

Terry Wells relishes playing two roles in 'As You Like It'

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



Wells

The third time's the charm for actor Terry Wells, whose appearance in the Southern Shakespeare Company's production of "As You Like It" will be his third time performing in the play over the length of his career. During this May's

Southern Shakespeare Festival in Cascades Park, Wells will appear as two characters, Duke Frederick and Duke Senior. Both differ greatly from his previous roles in the comedy — his first time as Adam at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in the late '90s, and the second time as Jacques during one of his final performances in Toronto before returning to Tallahassee.

As an actor, Wells has been delighted to work with many talented directors, and considers Canadian director Rod

Cebellos to be a prominent mentor as he cast Wells in many diverse and challenging roles. With every project and play, Wells appreciates traversing different worlds, and the customs, dynamics and behaviors of each character he's given the chance to embody. Wells has been particularly drawn to classics, the language of the bard both striking and enticing him. His favorite roles in Shakespeare have included Jacques from "As You Like It," Feste in "Twelfth Night," and Lavatch in "All's Well That Ends Well."

"Lavatch was just a sweet guy to play, and Jacques was such a philosophical, melancholy, and strange kind of guy," said Wells. "Feste was really fun because he had some great songs that I got to sing, which I don't normally do. I was also given the opportunity to go nuts with the pranks his character pulls, and I enjoyed exploring that side of my personality."

No matter the play or role, Wells always appreciates a challenge. He

If you go

What: Southern Shakespeare Festival presents "As You Like It"

When: 8 p.m. Friday, May 12, and Saturday, May 13; 7 p.m. on Sunday, May 14

Where: Capital City Amphitheater/Cascades Park, 1001 South Gadsden Street

Cost: Free

Contact: Visit <http://www.southern-shakes.org>

found just that in two recent shows, playing Sigmund Freud in "Freud's Last Session" and performing in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" with a Sarasota theater troupe. Both plays discussed and brought to light everything from faith and prejudice to good and evil.

"I like to work on something with some meat to it," says Wells. "I love

things that are well written with complex language too which is why I'm inspired by the chance to do something from the classics. These texts have survived 400 years and will possibly be around another 400 years or more."

Tallahassee is Wells' childhood stomping ground and where his passion for the theater was cultivated. An active thespian in Leon High School's theater group and musicals, he graduated from Florida State University's theater program during Dr. Richard Fallon's tenure. His English teacher, Ms. Clear, at Raa Middle School, first stoked his interest in theater during their readings of the classics, and Wells was thrust onstage in a myriad of roles by mentor Ray Kickliter, Leon High School's former choral and musical director.

Post-graduation, Wells attended the University of Alabama for his MFA and spent the subsequent years traveling and performing as an Equity actor

See Wells, Page 6D

Wells

Continued from Page 1D

throughout the country. He returned to his hometown just shy of a decade ago and continues to be inspired by the city's flourishing arts scene. He's excited to be participating and preparing with the Southern Shakespeare Company and says the secret to working with a centuries-old text like "As You Like It" can be summed up in two strategies.

"You have to understand every word that the character says," states Wells. "I worked with a director once whose advice was to sit down with your script and the Oxford English dictionary and look up every word that you say, especially what the word meant at that time because meanings of words change. The other is to study the verse and the rhythm of it and make sure that you're speaking it properly and figure out how your character is relating to other people."

For his upcoming roles as dueling dukes, he is practicing differentiating their delivery — many changes are as subtle as the way they walk versus the rhythms in which they speak. Wells is also looking forward to the company's unique take on the play which will set the work in 1920s Chicago and feature original music by local Tallahassee musician Steve Hodges. In addition to the colorful flapper-inspired costumes, Wells says audiences can look forward to "a spectacle of music and dance" reminiscent of that era, including the Charleston, as well as the tomfoolery and mischief that is so markedly Shakespeare.

"It's a fun show," smiles Wells. "There's a long segment of courting and misconceptions of who people are that is very funny as Celia and Rosalind decide that one of them will be disguised



as a boy so they'll be safer wandering around the Forest of Arden. There are lots of puns and wordplay off of that."

Ultimately, Wells believes Shakespeare's staying power in the cultural lexicon is a result of its truth-telling of human nature despite modernization or changes in circumstances or settings. While getting over the language may be the most readily apparent hurdle for some audiences, Wells says that attendees should trust their instincts and allow the actors to get them over the gaps they may not know.

"The real reward is when you are totally in that moment, and you lose most of your awareness of the audience, the

lights, and the sound, and are focused on the other people onstage with you," says Wells. "That's a rare gift and when that happens it's wonderful...it becomes crystal in your mind."

In fact, the most satisfying aspect of acting for Wells is when all of the above comes together — letting go of any insecurities or doubts, he relies on the talent and support of his cast mates to create something larger than themselves on the stage, and command the audience through an experience like no other, always in search of those moments of "aliveness."

"If you go back and you read plays from that period by other playwrights, you'll see the characters are not as alive as Shakespeare's were," says Wells. "Can you think of any better depiction of young, crazy, obsessive love than in

Romeo and Juliet? I think they give us such a picture of what human life is like."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts.



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