of the largest touring Shakespeare companies in the world, and certainly in the United States. There are a lot of things we can say that we do that are not hyperbole. We had been touring the US for twenty-two years, and for many of those years with a rotating rep of three plays, either Early Modern or with a direct tie-in to the period, all performed using Shakespeare's staging conditions. We're the world's only recreation of Shakespeare's indoor theatre and we perform fifty-two weeks out of the year in rotating rep in Early Modern plays.[141]

As Warren states, "We knew what the components were and we knew that we wanted it, and I think Jay gave us the push of, Why wait? We can more quickly become all of those things with that name."[142] While some would miss the attractive alliteration and regionality of "Shenandoah Shakespeare," the change was approved and the American Shakespeare Center was officially born.

The Evolution of the Actors' Renaissance Season: 2006-2009

In the *Staunton News Leader* article of March, 2005, which ran while the season still had a month left to play in repertory, Cohen admitted a few things that he could see already needed changing.

> [Cohen] plans to give more parameters to the actors and offer more scholarship. He's trying to fine tune the two-week rehearsal process and is asking the actors what worked and what needs to be changed. 'I'm going to tell them to not ignore the stage directions that the playwright put in,' Cohen said.

[141] McClure.

[142] Warren.

These were the most obvious concerns to the artistic staff and constituted some of the largest changes for the 2006 Renaissance Season, which was already slated for the new year and would feature Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston's *Eastward Ho!*; and two performances of a new play from Dr. Paul Menzer of Mary Baldwin College called *The Brats of Clarence*, which treated the story of King Henry VII, successor to Richard III.

Actors hired for the ARS company in 2006 (many of whom returned from the year before) were greeted with a document that was different than the previous year's. In the place of Precepts, they were given an expanded two-page document that listed Rules, terminology which made a stronger statement than the suggestions and goals of the Precepts. The text of the Purpose had been slightly shortened, but remained essentially the same as before: "To further explore English Renaissance rehearsal and performance practices in order to challenge, to surprise, to delight our audience and actors."[143] It was in the Rules that the greatest changes had occurred and which signified the areas that Cohen, Warren, and McClure felt needed the most adjustment.

To begin, there was a new section that attempted to demarcate different roles within the company while also expanding the troupe to officially include several non-actors. For its second year, the full 2006 Renaissance Season troupe would consist of a mixture of historical and modern positions: Sharers, Apprentices/Stagekeepers, Book-keeper, Tireman, Prompter, a Music Director, and Fight Choreographer. The Rules gave each group or individual certain responsibilities; for example, Sharers

[143] American Shakespeare Center, *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season*, http://skent0611.webs.com/backgroundmaterials.htm (accessed January 20, 2010).

would be the twelve actors cast by the artistic staff of the American Shakespeare Company, and would prepare their roles, act in the plays, and take on the different managerial duties of the troupe. One actor would also serve as Music Director, and if possible, a suitably trained and certified actor would also be the Fight Choreographer. Sharers would also be in charge of casting Apprentices, who would come from the MLitt/MFA students in the Shakespeare program at Mary Baldwin.[144]

The 2006 season also made a distinction between the roles of a prompter and book-keeper, which had been combined in the previous season's Precepts. It was now the prompter's responsibility to, among other things, "Keep and maintain the prompter's copy of the play; help run the individual, scene, and group rehearsals; prompt actors for entrances and lines in rehearsal or performance; and to go on for any actor in the case of an emergency."[145] By contrast, the book-keeper would "Prepare the season master schedule; prepare and edit the play scripts and sides for actors; run group rehearsals; maintain budget and make budget decisions (example: *Eastward Ho!* calls for a monkey- unlikely we will have one); and arbitrate disagreements."[146] Jay McClure would serve the role of the Book-keeper for the season, placing him in a position of authority to make similar decisions to those he might make during a regular season, though keeping him largely outside of the actors' creative decisions.

[144] Only one apprentice was cast for the 2006 season: Eve Speer, who played small roles in each of the three plays during the season.

[145] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

[146] Ibid.

One very significant change happened this season: the position of Tireman, or costumer, was assigned outside of the actors, in response to the many extended conversations about costuming which had consumed so much rehearsal time in the previous year. The Rules now read, "Working closely with the actors, the Blackfriars resident costumer will oversee costumes for the Renaissance Season. The costumer may decide to narrow the costumes for a show to a particular period."[147] Jenny McNee, the resident costumer of the Blackfriars, received credit as "Tyreman [*sic*]" alongside Erin West for the plays in the Ren Season repertory in 2006, although actors did retain the primary control over their costumes.[148]

In 2006, one other change was readily apparent within the Rules. Cohen, Warren, and McClure decided to increase the weight behind their intentions to keep the company producing shows within the spirit of the Early Modern theatre. Rather than the suggestions of the Precepts, certain Rules now included scholarly justification in the form of excerpts from Tiffany Stern's *Making Shakespeare*, which had been published in 2004. McClure had read Stern's earlier *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* just before the first Renaissance Season, which had helped to solidify some of his intentions for the season, but found her later book to be more specifically useful for the ARS.[149] Stern had, in fact, visited the first Renaissance Season and was an enthusiastic supporter of the venture, as reflected in her words to the *Staunton News Leader* on March 13, 2005, in which she called the season "tremendously thrilling" and praised its status as the only work of its kind being

[147] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

[148] Enloe, "Re-making Shakespeare," 15.

[149] McClure, interview.

attempted by any professional theatre company. McClure used Stern's work in the Rules for the 2006 Season because, as he says, "I really respect her work and I know [the actors] respect her work,"[150] and hoped that that respect would carry over into the actors' own work on stage. McClure cited Stern at several points during the Rules: as justification for the use of sides, for textually appropriate props, and for rehearsal practices. In this instance, the Rules become slightly more specific than in the previous year.

> Beginning mid-January, we will schedule time before group rehearsals begin for individual instruction of parts, scene-work, music, and fights… We will make available various instructors during this part of the rehearsal period (depending on available resources). We will expand Tiffany Stern's master/boy rehearsal theory by encouraging scene-partner rehearsal.[151]

Within this section was a lengthy quote from Stern that described the ability of Early Modern companies to use instructors and rehearse shared scenes between a sharer and his boy apprentice, reinforcing the goals McClure gave the actors in the Rule.

Stern's work was prioritized even more in its own, separate Rule, which read: "Before the season begins, we will provide actors with a copy of Tiffany Stern's *Making Shakespeare*, which they will be required to read. We will use *Making Shakespeare* and Dr. Stern's research as the guidebook for the Renaissance Season (but not necessarily the rulebook)."[152] It went on to recommend several other scholarly works to the company that focused on the Early Modern Shakespearean stage.[153] The move demonstrated the ASC's regard of its company as a group of

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[150] McClure.

[151] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

[152] Ibid.

actor-scholars, actively engaged in the research of the Center; rather than simply demanding the actors follow second-hand the work of well-regarded scholars, the Artistic Staff gave the actors the materials for themselves and let them, at their own discretion, seek out more.

A new Rule for the second season concerned stage entrances and exits, as well as the concern for the overuse of the balcony and trap. Despite the company's growing practice of keeping to the stage rather than entering into audience space (always excepting the audience members present on the gallants' stools onstage), last year's *Shrew* had featured an exit through the audience, as Petruchio carried his new wife offstage and through the house at the end of Act Three of the play. These exits and entrances would no longer occur, as the Rules now stated:

> We will follow stage directions in the parts and promptbook. All entrances and exits will be made from the center opening or flanking stage-doors. Action will remain on the stage platform (unless, as in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, audience entrances are called for in the text). The balcony, trap, or heavens will be used only if called for.[154]

These limits on the use of the different stage spaces had been implicit in the previous year's Precepts; the 2006 Rules made them explicit. McClure explains, however, that it remains a difficult decision, both for the actors and for the Artistic Staff to decide when to step in and discourage their use:

> You use the balcony when it's called for, you use the trap when and only when it's called for, and the heavens, which is not so much an issue because we can't use them and they're not called for often. When the actors use these

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[153] Namely, Gerald Eades Bentley's *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time: 1590-1642*; Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespeare Company: 1594-1642*, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, and *The Shakespearean Stage*; Tiffany Stern's *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*; and Patrick Tucker's *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach*.

[154] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

> areas when they may not have been called for in the text, then our discussion is, Do we let it go? If it doesn't violate the text, we generally let it go.[155]

Use of these staging areas was then decided on a case by case basis, with the Artistic Staff generally bowing to the desires of the actors, who soon became accustomed to the limits.

Other Rules were now included, based on issues that had arisen in the previous year. The use of a prompter had been a difficult adjustment for the actors, but the fast rehearsal process of the ARS did make them a necessity as well as a nod to Early Modern conventions. Despite hopes that the prompter's presence would only be a formality, in the first scene of the opening night of *The Tamer Tamed*, actor John Harrell had needed to call on the prompter for a line. As he reports, "At the time it felt like I had violated some fundamental rule about theatre and audience expectations, but since then we've all grown used to it."[156] By the second Renaissance season, these moments had occurred often enough that guidelines were defined for the prompter's role during performance, while also setting up a system for situations of disastrous proportions. Prompters were instructed when to step in (either when an actor called for a line explicitly, or put in an overlong pause), and actors were explicitly told that the traditional manners of covering for another actor were also acceptable (repeating the cue, skipping ahead, or paraphrasing the dropped line). For more extreme situations, the Rules described what might happen: "The prompter could go onstage with the prompt book; an actor could go backstage to look at the promptbook; the prompter could stop the offending scene by sending on the next

[155] McClure, interview.

[156] Harrell, interview.

scene or having someone go on to sing a little song while everyone collects their wits."[157] By having such a system in place, the Artistic Staff hoped that all bases possibilities had been provided for, even if they never needed to be put into practice (as was the general wish).

Finally, a new provision was put into the Rules to try and prevent a breakdown with the actors' communal decision making, such as that which had occurred in *Shrew*'s final scene. The Rules now concluded with, "In cases of dispute or disagreement within the troupe, ASC's Artistic Director will arbitrate. The Artistic Director may also give notes and make any changes, if necessary."[158] The new policy was immediately tested in 2006, during rehearsals for *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, as actor René Thornton recalls:

> We had a camp of people who were gunning for a tragic ending to the play, and we had a camp of people gunning for a more comedic ending to the play. Those were two separate groups of people, and all of them had lines in the scene. Who was going to be the arbitrator of how this was going to play out? And the who eventually became the artistic director- Jim finally had to step in and say, this is how it's going to play out. We as a group were not capable of coming to that decision.[159]

With rehearsals for the play at a standstill, Warren made the decision that the play should end tragically, although it still left half of the cast unhappy with the result. Thornton remarked that "it's an easier pill to swallow when you have a director because you know that that is how the system is set up. But in the Ren Season it

[157] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

[158] *Blackfriars Playhouse 2006 Renaissance Season.*

[159] Thornton, interview.

becomes about having to swallow that from peers, which is less easy to do."[160] Nevertheless, a decision was reached and rehearsals could move on.

Once again, local critics praised the Actors' Renaissance Season. The *Staunton News Leader* said in a review of *Romeo and Juliet* on February 9, 2006,

> From character development and line delivery to blocking and choice of costumes, the actors -- working in committees -- have fielded a play that looks good, sounds good and leaves the audience with a feeling of having participated in the great experiment. Normally, anything done by committee lacks inspiration, but not in this case.

The review went on to praise the individual acting talents of each of the leading actors of the company, and other plays in the season were met with the same enthusiasm.[161] In a review for the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Elizabeth Charlebois also found much to praise in the productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *'Tis Pity*. Where Lopez had critiqued the company a year before for all the ways in which their optimistic program notes had spun the Season, Charlebois found that the plays that season generally fulfilled these same promises.

> In fact the plays do seem to rely heavily on moments of actor-audience recognition and engagement more than is typical in modern Shakespearean theatre, where a thematic emphasis is often expected to emerge as a result of a number of deliberately conceived and interconnected stylistic and directorial choices. The actors at the Blackfriars are playing to please a distinctly modern audience, not to realize a director's vision.[162]

Where Lopez had found fault with the casting of *Tamer Tamed*, which gave Thornton's Petruchio a different actress with whom to spar, the parallels between Ford's and Shakespeare's plays were highlighted by casting actors in corresponding

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[160] Thornton.

[161] For example, a review March 9, 2006 had equal praise for the far more obscure *Eastward Ho!*.

[162] Elizabeth Charlebois, "*Romeo and Juliet/ 'Tis Pity She's a Whore*,"*Shakespeare Bulletin* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 93.

roles wherever possible. Rather than finding the musical interludes a distraction, Charlebois enjoyed that "In both productions the musical interludes, which take the place of regular intermissions at the Blackfriars, set a tone and commented on the action… [they] often cue audience sympathy and response… What was cast as youthful, passionate excess in one play became moral turpitude in the next."[163] Overall, Charlebois praised the theatricality of the actors' decisions and found the two performances to be an illuminating experience of each play.

The ASC actors were growing more and more accustomed to the mechanics of the Renaissance Season, and the positive reactions that they continued to elicit meant that the 2007 ARS did not change nearly as dramatically as it had done for 2006. In fact, the biggest change to occur was to expand the repertory from three plays into five: John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*; Shakespeare's *Pericles* and the First Quarto *Hamlet*; Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*; and a remounting of *The Brats of Clarence*. The only change within the Rules for that season was in regards to costume: the reference to the costumer limiting a show to a certain period was removed, in large part because the actors rarely chose costumes that stayed within a single period for the Ren Season shows. That season, the actors decided to appoint their own resident tireman: company actress Vanessa Mandeville-Morosco. She was given the responsibility of overseeing the costumes of most of the company and focused on ways to show character groupings, and thus "established a unified concept for the 'ladies' in *Devil is an Ass*, a clear separation for the various locations in

[163] Charlesbois, 96.

Pericles, and clear division from the other characters for the Queen and King in *Hamlet (Q1)*."[164]

Again, the Renaissance Season met with critical praise. In the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Andrea Stevens praised the ARS plays over those in the regular season, declaring,

> I suggest that it is precisely this diffusion of directorial authority that shows this company at its best. Possibly because the absence of a director required the actors to lean more heavily on their individual training, the Renaissance Season displayed more sustained and innovative use of music, space, and certainly of dance and movement.[165]

Stevens also noted with pleasure the effect of the costuming in *Pericles*, saying that "the several worlds of *Pericles* were kept scrupulously distinct even as they merged to create a coherent whole."[166] Ultimately, Stevens found more satisfaction as an audience member because the Season, as Charlebois had found the year before, delivered on its promise to excite the audience with the rawness and creativity of the Renaissance stage.

For 2008, the only changes to the format of the Renaissance Season were slight. The plays in repertory were Jonson's *Volpone*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline*, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, and Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*. This Season, the Rules combined the position of the Prompter and Stage Manager, roles which had already begun to overlap in practice. The process of the Renaissance Season had begun to streamline, as actors grew more comfortable each

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[164] Enloe, 15.

[165] Andrea Stevens, "The American Shakespeare Center 2007 Actors' Renaissance Season and the ASC 2007 Summer/Fall Season 2007 at the Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Virginia," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26 no.1 (2008): 181.

[166] Stevens, 182.

year and were able to make decisions based on their experience in previous years. Likewise, the Rules were beginning to shift to take into account how they functioned in practice, rather than the open conjecture that informed the 2005 Precepts.

The actors had also begun to consistently stray from the Rule that specified four interludes in every production by the 2008 ARS. Speaking about *The Jew of Malta*, actor James Keegan revealed this practice: "In the second interlude- when we've got two interludes, we usually say the second one is when we need the 'hoo-hah,' to wake the audience up for the last part of the performance- that's when we invite the audience on stage to do the Hava Nagila."[167] Despite the seeming authority of the Rules, the actors had become accustomed to breaking up the plays different amounts of times. In the same season, *Cymbeline* was performed with four interludes, returning to the practice of breaking between each Act.[168] Kevin Donovan's review of this *Cymbeline* was largely positive, with many compliments toward the ASC's playing style. Echoing concerns of earlier Renaissance Seasons, however, Donovan did have one particular complaint:

> At times, though, the farrago of costuming styles was distracting. In the wager scene (I.iv), with its representatives of various nationalities, Posthumus appeared in doublet and hose, the Frenchman in a three-piece suit and a fedora, the (mute) Dutchman – or Spaniard? – in black trousers, a red shirt, and a wig reminiscent of Rod Stewart in the 1970s, while Philario wore a sword-and-sandals costume reminiscent of gladiator movies… Perhaps the players were flaunting *Cymbeline*'s willingness to flirt with absurdity in its tragicomic mixture of emotional registers–lyrical, satirical, tragical, pastoral, etc.–as well as in its notable anachronisms.[169]

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[167] James Keegan, interview by Erik Curren, Staunton, VA 2008, http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=180 (accessed January 7, 2010).

[168] Kevin Donovan, "Two Productions of *Cymbeline*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 14, no. 2, (September, 2008) http://purl.oclc.org/emls/14-2/revdonov.html (accessed February 15, 2010).

[169] Ibid.

While Donovan seems willing to explain away the costumes he found distracting, the point stands that once again, the eclectic and thrifty costuming habits of the company drew unflattering notice. It is also worth noting, however, that Donovan ultimately found the play to be an affirmation of the fundamental goal of the American Shakespeare Center: "The ASC production in the Blackfriars showed the play's power to move in a theatrical mode almost entirely consisting of the spoken words and gestures of actors in close proximity to an audience."[170]

By the 2009 Renaissance Season, McClure and Warren made an effort to begin to shape the Rules according to the practices that the actors had developed over the last several years. Most notably, the Rules on interludes were amended, and now read "For English Renaissance plays, we will maintain the five-act structure used in the indoor playhouses by having 1 to 5 minute interludes between each act. *However, for some plays the acting troupe may choose to reduce the number of interludes with the approval of the Artistic Director.* [emphasis added]"[171] The actors had come to find over the years that too many interludes took away from the speed of the Blackfriars playing style and caused the evening to drag on past the audience's comfort. As Harrell notes, with four intervals, "you're never in for more than thirty minutes of play, which is kind of nice, but by the time you get to the last interlude, most people are probably like, I could sit through another twenty minutes!"[172]

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[170] Donovan.

[171] American Shakespeare Center, *Blackfriars Playhouse 2009 Renaissance Season*, http://skent0611.webs.com/backgroundmaterials.htm (accessed January 20, 2010).

[172] Harrell, interview.

Increasingly, Ren Season plays began to decrease the number of interludes, so that more than two per play became rare.

The other major change of the 2009 Season was the choice to begin performances much earlier. In 2008, *Macbeth* had opened the ARS on January 11, giving the actors slightly less than two weeks of rehearsal time. In 2009, the Ren Season actors began rehearsals for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on Tuesday, December 30 and opened on Friday, January 2, giving the actors only two days of rehearsal to prepare the production;[173] other plays in the Season would return to the traditional two week rehearsal period.[174] The shortened rehearsal period for *Midsummer* affected the preparation process in certain ways. René Thornton (Oberon) began discussing costumes with Alyssa Wilmoth (Titania) and Benjamin Curns (Puck) during the Fall, but these plans ultimately fell through in favor of what was achievable for the production.

> Supply becomes the determining factor. I couldn't find the wig I wanted, Alyssa couldn't find the costume she wanted. Ben, because he was also cast as Starveling, couldn't do the make-up that he wanted. And so, though we did have these conversations about great ideas on a production that would really look cool with a budget and a costume designer, when push came to shove in two days of rehearsals, those ideas became secondary to— what do we actually have in stock, and what fits, and what do you have time to put on and take off to make the changes for the other characters you have to play? Double /triple casting becomes a huge determining factor to decision making on that level in a way that becomes the costume designer's problem in other shows that we do here—it's Jenny [McNee] or Erin [M. West]'s job to figure out how on earth I'm going to get these people to make these quick changes but in the Ren Season it becomes your problem, and no one else's but your own.[175]

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[173] Harrell.

[174] The 2009 Renaissance Season also included season Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 1*, Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*, and George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*.

[175] Thornton, interview.

In many respects, the potential chaos of such a short rehearsal period was greatly reduced because of the familiarity of the play chosen to start the season. As Harrell explains, "The hardest thing is backstage. 'What scene are they on, do I have time to change into this costume, is this a quick change, I don't even know what happens next, where's that sword?' When you're doing *Midsummer*… everybody knows the rhythm of that play."[176] The seemingly Herculean task became achievable because the actors already knew when quick changes were called for, how many costumes they would need, or who had a long break between scenes, things which are only discovered over time in rehearsal with a less familiar play.

The 2009 Actors' Renaissance Season marked the fifth year in the American Shakespeare Center's experiment with director-less Early Modern theatre. Several core actors had begun to make it a habit to return year after year for the ARS; actress Miriam Donald relocated to Los Angeles after the inaugural Ren Season, but has returned every year to be a part of the Renaissance Company.[177] Actor Ben Curns has also continued to be a part of the ARS for several years, and has said,

> After doing a [Summer/Fall Season], I've found the rehearsal processes in it are too long. Individual actors wind up spending too much time doing nothing because someone gets your costumes for you, which may or may not work because they are not at rehearsals watching the physicality you're doing… I don't think that I have an interest in doing [Summer or Fall] Seasons. The contracts are too long for me.[178]

[176] Harrell.

[177] Harrell.

[178] Benjamin Curns, interviewed by Christine Parker, January 20, 2009, Staunton, VA http://www.americanshakespearecenter.com/v.php?pg=336 (accessed January 7, 2010).

The Ren Season stands apart in the ASC's programming, for both its actors and its audiences. The *Staunton News Leader*, in a February 12, 2009 review of *Henry VI Part 1*, stated warmly:

> 'Tis the season for forgiveness. At least, that's what the actors at the American Shakespeare Center will tell you in the pre-show palaver for *Henry VI, Part One.* Tossed into the usual mix of admonitions to turn off cell phones and refrain from taking photographs is a warning that you're about to see a play that was staged in a very short amount of time (days instead of months) without the benefit of directors or designers. You might even hear a prompter providing an occasional line.
>
> But forgiveness is unnecessary in this, the American Shakespeare Center's fifth annual Actors' Renaissance Season. In the first place, this is how it was all done in Shakespeare's day. In the second place, there's just no forgiveness required for displays of boundless energy, crisp interpretation and some of the best acting to be found. And in the third place ... well, it's a hell of a lot of fun.

The Actors' Renaissance Season for 2010 was assured and its programming would follow the model set in previous years: a lightning fast rehearsal period for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to start the season, followed by Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 2*, and Phillip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* to end the season. The Rules were once more sent out to the ARS actors, this time in a much abbreviated form. Gone were long notes on interludes, the particulars of designated responsibilities, and procedures for prompting; instead, McClure prepared a half-page of reminders for a system that the ARS actors had a long familiarity with. The Rules for 2010, according to McClure, are "based on the reality of what we're doing. These rules have come from practice, rather than being imposed on the actors."[179] McClure's inspiration to cut financial

[179] McClure, interview.

losses in the winter months seemed like a rousing success, with happy actors, audiences, and a fair amount of critical attention as it entered its sixth year.

"The Alchemist": A Microcosm of the 2010 Actors' Renaissance Season

The 2010 Actors' Renaissance Season officially opened with *Twelfth Night* on January 2, 2010 after two days of rehearsal. *Doctor Faustus* had its Opening Night on January 15, but had a Pay What You Will Preview on January 14, which was its first public performance.[180] The first rehearsal for *The Alchemist* was the afternoon following this preview. Following the standard procedure of the ARS, the company members were issued their sides in the fall of 2009 so that they could be off-book and ready to begin rehearsals in January.[181] As previously described, the sides given to the actors contained only their own entrances, exits, lines and a brief, unattributed cue for each of these elements.

Actor John Harrell prepared the performance script for *The Alchemist* and was given the authority to cut the text down from 3,000 lines to 2,300, thus making "two hours' traffic" more attainable.[182] Harrell cut the text according to criteria of his own devising:

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[180] *Twelfth Night* had given two preview performances, first on January 1st and then a matinee on the 2, which was also Opening Night. The actors arrived on Tuesday, December 29, 2009 for rehearsals, with their dress rehearsal taking place on December 31st. American Shakespeare Center, "This Week at the Blackfriars: Week of 27 December 2009 Podcast," http://americanshakespearecenter.blogspot.com/2009/12/this-week-at-blackfriars-week-of-27.html (accessed January 7, 2010).

[181] "Milestones," 2008, archived Actors' Renaissance Season online hub, American Shakespeare Center, Staunton, VA.

[182] Other actors in the company cut other plays in the 2010 Ren Season. René Thornton, Jr. would cut *Henry VI Part 2*, and Allison Glenzer prepared the text of *The Roman Actor*.

> In some cases it's really easy. The character that got butchered the most badly was Kastril- he has a whole discussion with Face about the rules of argument and swordfighting and it was so easy to just pitch that, all hundred lines of that. After that, it was more surgical. I tried as much as I could to preserve verse.[183]

The complication of cutting *The Alchemist*, as with many other Ben Jonson plays previously tackled by the ARS, was the complexity of its plot; unless Harrell was very careful, he might accidentally remove a crucial detail that would greatly inform the other actors' understanding of their characters and the play itself. Certain plot points were deemed safe to remove in their entirety, such as a bolt of damask cloth that was discussed in every scene involving the character Drugger; while the cloth disappeared from the play, the sense of Drugger's scenes remained intact. Most difficult was cutting down the nonsense spouted by the con artists Face and Subtle as they played upon their marks; Harrell quickly realized that in terms of action, the speeches served little use and did not advance the plot, but if they were lost, the point of the play would fade away as well. *The Alchemist* is a series of cons run by Face, Subtle, and their cohort Dol Common and the humor of the play comes in the absurdity of their plots and the growing tension as the threesome maneuvers to sustain them. The trick was, he learned, "You have to keep the texture of it, but not the volume of it."[184] The cuts were made and the goal was reached, leaving Harrell to prepare the sides for each character as well- a task much simpler in the age of electronic copying and pasting than in the days of Shakespeare's scribes.

When the actors gathered for the first *Alchemist* rehearsal, Harrell quickly addressed them before the read-through began, explaining how he had prepared the

[183] Harrell, interview.

[184] Harrell.

sides, with one important caveat outstanding.[185] Late in the play, a group of six neighbors appear to report on the shenanigans of Face, Subtle, and Dol; the necessities of the cast size meant that Harrell reduced the number of neighbors to three and split the lines between them. Harrell warned that his method was somewhat random, so that if the lines no longer worked as conversation, the actors playing the parts should feel free to reassign them in the most natural way.

Before the read-through began, Ben Curns spoke to the company, alerting them that he had also looked at the full text of the play and wanted to restore several cut lines. As per a long-standing (if unwritten) policy of the ARS, Curns acknowledged that he would be cutting an equal amount of his lines so that the alterations would be balanced and the total length of the play would be unaffected. Because his changes would alter the cue lines of several of his scene partners, Curns would keep to his side for the read-through and only make the changes later in the rehearsal process.

A read-through is always an important element at the start of any rehearsal period, but for the Renaissance Season, it is particularly vital. While some actors do take advantage of their easy access to full scripts (a privilege unavailable to most actors in the Early Modern theatre) and read through the play before the first rehearsal, many actors, particularly those with smaller parts, prefer to discover the plays through rehearsal and performance. Several copies of *The Alchemist* were present at the read-through, although most actors kept to their sides, and while the

[185] Except where noted otherwise, all information on the preparation of *The Alchemist* is based upon my own observations, as I was allowed to sit in on rehearsals during this period through its opening night, thanks to the generous cooperation of the ARS company and the support of Sarah Enloe, Director of Education at the ASC.

occasional line was directed towards the wrong actor, such mistakes are easily fixed. Chris Johnston, who would play the religious zealot Ananais, took the opportunity to carefully write into his side which actor supplied him with each cue, filling in a missing element in the sides. Working with sides is a difficult exercise in listening for the actors, and despite their best efforts, many cues were dropped during the read-through because when given in context, the cue lines were more difficult to instantly recognize. Nevertheless, because of the scarcity of time to prepare each show in the ARS, the actors took the read-through at performance level, seizing the rare opportunity to work through the entire play as a company.

Once the reading was complete, other business intervened. With the first public performance of *Doctor Faustus* having occurred the night before, the actors needed to discuss issues that had arisen and René Thornton (who played Faustus) opened and led the discussion. Details which had escaped previous notice or moments that fell flat before an audience were addressed. First, general concerns were aired, then the actors took the opportunity to break away into groups to address certain scenes. Scenes with Thornton were worked on the Blackfriars stage, while other actors used different spaces within the Blackfriars building to rehearse. Notably, in a scene like Faustus' death and descent into a hellmouth, Thornton took charge of the stage, making the final decisions on what worked best. In a second scene that featured comic business by Ben Curns alongside Thornton, all the actors present offered their suggestions, but Curns alone chose the schtick that he thought worked best for the moment. With the official opening of *Faustus* happening in only a few

hours, *Faustus* was the priority for the actors over *The Alchemist*, which had a comparatively luxurious two weeks of rehearsal.

When the actors met to rehearse again, it was on the evening of Sunday January 17.[186] At this point, *Faustus* was essentially considered a set show for the company; any further changes actors wanted to make would be worked out on their own time, rather than as part of the group rehearsal. Actors split into several groups to rehearse scenes in different areas of the Blackfriars, with John Harrell, Ben Curns, and Allison Glenzer taking the main stage. It is worth noting here that actors in the Renaissance Season have a rare opportunity to rehearse early and often in their performance space. Typical modern theatre rehearsals generally only take to the stage in their final days leading up the opening; stages are often booked with other performances in the previous weeks and are therefore unavailable. By contrast, the Blackfriars stage is reserved for the Blackfriars actors year-round, exceptions generally being planned on days when actors have the day off from rehearsals or performances. In this first week of *Alchemist* rehearsal, the actors have full run of the stage (and other rehearsal spaces) on Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights, which is a wonderful advantage that the actors are happy to capitalize on to their advantage.

In any case, Glenzer, Curns, and Harrell had the central roles of *The Alchemist* and thus it was their responsibility to make some basic staging decisions that would affect the entire play. One of the interesting aspects of Jonson's play is that the first

[186] Despite the appearance of two full weeks of rehearsal, this amount is reduced due to a number of practical interventions. Saturdays during the Season feature two performances, one in the afternoon and one in the evening; likewise, Thursdays typically feature a morning matinée for schoolgroups as well as an evening performance. On these "two show days," no rehearsals are scheduled. Mondays are also given to the actors as their official day off. Furthermore, dress rehearsals are given before an audience, and previews are Pay What You Will performances for the public, so that the full show must be mostly in place several days before the official opening night. Thus, *The Alchemist* had only seven rehearsal days before its first dress rehearsal.

four acts all take place within the same setting: a house belonging to the gentleman Lovewit, which his butler (Face) has taken over in his absence and given as a base of operations to his fellow con artists. The setting only changes in Act Five, when Lovewit returns and approaches the exterior of his home, before the scene switches once more to the interior for the conclusion. The actors therefore had to make decisions about the use of properties and how they would be able to show the transition from inside to outside, and back again. Also discussed was how to use the three possible exits from the stage and if each could be assigned a specific destination. Finally, the actors debated using the trap as a separate entrance, one that might lead to Subtle's unseen alchemy lab.

For properties, Harrell decided to use a small writing desk that was already in play that season as Faustus' desk. It would be the only movable property that would remain on stage for the entire first four acts. After much discussion, the actors decided that the stage left door would be used for all entrances and exits to and from the house. The stage right door would lead to a back way out of the house, and the curtain would lead to all other interior rooms. As for the trap, the actors decided that if used intelligently, it could be a valuable addition to the playing space. They experimented with the idea of resurrecting the "well" (the four low benches around the open trap, which had been used in the first Renaissance Season for *A King and No King*), despite the complications it might create for the transition into the final act.

Glenzer, Curns, and Harrell began to rehearse the opening scene, finding out where the rhythms of the scene directed their movements on stage. With each repetition, the actors tried new ideas and discovered where the text indicated that

movement was necessary. For example, the scene features a growing argument between Face and Subtle, in which Subtle threatens face with a vial containing "menstrue," a solvent used in alchemy to turn metals into gold. Jonson indicates that Subtle carries on the vial at his entrance, but gives no other explicit mention of it until Dol snatches it away from him as she chides the men for fighting amongst themselves. The actors, however, realized that the text held other, implicit directions. Within the larger argument, there are moments in which Subtle must brandish his vial to keep Face (armed with a sword) at a safe distance, such as in the folllowing exchange:

> SUBTLE No, you scarab,
> I'll thunder you in pieces: I will teach you
> How to beware to tempt a Fury again,
> That carries tempest in his hand and voice.
>
> FACE. The place has made you valiant.
>
> SUBTLE No, your clothes. --
> Thou vermin, have I ta'en thee out of dung… (I.i.59-64)

The actors quickly realized that in this moment, Face must be charging Subtle, who threatens the use the menstrue to ruin his clothes if he comes any closer.

By the end of the night, all of Act One had been rehearsed and basic blocking worked out. Curns and Harrell, who remained onstage for the entire act and whose sides contained the majority of the lines for the Act, generally took the lead on guiding other actors through the flow of the scenes. By the end of the night's rehearsal, they had the best understanding of how the scene should flow and how movement worked best around the open trap. Miriam Donald's Drugger and Denice Burbach's Dapper worked within what Curns, Harrell, and Glenzer had already

established. While Donald rehearsed from a full-text copy of the play, Burbach used only her side, and over the course of the evening, visibly discovered several new elements of her character, simply by hearing the lines spoken by Curns and Harrell, and altered her performance accordingly.

Rehearsals in the following days continued to move forward chronologically, blocking a full Act during each day's rehearsal, while also refining what staging they could as they progressed. One week after their first read-through, the blocking for the final Act was established. Throughout the process, when actors were not needed to rehearse scenes, they took the chance to assemble their costumes from the ASC's stores and would try out certain pieces in rehearsals. Glenzer's Dol Common appears in Act Five in the guise of the Queen of Fairy as part of the ruse to swindle Dapper. Glenzer had created an elaborate and absurd costume with many layers and components, incorporating any pieces that caught her eye until she had a suitably over-the-top Queen. As the actors blocked the scene in question, Glenzer was able to test her costume, first by gauging its comic effect on her fellow actors, then to see if it would allow her to perform a necessary quick change before the scene's end. Glenzer had complete authority over her own costume and the decision and troubleshooting calls were her own to make without need to consult any outside voices. If the costume was too elaborate to remove in the necessary time, she could make any adjustments required and try again on the next run-through.

With the entire play blocked, rehearsals shifted to include longer run-throughs and opportunities to finesse blocking or comic business among groups were taken wherever possible. The actors were well aware, however, that they only had three

more days of rehearsal before their first dress rehearsal on Wednesday, January 27, and other concerns rose to the foreground. During the final week, music began to be rehearsed in earnest. At the start of the Renaissance Season, the actors had commandeered a large white board in the rehearsal room for music suggestions for each of the five plays. Songs for ASC productions generally, but not always, relate to each show; for example, "I Only Have Eyes for You" was used after an eye-gouging scene in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and in *Doctor Faustus*, the Squirrel Nut Zippers' song "Hell" was featured during an interlude, with a thematically appropriate chorus of "In the afterlife/ You could be headed for the serious strife/ Now you make the scene all day/ But tomorrow there'll be Hell to pay."[187] Any and all ideas were taken down for the list, which was gradually narrowed according to which songs were most feasible and fun for the cast members to perform.[188]

The songs chosen, however, also depended on one more criterion: how many interludes a show will require. Plays at the American Shakespeare Center always begin with a "pre-show" performance by the company: typically three or four songs before a brief speech with season and safety information is given to the audience (generally via a humorous skit created for each play), with the potential for one more song to lead into the play itself.[189] Most shows during the Renaissance Season now feature only one interlude, although on occasion more are used. The rhythm of *The*

[187] Squirrel Nut Zippers, "Hell," *Hot*, Mammoth Records, 1997.

[188] Harrell, interview.

[189] In the 2010 Season, *Twelfth Night* uses this device. Actors Miriam Donald (Viola) and Gregory Jon Phelps (Orsino) sing "Falling Slowly" by Markéta Irglová and Glen Hansard to Phelps' guitar accompaniment from center stage. Donald exits at the song's end, as Phelps cries out in character, "If music be the food of love, play on!" (I.i.1) From the balcony, John Harrell's Feste plays the melody of the song until stopped by Orsino.

Alchemist, however, lent itself well to being split into three sections, and the actors decided to take the opportunity to add in a second, shorter interlude. The second break would also help to cement the scenic shift into the exterior of Lovewit's house, with the addition of a tree and mailbox coming up from the well to help represent the new location. As with Keegan's comments on *The Jew of Malta*, the second interlude would be brief and particularly suited to keeping the audience engaged. Accordingly, company member Greg Phelps chose to perform a song by the comic duo The Flight of the Conchords from the stage, a better position from which to engage the audience.

The Alchemist had its dress rehearsal on the 27, then its preview on the 28. After each night, the actors' first priority in rehearsal was to discuss areas where they felt things had not gone as smoothly as they might have wished. Time was taken to sort out these problems and to continue to fine tune performances and mechanics. During the preview, Miriam Donald had realized for the first time that actors who had to signal their appearance with a knock at the door were each using a different manner of knocking: some tapped a board against the interior of the door, some struck a hammer against the board, and some knocked in the traditional way with their hand striking the door itself. In rehearsal, it was the work of a moment to raise the issue and decide as a group how to knock consistently.[190]

Other issues were more revealing of the process of the Renaissance Season. Even after two performances before an audience, some actors were still unsure of plot elements that affected their characters. The Drugger subplot is brought to its resolution while Drugger is offstage, so Donald was still unclear how she needed to

[190] For the record, all knocking in *The Alchemist* was performed by tapping the board against the door.

present herself in her character's brief final appearance.[191] Her own scenes would not have revealed information necessary for her last entrance, so discussion with her fellow actors was vital to clearing up the misunderstanding that had arisen. Such occurrences are why plays like *Faustus* and *The Alchemist* would not be chosen by the ASC for the two-day rehearsal period given to *Twelfth Night*; actors simply aren't as familiar with these plays and need time to understand their mechanics and how their characters function within the story. The final full rehearsal for *Alchemist* ended with music, as the actors took the chance to polish their rendition of The Easybeats' "Friday on My Mind" for the performance that would take place in a matter of hours.

The official opening of *The Alchemist* appeared to capture both sides of the Renaissance Season in one performance. The show played to an enthusiastic and nearly full house that skewed towards a younger crowd of playgoers than one might find in other theatres: the majority of the audience members fell between 18 and 40 years old. Although few in the audience had probably read *The Alchemist* or knew its plot beyond what the program revealed, the audience was engaged throughout the performance, judging from the faces seen clearly in the shared light. At the play's end, a vigorous standing ovation and numerous curtain calls were given and warmly received. The "raw energy" promised in the program notes seemed present, but "raw" was a significant and revealing adjective. The actors were not all line-perfect; three times over the course of the night, an actor called for a line from the prompter. Ben Curns's costume for Face included a fake goatee that he forgot to remove as

[191] In the play, Drugger is swindled out of both his money and the opportunity of marrying his neighbor, a rich widow. He is sent off to fetch a parson for his marriage to the widow, but in the time he is offstage, she is married to the newly returned Lovewit. Drugger returns only to enter and be immediately be chased off by Lovewit.

planned for the final Act, and even the song that the actors had so painstakingly rehearsed that afternoon had a few sour notes. The Ren Season does not tend to open perfectly polished shows and it is not uncommon for some of the cracks to show early in the play's run. Mistakes made onstage are quickly dealt with, however, and performances and staging are refined over the weeks.

Because of the nature of rehearsal in the Ren Season, there is no chance for tablework, a process which can last several weeks during the regular season. While actors are expected to arrive in January prepared for the season and entirely off-book, the reality of the Ren Season has often been that many discoveries are made by actors once the plays are running. After *The Alchemist* had opened, Curns realized that his first three characters of the Season (Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, Mephistopheles in *Faustus*, and Face) were all different forms of liars, practicing upon others for their own gain, albeit in very different ways. This discovery then affected his understanding of each of the three characters and ultimately, he believed his performances altered slightly because of it.[192]

Actors discovered this aspect of the Renaissance Season early on, and performances during the ARS are never, as in modern director-based theatre, set by opening night and left unchanged throughout the entire run. With the Ren Season's short rehearsal time, the actors are focused on mounting a playable and watchable show for opening night, but this performance is by no means set in stone. For one, shows become tighter and run times decrease as the show enters into regular performances. If actors feel that their scenes aren't provoking the right kind of

[192] Ben Curns, "Blackfriars Backstage Pass: *The Alchemist* Podcast," http://americanshakespearecenter.blogspot.com/2010/02/blackfriars-backstage-pass-alchemist.html (accessed February 20, 2010).

audience response, or if new ideas occur, they can confer with their scene partners moments before taking the stage and implement a change; the responsibility for a scene rests entirely on the actors involved.[193] Thornton described his own experience with the 2009 Season's production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Particularly, movement-wise, I've made a lot of adjustments since opening because I now have time to think about that. I definitely put more attention into being aware of my physical self because I now know my lines and know who I'm talking to and know where I'm going to be exiting from, so now I can spend time thinking about the ways I can adjust my physicality to be more other-worldly. I didn't have much time to do that before… I feel like there's so much unworked on in Midsummer, it gives me things to work on while we're in performance.[194]

Rather than having months of the same performance, plays during the Renaissance Season are constantly evolving, responding to the audiences and letting the actors refine their performances as they see fit.

For the present, *The Alchemist* was open and entered into the regular repertory of the season and would undoubtedly change over time. On Sunday, January 31st, however, the actors would meet in rehearsal to shift their focus to *Henry VI Part Two* as the Renaissance Season moved on into its second month.

[193] Sarah Fallon, "Blackfriars Backstage Pass: *Twelfth Night* Podcast," http://americanshakespearecenter.blogspot.com/2010/02/blackfriars-backstage-pass-twelfth.html (accessed February 20, 2010).

[194] Thornton, interview.

Chapter 3: The Audacity of "Authenticity"

Questioning Authenticity

In his book *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*, W.B. Worthen begins by problematizing a common refrain surrounding the debate of what might constitute an "authentic Shakespeare." He first presents a familiar binary: that "authentic Shakespeare" lies either in the text or in theatrical performance. In examining the argument of those who would argue on behalf of the latter, he questions their assumptions on the transmissions of authority:

> One version of this account involves linking the transmitting agent- theatrical performance- to the genesis of the work itself. In this view, plays are "written for" stage performance and so assume their authoritative form in (only in? in any? in all? equally throughout history?) performance. The transmitting agent is authoritative in this view because he/she/it- director or actor or 'the theatre' itself- duplicates the work's theatrical genius. The theatre reproduces authoritative versions of the work because it produces them in a sanctioned medium. To think of "the Shakespeare experience" in the modern theatre as having its foundation in Shakespeare's sense of the stage is to attribute to the transmitting agents (stage practice, director, actor, designers, audiences) the ability to recover "authorial" meanings through the lens of theatre practice merely because it its "theatre practice."[195]

Worthen raises a number of interesting issues within claims of this type. The modern stage is a vastly different place than the stage Shakespeare knew, from its proscenium, variable lighting, and revolving turn-tables, to the array of persons who create the performances that play upon it. Worthen rightfully calls out the obvious interlopers on today's "Shakespearean" stage (directors and designers) but also the issues of actors trained under different systems and audiences who likewise live in a

[195] W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 20.

world four hundred years removed from what Shakespeare knew. Under these conditions, it is indeed false to automatically confer the privilege of authenticity on any theatrical production simply because it shares a similar medium.

The fundamental mission of the Actors' Renaissance Season, however, is to produce a very different brand of theatrical performance than is found in most theatres. Directors and designers are removed from the process entirely, leaving their duties in the hands of the actors or erased entirely (as with the set designer). In any case, the American Shakespeare Center does continue to place itself within the binary highlighted by Worthen of text vs. performance, but also colors both sides in order to promote their agenda. The program for the 2010 ARS opens with a series of bold and revealing statements that proclaim its mission for the next four months:

> **BEFORE** they were books, Shakespeare and his friends called them scripts.
> **BEFORE** they were works, Shakespeare and his friends called them plays.
> **BEFORE** it was something you ought to do, it was something you loved to do. [original emphases] [196]

From the outset, the American Shakespeare Center puts forward two opposing sides in a battle over Shakespeare. One side approaches Shakespeare as "books" and "works," and makes both into a chore performed without pleasure, or as a foul-tasting medicine that may well cure your cough, but is hardly enjoyable at the time. The opposite side claims Shakespeare as a part of the theatre, rejecting "book" for "script" and "work" for "play" (happily capitalizing upon the dual meanings of both words in this context). Their Shakespeare, claims the ASC, is the "fun" Shakespeare. According to the program notes, Shakespeare and his "friends" (not playwrights or colleagues or fellow company members) have been usurped by years of fuddy-

[196] American Shakespeare Company, *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program* (Staunton, VA: American Shakespeare Center, 2010), 5.

duddies. By contrast, the claim of the American Shakespeare Center is that they are "doing it right," both in the sense of producing fun and exciting Shakespeare, but also producing theatre that accurately captures the spirit of the Early Modern stage. By creating under the conditions of the Actors' Renaissance Season, the ASC claims to be able to offer its audiences "an even deeper level of fun and excitement for an audience experiencing the raw energy of the Renaissance stage."[197]

The literature produced by the American Shakespeare Center makes promises that seem difficult to keep; however "raw" and enjoyable an experience the Renaissance Season may be, can it truly be said to reproduce an atmosphere that the best scholars cannot describe with unassailable surety? Original practices Shakespeare has always come under fire from its critics, since the time when Poel's eccentricities detracted from the essential ideas behind his production. An oft-floated criticism is the term "museum theatre," which seems to indicate that by turning to original practices, the resulting production will be more concerned with accuracy in representation than entertaining its audience. At the same time, OP productions have also been likened to a sort of Disney theme park of Shakespeariana, lacking in substance and gawked over by cultural tourists.[198] Finally, there are those like Worthen who state the obvious: we can never witness genuine Elizabethan actors or audiences to know for sure how their theatre was prepared or performed, nor can we

[197] *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program*, ibid.

[198] On June 1, 1997, just before the Globe's official opening night, *The Observer* remarked upon such comments: "The Globe is restored at last. But what is it exactly? Is it an Elizabethan Disneyland? A Jacobean theme park? Tussauds-on-Avon? Stratford-on-Thames? Despite the yards of coverage, no one seems quite sure, and in the absence of reliable information some opinions have been downright misguided, even hostile. Last Tuesday, the *London Evening Standard* expressed what may well become a new orthodoxy. 'The Globe,' moaned its critic Peter Bradshaw, 'is steering worryingly close to being an undemanding, all-purpose Shakespeare Experience for tourists.'"

hope to recreate these factors based on the facts we possess; there is simply too much we simply do not (and may never) know for certain about the Early Modern stage.

Within the twentieth century, an analogous debate took place involving the early music movement, which sought for authenticity in the performance of musical works of prior centuries. The music scholar Richard Taruskin deplored those who chased after a definition of authenticity that limited itself to "mere freedom from error or anachronism.**"**[199] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, in an article that directly follows Taruskin's, proclaimed at the start that "What we are doing with early music is genuinely authentic to such a small degree that the word loses most of its intended meaning."[200] Michael Morrow's article "Musical Performance and Authenticity" noted a problem that is as valid for musicians as for theatre practitioners: "Where there is no surviving tradition- and performing style is something that can only be learned by imitation, not from books- any piece of music, medieval, renaissance, baroque, what you will, offers the modern performer the potentiality of countless possibilities of interpretation."[201] Morrow drew the parallels with the Elizabethan revival himself, and scorned the idea that practitioners would ever concede to following original practices:

> But, though the connection between music and the theatre has always been close, the attitude of the modern theatre to historical authenticity is that of a rather shifty lip-service. Any expression of the view that poetry, even Shakespeare's poetry- especially Shakespeare's poetry- could benefit even remotely from authenticity of pronunciation, of acting styles, authenticity of

[199] Richard Taruskin, "The authenticity movement can become a positivistic purgatory, literalistic and dehumanizing," *Early Music* 12 no.1 (February 1984): 6.

[200] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "The Limits of Authenticity: A Discussion," *Early Music* 12 no.1 (February 1984): 13.

[201] Michael Morrow, "Musical Performance and Authenticity," *Early Music* 6 no.2 (April 1978): 233.

> music or design, would be summarily rejected… Great publicity is made these days of the latest "authentic" Shakespeare theatre: apron stage; awfully Elizabethan sets and musicians playing pop versions of olde Elizabethan numbers on a preposterous conglomeration of shagbuts, crumhorns and rebecs. But the actors? Any consideration of 16th-century conventions of declamation or pronunciation would be to them unthinkable.[202]

Morrow, writing in 1978, may seem terribly shortsighted, considering the advances made by the original practices movement in the years to come,[203] but his comments did hold true for many years. In 1994, as construction was beginning on the new Globe, theatre historian Jonas Barish notes that practitioners were fleeing from the idea of recreating Elizabethan practices:

> Instead of attempting to recover the sense of the past in our theatres we seem to have substituted a frenzied flight from it. Instead of continuing to explore original conditions of performance we have embarked on a quest for "relevance", mostly through deliberate anachronism, the violent transplantation of the settings of the plays into other times and other climes than those intended by their authors, evidently with the purpose of showing that Shakespeare and other old authors were speaking directly "to us" across the centuries.[204]

Barish articulates both the difficulties of striving for authenticity, and the necessity of acknowledging the conditions under which the plays were originally written and performed:

> Historical authenticity may be a chimera, but flagrantly to disregard the plain indications of the texts and of what we can claim to know about original performance would seem wantonly to disrupt the only valid surviving links, however fragile, between playwright and spectator… But to say that the pursuit of authenticity can never entirely succeed is by no means to

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[202] Morrow, 239.

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[203] During Rylance's tenure, the Globe produced several productions that featured original pronunciation. Through the use of Jenny Tiramani's Elizabethan costumes, which were so scrupulous to the period as to be fastened only by ties or pins, actors did discover that they had to alter their posture and movements on the stage.

[204] Jonas Barish, "Is There 'Authenticity' in Theatrical Performance?," *The Modern Language Review* 89 no.4 (1994): 823.

> recommend that authorial purpose, known facts about original conditions of production, and the evidence from surviving texts should be brushed aside as irrelevant… We need, in short, a creative merger between what we can learn about original conditions and what we can find in the plays that without wrenching and straining, without vulgar italicizing, may be still valid for our own time and place.[205]

Barish makes his argument on the side of what would become the original practices movement and on the same ground which the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express had set its flag in 1988.

The proponents of OP, however, have often advocated goals that keep its critics in mind. When the Globe was first reconstructed in London, issues arose over audience members who "[came] along pretending to be a member of an Elizabethan audience or throwing things,"[206] which produced an atmosphere that was not ideal for either the actors or the audience themselves. Rylance's goal for the early years of the Globe was not to recreate an Elizabethan audience, but rather to find ways to communicate with the modern audiences he was given at the theatre. Paul Menzer, in his afterword to the collection *Inside Shakespeare*, presents a healthy critique of the rhetoric of original practices and the assumption that OP performance can function as a laboratory capable of producing conclusions about Early Modern theatre. Despite certain reservations, he does state the belief that OP can indeed teach modern scholars a great deal, so long as they can free themselves from the specter of "putative empiricism":

> Rather than conduct 'experiments' on discrete topics- entrances, music, crowd scenes- theater scholars should treat performances at the Globe and Blackfriars as texts in their own right... in time, as performances come and go at the Globe and Blackfriars, theater historians and performance scholars can

[205] Barish, 830-831.

[206] Rylance, 113.

> learn from those plays, can observe specific practice and extrapolate general trends. Watching the impress of a reconstructed Globe or Blackfriars upon modern actors should reveal fascinating details about the way theater architecture governs theatrical convention and the way physical space dictates decorum.[207]

Original practices can offer all of these opportunities to scholars, but the practitioners of the American Shakespeare Center also believe that OP methods provide the best means for Shakespeare's plays to connect with an audience today. As their program proclaims, "the Ren Season is not just some academic experiment in antiquated theatre- it's about making theatre exceptional, making it fresh."[208] Cohen, Warren, and McClure speak passionately about this belief and it is at the heart of all the ASC hopes to accomplish.

The American Shakespeare Center does, however, play a delicate game in the manner with which it engages in authentic staging practices. In the 2006 Renaissance Season, actor Matthew Sincell played the character Giovanni in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, who has an incestuous affair with his sister before murdering her. In the final scene of the play, Giovanni enters the stage, carrying a dagger on which is skewered his sister's heart. At the ASC performance, Sincell entered covered in blood and with what appeared to be a real heart on his dagger. Sincell knew that Early Modern actors used animal parts to create their more gruesome effects, and surmised that a pig's heart might well have been used for the dramatic moment on stage; the actor made arrangements with a local butcher and the gory moment was achieved. Of course, most gruesome effects of the period were achieved with animal blood; Sincell

[207] Paul Menzer, "Afterword: Discovery Spaces? Research at the Globe and Blackfriars," *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage*, edited by Paul Menzer (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006): 228.

[208] American Shakespeare Company, *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program*, 5.

had not gone so far, and instead had covered himself in modern stage blood.[209] The episode dramatically illustrates that, even when some original practices are certain (the use of animal blood on stage), ARS actors are not necessarily willing to make a 100% authentic choice.

Jim Warren recognizes the inherent difficulties of OP and positions his theatre in a slightly different way:

> The term "original practice" is starting to bother me- we don't know a lot of the answers. There is speculation, and to say that we are doing the practices that they did, that we are practicing like them, we are doing the *same* practices, I don't feel comfortable with. That starts to sound more like what they do at the Frontier Culture Museum. But *conditions* are different, and that's why calling them Shakespeare's staging conditions makes more sense to me, because we know more about conditions than we do practices…. We don't do this to be historically accurate. We try to tap into things that either we know they did or we *think* they did, or speculate that they might have done, and see if there's some great stuff in there to create some great theatre for today.[210]

Warren finds the distinction between "practice" and "condition" crucial to the goals of the ASC. If we cannot know for certain what actors in Shakespeare's day did in practice, we do know certain conditions that would have affected their actions on and off stage. Because the Early Modern period included neither electricity nor variable lighting, plays by necessity were staged in daylight or candlelight, which produced the effect of an audience visible to the actors and to each other; the ASC stages its plays under a similar condition, albeit with electric candles to produce the universal lighting, thanks to the mandates of modern fire codes. Likewise, if we cannot know exactly how an Elizabethan company prepared a new play for performance, we do

[209] Matthew Sincell,*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* Talkback, Staunton, VA, March 4, 2006.

[210] Warren, interview.

know it was not done by bringing in an individual to direct the action from the outside.

The Actors' Renaissance Season is founded on the idea of recapturing more of the theatrical conditions of Shakespeare's day by altering the actors' customary rehearsal process. As Warren admits, no one knows how Elizabethan companies rehearsed for sure; Stern herself admits this, noting that the best her exhaustive study can produce is "what was and was not within the range of possibilities"[211] rather than a definitive answer. Complete authenticity is an impossibility, but the ARS states to the audience that it is able to capture an authentic spirit of production through the elements of Early Modern theatre with which it engages. How then, does this engagement occur? While many of the tactics of the Renaissance Season have already been discussed here, now it is time to examine each of them critically and see the ways in which they make a claim for an "authentic" experience.

Authenticity in the Actors' Renaissance Season

Certain staging conditions of the Renaissance Season are, of course, carried over from regular seasons at the Blackfriars (which have in turned been carried over from the early days of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express), several of which are directly taken from what we know of the Early Modern theatre. At the ASC's Blackfriars, as at the historical Blackfriars, is the shared lighting that includes the audience within each play, which is perhaps the most fundamental OP element of the ASC. As Cohen describes the contrast with the modern proscenium stage, "This

[211] Stern, *Rehearsal,* 18.

rearrangement is a radical change from the situation in an early modern English playhouse, where the audience was famously on four sides of a thrust stage so that wherever they looked they saw the faces of other audience members."[212] Tim Carroll, who directed a number of plays at the Globe (including the OP *Twelfth Night*), describes the inevitability of the audience when plays are performed in universal lighting: "An actor cannot go out on to that stage and give a soliloquy without speaking directly to the audience. It would be perverse: they are clearly in the same place as the actor… And this is an important point: the audience members are not passive recipients; they are the most versatile scene partner in the world."[213] These conclusions come from both Cohen's and Carroll's experiences working in universal lighting over a number of years, and point to a truth discovered by each actor who has worked in similar conditions. The relationship between actor and audience in shared light seems to be a natural product of the environment, whether performing in our own age or in the Elizabethan era; the plays simply seem to be written with a visible audience in mind. Any play produced by the ASC in the Blackfriars features this relationship between the actors and audience and with their experience playing in the theatre, Ren Season actors arrive with an understanding that anticipates the ways in which they will be able to capitalize upon this relationship in their performances.[214]

[212] Cohen, "Shenandoah Shakespeare and the Building of the Third Blackfriars Playhouse," 146.

[213] Tim Carroll, "'Practising Behaviour to His Own Shadow,'" in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*," edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 40.

[214] Thornton, interview.

In its use of doubling and the size of its company, the ASC seems to directly mimic Early Modern practice. Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa's *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* describes what we know of these factors in performance:

> Thomas Platter saw [*Julius Caesar*] performed at the Globe on 21 September 1599, by a total of what he counted as fifteen players. The fifteen he identified obviously shared all twenty-three speaking parts between them, plus the crowd scenes… A player taking more than one roles must have been easily recognizable in any other, since Platter was confident of his count. A change of clothing, even just a new hat, was probably enough to identify a change of character.[215]

The description aligns well with the ASC's policy regarding company size and casting, as was the intention. Audiences receive the same experience of seeing familiar actors taking the stage in multiple roles and the possibilities of actors returning in significantly doubled roles are many, for in this theatre, "Metatheatricality ruled."[216] Gurr and Ichikawa propose that Richard Burbage, as leading player of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, would likely have played both Richard II and Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part 1*, in which the prince's father compares his son to the former king. Opportunities such as these abound in Early Modern theatre, but when a company of twenty-three actors plays *Julius Caesar*, those opportunities for actors and audiences are lost.

The ASC has always prided itself on the speed of its productions, and does its best to keep the promise of "two hours' traffic" on its stage through quick verse-speaking and careful textual cuts when necessary. As Worthen reminds his readers, for many, the text of a Shakespearean play is sacrosanct, but there is also a good deal

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[215] Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 12-13.

[216] Gurr and Ichikawa, 13.

of scholarly debate about the authority of those very texts, from the "bad" quarto of *Hamlet* to the distinct differences between *King Lear* in its quarto editions and in the First Folio, instances in which discovering a "full text" version becomes highly problematic.[217] Scholarship in recent decades has come to recognize that the claims of the New Bibliography school to deduce the "true" Shakespearean texts cannot be fulfilled, and that the multiplicity of texts perhaps stems from good reason.[218] In Shakespeare's day, all play texts were submitted for approval and licensure by the Master of the Revels; notably, however, "the Master's licence gave no allowance for adding to a text, but cutting was easy and legitimate."[219] It is possible that the four thousand lines of the second Quarto *Hamlet* reflect a text that was never performed in full in any single performance, but was rather used as the starting place from which cuts were made. In any case, scholars such as Gurr and Ichikawa have ascertained that players were accustomed to making cuts from the texts that were approved for performance, and thus the practice of the ASC of making cuts to shorten the run-time of its productions seems justifiable under what we know of Early Modern practice.

As Harrell recounted from his cutting of *The Alchemist*, the ASC does its best to make cuts that preserve the most important elements of the plot while reducing its length. After the cuts have been made, the actors' sides are prepared and dispersed. Interestingly, the Original Shakespeare Company operated differently in this regard. Although cuts were also made, Tucker believed that cuts in Shakespeare's day would

[217] The third Arden edition of *Lear* has a good explanation of these differences, as well as its editor R.A. Foakes's explanations for his choices in preparing the Arden text. The third series of the Arden *Hamlet* chose to create two separate editions to deal with the textual variations: one devoted to the second quarto text, the other to the first and Folio texts.

[218] See Weingust, Chapter 2: "First Folio techniques and the death of the bibliographer."

[219] Gurr and Ichikawa, 23.

have been made after cue scripts were prepared from the full text supplied to the Master of the Revels. Otherwise, Tucker states,

> to cut whole chunks of a scene would mean that all actors would have had to stand around with their cue scripts, changing and altering in a way that would be bound to lead to errors. Instead, I told my actors that cuts were necessary, that they were to cut their own lines, and that the only rule was to leave their existing cue lines alone [Tucker's emphasis]. We were thus able fairly painlessly to cut over four hundred lines from the play, bring it in on time, and yet have actors working from cue scripts not being confused.[220]

Two different approaches to solving the same problem, each producing the same result: a final text that could be performed in approximately two hours. Stern's work suggests that changes were made to playing texts at both points in the preparation process, as well as after the first performance of a new play;[221] the ASC and the OSC each came upon their solution based on their own practical experience within the theatre and each approach seems to follow a different thread of practice within the same Early Modern period. Notably, however, because actors during the Renaissance Season have the ability to continue to refine their performances over time in the repertory run, they are afforded the same post-performance adjustments that Shakespeare's company might have had, a quality the OSC could not share.

Besides cuts, the length of ASC productions is also tied into the rhythm produced by their staging. All productions at the Blackfriars use the unaltered architecture of the stage as the only set and let each scene lead directly into the next without pause; as Gurr recounts, "Continuous and high-speed staging went hand-in-hand with unlocalised settings. The 'scene' was changed simply by one person

[220] Tucker, 157.

[221] Stern, *Rehearsal*, 12.

departing and another entering."[222] The lavish scenery and spectacle of Shakespearean production in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and which can still be seen in some theatres today) left audiences accustomed to long pauses in the flow of the play so that scenery could be changed, creating interruptions that were simply unknown to Elizabethan audiences. In devising the priorities for the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, Cohen and Warren believed as William Poel had one hundred years before that uninterrupted motion between scenes was a necessary and beneficial quality of Shakespeare's stage and by following his stagecraft in this regard, audiences would profit.

One of the greatest benefits of the Renaissance Season is the core of actors that return year after year to participate. No actor is invited to the Ren Season without having prior experience at the Blackfriars, but in the 2010 company, only one of its eleven actors (Daniel Kennedy) was a first-time ARS company member; the remaining ten had each participated in at least one prior Renaissance Season. The accumulated, shared experience of its company is an invaluable resource each Season; mistakes from the past are less likely to be made again, and solutions to recurring problems are more quickly rediscovered. One of the greatest drawbacks in the work of the Original Shakespeare Company was its lack of a similar consistent acting company;[223] a few hours in the same room cannot possibly substitute for months and years of acting together, day after day. Although the ARS company also

[222] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 179.

[223] Tucker's *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare* contains cast lists for seven years of OSC productions; although some actors return for multiple productions, the majority of the productions are composed of new actors from play to play.

falls short of the extraordinary lengths achieved by Early Modern companies (who might have produced up to six new plays in a single week), it provides as good a substitute as the modern theatre can provide. Ren Season actors develop a great familiarity with each other as performers, so much so that as they learn their lines at home before the start of the Season, they can anticipate the way that their scene partners will react and prepare accordingly, which is an enormous benefit during the brief rehearsal period. One such example is Miriam Donald, who was able to plan physical stage business for *Twelfth Night* between herself and Allison Glenzer that depended upon their relative heights; having worked with Glenzer numerous times before, she was able to come into the first day with ideas that could be immediately tested.[224] Likewise, in preparing for his role in *The Alchemist*, John Harrell could draw on his experience in playing a similar set of roles opposite Ben Curns in two previous Ren Season plays by Jonson. As Harrell explains,

> Ben and I have played it enough that we've got a familiarity with the sort of tropes of that kind of scene, where you're talking to the mark, then you're whispering to your partner, then you're back to the mark, then you're talking to the audience- we sort of have a shorthand that we've worked out for that.[225]

These experiences working together as a company are an immeasurable help in preparing a play in a manner of days, as much today as for Shakespeare's company four hundred years ago. Likewise, the company is able to build upon its own successes and popularity within the community. When the 2009 Season produced George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, it appeared to have been the first

[224] American Shakespeare Center, "*Twelfth Night* Podcast."

[225] Harrell, interview.

professional production of that play since the seventeenth century.[226] Because the play does not possess the cachet of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Beggar* entered the repertory last, and played the least performances of any play that season; these performances, however, were very well-received by audiences, due in no small part to the popularity of Harrell in the title role. The *Staunton News Leader*'s preview of the season on January 1, 2009 cited Harrell as the main reason to see the play, invoking him as a promise that the performance would be worth catching. The leading players of Shakespeare's company were likewise well-known by their audiences, and would have also functioned as a name to draw in crowds.[227] The Renaissance Season has had these great strengths of reputation and consistency from which it has been able to draw upon over the years, and these qualities have no doubt helped immeasurably to sustain the project in its six years.

The stated goal of the Actors' Renaissance Season is to "rehearse like [Shakespeare's] company did."[228] This is primarily accomplished by removing the outside director from the company of actors, and allowing them to take responsibility for their own performances and the entire production. The modern theatre, especially modern Shakespearean production, is often called "a director's theatre," as supported by the claims of famed director Peter Brook, who in speaking out on behalf of the necessity of his role, claimed that "If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you want is for the play to be heard, then you must conjure its sound

[226] Ralph Alan Cohen, "Dr. Ralph's Brief: *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*," *2009 Actors' Renaissance Season Program*, (Staunton, VA: American Shakespeare Center, 2009), 37.

[227] Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare* (London: Routledge: 2004): 72.

[228] *2010 Actors' Renaissance Season Program*, 5.

from it."[229] Jonas Barish, by contrast, has railed against the increased interference of directors and other such imposing figures in modern Shakespearean production; in reference to a certain performance he witnessed, Barish stated in frustration, "The director (or was it the designer?) was notifying us in effect that Shakespeare's language had no meaning worth taking seriously and could safely be ignored."[230]

Worthen's concerns for the authenticity of Shakespeare performance largely rest in the modern interventions of directors, who arose at a particular time in the history of theatre for a number of reasons. "To produce a play in the modern period involves the open assertion of the play as a consistent conceptual, thematic, scenic whole, the assertion of an *interpretation* [Worthen's emphasis] of the text."[231] Directors, Worthen claim, became a necessity because of "a crisis of legitimacy. For the director comes into being at the moment that 'drama' gains an independent existence as literature, a mode of being and a cultural authority independent of theatrical production."[232] The director's role is to navigate between these two realms of literature (text) and theatre, but also immediately calls into question the struggle that Worthen identifies between ideas of "fidelity" and "creativity."[233] He also notes that concern with fidelity to the text is a distinctly modern one, as witnessed in the

[229] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1968): 38.

[230] Barish, 825.

[231] Worthen, 47.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid, 48.

centuries of adaptations of Shakespeare that overtook the original playtexts in the public perception during the seventeenth century.[234] Worthen writes,

> The fact that in the twentieth century performance has been seen to succeed when it recaptures or restates the authority of the text is a distinctive, modern way of situating text and performance, literature and theatre, one that represents a characteristically modern anxiety about the cultural status of drama- and the dramatic 'author'- in the theatre.[235]

Worthen does make a valid point, but his questioning of the quest for authenticity does focus on our perception of the typical Shakespearean productions in today's directorial theatre. The Renaissance Season is an opportunity to produce theatre under certain extra conditions: namely, taking an actor-based approach to theatre and making the self-imposed choice to prioritize the specified needs of the text in staging. As Stern puts it, Shakespeare's plays do not actually require a director to navigate the text for its audience or provide a "helpful" framework: in Shakespeare's day, a play was "not overlaid with a concept, it *was* its concept."[236] The majority of productions of the American Shakespeare Center (and all of those put on by the Touring Troupe) have a modern director overseeing production; during the Ren Season, however, the director is given the persona of "He or She Who Makes Extratextual Decisions," and these are the exact type of decisions to be shunned.

The ARS removes the official position of director, but there is evidence that some measure of leadership guided Early Modern theatrical productions. Shareholders within the company would have familiarity with the full play text, while

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[234] Such as the overwhelming dominance of Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* (1681), with its happy ending, or *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1667) by John Dryden and William D'Avenant, which added multiple siblings and romantic plots to the original story.

[235] Worthen, 27.

[236] Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 89.

the hired men who played smaller roles would have only had access to their sides.[237] Within Early Modern companies, there was an individual who took over some supervisory power among the players: the book-keeper, who kept the full text of the play and served as a quasi-stage-manager, due to his position as "the only member of the company who had to be reasonably familiar with the whole text of the play."[238] It is this quality of the book-keeper, as the person who knew the most about the full play, that has organically developed among actors during the Renaissance Season.[239] By carrying the bulk of the show, a certain amount of deference is given to the lead actor.[240] During the 2010 Season, René Thornton essentially led rehearsals for *Doctor Faustus*, due to both his natural proclivities as a leader and his knowledge of the play; as Faustus, Thornton had the largest role in the play, and although the production was certainly a collaborative process (and scenes without Thornton were rehearsed entirely independently of him), his influence was the most felt and carried the most weight. In *The Alchemist*, Benjamin Curns, John Harrell, and Allison Glenzer made basic decisions about the stage geography that affected the entire cast and their guidance helped other actors who could not understand how their characters

[237] Stern, *Rehearsal*, 59-61.

[238] Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 209.

[239] Of course, it is worth noting that as a company member in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare would also have had more than a passing familiarity with his own scripts in addition to the book-keeper's knowledge. Judging from the rate and variety of production of plays on the Early Modern stage, however, the Lord Chamberlain's Men would have more often produced plays by outside playwrights, relegating Shakespeare to the position of the other shareholders and prioritizing the book-keeper once more.

[240] By having the most lines, cue scripts for leading roles often convey the majority of the story, while smaller parts rarely reveal any information outside the specific character. In practice, actors who play these smaller parts, such as Denice Burbach as Dapper in *The Alchemist*, often choose to keep exclusively to their sides, and make discoveries about their character and the play itself in rehearsal and performance.

fit into the larger arc of the play. This basic idea also informs the OSC's practice of holding a "Burbage" session, which is based on the idea that Richard Burbage (who played the leading roles of Shakespeare's company and as a shareholder, would have had access to the book) also took a leadership position within his company of actors.

Such a form of leadership, however much it may seem to resemble the role of a modern director, does not serve the same function as the director conceived by Worthen. His conflict between fidelity and creativity are, however, the same concerns that have repeatedly troubled the Artistic Staff of the ASC and have permeated the intentions of the Renaissance Season Rules. Warren and McClure likewise perceive a tension between faithful and directorial-style staging, in which "faithful" staging is that which most resembles the practices used in Shakespeare's day, and "directorial" can refer to any element in a production that strays from the dictates of the text. These concerns reveal themselves in the Rules of the Season which are concerned with props and the use of the stage; if the text calls for a sword, McClure wants the actors to use that prop, and however exciting an idea it might be for actors to exit through the audience, from 2006 onward, the actors have been expressly told to keep all action on the stage itself. Even in the 2010 Season, the actors and Artistic Staff are still testing the boundaries of staging in that can be both creative and faithful to the text. Warren had given much thought to the original stage directions of *Twelfth Night* in the scenes in which Malvolio is imprisoned by the comic conspirators; the Folio refers to Malvolio as "within" and his lines reference a "darke house."[241] Warren decided that this was a case in which the actors could use

[241] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, edited by Neil Freeman (New York: Applause, 2000): 271.

the trap while remaining true to the text; by the time he walked down the street from the ASC offices to the playhouse to meet the actors in rehearsals, they had already staged the scene in question and used the trap. Their use of the trap in *The Alchemist* is less textually supported, but as it is likewise not working against the text, Warren did not interfere with its use in the production.[242] Warren's ultimate goal for the Renaissance Season is to keep the actors working within the frame of possibilities that Early Modern actors would have shared as much as possible, despite the difficulties that arise when elements like their use of the stage can only be conjectured.

In this particular area, it is of course necessary to balance the goal of authenticity with the ASC's second, equal goal of producing enjoyable theatre. In the 2007 Renaissance Season's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the actors chose the moment of the Duchess's death to tend toward what seemed to be a less "authentic," more visually striking use of the stage space than the text required. As Andrea Stevens's review in the *Shakespeare Bulletin* describes,

> As she stood in the open trapdoor, the Duchess was strangled by ropes attached to her from three different directions and held by black-clad executioners stationed at different points of the stage, including above. The ropes pulled taut; the Duchess crumpled, her limp body then care fully laid out in her coffin to the singing of a dirge. Indeed, the moment was so effective one felt it ought to have ended the show—how could any action resume after this?[243]

Stevens called the moment an "impressive use of the space of the stage;"[244] John Webster's text, however, simply calls for the Duchess to be strangled with ropes, with

[242] Warren, interview.

[243] Stevens, 183.

[244] Ibid.

no indication of any elaborate staging. The moment arrested the audience's imagination but at the expense of strict adherence to only the necessities of the text; of course, the actors' choice did remain within the realm of what an Early Modern company could achieve on stage, so it is possible that this moment is as true as a simpler staging might have been.

Such choices raise the question of whether, by prioritizing the goal of authenticity, the Renaissance Season might be depriving itself of other choices that might convey the power of Early Modern texts in new ways. Worthen implies that directors are often given the responsibility of finding these ways to navigate between text and performance for the audience, but the Ren Season bestows this capability upon its actors, trusting that a faithful performance of the text will suffice to communicate all that is necessary (and enjoyable) about the text to its audiences. Speaking on behalf of the Patrick Tucker's Folio techniques, Weingust makes an argument that holds equally true for the underlying assumptions of the Renaissance Season:

> The techniques espoused by Tucker and Freeman place actors at the very center of the critical/interpretive debate over text, make Shakespeare's texts (frozen in a version of the language 400 years earlier than their own) readily known territory for them, and give them license to claim this territory in the face of an often intimidating critical establishment having far greater scholarly knowledge than they about the works they enact.[245]

Directors are deemed unnecessary for the four months of the Ren Season; actors are given the authority over the texts they perform and the plays they produce, and through this repositioning of responsibility, rooted in historical fact and scholarly

[245] Weingust, 7.

supposition, the ASC presents a method of making theatre that stands alongside its traditional Spring, Summer, and Fall Seasons.

Willful Deviations

It is obvious, of course, that despite all its claims of authenticity, of "doing it like Shakespeare did," there are a number of ways in which the ASC is consciously choosing to deviate from what we know of Early Modern theatre. While putting up five shows with ten days of rehearsal each in rapid succession seems noteworthy to modern eyes, it simply does not compare with the rate at which actors in Shakespeare's day produced theatre, who constantly added new plays into their repertory and revived old works on a daily basis. The season is carefully planned so that the first play, produced in only a few days of rehearsal, is one that its actors will be most familiar with; plays that the actors do not know as well are given a comparatively luxurious amount of rehearsal. Although the actors are issued only cue scripts from the ASC, they receive them months in advance (giving them earlier access than Early Modern actors), and any actor who chooses to seek out full texts of any play in the repertory need only visit the library; players in Shakespeare's day had much less easy access to the prompt-book, which was often the only full text of the play available and was kept locked away to keep it safe from the clutches of rival companies.[246]

The most obvious deviation from authenticity, however, is in the composition of the acting company: the ASC has relied upon the talents of both actors and

[246] Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 79.

actresses from the time of its inception. One can surmise that in its earliest days as a company of JMU students, the size and composition of the available talent pool necessitated casting women in men's roles, but even as the company grew, it never changed this policy. Today, this has become a stated intention of the ASC, such that the program lists this aspect as part of its playing style, proclaiming "Because we are committed to the idea that Shakespeare is about everyone- male and female- ASC is not an all-male company, but we try to re-create some of the fun of gender confusions by casting women as men and men as women."[247] While an interesting justification, it cannot be denied that having women on stage is a blatantly non-authentic practice in a season that strives to create plays in the manner of Shakespeare's day.[248]

In regard to gender, the ASC has made a conscious choice to ignore an Early Modern playing practice. In two other areas, however, the ASC translates original practices into a modern idiom: the elements of music and costume. Music was certainly a staple of the Early Modern theatre; in the historical Blackfriars, Stern describes "flutes, lutes, and 'broken consorts'… [that] played in the four act breaks."[249] Any audience familiar with a performance of the ASC is accustomed to arriving early for the musical pre-show, where actors perform thematically relevant pop music of the last several decades. From flutes to the music of a group named the Squirrel Nut Zippers seems a far cry, but the ASC's argument is that modern music is the best means of connecting with modern audiences, just as the compositions played

[247] *ASC 2010 Program*, 8.

[248] Elizabeth Klett's article "Re-Dressing the Balance" (in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance* edited by James C. Bulman) discusses the distinct dynamics of all-female casts and selectively cross-gendered casts in performance of Shakespeare.

[249] Stern, 32.

by Early Modern musicians would have suited the contemporary tastes of Shakespeare's audiences.

Likewise, costumes at the Blackfriars during the Renaissance Season are an eclectic array of periods and styles, chosen to quickly convey the character an actor portrays to the audience. In *The Alchemist* alone, René Thornton's Lovewit is clothed in eighteenth century finery, while Daniel Kennedy's doubting Surly wears jeans and a t-shirt (an echo of the ability Surly shares with the audience to see through the machinations of the con artists). Clothing could likewise be read symbolically in the Early Modern theatre, as it was used to quickly convey the status and wealth of characters at their entrances.[250] One of the most familiar pieces of evidence for how Elizabethans costumed their historical plays is a drawing by Henry Peacham that seems to depict a scene from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. The dress of the characters shown reflects a number of different periods: some figures are dressed with Roman accents (such as Titus), while others are costumed more in the Elizabethan style (such as a pair of soldiers).[251] The text of *Julius Caesar* references the would-be emperor as wearing an Elizabethan doublet (I.ii.276); similarly, until the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's plays were performed in the contemporary dress of the day. It was only when the antiquarian movement began in earnest in 1830 that theatre practitioners began to use historical costumes and sets for Shakespearean productions,

[250] Stern, 103-104.

[251] Hal H. Smith's article "Some Principles of Elizabethan Stage Costume," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 25, No. 3/4 (Jul. - Dec., 1962), pp. 240-257, discusses this understanding of the Peacham drawing.

placing the actors in elaborate replicas of the setting of each play.[252] The eclectic costumes of the Renaissance Season, therefore, may well be tonally in keeping with the Early Modern philosophy of costume. It is a pity, however, that the finances of the ASC have never yet allowed for a costume budget that parallels the amounts spent on costume in Shakespeare's day, when costumes were among the greatest expenses of the company.[253] It is a noticeable weak point for the Renaissance Season, which depends entirely upon costumes already in the company's stores or in the actor's closets, and has been mentioned as such in critical reviews.[254] Warren has stated that, given the opportunity, he would love for the ASC to be able to create Early Modern costumes in the same vein as Jenny Tiramani's work at the Globe, but this remains only a future hope for the company. For now, Warren conceives of the ASC's costuming as mixing both sides of the issue, using both historical costumes and modern dress, which he believes captures "the spirit" of the Renaissance stage.[255]

Piecing out Imperfections: Final Thoughts

Warren's avowed loyalty to creating theatre that captures the spirit of Early Modern theatre is at the heart of the mission of the Actors' Renaissance Season. As Elizabeth Charlebois stated in her review of the 2006 ARS, "In contrast to the recreated Globe Theatre's emphasis on replicating the material conditions of

[252] Franklin J. Hildy, "The 'Essence of Globeness': Authenticity, and the Search for Shakespeare's Stagecraft" in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*," edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 15.

[253] Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company*, 103-104.

[254] As in Wiley and Colenbrander's review of *Shrew*.

[255] Warren.

Shakespeare's culture in their lavishly costumed productions, the Blackfriars aims for *experiential* authenticity, a version of historicity that is more flexible."[256] Cohen, Warren, and McClure, by shaping the playing style of the American Shakespeare Center, and giving the Renaissance Season actors a set of Rules to bear in mind, present their company with a framework, steeped in what research has taught us about the Early Modern stage, although not bound mercilessly to history's dictates. That frame provides a basic environment in which to work, but allows the actors the freedom to extend their creativity to its fullest, even if on occasion that means stretching the boundaries of the frame. As Jay McClure notes, "Our interest is in making great modern theatre, using early modern rehearsal and performance conditions as a catalyst. Our interest is not to re-create or re-enact early modern rehearsal and performance."[257] John Harrell, after six Renaissance Seasons, has formed a particular view of the concept of original practices that evokes the words of Jim Warren and Ralph Cohen:

> It seems like there's a common thread among people who are interested in original practices, that if you just crack some code, you can resurrect this original performance, you can bring back to life the olden ways. I'm not sure exactly what it is, but I guess the idea is that there's a right way to do it, and if you just follow these rules [you'll get there]. But all these rules are kind of arbitrary, based on half surmise, half certainty. To me, it's more important to have rules, than to say that they're the only way to do it[258]

The Renaissance Season was never intended to become the standard practice of the ASC, nor has it become so; for all that Warren praises the work of the actors in the

[256] Charlebois, 93.

[257] Jay McClure, personal email, February 17, 2010.

[258] Harrell, interview.

Ren Season, he continues to direct several shows a year at the ASC. Nevertheless, it affords actors and audiences the chance to become familiar with certain tools of Shakespeare's theatre that many other contemporary companies ignore. By coming to a better understanding of how these tools function in practice during the Renaissance Season, the ASC is able to inspire audiences and practitioners alike to consider the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in their own, original light.

Likewise, the ARS company actors are "playing to please a distinctly modern audience, not to realize a director's vision."[259] By building a community of actors and audiences in the shared light of the Blackfriars, the Ren Season allows actors to communicate Early Modern plays in a special way. Richard Taruskin, who spoke so critically of those he saw pursuing a misguided vision of authenticity in the early music movement, also proposed a different, more beneficial means of interpreting authenticity:

> Nothing is allowed to intrude into the performance that cannot be "authenticated." And this means nothing can be allowed that will give the performance, in the sense in which we first defined the word, the authenticity of conviction. For the first thing that must go in a critical edition, as in the kind of "authentic" performance I am describing, is any sense of the editor's or performer's own presence; any sentiment, as Rousseau would have said, of his being.[260]

The full name of the Ren Season places possession in the hands of its actors; it is their duty to find ways to infuse the plays with the spark of their own performances. When performances fall short of perfection, whether through messy staging or dropped lines, it falls on their own heads; likewise, when audiences cheer at a play's end and

[259] Charlebois, 93.

[260] Taruskin, "The authenticity movement can become a positivistic purgatory, literalistic and dehumanizing," 6.

continue to return year after year to see plays that they've never heard of, it is also to their credit.

The Actors' Renaissance Season invokes the spirit of the Renaissance stage as its ideal; Don Weingust (echoing concerns of Jeremy Lopez) is correct in pointing out that its regular inclusion of a prompter demonstrates that by the standards of today's professional theatre, Shakespeare's stage certainly had its rough edges.[261] As the ARS has continued at the American Shakespeare Center, however, many of those rough edges have been refined. Just as actors are able to explore their characters in greater depth as the Season progresses, with time, the Ren Season has evolved and fine-tuned both its practices and its expectations. In 2005, two weeks of rehearsal seemed a scandalously short time to prepare a play; in 2010, the actors took only two days to mount a public performance of *Twelfth Night*. After only six seasons, the ARS has evolved beyond the original expectations of its instigators and holds its place as a unique and on-going in experiment in what we can learn from utilizing Early Modern staging and rehearsal conditions, and which prioritizes scholarly research alongside offering audiences an enjoyable night at the theatre. With plans already in motion for the 2011 Actors' Renaissance Season, the opportunities for both priorities to advance still further seem ripe.

[261] Weingust, 182-183.

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