

Cranbrook Theatre School, Ridgedale Players train youth for stage

BY LINDA ANN CROMIN
STAFF WRITER

"Tony Castellani takes a few moments to rest before heading to a Ridgedale Players rehearsal in Troy. It's been a hectic summer running back and forth between teaching high school students at Cranbrook Theatre School in Bloomfield Hills and directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and acting in *Hamlet*, the two productions in the third annual Shakespeare Festival opening Friday, July 26, at Ridgedale Players.

"Theater is pretty much my life right now," said Castellani, director of the senior division at Cranbrook Theatre School and drama director at East Hills Middle School in Bloomfield Hills. "I'm working at Cranbrook from nine in the morning to four or five in the afternoon and the Greek Theatre in the woods and rehearsals at Ridgedale Players begin at seven. I'm rarely home but it's so much fun, the people I get to surround myself with. I had some of the actors a couple of years ago at Cranbrook Theatre School. It's interesting to see how they've grown. A lot of them are theater majors at colleges across the country and home for the summer. Of the 24 cast members 16 either have or are pursuing theater degrees. That's pretty unusual for a community theater show. There's lots of exceptional talent."

Jane Fader's going for a degree in theater and political science at Adrian College after studying at Cranbrook Theatre School just as her mother Amy did 30 years ago. This is Fader's first time doing community theater even though she performed with Junior Actors of Ridgedale during her four years at Cranbrook.

"It's such a great experience," said Fader. "The school is like cramming for a test. You learn so much in the six weeks and now I'm applying the basics of acting and character analysis to *Hermlia*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is high energy, funny, sensual. The amount of hard work that goes into it is amazing. I was in the production at Cranbrook two years ago.

Hermlia is innocent, sweet. She's not the villain. It's hard to keep things interesting and not last out at anyone."

Castellani's done his part to hold audiences' attention. "There's a misconception about Shakespeare being boring," said Castellani. "Midsummer is a comedy and moves very fast. Shakespeare's comedies were meant to be comedies. They're full of physical comedy. It's layered with traditional and non-traditional music and dance. We've edited in Hip Hop dancing, modernized the musical element."

"For an audience member afraid of Shakespeare they're going to have fun with it. It's a great place for people to start to turn on to Shakespeare."

Born and raised in Ludington, Castellani began teaching Shakespeare in high school but it took a job to change his life. Now he's torn between directing productions and playing roles like Claudius in the dark, brooding *Hamlet* directed by Waterford attorney John Rowland, artistic director of the Shakespeare Festival. Three nights a week Castellani directs *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and three nights a week rehearses the character that kills *Hamlet's* father and steals the throne.

"In high school I went and saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Stratford and I was just blown away," said Castellani. "Seeing it done in such a grandiose way turned me on to theater. That epiphany experience led me to choose that path."

"Shakespeare was a writer, actor, director and wrote for a specific company of actors and sometimes wrote the plays for particular occasions. *Hamlet* has a traditional Elizabethan feel, quite a contrast to *Midsummer*."

As choreographer Roberta Campion employed a variety of styles to update the comedy and keep it moving. Like Castellani, Campion lives theater. During the day the Southfield resident serves as associate and dance director at Cranbrook Theatre School. She's especially proud of the

staff there. Dance teacher Jennifer Flindt of Rochester Hills recently landed a role with the Rockettes - and school executive director Patrick Barnard was cast in the men's chorus in *Michigan Opera*. "There's a misconception about Shakespeare being boring," said Castellani. "Midsummer is a comedy and moves very fast. Shakespeare's comedies were meant to be comedies. They're full of physical comedy. It's layered with traditional and non-traditional music and dance. We've edited in Hip Hop dancing, modernized the musical element."

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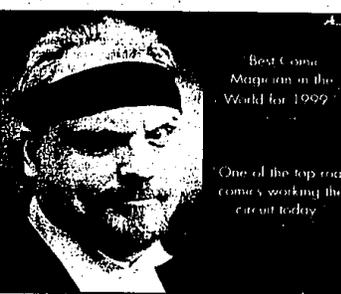
and the dance of the Queen of the Fairies is a rock the ground kind of dance. When Bottom is turned into an ass there's a bluesy strip kind of music that I've choreographed a sultry dance with a big feather bonnet. It's just hysterical."

Joanna Spanos learned much of what she knows about theater from Campion who directs the productions at Andover High School where Spanos was student. Now Spanos passes the knowledge on to students at Cranbrook Theatre School. She has two more years to go at the University of Michigan to earn a BFA in theater performance and a BA in English. After graduation she "plans to move to New York and make it as an actor."



Sarah Grace (left front row), Christine Pabian, Caitie Entwistle (middle row), Rita Montpetit, Bob Hotchkiss, Hilary Lake, Melysha Acharya (row three), Anna Fleury, Kristy Adamkiewicz romp through the Ridgedale Players production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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