

# Wisdom of the Bard in Orleans

By [DEBI BOUCHER STETSON](#)

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When it comes to figuring out family dynamics, you might try therapy, or self-help books. Or you might turn to a 16th-century playwright, who pretty much nailed human nature and family relationships in works that have proved timeless.

William Shakespeare knew family, observed Sister Danielle Dwyer, director of "From Whence We Come," a show comprised of family-themed scenes from Shakespeare plays being performed by Elements Theatre Company (formerly Stages Theatre Co.) in Orleans. "He obviously understood the tension between parent and child, siblings," she said. "He does have a handle on it."

The show includes scenes from "The Winter's Tale," "Romeo and Juliet," "As You Like It" and "Much Ado About Nothing." Some of the relationships highlighted are unexpected, like the "Romeo and Juliet" scenes between Juliet, her mother and her nurse and later, Juliet and her nurse. The nurse, Dwyer pointed out, was a surrogate mother to Juliet, having nursed her after losing her own daughter.

The scene from "As You Like It" shows a father (the Duke) who is essentially alienated from his daughter, as he has no idea what's going on with her or who she really is, Dwyer explained.

"From Whence We Come," in two acts, is performed by ten actors all of whom play multiple roles, including the roles of four narrators who are key to bringing the audience up to speed on what is happening in each given play.

In addition to using narrators to convey setting and context, and to pull the scenes together, Dwyer has added another contemporary twist. While Shakespeare's language remains intact - "I would never alter that," the scenes are set in present-day regions of the United States. For instance, "The Winter's Tale" is in Appalachia because it takes place in the country, while New York City seemed a good choice for "Romeo and Juliet" because that play had an urban setting. Scenes from "As You Like It" are set in the redwoods of California because that seemed close to the Forest of Arden. "It's where people retreat to when they are banished, and yet it's a place where relationships are healed," Dwyer said. For "Much Ado About Nothing," the company decided on Texas, because there's a lot of open land there, as there was on the plains of Messina.

The contemporary setting allowed for some fun touches, too, such as live fiddlers for the square dance in the sheep-shearing scene from "The Winter's Tale." All the music is contemporary, adding flavor and color.

"It should be a real fun evening. That was our main intent," Dwyer said.

But beyond entertainment, people are bound to take home some messages about

family. The overriding one, Dwyer feels, is that "No matter where you live, and what your station in life, family dynamics is a universal problem. In that, we're all the same no matter where we come from. Also," she adds, "yes, there are difficulties that come up in relationships, but there is humor."

Hand in hand with the entertaining aspect of the show is the underlying message that families are funny, and if we can only see that, it might alleviate some of our more difficult familial moments.

"There are some scenes where you just start laughing because you know what's going to happen," Dwyer said. "One of the narrators quotes Erma Bombeck saying, 'When your mother asks if you want advice, it's not really a question,' and everyone laughs. While it may drive you crazy, it is something you can laugh at."

Another modern twist is the use of projected photographs as set design to convey a sense of place. "That's really a new venture for us," Dwyer said. She noted the new Paraclete House where shows are held has created new possibilities for the company, as it was built with theater in mind. Part of the construction project that has been ongoing at the Community of Jesus, home to the theater company, the new building is open and airy, and has lighting and sound systems. It also has a lovely patio overlooking the bay that is used for the dinner portion of the dinner theatre offered on Saturdays. "This is only our second show in the new space," Dwyer said.

Entertaining and yet thought provoking, "From Whence We Come" is very much in keeping with the theatre company's stated mission of being "dedicated to exploring the eternal answers that offer hope and inspiration for the human condition."

In creating a montage of selected scenes woven together with narration, Elements Theatre Co. has in a way created a new play. But Dwyer hesitates to characterize it in that way. "It's a new piece, but because the truth of his stuff is inspired and has such universal appeal, the writing and the way he puts it together are timeless," she said. "Yeah, it's new, but it's always been there."

## **If You Go ...**

**What:** "From Whence We Come," an evening of Shakespeare scenes

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday-Sunday, dinner theatre 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 15-24

**Where:** Elements Theatre Co (formerly Stages), Rock Harbor, Orleans

**Tickets:** Call 508-240-2400



**Lord and Lady Capulet and Julie Capulet from “From Whence We Come”**