

Becoming a Shakespearian Actor, by Peter Sevitt

To be or not to be. That was the question I asked myself.

I had often wondered what it would be like to be on the stage - marvelling at how actors learned their lines, interacted with each other, but more, in particular, the challenge of the Shakespearian language.

During the day I am a 67 year-old Chartered Accountant looking after my clients. In my spare time I am a theatre-goer and a sports fanatic.

I had played sport at a competitive level and looked for analogies with being a performer on stage.

What makes one individual or a team successful? What's the secret of success? Yes, having exceptional individual talent helps! But it's also the discipline, the repetition, the building of teamwork with encouragement and support. The team is paramount.

Was it these aspects of team work that were driving me to go onstage even with exposing myself to all those uncertainties and pressures. Did I have the courage?

And then an opportunity arose to act in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was excited, although scared of the expectation, the scrutiny and the consequences. What would it be like being the player again rather than a spectator?

In my dreams I was now Laurence Olivier and Richard Burton....

"A Midsummer Night's Dream celebrates that place where fantasy and reality meet."

"That's for me", I thought! Soon, an eager cast of 24 was assembled to populate the fantasy world of *The Dream*. We range in age from 15 to 75. None of the actors had performed Shakespeare before.

To prepare for the play, we met once a week for eight weeks in a Shakespeare performance class taught by Aaron & Julie. Training in voice, movement, character development and text analysis was empowering – it helped us to bring the text to life and feel less daunted by it.

To be directed by the future leading Canadian directors is so exciting, and for them to pass on their extraordinary knowledge to a group of amateur actors is priceless. They represent Canada's emerging multi-talented artists.

In Shakespeare's day, all the women's roles were played by men. If the audience didn't like the play they came armed with apples and pears.

Times have changed, but the challenges are still there. Will we remember our lines? Will we come in at the correct moment? Will we let our cast members down? Will we let the directors down?! Will we freeze?!!

Will the audience respond as Shakespeare asks in the final words of the play?

"So, good night unto you all.

Give us your hands, if we be friends

And [we] shall restore amends."

In our technological world, for a brief moment of time, we are living and breathing Shakespeare's 420 year-old poetry and language, on stage, as actors, for the first time in our lives. What a joy. What a privilege.