



The Bard Comes to the 'Burg

The Shakespeare Festival Gets Direction from Christopher Owens

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

“Storytelling,” Christopher Owens states, “that’s basically what I think directing is.”

Christopher is the Producing Artistic Director of the Virginia Shakespeare Festival. The festival takes place each summer at the College of William and Mary’s Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall.

“Probably with Shakespeare, more so than contemporary plays, you have to employ ev-

Squires
EVERYDAY CAFE

Wine • Beer • Bar • Bistro • Music

Great Selection of Wines • Domestic Microbrews
Imported Beer • Great Food! • Live Music!

Live Music Every Thursday & Friday!

Menu & Schedules at www.squiresgourmet.com

GREAT MUSIC, FOOD & FUN!

Call to Place Your Order or Stop On By!
757-229-6939

Mooretown Road Across from Sentara



VIRGINIA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL 2010

AS YOU LIKE IT
A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Tickets: 221-2674 or www.wm.edu/vsf

everything you can to make the story clear," he explains. "Not everyone is going to get the meaning of every word even when eloquently spoken by professional actors. A tremendous amount of that story is in the physicality and body language of those characters, what they're doing to each other, how they're manipulating each other, and what they really feel when they speak those words."

Christopher's approach to directing has made the festival a favorite among Williamsburg area residents and visitors. The plays use sets that 'wow' the audience. The first year he directed, he changed the set.

"It was an Elizabethan set, not quite a reproduction of The Globe," he explains. "I wanted to create a set that pulled the audience into the production." His goal was to create a stronger visual production to complement the actors and the plot. "It was great to see audiences come into the theater and just gasp."

Several years ago, *Macbeth* headlined the season. "It was all about the witches," Christopher explains. "Their costumes were such that when they put the hoods over themselves, they virtually blended into the set and disappeared, then sort of came out of it, but you knew they were always there. That's always a big decision for a director of *Macbeth* - are the witches really doing this, or not, to Macbeth? My choice was they are."

For Shakespeare's comedies, Christopher likes to set them in other time periods, illustrating the universal, timeless themes.

"Last year," he says, "we set *Much Ado About Nothing* just at the cusp of World War I. For the entrance of the main men into the show, we built a full-sized Sopwith Camel. We had to have its wings folded up to get through some places, but it came in as if it had just landed and taxied onto the stage. For that company and that setting, it added a connection and incredible drama. Audiences went 'Wow!' I want audiences to go 'Wow!' sometimes."

Christopher received top-of-the-line training in the arts at the Juilliard School in New York. "At the time I went there," he says, "John Houseman was the head of the drama program." Along with the Academy Award winning professor, Christopher had a few soon-to-be famous classmates. "I went to college with Robin Williams, William Hurt, Kelsey Grammer and Christopher Reeve. We all did shows together and had a great time."

He attended graduate school at Southern Methodist University in Dallas where he received his Masters Degree in Directing. Upon graduation, he was hired by one of the larger regional theaters in Dallas where he worked for several years. "Later," he says, "I went on to head my own theater company. I moved from there to work at the Wayside Theater in the Winchester, VA area. Then I started teaching about eight years ago."

At the Juilliard School, Christopher had been studying acting, but he switched his focus to directing at the urging of John Houseman.

"If you remember John Houseman from *The Paper Chase*, that wasn't a character, that was him," Christopher says with a laugh. "At the end of my second year at Juilliard, I was having my annual conference with Mr. Houseman. He had just won the Oscar the year before for *The Paper Chase*. He had watched some of the things I'd done. I had gone to Juilliard as an actor, so he looked at me and said, 'Mr. Owens, I think you have a wider vision than some people. You should consider directing,'" Christopher says as he gives a perfect impression of John Houseman's slow, rhythmic voice. "He let me gather a few classmates and direct them in one-act plays."

How will your financial decisions affect your future?

We can help.



- RETIREMENT INCOME PLANNING • LIFE INSURANCE
- 401 (K) ROLLOVERS & IRAs • INVESTMENT STRATEGIES



Call Ted Coopriider or Jason Coopriider for a **COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION**

757-206-1627

www.coopriiderfinancial.com • 1769-122 Jamestown Rd.

Jason L. Coopriider is a registered representative of and offers securities, investment advisory and financial planning services and Ted A. Coopriider is a registered representative of and offers securities through MML Investors Services, Inc., Member SIPC. Supervisory Office: 222 Central Park Avenue, Suite 1100, Virginia Beach, VA 23462 (757) 490-9041. Insurance Representatives of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company and other fine companies. CRN201205-133915.

Retail Roundtable

Sharing Successful Strategies

Join Retail Alliance to discuss
THE FUNDAMENTALS OF NETWORKING

Wednesday, July 28 at 8:30 a.m.

AND
AIMING FOR THE IDEAL TARGET MARKET

Wednesday, August 25 at 8:30 a.m.

Heritage Commons

236 Commons Way, Williamsburg, VA 23185

(Roundtables are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month)



FREE



Visit www.Retail-Alliance.com to learn more!

Not All Realtors Are Alike

...and neither is the information we provide you.



Visit my newly updated website to learn about the market, read my Blog and view current listings!



Deelyn Neilson, A.S.P., REALTOR®
Liz Moore and Associates • 5350 Discovery Park Blvd.
757.503.1999

www.PremierWilliamsburgRealEstate.com

kitchentune-up®

Beautiful Kitchens for EVERY Family
IN 1-5 DAYS!

PACKAGES
START AT \$299*

REFRESHED IN 1 DAY
RESTORE or RE-DOOR IN 2 DAYS
RE-FACE or REPLACE IN 3-5 DAYS

Including New Countertops!

*not all cabinets qualify



Call for Details!
757.221.0999

Mark Levy
Each Franchise Locally Owned & Operated
mlevy@kitchentuneup.com

With Houseman's encouragement, Christopher began making the transition from actor to director. After finishing his studies at the Juilliard School, he lived in Seattle for a few years, staging plays in smaller theaters.

"I realized I didn't know completely what I was doing," he says. "I needed to go to graduate school and figure it out a little bit more. Dallas ended up being a great place for me with the job right out of school and the contacts I made there. I'm really one of those few incredibly lucky people in the theater in that I've never really done anything else. I know a tremendous number of people in the theater that have to hold down 'civilian jobs,' as we call them. My continuous theater work has been wonderful."

His opportunity to teach and work in theater was an attractive and compelling reason for Christopher to move to Williamsburg. One of the main reasons Christopher decided to teach at William and Mary was the Shakespeare Festival. "I had not been teaching all that long," he says. "Most of my career, twenty years of it, I spent running professional regional theaters. This combination of teaching and running the festival sounded like a lot of fun. It's a lot of work too."

Collaboration with the actors, musicians, set designers and builders, costume designers, stage crew and all the other people required to put on a professional production are contributors to Christopher's strategy of entertaining

the audience.

"One of my favorite quotes about directing," he says, "comes from Elia Kazan, director of *On the Waterfront* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* and all those wonderful movies he did. Somebody asked him 'What is directing?' and he said 'Directing finally consists of turning Psychology into Behavior.' An audience only knows what it sees. We believe what someone

"I'm really one of those few incredibly lucky people in the theater in that I've never really done anything else. . . My continuous theater work has been wonderful."

- Christopher Owens

does far more than what they say. Or as the phrase goes: Actions speak louder than words. As a director, you're trying to find those actions, that behavior. That's the wonderful challenge of the director's storytelling. The audience is seeing and believing everything they should, not just what they hear."

The entire visual presentation from sets and costumes to lighting and movement build on the actors' words. As director, Christopher ensures the production tells the story in an understandable and entertaining package.

For the festival, Christopher likes to have

one or two of Shakespeare's plays coupled with a contemporary play. This year, the festival starts with Shakespeare's *As You Like It* on July 7.

"We're taking a comedy into a slightly more modern setting," Christopher explains. "The *As You Like It* production is set in the early 1930s. That early Depression era where you have an upper class still trying to hold on to what they have, and the newly-hobo class wonder how they fell so far, so fast. We have some wonderful music, very Cole Porter-ish."

The second play in the season is Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* starting July 22. "It isn't Shakespeare," Christopher says, "but its subject matter of King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More, and Anne Boleyn is a perfect fit for a Shakespeare Festival with its 16th century setting. Henry VIII is always popular. The play

is really about the guy who is saying 'no' to the King. It's dramatic, [and] relevant. A crisis of one man's conscience that cannot bend. Is he stubborn or just incredibly principled?"

Christopher hopes that he and his troupe can tell the story so that you can decide for yourself. NDN

This year the Virginia Shakespeare Festival celebrates its 32nd annual season. To find out more about The Virginia Shakespeare Festival visit: www.wm.edu/as/vsf

"The quality of our entertainment is only surpassed by our food!" - Randall



Enjoy Dinner, Music & Friends!
A Classic American Grill


- Daily Chef & Tapas Specials
- New wine list featuring over 75 bottled wines
- "Critics Choice & Critics Pick" Best Casual Dining Restaurant - Tidewater Restaurant Review




757-259-0406
Corner of Longhill & Olde Towne Rd.
www.jmrandalls.com

"You'll be ready to dance no matter what music is playing."
Waltz • Rumba • Foxtrot • Swing • Cha Cha • Tango • Salsa and more!

- Steve Kirvan, Owner & Instructor
- 17 years teaching ballroom dancing
- Competed professionally for 7 years
- Teaches all levels of dance from novice to expert



It's great exercise!



(757) 903-4867
312 Lightfoot Rd., Unit E • www.7citiesballroom.com

Introductory Special \$99 Group Classes & Private Lessons For Adults & Children
Three 50 Minute Private Lessons

Friday Night Parties • Competition & Social Dancing • Wedding Packages