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Dramatic Publishing

Much Ado About Will



**A celebration of the words
of Shakespeare by
Robert Johanson.**

Much Ado About Will

A celebration of the words of Shakespeare. By Robert Johanson. *Cast: 6 to 30+ actors.* This charming entertainment demonstrates the amazing versatility of the greatest playwright in the English language. "Neither age can whither him nor custom stale his infinite variety." The show is bookended by the hysterical antics of the rustics from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a delightful journey through mistaken identity, murder, love and war in between. The company of actors presents a dazzling display of comedy and pathos with some of Shakespeare's most famous characters (Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, Puck, Cleopatra, Portia, Bottom, Richard III, Henry V, Malvolio, etc.) and some of his less-seen characters such as Joan of Arc, the infant princess Elizabeth, the three witches and the hilarious clown, Launce, with his dog, Crab. Extended and alternate scenes are provided so the play can be performed as a full evening or as a shorter version (carefully noted in the text). It is devised to be played by men or women in all the roles—so all your actors can be accommodated. This clever tour de force is a wonderful way to introduce your actors and audience to the marvelous world of William Shakespeare and is a full-course meal for Shakespearean veterans. *Bare stage with props. Approximate running time: 90 minutes (versions running 60 minutes or 35 minutes are also possible).*

Cover photos: Theatre Artists Workshop, Norwalk, Conn., (top) JoAnne Parady and Clayton Wheat in *The Comedy of Errors*. (bottom) Robert Johanson in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Photos: Andrea Braun Byrne.

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A celebration of the words of Shakespeare
by
ROBERT JOHANSON



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Much Ado About Will was originally presented at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, under the title *Shakespeare: Infinite Variety*, by the Theatre Artists Workshop of Connecticut with the following cast: Robert Johanson, Dan Kelly, Damien Langan, Jo Anne Parady, Katie Sparer, Clayton Wheat. Directed by Robert Johanson. Produced by Jo Anne Parady.

MUCH ADO ABOUT WILL

(A play for a minimum of 6 actors—male or female—easily expandable to 30 plus actors. The “narrator” is one of the actors and/or the narrations can also be divided among the actors—at the director’s discretion.)

The play is flexible in length from a short one-act [see end of script] to a full evening [pages 8-10].)

Characters include:

Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Cleopatra, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Portia, Shylock, Enobarbus, Puck, 1st Fairy, Adrianna, Antipholus of Syracuse, Henry V, Richard II, Richard III, Joan of Arc, the Three Witches, Mistress Page, Mistress Ford, Malvolio, Julia, Lucetta, Launce and his dog Crab, Cranmer and the infant Elizabeth, Quince, Bottom, Flute, Starveling, Snug, Snout

For presentation by 6 ACTORS (3 men, 3 women) the suggested breakdown is as follows:

MAN ONE: Bottom (Pyramus), Malvolio, Witch, Macbeth, Cranmer, Mardian, Macbeth (Soliloquy)

MAN TWO: Flute (Thisby), Demetrius, Romeo, Puck, Richard II, (Dead King), Sonnet 29, York, Hamlet

MAN THREE: Starveling (Moonshine), Antipholus of Syracuse, Henry V (in wooing scene), Launce, Richard III, (Joan/Guard), Messenger, Shylock

WOMAN ONE: Quince, Adrianna, Mistress Ford, Alice, (Nurse) Witch, Henry V (Kings), Cleopatra,

WOMAN TWO: Snout (Wall), Mistress Page, Lucetta, Katharine (Henry V), Witch, Lady Macbeth, Charmian, Portia

WOMAN THREE: Snug (Lion), Helena, Julia, Juliet, First Fairy, Lady Anne, Joan of Arc, Enobarbus,

Suggested breakdown for **12 ACTORS** (5 men, 7 women):

MAN ONE: Bottom (Pyramus), Macbeth, Mardian, Macbeth (Soliloquy)

MAN TWO: Flute (Thisby), Romeo, Richard II, (Guard/York)

MAN THREE: Starveling (Moonshine), Malvolio, Launce, Richard III, (Guard/York), Shylock

MAN FOUR: Antipholus of Syracuse, Henry V (wooing), (Dead King Henry), York, Theseus

MAN FIVE: Demetrius, Puck, (Richard/Guard), Messenger, Hamlet

WOMAN ONE: Quince, Katharine (wooing), (Richard/Guard), Cleopatra

WOMAN TWO: Snout (Wall), Mistress Ford, (Nurse) Witch, Lady Macbeth

WOMAN THREE: Snug (Lion), Julia, Juliet, Charmian

WOMAN FOUR: Adrianna, Alice, Witch, Joan of Arc,
Hippolyta

WOMAN FIVE: Helena, First Fairy, Lady Anne

WOMAN SIX: Lucetta, Witch, Henry V (Kings),
Enobarbus, Lysander

WOMAN SEVEN: Mistress Page, Cranmer, Sonnet 29,
Portia, Hermia

Suggested breakdown for **24 ACTORS** (8 men, 16 women):

MAN ONE: Bottom (Pyramus)

MAN TWO: Flute (Thisby), Richard II, (Guard/York)

MAN THREE: Starveling (Moonshine), Richard III,
(Guard/York)

MAN FOUR: Antipholus of Syracuse, Henry V (wooing)

MAN FIVE: Demetrius, Puck, (Richard/Guard)

MAN SIX: Romeo, Lysander, (Richard/Guard)

MAN SEVEN: Macbeth, Theseus

MAN EIGHT: Malvolio, (dead King Henry), Mardian

WOMAN ONE: Quince, Katharine (wooing)

WOMAN TWO: Snout (Wall), Mistress Ford, (Nurse),
Witch

WOMAN THREE: Snug (Lion), Julia, Charmian

WOMAN FOUR: Adrianna, Hippolyta

WOMAN FIVE: First Fairy, Lady Anne

WOMAN SIX: Witch, Henry V (Kings), Enobarbus

WOMAN SEVEN: Mistress Page, Portia (soliloquy)

WOMAN EIGHT: Cranmer, Macbeth (soliloquy)

WOMAN NINE: Launce, Joan of Arc

WOMAN TEN: Alice, Sonnet 29, Shylock (soliloquy)

WOMAN ELEVEN: Messenger, Helena

WOMAN TWELVE: Witch, York, Hamlet (soliloquy)

WOMAN THIRTEEN: Juliet, Hermia

WOMAN FOURTEEN: Cleopatra

WOMAN FIFTEEN: Lady Macbeth

WOMAN SIXTEEN: Narrator, Lucetta

For less or more actors use the previous breakdowns as a guideline striving to provide variety in each actor track and balance in the Company—remembering the various “Actor” and “Narrator” lines add quite a bit to each actor’s track.

Many roles can be gender neutral, especially the Midsummer Rustics, Witches, Launce, Puck, Kings: Henry V, Richard II; Sonnet; York, Cranmer, Messenger, All Narrations, Quotes and Soliloquies: (Enobarbus, Portia, Shylock, Hamlet, Macbeth)

FULL PROGRAM

(various-length programs noted at back of script)

OPENING: QUOTES ONE – “Everyday Expressions” –
Full Company

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics Part One –
Quince, Bottom, Flute, Starveling, Snout, Snug

QUOTES TWO – “Theatre” – Company

“Mistaken Identity” –

COMEDY OF ERRORS – Adrianna, Antipholus of
Syracuse

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Helena,
Demetrius

“Letters” – THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR –
Mistress Page, Mistress Ford

TWELFTH NIGHT – Malvolio

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA – Julia, Lucetta

QUOTES THREE - “Music” – Full Company

QUOTES FOUR – “Love” – Full Company

“Love” - KING HENRY V – King Henry, Katharine, Alice
ROMEO AND JULIET – Romeo, Juliet, (Nurse)

“Novelties”- MACBETH – 3 Witches
TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA - Launce & Crab
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Puck, First
Fairy

QUOTES FIVE – “Advice” – Full Company

“Kings” – KING HENRY V - Henry
KING RICHARD II - Richard
KING RICHARD III – Gloucester (Richard), Lady
Anne, Guards, Dead King
MACBETH – Macbeth, Lady Macbeth

SONNET 29 – “When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s
eyes”

“Historical Women” – KING HENRY VI, PART ONE –
Joan of Arc, York, Guards
KING HENRY VIII – Cranmer, the infant Elizabeth
ANTONY & CLEOPATRA – Cleopatra, Charmian,
Mardian, Messenger

QUOTES SIX - “Soliloquies” –
ANTONY & CLEOPATRA – Enobarbus
MERCHANT OF VENICE – Portia, Shylock
HAMLET – Hamlet
MACBETH – Macbeth

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics Part Two
– Quince, Bottom (Pyramus), Flute (Thisby), Starveling
(Moon), Snout (Wall), Snug (Lion)

FINALE: THE TEMPEST – Full Company

EPILOGUE - A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - Puck

Extended Scenes: KING HENRY VI – PART ONE – Joan,
York, Guards

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – Rustics Part
Two – Rustics and Court

RICHARD III (monologue)

Alternate Scenes: ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL –
Countess, Helena, Steward

THE WINTER'S TALE – Hermione, Leontes

MACBETH – Macbeth, Lady Macbeth

KING HENRY VI, PART ONE – Joan, Dauphin,
Burgundy, Alencon, Bastard of Orleans

ROMEO & JULIET – Romeo, Mercutio, Nurse, Peter

MUCH ADO ABOUT WILL

(The play is to be performed on a simple setting with minimal props and a basic costume with added pieces—hats, scarves, jackets. Suggest using 4 or 6 variably sized cubes that can be configured in many different combinations. Chairs or benches are placed at the off-stage sides for the actors to retire to when they leave the action. From here they will step quickly into each scene having donned a costume piece or picked up a prop—always supporting the action from the sidelines. The actors move the cubes around to create different configurations for the action.

The play starts with two cubes together at center, the rest scattered about the stage.

The houselights fade. Stagelights UP. One by one the ACTORS enter the stage exclaiming in exasperation the opening lines...)

OPENING: QUOTES ONE – “Everyday Expressions”

(assigned at the director’s discretion)

Actor: For goodness sake!

Actor: Good riddance!

Actor: I have not slept a wink!

Actor: My own flesh and blood!

Actor: It was Greek to me!

Actor: Too much of a good thing!

ALL: Into thin air! *(This accompanied by a gesture arcing across the air.)*

(Either the same six performers continue or more actors enter.)

Actor: A foregone conclusion

Actor: A tower of strength

Actor: A fool’s paradise.

Actor: Pomp and circumstance

Actor: Bag and baggage

Actor: Play fast and loose

ALL: Wild goose chase.

NARRATOR: If you have used these expressions in your everyday life—then you have been quoting Shakespeare—he coined these phrases:

(Either the original six or twelve continue—or yet more actors enter.)

Actor: Elbow room
Actor: Hold a candle to
Actor: Kill with kindness
Actor: Dead as a doornail
Actor: Laughing-stock
Actor: Love letter
ALL: Love is blind

(The final list goes very quickly—like fireworks.)

Actor: Skim milk
Actor: Shooting star
Actor: Star-crossed lovers
Actor: Short shrift
Actor: Sorry sight
Actor: More fool you
ALL: One fell swoop

NARRATOR: And who among us has not used the phrase:

ALL: “Kill all the lawyers.” (*Henry VI Part II, IV ii*)

NARRATOR: William Shakespeare wrote of Cleopatra—
“age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite
variety...” Today almost 450 years after Shakespeare
wrote those words we change a pronoun and apply that
phrase to the author most quoted of any writer the world
has ever known—“age cannot wither *him*, nor custom
stale *his* infinite variety...” We invite you to join us for
a sampling of that variety with “the best actors in the
world, either for tragedy,

Actor: Comedy...

Actor: Pastoral...

Actor: Pastoral-comical...

Actor: Historical-pastoral...

Actor: Tragical-historical...

Actor: Tragical-comical-historical-pastoral...

Actor: Scene individable...

Actor: Or poem unlimited.” (*Hamlet, II ii*)

NARRATOR: Where “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women...”

ALL: “...merely players!” (*As You Like It*)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM, I ii, III i, IV ii – RUSTICS PART I

(The actors add simple hats, scarves and vests and transform themselves into: QUINCE, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT, SNARVELING, SNUG. If more actors are used, they will take their places on the sidelines forming an enthusiastic audience.)

QUINCE: (*the director of this motley crew jumps on a cube at center—blows a whistle calling everyone together*) Is all our company here?

(*Various ad lib's from the company as they gather around QUINCE.*)

BOTTOM: You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.

(*BOTTOM stands to the side. He is quite grand—he knows he's the best actor around. He wears a decorative scarf around his neck and quite often uses it to punctuate his lines.*)

QUINCE: (*holding up a scroll*) Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit to play our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on his wedding-day at night.

BOTTOM: First, good Quince, say what the play treats on.

QUINCE: Marry, our play is: "The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby."

(*Oo's and ah's all around.*)

BOTTOM: A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

(*All the players sit quickly—legs spread apart.*)

QUINCE: Answer as I call you, Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM: Ready. (*Strides center.*) Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE: You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM: What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE: A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM: That will ask some tears in the true performing of it: *if* I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. (*He acts:*)

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates;
And Phibbus' car (*indicates the blinding sun*)
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish Fates! (*collapses*)

(*Generous applause from the company—including any on the sidelines.*)

BOTTOM: (*with a flick of the scarf*) This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players.

QUINCE: Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE: Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

FLUTE: What is Thisby? A wandering knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

(Laughter round about.)

FLUTE: Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming.

BOTTOM: An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice. *(As bass Pyramus.)* "Thisne, Thisne." *(As soprano Thisby with scarf around head.)* "Ah, Pyramus, lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!"

QUINCE: *(taking scarf off BOTTOM's head and throwing it at him)* No, no; you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisby.

BOTTOM: Well, proceed. *(Flicks scarf and moves away.)*

(At this point FLUTE pulls out a leek and sits at the side of the stage munching on it. This he does whenever he is nervous.)

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING: *(a deer in the headlights)* Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT: (*a very solid and dull person*) Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE: You, Pyramus' father: myself Thisby's father: Snug, the joiner; you the lion's part: and I hope there is a play fitted.

SNUG: (*very timid, quiet and slow*) Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE: (*dismissive*) You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM: (*jumping in*) Let me play the lion too: I will roar, that I will do a man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again, let him roar again.'

QUINCE: An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL: That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM: But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale. (*Coos a roar softly.*)

QUINCE: (*totally exasperated*) You can play no part but Pyramus! (*seeing that BOTTOM is offended he now must make amends*) for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentleman-like man: therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM: Well, I will undertake it. (*Flicks scarf.*)

QUINCE: (*handing out scripts—which the actors quickly check to see how many lines they have, etc.—no script for SNUG*) Masters, here are your parts: and I am to entreat you, request you and desire you, to con them by tomorrow night...

BOTTOM: Peter Quince,—

QUINCE: (*wary*) What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby that will never please. (*The players look up from their scripts.*) First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself; which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT: By'r lakin, a parlous fear.

STARVELING: I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM: Not a whit: I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say,

we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and for more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them out of fear.

QUINCE: Well, we will have such a prologue; and it shall be written in eight and six.

BOTTOM: (*a zinger*) Make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight.

SNOUT: Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING: I fear it, I promise you.

(*ALL group menacingly around timid SNUG who looks anything but ferocious.*)

BOTTOM: Masters, to bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living; and we ought to look to't.

SNOUT: Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM: Nay, you must name his name and he himself must say: 'ladies'—or—'fair ladies—I would wish you' or—'I would request you'—or 'I would entreat you,—not to fear, not to tremble: if you think I come hither as a lion, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men

are;' and there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.

QUINCE: Well, it shall be so. But there is two *hard* things; (*ALL gather about him in trepidation*) that is to bring moonlight into a chamber; for you know Pyramus and Thisby meet by moonlight.

(*ALL look to BOTTOM.*)

BOTTOM: Ay; one must come in with a bush of thorns and lanthorn, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine.

(*Relief. ALL move away.*)

QUINCE: Then, there is *another* thing: (*ALL rush back*) we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisby says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

SNUG: You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

(*ALL look to BOTTOM.*)

BOTTOM: Some man or other must present Wall and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.

QUINCE: If that may be, then all is well. ...tomorrow night; meet me in the palace wood, (*ALL rush to*

QUINCE who is back up on the cube center) a mile without the town, there will we rehearse...

BOTTOM: (*jumping up on cube right or left*) We will meet; (*ALL rush to BOTTOM leaving QUINCE*) and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously; every man look o'er his part, let Thisby have clean linen, and let not him that plays the lion pare his nails, for they shall hang out for the lion's claws. And most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, (*grabs leek from FLUTE and passes to other actors*) for we are to utter sweet breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say it is a sweet comedy! (*Triumphant—ALL cheer.*) No more words. Away. Go, away!

(The rustics hurriedly exit except BOTTOM who marches off grandly, flicking his scarf, as the lights fade.)

MUSIC: (*to accompany BOTTOM's exit*)

QUOTES TWO – “Theatre” – Company

(As the NARRATOR begins the “Actors” return and speak conversationally to each other. Note: The actors about to play Adrianna and Antipholus do not appear.)

NARRATOR: “All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players!
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts,”
(As You Like It, II vii)

End of excerpt. Production Notes
and

PRODUCTION NOTES

Note on the Text

Every effort has been made to use almost exclusively the words of Shakespeare. The scenes and monologues are cut and shaped for this show—sometimes combining two or three scenes into one. Their sources are noted with Play, Act, Scene in case you might want to restore some of the original text, but note that every effort has been made to keep this program tight and allow no particular scene to dominate. However, it is advisable to have the actors study the full play from which their scene or monologue derives so that they will have a better understanding of their characters and how they fit into the source play. Also, it is good to consult the original versions for notes on words and meanings.

The source plays listed after the ‘Quotes’ are merely noted for edification, not necessarily reflecting the character from the play, but meant to stand alone. Assigning the actors to the “Quotes” and “Narrations” is at the director’s discretion. The use of one Narrator can provide continuity, but is not necessary—breaking this up can also be very effective. Just remember it is most important that the Narration pick up immediately after each scene—the actor speaking from the sideline as he or she is crossing in—the verbal action continuous.

Selecting Your Program

In producing *Much Ado About Will* it is most important that you tailor the performance to the talents of your group. Many options are available to you in this index and suggestions for how to go about performing Shakespeare. If you are new to Shakespeare then don’t bite off more than you can chew. Of course, if

you have experience with Shakespeare already, then take what you will with a grain of salt. Use what is helpful and build your production from there. The length of the performance and content are quite flexible. If you have more women than men to accommodate, there are plenty of female or gender/neutral scenes to choose from. The same if your actors are primarily younger or older.

In the **Scene-by-Scene Breakdown** that follows, approximate timings for each scene and difficulty levels are indicated to help you choose your program, as well as many suggestions for staging.

Alternate and Extended Scenes are also available so you can pick and choose your program according to your taste and age and experience level of group.

The Basic Program: ALL PERFORMANCES include the Opening/Quotes One—"Everyday Expressions" through Midsummer Rustics—Part One and closes with the Midsummer Rustics—Part Two through Finale/Bows (with the exception of the optional Epilogue).

What you choose to perform between these bookends is at your discretion and some suggestions follow to help you make your choice.

The **Full Version** (as noted at front of script) should run approximately 90 to 100 minutes—depending on whether you replace some scenes with Alternate or Extended Scenes.

VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: The show is designed to keep the actors talking. There should be no pauses between scenes, eating up time. As soon as one scene ends (or applause subsides), an

actor or narrator stands up from the sidelines and begins speaking and moving into the action. As soon as the interlude is finished the actors in the new scene pick up the ball. This will make for a very tight and energetic performance.

The **One-Hour Version**—which is probably the second most preferable—should include the book-ended scenes noted above and:

One scene from the comedy section, either Comedy of Errors – Adrianna, Antipholus OR A Midsummer Night’s Dream – Helena, Demetrius.

Two scenes from “Letters,” either Merry Wives of Windsor – Mistress Page and Ford, Twelfth Night - Malvolio, OR Two Gentlemen of Verona – Julia, Lucetta.

One scene from “Love” section, either Romeo & Juliet – Romeo, Juliet (Nurse) or Henry V (wooing scene) – Henry, Katharine, Alice.

Two scenes from Novelties, either Macbeth – Witches, Two Gentlemen of Verona – Launce, OR A Midsummer Night’s Dream – Puck/Fairy.

From “Kings,” perform the Henry V monologue, the Richard II monologue and either the Richard III scene OR the Macbeth scene.

For the one-hour version there is not time to perform the Historical Women section. You may however opt to not do the Kings section and just do the Cleopatra scene.

Do not do the Soliloquies.

Other than Opening/Quotes One—choose only one or two other Quote sections,

IE: QUOTES FOUR – “Love,” QUOTES FIVE – “Advice”

Conclude with Midsummer Rustics and Finale (with or without Epilogue).

NOTE: With the timings listed for each scene in the Scene-by-Scene Breakdown you can arrange your program for what best suits you.

Suggested One-Hour Version:

OPENING – QUOTES ONE – “Everyday Phrases” –
Full Company
MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics Part One
COMEDY OF ERRORS – Adrianna, Antipholus
“Letters” – MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR –
Mistresses Page and Ford
TWELFTH NIGHT - Malvolio
QUOTES FOUR: “Love” – Full Company
“Love” – ROMEO & JULIET – Romeo, Juliet (Nurse)

“Novelty” – MACBETH – Witches
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Puck,
First Fairy
QUOTES FIVE – “Advice” – Full Company
“Kings” - HENRY V – Henry (female actor)
RICHARD II – Richard II
RICHARD III – Gloucester (Richard III), Lady Anne
MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics Part Two
FINALE – THE TEMPEST – Full Company

The 35-Minute Version: This fast-paced version should focus on Comedy. The book-ended scenes as noted above and the choice of 5 comic scenes from: Comedy of Errors, Merry Wives, Two Gents – Julia/Lucetta, Malvolio, Witches, Launce, Puck/First Fairy and one love scene: Romeo & Juliet or Henry V.

Suggested 35-Minute Version:

OPENING – QUOTES ONE – “Everyday Phrases” –
Full Company
MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics Part One
COMEDY OF ERRORS – Adrianna, Antipholus
“Letters” – MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR – Mistress
Page & Ford
TWELFTH NIGHT - Malvolio
“Novelties” – MACBETH – Witches
MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Puck/First Fairy
QUOTES FOUR – “Love” – Full Company

“Love” – ROMEO & JULIET – Romeo, Juliet, (Nurse)
MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Rustics –
Part Two

FINALE – TEMPEST – Full Company

The **One-Hour Fifteen-Minute Version**: would be the One Hour-Version with the Historical Women section and QUOTES SIX – “Soliloquies.”

GENERAL TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

SET – a neutral, but elegant space is ideal. Can be surrounded by blacks, or a plain backdrop or cyc. It is best to keep things as simple and undistracting as possible so the actors stand out. 4 to 6 different-sized cubes— (4 square boxes chair height—2 double that size rectangular to play on side or upright) —can be moved by actors to create different playing combinations. On either side of the stage are chairs or benches for the observing actors to take their places with props and costume pieces behind or underneath for easy access.

LIGHTS – can focus and enhance the action. They can be very simple—up and down—or more specific as the production allows. Specific suggestions are listed in the scene-by-scene.

COSTUMES – a neutral basic costume possibly all black to which are added bright primary colored pieces: vests, jackets, robes, skirts, scarves, hats, etc. Suggestions for these are listed in the scene-by-scene.

PROPS – minimal. Suggestions listed in the scene-by-scene.

MUSIC – The inclusion of music can be as elaborate or simple as your production can allow. If you can have a live keyboard and also a guitar, flute or recorder and tabor or drum, this would be ideal. But a keyboard alone would suffice. If you have actors who can sing, then any of Shakespeare’s songs could be used between scenes. Also, the use of recorded music for transitions can work effectively as well. At the very minimum, music to button scenes and provide transitions—almost like vaudeville fills—can keep the energy up and signal the audience when scenes are over and encourage applause.

The best plan is to go online looking up “Shakespeare Songs” and you will find sheet music (vocal and instrumental), recordings and many musical possibilities to enhance your production. There are many settings of his songs in the public domain and can be included easily. Some good ones are “Sigh No More Ladies,” “Under the Greenwood Tree,” “O Mistress Mine” and “Where the Bee Sucks.”

For the “Music” section, a lovely recording of lute and recorder could be very effective under the dialogue or, of course, if the actors themselves could play live—all the better.

SCENE-BY-SCENE BREAKDOWN

props, costumes, lights and director suggestions for staging scene, timings on scenes and acting tips.

OPENING “QUOTES” – “Everyday Expressions” (90 seconds)
Actors wear basic costumes, no props. They should arrange themselves—some standing, some seated, some up on cubes—to present an interesting picture. Every attempt should be made to convey their own personality prior to taking on “characters” from the plays. The costume pieces and props they will need for

the next scene have been preset behind cubes so they can be quickly picked up transforming them into:

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – Rustics Part One (4 minutes)

Bottom: long elegant scarf

Flute: vest, leek (eatable)

Quince: satchel with scroll, 4 scripts, coach whistle (around neck) , beret

Snug: Thick vest, flat hat

Starveling: Knit hat covering entire head, vest

Lion: Small hat, too small vest

Innocence is the key here. If the actors think they are funny—they won't be.

Earnestness. Enthusiasm. These amateurs are being asked to perform before the

Duke! Fear! Anxiousness.

Important that very clean and clear focus go to each actor as it is his/her turn. A great deal of reverence and respect toward Bottom by the other actors who know they can't hold a candle to him.

QUOTES TWO – “Theatre” – Company (1 minute)

Actors stroll thru as though in a conversation—some jaded, snobbish. Basic costume.

COMEDY OF ERRORS: Adrianna, Antipholus of Syracuse (2:30 minutes)

Cubes set side-by-side with high backs behind to lean on simulating beach chairs.

Antipholus S: Bright-colored Hawaiian shirt. Walkman, water bottle, newspaper or magazine, sunglasses, beach towel

Adrianna: bright colored beach hat, sunglasses, beach towel

This scene should be very active. Adrianna should be all over the man she thinks is her husband, so he—Buster Keaton-like—can play shock and awe. It is definitely a set-piece for Adrianna and she can be quite histrionic. This also breaks the “reverent” idea of Shakespeare and shows he can be fun.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM: Helena, Demetrius (2:30 minutes)

Cubes remain in same position as previous scene.

Demetrius: Bright sash

Helena: Bright sash

Again, very active and physical. Running, searching, pushing away, pulling toward, throwing self down, jumping on partner, etc. Should be quite exhausting and not still till Helena’s final lines—then the chase continues.

LETTERS:

Narrator: 3 separate letters, one for each scene, with seals

MERRY WIVES: Mistress, Page, Mistress Ford (3 minutes)

Cubes remain in same position, ladies can sit on them.

Mistress Page: Bandana ties on head à la Lucy. Broom.

Mistress Ford: Feathered hat, gloves, second letter in purse.

This scene is middle class and bawdy. The ladies are married and though shocked by Falstaff’s proposal are a little bit flattered too. Important that they conjure up for us the image

of the fat, outrageous knight. The broomstick can be used to make this as “lewd” as your taste will allow—showing Shakespeare’s bawdy side.

TWELFTH NIGHT: Malvolio (3 minutes)

Cubes remain the same

Malvolio: Cravat and striped vest—elegant servant

The key to this scene is Malvolio’s priggish uptightness. He NEVER smiles until the end which makes this very funny. In the play he has so offended Sir Toby and Maria with his conceit—that they play this trick on him. His amazement that Olivia loves him—as he deciphers the letter—is the key to the humor. Lots of fun can be had as he imagines showing off his yellow stockings—cross-gartered—strutting and mincing. The actor should not be shy about “mugging” in his reactions to the letter as he figures things out. He thinks he’s alone—so his ruminations can be very funny and revealing.

TWO GENTLEMEN: Julia, Lucetta (3 minutes)

Cubes pulled apart, to sit separately

Julia: Plastic headband

Lucetta: Mop cap, letter

This scene is lovely in rhymed verse. Taking advantage of the rhymes can be fun—it is very like a scene from Molière. There is a lilting quality to the banter. Lucetta is the constant, dry and droll. Julia changes like the weather—outraged, peevish, imperious, and ultimately madly in love with Proteus. Her business with the torn-up letter can be very funny and she should end up in a ridiculous position at the end of her monologue to be discovered by the returning

Lucetta. She quickly regains her proud demeanor trying to hide the fact that she's been found out.

QUOTES THREE – “Music” – Full Company (1 minute)

Beautiful instrumental music should play under entire scene—as the actors are commenting on “music.”

The company arranges itself one-by-one in the tableau that will become:

QUOTES FOUR – “Love” – Full Company (1 minute)

A seated, conversational tableau.

Cubes can be re-arranged if desired.

“LOVE”: HENRY V – Henry, Katharine, Alice (4 minutes)

Crowns or robes could be added for Henry and Katharine, but not necessarily

The scene is quite formal and takes its time to warm up. Katharine at first must seem quite icy and difficult to break through making Henry's job very difficult indeed. However, she must finally melt. She must find the moment in the scene where she falls in love with him and by the end we must believe that they in fact do love each other and are right for each other.

For Henry, the tour de force is in all the ways he tries to break through and his charming exasperation at being so awkward at “making love.”

The French of Katharine and Alice must be flawless to show just how bad Henry's is. This scene can be very funny, but should never become cartoonish.

ROMEO AND JULIET – Romeo, Juliet, (Nurse heard from the side) (5 minutes)

They do not require any special costuming.

Ladder

The trick to this scene is not to play the end of the play. Too often actors think this needs to appear tragic, when the opposite is true. We must see Romeo and Juliet giddily, charmingly, amusing in love so that the tragedy of the end would work. They are both so totally lost in one another that they don't want to leave each other's company. The verse must be spoken very conversationally—not like reading a great poem or declamatory. That is not to say that at times it shouldn't soar and take off as their imaginations take flight. A great degree of intimacy must also be reached, very tender and touching. Everything else in the world has stood still and there is only them. They are in a delicious bubble that neither they, nor we, want to be broken. If the actors play this without any knowledge of the impending tragedy, then everything they do will be tragic and heartbreaking to *us*.

“NOVELTIES” – MACBETH – The Witches (3 minutes)

This scene should be a lot of fun and take it as far as you want to go. It provides a great shot in the arm right in the middle of the program.

Card table, 3 chairs or cubes

Poker cards

Chips

Three large purses containing any amount of odd “witchy” objects

Costumes: have fun with these accessories. Odd and fanciful hats. Gypsy shawls. Dead animal furs with snarling teeth. Each Witch can have a distinctive character depending on what she's wearing. Jewelry.

Although this is a card game, there is still the idea of casting spells. Witch Three wants to get even with the wife of the sailor (captain of the ship named Tiger). The wife refused to share her chestnuts, so in the course of the "game" the Witches are conjuring a spell against her. It is important that they rehearse the sections where they all speak together, thoroughly—rises and falls—fast and slow. It must appear as though they've been doing this for a long time and are very good. A Witchy trio of Andrews Sisters (or Dixie Chicks!).

If the budget allows the scene may button with the explosion of a smoke-pot—a touch of magic from the Witches.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA – Launce and Crab, his dog. (3 minutes)

A real dog (tricky but doable) —an actor who uses his own dog can be a lot of fun.

OR a large stuffed dog—if it can be a "puppet"-type stuffed animal that is the best. Then the actor can really manipulate it for maximum expression. A rope tied around its neck to drag it off and on is funny. OR an actor dressed as—or miming—a dog.

A staff.

Shoes that can easily be taken off and put back on—slippers.

This is a tour de force. Launce is quite histrionic. He obviously comes from a family of criers. It all contrasts the dryness and complacency of the dog. He has taken an important position and for the first time is leaving his family.

The re-enactment of their parting can be quite amusing. Then the antics with his dog take over—and all the trouble that Crab gets into and Launce takes the blame for. This speech should be directly to the audience as though confiding to a friend his frustration. Underneath it all, of course, is his great love for his dog, even though he complains about him all the time and reprimands him repeatedly.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – Puck, First Fairy (2:30 minutes)

A table or cube to play cards on—21.

A deck of cards rigged so that after 6 goes at 21—3 cards each—the King, Queen and Jack with show up. This can be easily done and even shuffled just on the top, so the arrangement is not disturbed. Takes a little practice.

Puck – sunglasses, gold chain, leather jacket

Fairy – loud jewelry, scarf, gum, big purse, dilapidated flowers

The stronger the Mafia—Sopranos—accents—the funnier the scene. Two odd balls from the fringe of society. She very tired and run down, he trying to appear tough. The staging should get very physical once Puck reveals himself and takes control. He should manipulate the Fairy in every way possible, much to her delight.

QUOTES FIVE – “Advice” – Full Company (90 seconds)

Once again the actors enter and form a tableau—lines and staging at the director’s discretion.

“KINGS” – Now the presentation takes a decidedly dramatic turn.

If the lighting can become more isolated and stark, that will set the mood. During the narration, the actors who will perform the Kings take places—if they can be lit with lighting specials this will be fine. All of them listen to Henry V and Richard II—then they disperse as Richard III or Macbeth take the stage.

HENRY V – Henry (1 minute)

This stirring speech should be given to fellow actors and specific audience members—so the idea is apparent that Henry was so successful as a military leader because he made each soldier feel that he was personally speaking to him. This is one of the most famous battle cries ever written. Jumping up on a cube and commanding attention is very effective. This is also very powerful when performed by a woman.

RICHARD II – Richard (90 seconds)

Richard has just learned that Bolingbroke has been successful in usurping his crown. He must consider the fact that Kings are not all powerful and, in fact, human. At times imperial in this speech, but ultimately truly human as he discovers just how empty all that “pomp and circumstance” is. There should be an immediacy and sense of discovery as he realizes—chillingly—that death waits for us all.

**RICHARD III – Gloucester (Richard) (monologue 1 minute—
scene 4 minutes)**

Note: alternate monologue in Extended Scenes.

The monologue can stand alone or go on into the scene with Lady Anne. The interesting choice for the actor is how to play Richard’s deformity. This can easily be conveyed just

by physicality—his withered left arm, his stoop, his limp. If some physical addition wants to be added such as a jacket padded with a “hump”—this can work too.

Richard carries a sword.

For the actor, it is Richard’s lightning changes from angry villain to seductive suitor—humble servant—sly manipulator—that keeps us on the edge of our seats. What trick will he play next? His level of sincerity to Lady Anne must ultimately be convincing to her—even though we know he is lying and manipulating—we must see how good he is at “acting” his part. He does not need to overplay the villainy—we will see that when he is alone at the beginning and at the end.

Lady Anne can run the gamut of emotion. She arrives in full grief. The dead king was her father-in-law Henry VI—her husband Edward was killed by Richard as well. He killed both men. She is vengeful, furious, full of hate for him that must transform to the “possibility” of love by the end of the scene. She is vain—and his repeated complimenting of her and his protestation of his feelings for her—has its effect. Of course, it is important that the actor playing Richard be quite seductive.

The “dead king.” Blanket. Two cubes pushed together. The “body of the dead king” is a tricky thing. If one of the actors can “stand in” or rather “lie in” covered with a blanket—trying hard not to breath—that would be ideal. Unless the cast is large—it will be difficult to carry him into position, but a simple device is to use the blanket held upright as the actor gets into place lying on two cubes pushed

together—and then is covered by blanket and the scene begins. If Richard can be speaking his monologue to the side—isolated in light—that makes this easier. At the end of the scene—the same thing—Richard pulls to the side— isolated by light—the blanket is raised and covers the dead king’s exit.

MACBETH – Macbeth, Lady Macbeth (3 minutes)

Macbeth and his lady have plotted to kill their guest— Duncan, the King. Their plot is to kill him as he sleeps and make it appear that drunken attendants have done the deed. In this scene, while the banquet for the King is taking place, Macbeth withdraws and has second thoughts. Lady Macbeth—emerging from the banquet—elegantly dressed (rich evening shawl) —must convince him to do the deed. The undercurrent here is their deep connection, sensual and compelling. He is a powerful military man who has been awarded by the King. He could break his wife to bits, but she knows how to work him—she dresses him down, then seduces him to her purpose.

An Alternative Scene is offered following—it is the scene where the murder is committed (offstage). It is more active and requires some sound effects—knocking, screeching which actors can do from the sidelines—and two bloody daggers and blood on the hands.

SONNET 29 (male or female actor) – (1 minute)

This beautiful poem provides a still, simple contrast the preceding dramatic scene. It can be quietly underscored and lit with a tight pool of light. The actor can do this standing or seated.

“HISTORICAL WOMEN”

HENRY VI PART ONE – Joan of Arc (La Pucelle), York, Guards (2 minutes)

The historical Joan was 18 years old, a farm girl who brought up cattle, but received a calling of saintly voices telling her to save France. She leads the armies of Charles, the Dauphin, to many victories, before finally being captured by the English and burned at the stake as a heretic. Shakespeare does not present a particularly flattering picture of her, embodying more her fanatical zeal than anything else. But, nevertheless, she is a strong female character. Several scenes are available. The scene in the text (V iv) depicts her as a martyr, yet the extended scene in the index shows her ploy to claim she is pregnant and the possibility of three fathers. This would not be suitable for all occasions, but may prove of interest to some. The alternative scene (III iii) shows her persuasive ways as she convinces Burgundy to come over to their side. In any case, she is a remarkably strong female character in history and interesting for an actress to portray.

York is the father of Richard III. He will, for a time, take the crown away from King Henry VI. An ambitious political machine.

HENRY VIII – Cranmer (male or female), Infant Elizabeth (1 minute)

This is an interesting speech extolling—movingly—the qualities the future Queen Elizabeth will exhibit. Written in fact, after her death, it is a beautiful tribute to the Virgin Queen.

Needed: a beautifully dressed doll as Elizabeth—rich mantle

ANTONY & CLEOPATRA – Cleopatra, Charmian, Mardian, Messenger (3:30 minutes)

This fantastic scene (a grouping of 3 scenes) is a tour de force for the actress playing Cleopatra. She turns on a dime from bored to lovesick to imperial monarch to jealous to vain. She is a thoroughbred who is highly strung, capable of large passions, wicked wit and great longings. She should be very active, like a tiger pacing in its cage. A sheath robe of some sort might be useful to give her some fabric to work with.

Charmian is her sly and loyal attendant who knows her well and is quite capable of baiting her. Mardian, a eunuch who ideally plays an instrument like a lute, also has a sense of humor. The Messenger is a great role—terrorized by the Queen and clever enough to know to turn his/her story to his/her own advantage.

The scene is highly comic and unexpected. The physical business—beating—must be carefully worked out.

Props: Coffers with gold brought on by Charmian

Dagger

Lute (or guitar) or recorded music, or from an actor at the side

Perhaps a fan for Cleopatra

Cubes can be arranged to form a chaise or dais for the Queen

QUOTES SIX – “Soliloquies” (total 3:30 minutes)

These beautiful speeches can be performed by men or women. It is about the words, not the plays here, and their universality. Enobarbus picks up the Cleopatra theme by conjuring up this memorable description. The Portia/Shylock

speeches are, of course, linked—one setting up the other. The Hamlet and Macbeth stand alone.

This section can be enhanced if the five performers can be in individual pools of light, but failing that, having them each take their position and simply letting the words trade from one to the other can be elegant and effective.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – Rustics Part Two
(5 minutes)

This section is well explained in the script. It is the comic finale and all stops should be pulled out.

Bottom – action hero cape, overdone make-up, child's wooden sword in his belt.

Flute – cheap wig (like Dorothy in Wizard of Oz), dress or bib apron with prominent boobs, scarf, bouquet of flowers with leek in the middle, lipstick, rouge

Quince – beret, satchel with prompt script, coach whistle

Starveling – lantern, branch, dog, vest, hat

Snout – sandwich board wall homemade, vest, flat hat

Snug – lion's mane, small girl's hula skirt, or cut from newspaper

The extended scene in the index can be used to incorporate the lines of the Court commenting on the sidelines. They should not be literally Theseus, Hippolyta, etc., but the actual fellow actors and given out to as many people as possible.

In style, 100 % total innocence, 200% commitment, 500% amateurish

FINALE: THE TEMPEST – Company (1 minute)

Costume pieces removed, the company as it began, eventually forming a line together by the final unison speech, taking hands and bowing as the lights fade.

The EPILOGUE: (optional) If after initial bows, the actor who played Puck whips out his sunglasses and walks forward shushing the audience with a hand gesture—then like Joe Pesci—offers up the final speech.