

## Our *Shakespeare From the Streets*

production of *The Tempest* was Friday 12 April 2019 at the Wilson Foundation School Auditorium, 200 Genesee Street, Rochester, NY.

*At-RiskYouth*, members of the *Rochester Police Department*, *Hillside counsellors* and *teaching artists* worked together as an ensemble since 7 January 2019 on *our grant-supported community venture*.

When the play within the play is in play *and* makes itself known, then *all* is in alignment, *all* in accord.

Such as it was four days prior to *The Tempest*, when the King had three of his teeth knocked out.

The night before, for he really wanted to – but when he got on stage and spoke, the pain was too much to bear and back to his seat whilst others bespoke.

But on the day - all forces summoning within - his voice filling the room with power majestic.

Then, one hour before curtain, “Mister, I can’t do this; I tried so hard... I’m so angry at myself for having done *this* to Myself” - pointing at his mouth.

And thinking back twelve weeks to the very first day...

“Mister, I can’t read so well.”

“That’s OK, I’ll say your lines behind you and then just say as I say.”

Gonzalo was trying to cheer him up, himself just after having lost Ferdinand his son drowned.

The King’s next line was “Prithee peace.”

He kept looking over his shoulder for the cue, and when it came time:

“Prethee peace,” whispered I.

“What does that mean?” said he.

“It means shut up,” said I.

“Shut the f\*\*k up!” to Gonzalo said he.

Now as director to he and all the cast: “That was great! – now say ‘Prithee peace’ and mean ‘shut the f\*\*k up!’”

## Gonzalo

*Beesech you Sir, be merry; you have cause,  
(So have we all) of joy; for our escape  
Is much beyond your loss; our hint of woe  
Is common, every day, some Sailors wife,  
The Masters of some Merchant, and the Merchant  
Have Just our Theme of woe: But for the miracle,  
(I mean our preservation) few in millions  
Can speake like us: then wisely (good Sir) weigh  
Our sorrow, with our comfort.*

## Alonso

*Prithee peace.*

It was *perfect*.

And cheering and applauding all, with countenance beaming confidence, now joined he with all.

Later on, when blocking the selfsame *Act II, scene 1*:

## **ENTER ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, ANTONIO, GONZALO, ADRIAN, FRANCISCO, AND OTHERS**

And setting the scene:

“The last you remember was the tempest, the terrible storm wherein your ship broke apart and each falling into the sea to drown, - yet now, somehow on *this* island, surviving, but *your* son, Ferdinand, not here and feared dead by drowning.”

Turning to the King, now standing downstage right, towering o’er the edge upon the many gazing up from below: “how do feel knowing that your son is likely dead.”

“I don’t care.”

“Then you have to let the audience see that you don’t care.”

“Let me see what it looks like when you don’t care that your son is dead.”

And so he did, though with a hint of unease.

“Now hold that look, and let the audience see your not caring that your son is dead, while you listen to Gonzalo.”

“And what is Gonzalo trying to do.”

“Cheer me up.”

“Why?”

“Because I believe my son has drowned and is dead.”

“And what does just about everyone in this scene want you to believe.”

“That he is dead and to stop looking for him.”

“And what does the King do?”

“He’s not going to stop looking for him until he finds him.”

**Alonso**

*Lead of this ground; and let’s make further search  
For my poor son.*

**Gonzalo**

*Heavens keep him from these Beasts:  
For he is sure I’th Island.*

**Alonso**

*Lead away.*

**Ariel**

*Prospero my Lord, shall know what I have done.  
So (King) go safely on to seek thy Son.*

Over the weeks, his voice and presence coming into the room.

A hidden side, the sun behind the clouds.

In front of family and friends in thirty minutes time.

His understudy stepped up and in.

Yet this did not stop him, 20 minutes before time, from sitting next to Antonio, himself, perhaps the sunniest of all, and through his broken mouth, trash-talking a rival gang member.

Everything blew up at that moment.

Adult counselors and police officers within the cast running after Antonio who had ripped off his costume and stormed up the middle aisle of the auditorium, now with filling in with over a hundred people, all witness to this event.

And unbeknownst to all of us responsible for this event, 10 minutes before time, Ariel and Adrian texting their fellow gang members to come quickly as trouble was clearly on its way...

All now back, Antonio clearly bitter and deflated - yet he did choose to stay, one of the many victories along the way - which allowed the space for Sebastian now within the room to shine.

Now, to the two hundred or so members of audience:

"Welcome, everyone and thank you for coming.

Does anybody else feel like something really bad just happened?

Heads nodding yes.

"Well it did, and thank you all for this our atmosphere, for this our Tempest, which now begins with a storm!"

"But first...

"Don't think that tonight you are going to be just sitting there watching us like on TV.

"No, in Shakespeare's time the audience was perhaps the most important member of the cast - attending, listening, watching over *this* our space within which *this* our story does now unfold.

"So, I am now going to invite you into role and would like everyone to stand up now."

All stood up.

I remember looking out thinking that many of the kids' older brothers and friends have come to see the play.

"Now watch what I do.

I am going to count to three, then sit down, pause and speak loudly and clearly "Audience."

"1, 2 – sitting down- 'Audience'-3."

"That was awful!"

"Everybody back up!"

All stood up.

"Now you see what we've been through," said the retired Chief of Police from the front row.

"1,2, 3."

And sitting down, as one:

**"Audience."**

Quiet stillness coming into the room.

The front row still standing, each youth, each adult, one by one from left to right, clearly saying their name, then sitting, pausing and with voice fully-filling, the name of their character - their character now becoming.

Quiet stillness now the room becoming.

**A TEMPESTUOUS NOISE OF THUNDER AND LIGHTNING HEARD: ENTER A SHIP-MASTER, AND A BOATSWAIN**

**Master**

*Boatswain.*

**Boatswain**

*Here Master: What cheer?*

**Master**

*Good: Speak to th'Mariners:  
fall to't, yarely, or we run ourselves a ground  
bestir, bestir.*

There was in that stillness the ever present menace of storming violence, yet as the play pivoted into forgiveness, Prospero recognizing his *own* part that he had played, the room did not turn to violence --

Despite there being active gang members from four rival gangs within that very audience.

**Shakespeare as Medicine®**