

On Shakespeare's birthday, April 23, Artistic Director Bill Rauch, Director of Literary Development and Dramaturgy Lue Morgan Douthit, Head of Voice and Text Scott Kaiser, Resident Costume Designer Deborah M. Dryden and actor G. Valmont Thomas participated in a panel discussion before a Carpenter Hall audience. The discussion, called Shakespeare, Period: How We Make Production Choices, was moderated by Alan Armstrong, director of Southern Oregon University's Center for Shakespeare Studies and dramaturg for King John and Coriolanus. Prologue Editor Catherine Foster edited this transcript of that discussion.

Alan Armstrong: The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and later the King's Men, had what seems the enviable job of performing the works of a contemporary playwright—Shakespeare, their fellow actor—to contemporary audiences, in more or less contemporary dress and increasingly on contemporary stages. But even they made production choices, as we do. Scripts changed, audiences varied, actors came and went, companies performed in different houses, the world changed every day, now as then.

But the passage of 400 years has complicated the process of staging Shakespeare's plays. During our last rehearsal the night before *Coriolanus* opened, Laird Williamson, our director, invited the cast to take some credit for something he said we don't give ourselves credit for often enough: bringing a 400-year-old play to life. It's a miracle that is easy to take for granted, especially here in Ashland. Every Shakespeare production now involves a negotiation among these 400-year-old texts, 21st-century performers, and 21st-century actors.

We're here today to talk about what should guide the production choices that are made in this negotiation, and maybe, even more importantly, to find out what actually *does* guide these choices. I think you'll be surprised. To help us keep from riding off in all directions at once, we're using some Shakespeare myths to structure our conversation. [Myths are projected on an overhead screen.]

Myth #1. The best way to approach Shakespeare is to contemporize him.

Anybody want to take a crack at that one?

G. Valmont Thomas: I think one of the stumbling blocks in the conversation starting from this myth is that little four-letter word "best." The best way. That really depends on your perspective. I think an *advantageous* way is to contemporize. By contemporizing, often we highlight some of the things that Shakespeare wrote into the plays and bring them closer to us and remind ourselves that Shakespeare's plays are, after all, about people, about human beings acting, reacting and interacting with all sorts of obstacles and each other. Of course, it's a theatrical representation of those actions, reactions and interactions. But at the center of it are human beings.

Deborah Dryden: I would ask what we mean when we talk about contemporizing a production. Contemporary settings? Contemporary clothing? Contemporary idioms? Contemporary weapons? Male-female relationships that are 21st-century, as opposed to 16th-century? Issues of class, etc.? All of those individually, I think, need to be addressed

when we're talking about whether we're contemporizing a production Are we doing it all the way across all of those things or just some of them?

Bill Rauch: So often with Shakespeare, all of us—theatre-makers and theatre-watchers—get so hung up on the clothes. We obsess on what they are wearing and that dictates everything. And in addition to the list that Deb started rattling off, something that we will touch on in some of the later myths is: How is the language spoken? And how do we, in 21st-century United States of America, deal with 16th-century English language?

So I think that it's quite bottomless and complex, and I agree with G. Val that the idea of "best," absolutely not. You know, I'm a big believer in the big tent and the more approaches the better, because that is what keeps the word vibrant and fresh and alive. But I think one exciting way to make connections with an audience is through contemporary approaches. Not the only one at all.

Lue Morgan Douthit: Right. And also adding to Deb's list is the whole notion of contemporizing the language. So your point about where on that line we're calling "contemporary" or what we are focusing on is really a good one.

Rauch: We have all known since the brochure came out last summer that *The Comedy of Errors* on the outdoor stage was going to have original songs and lyrics. But some of that spirit of adaptation by Penny Metropolus, who is directing the show, and her team, has begun to infiltrate some of the spoken language as well as the songs. So we have actually crossed the line now to where we are calling it an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*. And that is something that has not happened very often here at OSF. So this will be part of our ongoing dialogue with all of you.

Scott Kaiser: There is an important distinction to be made in terms of contemporizing language. One is how the language is spoken as it's written there on the page, and we can contemporize it by making it sound like it's today, an American speaking in the present. The other way you contemporize the language is to pull words out and put words in that are more familiar to us. And that happens more invisibly. Except for those of you who have the plays completely memorized from cover to cover—which some of you do, I know—I just want to be clear: There are two different ways of contemporizing the language when we talk about that, two separate issues.

Douthit: I have seen people bring scripts into the theatre with them. [Laughter.]

Rauch: Raise your hands if you have done that. [Laughter.]

Dryden: When starting out to explore a new production, one of the things we all struggle with is: How do we make the storytelling contemporary? I'm not talking about how it's visualized; I'm talking about the immediacy of the word, the story. And there are some plays—*Measure for Measure* comes to mind—that, every time we even think about doing them, there is always something in the news that makes us go, "Wow, it's happening again." You know, it's Eliot Spitzer or it's Jerry Falwell. [Laughter.] And, do

we need to visualize it contemporarily for the thematic nature to be contemporary? I'm not sure that that is always true.

Armstrong: Any questions?

Audience member: Wouldn't it make a difference what play you're talking about? It seems to me if it's *Comedy of Errors*, that's fine, I can handle that. But if you start messing with *Hamlet*, I get real uncomfortable. I think the play would dictate to some extent the possibility of contemporizing.

Rauch: I would love to tease that out with you. When you talk about "contemporizing," do you mean contemporizing the language in adapting, as Scott referred to, or do you mean contemporary clothing? Anything?

Audience member: Well, everything. Some years ago you did [*Coriolanus*] where you had guys rappelling down the side of the outdoor theatre. That was very exciting. But I had a little difficulty with the whole thing. I guess [I would say] don't mess with the history plays.

Thomas: Because, as we all know, history is never messed with. [Laughter and applause.]

Rauch: As an artist who has sometimes has chosen contemporary settings for classical plays, I also think that a big part of the inspiration is that Shakespeare is so packed with anachronisms. Shakespeare had no interest in historical accuracy when he was dealing with something that was 500 years earlier or a thousand years earlier. There are references that are so topical about what was happening in his audiences' lives. So I think often artists are inspired to mix in the cultural lens of what is happening [in their present] because it feels like it is in the spirit of what Shakespeare was doing when he wrote the play.

Audience member: I think it was fun, Bill, in *Romeo and Juliet* last year how you injected that little comment from *West Side Story*. [Hums song.] [Laughter.] Also in *The Clay Cart*, where did that little old lady's purse come from? That was a modern purse.

Rauch: I'm happy to tell you about both those things, because neither of them was my idea. [Laughter.] It proves my mentor's adage that the director is welcome to—has to—take all the blame but can take none of the credit. And Dan Donohue [who played Mercutio], on opening night day, said, "I have this idea that I should do this *West Side Story* thing." So the first time that was being done was in front of the opening night audience. [Laughter] I'm the guy who didn't say no, but it was not my idea. And it was Deb Dryden's idea to inject, very sparingly, some modern costume accessories and props into *The Clay Cart*. I was resistant at first and she totally won me over. And that idea that [the mother] is everybody's mother and we can relate to her from any time period because she has that particular handbag, ultimately, I just thought I can't argue with how powerful that idea is. Do you want to add anything to that?

Dryden: Well, ironically, the purse comes up a lot in conversation. I never thought it would be such a big topic. An ordinary little navy handbag, it has received much discussion, both pro and con.

Armstrong: Myth #2. The best way to approach Shakespeare is traditionally.

Rauch: I heard somebody say, “What is traditional?”

Douthit: Well, that is the question, isn’t it? What do we mean by “traditional?” I define it by the last time I saw the play in production. That is my “traditional.”

Thomas: This myth causes me a lot of consternation. There were certain traditions in Shakespeare’s time that we know of. One of those is the all-male cast. So anytime there is a woman cast in Shakespeare, you can think of it as non-traditional. When I was growing up and dreaming about being in these plays, if I accepted the tradition of Shakespeare as I looked at it, there were only three roles I could play, if that. And those were the only few that could speak in verse. I could dream about doing some others, but they would only be prose and I would probably be killed in the next scene. [Laughter.] Or make a joke or sing a song. So, you know, it depends on what tradition we’re talking about. I think sometimes if we allow ourselves to get straight-jacketed by the term “traditional,” then we can lose out on a lot of things that Shakespeare’s plays can enlighten for us. And I think, the further we get from the time that these plays were written, the more good we can do ourselves if we relax our ideas of tradition. Maybe not relax—expand. Expand our ideas of tradition.

Rauch: Lue has really been on me to not use the word “traditional”—ever—if I’m speaking in public. I have an invisible collar. I’m in a lot of pain right now because I just used it. But, seriously, we’re really trying to shift, in terms of the organization itself and with our audience, away from that word; or to use that word in more and more specific ways. As G. Val’s putting out there, often we use “traditional” as shorthand for an old period; or, as we say, a period where the dresses touch the floors. Again, as Alan said in his opening remarks, our best guess, from a lot of research, is that the plays were originally done in what was essentially modern dress, contemporary dress. Do we mean the tradition that the actors should be wearing what the audience is wearing? Is that the tradition we mean? And that particular tradition of doing Shakespeare in the roughly historical period of when the play is written to be set in, or the period when the play was first produced, that is relatively new in the 400 years of producing Shakespeare. So I really hope with today’s discussion and the discussions we can keep on having, that we can continue to refine and deepen what we mean by this word “tradition” and get more specific, each of us, about what we mean every time we use it.

Dryden: I have to say that this comes up a lot in my work as a costume designer. I was thinking about it a lot over the last few days in preparation for this event, scaring myself thinking I don’t know what “tradition” means. And then I realized that I have been fortunate enough in the 30-some years that I have been designing Shakespeare and other

playwrights, that I have had the luxury of working as a costume designer in this moment in time that has allowed me to tell those stories in contemporary clothing. Often I've been able to tell them in a mixture, because that is what has been popular in the American theatre, certainly for many decades—a blended kind of style, which sometimes borrows liberally from other historical periods incorporating some modern elements. But it also has allowed me to do Shakespeare in quite stylized ways. The *Macbeth*—I have done several *Macbeths*, both on the outdoor stage and in the New Theatre, all of which were in one way or another stylized, so that they were in a not easily definable historical period. There is no such thing as being purely historically accurate, but I have had the luxury of also doing some productions that were consistent in their time period. All of those give me a great deal of richness of ways—of tools in the tool kit—to try to tell the stories each time. So I feel very fortunate that we have, both as a Festival and a theatre in this country, embraced this kind of multiplicity of visualization.

Audience member: I'm trying to think of a way of describing tradition [in terms of] what the play is saying to the audience and how does the audience react? And if that is what tradition is, then you want to do the same thing with us, so that we react to the play within our time the same way Shakespeare's audience did.

Rauch: I think that is one tradition, absolutely. The other thing that I think is very important to acknowledge is there is OSF's own tradition. Angus Bowmer founded this theatre in 1935 in wanting to create productions of Shakespeare in an Elizabethan style. The focus was on the words and the stories and was not about—to use language that sounds loaded—“tarting up” the productions. And that is a tradition that our audiences have come to expect, even though the modern-dress Shakespeare at OSF go back to *Timon of Athens* in the 1970s. There is a several-decades-long tradition of mixing periods, as Deb has described, here at OSF, and yet that founding legacy that the Elizabethan period approach is the proper approach for this organization continues to have a lot of weight. That is another tradition that we all have to acknowledge exists.

Kaiser: Another Festival tradition is that the outdoor stage has remained unamplified. This is a tradition that elsewhere is rapidly falling away; we are one of the last institutions where you see an outdoor play, a Shakespeare play that is utterly and completely unamplified. Going back to '35, this is a long-standing tradition.

Douthit: I'd like to address the very provocative idea of figuring out a way of how the Shakespeare plays may have landed with that audience, plus in terms of how we then feel that the plays we're producing will translate with us today. I'd also like to know where the metrics are to know how Shakespeare's audiences responded to those plays, other than to know that they were popular or not popular.

As far as I can tell, *Timon of Athens* was not produced in his lifetime, because he probably thought it wasn't going to be very popular. So we're rising above that tradition in a way. And because these continue to be so popular, we are honoring the tradition of producing Shakespeare. You know, 1600 is sort of a benchmark, give or take a decade or two. That was the first box office theatre. Before that, in the Middle Ages, somebody, a

patron or some citizen, took on the charge to produce the three-day festival. But the Shakespeare theatre, the Elizabethan theatre, is the first that we know of that was solely dependent on box office. And let me just say to you, if those plays were not popular, they were not run again. We don't do that, because we're going to produce *Timon of Athens*, you know. And, by God, *Henry VIII* in the Elizabethan next year. And every one of you better be there. [Laughter.]

Rauch: I got an angry letter from a patron about the response of young people at a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, saying, "Do you want this kind of hooting and hollering and vocal response ruining our Shakespeare experience?" [Laughter.] So this goes back to interpreting what the relationship is to that original audience. We know there were groundlings [audience members who stood in an open section in front of the stage]. We know the groundlings were probably boisterous in their responses. So, for me, when I have a group of young people in a theatre who are responding vocally, that is an incredible triumph for me as an artist. But I understand for some other audience members, it is a sacrilege of an experience that should be received quietly and respectfully, and not vocally.

Douthit: I will say that we assume a vocal response is what happened 400 years ago. I mean, in some ways, we are undercutting the potential for that kind of response in the way we present plays 400 years later. Those Elizabethan plays were done in the daylight. You were right there with the actors and performers; there was no separation. That separation is what began to happen in the mid-19th century when we began to have lights come in, which focused our attention to the stage and not our surroundings. So, in some ways, we are undercutting the potential of what we think and how we think those plays could have been received.

Thomas: We often, as actors, talk about the difference between then and now. I know, at least as far back as the Restoration, it was a British tradition for audience members to actually talk to the actors during the performance. People, if they didn't believe what you were doing, they would talk to you. Could you imagine being in the midst of *Hamlet*, "To be or not"—and having somebody scream out, "Kill yourself! Do it!" [Laughter.] I wonder, as 21st-century actors, how well would we would fare?

Armstrong: Myth #3 Shakespeare's plays should be performed as written.

Thomas: One of the things that would happen if we did do them "as written" is that half the vocabulary would be unknown to us. We would be out there saying words that we have no idea how to pronounce. And half the people wouldn't know what the heck we were talking about. There are some words we don't use any more.

Douthit: Or if we do, they're opposite of the meaning they had 400 years ago.

Thomas: One of the great examples is Miranda's speech [in *The Tempest*]; her line "Oh, brave new world." You know, "brave" back then, as far as we know, also meant "beautiful." Every *Tempest* production there is an argument about it. And that's what she

said. She is saying, “look, this is a beautiful new world.” Then Mr. Huxley took it and applied it in another way. And so the usage of certain words—as well as sounds in the English language—if we did them as written, might not be understood.

Kaiser: Part of the problem with “as written” is that we really don’t know very much about how the plays were performed versus how they were written down. We use the Folio of 1623. It was put together by a couple of actors after Shakespeare’s death. Some of the copies are very good, but some are very bad. There are Quarto versions of those Folios that completely contradict what is written in the Folio. There are first Quartos and second and third, each of which contradict each other. The major plays—*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*—have major differences, thousand and thousands of differences, in some cases. Many a PhD has been awarded to a scholar who has dedicated his life to figuring out how was this written? What was the playwright’s original intention? Was this a road tour? Was that something that was revised? Was this a reconstruction so that some actor could inflate his role to make it bigger and better? So the whole notion of “as written” I don’t find to be particularly useful, because, as theatre artists, we simply certainly don’t know, and never will know, how the plays were originally produced, what words actually tumbled into the Globe at the time they had been originally performed.

Audience member: I just came back from a pleasant visit in Virginia and heard an amusing comment that kind of fits with this. A young person came up and said, “I saw your *Henry V* and I was so amazed because it’s the first Shakespeare I ever understood. Could you tell me who translated it?” [Laughter.]

Armstrong: It’s surprising how often one hears that.

Douthit: People say it now about *Coriolanus*, “Did you change some lines?” No. Well, yes. Not in the way they’re referring to.

Thomas: Given the nature of how a theatrical production comes to be, Bill told you about the thing that happened on opening night day, and how many of those things happened during the original productions of some of these plays and they were written down. So we might already get it, not as written, but as thought up by some clever actor.

Douthit: I think the way we have been producing theatre is the same as it was 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece. I think people tried to learn their lines, they tried not to step on their costumes or their fellow actors. I think things happened in the audience that you responded to or not. I think it’s still a human, handmade event. And I don’t think we’re all that different—fortunately or unfortunately—right? I don’t think we’re altogether that different in the way we’re telling these stories. It’s still a body in front of an audience. So, it’s all kind of the same, in a way.

Audience member: It seems to me that a curative for this problem is to just keep going to the plays. I remember going to the plays when I was a kid with my parents, no expectations. Then you go to high school literature class, you get a teacher who teaches

you the men-in-tights version. But then you keep going to the plays. And, I can't imagine if I saw a Shakespeare play now in my 50s if it was exactly the same play, word-for-word, outfit-for-outfit as it was the first time I saw it when I was, you know, 12.

Rauch: You'd be disappointed.

Audience member: It's the richness of seeing the plays in so many different ways. That is what keeps it alive.

Audience member: So what is it that all Shakespeare plays have in common, or that different renditions of them have in common? I understand the uncertainty about the origins of the language and the tinkering that happens with it. What makes it Shakespeare?

Rauch: Wooooo! [Laughter] It's funny, those of us in the Artistic Office are working on a revision of our mission statement because each new Artistic Director at OSF has taken the substance of the mission statement and tried to frame it the way it made sense to him or to her over the years. And so we are right in the thick of that right now. And there is a phrase, the "blank" of Shakespeare's work. We are inspired by the "blank" or the "blank and blank" or the "blank-blank" of Shakespeare's work. And we just go in circles on this topic, and we talk about the immediacy and the vibrancy and how it stirs your soul and the humanity and the breadth and the depth and the scope. And we have not hit on a phrase yet that we're all at peace with. But it is something—for me, I'm just answering personally—it's something about how wide and how deep the work goes, you know, and so panoramic, and yet shockingly deep, in terms of the humanity of every character and every moment. That is a personal response.

Thomas: For me, as a performer as well as a director and an educator, it's the uncanny familiarity. There are a lot of these things that happen in these plays. And if you listen to yourself and you get in tune with your first reaction to it, you know it. There is a lot of this stuff that happened, and you go, I'm watching some Danish prince from however many hundred years ago, or I'm watching some Roman emperor from how many years ago, but what he just said, I get. I get that. So, for me, as Lue was saying, human beings, we haven't really changed that much. What we hunger for, what we drive for, the things that we need to lead what we want as a healthy and a vibrant life, those things are pretty much still in existence. We still hunger after some of those things. We still fight with the same demons that we have. So, for me, what makes it Shakespeare is that uncanny familiarity. I'm watching something which is so totally removed from me, but I get it.

Armstrong: Myth #4. Shakespeare's plays need to be tailored for each production.

Audience member: I'm wondering if you have guidelines for what you consider an adaptation? Sounds like you can change some of the text for a modern audience. You can probably switch scenes around a bit. You have some license to do that. Where do you think the line might be between an adaptation and saying you're doing Shakespeare?

Kaiser: We struggled with this when we did the *Henry the VI*s. We combined the Second and Third parts of *Henry VI* together into one evening. And we endlessly talked about: Well, is this an adaptation? A condensation? Is it an abridgement? Looking for the right word is very tricky. When you take six hours or eight hours of material and turn it into three, clearly, words begin to fail us. We're talking about the process. Another word is distillation. I think if we talked to Actors Equity, they would say there are official designations for something that has been adapted versus interpreted. So, again, it's very slippery ground, and I honestly don't have an answer for you, other than to say there is a huge amount of gray area once you start to tinker, once you start to pull out a scene, combine characters, transpose scenes. The more you dive into surgically altering the face of the play, the more it becomes an adaptation, although I'm not exactly sure where that line is.

Rauch: I think like any artistic choice, it's a judgment call. And it's a judgment call that, ultimately, Lue, as the head of her department, and I, as artistic director, have ultimate responsibility for making, whether we're calling something an adaptation or not. For my taste, I don't think there are any physical production choices that would ever lead to calling something an adaptation. For me, it's all about language and how much has the language been changed? And has it been changed to the point that we need to acknowledge that it's an adaptation of William Shakespeare?

Douthit: There is no formula. It's not like, just because we can do word checks now with computers, it's not like, oh, 25 percent of the words are changed, therefore that equals an adaptation. I think that for Bill and for me, when we make that assessment or have that conversation, it's based on how does it feel: Does it feel like it's kind of tipped over? Are people going to receive it in a way that seems that they will be questioning how the order of those things are put down on the page to be spoken? And it's, like I said, there is no formula about it. It's decided by our own instincts.

Audience member: Or if you added an entire scene?

Douthit: Yeah, that would count heavily in that sort of percentage. But, again, it's not like, oh, 32 percent; therefore, we have to call it. It just sort of depends.

Dryden: I really think it's fascinating how much time is spent discussing and investigating the text on every single Shakespeare production that we do here. The amount of time it takes to do just what we're talking about—analyzing every word over and over again, as to say: Does it stay? How can we change it? Are we doing too much? Before we have even talked about what the clothes are going to look like.

Thomas: And then, we start talking about how we *feel*. Sitting around the table going, “you know, that doesn't feel right, that doesn't taste right. I said that word, but that's not what I meant.” Then we have a whole ‘nother round we have to go through.

Audience member: At what point in the construction of a new production do you determine how you will—I hate to use the word “period”—but what sort of contemporary

or whatever period you're going to use in a Shakespeare production? Obviously, it sounds to me like you do that before you actually sit down and start reading through this. Maybe it's some influence that the director has, or something.

Rauch: I think a good specific example is last summer in July. We were finalizing images and copy for our brochure for the 2008 plays. Well, you go pick up your brochure right at the box office. You will see John Tufts sitting on a disco ball for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You will see *The Comedy of Errors*' saloon doors and very explicit prose about a Wild West setting. And you will not see anything specific about *Othello*. And believe me, if we had been able to say, "a lush, Jacobean production," or "a period production," we would have very happily shared that with the audience, especially those audiences who hunger for older periods. But the director at that point said, "I'm leaning toward it being an older period, but I don't want that reflected in the marketing materials yet. I'm not ready to commit to that." So, ultimately, our job is to communicate to you as much as we know, and to urge directors to be proactive in their decision making, but never to push an artist into making a decision they don't believe in yet. So it differs from director to director and from play to play and design team to design team.

Dryden: It is not unusual for the actual decision making (re: period style) to happen in a collaborative way. The initial design meetings happen many months before the production. Directors may come into those meetings with a clear idea of what story they want to tell with this production but may not have specific thoughts as to how to visualize that story. And at that point, the collaborative team is very much involved in brainstorming and collaboratively coming up with the visualization for the piece.

Rauch: In *The Comedy of Errors* that I directed in 2004, the Las Vegas-inspired setting came out of design meetings, and Bill Bloodgood, the set designer, was very influential in that. I wanted it to be completely contemporary. And Joyce Kim Lee, the costume designer, fought hard for 1962, and that's what it became. So, that's a great example. I did not come in and say, *Comedy of Errors*, 1962 Las Vegas, in any way, shape, or form. That was very collaborative.

Douthit: Also, how that affected the text, in terms of this myth about shaping. It was a very funny moment in that design conference when we landed in Las Vegas, sort of like "what happens here stays here," you know? As we were testing out: Could the actions of this play take place in a world like Las Vegas? We said, yes, check. Courtesans? Check. Jewelry? Check. All these strangers coming? All the actions of the play fit into that world. And then we realized that in Las Vegas, if we were going to keep it in that world, everything seemed to happen at night to us, right? [Laughter] Instead of during the day. We also had some gender-switching, did we not? We had to change he's to she's. But then we had done a lot of text work, we had to do this kind of fine-tuning to fit with that particular production. It's not always sequential and it's not always serial as well.

Kaiser: The other thing to add to that, just to throw in the element of speech, is to delineate the Dromios and their masters, the Antipholi. We had one set from Texas and

the other from New York. That came very much out of all these design decisions that Lue and Bill were discussing.

Audience member: How do you decide your season?

Rauch: Although it is the kind of cornerstone of my job decision to pick the plays—that is my responsibility, my privilege—it is an extremely collaborative process. Lue and I work very closely together, but everybody in the Artistic Office [does.] There is also a group called Boarshead, named for the pub in *Henry IV, Part II*. It's made up of representatives from every part of the organization, who read many of the plays we're thinking about. This year Boarshead consisted of 45 people, who were asked to read about 60 plays to consider for 2009. It's a huge time commitment. That includes representatives from the acting company and every department in the Festival. And so it's a very collaborative process. And, I would say the watchword is we want plays that we're excited to do, that we believe in, that we're passionate to do. There are stories that we feel need to be told. And what is going to create the kaleidoscope of experiences that is going to be thrilling for Festival audiences, those of you who are local and those of you who come from far away, knowing that often people will see two, three, four—up to nine plays in a single visit.

Is there enough variety in any given slice of time? That may be good, but in July, there is as much variety as there was back in February, or vice versa. So all of that goes into the season-selection process.

Audience member: Bill, First, did you receive much criticism about having a contemporary play, *Our Town*, in [the Elizabethan Stage]? Secondly, have you ever considered a matinee [in the Elizabethan] à la the Globe in London?

Rauch: The matinee issue often comes up. We think that what it would do to the actors to be baking sometimes in heavy period costumes and what it would do to audiences, too, to have that direct sun beating down on their heads, makes it untenable without some kind of redesign of what the space is.

Executive Director Emeritus William W. Patton [in the audience]: We had the experience. In 1953. I think it was rained out the night before. It was sold out. People wanted to see it, so we did a matinee.

Rauch: How did it go, Bill?

Patton: The entire audiences sort of got over against the wall. And the actors just died.

Rauch: The other thing [with matinees in the Elizabethan] is that you're cutting out lighting; which could be fine. But then, again, when you have built a show to be done at night that is based on lighting effects, to cut out that whole part of it is also challenging. With *Our Town*, I have got to say, I expected much more negative response. The people who are negative about it are keeping it to themselves. I'm sure people have negative

thoughts; I haven't heard them. I think we have been very open about the fact that this is an experiment. What will it be like to do a 20th-century American play on the outdoor stage? Let's learn together. Let's see how that play holds out there, and how that space holds with that story being told on it.

Douthit: And in that kind of language, too.

Rauch: But I think it's a good experiment. I think we will learn a lot from it.

Audience member: What you're talking about is a process of experimentation. Every production is an experiment. And, in science, certainly some experiments work, some don't. Can you—individually or collectively—specify productions that really lived up to all expectations and more, and why? And perhaps one or two—I have my own personal candidates—that maybe didn't? Can you express yourself on that? It might be interesting.

Thomas: You're asking for, like, a weekend of discussions. [Laughter.] I think each one of us up here has been involved with either end of the spectrum. I think to delineate from our experiences here at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival would be to invite a whole heap of different perspectives. But the short answer to your question, is, yeah, everybody had one that you just go, "yes, we did it, yay for me." As a theatre artist, you're exuberant for awhile, and then it's over, and you've got this next play to work on. So you just hope you can get anywhere close to that on this next one. Then there are those that you do and you walk away and pull your hat down. People mention it, you say, "Yeah, thank you. Did you happen to see the ball game last night?"

Douthit: I would rather use the word "process" rather than "experimentation," which sort of lends itself to say that you're going to solve that particular problem with a combination of ingredients and come up with a formula for something that can be repeated using the same set of ingredients. "Process" is more accurate, because, the bottom line is, every time out, we're starting over. No matter how experienced we all are, sometimes the chemistry works, sometimes we made right decisions. I like it to put it in a different frame, which is: What did we set out to accomplish? Did we accomplish it? Was it worth the doing? Quite frankly, in my 14 years here, there has been no production not worth doing. And I think that is pretty remarkable, and that is why I love being here.

[Applause.]

Rauch: If I had more class, I would let that be the last word, because that was such a good last word. [Laughter.] I would say that 90 percent of the mail I get—email and written letters—are about period settings, and people write with a lot of emotion about them. I want to say, as an artistic director, these are the kinds of productions that I am shooting for: ones where the people who are absolute, died-in-the-wool, self-described traditionalists come to see a play that has a shockingly contemporary sensibility and say: "That was so good and so moving and so vibrant that I went on the ride despite my predilections." And other ones where the people who say, "I hate museum theatre; I hate people in old musty dresses that touch the ground; I want to see relevance; I want to see how it connects to my life today," are transported by a gorgeous, lush, period OSF

production and get an immediate, direct hit on why this play is incredibly important in this moment. I want us to do productions—whatever their periods—that pull people out of their safety zones. Because you cannot rest on what you think you like, because the work is just too strong and right there and we just must respond to it for what it is.

Armstrong: That really is the end of our program today. Hope we can continue this conversation again.

Reported by Amanda Berkeley, Certified Shorthand Reporter