

SummerFest

If it's July, it's time to head to the Arboretum

By Kim Thomas

On Sunday, two weeks before the opening of the first show of this year's SummerFest at the Arboretum, photographer Tom Eisenhauer and I did our summer-heated best at three rehearsals to take photos without disturbing the artistic process, talk to some of the players, and catch a glimpse to share.

SummerFest President Joe Cannon Artz, anticipates a warm (pardon the expression) reception with this year's offerings of *Henry IV, Part I* (opens July 8) *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (July 15), and *Once On This Island* (July 22). SummerFesters will indeed enjoy a broad spectrum of entertainment, from the seriously funny Shakespearean drama of a king and his battles within his kingdom and his family; to the twisted humor and obvious fascination we all have with the Dr. Jekyll in us and our darker, Mr. Hyde side; then ultimately soothed with the music messages of acceptance and reconciliation found in the musical *Once On This Island*.

SummerFest, in its third year at the Arboretum keeps Shakespeare and outdoor theatre alive and well in Lexington. It represents a collaboration of civic, cultural, and educational leaders. In conjunction with the University of Kentucky, SummerFest extends opportunities for young artists to study in an intensive summer immersion program with a curriculum covering the full spectrum of theatre practice and study. Conservatory students to act alongside Lexington's stage veterans.

Artz is excited about the organization's future. "We are positioning ourselves to become a year-round producer of performance arts training and educational opportunities along with live theatre."

With veteran directors Margo Buchanan (*Once On This Island*) and Patty Heying (*Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*) at the helm of those two productions, Joe Ferrell's role as a Producing Director (in addition to directing *Henry IV, Part I*) for SummerFest is invaluable as he oversees each show and ensures the continuity of quality education and entertainment throughout the entire festival.

"A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too! marry, and amen! ... A plague of all cowards! — Give me a cup of sack, rogue!"

— Falstaff, *Henry IV, Part I*
by William Shakespeare

SummerFest: Henry IV, Part I

Gates open at 7pm Wednesday, July 8 and continue thru Sunday.

In a tough economy, it seems that we see more of the good and more of the bad in people. We can allow ourselves to be fooled for a while by people's behavior, but William Shakespeare provides insights that help us understand the people we are dealing with. Proof positive is SummerFest's first offering of *Henry IV, Part I*. Walter Tunis plays the role of Falstaff with comedic gusto and Henry IV is mischievously portrayed by Trent Fucci. Other area stage veterans include Eric Johnson (Henry IV) and Joe Gatton (Sir Walter Blount).

Gatton laughs at the challenges of outdoor theatre. "I

All photos by Tom Eisenhauer



Falstaff (played by Walter Tunis) tells the tale of fending off foes and his drinking buddies mock him. This set is the one that will be used for *Henry IV, Part I*, which will be the first of the Summerfest offerings, to open on July 8.

saw in the *New York Times* review of the *Twelfth Night* production with Anne Hathaway, etc., how they had to deal with bugs, planes, ambulances etc. I'm glad the big boys have the same issues!" He also recalls Shakespeare Festivals past, and how actors had to at times incorporate the natural 'additions' to the show. "Back in the good old days, at Woodland Park, we'd have a dog come up on stage once in awhile. Jeff Sherr (who is also in this show as Bardolph) and I were going to do some shtick with a Black Lab who came on stage and hung around during *Taming of the Shrew* once. That doesn't happen at the Arboretum."

Joe Ferrell directs Shakespeare's most popular play (in print as well as on stage), and when we visited rehearsal at the Arboretum on Sunday evening, he and the cast were busy rewriting a tavern scene (according to Ferrell "perhaps the longest scene Shakespeare ever wrote").

It is Falstaff's charisma that captivates the Prince, who is weary of the grave nature of royal hypocrisy. Therefore, at the center of the play are the young Prince Hal and his companions Falstaff, Poins, Bardolph, and Peto.

These quick-witted squanderers use the colors of comedy to paint over grim history, and it's a treat to watch Tunis in action as his Falstaff commands his group of scoundrels. Trent Fucci's playful Henry V teases and taunts Falstaff throughout the tavern scene, delights in the spiking of Falstaff's 'cup of sack' (sherry) and provokes the gentle mock battle against Falstaff with his fellow rascals.

Ferrell often would stop an actor to help them enhance

their role, asking them to laugh more, talk more, have another cup of sack at the ready for Falstaff's drunken tirade, use the confusion of the scene to promote the mood rather than try to make it neat and tidy.

He emphasizes, "We are setting the play in its true historical setting — I much prefer this, and to do so seems to me to provide an historical setting that matches the historical context and story that Shakespeare dramatizes, although, like

most good story tellers, he surely compresses time, includes only those characters who interest him and move the story along, and, yes, he even lies a little — the prime example here being the fact that Prince Hal did not kill Hotspur and thus become a hero at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403."

He adds, "I think that, in this the first year of a new U.S. President, one who is dealing with economic chaos, two war/conflict fronts, and is trying to push through major new legislation, *Henry IV* offers up a country which is also in some chaos. In 2009, therefore, we have a chance to examine with Shakespeare the characteristics of leadership — what is good and bad — what is needed to lead a country, AND with the very important comedic elements of the play (close to half) we also get Falstaff's everyman perspective on war, honor, country, etc. — much in the same way I suppose we could say that Jon Stewart, Bill Maher, etc. entertain us in a political nature."

"I incline to Cain's heresy," he used to say quaintly: 'I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.'"

— Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Chapter 1,
by Robert Louis Stevenson

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde begins Wednesday, July 15 at the Arboretum and continues thru that Sunday. Gates open at 7pm.

Jeffrey Hatcher adapted Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 best-selling novella to include not just one Mr. Hyde, but four

... and part of that intrigue is that one of the four Hydes is a female. Patty Heying directs the cast of characters played by Bob Singleton (Jekyll) and Adam Luckey (Lanyon and Hyde 3) as well as Susan Wigglesworth, who steals the show in her myriad roles and comedic take on various moments in the play, to the point of momentarily taking Singleton and Luckey out of character and causing them to break out in laughter during rehearsal. With the mid-day sun beating down on them, it was not surprising to see the players take measures to protect themselves from heat exhaustion. Kim Dixon (Elizabeth) collapsed on a nearby blanket, covering her head as soon as her character exited, but cheerfully gathered up her energy to scramble back onstage for her scenes. Heying, who works for the Department of Public Advocacy in Frankfort, kept the energy level up though her involvement doesn't end with the direction of *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, though, as later in the day she appeared at the *Once On This Island* rehearsal, sporting a fine pink sunburn, ready to meet with Haitian dialect coaches to assist the cast of the Caribbean musical.

Bob Singleton is also no stranger to Lexington's theatre goers. He explains that he has no difficulty adjusting to the four actors playing the four different Mr. Hydes. "It's not very tricky, in that all the actors are playing the same character. Of



Elizabeth (Kim Dixon) finds Dr. Jekyll (Bob Singleton) in a devastated condition. Shows begin July 15.

course, they are each putting their own stamp on their 'version' of Hyde, and they are emphasizing different elements of Hyde (i.e., although all are sinister, one is more playful, one is more sensual, etc.), but I haven't really noticed a different type of challenge to working in this manner. I think it helps to be working with talented people who are relishing the opportunity to play such a character ... they give me a lot to play off of and hopefully that works both ways. And maybe that's the trick, if there is one ... to not think of it as one Hyde, but to

work with, use, and respond to what each individual actor brings to the different scenes and scenarios."

This is Singleton's first SummerFest appearance however he did perform in the AGL/Equus Run production of *Love's Labour's Lost* in 2007.

Singleton admits the character of Jekyll is similar to some other roles he has played that either have a double-identity, or at least a certain duality to the character. "Many well-written characters are drawn so well that there is a certain amount of dissonance to their personality traits ... if not two-sided, certainly complicated and conflicting aspects. In this case, the battle between the 'good' side and the 'evil' side is certainly played out much more overtly, more literally I guess you could say. But it is also separate from most other roles I've performed in that Jekyll's 'internal' battle is actually externalized, and that it plays out against and with another actor (or actors, in this case)."

This show's a chance to watch the dark side from the outside in.

This is a chance to watch it from the outside-in.

You've never been away from the sea, child; You're gonna need a helping hand; A fish has got to learn to swim on land! from "Mama Will Provide"

— from *Once On This Island*, words by Lynn Ahrens and music by Stephen Flaherty

Once On This Island

Performances begin at 8:45pm, Wednesday, July 22 and continue thru Sunday, July 25. (Gates open at 7pm.)

UK Opera great Alicia McCorvey, show-stopper Peggy Stamps, triple threat Taylor Eldred and charming vocalist Manuel Castillo are all familiar names on area stages. Their voices and talents are pooled along many others in Director Margo Buchanan's superbly selected ensemble to bring the musical *Once On This Island*, a Caribbean tale of human passages, which will wrap up this year's Fest. Buchanan has an ease with such performers, has a fine voice herself, and was organizing the performers in the rehearsal hall into a human pyramid, a life-filled tree that supports and saves the title character from a terrible storm.

The story begins, appropriately, on a stormy night. The thunder rumbles and roars, making a small girl cry in fear. To comfort her, four storytellers tell her the story of Ti Moune, a peasant girl who falls in love with a grand homme, Daniel Beauxhomme. This is a story of life, pain, love, grief, and faith.

As Armand, Manuel Castillo portrays the character of the *Tale of the Beauxhomme*, a high class Frenchman living (perhaps governing) in Haiti.

Recently seen in UK Opera's ambitious production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Castillo has only performed once before in an outdoor venue, in the highlights of *West Side Story*, but realizes the outdoor arena is a test of ability. "It was fun, but the challenges of an open space are bigger since the performers have to catch-and-keep the audience's attention from 'going out the window' ... well ... you get the idea, there are no boundaries that can separate the illusion as opposed to the Opera House, where you have a curtain to make change of stage and stuff.. In this open space, many times the changes happen at the sight of the audience. That means that any movement done on the stage needs to as accurate as possible to carry-on the story without losing its meaning."

However, Castillo finds comfort in the fact that he has



Once on This Island rehearsal (shows begin July 22)

worked with Tai-Kristin (Ti-moune, a peasant girl who tries to break the social barrier), Luther Lewis (Agwe, God of Water) and Taylor Eldred (Andrea, Madame Armand) before. "They all are wonderful performers ... we were part of the last UKOT production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in the spring. The entire cast of *Once On This Island* is wonderful and full of energy. It is a great mix of singers, actors and dancers, we all put our best effort and complement each other as best as we can, which results in a wonderful environment to work with and to create a better play."

The message, according to Castillo, "is a simple one, that becomes complicated...it is about love, loving our differences, accepting them and make things work for the best. It is, in a way, a sad story since Ti-moune dies, but I am certain the show will leave the audience a good taste of human interaction: which values we think they are good, but in fact, are not ... and vice versa."

Arzt acknowledges, "It has been an interesting year for Lexington's arts community. To say that times are tough would be an understatement. It is difficult to run an arts organization even in the best of times. The long and winding road to financial sustainability is often difficult to navigate, but how do you produce a three-show, outdoor theatre festival when everyone is dealing with one of the most terrifying financial times in recent memory? I'll tell you what we did. We turned to our friends and neighbors. They say that your friends will stick with you no matter what. I now say the same thing with enthusiasm, vigor, and gratitude. SummerFest 2009 has been funded because of our Board's personal friendships with the best kind of people. Over 18,000 people come out to enjoy SummerFest each year." He asks, "Certainly there are some new friends to be made?"

General admission tickets and reserved seating are available at the gate. Phone Reservations at 859.608.3805. General admission: \$10 adults, \$5 children (aged 12 and under). Reserved seating: \$12 chair, \$49 blanket area for four.