

Grand River Rainbow Historical Project

www.grandriver-rainbowhistory.ca/

celebrating the lives and times of rainbow folk in Grand River country

Rainbow Chorus Events (1995-)

Publishing History: Documents issued at irregular intervals by the **Rainbow Chorus** for its concerts, fundraisers, and other events.

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Shakespeare Concert Outline

Act I

Chorus enters randomly while music vamps, greeting one another as they take their places.

(Another Op'nin') (with movements)

Narrator (Titania, Queen of Fairies):

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

"Out of this wood do not desire to go:

Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.

I am a spirit of no common rate;

The summer still doth tend upon my state;

And I do love thee: therefore, go with me;

I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,

And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,

And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;

And I will purge thy mortal grossness so

That thou shalt like an airy spirit go."

Welcome humans and fellow mystical creatures of the woods, I am the one they call Titania, Queen of the Fairies, and I will be your guide for this evenings festivities. In the spirit of the Guelph Wellington arts community "Shakespeare: Made in Canada" Festival, the Rainbow Chorus presents: Shakespearean Rainbow, A Cycle of Songs. Tonight we will delight your mortal ears with songs inspired by Shakespeare's plays, and music composed in Shakespeare's time. Just as the colours of the Rainbow are unique and yet visible as a single marvellous work of nature, our songs tonight represent broad spectrum of music which have been joined together to create a cycle exploring death, life and love.

In the days of the Bard, life, death, the future and the past were understood differently than the linear model of your current, modern views. History was seen as cyclical and therefore always repeating itself; people were less interested in the realities of what was happening, and more concerned with the meanings of those events. Events "were not seen as singular but as examples of eternal laws, revelations of a timeless, constant reality."

This should help you modern folk make sense of some of Shakespeare's histories, which are not accurate accounts of historical facts, but rather explorations of meaning and significance. And help you understand why many of his comedies include fairies and other improbable, but not impossible, *wink* creatures.

In our next song, writer William Byrd calls upon the Muses, the goddesses of music, song, and dance, to come down to earth to deliver once again inspiration to poets and artists, because the great composer Thomas Tallis has died, and with him music on earth has perished.

(Ye Sacred Muses)

(Fear No More)

The muse of music, Euterpe (you-TER-pee), was obviously with chorus member Les Smith as he set words from Shakespeare's romance Cymbeline to music in the creation of that last glorious piece, Fear No More. The text speaks of the universality of death, a subject which Shakespeare often reflected upon and whose presence was weighty in an age without proper sanitation...or antibacterial soap. Perhaps Shakespeare's most famous contemplation of death is found in Hamlet's soliloquy:

"To be or not to be: that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come?"

(Blow, Blow)

(Fire, Fire)

Omitted narration about death previous to If Music be the Food of Love and instead transitioned to talking about music and love.

Although Shakespeare devoted much time to deliberations on death, he spent equal amounts of paper and ink celebrating life, beauty, love, and music! Ah, sweet music! In fact, in both secular and sacred circles music was held in high regard in Elizabethan times and Shakespeare's queen, Elizabeth the first, was herself a gifted musician. Shakespeare praised the necessity of music to a full life as Lorenzo declares in The Merchant of Venice:

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music."

(If Music be the Food of Love)

Chorus exits.

Intermission

Act 2

Chorus enters and takes places.
(O Mistress Mine)
(Take O Take)
(Hey Nonny)

"I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me"

With these tongue-in-cheek words, Beatrice declares her scorn for love - and her sharp wit - in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Shakespeare knew that humour was tremendously important in the daily struggle through the cycle of life, and his comedies bear this out.

The versatility and universality of Shakespeare's stories have lent themselves to being re-told in many contexts and set in many eras, including the Broadway musicals of the past century. Did you know that *West Side Story* is a re-telling of *Romeo and Juliet*, the classic tale of the "star-crossed lovers" and their forbidden love? Hmmm? Forbidden love? Sound familiar? No matter what your sexual orientation, Shakespeare's poetry echos the passion, desire and longing of love, as in sonnet 116:

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me be proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

The next number, *One Hand, One Heart*, is from *West Side Story*, and the words remind us that the bonds of love can transcend the boundaries of time and place. It is followed by a Cole Porter Medley of three songs of love, one taken from the Broadway show *Kiss Me Kate*, a story about a theatre troupe staging a musical version of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Shakespeare loved the idea of a "play within a play."

(One Hand, One Heart)
(Cole Porter Medley).

William Shakespeare's writings have proven themselves to be timeless. They have entertained theatre-goers for centuries, they are studied in schools, and his words are often quoted to aid us in understanding our daily experiences. The Bard holds keen insights into human nature, the workings of human relationships, the cycle of life and death, and love's connection to it all.

The queer community are not excluded from the ability to connect to Shakespeare's writings. While Shylock spoke of the prejudice against Jews in *The Merchant of Venice*, we can borrow his words and say:

"If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?"

Shakespeare was ahead of his time in his ability to call attention to issues of oppression and exclusion. The timeless nature of his work is also due to his ability to highlight the commonalities of human experience—four centuries later his thoughts on life, death, love and beauty still ring true and connect diverse communities of people.

(Somewhere)

{Applause/Bows}

Encore

(Interview with Faeries).

Exit.

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