

## The Soul of Wit: Shakespeare Gala Raises Funds for Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre

By [Mathew Chipman](#)



### **BARD'S BIRTHDAY**

Bianca Chesnut will play Ophelia at the Shakespeare Gala, a fundraiser for the Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre.

Photo: Sarah Albertson

If he were alive today, William Shakespeare would be turning 462 years old on April 24. To celebrate four and a half centuries of Shakespeare, the Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre is putting on a Shakespeare gala during the bard's birthday week.

Directed by San Francisco State University professor emeritus and local Shakespeare scholar Bill Peters, this fundraising event aims to take audiences on a journey through select songs, scenes and poems from Shakespeare's immense 38-play, 152-sonnet repertoire.

"Somebody once wrote a poem saying that a poem should always be better than anything that can be said about it, and I think that's also true of an act of theater," Peters says.

Santa Cruz County is home to a rich and diverse theater community, from Mountain Community Theater in Ben Lomond, Shakespeare Santa Cruz in DeLaveaga Park, Cabrillo Stage in Aptos, Actors' Theatre in the heart of downtown, and a dozen others. Peters' goal in casting the gala was to draw from this community, bringing an ensemble of 30-plus talented actors together from all corners of Santa Cruz.

"I'm working with friends and folks I didn't know before the show but I had known their work and admired it. Like most organizations, there's a struggle for funds and I thought this would be a great way of celebrating Shakespeare's birthday," Peters says.

Peters discovered his love for the Bard in drama school at Toronto and Yale, feeling at home with Shakespeare's mastery of the English language. Yearning to share that love, he would spend time as a working actor before taking a teaching job at San Francisco State University. Since retiring he has continued to teach workshops and direct, keeping the flame of Shakespeare's work lit.



## **ACTORS' THEATRE**

**GALA** David Leach and Tom Boyle will enact the murderers scene from Shakespeare's 'Richard III.' Photo: Christopher Peak

"When I was studying at drama school there was a curious order in which teachers let the actors confront world literature. They started with naturalistic drama, increasingly moving back in time before arriving at Shakespeare, and I always thought that was the wrong way to do it. Because Shakespeare is such a master of the theater, you learn everything there is to know about the English language and its ability to take us anywhere in our imaginations. I always felt at home with that," Peters says.

In a time when the pendulum of our society constantly swings toward hate over love, jealousy over acceptance, returning to the timeless work of Shakespeare—a man especially concerned with the power of love—is something we all need.

"This gala is more than a showcase; it is a journey through this playwright's sensibility from birth to death, the opening moment we're waiting for him to be born and one of the closing moments we're waiting for him to be buried, journeying through the things he was most concerned with as an artist. He used the word love over 2,000 times in his plays and poems, and only used the word hate under 200 times in all of his writing, so that shows you what his obsession was," Peters says.

What better way to celebrate the Bard's birthday than an evening full of songs, scenes and sonnets—all while supporting live theater?

*"The Shakespeare Gala" runs April 23–25 at 7pm plus a pay-what-you-will show April 25 at 9pm. Tickets are \$50; all proceeds will go toward Santa Cruz Actors'*

*Theatre. [santacruzactorstheatre.org](http://santacruzactorstheatre.org)*