

Much Ado on Solano's Level III

by **Joey Pagaduan**
Editor-in-Chief

After seven months of hard work and rehearsals, Shakespeare at Solano's Level III acting troupe performed *Much Ado About Nothing*, a classic Shakespeare comedy about love, betrayal, and redemption.

The play, directed by Marin Shakespeare Company's Lesley Currier and drama therapist Lynn B., was held before a mixed audience of over 75 inmates and outside guests in the Level III Gym on April 28, 2018.

"We met every week since October," said Lynn, who also played Beatrice in the production. "And seeing all the hard work put into improving themselves and the play makes it all worth it."

The play follows the love between heroine, Hero, and the nobleman Claudio. Hilarity ensues when a plan is hatched by Prince Don Pedro's brother, Don John, to trick Claudio into thinking that Hero has cheated on him.

"The title is a play on words," said Vincent Tu, 37, who played Verges a constable. "*Much Ado* means 'a big deal,' and the *Nothing* is really the complete opposite. The big deal is Don John conspiring against everyone and making them doubt themselves."

Tu is 17 years into a conviction for voluntary manslaughter and attempted murder and will be released in four years. He said that this was his first time acting and that the Shakespeare program has challenged and enabled him to be more open and pro-social.



Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*

The court, Lynn B., Alejandra W., Christian Birdsall, Craig Valentine, Todd Winkler, and LeVaughn Gaines celebrating good news.

"You can see the changes in our participants as time passes," Lynn said. "Their confidence increases and that translates to better social skills."

Pharaoh Brooks has been with the program since it was brought to Solano in 2014. He played Benedick, one of Shakespeare's most iconic roles.

"This is my fourth year and I'm not scared to be on stage," said Brooks, 38, who is 12 years into a seven to life conviction for attempted murder. "But it is intimidating because you have to work at it. We confront our fears. We learn and we grow together."

Shakespeare first-timer Marcus Oden was

anxious, spending the morning of the performance recommitting his lines as Don Pedro to memory.

"I'm a little nervous about forgetting a line," said Oden who has been incarcerated for eight years on a 13-year sentence. "This is part of coming out and being a man. Striving to be a part of something bigger than ourselves."

Alejandra W., 29, has volunteered with the program since April of last year. Acting from the age of four, Alejandra believes in the redemptive power of the arts.

"Theatre saved my life in a lot of ways," said Alejandra, who played Hero in the play. "I understand how transformative and freeing theatre is. When you hand someone those keys, you unlock the creative mind."

LeVaughn Gaines, 27, has acted in the program for the last three years. He was convicted of attempted murder and has been incarcerated for the last seven years. He said that he read Shakespeare in middle school and he always wanted the opportunity to get to act what he read.

"I related the play to prison," said Gaines who played Balthazar, a gentleman of Messina. "Not much goes on in prison, but there's so much going on behind the scenes."

Easily noticed by the patchy stubble and blonde beehive wig, Christian Birdsall, 22,

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Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*

The constabulary, Stephon Cruthchfield, Vincent Tu, Larry Roach, Nathaniel Smith, Khoa Nguyen, questioning one another.

No More

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Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*
Teresa Courtemanche sharing the story of her son, Matt Garcia.

This is the third time that Chu has sponsored an event at Solano for National Crime Victims' Rights Week. She said that each time, she has guest speakers from different backgrounds so that those in attendance can see that their victims are not just those they directly hurt, but also their own families and communities.

Matt Garcia was the youngest person to ever be elected to the Fairfield city council. He was born to a teenage mother and a gang member father who was in and out of prison. Garcia was murdered in September 2008.

After Garcia's murder, Courtemanche asked herself "What would Matt want?" She formed the Matt Garcia Foundation in his honor. The foundation's mission is to create safe places for youth to go and to change the culture of violence in communities.

Emcee of the event, CSP-Solano resident Tyrann Townsend asked the audience, "How do we put ourselves in a better place so there are no more victims?"

The Family Resource Center provides services related to establishing healthy family structures. Guest speaking from the Fairfield branch was Amenhotep Edwards, 39, a participant in the parenting class offered by the organization.

"I realized that I was running away," said Edwards, who has four children and was referred to the class by his child support case worker. "I neglected my children and made victims of them. I should have done this a long time ago, but it's never too late to change."

Throughout the two hour event, some of the men in attendance openly cried, and said that it was because they were thinking about their children. Others said that they thought of their victims.

A few audience members took the opportunity to speak about how they are trying to make a meaningful change in their lives so that they will not make any more victims.

"The cycle doesn't have to continue," Courtemanche said. "It doesn't matter where you come from, what you've done. Just do the right thing now. Make the difference now."



Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*
Guests from the Fairfield Family Resource Center listen as Teresa Courtemanche speaks.

Much Ado

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was greeted by laughter every time he took the stage. He joined the program last year, and took on the role of Margaret, a lady in waiting to Hero.

"I was shaking the whole time," said Birdsell, who was a juvenile when he was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. "It was a new experience, but it's just like jumping. You're gonna jump and it's gonna happen. You just gotta do it."

Shakespeare at Solano is run by the Marin Shakespeare Company's Shakespeare for Social Justice programs, which are active in 11 California state prisons. It is made possible through support from the California Arts Council, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and private donors.

"The men here have so much talent and a lot to offer the world," said Marin Shakespeare Company's Managing Director Currier, who also oversees all of their prison programs. "And, sometimes, they need someone else to recognize that in them before they see it in themselves. That's what these programs are for."

Because of the lifestyles led by many people in prison, participating in the arts did not seem like a realistic option. Shakespeare at Solano is not only opening the door to the arts for these men, but is also offering rehabilitation.

"Don't be scared to challenge yourself and try new things," Tu said. "I'm proud."

Commutations

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Governor Brown traditionally grants pardons and commutations around the Easter and Christmas holidays. His last term as California's governor will conclude at the end of 2018.

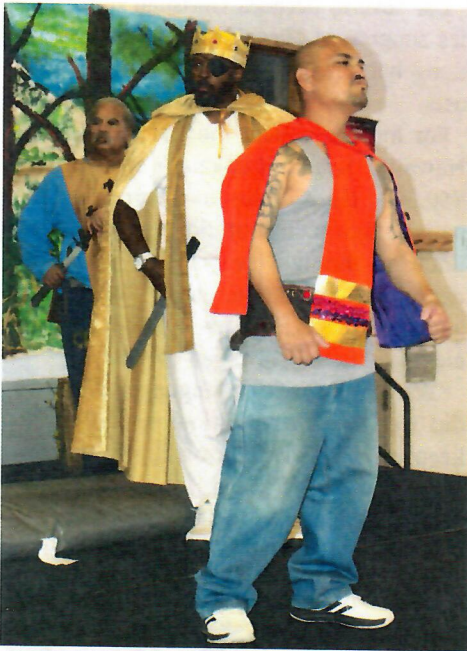
Those that have received an interview are now awaiting the decision for a chance to have a parole hearing and possibly return to society one day. Some are even making plans for their life outside of prison.

Foster said, "I plan to pursue culinary arts to become a chef as a career and help senior citizens when I am free."

—With reporting by Joseph Bell

Shakespeare at Solano's Level II delivers *As You Like It*

by Hung T. Lý
Copy Editor



Justin Bentley—*Solano Vision News*
Daniel Trevino as a Court Lord, Dion Wheelwright as Duke Frederick, and Art Bontilao as Charles the wrestler.

The Marin Shakespeare Company and the Shakespeare at Solano Level II actors return for another season, showcasing a live performance of *As You Like It*.

Lesley Currier, Marin Shakespeare Company's managing director, opened the show with a summary of the play.

It is about young Orlando being exiled by his older brother Oliver in an attempt to seize their late father's inheritance for himself. Hoping for his brother to be killed, Oliver set Orlando up in a wrestling match with Charles, the wrestling champion. After coming out victorious, Orlando gains the admiration of Rosalind, daughter of Duke Senior, and they fall in love.

"I'm so excited," said Julianna H., who volunteers at Folsom State Prison's Shakespeare program and sitting in the front row. "This is my favorite play."

The Level II Gymnasium was filled with over 160 audience members consisting of California State Prison-Solano residents, staff members, and outside guests on the evenings of May 12 and 19, 2018. The play began at 6 p.m. and lasted two hours.

Art Bontilao, 45, who played Charles, evoked laughter from the audience with his wrestling moves, dance moves, and storylines. "It helps me to express my feelings," Bontilao said. "I want to be a great comedian."

Several members said the program has not only provided them a form of therapy, it has also improved their social interactions with others.

"Acting has helped me become more expressive in verbal communication," said Duc-Trung Tong, 23, who played a forest lord. "It was something that I lacked in the past."



Justin Bentley—*Solano Vision News*
Oback Khongmany as Orlando serenading his love interest, Rosalind.

Lynn B., who is a drama therapist with MSC, co-directed the play with Currier. She played Celia, Duke Frederick's daughter. She said it is an honor to be involved in the process.

"These guys inspire me every week," Lynn said. "We love being here seeing their growth. Theatre heals."

Friend and supporter of several of the actors, Frank Clay, 48, said this is his second time watching a Shakespeare performance. "I think this is cool because I knew a few guys who were always boxed in, but this brings them out."

"I think they all did a fantastic job, especially the guys that played the fools," said William Mothershed, 56, who saw several plays in the past. "Their timing was perfect."

Also in attendance was Kristina Khokhobashvili, public information officer II from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's headquarters in Sacramento. The PIO was snapping away, capturing memorable photos from the performance. She said she likes how the program brings the participants out of their comfort zone, and was glad to see many new faces. "Almost twice the size as four years ago."

Joseph Jackson, 41, has participated in three Shakespeare plays in the past. He



Justin Bentley—*Solano Vision News*
The royal jesters, Touch and Stone, played by Joseph Kirk and Kelton Moore.

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Rehearsal for reentry

by **Joey Pagaduan**
Editor-in-Chief

The Arts-in-Corrections' Drama for Reentry program at California State Prison—Solano returns for a second year to aid soon-to-be released men transition to home and society.

The program was first introduced to Solano's Level II and Level III population in 2017. Prospective participants receive an 'invitation' in the mail from the Marin Shakespeare Company to sign up for the class. Hopefuls then fill out the application and await confirmation for admission. The class incorporates drama therapy and exercises to prepare inmates for challenges they might face upon release.

"We practice what to do when faced with certain situations," said Lynn B., a drama therapist who teaches the reentry group. "We tap into our creative sides. When you have creative ideas, you expand your mind and your options to make healthier decisions."

There were two separate groups, one for Solano's Level II and one for Level III. They met weekly for ten weeks. Both groups were led and taught by Lynn and Alejandra W., a teaching artist working for the Marin Shakespeare Company. Each of the participants in the groups had less than nine months left on their sentences.

"The goal is to let them find new ways to express themselves," Alejandra said. "You discover new abilities and rediscover misplaced ones. You give yourself permission to succeed."

Craig Holland, 50, participated in the Level II group. He was set to be released in August 2018, and said that he signed up to try something new and because of a recommendation from a coworker that is part of the Shakespeare at Solano theatre troupe.

"I'm shy so this was good therapy. The instructors were good at bringing the shyness out and making you feel comfortable," said Holland, who has been incarcerated for the last two years on a domestic violence conviction. "The best skill I got out of the program was the confidence to communicate with others."

The group covered many areas, from a returning citizen's initial homecoming, job interviews, to starting and maintaining healthy relationships. A central theme throughout was practice makes perfect.

"It's important to challenge yourself every day," said Alejandra, who also volunteers with the Shakespeare at Solano program with MSC. "It's a muscle and you have to exercise it."

DeShawn Robinson, 47, has been incarcerated since December 2017 for drug possession. He was released in September 2018, and said that the program has changed his outlook on life.

"Alejandra and Lynn were inspiring," said Robinson, who plans on seeing a play at the Marin Shakespeare Company. "I plan to further my education in drug and alcohol counseling and to write an autobiography. They inspired me, giving me more clarity, purpose, and confidence by letting me know



Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*
Devin Whitefrost laughing during a stare-down exercise.

that I can do it."

Robinson said he has a son, Semaj, who just turned 11. He has not seen him since 2012, and he hopes to reboot their relationship.

"The class helped me to trust more in my peers and myself," Robinson said. "I got myself together and I'm ready to be a father now."

Holland is also planning for his life outside of prison. A professional chauffer for years, he said that he wants to invest in his own future.

"I want to own a business one day," said Holland, who will parole to Palm Springs. "The different exercises motivated me and

(See *Reentry* on page 19)



[L-R] Joel Clarke and DeShawn Robinson acting out real-life scenarios they might face upon release. Lynn B. and Alejandra W. addressing the group.

Joey Pagaduan—*Solano Vision News*

Legal

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Prop. 57: Final Round

Certified for compliance by the Office of Administrative Law, on May 1, 2018, the CDCR released the final version of the ballot initiative enacted November 2016, and implemented on an emergency basis in 2017.

Despite much public commentary and court challenges (e.g., *In re Irby*), the regulations remain the same since the last version (Round III) was published earlier this year. Note: § 3043.2(b)(3), which grants to Non-violent Three Strikers an increase from 20 to 33 percent credit for time served, and eligibility to participate in other credit earning programs, affects *only* the determinate portion of a sentence, and thus the earlier arrival of the Minimum Eligible Parole Date of those inmates. Once the MEPD is reached, no other credits are applicable.

Since the next edition of Title 15 to contain the final version of Prop. 57 will not be available until 2019, until then, the library is the only place with a copy of these regulations.

AB 665

Anyone who is, or was, a member of the United States military, with a felony conviction prior to January 1, 2015, may petition a court for resentencing if this bill becomes law. Eligible inmates are those who may be suffering from sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or mental health problems as a result of their military service. The reviewing courts will determine whether the petitioner meets the bill's criteria. The bill awaits legislative action to provide funds for implementation.

AB 1940

Participation in educational, vocational and public service activities will allow parolees earn credit toward discharge of parole under this legislation. Parolees could earn in a 12-month period as much as 12 months credit toward their discharge or discharge review date, as well as an increase in the distance they are allowed to travel without written permission from their parole office. Paroled lifers, subject to possible lifetime parole, could earn credits toward their discharge review date.

SB 1242

This bill codifies previously unwritten--but heavily relied upon by the parole board--suitability criteria, such as demonstrations of remorse and insight, length of time between disciplinaries, and parole plans. Impinging on the Board's broad discretion without providing specifics, this bill appears to exclude from youth offender parole consideration inmates whose victim was a peace officer or former peace officer.

SB 1391

A District Attorney's authority to motion a court to transfer certain offenses committed by a minor to adult court is being repealed by this bill's amendment to Prop. 57.

SB 1437 update

Last amended on August 30, 2018, the bill is the Legislature's remedy to Penal Code inequities noted in last year's Senate Concurrent Resolution 48 (felony murder, and aiding and abettor statutes). The bill removed "conspirator" and other language that might make it harder to separate a person's participation in a crime from the person who was the actual killer.

The resentencing process was also revised so that, upon "receipt of the petition, the court shall provide notice to the attorney who represented the petitioner in the superior court, or to the public defender if the attorney of record is no longer available, and to the district attorney in the county in which the petitioner was prosecuted."

Both parties must respond within 60 days for or against the petition. If the petitioner's claim falls within the provisions of this bill, the court will inform both parties that petitioner is eligible for a resentencing hearing. The revision also clarifies the resentencing process.

This version of the bill contains input from members of the Assembly, which may facilitate the bill's passage. If SB 1437 becomes law, its effective date will be January 1, 2019.

To receive free copies of California legislation and the Legislative Bill Index, write to: Legislative Bill Room B-32, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814-4997.

Ed.: If any of this legislation passes the Senate and Assembly by Friday, August 31, 2018, it will await the governor's veto, or become law on September 30, 2018, whether signed or not.

Like It

(Continued from page 9)

said his entire dorm from building 23 came to support their dorm-mate, Tom Edwards, who played Adam, an old servant. "We should have more programs like this so more people can be involved."

Alejandra W., 29, is a volunteer, and has performed in four Shakespeare at Solano plays since April 2017. Her character in the play was Rosalind.

"There are some differences and some similarities," said Alejandra, speaking about the comparing acting outside and acting in prison. "The one unifying thing is it feels like family and home. I love it here."

Alex Kavutskiy, who is a screenwriter, came into a prison for the very first time to support his coworker, Alejandra. He said he loves Shakespeare and likes how they changed some parts of the play to make it more modern. "It was really great fun. I would love to come back."

"We have AIC in every prison now and I just wish more people knew about it," said Khokhobashvili, referring to the Arts in Corrections program. "I would love to see a cast of Level II and Level III guys perform together."

—With reporting by *Dámon L. Cookë*
and *Joseph Bell*

Reentry

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showed me that with hard work, I can succeed."

Julianna H. volunteers with the Shakespeare program at Folsom State Prison. She filled in to help teach the last two sessions of the group.

"I find comfort in theatre," Julianna said. "I want to share that with others and give them that same confidence and comfort."

The group is awaiting funding for another session, but Lynn and Alejandra hope to bring it back to Solano next year once funding is secured.

"I've already recommended the group to others," Robinson said. "I showed people the invitation and told them that if they ever got a letter like this, to sign up. I first signed up for the credits, but got so much more."