Oregon Shakespeare Festival

prologue

magazine for members fall 2015

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INTRODUCING THE 2016 SEASON

2016 Season

Angus Bowmer Theatre
Twelfth Night
William Shakespeare
Directed by Christopher Liam Moore

Great Expectations
World Premiere Adaptation
Adapted by Penny Metropulos and Linda Alper
Based on the novel by Charles Dickens
Directed by Penny Metropulos

The River Bride
World Premiere
Marisela Treviño Orta
Directed by Laurie Woolery

Roe
World Premiere, American Revolutions
Lisa Loomer
Directed by Bill Rauch

Timon of Athens
William Shakespeare
Directed by Amanda Dehnert

Thomas Theatre
The Yeomen of the Guard
World Premiere Adaptation
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Libretto by W. S. Gilbert
Adapted by Sean Graney, Andra Velis Simon and Matt Kahler
Directed by Sean Graney

Vietgone
Qui Nguyen
Directed by May Adrales

Richard II
William Shakespeare
Directed by Bill Rauch

Allen Elizabethan Theatre
Hamlet
William Shakespeare
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The Wiz
Book by William F. Brown
Music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls
From the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum
Directed by Robert O'Hara

The Winter's Tale
William Shakespeare
Directed by Desdemona Chiang

2016 opening weekend:
February 26–28

Cover: Ashley D. Kelley will play Dorothy in *The Wiz*.
Photo by Jenney graham

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Mission Statement

Inspired by Shakespeare's work and the cultural richness of the United States, we reveal our collective humanity through illuminating interpretations of new and classic plays, deepened by the kaleidoscope of rotating repertory.

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From the Artistic Associate
Dawn Monique Williams

When I Think of Home

Living here in this brand-new world might be a fantasy. But it's taught me to love, so it's real to me." This lyric from "Home," the final musical number in *The Wiz*, is an expression of my journey to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. At six years old, I was seeing a live musical for the first time—*The Wiz,* which inspired me to pursue a life in theatre. Now all these many years later, I can say it's true that theatre has taught me to love, and I am proud to call Ashland and OSF home.

As I reflect on our 2016 season, it strikes me that these characters in these plays have all embarked on some journey: varied, dark and fantastic; in search of home, identity, legacy; in search of love. What a privilege to share these 11 stories with you that they may provide laughter, comfort, warmth, challenge, compassion and understanding (all the things we dream make a home).

From the bittersweet twists confronting our lovers—a shipwrecked Viola (*Twelfth Night*), the steadfast Helena (*The River Bride*) and a loyal Jan Point (*The Yeomen of the Guard*)—or the maturation we witness as our young heroes Pip (*Great Expectations*) and Dorothy (*The Wiz*) come of age, there is romance and loss, and a chance for each to get lost and find their way again.

While our Shakespearean men, Hamlet (*Hamlet*), King Richard (*Richard II*), Leontes (*The Winter's Tale*) and Timon (*Timon of Athens*) wrestle with rage and despair, they also come to see themselves and their missteps more clearly.

There are tender and humorous biographical snapshots as a playwright (*Vietgone*) crafts a version of his family's immigration to the United States and recounts his parents' love story. Similarly, we get just a glimpse of Norma McCorvey (*Roe*), a fascinating account of the real "Jane Roe" from inside her messy and complex life.

This eclectic mix of new and old, world premieres and treasured classics, does sing something of home. Welcome, and allow us to offer you the embrace of a heart-full, heartbreaking and heartwarming season.

Artistic Associate Dawn Monique Williams was the 2013 Phil Killian Directing Fellow, associate director of Pericles *and* Antony and Cleopatra *(2015) and assistant director for* The Unfortunates *and* Cymbeline *(2013).*

Planning & Passion

Choosing just the right mix for OSF's five-Shakespeare season

Richard II (2003): Richard II (David Kelly). *Hamlet* (2010): Hamlet (Dan Donohue)

By Judith Rosen

In 2014, soon after OSF announced it would produce all of Shakespeare's plays in 10 years, members of the artistic staff shut themselves in a room, covered the walls with butcher paper and started constructing a flow chart.

In past years, "passion pitches" had strongly influenced which Shakespeare plays were offered each season: a director's yearning to reframe a familiar work, or an actor's take on a challenging part. As a result, popular plays like *Twelfth Night* or *Romeo and Juliet* could crop up every four or five years while other, knottier works like *Timon of Athens* or *Coriolanus* might languish for more than a decade. Now, with a tight deadline to meet, the company would need a finer balance between strategic planning and artistic desire.

The chart was not meant to set 10 years in stone. Instead, it helped identify both the problems and the opportunities the company faced. For example, they would be launching the new canon project without having fully completed the old one; *Timon of Athens* was still waiting to be checked off, having been hanging about without a production since 1997. How could the Shakespeare Festival apportion its resources so that each year felt urgent and exciting, so that plays in the cycle's final seasons didn't look like leftovers on a plate?

Timon went up on the wall for consideration in 2016. So did *Richard II*. As Resident Dramaturg Lydia G. Garcia noted in a July phone interview, beginning a new canon cycle gave the company a chance to push the "reset" button on Shakespeare's history plays. Producing *Richard II* would allow OSF to present eight of the histories in chronological order instead of by composition date, giving each successive production new narrative momentum. An open slot in the Allen Elizabethan Theatre offered another opportunity to shift perspective. *Hamlet* had last appeared in 2010 in the Bowmer in a production that focused on the intimate intricacies of family life. Setting the play outdoors would enable a treatment that viewed the work through a wider, more spectacular lens, one that could bring generational tensions more fully into play.

Pragmatism helped a fourth work, *Twelfth Night*, claim a possible slot; the season would need a strong Shakespearean comedy. But a director's clear, compelling vision helped as well. Christopher Liam Moore proposed setting the work in 1930s Hollywood, an approach that would add an intriguingly different tone and texture to the season's mix.

When OSF's Boarshead committee—a multidepartmental group that reads and proposes play possibilities two seasons in advance—met to make final recommendations to Artistic Director Bill Rauch, all four plays made their list. But further dialogue with various OSF stakeholders revealed that something crucial was missing. In past seasons, culturally specific settings of Shakespeare's plays had given the works a contextual richness as well as insight into particularly American experiences. For example, the 2012 *Romeo and Juliet* highlighted tensions between Anglos and Mexican-Californios; in 2014, *The Comedy of Errors* was set in the Harlem Renaissance. Yet OSF had never produced a Shakespeare play staged through an Asian-American lens. Unfortunately, none of the four plays under consideration seemed to offer an organic way in. So the selection process paused as Bill Rauch talked to Asian-American company and community members, asking which plays in the canon spoke to them most. *The Winter's Tale* emerged as a favorite, with respondents calling its treatment of a daughter's devaluation and eventual reclamation especially resonant. Setting the work in both dynastic China and the American Wild West would allow a particularly fruitful cross-cultural conversation. And so, late in the process, a fifth play joined the list.

Prophetic selections

While Boarshead sometimes discusses the topicality of plays under consideration, it's often only later that members see how prescient their choices were. For example, says Garcia, knowing that 2016 would be an election year played almost no role in the selection process. Yet questions that will be preoccupying American voters about the nature of power, economic inequality, women's roles and social change inform each one of the 2016 works.

In past seasons, culturally specific settings of Shakespeare's plays had given the works a contextual richness as well as insight into particularly American experiences.

Certainly the question of what a nation needs in its leader is central to *Richard II*. As England's monarch, Richard II should be the embodiment of continuity and stability. He rules by divine right, as the Lord's anointed as well as by hereditary right, the crown having descended to him in an unbroken line from William the Conqueror. But while he is a formidable symbol, Richard is a weak ruler and a worse politician. Secure in his sense of entitlement, Richard sees no need for accountability—or allies. He levies "grievous taxes" to finance his personal extravagance, losing popular support. His suspected involvement in the murder of his uncle unsettles his powerful kin. His violation of their property rights, the basis of their social status, pushes them over the brink into rebellion.

Does a more capable rival have a right to take the throne because he can, especially if he will rule more effectively? What part does morality play in good governance and what compromises are permissible, even critical, to secure allegiance and obedience? Shakespeare examines such questions with a typical mixture of shrewd appraisal and unease. As Richard loses power, and his challenger for the crown, Henry Bolingbroke, gains it, the play engineers a notable shift of sympathy. As in *King Lear,* deprivation gives the deposed king new awareness of the basic humanity that connects him with others: "I live with bread, like you; feel want, / Taste grief, need friends." Imprisonment will deepen his emotional and spiritual growth. However, this personal growth, like Lear's and Prospero's in *The Tempest*, comes at a cost; he must give up his responsibilities as a ruler.

And Bolingbroke? His strengths as a leader contrast pointedly with Richard's failings, but his own deficiencies come under scrutiny as well. He stepped in where Richard had checked out, and his actions save the state. Whether his rule will bring lasting improvement is left in question; the civil wars Bolingbroke began are far from over. Furthermore, his takeover seems to bring repetition instead of renewal, a pattern currently plaguing the Middle East, where one regime replaces another to little apparent effect. "They love not poison that do poison need," Bolingbroke admits on learning that he is indirectly responsible for Richard's death. Richard's coffin occupies the stage in the play's final moments, invoking the situation with which the work began, a king with blood on his hands.

DAVID COOPER

The Winter's Tale (2006): King Leontes (William Langan) and Hermione (Miriam A. Laube)

Family business

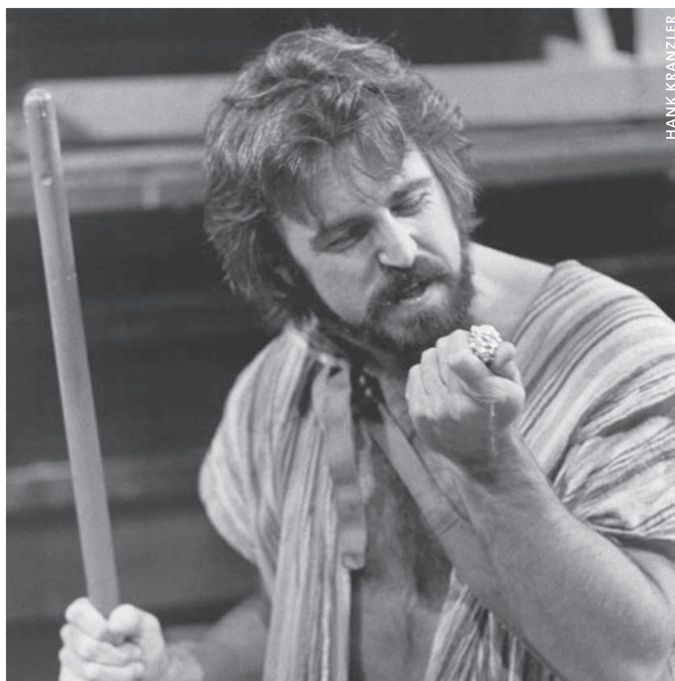
Richard II is temperamentally unfit for the role he has inherited. So, too, is Hamlet. In *Hamlet,* Shakespeare ups the ante by making the obligation overtly filial as well as political. Richard's father died when he was a child and is barely mentioned in the play. Hamlet's father gave him his name and loomed over his youth and adolescence; young Hamlet describes him as a kind of god, a "Titan" and a "Mars." The man loads his all-too-mortal son with heavy expectations, even after death.

For Hamlet the son is not quite his father's child. The older Hamlet, as the epithets suggest, was a model of heroic, martial masculinity; notably, he appears on Elsinore's battlements armed to the teeth, dressed just as he was when he killed old Fortinbras in single combat. Young Hamlet, by contrast, is a student and a thinker, not a fighter. His first offensive move is to put on a play.

But Hamlet's father demands revenge, not revelation. In doing so he insists that his son repeat the pattern of old Hamlet's past rather than move forward into a future of his own making. Revenge, after all, is about compulsive repetition, the taking of an eye for an eye, a life for a life. And as Hamlet suppresses his own nature to take up the burden of his father's will, we see the widening cycle of destruction that comes from it: not justice, but a mistaken act of butchery that sets yet another son, Laertes, on the same compulsive path; two old friends sent to their deaths; and a stage piled high with corpses at the end.

As in many of Shakespeare's plays, *Richard II* included, family politics are national politics, and tensions between a father and a child speak to the tensions between whole generations. In *Richard II*, fathers chafe at their king's excesses but their obedience and reverence hold. Young sons rebel, nudging the nation away from feudal monarchy and toward the modern world. In *Hamlet*, this generational progress is short-circuited. When Hamlet finally gives in to his father's demands, his soliloquies stop. His devotion to philosophy, to law, to art and to reason—all qualities crucial to a civilized society's growth—is wiped away. "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" he cries.

"I am dead," Hamlet will declare multiple times in the play's final scene. Indeed, he dies in spirit long before his body does. And he is not the only one. Obedience to a father's will so completely annihilates the younger generation (Ophelia included) that there is no one left to inherit. Denmark is left in the hands of an invader, Fortinbras, son of Fortinbras, made in his father's mold. At the close of the play, he rewrites Hamlet's life with his epitaph, imposing the values of an older generation—notably now foreign values—over the hopes of the younger one: "Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, and for his passage, / The soldier's music and the rite of war / Speak loudly for him."


HANK KRANZLER

Timon of Athens (1978): Timon (Michael Kevin)

A woman's office

The Winter's Tale interrogates the destructive effects of male violence and absolute male power from a different perspective, that of the women subjected to them. Early in the play, the King of Sicily suspects his pregnant wife of cuckolding him with his visiting best friend. Leontes' resulting rage is devastating. By Act III, his tormented wife is apparently dead; so too, it seems, is their daughter, Perdita, left to perish on the king's orders. And so too is their son, Mamillius, who is literally sickened by his mother's treatment. The boy's name signifies how vital women are to men's identity and well-being. Violence against women does violence to men—and to the nation, since Mamillius was the king's heir and the kingdom's future hope.

But *The Winter's Tale* is a romance, and Shakespeare's romances offer erring fathers and rulers a saving second chance to learn from the women they spurn. To turn the king from his madness is a duty that "becomes a woman best," insists the Queen's waiting woman, Paulina. Risking her own life, she challenges Leontes' absolutism and his misogynist constructions, gradually bringing him to a new understanding of himself as a ruler and a man. She will orchestrate his final repentance, along with the near-miraculous reconciliations that make his family whole again.

His family's restoration restores the nation's future as well. Having obeyed Paulina's mandate not to remarry, the king has no sons. His daughter's discovery and return means that she will inherit. Furthermore, as Perdita is engaged to the son of the king's former friend, she not only renews the two kings' relationship but will also unite their two nations. It is true that, like the other women in the play, she functions primarily as the agent of men's reclamation. But *The Winter's Tale* insists women occupy a crucial role in their families' and countries' destinies, and men discount their value at great peril.

Timon time again

Money is the sole power respected in *Timon of Athens,* where the hyper-wealthy one percent exert their influence through loans and lavish gifts. Most live well beyond their means, thanks to a precarious pile-up of credit they resolutely ignore. When that credit fails, lives fall apart.

Tellingly, *Timon* is the only one of Shakespeare's plays whose title character has no romantic interest or family. While a word used repeatedly in the play, "bond," can invoke human closeness and connection through relationships valued and invested in, the cash nexus is the only bond that ties. It's not surprising that the sole women in the play are hired dancers and prostitutes who, like the rest of the play's characters, "will do anything for money."

Certainly Timon seems unable to recognize genuine intimacy or emotional connection. His extravagant philanthropy gives him power; it also magnifies his distance from those he gifts. "Imprisoned" is the first word Timon speaks, and though it's supposed to describe the man whose freedom he offers to redeem, it applies to him as well. When his power to give is taken away and his "friends" turn their backs, he rejects the free and loving aid of his servant. Instead he retreats into a hate-filled isolation, replicating the sterility of the community he'd once considered so rich. Unlike Richard or Hamlet, Timon does not discover a greater

Twelfth Night (2010): Duke Orsino (Kenajuan Bentley) and Viola (Brooke Parks)

humanity through loss. What this play lacks in hope it makes up for in its searing appraisal of a culture where worth is determined by coins instead of by character and where politics is deeply rooted in greed. Little wonder that *Timon* feels so current in our second Gilded Age.

How could OSF apportion its resources so that each year felt urgent and exciting, so that plays in the cycle's final seasons didn't look like leftovers on a plate?

Misrule

Twelfth Night introduces a community whose aristocrats have abdicated their authority. This has opened up spaces for both repressive and creative misrule as social boundaries are challenged and even redrawn. In Illyria, we quickly discover, "nothing that is so is so." Almost everyone yearns for something (or someone) they cannot admit to or don't yet realize they want. Only by encountering new forms of desire—as Olivia does with Viola, a young woman disguised as a man—will the lucky ones overcome the limits they're locked into. Others, particularly social climbers like Malvolio, will be mocked and punished for their hopes.

Twelfth Night makes us notice both the joy of desires fulfilled and the pain of those denied. The happy couples at the close are notably offset by characters who are absent or left out: not only Malvolio, with his famously bitter exit, but also Maria, the hurt Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, and Antonio, who (like Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*) can only stand by and witness a love he is barred from.

Deciding what constitutes a happy ending is the point of an election year. Who will be let in and who excluded from the common dreams that bind us? What cultural boundaries need reinforcement; which should we loosen or redefine?

In *Twelfth Night,* Feste's final song ushers its audience from a fantasy scene of resolution back to their everyday lives. When the curtain rings down, when the balloons and confetti are gone, who's in and who's out is not the end of the story.

Judith Rosen is a freelance writer and dramaturg.

Writing Roe

Lisa Loomer found inspiration in the people who made *Roe v. Wade* happen and their lives in the decades that followed.

By Amy E. Richard

Lisa Loomer, *Roe* playwright.

Lisa Loomer is a prize-winning playwright whose plays include Distracted *(OSF, 2007),* Living Out *and* The Waiting Room. Roe *is an American Revolutions commission. Here Loomer talks with Media and Communications Manager Amy Richard about the complexities of writing about the polarizing subject of abortion and choice.*

Amy Richard: American Revolutions asks playwrights to select a significant event in American history. How did you land on this one?

Lisa Loomer: Fate. I was taking a walk with my husband and I picked up a message that Bill wanted to talk to me about an American Revolutions commission. I said to my husband, "How much you wanna bet they want to talk about *Roe v. Wade*?" It turned out that Bill wondered if I might have interest. Initially, though, I was not interested in doing a play about a case or a courtroom drama. I take the issues very seriously, and I write about very serious issues, but my plays often have an unusual theatrical style. I was not going to write a straight drama. But then when I did the research—and it's a little hard to talk about, because I don't want to give away Norma's story, Norma McCorvey, who was Roe—but her story, her real story was so amazing. It was so inherently theatrical, so . . . bent . . . that following this fascinating character allowed me to tell the story from a unique point of view.

AR: And without giving too much away, the way it was bent then allowed you to show the vastly different perspectives around *Roe v. Wade*?

LL: Yes, right, which is certainly something that I'm always interested in. It gave me all the perspectives in one play. The true story gave it to me. I didn't have to manipulate it.

AR: What was your research process?

LL: I love research. I read Sarah Weddington's book and Norma's two books and everyone else's books about *Roe v. Wade*. I did a lot of research on the net. I did a residency at University of Texas (UT) in Austin and went to classes on feminism and spoke to young feminists. I read books on feminism, watched documentaries, and I went to churches. I spoke to people on both "sides."

AR: Tell me more about the residency.

LL: Sarah Weddington, the lawyer who argued *Roe v. Wade*, studied at UT and also taught there. Scholars talk about three waves of feminism. Sarah Weddington was part of the second wave, as were Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. The third wave is more about women of color. When I went to UT, I was so moved by the young feminists I met. One young African-American woman told me frankly, "I probably wouldn't see a play if it was all white women, middle-class, second-wave feminists." I so much wanted those young women to go, to feel a part of the play, to feel invited, to relate. So I created a character that would be closer to them, to their experience, in the present.

AR: Yes, your play moves fluidly through the years. Why cover so many years?

LL: *Roe v. Wade* was argued in the early '70s, and it's still being argued today. Sarah Weddington was 26 when she went before the Supreme Court; Norma McCorvey was close to her in age. They started out lawyer and plaintiff on the same side. But their divergent journeys reflect the larger cultural divide, so it was important to me to not stop at 1973, but to stay with them.

AR: That big cultural divide, do you see that changing?

LL: I don't think the two sides will ever agree because their response to the issue comes from such different life perspectives. Some people see *Roe v. Wade* as about the law, about choice. For others, it is about religion, morality. For Norma McCorvey, it was about her.

AR: How do you move from research to writing?

LL: When I sit down to write a first draft, I sort of just let it come through. The characters start talking. The story emerges. Then I will look at what I have and see what it, the play, wants to be. Once I know what it's really about, I'll go back and reread the research that is most relevant. Then I'll go on to a second draft.

AR: What was it really about?

LL: It's about an issue that has sparked—or reflected—a huge cultural divide. It's about how hard it is for us, as Americans, to talk to each other. Some people see the issue as abortion, others see the issue as being about choice, about allowing people to make up their own minds.

AR: And your commitment to showing both sides, what was your thinking on that as you wrote?

LL: I see theatre as people sitting together in the dark to look at the human condition. Perhaps to consider a question together. If we are really considering the questions that are evoked by *Roe v. Wade*, don't we have to hear from both sides? I don't kid myself that a play will change minds. It happens, but very rarely. But if we can open our minds enough to even consider a position that is different from the one we brought into the theatre—that is the beginning of compassion. Compassion and curiosity are, I think, great things to leave the theatre with. If we go to the theatre just to encounter what we already believe, what's the point, really?

AR: Did you find your attitudes and perspectives changing as you did your research?

LL: For one thing, I began to think about "choice" in broader terms. How the act of making a choice is so much a part of what it means to be a human being.

AR: In spite of the serious issues addressed, you have put quite a bit of humor in this play.

LL: There are a lot of "serious" or highly dramatic scenes. But something in me does always seem to find what is funny about people. I guess I just don't have a "straight" or "serious" approach, there's always something a little wacky in my plays. I don't think it's even intentional. My way of seeing may just be a bit skewed. I have found, though, that humor does open people up. People start laughing, and then they are more open to considering the more serious issues of the play. Laughter opens our minds and maybe even our hearts.

Roe's playwright, Lisa Loomer, and director, Bill Rauch.

AR: What are your thoughts on staging this in an election year?

LL: First of all, people will be fighting over the issue in the election year, and there is a scene in the play that addresses that. There's a media circus, and certainly we will have seen a media circus if we have turned on the news earlier in the day. So that resonates, and the way people use this issue for political ends will be extremely resonant in an election year.

I'm also aware that it's all but a *fait accompli* that we will have a woman running, and there are things that Sarah Weddington goes through on her journey in this play that I think—certainly if Hillary Clinton is running—we'll have Hillary in mind. There's this speech that Sarah has to the press when they're all about "Tell us about your hair," and "Tell us about your divorce," and "How do you feel about your own . . . ?" It becomes absurd. And I think that will resonate as we see the kinds of questions that Hillary Clinton will be asked. It's exciting to be working on a play that illuminates this issue at this particular time, and I hope the play will draw attention to the importance of the topic. On the other hand, I suspect the issue will continue to be argued long after the election.

AR: Bill Rauch is directing your play. What's your history with him?

LL: You know, we do have a history. I think we share a desire to humanize all sides of the question, and a proclivity to not want to demonize, and a lot of aesthetic proclivities as well. And we have a bit of a shorthand because we have worked together before [at Cornerstone Theater Company and the Mark Taper Forum], and we're friends. So even though we've just started our design meetings, they have been wonderful. Everyone is so involved in this play. That has surprised me, and you can feel that in the room. Everyone's got a very personal stake in a play about *Roe v. Wade*.

Love under the Surface

The *River Bride* is a fairy tale for grown-ups about being bold in love.

By Catherine Foster

Marisela Treviño Orta got the idea for *The River Bride* in 2010 while doing laundry. She was watching a TV nature show called *River Monsters*, in which a man was throwing fish into the Amazon. The fish were disappearing, being pulled down by something below the surface. When the camera went underwater, she could see dolphins snatching up the fish. By chance, she looked up at the screen and saw the following trivia scroll by: "In the Amazon, there's folklore about Amazon dolphins turning into men. I thought, 'Oh, let's look that up right now.' "

Playwright Marisela Treviño Orta

Beware of strange men in June

In the play, a mysterious man who calls himself Moises gets pulled out of the river next to an Amazon village. A young woman in the village, Helena, is intrigued with him. The attraction between them grows, but Moises wants to marry her right away—within three days. Cautious by nature, Helena asks for more time. But Belmira, Helena's younger, more impetuous sister, who is already engaged to be married, sees in the handsome stranger a way out of their stultifying village. But the stranger is not what he seems.

At the time, Orta was working on a cycle of fairy tales inspired by legends, folklore and mythology and needed more ideas. "I'm a poet," she says. "I like things in threes. I'll do a cycle of fairy tales—not necessarily a trilogy but I do want some sort of connecting theme, so there's shape-shifting in all of them. I was working on the first one, *Wolf at the Door.* It's got a shape-shifter and is set in Mexico."

It took one year to start working on the play. But after that, it slid out quickly, almost writing itself: Three months for the first draft. *The River Bride* was the co-winner of the 2013 National Latino Playwriting Award and had its first-look production at the Alter Theater in San Rafael, California, in 2014.

Even though Orta calls *The River Bride* a fairy tale, she didn't write it for children. She likens it to the old Grimms' fairy tales: "They were scary cautionary tales to try and help instruct people about living their lives so they could avoid things like death and dismemberment. So I think of *The River Bride* as a cautionary tale about love and regret especially, and hopefully not having regret when it comes to love."

When Orta began the play, she imagined it being about the youngest daughter in the family. Belmira is the belle of the village who gets everything she wants and is so charming that everyone forgives her selfishness. But something funny happened during the writing: Helena became much more interesting to her. "The

older sister's always pushed aside by the younger one and she allows that to happen," says Orta.

As she researched the folklore about the river dolphins that live in the Amazon, Orta discovered more. "The folklore is that for three days in June, dolphins come on shore as handsome men and seduce women. It's the way Amazonian people explained children who don't look like their fathers."

"Part of me says, 'I want their hearts to be broken a little bit.' I like going to theatre that reaches out and grabs hold and makes me feel something."
—Marisela Treviño Orta

Director Laurie Woolery added to that. "What's interesting is this tale has many different versions throughout various South American countries," she says. "The husband of our scenic designer, Mariana Sanchez, heard one about white dolphins; women have to be careful of white dolphins because they'll end up having white babies. It's really fascinating when you start digging in, because it's about women being very aware of men, learning cautionary lessons and exploring origin stories."

A character who breaks the mold

In the folklore, the dolphins are trickster characters who are not to be trusted. "If you meet a man in the month of June and he's a stranger," says Orta, "you have to ask him to take off his hat and feel the top of his head, because the one giveaway would be a blowhole still there."

In the end, "it's about people settling or hesitating or not being bold in love," Orta says. "It's really sad in a lot of ways."

Orta says she has a thing for tragedy. "Part of me says, 'I want their hearts to be broken a little bit.' I like going to theatre that reaches out and grabs hold and makes me feel something. That's the cautionary tale part of this: Here is this amazing love. They have this amazing opportunity. The lesson for our audiences is: Be brave. Take those risks, especially with love, because there's so much you can lose."

Catherine Foster is Senior Editor at OSF and Editor of Prologue.

Magic, Not Magic Realism

If elements of this play make you think of magic realism, both the playwright and director say, don't go there.

"Oftentimes when talking about Latino works, the term magic realism gets thrown out there," says director Laurie Woolery, "and I don't want it to feel clichéd, like, 'we're going to see *The River Bride* . . . so we're going to see that magic realism thing.' I researched magic realism because I wanted to know how is it actually defined? It's a world where magic and surreal moments can happen together and they're accepted. And so, it made me start thinking about my mother and my mother's family. For them, it's prayer. For them, it's religion. For them, magic, miracles can happen out of prayer. And so, the juxtaposition of that leap of faith that you take in religion is also a leap of faith you take in love. It's how those two worlds collide. It's that moment where you fall in love.

"What I've been reflecting on a lot, is that heightened feeling of true love, when you truly make a connection with somebody, and you feel seen by them and heard by them and known by them. That's the magic."

Marisela Treviño Orta concurs: "I and a lot of other Latino playwrights feel like the term gets used as shorthand and becomes this umbrella term that loses its specificity in meaning. When I think of magical realism, I think of a scene in Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The character Remedios ascends into heaven while folding a bed sheet. Everyone accepts the event, but one character prays to God for the return of the bed sheet. That's magical realism to me; that the magical/surreal moment doesn't shock the other characters, it's part of their world.

"In my other work, I do have moments where surreal things happen onstage, where the emotions of the characters are impacting physical things in the physical world. I don't feel like that's happening here. So I think of *The River Bride* as fantasy or fairy tale instead of magical realism."

Penny and

The long-time OSF company members carefully adapted Dickens' novel to sustain the story's beating heart.

By Catherine Foster

Great Expectations adapters Penny Metropulos (who also directs) and Linda Alper at the table where they worked on the play.

How do you boil down a nearly 500-page novel teeming with characters and subplots to a two-act play? How do you capture onstage landscapes that range from the English countryside to 19th-century London, and from a manor house to a boat on the Thames? When Penny Metropulos and Linda Alper got together two years ago to adapt *Great Expectations*, they knew it would be a challenge. "We relied on our most important collaborator, Mr. Charles Dickens," says Metropulos. "A huge challenge—and one that was important to both of us—was to be faithful to his great book."

The pair were experienced at compressing, culling and combining material to adapt it to the stage. Metropulos, the director, and Linda Alper, an actor with OSF for 24 seasons, have co-adapted *The Three Musketeers* (1999) and *Tracy's Tiger* (2007). Metropulos also adapted *The Comedy of Errors* in 2008.

Back in 2013, Alper was in Taiwan on a Fulbright grant and Metropulos had started adapting a little-known Dickens short story, "The Haunted Man."

"It was an impossible story to adapt, but I thought I'd try it," Metropulos says. "It had been a while since Linda and I had written an adaptation together, and I was just trying to put my fingers back in the pot to see what could happen."

After she told Artistic Director Bill Rauch what she was up to, he said, "We have to do *Great Expectations*." Metropulos was game, but she wanted to collaborate with Alper.

Creating atmosphere

The two went to work. Originally the play was slated to run in the outdoor Allen Elizabethan Theatre. They had to solve an immediate challenge: The first scene takes place on a darkening afternoon of Christmas Eve. But when a production begins on the outdoor stage, it's still light out.

"The book and the play start with this very frightening scene," says Alper. "It's from a child's point of view, and it's very atmospheric. So to create a sense of mystery outside when it's bright daylight required us to think about it in a nonvisual way, to create that atmosphere through language.

But then *Great Expectations* was re-slotted to the Angus Bowmer Theatre, which meant that lighting effects could be used at curtain time. Ironically, the two adapters decided to keep the framework of narration. "What is required outside—the flow of action and easy transformations from one thing to another—was needed inside as well, because of the sweep and expanse of the story," says Metropulos. "So we continued to use narration, although we found we needed less as we moved along. The new task became determining how much we need to hear from a narrator to give us a sense of place or time versus how much we see via set and lighting."

When the two had adapted their earlier works, they both lived in Ashland and could share ideas and work on scenes at the same time, in the same room. But because Alper had moved to Portland, where she's a resident artist at Actors Repertory Theatre, the two developed a new system. At the beginning, they worked accord-

Linda's Great Expectations

ing to their schedules. One would do a draft and then send it to the other. And the drafts went back and forth that way over almost a year.

Each collaborator brought different strengths. "I think Linda is really, really strong in structure," says Metropulos. "She also has great comic sense, which I rely upon."

For her part, Alper says Metropulos is good at the overall concept and the mechanics of how the story will actually live on stage. When they worked on *The Three Musketeers*, Alper says, laughing, "I wrote back-to-back scenes, and Penny would point out, 'When do they change their clothes? How do we get that off the stage? Where does the dead body go and when did it get there?"

She adds, "And Penny has great heart. She always finds the soul of the characters and remembers to capture that, no matter how much plot we need to cover." Says Metropulos, "Obviously, we work well together. It's very much back and forth, you know: 'Why don't you take this and I'll take this.' Or, 'why don't you do that because you really know how you're thinking about that.' "

The two always wanted to maintain the suspense that Dickens built into his story. "The novel is narrated in first person," says Metropulos, "which works beautifully as you read it, but we felt if the hero narrates onstage we would lose the suspense of his journey; we would know everything is OK with him." Narration is now divided up among the other actors.

"How do you become an authentic human being in a challenging world? How do you live with your dreams when they do not pan out?"
—Linda Alper

Dickens' multifaceted characters
While Pip is the central character, he is surrounded by fascinating, indelible smaller characters.

"When you have all these colorful characters," Metropulos says, "your center, the hero, can become passive. So that is constantly a challenge, to make sure that Pip's journey is the soul of the play.

"Dickens is capable of always letting you see every character from different angles," she says, "so that you have a Mrs. Joe who's funny and also very mean, and yet you somehow understand her. You think, 'Oh, yeah, your folks died and you had to raise this kid. What happened to your life?' I think it's why it's so luscious for actors to get their hands on these characters. No matter how briefly some of our small characters, like Spooney Mike, may appear, the actors can read Dickens' description and know who Spooney Mike is and can bring all that information into that small moment. It's really phenomenal to have that resource."

Like Shakespeare, says Alper, Dickens was a commercial writer. "This is not a highbrow novel, even though it's incredibly metaphorical, and you could certainly write a doctoral thesis on it, but he wrote it to entertain people. I think to entertain people and to move people are the same thing, so we're going to take people on the big journey that Pip goes on—that we all go on in some way—which is how do you become an authentic human being in a challenging world? How do you live with your dreams when they do not pan out? What about when your dreams are realized, but you lose touch with yourself? At various stages in our lives we see those dreams in different ways. For me, that's the journey Pip takes, and it's a thrilling ride; heartbreaking, funny and very, very theatrical."

Catherine Foster is Senior Editor at OSF and Editor of Prologue.

Hypocrites & Cowboys

Two artistic directors of brash young theatre companies bring their fresh styles to OSF.

By Kerry Reid

If you want to start a theatre company in glutted markets like Chicago and New York, get a name that stands out. At least, that's what two guest artists for OSF's 2016 season have found out. Of course, it also helps to have a vision that explodes classics in startling new ways, or that champions a new genre of theatre inspired by comic books and other pop-culture adventures. Add in company monikers like "The Hypocrites" and "The Vampire Cowboys" and people will sit up and pay attention.

Sean Graney, artistic director of The Hypocrites, *is directing* The Yeomen of the Guard.

Sean Graney and Qui Nguyen (pronounced "Kwee Gwinn") make their OSF debuts in 2016 in the Thomas Theatre—the former as the adapter/director of a new country-and-western version of Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert's operetta *The Yeomen of the Guard* (February 24–October 30) and the latter with his play *Vietgone* (March 30–October 29), which lands in Ashland fresh off its world premiere with California's South Coast Repertory. But both have logged serious time in the never-easy world of nonprofit theatre in cities overflowing with talent—and competition.

In Graney's case, he started The Hypocrites in Chicago in 1997 with a mission to reinvent classics. "There was a lot of realism going on in Chicago at that time. Now it's changed," says Graney. "But I wanted to make a company that could explore different styles of theatre other than just realism. We did absurdist plays in the very beginning. [The Hypocrites' initial season included Sam Shepard's early piece *Action*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*.]

"We were just lucky enough to get some really good press early on and we did really cheap shows and audiences came and we were lucky enough to sort of get a reputation. And I named the company 'The Hypocrites,' which I think gave us a leg up on the other people [doing theatre] in the '90s, because we weren't some 'Color-Noun Theater Company.' We were just named something that people had an easier time remembering."

Graney took a three-year break as artistic director, during which time he had a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard and put together his critically acclaimed 12-hour opus, *All Our Tragic*, created from all the extant Greek tragedies. He returned to The Hypocrites' helm in early 2015. *Yeomen* represents his fourth foray into Gilbert and Sullivan, after hugely successful versions of *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado* and *H.M.S. Pinafore* began at The Hypocrites. The first two subsequently traveled to Boston's American Repertory Theater, and *Pirates* stormed the stage at Actors Theatre of Louisville. But *Yeomen* is the first G & S show he's created for a different company. (Artistic Director Bill Rauch suggested both *Yeomen* and its country-western aesthetic to Graney.)

Nguyen's company got its name from a trilogy of "live comic book" plays, collectively entitled "the Vampire Cowboy Trilogy," created by Nguyen and his creative partner and co-artistic director, Robert Ross Parker, who met in graduate school at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. After the two men relocated to New York City in the early part of the new millennium, Nguyen says they were "having a hard time finding our niche with more mainstream companies." So they decided to strike out on their own with a style that has since become known as "geek theatre."

Nguyen notes that the name "Vampire Cowboys" didn't sound like a good idea to everyone. "We joined an arts organization [in New York] that supports theatres. They told us 'You shouldn't

name yourselves that. That's the name of a fringe company, at best. It will never be taken seriously. You'll never get a [*New York*] *Times* review.' They said, 'It sounds like you're just going to be doing crazy shows.' I want to do small crazy shows. That's the whole point!' "

All of a piece

But though the pieces they're bringing to OSF have some significant differences from their early work, both Graney and Nguyen identify these shows as part of a continuum or synthesis of earlier work.

Vietgone is drawn from the real story of Nguyen's parents, who fled Vietnam in the last days of the American war and met in a refugee camp in Arkansas. Nguyen was born and raised in Arkansas. In that way, it's similar to his very first play, *Trial by Water*, a grim drama about Vietnamese "boat people" inspired by the experiences of Nguyen's cousin. But, says Nguyen, *Vietgone* "still uses all the Vampire Cowboys stuff—martial arts and hip-hop and other genre stuff."

Getting his parents to open up about their lives was the real challenge, says Nguyen. "To get the stories, I basically had to lie to my parents. It's very common for immigrant kids—they don't want to hash up [their parents'] sad memories." To keep them from feeling that they were "under the microscope," Nguyen told his parents that he was writing a play about Vietnamese refugees in 1975 and the fall of Saigon. Along the way, he'd present "wrong" facts about his parents in order to get them to open up. "I was actually conning them," he says with a laugh. 'So you and Mom married in Vietnam?' 'We weren't married in Vietnam.' "

For Graney, Gilbert and Sullivan initially entered his wheelhouse for the most pragmatic of reasons: He wanted to do more musicals as a way of expanding The Hypocrites' audience and aesthetic. But a 2008 production of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* proved frustrating "because we couldn't change anything. We usually do stuff in the public domain so we can have a relationship with it in the rehearsal room, we can modify it, talk to it, push it around, cut some things, rewrite other things," says Graney. Despite his creative frustrations with that show, it proved financially successful—as did a subsequent Hypocrites revival of *Cabaret* that Graney didn't direct.

Qui Nguyen, artistic director of Vampire Cowboys and *Vietgone* playwright, with actors Amy Kim Waschke (standing) and Maureen Sebastian.

Both Sean Graney and Qui Nguyen have logged serious time in the never-easy world of nonprofit theatre in cities overflowing with talent—and competition.

"As I was thinking of musicals I could direct, I was like 'Oh boy, I wish there were musicals in the public domain. And then I was like, 'Oh, Gilbert and Sullivan!' But I was totally against them for some reason. I thought they were going to be too fluffy and not serious. I listened to *The Pirates of Penzance* and I read the libretto and I was blown away by how smart it was." Mostly, says Graney, "I was blown away by how the whole spirit of the piece was so respectfully subversive, you know what I mean? It was pointing out the problems of society without really condemning anyone."

Going with what's familiar

Both *Yeomen* and *Vietgone* are starting life away from Graney's and Nguyen's home companies, but there are also continuities in collaborators. Graney's longtime musical team, Andra Velis Simon and Matt Kahler, are involved in *Yeomen*. And though Simon and Graney both note that the OSF show will start with a more developed draft than is typical in Hypocrites' productions, Simon says, "It's going to be the same [creative] process, but with different players. We all know each other so well that we know each other's strengths and how to get the best out of each person." Graney's past productions have used the technique popularized by Scottish director John Doyle, where the actors are also the musicians. With help from OSF, they've already had developmental workshops in Chicago.

Vietgone director May Adrales hasn't directed for Vampire Cowboys before, but she and Nguyen have a shared vocabulary as children of immigrants. "My brain is exploding from having another Asian-American on my side of the table," he says. Two cast members for *Vietgone* are company members with Vampire Cowboys (including Amy Kim Waschke, from OSF's 2012 *The White Snake*). The rest, says Nguyen, will figure out "how to be able to do the rapping and the martial arts and craft of acting—walking that tightrope between comedy and serious." He also warns, with a laugh, "It's going to be vulgar and kind of strange and [will] jump back and forth."

For both Graney and Nguyen, the ultimate triumph seems to be that they've grown their careers—and their companies—while staying true to what made them want to make plays in the first place. After years of producing as a nonunion company (a commonplace situation in small Chicago theatre), The Hypocrites recently made the leap to a contract with Actors' Equity. Graney says the difference between his last time as artistic director and now is that "being an artistic director, especially of an organization that is crossing the million-dollar mark, really takes a different kind of mentality. I have to figure out what that means for me and what that means for the organization."

And despite the early naysayers, the wacky names work. "The thing that we've been proudest about is that in the last eight years, we haven't had an empty seat," says Nguyen.

Kerry Reid is a Chicago-based freelance writer.

A Vietnam War *Love Story*

Using a combination of urban lingo and hip-hop, Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone* makes history modern and fun.

By Diep Tran

Vietgone opens with a man walking onstage. He looks out into the crowd and says, "Hi, I'm playwright Qui Nguyen. I'm here to introduce you to my play *Vietgone*." This is not a pre-show talk. And this is not the real Qui Nguyen; it's the character of the playwright, who is setting the rules of engagement for the play—a love story about how his Vietnamese parents met after the Vietnam War.

In *Vietgone*, there is no Vietnamese language, no foreign accents, no historically accurate idioms. Instead, Tong, Nguyen's mother, speaks a lingo that is distinctly modern—and definitely not PG rated. "It's so f***ing nice to f***ing meet all you f***ing people," is her first line in the play. Quang, Nguyen's father, greets the audiences with "S'up, b****es." This is not your mother's Vietnam War play.

Speaking over Thai food in New York City, Nguyen is self-effacing yet precise about why he is choosing to use such vulgar language for the characters who are supposed to be his parents.

"I want [the audience] to know that I'm a dirty-mouthed little juvenile," he says with a laugh. That sentiment represents only a small sliver of why he chooses to write in that particular fashion. The playwright grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood in El Dorado, Arkansas. His parents owned a diner that his mother ran. His father, Quang, who had been a fighter pilot in South Vietnam during the war, worked in a cable-making factory.

Nguyen didn't learn to speak English until kindergarten. "My influences tend to be extremely blue collar, and also from the pop culture that I was taking in, because it was my avenue in which I learned English," he explains, "I obviously cuss a lot, I drop a lot of F-bombs. And in my plays, I definitely have it because this is how I think people talk."

Nguyen's influences span different mediums, from blaxploitation films such as *Foxy Brown* to Bruce Lee's kung-fu films to comic books to Quentin Tarantino to Jay Z. In *Vietgone*, he takes all of those inspirations and stirs them into a historical drama that spans from the last days of the war in Saigon to a postwar refugee camp in Arkansas. The facts are all accurate, according to Nguyen; it's just the language and style that might be disarming. And while it may be tough for some audiences to see a familiar topic done so nontraditionally, and a play to start with so much foul language, Nguyen notes that his parents' love story eventually wins them over. "At my South Coast Rep presentation [at the 2015 Pacific Playwrights Festival], I sat in front of a wall of older, more conservative folks who said 'oh my' to every F-bomb that was said—for two straight minutes. However, by scene three they were crying."

Vietnamese characters are the heroes

Yet there is a method to all of the seeming madness. A Qui Nguyen play is not just irreverent for the sake of spectacle. It is a direct reaction to the plays and films about Vietnam that Nguyen was exposed to growing up.

"The Vietnamese characters were never the main characters; it was always some other white person coming in to save all the Vietnamese people," Nguyen recalls. "It always felt really alienating. I'm always aware that when I'm writing stuff like this that I'm going to take that [feeling of alienation] away. These are the heroes of the play. So when they're speaking, they just sound normal and eloquent and their ideas are coming quick and they're sounding as cool as they can possibly sound."

This modern, hip dialogue is one that Nguyen has honed over his 15 years as the co-founder and co-artistic director of Vampire Cowboys, the New York City-based company that specializes in geek theatre (i.e., works that features superheroes, outrageous fight sequences and copious amounts of cursing. See related story on p. 14.). His dialogue has become so stylized, so distinctive,

that Maureen Sebastian—who has acted in Nguyen's plays numerous times before, and who played Tong in the world premiere of *Vietgone* at South Coast Repertory—has dubbed his mix of rapid-style speech patterns and contemporary lingo "Quiyanese."

"I'm definitely vulgar without being angry," says Nguyen. "[My characters are] blue-collar speakers, and they're saying [f***] with a lot of affection. And I definitely use a lot of alliteration. You can just enjoy the fact that I'm playing with some words out there, that if something sounds cool, you can let it sound cool, that the character sounds cool."

A dose of hip-hop

It is Quiyanese, not Vietnamese, that audiences can expect to hear when they sit down for *Vietgone*. What else can they expect? Beats. The play features a number of rap songs, with lyrics by Nguyen and music by Shane Rettig. It's not a musical, but the characters do bust rhymes when they become emotional. When Quang encounters a hippie who apologizes for America's involvement in the Vietnam War, he delivers an impassioned ballad with the following refrain: "You lost a brotha / I lost my family / You lost a brotha / I lost my whole country."

Besides comics and action movies, hip-hop is another one of Nguyen's passions. This is not the first time that the characters in his plays have rapped (previous examples include *The Inexplicable Redemption of Agent G* and the musical *Krunk Fu Battle Battle*).

Growing up in El Dorado in a predominantly African-American neighborhood, freestyle (i.e., lyrics improvised on the spot) rap battles were a pastime for Nguyen and his friends. "We would battle at the bus stop. And they were usually insult battles, basically 'yo momma' battles, except that they would rhyme. And I was terrible at them. I'd write down my rhymes before I showed up at the bus stop, which was totally cheating," Nguyen recalls.

For Nguyen, putting rap in *Vietgone* isn't intended as cultural appropriation or pure irreverence. Instead, it's a way of conveying the environment that Nguyen grew up in and his preferred style of expression. Which is why when it came time to write the songs for *Vietgone*, Nguyen was determined to up his freestyling game. Knowing that writing lyrics down on paper made for more staid compositions, Nguyen instead turned to YouTube, where various deejays provide free beats for aspiring rappers to practice their rhymes.

"My influences tend to be extremely blue collar, and also from the pop culture that I was taking in, because it was my avenue in which I learned English."
—Qui Nguyen

"I freestyled it, recorded it and then transcribed it out," he explains. "And of course, I freestyled more than what I wrote down. I probably wrote 20 songs worth of freestyle just to get to those lyrics [in the play]."

Enlivening the past

Hip-hop, urban lingo, historical subject. That atypical combination may remind viewers of a show that's currently on Broadway: Lin-Manuel Miranda's founding-father musical epic *Hamilton*, which features historical figures such as Alexander Hamilton and George Washington rapping and high-fiving each other. Nguyen has never met Miranda but he did see *Hamilton* during its tryout run at The Public Theater and loved it. Though both theatrical works are not 100 percent accurate period pieces, they aim to convey the energy of the time period in a way that is relatable to a modern audience, whether it's the excitement at the birth of a nation, or the profound loss of life and home during war. "How hard it was to be broken away from your family," explains Nguyen, "to be taken away from your country, to lose all those things, to be in a country that you don't understand. . . . It was more important [to me] that the spirit of it was there, that you got the emotional truth of it versus, 'is that really what that refugee camp looked like?' "

Which is why, he's careful to point out, audiences coming in expecting to hear lilting Vietnamese-language poetry, or wanting a melodramatic historical romance on par with *Miss Saigon*, or a cultural education similar to OSF's *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land* will be disappointed. Instead, Nguyen is aiming to tell a story that is both Vietnamese and American. And audiences will know that from the first line in the play.

"There's nothing traditional about this," Nguyen says, with a mix of forcefulness and tongue-in-cheek. "This is as modern as *Hamilton*. It is as modern as *Avenue Q*, as *Spamalot*, as *The Book of Mormon*. It's not an education in that sense. But you will learn about my parents, about 1975 people."

Diep Tran is an associate editor at American Theatre *magazine.*

TANIA THOMPSON/SCR

Samantha Quon, Raymond Lee, Lawrence Kao and Paco Tolson in rehearsal for South Coast Repertory's 2015 Pacific Playwrights Festival reading of *Vietgone*.

The Folger Theater wants to bring together Shakespeare theatres to partner in sharing resources.

By Catherine Foster

Imagine having your own Shakespeare curator. A trusted guide who can bring you the most interesting new discoveries, the most fantastic performance insights, even take you behind the velvet rope for special access to cool events and happenings. The Folger Shakespeare Library, home to the world's largest Shakespeare collection, in partnership with Shakespeare theatres in the U.S., is planning to do just that in 2016.

Wanting to share its massive resources and link together the audiences of many large and small Shakespeare theatres, Folger staff spent a year developing the Folger Shakespeare Theater Partnership Program to connect enthusiasts with the resources, programs and collections of the Folger and to the work of festivals and theatres that are leading the way with significant Shakespeare programming.

Participating theatres will have access to digital texts of plays available on the Folger Shakespeare Library website, information about partner theatres on a page of the website, highlights from the Library's collections, Shakespeare news, a wide variety of digital and audio offerings and much more. All the content is available for use on participating theatres' websites, social media, newsletters and other communication channels.

The Folger will have a soft launch this month with the first round of 28 theatre partners, including OSF. After recruiting a second round of partners, the program will be fully up and running by January 2016. Many of the theatres will also be part of the Folger's 2016 national tour of a First Folio of Shakespeare that will visit all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

For the past couple of years, the Folger has been thinking about how it can support theatres producing Shakespeare and help build a bigger audience for Shakespeare and his plays. Metropolitan Group, a communication and creative agency, helped the Folger conduct focus groups last summer to learn more about what theatregoers wanted. (A focus group hosted in Portland attracted dozens of OSF members.) It followed that with a major national survey last winter. Survey results showed that theatregoers are eager for more information about both Shakespeare plays and his world. In their conversations with theatres around the country this spring, the Folger staff agreed that 2016, with the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, seems like the right time to pilot a new program aimed at ensuring a strong future for Shakespeare.

"The idea emerged organically," said Michael Witmore, director of the Folger Shakespeare Library. "We know that there are people all over the country who have a passion for Shakespeare in performance, and realized that we have significant resources to share. It's an opportunity for us to deepen the conversation about this art form and its sources, as well as pave the way for future directions in performance, appreciation and even scholarship. We've been doing this . . . for decades, but realized that others are doing it too and that we have something to contribute."

Two-way street

The Folger sees this as a shared conversation, desiring to draw on the resources of the theatre partners as well. Knowing that staff energy in theatres is limited for outside projects, the program's request of participating theatres is modest: Just share 12 pieces of Folger content—stories, podcasts, video, blog posts, Pinterest pins, Instagram pics, Buzzfeed galleries—throughout the year. Participating theatres are also invited to share their own content with the Folger. Each theatre's content is branded with its own logo and all theatres can utilize a special Folger Shakespeare Theater Partner logo, if desired.

Theatres will also be able to participate in a wide variety of digital events. The program offers partners, members, subscribers and other constituents invitations to digital and live conversations and events offered by the Folger. Partner theatres have the option of offering each others' members discounted tickets to performances and events as well as collaborating on joint bookings of touring productions and visiting writers.

Participating theatres' education departments will have access to the Folger's digital educational resources, a quarterly web conference call with education directors across the country and the opportunity to invite high school teachers to apply for the Folger's Teaching Shakespeare Institute.

The OSF-Folger connection goes back more than 10 years, beginning with an interview with then-Artistic Director Libby Appel for *Shakespeare in American Life*, a documentary the Folger produced for public radio in 2007 hosted by Sam Waterston, and later in a popular *Shakespeare Unlimited* podcast on the American phenomenon of outdoor Shakespeare. This season, OSF's 2015 production of *Pericles* will perform at Folger Theatre from November 13 to December 20.

The benefits to OSF members include the following: OSF's newsletters, e-blasts and *Prologue* magazines may include information on the Folger's Shakespeare anniversary celebrations. They may see references to what other theatres are doing on our social media pages. If they find themselves in another part of the country and desiring to see some Shakespeare, they'll be able to find out what's playing very quickly. Members wanting to complete their Shakespeare canon in a certain timeframe will be able to find out who is doing *Titus Andronicus* or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—and possibly receive a ticket discount from that theatre.

"Everyone knows the Folger as the premier destination for scholarly research, but this partnership program brings the vast resources of the Folger directly to theatre enthusiasts wherever they may be," says Eddie Wallace, Membership and Sales Manager. "I know OSF members will be delighted to discover the depth of the collection that the Folger has available.

"In addition, this is a fantastic opportunity to share the Oregon Shakespeare Festival with new audiences. The Festival will provide an array of content for the program. I envision director interviews, *Prologue* articles, behind-the-scenes videos and more being shared."

The span of the Folger program ranges from large to small Shakespeare theatres.

"The Globe's relationship with the Folger helps us integrate for our audiences two aspects of this writer we revere," says Barry Edelstein, Artistic Director of the Old Globe. "In the study, Shakespeare exists in the main as a man of ideas, as a literary and historical phenomenon. In a theatre, Shakespeare lives first as a wellspring of passions and emotions, as a visceral and physical phenomenon. The Folger's programs encompass all of Shakespeare: the page and the stage, the playwright of yesterday and the visionary of tomorrow, the Shakespeare of the intellect and the Shakespeare of the heart. That's our project, too."

Mary Ann Bamber, Executive Director of Nebraska Shakespeare, also sees multiple benefits to this partnering. "My top five are: affiliation with the . . . highly regarded Folger Shakespeare Library 'brand'; access to an expansive array of experts and educational resources for our organization and partner schools; connection with a network of like-minded, well-established Shakespeare theatre partners; greater visibility and broader reach for Shakespeare's work and for our organization; a lucrative vehicle for sustaining our 'continuous improvement' beliefs and goals."

"In addition, this is a fantastic opportunity to share the Oregon Shakespeare Festival with new audiences. The Festival will provide an array of content for the program. I envision director interviews, Prologue *articles, behind-the-scenes videos and more being shared."*
—Eddie Wallace

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The Folger Shakespeare Library's Paster Reading Room with several First Folios on display..

Background

Established in 1932 on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., the Folger Shakespeare Library is a renowned research center dedicated to Shakespeare and his world, a national teaching resource, and home to the award-winning Folger Theatre, as well as music, lectures and readings. The Folger produces the Folger Editions of the plays and poems, as well as print and e-books, audio recordings, iPad apps and a free mobile resource. It also produces a journal for Shakespeare scholarship, *Shakespeare Quarterly,* and the award-winning *Folger Magazine* for general audiences. The Folger also produces podcasts, blogs, videos and documentaries, and links to other Shakespeare-producing theatres. The Folger collection houses the largest collection of First Folios in the world and more than 250 Shakespeare quartos. Its holdings also include books of Shakespeare's time as well as scripts, playbills, set and costume designs and works of art. The Folger's digital image collection makes available more than 100,000 images.

"Shakespeare is the great connector," says Witmore. "We all bring significant life experiences to his plays, so in a sense, everyone is a peer when it comes to Shakespeare. From that wide community, we can work toward the deeper questions that keep returning us to this playwright. A good question is like a good shovel: it helps you get under something, gets the earth turning. Why is power even harder to give away than it is to get? Cue *King Lear* and *Richard II*. Why is the capacity to forgive so precious, and how is it a part of what we call love? Turn to *The Winter's Tale*."

The Theatre Partners page on the Folger website, www.folger.edu, will be up and running in the fall. Check back in late September.

Catherine Foster is Senior Editor at OSF and Editor of Prologue *magazine*.

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