

# prologue

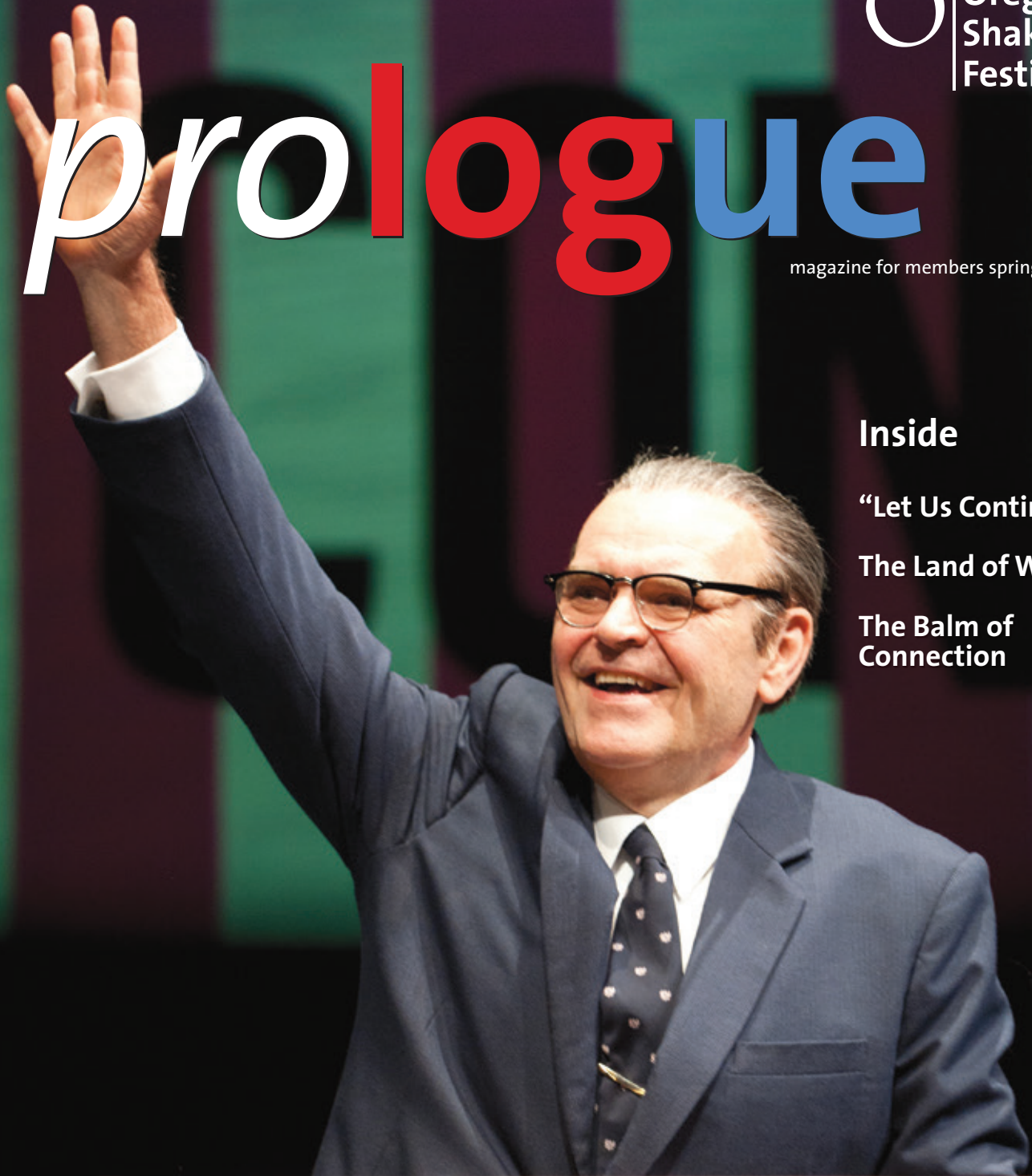
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## Inside

“Let Us Continue”

The Land of Wow

The Balm of  
Connection





Franchelle Stewart Dorn has spent her long acting career grappling with the meaty roles of Shakespeare's women.

Acting is “a calling, like the priesthood,” says Franchelle Stewart Dorn. She has a life offstage—as a mother, a grandmother, a wife and a tenured professor at the University of Texas at Austin—but believes she entered this world an actor.

“Actors, I think, are born, and then you get training so that you can be good at that thing that you were meant to do,” says Dorn, who portrays Emilia in *The Comedy of Errors* and Queen Margaret in *Richard III* in her first season at OSF. “And should I never act again in my life, I’ll die an actor. That’s what I am. I’ve scared many students by telling them that if you really want to know who I am, see me on stage.”

An actor by birth, perhaps, but Dorn—recipient of three Helen Hayes Awards, four B. Iden Payne Award nominations and three Austin Critics’ Table Awards—became “a Shakespearean actress by default.” After moving to Washington, D.C., in the late 1970s, Dorn’s first acting gigs there were with the Shakespeare Theatre Company. It would become her artistic home for the next 20 years as she inhabited some of Shakespeare’s strongest female roles, including Cleopatra, Paulina, Gertrude and Lady Macbeth.

“Season after season after season, I would think, ‘OK, enough already. No more iambic pentameter and no more corsets. No more. I’m done. I want to sit down at a coffee table and drink coffee and smoke cigarettes or something in a play.’ And occasionally I would be cast in a play like that, and within about three days, I’d think, ‘Well, where’s the language? Where’s the passion?’ So I say Shakespeare kind of spoils you for any other playwright,” she explains, the rich, deep voice that has naturally steered her away from

ingénue roles not yet at full throttle during an early-morning interview in the OSF Members’ Lounge.

After decades of acting and teaching, with much of her work in those years centered on the man from Stratford, Dorn marvels at his lasting ability to surprise her. “I teach Shakespeare. I teach Shakespearean acting. My students tend to do the same kinds of scenes every semester. Every semester I think, ‘Wow! I never heard that part before.’ I think that’s just phenomenal. I mean, how is it even possible that I am so familiar with this scene and I’m still hearing something new in it?”

#### Welcoming all to Shakespeare

If we want Shakespeare to be revelatory and new for today’s theatre-goers, Dorn says culturally specific productions—including this season’s Harlem Renaissance-set *The Comedy of Errors* and Shakespeare Theatre Company’s “famous or infamous negative reversal of *Othello*” in 1997, featuring Patrick Stewart as the Moor, Jamaican-born actress Patrice Johnson as Desdemona and Dorn as Emilia—are essential.

“These plays have been done for the past 400 years, so what are you going to bring to today’s audience that they haven’t seen or can’t read themselves? And there are lots of different kinds of audiences who are now experiencing Shakespeare, sometimes for the first time. Are they going to feel welcome?”

For Dorn, enriching lives through theatre requires casting actors who look like present-day audiences and those of the future—and that means diversity has to be a conscious priority.

“I’ve changed the term ‘color-blind’ casting to ‘color-aware’ casting, because I think that it’s really important, and I think that’s what OSF is doing,” she says. “If you’re looking at the world and you want that world reflected on your stage, you’re going to have to be mindful of that. Otherwise you forget. You think, ‘Well, I’m not worried about what color people are, so it doesn’t really matter.’ And then people start to look like whoever it is who’s doing the casting.”

However, she points out, “We don’t know what those characters look like. . . . Where’s a portrait of Mistress Quickly? It’s whoever shows up—that’s who Mistress Quickly is.”

Who Mistress Quickly is just might influence who your audience is, so Dorn has simple advice for theatre companies: “Bring everybody!” —Julie Cortez

Julie Cortez is OSF’s PR and Social Media Associate



Dorn as Emilia in *The Comedy of Errors*.



Barry Kraft and Martine Kei Green-Rogers are dramaturgs for, respectively, *The Tempest* and *The Comedy of Errors*.

# Deep Divers

Shipwrecks, reconciliation and forgiveness. Two dramaturgs explore their work on the texts of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*.

**By Barry Kraft and Martine Kei Green-Rogers**

*Dramaturgs at OSF work on their plays independently and rarely get a chance to sit down and talk to each other about them. Prologue invited longtime OSF actor and dramaturg Barry Kraft, who worked on *The Tempest* (directed by Tony Taccone), and Martine Kei Green-Rogers, who worked on *The Comedy of Errors* (directed by Kent Gash), to talk about what they discovered about their plays—one early, one late.*

**Barry Kraft:** It always surprises me when people throw up their hands in despair and say, “Shakespeare is like a food that has a date on it, and it’s gone. Nobody wants to eat it or touch it!” And then you think, well, that’s the end of Shakespeare, like so many plays that are time-locked. I’ve been acting Shakespeare for

more than half a century, and my school was very purist at the beginning: “We can make it work the way it’s written.” And then I went through a phase when directors had to change everything. Then it was back. But if you’re in the biz long enough, you get to ride with the billows.

## **On the similarities between the two plays**

**Martine Kei Green-Rogers:** These are two of the shortest plays in the canon. Structurally, both could be called comedies and both are locked into a single place and time period—the classical unities that Shakespeare never really did elsewhere.

**BK:** The other thing that is interesting is that they are only single-text plays. Half of the plays have two versions, the quarto usually, most often published during Shakespeare’s lifetime, and then what we find in 1623 is 16 plays we didn’t even know about! And two of those are *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*. So, more similarities. . . ?

**MG:** There are actually quite a few interesting similarities between the plays. On the subject of shipwrecks, however, ours is a back-story shipwreck. Yours is more an “in the moment” shipwreck.

**BK:** In *The Tempest*, we do have the backstory of what happened with the shipwreck 12 years before, which is awfully important. That takes a tremendous amount of stage time, all that exposition.

**MG:** True! Another similarity we have is how to treat the “slave” situation and word. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the Dromios were “bought, and brought up” to be in service of the two Antipholi. With our production set in the Harlem Renaissance, we have to figure out how to deal with the idea of black people owning other black people. In the end, we are treating Dromio as a servant, rather than a slave.

**BK:** What about the question of forgiveness? This is huge. Prospero can destroy his enemies, or he can forgive them. And the way Tony’s been structuring it, it’s not an easy answer, and the solution isn’t arrived at until the very end. How does your play deal with forgiveness?

**MG:** Even though forgiveness is a big part of the play, that theme has been downplayed because of the concept that’s been superimposed. For example, the Duke’s forgiveness of Egeon is muted by the importance of the re-unification of the family at the end of our production.

#### On the differences between Shakespeare’s early plays and his later ones

**MG:** In comparing the two, *The Comedy of Errors*, an early play, is heavily Roman comedy–influenced, versus the later *Tempest*, which is story-influenced.

**BK:** *The Tempest* is entirely Shakespeare’s creation. You could say that there are just four plays that aren’t firmly grounded in historical background. The others are a highly fanciful *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Love’s Labor’s Lost* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

**MG:** Going back to the Roman influence on *The Comedy of Errors*, the play is very open and improvisational as one of his early works. The influence of commedia dell’arte on Roman theatre, as seen in Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, the play that was the basis for *The Comedy of Errors*, is a huge aspect of the play, and that seeps into Shakespeare’s version. It was all about the entertainment value.

#### What is Shakespeare doing in my play?

**MG:** He was probably just interested in having some fun. Because he doubles the fun; now we’ve got two sets of twins. So he’s probably interested in stretching the abilities of those in his company and having fun with the audience. There are so many asides, so many moments of “let’s interact with the people who are watching us.”

**BK:** The playwright who writes *The Tempest* has other issues than sheer entertainment. It’s so hard to escape the notion that Shakespeare is having his own farewell to his theatre. Farewell to his whole art because it seems to be the last play that he wrote unassisted.

Also, Prospero seems to be in some danger by doing black magic as well as what’s called white magic. You are not allowed to bring the dead back from the grave, and Prospero says he has done that. But, there’s magic and there’s magic, and Shakespeare is the magician here. I think it must be Shakespeare’s goodbye to the theatre, all the worlds that he’s created, the power that isn’t true power, and also the failures, with his brother Antonio, at the end. But to me, it seems to be the clearest and most compelling argument that Shakespeare is saying goodbye at this point.

**MG:** Let’s discuss how reconciliation factors into both plays, since you brought that up in reference to Prospero and Antonio. Essentially, our production connects the separation of families that occurred during slavery and the attempt to rectify that separation during the Great Migration. African Americans during this time were on the search for family members that they had lost. In our production, post-slavery Egeon made a good business sailing the seas, and because of the shipwreck, his family is separated in a way that is reminiscent of what happened during slavery. So the search for lost family becomes the driving force that brings Antipholus, Dromio and Egeon to Harlem. What about yours?

**BK:** It has to do with our Prospero, because Denis Arndt has been a key figure in this Festival, from a different generation, and to have him return and play the role of Prospero in his higher years is a thrill. That is something that informs the play in a way that is not extra-textual or conceptual but totally theatrical, almost as if Shakespeare himself had played Prospero at the end. It’s a lovely thought.

**MG:** *The Comedy of Errors* focuses on how language may be manipulated to create humor. One of the funniest moments of this occurs when the visiting Dromio, who has just encountered Nell, the servant, talks with his Antipholus about how spherical she is. Then they start a series of running analogies and puns by connecting Nell’s body parts to countries. When they discuss the “Nether-Lands,” Shakespeare is having fun with us because you know exactly what part of Nell’s anatomy they are referring to.

**BK:** And there are so many ways to do these productions. You just can’t pigeonhole them. Speaking as a dramaturg, I would prefer the production to make the text work. People talk about obscurities. Every year that passes, words will not mean what they meant then. The easiest thing to do is say, “Well, let’s change that word to make it something that the audiences will understand.” And I think, yes, but it must be a word that Shakespeare uses elsewhere. If all else fails, we’ll say it has to have been in existence while Shakespeare was still alive, even though there’s no record of him using it. Directors just looking at the script, especially directors who don’t have an extensive experience with Shakespeare, might say, “Oh that makes no sense.” I would say, “Give it a chance.” If the actor is a good actor, let it come across. I don’t want these words to disappear.