

Celebrating  
'cathedrals'  
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# THE Friday EDITION

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Arts and Entertainment

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## Research, intuition blended in 'Winter's Tale'

A 7 p.m. curtain call is scheduled. Some actors scurry across the stage setting up needed props while a lone actor addresses his lines to the sky outside Villard Hall. Others sprawl haphazardly across the theatre floor, patiently awaiting their cues.

Suddenly, the lights dim. Positions are taken, and a run-through of "The Winter's Tale," the final production of University Theatre's 1985-86 season, begins. After an intense Thursday night rehearsal, exhausted cast members gather round to hear Director Robert Barton's critique of their performance.

The wait is not long and the critique, although severe, is delivered in a light vein.

"Forget it," Barton warns the 18-member cast. "You're not getting a single compliment out of me tonight."

"But we need strokes," a voice quips, drawing tired chuckles from the exhausted actors.

"Bob is a good director," says Scot Crisp, who plays Clown in "The Winter's Tale." "Even when he gives critiques, he does it on a positive note. And when giving harsh criticism, there's a wit that takes away any emotional reaction to it. So it's constructive."

As director, Barton has the ability to "visualize what he sees in his mind's eye" and turn it into a reality, Crisp adds.

It's a director's obligation to expose a variety of plays to people, says Barton, who is also the performance program coordinator and an associate professor in theatre arts and speech.

"To make a play understandable to the audience is very challenging to a director," says Barton.

Audience comprehension is a key factor in Barton's production of "The Winter's Tale." Extensive research and technical preparations for the production began last year as an "automatic" process.

"If you're directing a play that you love, the research is almost automatic," says Barton. "It's fun to read about it (the play). You read everything that you can get your hands on — production histories and all sorts of criticisms and background."

Scholastic research or "library work" only serves to lay the foundation that enables the creative juices to flow.

"What you have to do is to read as much as possible," says Barton. "Then let yourself absorb it and let it intuitively filter into the work."

Then, the original Shakespearean text of "Winter's Tale" was cut and shaped into an understandable, and much shorter, acting version. Meetings with set and costume designers were held in May, but auditions for cast members did not take place until February.

"It's a gradual process," Barton says. "As director, I try to pull the play forward in time and the audience backward so they meet."

"Winter's Tale" is one of Shakespeare's most obscure plays but one of his most beautiful, adds Barton. "It's got everything. It's very comical, and it's very moving."

Besides, "You have the chance in your lifetime to see many productions of Romeo and Juliet," Barton adds. "But I think that Shakespeare is a great enough writer that his other works deserve to be shared with the public."

"It seems to me that the total education of the students at the University," says Barton "is that (they) get exposed to philosophy and ideas that are unknown to (them) when (they) first come here."

Exposure to "every major dramatic period and a full spectrum of plays" is an obligation the University has to its students, Barton says.

"We have the reputation of classical theater," Barton adds. "This is where people come to see Chekhov, Shaw and Moliere. And that's a very good identity for a university theatre."

Yet, despite the complications and the intricacies involved in directing a play written by Shakespeare, one never becomes tired of them. New wisdom and insights into the human experience can always be found.

"There's always something undiscovered," says Barton. "You can play a Shakespearean role three or four times and still begin to find more in it."

"Shakespeare is the Olympics of acting," Barton adds. "A lot of people can play themselves in a simple, contemporary piece of work, but the real performers of



(from left) Cast members Kim Anderson (Queen Hermione), Max Martin (Prince Mamillius), Jedda Schmitz (Time, Ruler of all Mortals) and Mikel Mac-

Donald (King Leontes) rehearse a scene from University Theatre's production of Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale."

enormous power and force are those that can handle Shakespeare."

These plays are "magical" and are the "fairy tales for grownups," Barton says. "They take place in extraordinary, fantastical worlds, full of splendor and grandeur. And it's certainly true of a play like "Winter's Tale."

Although problems seem to occur every night, the search for the right music was the "real challenge."

"It (music) needed to be vaguely Eastern," says Barton. "It needed to have a flavor to it that was both exotic and still very accessible to the audience."

But, "All Shakespeare are monumental challenges that brings its own challenges," Barton adds.

"Winter's Tale," according to Barton, "is a wonderful play trapped inside some difficult language."

Much of the text work in "The Winter's Tale" was done prior to the actual rehearsals in an attempt to "free" the beauty of the play without altering its essential language.

The actor's time commitment to the show is tremendous. Rehearsals are four hours long and are held five nights a week.

Actors receive the chance to become very "loose and very playful" with their characters.

"They (actors) have the chance to inhabit the character without being inhibited by the verse," says Barton. "It's essential that the actor feel an absolute kinship with Shakespeare."

"The key goal when doing Shakespeare," says Mikel MacDonald, who plays Leontes, "is making him accessible to the audience. The real key is to understand what is being said, to manipulate the vowels and to make every consonant a weapon."

As an additional challenge to the cast of "Winter's Tale," members portray four or five different characters during the show, which is similar to the productions in Shakespeare's time.

Playing several small character roles helps every single person feel vital to the play, Barton says.

"If you're playing four small parts and one big part, they all come out to a massive contribution to the play," says Barton.

Believing in one's character lends "credulity" to the production and helps cast members create a world that the audience can believe in.

"The main thing is to win the audience by being the character," says Barbara Pitts (Perdita). "You have to really give in to the fantasy. If you're true to your character, then the audience will remember you."

"You want to create a world that the audience is compelled by," Barton says. "You try to find the basic humanity in every one of those characters so that the audience forgets that the play is 400 years old, that the language is complex, and they appreciate it just as they would any great story."

"It's sort of like a journey that you try to get the audience to go on," Barton adds.

The appeal to the play lies in its story line, its magic and its mystery.

"People love watching kings and queens, princes and princesses," says Barton. "It's a very rewarding play to watch because you get a whole range of humanity."

"Everyone is going to get something out of it," says Zaxaro Kokkoris (Mopsa). "There isn't any line in the play that doesn't have any meaning behind it. The actors may have only one line but it's significant and it gives them significance to be on stage."

Also, Shakespeare often generates an ability in actors to discover a "universality" in themselves that enables them to play characters that are often "one step down from the angels," says Barton.

"There's a king somewhere in everybody," says Wade Johnson, who plays Polixenes. "When I go on stage, I give myself license to be above people. And I enjoy being the King."

"The Winter's Tale" will be performed tonight and Saturday night, May 19-31 and June 6-7 at the University's Robinson Theatre. Curtain time is 8 p.m. All seats are reserved and tickets are \$5.50 for the general public and \$3.50 for University students.

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