

# Introduction to Stratford 2010

## Prepared by Greg Bouman

### Redemption and the Tragic Potential

*The genius of Christian faith is its proclamation that nothing is beyond redemption. The Gospel is not about integration of opposites but about their transformation and redemption.*

--Romney M. Moseley, *Becoming a Self Before God: Critical Transformations*

Having spent the last two seasons at Stratford plumbing the depths of Hell, visiting the 8<sup>th</sup> Circle of Deception on our way through the 9<sup>th</sup> Circle of Betrayal, it's time to follow the example of Dante, cross the center of the world and begin our ascent heavenward.

The playbill this year is interesting. When it was announced, I immediately noticed that there were no tragedies on it. Further reflection reveals that this is not entirely true; two and a half plays could be considered tragic, if not in the classical sense. Certainly *Dangerous Liaisons* doesn't end happily; neither does *Evita*. Yet neither is strictly tragic. Both are too wry and ironic to leave audiences with a heavy sense of loss. The characters who meet their fatal end are deeply flawed, and not in the classical, heroic sense. It's as if the audience approves and encourages them toward their end, and there's nothing tragic about that. The "half" tragedy is *The Winter's Tale*: specifically the first half, which doesn't have nearly the same effect. The audience doesn't go *home* with the tragic sense of foreboding, they go to the restroom or the snack bar, and return for the "antidote" in the second half of the play.

Despite this deficiency of genre, every play this summer contains a *potential* for tragedy, and in that potential we find the struggle that defines our human nature. As every first year literary student knows, dramatic tension depends on conflicts, and each conflict is a tipping point that could potentially end in tragedy, when (or if) carried on its course without resolution. Of course, the extent to which we *believe* that we are indeed headed toward tragedy will vary from play to play. Certainly the tone of a Cole Porter romp will prevent us from taking any tragic elements too seriously. The gangsters in *Kiss Me Kate* inspire about as much fear as the plastic guns the actors are most likely brandishing. Nonetheless, even in *Kiss Me Kate*, we see reminders of our fallen world, from which drama is intended to provide us a much needed respite.

A telling sign of such a world is seen in the broken relationships we have with one another, portrayed with painful accuracy in various manifestations throughout the playbill, sometimes in a light-hearted manner, but often not. The mistrust between lovers and friends drives the potential tragedy in the first half of *The Winter's Tale*, as well as both the on-stage and off-stage plots of *Kiss Me Kate*. Brother will turn on brother twice in *As You Like It* and twice again in *The Tempest* (which makes one wonder about the playwright's relationship with his own brothers). Friend betrays friend in *Two Gentlemen*. The brokenness between lovers, or potential lovers, is especially painful when carried to the extreme. Despite Valmont's protestations in *Liaisons*, we will not believe he is capable of loving Mme Tourvel because of his previous

cruel and misogynistic behavior. We'll follow the pitiable progression of Evita's man-eating relationships to its conclusion, knowing that her relationship with Col. Perón can be nothing more than self-serving (which both freely admit in their first duet). Even underneath the lighthearted *Peter Pan*, we see brokenness: a boy who has left his family to remain young, seeking out a "replacement" for his lost mother, and ultimately becoming unable to form lasting relationships because others are not willing or able to make the same sacrifice.

The natural response to this brokenness seems to be a desire for revenge, and revenge indeed is central to the plot of just about every play this summer. It's the centerpiece of *The Tempest*. The audience anticipates the potential for revenge right from the start: Prospero spends the entire first scene explaining in detail to Miranda (and the audience) that he was wronged, that his enemies are now being brought under his control, and that he has absolute power on his island. As a set up, we have already witnessed one form of his revenge: Caliban has been enslaved for attempting to rape Miranda. Some might call this justice, but our modern consciousness (especially regarding capital punishment) knows that there is a fine line between justice and retribution, one that we cannot always see clearly. Our view of whether Prospero crosses this line depends on how he and Caliban are portrayed in the rest of the play. Shakespeare certainly stacks the deck by making Prospero elsewhere appear just and Caliban monstrous. As other characters plan egregious wrongs, the audience's thirst for revenge/justice is heightened as the play reaches its surprising climax.

We also see the potential for revenge in *Two Gentlemen*. Proteus wrongs all of the other major characters through his misbehavior: betraying his friend, forswearing his girlfriend, and threatening to rape his friend's girlfriend. Their responses to his actions become the focus of the latter half of the play. The potential for revenge becomes very real in *The Winter's Tale*. Hermione's innocent protests do little to stem Leontes' determination for punish her for her (imagined) infidelity, and he spends the next sixteen years (which turn out to be only two acts of the play) suffering the consequences. In *As You Like It*, revenge is the prime motivation for both Duke Frederick and Oliver to banish (and seek to kill) their brothers for nothing more than being more popular or gracious.

We will see revenge as a key thematic device outside of the Shakespeare plays as well. A scorecard barely helps us keep track of who is trying exact revenge from whom in *Liaisons*. Evita desires revenge on the social elites whom she perceives were responsible for the wrongs she suffered through her impoverished upbringing. In a more comic turn, but no less vengeful, Capt. Hook's monomaniacal pursuit of Peter Pan stems from his desire to make Peter pay for the loss of his hand. Laughter will also fuel the vengeance sought by the protagonists of *Kiss Me* for their various perceived wrongs, even leading to a climactic spanking.

So what happens to these vengeful motives, these potential tragedies, as the plays draw to a close? How do these tragedies become comedies? In the classical Greek understanding of the genre, a "comedy" is not necessarily a play that invokes laughter, but one in which the world at its conclusion has returned to order. Contrarily, the world at the end of a tragedy is in chaos, caused by the fatal flaw of the protagonist. In order for these plays to reach that return order, there must be reconciliation that redeems the

characters from their tragic potential. The means *by* which, and extent *to* which, the characters are redeemed will vary from play to play; that will be the focus of my introductory remarks this summer. I will also draw upon Peter L. Berger's book, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* in my exploration of the theme. Although Berger largely discusses joke-telling and laughter, rather than Comedy as a theatrical genre, his analysis of the redemptive properties of humor are indeed apt.

Should be another great season. See you in August!

December 19, 2009

# STRATFORD TOUR 2010

## SPECIFIC PLAY INTRODUCTIONS

Prepared by Greg Bouman

Note: \*denotes a Core Play, one of seven that will be at the center of the introductory talks this summer at Stratford; the non-core plays will be given brief introductions but will not be the centerpieces of the lectures. Directors and cast (those known as of this writing) are given so that returning tour members can look for favorites from previous productions.

### FESTIVAL THEATRE

#### **\**The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare**

Dir: Des McAnuff

Cast: Christopher Plummer (Prospero), James Blendick (Gonzalo), Bruce Dow (Trinculo), Peter Hutt (Alonso), Dion Johnstone (Caliban), Trish Lindström (Miranda), Gareth Potter (Ferdinand), Timothy Stickney (Sebastian), John Vickery (Antonio), Geraint Wyn Davies (Stephano)

**Brief Summary:** Twelve years after Prospero was deposed as Duke of Milan and exiled with his daughter Miranda to an almost deserted island, he manages to bring King Alonso of Naples and his other enemies to him for his own purposes. In the intervening years, not only has he mastered the island's lone inhabitant, the monstrous Caliban, he's gained the service of the sprite Ariel and seemingly unlimited power. Will he use that power for revenge, or find means of reconciliation?

**Commentary:** This is the headlining play of the festival. Christopher Plummer heads an exceptional cast in what some scholars have considered to be the last play in the Shakespearean canon (although that view has lost favor in recent years). Whether or not it is indeed the last, Prospero gives a poignant speech about relinquishing his power, complete with imagery of the theatre, that seems to echo Shakespeare's reflection on the impending end of his career. The great William Hutt gave a moving rendition when his portrayal of Prospero ended his long career at the Festival. (One only hopes that Plummer does not have similar plans in taking on this role.) Dow (who played the Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret* two years ago) and Davies (Bottom from last year's *Midsummer*) will get to showcase their comedic talents as the fool and the drunken butler, respectively.

#### **\**As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare**

Dir: Des McAnuff

Cast: Ben Carlson (Touchstone), Brent Carver (Jacques), Paul Nolan (Orlando), Andrea Runge (Rosalind), Lucy Peacock (Audrey), Cara Ricketts (Celia), Tom Rooney (Duke Frederick/Duke Senior), Mike Shara (Oliver)

**Brief Summary:** Banished by court, Rosalind and her cousin Celia take refuge in the forest, where they are pursued by the lovesick Orlando. While Rosalind (disguised as a boy) gives the clumsy Orlando lessons in how to woo women, they and court fool

Touchstone meet up with a band of outcasts that include the cynical and melancholy Jacques.

**Commentary:** Rosalind, Harold Bloom argues, is Shakespeare's greatest female character, one of three (the others being Falstaff and Hamlet) in which he endowed the greatest "human-ness." Runge, who played Cecily in *Earnest* last year, will take on this intriguing role. Carlson has earned critical acclaim at the Festival since his debut as Hamlet two seasons ago; he gets to take a comic turn as the witty fool here. Carver and Peacock are Festival favorites in supporting roles here, although Carver will get one of Shakespeare's most famous monologues at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Act ("All the world's a stage"). The evil duke and his benevolent (and banished) brother never appear on stage together; the Festival is most likely following the example of Shakespeare's company by doubling these parts to the same actor. Look for music to be featured, as this play contains more songs than any other by Shakespeare.

**\**Dangerous Liaisons*, by Christopher Hampton**

Dir: Ethan McSweeney

Cast: Tom McCamus (Le Vicomte de Valmont), Seana McKenna (La Marquise de Merteuil), Sara Topham (La Présidente de Tourvel), Martha Henry (Mme de Rosemonde), Bethany Jillard (Cécile Volanges), Yanna McIntosh (Mme de Volanges), Michael Therriault (Le Chevalier Danceny)

**Brief Summary:** In 18<sup>th</sup>-Century France, Vicomte Valmont and Marquise Merteuil spin webs upon webs of deception and intrigue in their cruel hunger to dominate and humiliate others through sex. Merteuil asks for Valmont's assistance in seducing Cécile in order to exact her revenge on Cécile's fiancé, one of Merteuil's former lovers. Valmont initially refuses, but when Cécile's mother interferes with his other plans, he becomes more willing. His attentions, however, are more bent toward the virtuous (and married) Tourvel. In contrast with his previous conquests, he begins to fall in love with her, which both alarms and amuses Merteuil, who plots to use this advantage in bring Valmont under her control. Others will suffer the consequences as their psychological battle escalates.

**Commentary:** Author Christopher Hampton adapted this play from the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos; Hampton would subsequently rewrite the play for the big screen and win an Academy Award for Best Screenplay. The novel, play, and film have all been censured as lurid and amoral; such criticism, however, misses the point that there are destructive consequences of such behavior. There may be little in the way of a moral center, but the play neither glorifies nor panders to its immorality. The result is a dark and sardonic look at power and manipulation that will hit its mark, even across time and culture. Another top-notch cast here; McCamus (Macheath in *Threepenny Opera*, also the title character in *Richard III*) is especially good at playing amoral manipulators.

**\**Kiss Me Kate*, music & lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Sam and Bella Spewack**

Dir: John Doyle

Cast: Juan Chioran (Fred Graham), Monique Lund (Lilli Vanessi), Chilina Kennedy (Lois Lane)

**Brief Summary:** Fred Graham and ex-wife Lilli Vanessi fight onstage and off during a production of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (they play Petruchio and Katharine, respectively). Although engaged herself, Lilli is jealous of Fred's latest girlfriend, Lois Lane (Bianca in the play). Unbeknownst to Fred, Lois finds herself increasingly attracted to Bill Calhoun (Lucentio), who has run up a gambling debt that he settles by forging Fred's name to an IOU. When a pair of gangsters arrive to collect, the off-stage antics spill into the performance. Add a few Cole Porter standards ("So In Love"; "Too Darn Hot") and the audience is in for a toe-tapping good time.

**Commentary:** This classic musical contrasts well with the more modern *Evita*. Cole Porter had already experienced several peaks and valleys in his career by the time *Kiss Me Kate* gave him his biggest hit in 1948. Porter was one of the few Broadway composers from his era to pen his own lyrics; as a result, music and lyrics form a seamless combination that can swing from urbane to bawdy (and often be both). While parts of the plot echo earlier Porter hits—the love complications, the bumbling gangsters, and the performing protagonists all will remind audiences of *Anything Goes* (written in 1934 and performed at Stratford in 2004)—the backdrop of a Shakespeare performance and its parallels off-stage work well and put a fresh face on the recycled bits. Mounting this production in the Festival Theatre, the signature locale for Shakespeare in Stratford, will add character to the *Taming of the Shrew* scenes.

## AVON THEATRE

**\**Evita*, lyrics by Tim Rice, music by Andrew Lloyd Webber**

Dir: Gary Griffin

Cast: Juan Chioran (Juan Perón), Chilina Kennedy (Eva Perón), Vince Staltari (Magaldi)

**Brief Summary:** The story, filtered through the cynical narration of Ché (a thinly-disguised incarnation of the Argentine-born revolutionary, Ché Guevara), traces the rise of Eva Duarte from humble beginnings to B-movie actress to the first lady of Argentinean dictator Juan Perón. Ambitious and ruthless, Eva hastens her ascent through a number of sexual conquests. As she enters the upper echelon of society, she earns the adoration of the common people while alienating the wealthy and the military. Ché ultimately blames the economic and social demise of the country on her exploitation of power for personal gain.

**Commentary:** This is as modern as the Festival has ever gotten in their selection of musicals, and it's their first mounting of one by Lloyd Webber. As with other Lloyd Webber musicals, there will be no spoken dialogue in this rock opera. The music is a mixture of the composer's distinctive style and traditional Argentine rhythms and chord progressions. Tim Rice's lyrics are both clever and poetically poignant. Kennedy (Maria in *West Side Story* last season) and Chioran (whom some tour members might remember as the title character in *Dracula* in 1999) bring outstanding voices to their demanding roles.

## ***Peter Pan*, by J. M. Barrie**

Dir: Tim Carroll

Cast: Tom McCamus (Captain Hook), Michael Therriault (Peter Pan), Sara Topham (Wendy), Seán Cullen (Smee), Paul Dunn (John), Stacie Steadman (Michael)

**Commentary:** I imagine everyone is familiar with the story of the “boy who wouldn’t grow up” and his adventures in Never Land, whether through the original Barrie play or its various incarnations at Disney. There are two potentially intriguing aspects of this production. First, expect the special effects to be first-rate, especially if they are of similar quality to the Cirque-du-Soleil-trained fairies from the 2004 production of *Midsummer*. Second, the return of Michael Therriault to the company is a welcome surprise; tour veterans might remember his energy as Mordred in *Camelot* or Ariel in *The Tempest*.

## **TOM PATTERSON THEATRE**

### ***\*The Winter’s Tale*, by William Shakespeare**

Dir: Marti Maraden

Cast: Ben Carlson (Leontes), Yanna McIntosh (Hermione), Seana McKenna (Paulina), Sean Arbuckle (Camillo), Dan Chameroy (Polixenes), Ian Lake (Florizel), Cara Ricketts (Perdita), Tom Rooney (Autolycus), Mike Shara (Young Shepherd)

**Brief Summary:** When Leontes, King of Sicilia, cannot convince long-time friend Polixenes, King of Bohemia, to stay longer as his guest, he asks his wife Hermione to make an appeal. The ease with which she is successful plants suspicions in Leontes’ mind which quickly bloom into a jealous rage. A faithful courtier manages to save Hermione’s infant child (whom Leontes believes is Polixenes’), but others do not escape the ensuing tragedy. After a passage of sixteen years, we learn that the child (Perdita), reared as a simple shepherdess in Bohemia and ignorant of her heritage, has fallen in love with Florizel, son of Polixenes. When the young couple, threatened by a disapproving Polixenes, escapes to Sicilia, old enmities are reawakened. Has enough time passed for Leontes to be forgiving?

**Commentary:** This play makes an interesting companion piece to *The Tempest*. Both were written towards the end of Shakespeare’s career, and both are on the surface romances (not in the modern sense, but in the Shakespearean sense, with fantastical plots set away from ordinary life). The plot of *The Tempest*, however, is tightly drawn, set in one location and confined to a single day. *The Winter’s Tale*, by contrast, is almost two plays, with the tragedy of the first half balanced by the pastoral comedy of the second, which takes place many years after the first and is set mostly in a distant country. It almost seems as if Shakespeare were experimenting with the boundaries of his plots, to see how loose or tight he could make them. This cast looks promising, with the ever-capable Carlson in the lead and Rooney (Puck in *Midsummer*; the Porter in *Macbeth*) as the comic Autolycus.

***Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, production conception, English lyrics and additional material by Eric Blau and Mort Shuman, based on Jacques Brel's lyrics and commentary, music by Jacques Brel**

Dir: Stafford Arima

Cast: Brent Carver (Brent), Jewelle Blackman (Jewelle), Mike Nadajewski (Mike), Nathalie Nadon (Nathalie)

Commentary: Interestingly, all four venues this season will mount musical productions, although this one at the Patterson is more of a revue than a musical. Brel, who is little known in the English-speaking part of the world, was a cultural icon in Belgium, France, and Canada in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. An off-Broadway version of this show ran from 1968-1972, with input from Brel himself. The Festival Guide offers this introduction: "Often haunting, sometimes humorous, always vividly dramatic, the songs of Belgian troubadour Jacques Brel have been recorded by countless artists throughout the world. Encompassing themes of joy and sorrow, love and loss, life and death, this compilation of Brel's finest work celebrates the diverse complexity of the human heart."

## **STUDIO THEATRE**

***\*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, by William Shakespeare**

Dir: Dean Gabouri

Cast: Dion Johnstone (Valentine), Claire Lautier (Silvia), Gareth Potter (Proteus), Bruce Dow (Speed), Robert Persichini (Launce), Sophia Walker (Julia)

**Brief Summary:** Valentine leaves Verona for Milan, where he secretly falls for the beautiful Sophia, even though her father has promised her to another man. Valentine's friend Proteus soon follows him to Milan after a forced and painful separation from his beloved, Julia. Once in Milan, however, Proteus forgets about Julia and joins in the hunt for Silvia, betraying Valentine and getting him banned from the city. Valentine takes refuge among outlaws in the forest, where Silvia (running away from her father) and Julia (intent on pursuing Proteus while disguised as a boy) soon join them. Naturally, this being a Shakespearean comedy, everything will sort itself out well in the end. Commentary: This is the first time within my memory that a Shakespearean play has been mounted at the Studio. *Two Gentlemen* is one of Shakespeare's earliest, and in it we see many devices that he will return to again and again in his career: women disguised as boys, outlaws banished to the forest, paternal disapproval of potential matches, foolish men who swear and forswear their affection for women, clever servants who act as go-betweens, and so forth. Much of this play will seem familiar to audiences more familiar with Shakespeare's later comedies. One interesting casting note: as the Festival company increasingly becomes more integrated, the roles have become more "color blind"—as we see in this play with the bi-racial casting of both couples. Dow and Persichini fall into familiar roles as the clowns in this play.

***King of Thieves*, by George F. Walker (songs and music by John Roby)**

Dir: Jennifer Tarver

Cast: Evan Buliung (Mac), Seán Cullen (Vinnie), Laura Condlln (Polly)

**Commentary:** Walker (author of last season's *Zastrozzi*), has modernized the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century play, *The Beggar's Opera*, by John Gay (which also served as the inspiration for the more well-known *Threepenny Opera*, by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, performed at the Festival during the 2002 season). The setting has been moved from seedy London to corporate New York, as "Mac" (the character based on Macheath) and Peachum turn on their fellow corrupt bankers as part of a sting operation hatched by the FBI. Following the lead of Brecht and Weill, Walker turns the story into a musical while keeping the sardonic flavor of the original. Buliung returned to the Festival two seasons ago, playing Petruchio (*Taming of the Shrew*) and Mercutio (*Romeo and Juliet*) after a few years' absence during which he played Aragorn in the Toronto production of *Lord of the Rings*.