

The British are Coming! Shakespearean classic comes to life on Hauck Stage

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Places!

The lights dim and Beatles music starts playing through the speakers. The actors stand at attention, ready to take their spots and begin reciting their lines to a near-empty Hauck Auditorium. There are only a few people out in the audience: technical crew, a couple of photographers and guest director Dawn McAndrews.

McAndrews is the producing artistic director at the Theater at Monmouth in Monmouth, Maine. This is her first play in collaboration with the University of Maine School of Performing Arts. And it is no surprise that it's of Shakespeare's craft — the Theater at Monmouth is the Shakespearean Theater of Maine. This year, the school is performing the bard's "Love's Labour's Lost," a classic tale of love and mistaken identity, and tonight is a crucial dress rehearsal.

For students in the School of Performing Arts, having a director with experience such as McAndrews is an excellent opportunity to get a taste of the theater world outside of the University.

"Theater is a tapestry of theater artists who all contribute in their own unique ways to create novel productions," Daniel Bilodeau, chair and assistant professor of theatre at UMaine, said.

"I think it is very important for us to expose our students to not only guest directors, but guest designers and guest choreographers as well," Bilodeau said. "I've been working as a designer at the Theater at Monmouth...for a number of years, and thought it would be a good idea to bring in Dawn ... to direct the show."

Looking at the production, one immediately conjures to mind the word "groovy": Actors clad in bellbottoms and wide-stripe suits in bright colors; actresses in linen headscarves with bold sunglasses and boots galore. Talk about a walk down Abbey Road.

For Bilodeau, who is also the scenic designer for "Love's Labour's Lost," the decision to let the British invade the Hauck stage came easily.

“Shakespeare wrote plays about the human condition. Because of that, his plays can be viewed through a lens of almost any time period,” Bilodeau said. “We settled on late 1960's London... because of the the great music that came from over there in that era.”

Some of that music can be heard throughout the production. The play features original music from UMaine student Ben McNaboe, which is used in the reading of love letters.

In many ways, this is a unique show for the University and a unique opportunity for its student actors and technical crew. Being the first Shakespeare production in many years, Bilodeau wanted to recreate Shakespeare's famous Globe Theatre in London.

“I tried to indicate, without creating an exact replica, the same balcony structure as the Globe Theatre,” he said. “Everything from the scenic design to the performance style flows from the language of Shakespeare.”

Perhaps even more unique is the context of collaboration between the University and the Theater at Monmouth. Bilodeau said that this collaboration is just one of hopefully many to come. He and McAndrews have more in mind for the future and would like the School of Performing Arts to be a recruiting ground for the Theatre at Monmouth, Bilodeau said.

“Love's Labour's Lost” runs through Feb. 21 in Hauck Auditorium. For more information, contact music@maine.edu or call 207-581-4703.