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Performance Shakespeare 2016. Other.

London: King's College London; Calgary: University of Calgary, 2016. Accessed 8 January 2021.

performanceshakespeare2016.org.

As a new visitor to the Performance Shakespeare 2016 website, I found the production that got away. *Lear* was performed as a dance version in October 2016 at Trinity College Dublin's black box theatre. I categorically enjoyed this production's blog entry on the site as I simultaneously watched news coverage on the US election in the fall of 2020. Actively imagining this production's liveness calmed me. Links to a *New Yorker* 2016 feature, a review by Katherine Hennessey, and video interviews with the director, John Scott, and with the eighty-two-year-old modern dance star, Valda Setterfield, roused me from the forced passivity of COVID-19 isolation. On this site, there is, perhaps, a production to lift you from every f?&+!\$# day and the difficulty of 2020 and beyond. Each of the 435 blog entries on archival theatre and events from eighty-three countries in more than two dozen languages and dialects can enliven us perchance to dream once again of performance and put aside talk and thoughts and coverage of the undiscovered country. It transports us to imagine a post-pandemic world by returning to the liveness of theatre. As an archive that records 2016 Shakespeare productions on the four hundredth anniversary of his death, it renders the artistry and consciousness that William Shakespeare amplifies and continues to offer 404+ years later more meaningful and more accessible than ever.

The site also functions as a census that tallies the results of the last few decades of culture wars, conservancy, and innovation via live performances of Shakespeare's works. Who and what organizations are participating? How are they supported (financially, artistically, intellectually)? What materiality is present or lacking? Scholars and (aspiring) practitioners can access these rich Shakespeare performance archives to help offset unavailable or limited libraries and theatres. Each blog entry also demonstrates the natural, thriving direction of online theatre performance and archival keeping. Navigating Shakespeare plays and adaptations by country, global region, and play title is seamless. The handy menu option "How to Search the Performance Shakespeare 2016 Blog" provides a simple but useful guide to support efficient navigations and research.

The featured photograph for each blog thumbnail captures exciting scenic, costume, lighting, and performance design schemes, making it hard to choose one or two—a virtual Shakespeare candy shop for practitioners, students, and spectators alike.

The blog entry I clicked on after a nightmare wherein my Zoom exploded was “Pericles, Prince of La Habana, Celebrating Cultures.” In a new translation by Salvador Oliva and Angel Luis Pujante, this adaptation was presented in Spanish at La Casona en Linea in Havana, Cuba. Press “play” on the YouTube video and stills of the June 2016 production, directed by Stuart Cox and produced by Celebrating Cultures, are supported by Afro-Latinx rumba and salsa music. It may be impossible not to move and dance to this blog’s offering and the ecstasy of Caribbean rhythms and lyrics: “Somos Cubanos, Español y Africanos [...] póngame un lechon asado en la mesa, y papita frita, y yucca con mojo” (We are Cuban, Spanish, and African [...] put me some bar-b-q pork on the table, and fried potatoes, and yucca in garlic sauce).¹ The Caribbean food and music I grew up with in a production of Shakespeare, in my native language? ¡Sabroso! (Delicious!) This was a welcomed dose of nostalgia together with a new interpretation of the play that sieged my spirit, albeit temporarily but effectively—good theatre, in other words. The streamed video highlights photographic stills of Marina, Pericles, Antico (adapted as *el rey de Haiti*/the king of Haiti), and other characters in performance, plus stills from rehearsals toward the end of the video. The blog entry also details the production’s vision and provides a link to a review in *On Cuba Magazine*; when I first clicked on the review link, it came up right away, but when I returned to it a few days later, there was no response from the link. I navigated online to *On Cuba Magazine* and searched the play, but there was no result. I researched the director, Stuart Cox, and the English production company, Celebrating Cultures, to no avail. Nonetheless, the video and written portion of the blog entry got my attention right away, including how “the play will be intertwined with Cuban vocal melodies and Caribbean percussion.”² However, the lack both of access to those responsible for the production and of any review of the production left me eager to discover how other production blog entries performed on the site.

1. “Pericles, Prince of La Habana, Celebrating Cultures,” *Performance Shakespeare 2016*, performanceshakespeare2016.org/blog//pericles-prince-of-la-habana-celebrating-cultures. Translation mine.

2. “Pericles, Prince of La Habana, Celebrating Cultures.”

There are nine more blog entries for *Pericles* adaptations and multiple blog entries for almost all of Shakespeare's plays, including sixty-seven for *Hamlet*, twenty-five for *The Tempest*, fifty-one for *Romeo and Juliet*, and thirty-three for *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

The value conceived by the website's project leaders, Susan Bennett and Sonia Massai, and web designer and editor, Jess Nicol, is theatre productions transformed into digitized archives and how these archival blog entries perform against each other. The project team includes research assistants Benjamin Blyth, Rowena Hawkins, Shana Krisiloff, and Aimee Morris, along with seventy-three contributors from across the world. The site is an opportunity for theatre practitioners to further understand their own contributions by witnessing the contributions of others via a global communing and sharing, inherently competitive and thriving—a neatly trimmed and dressed online land, where fortunes are weighed and artistry wins.³

Surfing through each imaginative production and its blogged materials, one begins to feel, to borrow one of my thirteen-year-old's favourite acronyms, FOMO—or a fear of missing out. In this case, once again, *having* missed out. Then again, this next archival blog entry and its materials, as the others, became invaluable. *The Winter's Tale* at the HERE Arts Center in New York City was performed in December 2016 by Amerinda, an all-Native American cast. I explored this blog the morning after our nation's first attempted coup on 6 January 2021. A link on the blog entry took me to a TED Fellows article written by the production's Native American director, Madeline Sayet, who notes how the production had woven “the destruction of our environment and sacred lands. [...] *The Winter's Tale* also echoes today's political climate of division in the United States. The first half of the play takes place during a winter in which a country is extremely divided and there is a desperate need for balance. This division harms the future generations.”⁴

As I began my winter quarter classes that afternoon of the sixth, my students and I were alert, worried, and affected about what was going on simultaneously in our nation's Capitol as we met on Zoom. That week, I introduced them to the site and had an engaging, perhaps even calming discussion over Amerinda's

3. Inspired by the Gardener's speech in 3.4 of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard II*.

4. M. Sayet, “Why Shakespeare Deserves a Native American Perspective,” *TED Fellows* (blog), 29 November 2016, accessed 7 January 2021, fellowsblog.ted.com

blog and Sayet's article. We discussed how theatre, its practitioners, its archives, and *digital archives* arm us with their ability to capture the past and present and discern the future. As an archive to strategize with in our times of crisis, this blog's performance represents the ability of digitized productions from across the world to transport us back to the meaningful offerings of the live performance.

A "madness" driven by ambitions for power in a world of greed, lack, and isolation are prevalent concerns in the Bard's plays, yet of special interest in *King Lear* (twenty-three blog entries), *Antony and Cleopatra* (five blog entries), and *Macbeth* (fifty-five blog entries). All three plays were written by Shakespeare in 1606 while in isolation from the Black Plague, as James Shapiro notes in *The Year of Lear*. Characterized by loss, innovation, perseverance, racial and political strife, our own plague, the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to pose many difficult questions. It has also provided definitive answers to further understand class and racial disparities. To inoculate against virulent strains of division and hate, collaborating and communing with theatre may be more important than ever. "Globalization is globalizing the poet (Shakespeare) even more,"⁵ notes scholar Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso. In her 2017 article, "'All the World's a Stage': William Shakespeare's Cultural Capital 400 Years after his Death," Muñoz-Valdivieso points to a shifting accessibility to Shakespeare provided by alternate technologies that promote engagement with culture and influence rather than apathy and acceptance. The Performance Shakespeare 2016 archive disavows inaction motivated by division, fear, and isolation. It offers, instead, a site lush with relentless (theatrical) efforts and methodologies to engage with humanity's most difficult challenges.

With over a half-century of Shakespearean performance innovation, world-renowned Japanese director Ninagawa Yukio left behind a legacy of grit and artistry. He adapted each of these 1606 tragedies to critical, international acclaim, as noted in the blog entry for a production of *Richard II* (Saitama Arts Theatre), also directed by him.⁶ Performed in Japanese, it was produced and presented by Saitama Arts Theatre and toured in Japan and Romania in

5. Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso, "'All the World's a Stage': William Shakespeare's Cultural Capital 400 Years after his Death," *Changing English* 24.1 (2017): 67–80, doi: 10.1080/1358684X.2016.1251307.

6. "Richard II, Saitama Arts Theatre. *Performance Shakespeare 2016*, performanceshakespeare2016.org/blog/richard-ii-saitama-arts-theatre.

February and April 2016. Ninagawa died shortly after closing, on 12 May 2016, at the age of eighty.

A key offering found often on the site are productions that, like this *Richard II*, mix “young interpreters with elderly ones.”⁷ Sayet also noted how her cast “ranging in age from 13 to 90, reminds us that we are accountable to the generations before and ahead of us for every decision we make now.”⁸ When my restless, community-involved, 102-year-old grandmother passed in December 2019, I had been teaching her how to use her new cell phone to market and manage her community outreach, a small token of what she taught me every day. I hope I can go like her and Ninagawa—older and involved, with younger generations teaching me new (performance) technologies like this site, to bridge divides, to collaborate, or to simply provide comfort.

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bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare.

Reviewing Shakespeare is an online archive that aims “To create the most lively, comprehensive, accessible and intelligent guide to 21st-century Shakespearian performance the world has ever seen” (“About”). Hyperboles aside, the blog contains independent reviews and articles of global Shakespeare performances (or what the editors term “worldwide Shakespearian performance”). Produced by the University of Warwick and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and helmed by general editors Paul Edmondson and Paul Prescott, the site’s URL (bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare) links to parent site Blogging Shakespeare, another archive powered by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and

7. “Richard II, Saitama Arts Theatre,” *Performance Shakespeare* 2016.

8. Sayet, “Why Shakespeare Deserves a Native American Perspective.”