

Shakespearean scenes = night of laughs

By CATHERINE HOUSER

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

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ORLEANS — Scenes of funny family foibles have been plucked from some of Shakespeare's greatest plays to create "From Whence We Came," the entertaining new production by the Elements Theatre Company (formerly Stages Theatre Company).

The collection of brief scenes from "The Winter's Tale," "Romeo and Juliet," "As You Like It," and "Much Ado About Nothing" make for delicious bites of Shakespearean humor and insight into the human condition.

Sister Danielle Dwyer, artistic director and co-founder of Elements, directs a talented cast of actors in a production that maintains Shakespeare's 16th century language while setting the scenes in contemporary American settings that include Appalachia, New York City, Texas, and California.

Though the physical stage is quite simple, the scenes are set primarily with an innovative use of big screen images that place classical characters such as Juliet in a posh New York setting. It's an inventive and compelling technique that is effectively reinforced with authentic, rich costuming by Sister Lydia Ingwersen and Sister Petra Gibson.

The evening opens with two brief scenes from "The Winter's Tale," set in Appalachia where, in typical Shakespearean style and language, confused identities are revealed with hilarious repercussions. Brad Lussier plays a funny and fawning Old Shepherd while Chris Kanaga and Kyle Norman as the King and Prince of Bohemia deliver their lines with precision and enthusiastic passion.

Lussier, Kanaga, and Norman also give clever and captivating performances again at the end of the play in a scene from "Much Ado About Nothing."

Though each scene carries its own drama and humor, the scene from "Romeo and Juliet" offers downright riotous laughs. Director Dwyer takes a turn on stage here as she plays the nurse to Juliet Capulet. At the urging of Lady Capulet, played with regal splendor by Kate Shannon, Dwyer, decked out as a tarted-up nurse, offers Juliet advice on marriage. Her exchanges with the wide-eyed Juliet, played with perfect innocence by Rachel McKendree, are hilarious.

Shannon and McKendree also take a turn as Rosalind and Celia in a scene from "As You Like It." The two are thoroughly convincing as exuberant schoolgirls, best friends forever, whose friendship is threatened by the blustery Duke Frederick, played by Luke Norman. Their interactions punctuate the timelessness of Shakespeare's insight into human emotions.

The Shakespearean theater experience is enriched by live musical performances that precede scenes and then conclude the evening. The spirited musical accompaniment features violins (Charity Spatzeck-Olsen, Sister Huai-Kuang Miao, Mary Jordan, Sharon Tingley, Kirsti Pugsley, Heather Catlin), bass (Mark Albro, Mike Hale), trumpet (Mark Albro), trombone (Jim Pfeiffer), saxophone (Jesse Haig), banjo (Brother Benedict Young), percussion (Rick Vought), and keyboard (Sharon Rose Pfeiffer).

"From Whence We Came" provides a bountiful evening of entertainment.

What: "From Whence We Came" (an evening of scenes from Shakespeare)

Presented by: Elements Theatre Company (formerly Stages Theatre Company)

Written by: William Shakespeare

Directed by: Sister Danielle Dwyer

When: 7:30 p.m., Aug. 15-17 and 22-24; dinner theatre 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 23.

Where: Paraclete House, Rock Harbor, Orleans

Tickets: \$30, \$25 for seniors, free 18 and under, \$18 more for dinner theater (including for youth)

Reservations: 508-240-2400