

Theatre West Shakespeare Workshop

By Joe Nassi, Current Moderator

Shakespeare's contributions to the English language, theatre, modern culture, and literature are well known. Still, it can be forgotten that Shakespeare originally wrote to create fantastic theatre that would touch the hearts of his audience.

To meet the goal of inspiring the audience, an actor preparing for performance needs a reliable, specific theatrical process that will lead to a fuller understanding of the text and a deeper emotional connection to the material.

Then, an actor's modern craft and inspiration will easily sync with Shakespeare's language, stories, and characters to bring each performance to life.

Theatre West's Shakespeare Workshop is specifically structured for the actor/director to learn the skills to:

- Dive into the text to find the 'buried treasure' in the script – the clues and cues Shakespeare left to help actors build a character and communicate the story clearly.
- Speak the language with clarity, power, and understanding.
- Use the language to build unique, emotionally satisfying, relatable characters.
- Easily cold read Shakespeare well.
- Combine Shakespeare's script with their modern acting craft to create exciting performances that use each actor's individual personality.
- Make Shakespeare understandable and relatable.

We also discuss the historical context and current relevance of the plays.

Even for the actor who never intends to perform in a Shakespearian play, this work will be an exciting creative foundation to build full characters and tell compelling stories of the grandest size or the most detailed intimacy.

Shakespeare Workshop over the years.

By Nick Musleh, Moderator

The Shakespeare Workshop has been one of the artistic pillars of Theatre West since its founding. For roughly the last ten years, the workshop has provided an eclectic training ground for performers based in the synthesis of classical text analysis and modern acting techniques.

Rather than limit each artist's voice, the Theatre West Shakespeare Workshop encourages people to express themselves uniquely while giving them the tools needed to research and analyze the material for context, comprehension, and relevance.

Because of this, we have seen multiple artists discover Shakespeare, some for the first time, and others are re-introduced in a way that has made them more confident with the text and, more importantly, more confident in how *they connect* with the text.

When I began moderating the Shakespeare Workshop, my inclination was to make it almost entirely a Scansion workshop. It evolved into an Actor's workshop, where the actor's questions determine their development process.

Since then, we have had an overwhelming number of actors developing work, so much so that performances seemed almost necessary. Our first *Invitation to Shakespeare Workshop* performance featured a diverse group of actors, many Shakespeare veterans, and several first-timers, all presenting scenes and monologues they developed on their own with each others' help. Local audiences were invited to join two performances, one outdoors at a nearby park and one at the theater—both were free to the public.

Making Shakespeare work free and accessible is part of our mission at the Shakespeare Workshop. The material is already there for actors to use, and it is indeed the foundation of all modern storytelling. Theatre West makes this foundation accessible to its members through workshops, and it is our aim to provide it to the public.

Our workshop members have gotten Shakespeare work elsewhere because of their training in our workshop. Some have moved on to work for professional Shakespeare companies, shows Off-Broadway, and many still work in film and television. I myself have directed a film adaptation of *Love's Labour's Lost* and am now developing a Shakespeare series with a partner in London--we recently announced our cast in *Variety*.

Members at Theatre West have already begun producing small budget Shakespeare theatre projects, including at least two of them virtually during the pandemic, as well as deep-reading sessions of plays over several weeks or sometimes months.

We have seen first hand at Theatre West how Shakespeare practice in the modern world encourages artists to create new work and build connectivity in their community. Our company wants to go further and fully produce Shakespeare plays for the public to continue to provide this vital resource to actors and audiences.