

Partnerships and Playhouses

BY PAUL MENZER



This piece is devoted to the partnership between Mary Baldwin College’s Shakespeare and Performance program (S&P) and the American Shakespeare Center’s (ASC) Blackfriars Playhouse. The first thing to note is that, while both projects launched in 2001, there is no chicken-and-egg controversy here. The S&P program owes its existence to the Blackfriars (I will here abandon the chicken-and-egg analogy since it would obligate me to call us the egg the ASC laid, and I do not wish to end up with analogy on my face).

The more pertinent metaphor might be the cart and horse.

Again, this might seem an obvious one — the ASC as horse, S&P as cart. That arrangement certainly harnesses some truth, but in what follows I suggest that it’s possible to be both. Sometimes, and at the same times, both organizations are both cart and horse, though always “pulling” in the same direction.

Since it is more evident the ways in which the Blackfriars pulls the program, let me detail some ways in which the opposite is also true. The program has often served as a sort of “research and development” wing of the ASC. Without the pressure of running a professional theatre, S&P answers to a different kind of bottom line.

Whether that's staging scenes by candlelight, strewing rushes on the stage, performing plays too obscure for even the Renaissance Season (*The Misfortunes of Arthur*, anyone?), S&P can often do the work the ASC cannot. Our bottom line has only to answer to our own curiosity. That's one luxury a graduate program has that a professional playhouse does not. We always hope the work we do filters out into the community, particularly to our partners down the hill at the Blackfriars.

At the same time, the repertory at the Blackfriars practically constitutes our curriculum. That means that a class on, say, Shakespeare's contemporaries can explore *Edward II* from both critical perspectives and performative ones. At the same time, our core competencies — acting, teaching,

directing, dramaturging — overlap the work on the ASC stage, in its rehearsal room, and in its educational department.

In fact, it's often hard to tell the horse and cart apart, which perhaps means hitching that analogy on the post and leaving metaphors behind. Consider this: S&P boasts six core faculty members and about 50 students; the ASC has two acting companies and an office and playhouse full of staff and administrators. All told, we're looking at nearly 100 folks who form, in Staunton, a Shakespeare community. We're all working on the same things, exploring the same ideas, in love with the same work. In these terms, we're all chickens and eggs and carts and horses, ultimately on board for the same ride. ■

New MLitt Approach Prepares Students for MFA Company Model

BY MARSHALL GARRETT

Although Shakespeare and Performance (S&P) at Mary Baldwin was designed to produce well-rounded artist-scholars, the pages of *Folio* frequently focus on the performance aspects of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) coursework and the scholarly aspects of Master of Letters (MLitt) classes. However, changes in both degree programs over the past two years have strengthened their lesser-known features. As the MFA program transitioned from traditional concentrations to a more interdisciplinary production degree, the performance curriculum at the MLitt level has undergone a more gradual — but

every bit as complete — overhaul.

The first-year MLitt course better known by its numerical designation (531) than its title (Performance of the Language) is now a benchmark of the curriculum, along with its counterpart, REN 530: The Language of Performance. In REN 530, students engage with early modern English texts, applying lessons on classical rhetoric, metrics, and other textual peculiarities. Students carry these lessons into REN 531, where they are put to the test outside of the classroom in a 90-minute production of one of Shakespeare's plays.

“What was most unique about this acting experience was the way

it integrated work from REN 530,” said Patrick Harris, who played the titular role in the spring 2014 REN 531 production of *1 Henry IV*. “Using those tools we practiced in 530 to break down the characters’ text and trying different deliveries made the process as much a workshop as a production.” Merlyn Sell agreed, noting that, “530 gave us a common vocabulary to work from — which was absolutely vital considering the fact that all of us came from different backgrounds and experience levels.”

Throughout the process, actors (and *everyone* was an actor) were asked to learn the fundamentals of contemporary American

acting, especially methods developed by Konstantin Stanislavski and Anne Bogart, and to justify their acting choices by looking at rhetorical and other textual clues provided by Shakespeare.

In addition to acting, every member of the company was asked to take on at least one production role: dramaturgy, stage management, props, costumes, publicity, music, or choreography. The faculty encouraged students to choose areas in which they could best serve the production. Students also picked a second area to serve as assistant committee members, allowing everyone the opportunity to learn a new

Photos by Allan Moyé



skill while supporting the company with their true strengths.

“REN 531 was extremely similar to experiences I’ve had outside of educational theatre,” said Sell, who ran a small theatre company before enrolling at Mary Baldwin. “There was no safety net of ‘adults’ who were going to be sure the show went off well if work didn’t get done. As a group, we had to pull our weight or deal with the consequences.”

REN 531 has grown from an opportunity to test the skills learned in REN 530 to a stepping stone on the way to the collaboration demanded by the MFA company model.

Doreen Bechtol, co-instructor of REN 531 and MFA company manager, has witnessed how first-year MLitt classes inform the third-year MFA model. This year’s Turning Glass Shakespeare company is the first to have gone through REN 531 in its current format as a full production course.

“This year’s MFA students have demonstrated collaborative skills such as readiness to work with an open mind, willingness to integrate different perspectives, and the ability to work decisively and take risks without the desire to control the final product,” Bechtol said. ■





TURNING GLASS SHAKESPEARE

MFA Company Explores Identity, Community, and Societal Roles

BY NICOLA COLLETT

On the morning of April 23, 2014, universally celebrated as William Shakespeare's 450th birthday, the third Shakespeare and Performance MFA company met for the first time to begin the process of discovering what their company name would be. This auspicious timing was echoed three weeks later when, at 4:23 p.m. (again referencing the Bard's birthday on 4/23) on the last day of May Term, students took their final vote deciding their moniker: Turning Glass Shakespeare.

The seed of the name came

from Time's monologue in the company's Blackfriars show, *The Winter's Tale*: "Your patience this allowing / I turn my glass and give my scene such growing / As you had slept between." The MFA company is a venture with a pre-determined end date, so the hourglass seemed a perfect symbol of the importance and constraints of time. Another meaning also lives in the phrase "turning glass": through intense heat and pressure, many individual grains of sand can turn into a single piece of glass. The members of Turning Glass Shakespeare hope that the



pressure of time will help them turn their disparate experiences and selves into one unbroken whole.

The company's season explores themes of identity, community, and societal roles. The season began with a devised show, *Little Life*, blending the other shows into an examination of the human life cycle. The educational touring show is *Twelfth Night*, the small-scale touring show was *Romeo & Juliet* with a six-person cast. In

THE COMPANY

Sarah Blackwell
Nicola Collett
Amy W. Grubbs
David Loehr
Nora Manca
Sarah Martin
Emma Patrick
Ashley Pierce
Mara Sherman
Rebecca Wright



Poster designs by Nora Manca

February, Lisa Wolpe, founder of the LA Women’s Shakespeare Company, directed *The Winter’s Tale* for the Blackfriars stage. Finally, the Renaissance-style show — to be put up collaboratively in two weeks with no director — will be *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* by Thomas Middleton.

As a last hurrah, the last weekend of March will bring the MFA Play Festival, during which Turning Glass Shakespeare will mount all of its plays again, accompanied by visiting scholars who will present pre-show lectures, and more. ■

THE SEASON

Little Life (devised show)
September 6 and 8

Twelfth Night, or What You Will
October 13 and 14

Romeo & Juliet
December 6 and 8

The Winter’s Tale
February 9–11

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside
March 23 and 24

MFA Play Festival
March 29–31



You know you're a Shakespeare geek when ...

- #10 ... you give your pen collection punny names: PENedick, INKago, CalPENia.
- #9 ... you get into fights with your friends about the best stage directions, and “Exit, pursued by a bear;” “He drinketh;” and “He drinketh again” always top the list.
- #8 ... you can recite lines anywhere — in the shower, in the car, or on the treadmill.
- #7 ... you often use the word “thou” — with correct conjugation.
- #6 ... you find it more challenging to determine your favorite play each time you see a new production.
- #5 ... you are increasingly attracted to those capable of clever word-play.
- #4 ... you notice allusions to Shakespeare so frequently in novels, film, and television that you almost get sick of them. Almost.
- #3 ... you know that the noun that’s spelled like “desert” but pronounced like “dessert” has nothing to do with desolate wastelands or sweet snacks.
- #2 ... you start to rhyme in everyday speech, because Romeo and Juliet taught you that rhyme is sexy.
- #1 ... you procrastinate your non-Shakespeare-related responsibilities, saying you will get to them tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.

Contributions by Paige Hammock, Zac Harned, and Mark Pajor



FEATURE

‘How Far that Little Candle Throws His Beams’

BY PAIGE HAMMOCK

Mary Baldwin College professor Ralph Alan Cohen received the acclaim of two major Shakespeare institutions for his work in co-founding both the American Shakespeare Center and the Mary Baldwin College graduate program in Shakespeare and Performance (S&P).

At the Blackfriars Conference in October 2013, S&P director Paul Menzer took the podium from Cohen to introduce Michael Witmore of the Folger Shakespeare Library. Witmore surprised Cohen by presenting to him the Folger’s Shakespeare Steward Award, given annually for “outstanding contributions to the teaching of Shakespeare in America’s classrooms.”

The award was especially significant to Cohen because it came at the end of a conference in honor of his teacher and advisor, Duke University Professor Emeritus of English George Walton Williams.

“Having my own great teacher there to see the Folger recognize my work in teaching made it all the more meaningful for me,” Cohen said.

In June 2014, Shakespeare’s Globe in London lauded Cohen with its Wanamaker Award for “pioneering work in Shakespearean theatre.” He is the first American to receive the award. Other recipients include Cicely Berry, Paul Scofield, Stanley Wells, Andrew Gurr, and Mark Rylance.

In announcing the award, Neil Constable, chief executive at the Globe, said, “Dr. Cohen has long championed Shakespeare productions in which actors and audience share the same light. We want to shine the light on Ralph and recognize the contribution he has made.”

The Globe presented the award following a matinee performance of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Cohen reports it was a perfect day: “I had just seen a wonderful

performance of my favorite play, the sun is out, I’m standing on the Globe stage in front of a full house, the best Cleopatra I have ever seen gives me a bottle of champagne and kisses me — and I was looking pretty svelte.”



In presenting the award to Cohen, Patrick Spottiswoode, founding director of Globe education, called the MLitt/MFA program at Mary Baldwin “the number one center in the United States for the study of Shakespeare in performance.” ■

Navigating the Art of Collaboration

BY REBECCA WRIGHT

Monica Stufft, associate professor of theatre arts and performance studies at the University of San Diego, worked with members of Turning Glass Shakespeare during fall semester to hone their collaboration skills. While observing meetings, classes, and rehearsals led by members of the company, she held an informal lunch meeting with students. Company members introduced themselves and told her a little about their educational background, what brought them to Mary Baldwin, and their hopes for the future. The time to get acquainted was crucial for Stufft's workshop later that

week, where she made connections and associations within the group and with her own life journey.

On her final day with the company, she led a workshop on productive collaboration and compassionate criticism. Stufft guided students through group discussion, individual work, and acting out and responding to narrative situations. Turning Glass Shakespeare members discussed the meaning of collaboration and how that definition applies, then Stufft guided the company through a series of acting and reacting exercises where members performed scenarios of positive and difficult moments



Visiting professor Monica Stufft (far left) with members of Turning Glass Shakespeare.

of collaboration. This allowed students to analyze moments in which collaboration was successful and times when it was not used to the best advantage.

Having Stufft present allowed the company to examine past

moments critically and to make decisions about how to deal with difficult moments in the future. Collaboration is a process Turning Glass Shakespeare is continually refining, as all future MFA will discover. ■

S&P PERFORMANCE INTENSIVE

Over two weekends in June, the Shakespeare and Performance (S&P) program launched its first S&P Intensive. Forty prospective students attended workshops and performances at the Blackfriars Playhouse with S&P faculty and ASC actors. Participants were selected to attend by their undergraduate Shakespeare professors, who became acquainted with Staunton and the S&P program by attending Blackfriars Conferences. The program will offer the next S&P Intensive session June 5–7, 2015.

SHAKESPEARE ON THE ROAD

Paul Edmondson and Paul Prescott from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the University of Warwick traveled the United States last summer to explore the breadth of American performances of Shakespeare's plays. The American Shakespeare Center was the Shakespeare on the Road team's penultimate stop on August 27. "The Pauls" presented an informative session for S&P students just before fall term began.



Photos by Catie Osborn



Photo by A.J. Leon

COLLABORATION WORKSHOPS

Monica Stufft, associate professor in the theatre department at the University of San Diego, visited the S&P program in early November to lead workshops with MFA students, further developing their skills as collaborators. She directs and offers undergraduate courses in Performance Studies, Theatre History, Contemporary Theatre, Theatre & Society, and Acting as well as a special topics course on devised theatre. Stufft's research focus is the intersection of performance and pedagogy in the classroom with a particular interest in the theoretical and philosophical implications of collaboration and collaborative theatre making. Her written work has appeared in *Ecumenica*, *Theatre History Studies*, *Theatre Journal* and *Theatre Topics*. She earned her PhD in performance studies from the University of California, Berkeley.



Photo by Helena Wei

SHAKESPEARE AT WINEDALE

Shakespeare at Winedale, the University of Texas program that studies Shakespeare's plays through performance, finished its 2014 summer season with a performance of *Troilus and Cressida* at the Blackfriars Playhouse on August 25. This was the seventh year that the Austin TX company has held its grand finale show in Staunton.



Photos by Mark Metts

S&P Alumni Make Their Mark



Byers



Chips family

CATHY BROOKSHIRE '04 is an instructor in the speech communication and rhetoric program at the University of South Carolina and also works as the “fight gal” for USC’s opera program. She recently became certified as a beginning instructor with the Taoist Tai Chi Society and has begun teaching Shakespeare 101: Page to Stage, at the Columbia Children’s Theatre with 16 enthralled, home-schooled teenagers discovering all the dirty bits in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* ... and then acting them out! Cathy says, “It can’t get any better than that.”

JAMES “BOBBY” BYERS '13 started teaching theatre to middle-schoolers in New Braunfels TX this fall, and he continues to work in the Austin theatre community. Among his upcoming projects are the Hidden Room’s *Apocrypha Project*, directing *Hamlet* for the Emily Ann Theatre, directing *Annie* for his

school, and continuing to create opportunities for Roving Shakespeare.

ALEX CARNEY '06 moved to and taught high school in Baltimore for two years after leaving MBC. He then returned to New York City, directed and acted again, and founded a theater company named Raised Spirits. Most importantly, he married Cathy Gray-Carney. He has also been working as a professional stagehand, primarily at NBC and Madison Square Garden, and occasionally on Broadway. He is at work on a one-man show about Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

JEFF CHIPS '12 is keeping busy with theater while continuing to work in closed captioning. His production of *Twelfth Night* with his company Steel City Shakespeare was well received, and he is planning more shows in 2015. Jeff will also direct *King Lear* with Pittsburgh Shakespeare in the Parks in August.



Cross



The cast of Winston Teen Center's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* supervised by Rachel Kohler Fitzhugh '11.

ANNA CHRISTIANSEN '07 is teaching language arts and social studies for a middle school in Salt Lake City; she has been teaching middle school for 5 years. She also taught acting and TV/film analysis courses at a local community college and at the University of Utah. In December 2013 she bought her own home, officially becoming a member of the middle class. In March, she broke both of her arms in a snowboarding accident. She was in casts and braces for more than 3 months, and she still wears braces when she's active. Anna said, "I looked like T-Rex!" She recently ran a half-marathon in Moab UT, one of the most beautiful places on earth. Her most recent acting role was as Lady Olivia in *Twelfth Night*.

CASSIE ROBERTSON COX '09 is in Tampa FL, working as a professional editor and part-time goat-milker. Books she has edited have appeared

on the *USA Today* and *New York Times* best-seller lists.

MONICA CROSS '13 moved from Staunton VA to Sarasota FL to be the technical director of the Black Box Theatre at New College of Florida, where she earned her BA in 2010. She is also teaching production courses for the college. Last year, she directed *Hamlet-Machine* for Roving Shakespeare and *4.48 Psychosis* for the Mary Baldwin College theatre department while working as the playhouse manager for American Shakespeare Center.

ANDREA KELLEY DEWHURST '11 and her husband, Paul, recently moved into their new home in Montgomery AL, where Andrea is teaching at Baldwin Arts and Academics Magnet School.



Leasure



Levy



O'Connell

RACHEL KOHLER FITZHUGH '11 serves as youth development specialist at the Winston Teen Center in southern Oregon. She supervises teenagers and designs and implements youth programs, most notably the youth Shakespeare club, Shakespeare Time. In addition, she is an adjunct, dual-credit writing instructor for Umpqua Community College, teaching a college-level writing course at a local high school.

ROBERT JOHN GIBBS '06 lives in Los Angeles and works as a screenwriter. Short films he has co-written have played at festivals in the United States and internationally. The films include *Peter at the End*, *The Capers Kind*, and *Midway*. He also co-wrote the feature *Dreamworld*, which is available on DVD, Amazon Prime, and iTunes. He currently has TV pilot scripts in development with Fox Studios and other producers.

ELIZA HOFMAN '09 performed as Bianca in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* with Two Pence Theatre Company at the Den Theatre in Chicago. She continues to serve as the company's literary manager while working as a yoga therapist. The biggest news, however, is that she and husband, Adam Goldstein, welcomed a baby boy, Colin Frederick Goldstein, on February 6.

DANE CT LEASURE '13 is working on Rubber City Shakespeare Company's fall and winter seasons, serving as producing artistic director. He will teach at Cuyahoga Community College this spring in the theatre department and will continue to teach at Weathervane Playhouse. Dane also works as a freelance director and actor.

JEMMA ALIX LEVY '11 recently joined the Theater, Dance & Film Studies department at Washington and

Lee University (W&L) as assistant professor and head of acting and directing. She also continues as artistic director of Muse of Fire Theatre Company in Evanston IL, where her summer 2014 production of *Romeo and Juliet* received rave reviews from Chicago critics. This spring she will direct *Spamalot* at W&L before returning to Evanston to direct *Hamlet*.

JAMES MAINARD O'CONNELL '08 directs the theatre program at Episcopal Collegiate School, a college prep school in Little Rock, teaching everything from 6th grade creative drama to high school Shakespeare. He also directs and designs two plays per year, and stays busy as a professional actor, recently performing in the world premiere of *Disfarmer*, a play about the Depression-era portrait photographer Mike Disfarmer. James wrote a 15-minute play called *Surprise Visit* that a friend produced at Manhattan Rep's Winter Short Play Festival. Earlier this year, he had a small role in a regional bank commercial, wrote and acted in a project for the Little Rock 48-Hour Film Festival, and played a small role in the short film *Bridge Over the River Loire*.

VICTORIA REINSEL '10 spent the fall acting in a remount of the DC Fringe Festival hit *A Dream Within a Dream*, in classrooms, with Young Playwrights' Theater, and as a swing in Shakespeare Theatre Company's (STC) *Tiny Tempest* education tour. In addition to teaching for STC and Ford's Theatre, she has also been busy producing a repertory of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* for Brave Spirits Theatre, the company she co-founded with fellow alum Charlene V. Smith. You can catch Victoria onstage again in the spring when she'll play Alice Arden in Brave Spirits' production of *Arden of Feversham*.

DAVID SANTANGELO '11 has spent the past two years in a variety of professional theatre positions, including box office manager and occasional dramaturg for Phoenix Theatre of Indianapolis, where he served as co-assistant stage manager on a production of *August: Osage County*. He also worked as dramaturg with Indianapolis-based companies EclecticPond and NoExit Performance on *The Wars of the Roses* and *Macbeth*. David served as house manager for Hoosier Bard's productions of *The History of Cardenio*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Arden of Feversham*.



Steigerwalt



Bad Quarto's production of *Henry the Fifth*



Trombly family

In mid-October, David began a new job as assistant ticket services manager with Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota FL.

JENNA STEIGERWALT '06 completed her PhD in English literature in 2013 at Arizona State University with a dissertation titled, "Early Modern Playing Practices on Modern Stages." She is assistant professor of English at the University of Pikeville (UPike) in Kentucky, where she teaches British literature and Shakespeare, among other things, and is helping to create a theatre minor. She is directing students in *Pyramus & Thisbe* for the university's Humanities Festival and has tentative plans to bring UPike students to the Blackfriars in the spring.

TONY TAMBASCO '12 directed a production of *The Cronicle Historie of Henry the Fifth* with Bad Quarto Productions in NYC and *Julius*

Caesar with alumnus Jeremy Fiebig's company Sweet Tea Shakespeare in Fayetteville NC. He also worked as the production manager for Windwood Theatrical's 2014 national tour of *Sweet Charity*.

DANIEL AND AMANDA ALLEN TROMBLY '12 continue to present their Alphabet Shakespeare series in venues around Phoenix and will be premiering *C is for Clown* this summer, as well as acting and directing around the valley. Their favorite production, however, is their new son Desmond Daniel Trombly, born May 28, 2014.

ABOVE CENTER: "Well, weele breake that custome." King Henry (Elise C. Williams) and Princess Katherine (Rachel Drayke) kiss in Bad Quarto's production of *The Cronicle Historie of Henry the Fifth*. Directed by Tony Tambasco.