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SHARED RADIANCE: MY SHAKESPEARE FAMILY

Written by Dan Manross

Pictured to the left.

Having been asked for several months, I finally said yes – I will audition to become a Shakespearean actor. I had run out of excuses. I had retired, so I couldn't use work and travel as an excuse any longer. So, I agreed to participate in an upcoming audition with Shared Radiance. Ah – “The Audition”, the actual true reason I had resisted. You see auditioning requires memorizing lines and at my age, I need post-it-notes just to get dressed in the morning. My fear of “The Audition” is well documented in the chronicles of Shared Radiance lore. But the allure is unmistakable.

The call to be part of a Shakespeare “family” was too great a draw, however, to succumb to my fears. I have loved Shakespeare's works since an early age. My school would take field trips in junior high to productions at the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival in Cleveland, Ohio where I grew up in the mid-'60s (I told you I was old). I was hooked.

Even as a younger child it was assumed that the television would be an excellent babysitter. Old movies were my playmates and when a Laurence Olivier Shakespeare movie would come on, I was transfixed. So that's how the fancy people talk. I was mesmerized. It has carried on to this very day. You can never get tired of a Shakespeare book, movie, or play. People say “why watch it again, I've seen that old play already” (when most people actually only remember bits and pieces). People may say the words all sound the same and are hard to understand. But each time we watch we find another gem or fun spot or heartfelt moment. We all know the endings (spoiler alert!) – Romeo and Juliet always die; Hero always gets her revenge; we all want to slap Richard III for his evil arrogance; we all groan with Falstaff's gullibility; Bottom always unknowingly becomes an ass, and Dogberry knowingly wants to be remembered as an ass.

It's the beauty of the language that draws us in but the variety of the production that keeps us coming back. It's like saying “we've seen the sunrise – what's the point of seeing it again – it's just the same sun”. Yet each time the glow is different, the hue is different, the clouds make it different, the breeze can make it different, etc. It is the same to me with Shakespeare. William Shakespeare sets the table with his words then the actors provide the flavor and the feast. The actors give the words purpose. An expression, a gesture, a costume can make the words come alive and bring them meaning no matter how old the original script is–the words were written to be acted–and thus the story can have substance in any venue, time period, or costume desired.

Yes, the words are the same but oh how they come to life! Being part of Shared Radiance is to be able to see a Macbeth, or a Shylock, a Puck or a Hermia transform from a typed gray line on a piece of paper to the emotion of the moment on the stage. Seeing the actors from the first day of a read-through to the opening night performance is like the beauty and amazement of watching a caterpillar change into a butterfly. The ability of these young people to metamorphose words into actions is electrifying. It is like a new sunrise each morning. They do it because they love doing it. It shows in their devotion to the part, to their dedication to each other, and their commitment to the process. Their constant collaboration, zeal to get it right, and then lend their extensive various talents to making it all come together makes me proud to associate with the organization – or family as it has become.

Being a part of Shared Radiance has allowed me to reinvent my joy of The Bard by providing a platform to “Share the Radiance” with others. To date, I have been in five Shared Radiance productions with another one pending post Covid. Every day of rehearsal is like a warm family reunion – except in this family I have to remember my lines. If only we could get rid of that audition thingy!



GRATITUDE FOR GRANTS

Thanks for Generous Funding During Tough Times

Written by Sherri Raeford and Chappell Upper

We are pleased to announce that we have been awarded multiple NC Cares for the Arts grants from ArtsGreensboro and Guilford County. The NC Cares for Arts Grant is designed to offset business disruption and/or expenses incurred due to COVID-19. To learn more about the NC Cares for the Arts grants, please visit the ArtsGreensboro website [here](#).

Shared Radiance Performing Arts Company would like to thank the NC General Assembly for awarding 9.4 million to the arts in North Carolina during this time. We also thank the North Carolina Arts Council for overseeing the program. For being instrumental in all of our grants since November, we would like to thank ArtsGreensboro. We are grateful for the work they’ve done in providing a relief fund to arts groups to help organizations support their creative planning and mission and in making final grant awards. They have been a strong force and lifeline, both before the COVID-19 pandemic and during.

For the Guilford County grant, Shared Radiance Performing Arts Company would like to thank Guilford County and the Board of Commissioners for their fearless leadership and passionate advocacy. We feel blessed to be based out of Guilford County.

We are truly grateful to be able to continue our mission to entertain, enlighten, educate and explore experiential theatre through the works of Shakespeare and

beyond. Through generous funding, we will keep on reaching out to educators, schools, and the community at large with quality programming and experiences. We have been overwhelmed with the support and appreciation the arts have been given during this time. Thank you to all who have helped us survive and thrive.



MEET OUR PLAYERS: PATSY HAWKINS

Introduction and Interview by Chappell Upper
Patsy Hawkins is pictured to the right.

“... I am obnoxiously proud that I am 76 years old.”

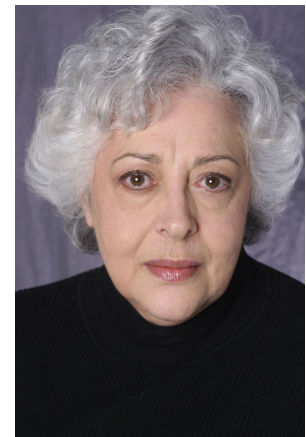
When I asked Patsy Hawkins if we could feature her in this article she said we “must be having a slow news day,” but agreed. Humble and thoughtful, Patsy deserves more praise than she’s willing to give herself. Not only is she a writer and actor, but a friend, wife, mother, grandmother, soon-to-be pet owner, indigenous woman, ukulele player, and much more. Somehow she still doesn’t seem to think of herself as newsworthy. It’s one reason praise must be given here.

In the text below, my statements are preceded by a “C” and Patsy’s are preceded by a “P.”

C: What's your favorite color?

P: Teal.

C: If you were an animal, what would you be and why?



P: If I were an animal, I would choose to be an English Cream Golden Retriever. Golden Retrievers are the essence of joy. They can be your best friend and/or your best therapy dog. Goldens are very clever, definitely funny, most often smiling, and have a pure heart. Imagine that the Simple Art of Being would bring so many people so much joy.



On the left, Patsy Hawkins, Ruan Walker, and Jalila Bowie pose in costume for Sisters of Mine. On the right, Sherri Raeford and Patsy Hawkins discuss writing. Both photos are by Steve Raeford.

C: [What's your Shared Radiance story?](#)

P: April 18, 2019. That's the day I received this message from Chauncey Miller, " My friend Sherri Raeford is putting together a play for the 100th anniversary of the women's suffrage movement.....we realized she didn't have any indigenous women. Would you be interested in speaking to her about it?" Long story short. I was, and I did.

I am an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. I had a fair grasp of our history, but I was not at all informed as to how my tribe could possibly be connected to the women's suffrage movement. The North Carolina band of Tuscarora proved to be the thread that connected my people to the Indigenous women of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The women of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in upstate New York educated Elizabeth Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony in the art of women's rights.

Each sister, being not only brilliant, but incredibly talented and thoughtful, researched and wrote her own speech. Our first performance was scheduled for March 27 in Asheville, NC for a AAUW conference. And then there was Covid-19.

C: [You were a part of the team that developed, wrote, and performed Sisters of Mine: Hear the Voices. What does sisterhood mean to you?](#)

P: When I met the sisters at Sherri's for the first meeting, I would have never expected how deeply this association with Shared Radiance and Sherri Raeford would become. Sisters of Mine would fulfill, lift, and nurture me as a sentient being. I felt a camaraderie that I had not felt in years. The nine of us did in fact become sisters on and off stage. As diverse as our research subjects were, we sisters encompassed the spectrum: we were short, tall, slender, fully-figured, Italian, Jewish, African American, Chinese American, Native American, Christian, bi-racial, tri-racial, surely somebody was Irish or English! As diverse as our lineage was, we were united with a single purpose: to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.

C: [When you're not acting or writing, what do you do?](#)

P: When I am not acting or writing, I enjoy playing my ukulele, reading, and binging some show on cable. I find it most unfortunate that I can not do all at the same time. This spring we are expecting two puppies. One male. One female. I expect the activity level around here will pick up considerably. I would like to get back into my long form tai chi when this pandemic is over. For the present, I'm trying to get in a better physical state to not be overwhelmed by two puppies!

C: [What's the first thing you'll do when the pandemic is over?](#)

P: The first thing I want to do when the pandemic is over is take a trip to the ocean and eat lightly battered fried oysters until I pop!

C: [What's something most people don't know about you?](#)

P: Can't be sure what people don't know about me. Maybe that I like to be alone in my own world with no talking. I love sardines out of the can. I can't eat ice cream. I don't like chocolate. I don't like to talk on the phone unless it is someone I love like my sisters! I have zero interest in shopping unless I HAVE to have something, and then I will just bear it until it is over. It distresses me to think 'what is for dinner' every day for the rest of my life! I'd be happy to swallow a pill for a meal and get back to doing something more interesting. I'm not particularly proud of this, but forgiving is not my strong suite. And I will not suffer a fool. Sorry. (NOT SORRY!)

C: [What do you like most about yourself? Don't be shy!](#)

P: The thing I like most about myself is that sometimes I get in "The Zone" and can write or say things that are insightful, thoughtful, even helpful, and upon occasion humorous.

C: Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know? Do you have any final words?

P: I would like our readers to know that I am obnoxiously proud that I am 76 years old. I didn't start doing theatre until I was 43 years old. I'm still doing theatre whenever I have the opportunity. I joined the Greensboro Playwright Forum when I was 69. We adopted our 2 year old daughter from Korea when we were 40 years old. When I was 43, I was diagnosed with a highly aggressive carcinoma. I'm a 33 year out cancer survivor. For my 60th birthday, I got a ukulele which I love to play. At 76, I feel as if I have finally come in to being the me I was always supposed to be. Getting older is one of the best things that has ever happened to me.



LEARNING AND GROWING

A Roundup of the 2021 Shakespeare Theatre Association Conference

Written by Chappell Upper

Artistic Director and Founder Sherri Raeford and Assistant Managing Director Chappell Upper attended the 2021 Shakespeare Theatre Association Conference. They were pleased and excited to engage in ongoing training and education. The conference took place virtually via Zoom and Whova from January 5th to January 15th. Events and activities included workshops and networking.

Workshops incorporated a variety of topics including, but not limited to *Shakespeare as Scaffold for Social Justice*, *What is the City but the People?* *Authentic Community Partnerships*, and *There is Nothing Good or Bad but Thinking Makes It So: Healthy Mindfulness*. Networking groups were organized by everything from favorite fast food meals to existential crises. Lots of thoughts and ideas were shared over the course of two weeks. Several new friends were made as well.

According to the [website](#) for the conference, "The Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA) was established to provide a forum for the artistic, managerial, educational leadership for theatres primarily involved with the production of the works of William Shakespeare; to discuss issues and methods of work, resources, and information; and to act as an advocate for Shakespearean productions and training." To learn more about STA, you can visit their general website [here](#).



LOVE, HOPE, JOY: *SHINE* 2021

Written by Chappell Upper

For this year's Shine fundraising event, members of the Shared Radiance family came together to perform various acts virtually. True to tradition, Sherri Raeford directed the cabaret, but in a twist, decided to focus the theme on love, joy, and hope instead of love alone this year. Bill Pirkey edited together the whole show and his wife, Jenni Pirkey, worked as a production assistant. The cast of ShakesCollage served as the masters of ceremony, including Sherri Raeford, Jenni Pirkey, David Merritt Jr., Joey Upper, Jasmine Fuchs, and Chappell Upper. The final product premiered on February 5th and is available now for viewing on [YouTube](#).

The show featured several musical acts, including Brianna Witherspoon performing *Can't Help Falling in Love* by Elvis Presley. A majority of the straight, or non-musical, acts were original pieces. One example is Judy Dove's original poem called *Morning Capriccio*. The sole dance performance was a swing by Sherri and Steve Raeford to *Rockin' Robin* by Bobby Day.

Shine has always been a joyful event and many of our Shared Radiance veterans look forward to participating every year. Newcomers often find themselves drawn in by the energy and excitement of the showcase. We hope our audience enjoyed viewing this year's Shine as much as our performers enjoyed making it. Until we can meet again in person, we wish you love, hope, and joy.



NCTAE WINTER FOCUS: DIRECTING AND PRODUCTION IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

With Sherri Raeford and Bill Pirkey Written by Sherri Raeford

"I thoroughly enjoyed working with these folks. They were very engaged and did a wonderful job. It was fun to watch them go from reading to performance level in less than 24 hours!"

- Bill Pirkey

Shared Radiance Artistic Director, Sherri Raeford and Board Member, Bill Pirkey were pleased to spend a virtual weekend with theatre teachers from across North Carolina leading a workshop in "Directing and Producing in a Virtual World." The workshop was offered through the North Carolina Theatre Arts Educators (NCTAE) at their Winter Focus Conference in February and arranged through Educator and Shared Radiance Resident Actor, Christopher Veneris.

Sherri served as Director and Bill as Technical Director and Editor to a 9 ½ hour journey of rehearsing and producing a 40 - minute zoom production of key

scenes from A Midsummer Night's Dream. In this Marathon Weekend, the group rehearsed on Friday night and Saturday morning, filmed on Saturday evening, with Bill editing and having the final product by Sunday morning. Bill and Sherri also had time to share techniques and concepts they have learned this past year while being thrust into the world of virtual theatre.

We loved the reactions of our participants to the weekend:

"This past weekend was my first time working with Shared Radiance, and boy do they live up to their name! Sherri Raeford created such a welcoming and safe environment for us to be free as artists, and Bill Pirkey made everything so technically easy!"

*- Medina Demeter, Hoke County High School, Raeford, NC
NCTAE Professional Development Committee Contracts Liaison*

"Winter Focus was such an amazing experience. Shared Radiance is such a great cause; and I'm glad to have been a part. I would love to work with them again in one of their high-quality zoom productions. Highly recommend to anyone looking for a great virtual show!"

-Valerie Cook

"Working with teachers was so exciting and meaningful to us. Education is such a key part of who we are as a company and we have missed being in the schools and educational settings this year. I always enjoy seeing theatre teachers, who are often behind the scenes, taking the stage. They were innovative, creative, motivated and fun to direct."

- Sherri Raeford



OUR 2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

Our players share their favorite memories from the past year.

Shine 2020



"One thing that stands out is the magical night at Shine at TS when we received our Constance Welsh Theatre for Youth Award from NCTC and so many of our players were there to stand on the stage with us and share the moment."

- Sherri Raeford

"When my sweetie and I did our cha cha in Shine I felt like we totally got it right no mistakes, is great when the performance out does all the practice, I felt really good about it, best ever, also a huge cool factor therein was our two amazing vocalists, Liam and Tori, they were so awesome some of their velvet vibes rubbed off on us, cool by association."

- Steve Raeford



"Daniel the amazing Cupid Man and Jenni "Goddess of Love" Pirkey running around the cabaret."

- Sheryl Renee Chase

Dan Manross as Cupid is pictured to the left during a Studio 609 performance.

"I always look forward to being in Shine, and this year's highlight for me was getting to perform a classic Carol Burnett skit with Joey!"

- Robin Ward Gentile

"Shine was such a great time! It's especially poignant looking back on Shine now because back in February everything was still normal. Covid19 hadn't reached the U.S. and we could gather together, give hugs, and celebrate love."

- Maggie Swaim

"Eppie doing my make-up and making me look pretty."

- Jenni Pirkey

"Maybe I'm a bit biased..."

- Eppie Jo Miller



To the right, Kristian Torres proposes to Eppie Jo Miller at the Upstage Cabaret performance of Shine 2020.

ShakesCollage before COVID



To the left, David Merritt Jr. dabs in a horse head mask while Steve Raeford looks on. To the right, Jenni Pirkey and David Merritt Jr. rehearse Pyramus and Thisby for a practice audience.

Radiant Masks

“The sense of purpose and hope that Jan Yarborough gave to me and to all of us with her mask making and our collaboration has been a godsend during the pandemic.”

- Sherri Raeford

“The path to the mask making joint venture feels magical. I started getting calls (and am still getting calls) to go back to active duty nursing to help in the pandemic. I started making masks to quiet the nurse inside who was screaming that I have to help. After I had made a couple of dozen (shout out to my quilter cousin who gave me my first supply of fabric - most requiring fussy cutting). When a few people insisted on paying, I asked them to donate to Shared Radiance. During the pandemic, I had a dental emergency. My dentist was making masks too - and showed me one of hers that she had embellished with a few rhinestones. Those stones stirred something inside this ballroom dancer! I have stones and I know what to do with them. Sherri Raeford saw the potential and after a brief and distant outdoor tutorial, she blinged her cat mask. Then I asked if she wanted to bling for donations. And the success of the masketeers has gotten me through! Every time I see our masks in the wild I feel so happy.”

- Jan Yarborough



Jenni Pirkey models a Shakespeare mask sewn by Jan Yarborough and painted by Sherri Raeford in the photo to the right.



The Tempest

“Complete with sneakers if I had to outrun Caliban.”

- Jenni Pirkey

Jenni Pirkey poses as Prospera in costume to the left.

Sisters of Mine

“I was so honored to be asked to be a part of Sisters of Mine!!”

- Robin Gentile

“I was in a really dark place when Chauncey Miller IM'd me to contact some lady named Sherrie Raeford who was looking for a Native American. Suddenly I had 8 glorious sisters to call mine! The rest is history, and I am dark no more!”

- Patsy Hawkins

Julius Caesar

“I've only worked on one show with Shared Radiance, "Julius Caesar" this past summer. We had a great director, Chauncey Miller, and a wonderful cast. It's a great memory for me and I hope to work with Shared Radiance again sometime.”

- Randy Morris



A Midsummer Night's Dream

“When the Mechanicals had their first rehearsal and improvised!”

- Carrie Moscoe

The cast of A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Zoom Experience goof off in the photo to the left.

Director Jenni Pirkey tries on Bottom's donkey costume in the photo to the right.



“Of course the chance to reprise my signature role as wall, with all the fun and talented mechanicals, new friends and old, thank you Shared Radiance!”

- Steve Raeford

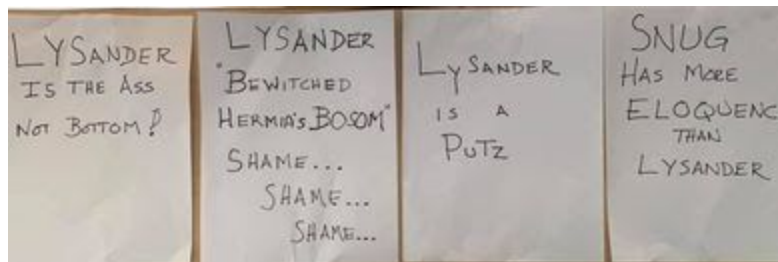
“Having the opportunity to be Puck in Jenni Pirkey's Midsummer was magical. It gave me joy, a challenge and lots of amazing interaction with a stellar cast.”

- Sherri Raeford

“I’m here for this Dan/DJ rivalry,”

- Taylor Neese

Some of Dan Maross’ character notes are pictured below. He played Egeus, Lysander’s would-rather-not-be father-in-law.



Hamlet

“This line from Hamlet rehearsal:

Stephanie: DJ, when the audience looks at you, they should start to cry!

Daniel Manross: when people look at DJ they already start to cry.”

- Carrie Moscoe

“In a rehearsal for Hamlet, I (Polonius) was off-screen waiting to be stabbed, and I was so mesmerized watching Jenni Pirkey perform as Gertrude that I totally missed DJ thrusting the sword, so there was this delay and then a surprised “Ah!”

- Judy Dove

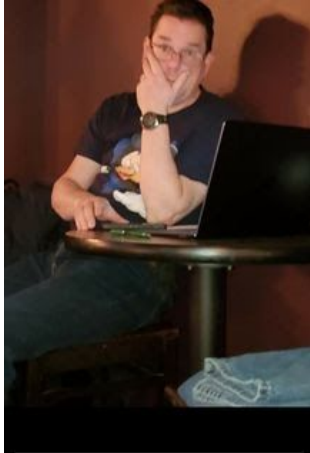
“Watching the Ghost disappear in Hamlet!”

- Judy Dove

“Getting the opportunity to play Ophelia in Hamlet!”

- Emily Mohler

Zoom Productions in General



“My greatest memory is the direct result of the pandemic. With all the Covid restrictions in 2020 we were not able to freely visit with family members and close friends. The Zoom productions allowed a gathering and conversations with good friends. I was able to reconnect with old acting peeps and meet wonderful actors from other cities and even other States. Without being forced to do virtual performances, I would not have met such talented, gracious people and incredible actors. I hope someday our paths could meet and I would enjoy sharing a real stage with all of them. I promise to behave.”

– Dan Manross

Bill Pirkey, who served as technical director and editor for all of our Zoom shows in 2020 is pictured to the left on a late night.

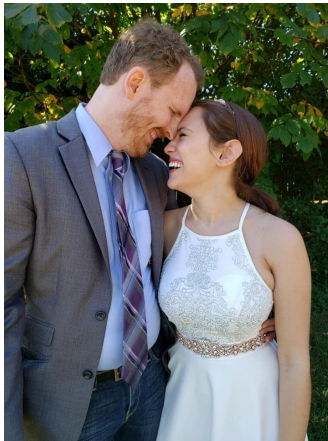


SHARING THE LOVE: A WHIRLWIND ROMANCE

Newlyweds and New Parents Tori & Sean McCracken Share Their Story

Written by Chappell Upper Edited for Length

Tori and Sean McCracken are pictured below.



While I’m still in the process of getting to know Sean McCracken, I’ve known Tori since we went to high school together. Our friendship has produced many surprises, including one that was revealed when I sat down with Tori and Sean for an interview over Zoom. Their newly adopted, two-and-a-half year old son Eli joined them for our meeting. The only one missing was big brother, Pavel.

The interview that follows is joyful and loving. I wish I could include all of the little nuances I wasn’t able to record here with their words alone, like every time they laughed with each other. When I asked about their history with Shared Radiance, Tori took on a nasal, mocking tone meant to shrug off any pretentiousness to say she’s been with the company from the very beginning. Later when Tori made a terrible pun (it’s hard to miss) both interviewees punctuated the moment with a goofy grin and a snapping motion.

In the text below, my statements are preceded by a “C,” Tori’s are preceded with a “T,” and Sean’s are preceded with a “S.” Anything I’ve added for clarification is in parentheses. Please enjoy the interview. I know I did.

C: [What Shared Radiance projects have you been involved in?](#)

T: The Tempest!

S: Together or separately? Because she's been in everything.

T: Well, I was there for the conception of Shared Radiance. Do you need a list? Midsummer, the first Tempest, the first Twelfth Night, the second Midsummer, Much Ado About Nothing . . . I flew in from Florida for As You Like It for a weekend. I was in the original ShakesCollage - learned the show in a day because I was the understudy and then I was not the understudy anymore. Am I missing a show?

S: Romeo & Juliet.

T: Oh! The one that Sean saw. That was the only tragedy I was in. I was in all the comedies, except for the last (in-person) one.

C: [In a few sentences, can you sum up your love story?](#)

T: Um, weird? Actually it's funny because it was Shakespeare-induced. We met when he did Midsummer with Theatre Raleigh and then didn't talk for a year because we were just like "hey." Then we re-met a year later in a different show. A little while after that we started hanging out. It was kind of perfect timing. It's like love at second sight.

C: [What were your first impressions of each other?](#)

T: I thought he was super cool. I was like "Oh, he's this big-time, professional actor," which is stupid because I'm a professional actor. I put him on such a pedestal in my brain that I thought "if we could be friends, that would be cool, but he's probably too busy to be my friend." I was starstruck.

S: My first impression . . .

T: You're so mean.

S: I knew Liam (Yates - another Shared Radiance veteran) really well. We've worked together in Raleigh for years and done a million shows together. He kept talking about his best friend. I don't know what I thought his best friend would look like, but I saw Tori and I was like "THAT'S your best friend? How? Just . . . gorgeous."

T: He was not expecting Liam's best friend to be cute.

S: No, I wasn't.

T: Which was very rude to Liam.

C: *As a follow-up question, what do you think of each other now?*

S: I still don't believe that Liam's friend is this hot.

T: Obviously I'm not intimidated by him anymore.

S: C'est la vie.

T: We're still very much in love. I think we love each other more every day which is weird because -

S: We fell in love very quickly.

T: It felt like it had peaked, but it hadn't. Surprise! We kind of live our lives fast and furiously over here.

S: Well the pandemic had something to do with that.

T: COVID taught us to stop waiting for things.

C: *In The Tempest, you had a chance to work together. Have you worked together on any other projects?*

S: We were in a school tour of Midsummer Night's Dream with Theatre Raleigh.

T: He was Peter Quince and Demetrius. I was the stagehand - slash - Cobweb - slash - Snout.

S: You were also sort of the Vanna White.

T: "If you look over here, we have a sign that tells us our location."

C: *What is working together like?*

T: The Tempest was a lot more fun because we actually interacted. I don't think we interacted at all in Midsummer.

S: It would be nice to do more things where we actually interact with each other. I think that would be a lot of fun.

C: [Tori, in your wedding announcement, you said “ . . . sometimes you just have to get married and run away to Disney.” Can you tell us a little bit about it?](#)

S: We tried to plan a wedding during COVID and kept realizing there was no way to plan a wedding during COVID. We kept saying “Okay, we have this really big idea. We have no way of making sure it comes together in any sort of timeframe because we don’t know what the pandemic is going to be like in three months, six months, a year, a year and a half.” We had friends who had all these deposits being lost because the venues or the caterers were going under. They couldn’t guarantee they’d be around at that time. Different states were closing different things at different rates and different times. We went from having this big plan to this tamed-down plan to this very-tamed-down plan. Nothing we were planning, even the most tamed-down plans, we couldn’t be one hundred percent sure we could pull off. We were like “You know what? We just want to be married. Let’s just do it.”

T: We were going to get married at the detention center. You know, normally you go to the courthouse to get married, but during COVID you can’t. You CAN go to jail and get married.

S: Apparently that’s always an option that anyone can take up.

T: You can just do a walk-in wedding at the detention center. I told my friend, Cynthia, we were going to go to the detention center and get married and she said “over her dead body.” So we found Sean’s old pastor from high school and we found this church that allowed a few people and we were like “fine, we’ll do it there for Cynthia’s sake.” I just thought it would be funny to get married at the detention center because then you could say “well I always heard that marriage was a prison.” We also knew we wanted to add to our family so it was like everything was lining up. Then we ran away and had a mini-moon in Disney. It was a few days because we still had work and we got married in the middle of the week.



S: On a Wednesday morning.

Toi and Sean enjoy their Disney mini-moon in the photo above.

C: [During this year’s Shine, you announced your intent to adopt a second child. Can you tell us more about that?](#)

T: By the time Shine premiered, we actually already had Eli. We got a call on Friday, January 22nd. The day before I’d heard back from our agent there was, quote, “a big

fat nothing burger” about Eli and his case. The next we got a call saying “we’re looking at your home study right now and we think that y’all are awesome. Yay!” So the next step is they get an adoption committee together and vote on this. They called us back an hour later and said “The adoption committee is here. We went ahead and started all of this process because we like you so much.” We got approved that day. They said, “we’re going to have a (Zoom) meeting on Wednesday with everyone.” Before the Zoom meeting we got a call saying “hey, do you want to come down here this weekend and get him?” Thursday, January 28th we went down to Georgia. Eli was in the custody of North Carolina, but was with a foster family in Georgia. We brought him back on the 30th, which is my dad’s birthday.

Pavel, Sean, and Tori pose for a family photo below. Not pictured is the new baby, Eli.

C: **What lessons have you learned from each other?**

T: What lessons have you learned from me?

S: What have I learned from you?

T: You have to think about it? That’s so rude.

S: Okay, fine. What have you learned from me?

T: Well, for one, I have learned some acting stuff because you’re an excellent coach. Also, I have learned that . . . how do I phrase this? It’s okay to let go of who you thought you were and to grow and go forward cause I’ve seen that a lot with you and your story and your life. It’s not that you’re a different person than you were when you were younger. It’s that you’ve grown up. Your eyes have been more opened to the world and it’s okay to accept a new iteration of yourself. I think that’s been really important for me because I have a lot of personal crises about “who am I” and “what’s happening.” It’s learning how to accept yourself for who you are and also accept the fact you’re going to continue growing and changing.

S: I think I’ve learned new ways to continue to grow and change from you.

T: Aww. Look at us. We’re so cute.



At this point in the interview, I asked the real-life couple which Shakespeare couple they thought they were most like based on their personalities. They went back and forth so many times I decided to compile their answers in a list with notes pulled from their statements instead of writing it out in full.

- ❖ Benedick and Beatrice - Tori often asks Sean to kill Liam.
- ❖ Oberon and Puck - As portrayed by Chris Veneris and Tori
- ❖ M and Lady M from the Scottish Play - Without the murder.
- ❖ Two of the Three Witches from the Scottish Play - Liam is the third witch and his girlfriend, Rin, is Hamlet.
- ❖ Orsino and Viola - Tori disagrees.
- ❖ Lysander and Hermia - They ran away together to Disney World.
- ❖ Hamlet and Ophelia
- ❖ The Nurse and Friar Laurence - As portrayed by Jenni Pirkey and myself
- ❖ Dogberry and Hugh Oatcake
- ❖ Every Shakespeare couple - It depends on the day.
- ❖ Ferdinand and Miranda - They compete to take care of each other.

C: [Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share?](#)

S: I think we should play all of the famous Shakespeare couples.

T: My parting wisdom is . . . do you ever realize how much Sherri is like Betty White?

S: Please put that in there.

T: My parting wisdom is always follow your heart, don't be afraid to take chances, and life is short, especially in a pandemic, so go adopt a child.

S: Get married and run off to Disney.

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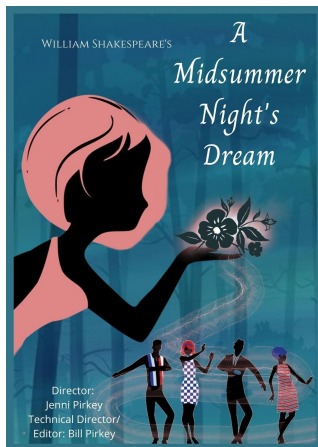
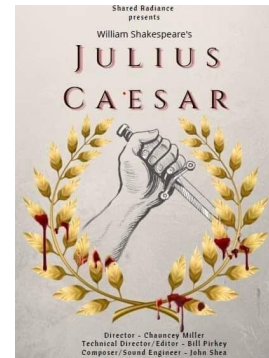
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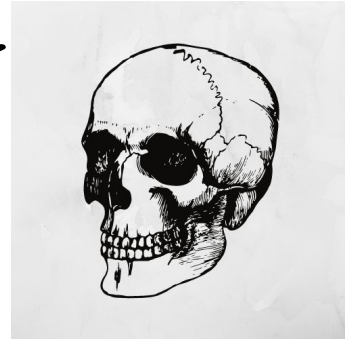
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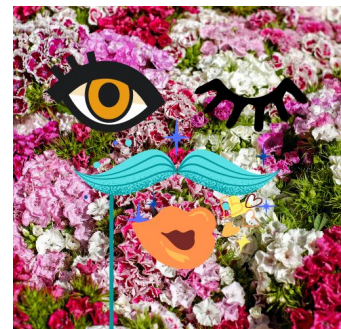
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