

This Valley Life: A peek behind the curtain

By Jim Ott
Columnist

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ALTHOUGH SHAKESPEARE wrote his plays more than 400 years ago, many of his expressions are so common today that most people have no idea they are "speaking Shakespeare" when they use such phrases as "come full circle," "as luck would have it," "short and the long of it," "one fell swoop" and "elbow room."

This is because, along with the Bible and Samuel Johnson's 1755 "Dictionary of the English Language," the plays were typically found in households in England and America for many generations as our language was finding its modern voice.

In fact, Shakespeare's stories are such a part of our lives that we don't always realize how he has influenced our ways of looking at the world. For example, while love and marriage are treated differently in some cultures, our western and romantic belief in the purity of love at first sight is certainly associated with how Romeo and Juliet fall in love.

It's no wonder, then, that Shakespeare's characters continue to resonate with us and why he remains the most popular playwright in the United States.

It's also one reason that Lisa Tromovitch enjoys producing Shakespearean plays in the Tri-Valley. For more than eight years, she has been the producing artistic director for Shakespeare's Associates, producing the Livermore Shakespeare

Festival at Concannon Vineyard and overseeing indoor plays and performances.

"We have an intelligent audience, and many are

interested in how theater is created," said Tromovitch, describing a unique opportunity taking place later this month at the Bothwell Arts Center in Livermore. Shakespeare's Associates is offering an evening of workshops to community members, teachers, students and playgoers that will reshape the experience of attending the Livermore Shakespeare Festival.

"We want to involve people in the creative process," she said, "to experience how to make language live and breathe." The sessions will unlock clues to the meaning of Shakespeare's original texts, explore fight choreography and stage combat techniques, and examine acting techniques.

As for the fighting techniques, "Think sword fighting," said Philip Manwell, the dean of art and communications at Las Positas College who also serves as a board member of Shakespeare's Associates.

"We thought it might be interesting for people to learn a little bit about what goes on before the show opens."

Professional actors will help facilitate the workshops, and the examination of the scripts will be based on Canadian scholar Neil Freeman's work with original texts, which differ in subtle ways from the First Folio texts. Freeman's work offers hints to meaning and stage direction when the plays were originally produced by the acting company in which Shakespeare was both a financial partner and an actor.

"We'll hunker down together with the text,"

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Tromovitch said. "Then we'll learn some acting techniques and stage combat." She said the experience will be one of "audience and artist working together. Our patrons get to participate, not just be spectators."

Because Shakespeare's Associates is a nonprofit, the event also is a fundraiser. For adults, tickets are \$80. Food, soda and wine are included. Tickets are \$20 for teens.

"These are real workshops that will benefit actors, teachers of theater or Shakespeare, and anyone in our community who wants a hands-on experience," Tromovitch said.

The event will be held from 6 to 9:30 p.m. Feb. 26 at the Bothwell Arts Center, Eighth and G streets, Livermore. For details, go to www.LivermoreShakes.org or call 925-443-2273.

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