

Players bring Shakespeare to Northumberland

By Northumberland Today

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For a family of four to see a play at Stratford it costs about \$400 - not counting gas and food. When a school rents a bus and takes students to Stratford not all students can go because not all parents can afford it, which means that there are countless kids who do not get to see a live Shakespearean play, and that's a real shame. Reading and studying Shakespeare in class can be wonderful, but nothing like seeing his plays acted on a stage with costumes and props and lighting and the audience response.

Northumberland Players decided to do something about that for kids in our county.

The Players teamed up with Shakespeare Street Theatre's artistic director Paula Worley, an actor, dancer, drama teacher, artist and puppet maker, who created and directs the magic happening at the Firehall Theatre. Worley somehow managed to take 45 to 50 minutes out of the play, set it in 1850s Canada and keep the storyline intact. A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of my favourite Shakespeare plays and, having played the fair Helena in a high school production, I remember many

of the lines, including Puck's Epilogue. I can assure you that Puck and his shadows in no way offended.

As Worley says, "This hilarious comedy with its complex sub-plots is for all audiences or all ages, as well as supportive of secondary school curriculum."

Indeed it is hilarious, made more so by some very funny bits, including Demetrius doing push-ups during his fight with Lysander over Hermia. There is contemporary music, magnificent costumes from the Northumberland Players Costume Centre that reflect the 1850s in this area (Lysander wears a kilt!), the delightful transcription of several male roles into female and glorious androgynous fairies. Their headpieces, created by Lisa Schnalzer-Missen, are absolutely stunning. Several actors – seven members of the cast are local high school students - play more than one part and sit on the sidelines or stand by the audience until they are onstage again. That's because there is nowhere off stage for them to hide! Just like in Shakespeare's day.

Thursday- and Friday-morning performance are for local school students. I went last Thursday morning and sat in the Firehall's wonderful theatre in the round with Grades 9 to 12 students from East Northumberland Secondary School. Those kids were completely absorbed for the 90 or so minutes of the play. And that was the intention of Northumberland Players.

Yet another smash hit from Northumberland Payers. Call 905-372-2210 for tickets for the performance on Saturday, Nov. 15 at 8 p.m. or on Sunday, Nov. 16 at 2 p.m. If you are interested in going to the Thursday- or Friday-morning performances on Nov. 13 and 14 – I can attest to how much fun it is – then send an e-mail to A Midsummer Night's Dream producer Jack Boyagian at boyagianjack@gmail.com.

This is the first Northumberland Players Shakespearean production. They intend to do it every year. Hooray to that.