

## Cal Shakes' 'Comedy of Errors' is Fast-Paced Fun

By Lou Fancher



From left: Nemuna Ceesay as Adriana and Danny Scheie as Dromio in Cal Shakes' *The Comedy of Errors*, directed by Aaron Posner. Photo Kevin Berne

The synopsis is simple, the laughs are plentiful, the acting spools out joyfully, direction is sturdy, and the choreography is nothing short of magical in California Shakespeare Theater's current production, "Comedy of Errors."

Director Aaron Posner, returning after helming Cal Shakes' "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in 2009, picks up William Shakespeare's 421-year-old play and takes it for a spin. Like bumper cars, it's perfect for summer: fast-paced fun, with "dings" both certain and celebrated. If there's occasionally a bit too much striving for a joke, it can be forgiven. After all, a theater buff craving depth can dig in and appreciate The Bard's deft tilting of a classic story of mistaken identity into something of a pronouncement. Shakespeare, even in this farcical realm, manages to pierce the heart and cause a person to ponder true identity, acceptance, parental love, and more – amid the chuckling.

Although no one dies (rare in a play by Shakespeare), there is a shipwreck and death sentence to start the action. Pronounced upon Egeon (Ron Campbell, playing multiple roles with rubbed-raw clarity), the merchant has violated the trading rules of the city of Ephesus. A Duke (Liam Vincent, who surfaces as a scene-stealing gem throughout the production) hears his plea for mercy and grants him a one-day reprieve.

Why a reprieve? Because Egeon is in Ephesus to search for the sons he lost in the shipwreck: identical twins, Antipholus of Syracuse and Ephesus (Adrian Danzig, convincingly dignified and/or indignant in the "dual" roles).

Of course, the high-class kids have manservants: identical twins Dromio of Syracuse and Ephesus (Danny Scheie, an actor with tremendous comedic instincts and a broad vocabulary of pirouettes). When Antipholus of S arrives in Ephesus with his Dromio, searching for his long-lost brother, mayhem ensues. Ephesians mistake one brother for the other, masters misidentify one servant for the other, and so on. Adrianna (the rock solid Nemuna Ceesay), the wife of Antipholus E, and her sister Luciana (Tristan Cunningham, revealing her circus background and applying it with effortless velocity to Antipholus S), join the brouhaha. The women add love, lust and "you're a louse" decla-

rations to the equation. Soon, everyone knows everyone and no one knows anyone – until the end, when the whole mystery is cleared up and the family is reunited. Even the long-lost mother shows up, emerging as an Abbess (Patty Gallagher, more in a moment, on her).

Leaping and loping nimbly through the Bruns Amphitheater and across set designer Nina Ball's colorful, platform-and-stairway set, the actors are unafraid to plop into an audience member's lap – or pilfer an unprotected bottle of wine. Costume designer Beaver Bauer has a rich eye for texture and does a fine job handling the cut and style of costumes – especially considering the seven-member cast's need to whip in and out of them at a hellish pace behind the scenes.

One of the best aspects of attending a Cal Shakes performance is that even when ambition exceeds artistry (a rare occurrence, but it happened a few times in a performance on July 6), there is excellence. Gallagher, in multiple roles not typically viewed as leading roles of the play, emerges as a real stunner. She's funny, commanding, astute in playing off fellow actors, spontaneous and genuine.

And Movement Director Erika Chong Shuch deserves her own ovation. There's a tango with a torch press lift (go see it if you're needing a ballet fix during the dance season's slow summer months), Gallagher's hilarious Courtesan solo, an apple/kiwi interaction that if not choreographed by Shuch is surely movement coached, and the cast's vigorous spins and pratfalls. All is deftly handled and delivered with a perfect balance between dexterity and dumb luck. As audience, we're never worried they'll hurt themselves, but afterwards, aching actor's bones must prevail.

"Comedy of Errors" ends July 20, but don't despair if you have to miss it: after Cal Shakes' Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone directs a production of George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" (July 30-Aug. 24), Shuch returns as movement director for "A Midsummer Night's Dream," directed by Shana Cooper (Sept. 3-28).

For information about California Shakespeare Theater, at the Bruns Amphitheater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way (off Highway 24), Orinda., call (510) 548-9666 or visit [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org).

## Orinda Rotary Kicks Off Year of Music with Two Blockbuster July Concerts

By Laurie Snyder



Music lovers will be blown away this month when jazz great Mike Vax headlines the Orinda Rotary's Concert in the Park July 22. Vax, the former long-time lead trumpet for Stan Kenton and co-leader of Kenton's ensemble, is shown here performing with his Mike Vax Big Band at Yoshi's. Photo courtesy Friends of Big Band Jazz

The Orinda Rotary, known for greatly bettering the lives of Lamorindans, is about to celebrate its 65th anniversary in a big way – by giving a boost to the performing arts while banishing the word "Borinda" from Bay Area residents' brains forever.

"One of my projects is to bring music to the community, to the schools, to the seniors," said 2014 Rotary president, David Pierce, who declared the next 12 months A Year of Music in Orinda. "We'll start in a big way in the fall with Music for Seniors and will then bring in music to assemblies."

They're kicking it all off with two powerhouse concerts. On July 22, jazz giant Mike Vax will bring his best friends to town for an evening sure to be marveled at long after the sweet sounds of his trumpet have faded. His Mike Vax Big Band includes the biggest of the big – those who've wowed with the ensembles of Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Duke Ellington, Clark Terry, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Cab Calloway, and Tex Beneke.

"Jazz is America's only true art form," and a major reason why, says Vax, is the Big Band sound. There's nothing like it.

A 1960 Oakland High graduate and jazz circuit fixture for nearly 50 years, he was the first trumpet, soloist

and road manager for the Stan Kenton Orchestra. Its co-leader during the period Kenton was recovering from surgery, he also performed or recorded with Gene Krupa, Anita O'Day and Art Pepper. Today, when not touring with his own band or the Stan Kenton Alumni Band, he's managing the Prescott Jazz Summit in Arizona. And yes, that Mike Vax Custom Series 3001 Trumpet manufactured by Getzen ProShop was named after him ([www.mikevax.net/getzen\\_trumpets\\_3001mv.html](http://www.mikevax.net/getzen_trumpets_3001mv.html)).

Taken under Kenton's wing, Vax also carries on Kenton's storied mentoring efforts. He launched Friends of Big Band Jazz ([www.bigbandjazz.net](http://www.bigbandjazz.net)) to raise funds for high school music programs and send students to summer jazz camps. He hopes the audience at Orinda's Community Park will be filled with students of all ages. "We're carrying on the tradition of true American music, but we don't just play nostalgia music. We play everything from the '30s and '40s up to the hits of today. It's so much better live than hearing it on a CD. You feel the energy coming off that stage from all those musicians."

And on July 27, souls will soar to different strains – Orinda's annual afternoon of Opera in the Park, which is presented in cooperation with Open Opera ([www.openopera.net](http://www.openopera.net)). As of press time, Torlef Borsting, Alex

Boyer, Brad Kynard, Eileen Meredith, Angela Moser, Julia Nielsen, Cass Panuska, and Orinda's own Lisa van der Ploeg were slated to perform arias and duets from Puccini's *La Bohème* and Madama Butterfly, Dvorak's *Rusalka*, Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Bernstein's *West Side Story*, and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Brindisi from Verdi's *La Traviata* is likely to be the closer.

Suitable for children, these concerts coincide with Parks Make Life Better Month. Additional support is provided by the Orinda Parks and Recreation Foundation, Orinda Community Center Auxiliary, Orinda Community Foundation, and the City of Orinda.

### Orinda Concerts in the Park:

**Big Band Concert:**  
July 22, 6 to 8:30 p.m.  
**Opera in the Park:**  
July 27, 4 to 6 p.m.

Cost: Free admission; food, beer, wine, and other beverages available for purchase; bring a lawn chair or blanket. Location: Orinda Community Park, 26 Orinda Way. Parking limited; recommend early arrival or BART use. Information: [www.orindarotary.org](http://www.orindarotary.org).

## Sustainable Lafayette Film Series Continues

'With My Own Two Wheels' showing July 31

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Since summer is a more relaxed time, Sustainable Lafayette board members decided this is the best season to show their annual film series. The topics are informative, provocative, transformative, and also entertaining. While the first film in June was about chemical exposure, the next film scheduled July 31, "With My Own Two Wheels," is an upbeat and beautiful depiction of how bikes affect lives around the world. It was made by two Berkeley brothers who traveled the world, meeting people who changed their destiny, and sometimes that of their community, through bicycles.

"This movie was beautifully shot all around the world," says Kim Overaa, the film series committee chair for Sustainable Lafayette. "It is a window into the world, and maybe it will inspire us to do more with our bikes at home." The movie was discovered by Bart Carr, who saw it profile in *Bicycle Times* magazine. He and Brad Crane have been making strides on the Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee to make Lafayette bike friendly. "When I heard that Sustainable Lafayette was looking for a film on bikes for this summer series, I decided to get in touch with the producers," Carr says.

"We were very excited when we heard about the series," says Jacob Seigel-Boettner, who lives in Berkeley with his brother, both former Cal students. The two grew up using their bikes all the time, and for them it was just a natural mode of transportation. "Then as part of my studies at UC Berkeley I did some research and a short film on a coffee farmer in Ghana who's bicycle allowed him to become independent as he transported his coffee himself," recalls Seigel-Boettner. "The film was well received on the campus, and it made me realize that what I considered an easy way of transportation was so much more to others around the world."

Seigel-Boettner and his brother decided to make a movie with many more examples of people whose lives are transformed by bicycles. They were awarded \$25,000 as part of the Judith Lee Stronach Baccalaureate Prize at UC Berkeley to finance their project. "We did research through our connections with the bicycle world and decided on the five individuals across the globe that we were going to feature," explains Seigel-Boettner.

The movie features Fred, a health worker in Zambia who uses his bicycle as a means of reaching twice as many patients; Bharati, a teenager in

India whose bicycle provides access to education; Mirriam, a disabled Ghanaian woman who works on bicycles as an escape from the stigma attached to disabled people in her community; as well as a Guatemalan farmer and a young California man who uses bicycles to escape from gang involvement.

"The story of the woman in Ghana particularly touched me," says Carr. "Through the program 'Bikes not Bombs' she learned how to build and repair bikes and joined a local shop that makes bikes for locals. It shows how it gave her a sense of pride, and people are looking at her as someone who is important in the community." He was also touched by the story of the young man in the Santa Barbara area who was entangled in local gangs, but who learned to repair bikes and now teaches others how to do it as a way to veer away from that path.

"If bicycles can do these kinds of things for these people, what could they do for me and my community?" asks Carr. "That was one of my takeaways from that film. It helped me revisit that thought: What we can do here to make bicycles a more ubiquitous mode of transportation in Lafayette?"

The film will be shown at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, July 31 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Refreshments will be served and Seigel-Boettner will come to answer questions and discuss future projects. The August movie will be "Watershed," shown at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 13; it tells the story of the threats to the once-mighty Colorado River and offers solutions for the future of the American West's water supply.

### Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 250 words) to [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com), and include "Celebrations and Remembrances" in the subject line.