



Shakespeare On-The-Go: 4 Touring Shakespeare Plays For Young Audiences

Gillette Elvgren

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These dramas are designed to be performed for kids of all ages by adults or teen drama groups. They last approximately 45 to 50 minutes; can utilize a cast of various sizes depending on the doubling up schemes; but are ideal for no more than five, two females and three males or one female and four males depending on the show. When the number of characters in a Shakespearean drama usually totals more than fifteen how this can be realized? Primarily this is accomplished through the use of a FRAMING DEVICE, which means an imposed structural framework that justifies using the stage conventions inherent in the script. So, for example, in MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, a small struggling theatre company that is touring (i.e. think of Commedia dell Arte) wakes up to discover that a significant number of actors have abandoned their group to take roles in KING LEAR at a nearby city. They then have to discover creative ways of putting on the show using a greatly diminished acting company. This leads to the discovery and invention of a number of STAGE CONVENTIONS. Some of these include the use of a Narrator; puppets; rapid a-vista costume changes; elaborate doubling schemes; audience participation, and, as mentioned above, a play-within-the-play structural device which allows the audience to see the story of the actors revealed as well as the Shakespearean characters they are creating. SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE. The various adaptations do not shy away from using the Shakespearean texts as much as possible. The Bard's eloquence and natural instinct for dramatic flair are unequaled in the English language and to offer to the audiences, no matter what age, a watered down or totally rewritten version of the stories would be a violation of the purpose of doing these plays. And that purpose is to present an abridged version of Shakespeare's inspiring stories, introducing and challenging the audience to understand and appreciate the beauty and passion of his active and descriptive language within the context of an exciting and entertaining story. In this digitally inundated age today's youth, with their texting, face booking, and other short hand ways of communicating are literally developing abbreviated ways of writing/reading that have reduced the rich scope of the English language to a state of being almost incomprehensible to the modern reader. Metaphor and poetry are no longer explored or appreciated; vocabulary has been reduced to the use of flashcards trying to raise ones test scores, and the soaring power of language to excite emotion and to probe inner truth and humanistic meaning has been discarded as being digressive or precious. We are in a monosyllabic age that is crying out for richer means of expression through language. 1. Young audiences are not used to hearing the language of Shakespeare. Because of this, don't rush the opening of your show. It takes about ten minutes for an audience to begin to acculturate to the 'sound' of this rich language. 2. The adaptations are written to have a strong physical action base. It's too easy to reduce Shakespeare to a talking heads approach which will distance your audience from the story being presented. 3. The FRAMING DEVICE in all of the plays is structured around 'putting on a play', in which a compromised theatre group is desperately trying to figure out how to do one of Shakespeare's challenging epics with five actors. Actors can change costumes, wigs, hats, props in full view of the audience. Part of the fun of these shows can be found in the way the performers actually 'put on a show'. 4. These adaptations using a number of PROPS. Make them colorful, and large, and functional as well as symbolic. The plays also are PARTICIPATIONAL in nature. If playing to high school audiences the participation may be eliminated, leaving the frame story to appeal to adolescents.

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