

# Santa Cruz Actors' Theater to celebrate the Bard's birthday with gala event

By [Jake Thomas](#)

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On April 23, the Santa Cruz Art Center will become a portal to another time as Center St. Stage transforms into a tribute to William Shakespeare. We spoke with Bill Peters about this fundraising event in honor of the great playwright. A talented cast of 32 actors and five musicians will perform “a collection of sonnets and fragments of scenes and monologues, all stitched together in a pattern to take us through the various corners of Shakespeare’s theatrical imagination.” This wild idea is dreamed up by Peters. He chose the fragments, created their sequence and is directing the entire 90-minute show.



Who is Bill Peters? We wanted to know more about his background, so we asked him some questions.

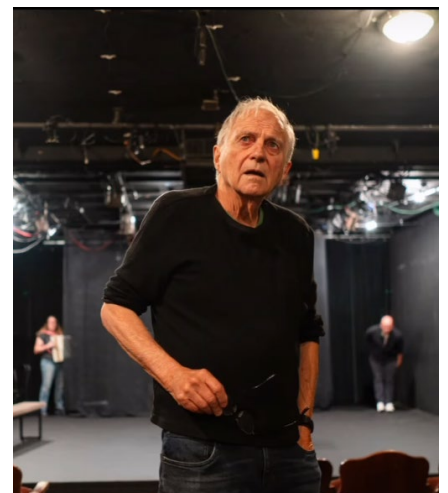
**Q:** How extensive is your background with Shakespeare?

**A:** I’m a dual citizen. I was born and grew up in Canada and when I was in high school, I lived in Toronto and the usual thing for school trips was to go to Stratford, Ontario, to the Shakespeare festival there — it’s kind of Canada’s national theater. It’s a huge organization and they specialize in Shakespeare and eventually after graduating from Yale drama school I got a job working at

Stratford one summer and so I was able to see it up close. I’ve been obsessed with Shakespeare since college days, and I’ve directed many of his shows. I just retired from about 35 years teaching at San Francisco State University where I routinely taught Shakespeare class.

**Q:** What was it like to attend Yale School of Drama?

**A:** I graduated from the University of Toronto in a course called English Language and Literature, modeled on Oxford in Cambridge, so we studied it right from Anglo-Saxon up. I spent about a half a year after that teaching school in London and I got to see a lot of stuff that was going on in London — that was the heyday when (Laurence) Olivier was running the National Theater. Being Canadian, I had no idea what the Yale School of Drama really was and I just naïvely applied and got accepted as a director. This was the tail end of the ’60s in the beginning of the ’70s. And while there, I formed a little company of fellow students and we





started specializing in sketch comedy. After graduation, we wound up back in Toronto and we were functioning as a comedy troupe for about eight years or so.

While at the drama school, we had teachers in my first year who were foundational members of Actors Studio. Stella Adler, Bobby Lewis — it's just amazing to see

history standing in front of you 10 feet away at the front of the classroom. Strangely enough, the one thing that was not taught was the British way of entering Shakespeare's world and text. We were pretty well method-oriented trained, and those tools just only get you so far with Shakespeare's language. It sits there like a big lump. Fortunately, we had some instructors who had come from England so we got a little whiff of that — just enough to make it really interesting to pursue later in life.

**Q:** What was it like to teach at San Francisco State University?

**A:** Wonderful. There was this program called Brown Bag Theater. The class had its own theater, and we were charged with producing 15 different shows during the semester at lunch hour, so it was lunchtime theater for the rest of the university. Everybody in the company did everything — they did sets, gathered costumes, sound effects, lights ... everything. Over the course of my time there, I oversaw about 500 different plays.



**Q:** What is your experience like working with theater in Santa Cruz?

**A:** The thing that excites me about being here in Santa Cruz is that it's a community. If you study Shakespeare, you find out that the theater atmosphere in London was a village. It was small. These guys lived together and they worked together. I think Shakespeare had company members during his entire career that he would be working with as friends. In many ways that vibe that you get from a community reaches way back in theatrical history.

If you want to experience some of that Santa Cruz theater community vibe, enjoy an evening of Shakespearean wonder, and support the Santa Cruz Actors' Theater (home of the 8 Tens at 8 Theater Festival), then the upcoming Gala is your opportunity to join in the fun. Go to [santacruzactorstheatre.org](http://santacruzactorstheatre.org) for information and to get tickets to the Shakespeare Gala, which runs April 23-25.