ACTING SHAKESPEARE
A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespearean Festival's 2008 Production of *Othello*

Michael Flachmann
Utah Shakespearean Festival Company Dramaturg

Featuring: J. R. Sullivan (Director), Jonathan Peck (Othello), Lindsey Wochley (Desdemona), James Newcomb (Iago), Corliss Preston (Emilia), and Justin Gordon (Cassio)

Flachmann: Welcome to the culminating event in our Wooden O Symposium, the Actors' Roundtable Discussion about *Othello*. I'd like to begin with a question for the actors, and then we'll come back to Mr. Sullivan for his opinion. With a play produced as frequently as *Othello*, how do you make these roles your own? How do you balance the demands of the script, the director's vision, and your own innate ability and life experiences to take ownership of these roles? We'll start off with Jonathan, please. You've done the role twice before, right?

Peck: Actually, two and a half times. The first one was ninety minutes in Knoxville, Tennessee. Four actors did the show, which was very strange [laughter].

Flachmann: Aside from that production, Jonathan, how do you make this role your own when it has been done so often, with so many films and video tapes available, and so much information about past performances?

Peck: Number one, you try to avoid watching other actors do the role. You're going to steal, of course [laughter]; you're going to borrow from other actors, but I've found several cultural idiosyncrasies to personalize my characterization of Othello. For instance, if you spend time in Africa, you see people squat on their haunches while they wait for buses. And African men have no qualms about walking down the street holding hands. You also see

this behavior depicted in Egyptian paintings. I didn't want to go as far as using an accent or dialect, which I think sometimes distracts from the words you are saying. And then you end up working with some really amazing directors who . . . Oh, I've already got the job [laughter]. You come in with your own ideas, and then you collaborate with people you trust. I guess that's pretty much it.

Flachmann: Great! We're off to a good start. Lindsey?

Wochley: I like to begin with the text, with what I have that's solid in front of me, and then take into consideration the other actors I'm working with and the director's vision of the play. Desdemona is nineteen, and she's very fantastical. In this production, she daydreams most of the time and is very happy with Othello. She loves him with all her heart.

Flachmann: Good job. Jamie?

Newcomb: Yes, I also begin with the text, but you have to understand that in regional theatres in this country, most of the conceptual decisions about the play are made long before the actors start the rehearsal process. I have occasionally been part of the initial design conferences; that's always a joy to be involved from the beginning, but it doesn't happen very often. So you have to be very careful about any kind of rigid choices you make as you approach the text.

I started working on Iago last December. For such a massive role, you have to be pretty familiar with the language before you come into rehearsals—especially here, where you have about two and a half weeks of actual rehearsal that is spread out over seven weeks. But I also couldn't be too rigid in decisions I had made about the character since I was going to be collaborating with the director and with other actors. So much of the joy in the process is in what we come up with collectively.

Corliss and I met early in the rehearsal process for breakfast and came up with a very interesting idea about the relationship between Emilia and Iago. Then you just have to take your best shot. You make a series of assumptions in the rehearsal room as you conceive the play, and then you hope that the audience will affirm your assumptions by the way they respond to the play. That's pretty much the context in which we work.

Flachmann: Thanks, Jamie. Corliss?

Preston: Yes, I agree with Jamie. I was cast in February, and I know from working here before that I need to get on the text immediately. I try to learn the role before I get here, just so I have it inside me, and then when I hear the design concepts and what we're going to cut, I let go of pieces of the play I learned, but I still

keep them in my head. I already know different pieces of the puzzle that I can incorporate, even though they may be cut. I've seen this show a lot, and I've always found Emilia a bit of a puzzle. There's such ambiguity to her until the end of the play, when she gains clarity and you get to see who she really is. I love that arc to her character and tried to make it as exciting as possible. And I did get together with Jamie so we could discuss a lot of our choices. They weren't set in stone.

And I also like to go to museums and just look at paintings and sculpture and see if anything hits me instinctively. I also did a lot of research. I love to see what's out there. I think it's very important to have your own ideas before you enter into rehearsal and then be ready to let them go. But I think about the role beforehand so the ideas can gestate inside me.

Flachmann: Thank you, Corliss. Justin?

Gordon: I approach plays in a similar fashion. I always begin with the text and see where that takes me, but I try to be as open as possible when I arrive at the rehearsal process. And then I really begin to look for the parallels between myself and the character I'm playing. I found Cassio very eager to begin his new career, much in the way that I, too, am beginning my career as an actor. The eagerness and the desire to do well are parallels that I found between myself and Cassio.

Flachmann: Excellent. Let's move the microphone down to Mr. Sullivan. Jim, are the problems of making a production your own vastly different for a director than for an actor. You start with the script, of course, and have a direction in which you want to proceed. Jamie has said, I think quite accurately, that many of the most important conceptual decisions are made before the actors are on board. So how do you as a director approach a play like this that's done so frequently and has such a rich production history behind it?

Sullivan: Well, at this theatre, of course, I think the actors have much more conceptual input, especially those who have been here before. If the play is being done in the outdoor Adams Theatre, the architecture, based on the recollection of a Tudor theatre, encourages a playing style that enhances the relationship of the actor to the audience through the natural light that is available for the first ninety minutes of the performance. In fact, we're now seeing [in August] lighting cues at this point in the summer that we set after midnight in late June!

The work on the outdoor stage at the Utah Shakespeare Festival is generally going to be, for want of a better word, "traditional."

First and foremost, most directors want the play to mean something right now. So all our decisions are made with one foot in Shakespeare's time and another firmly planted in our own. Costume designer Bill Black has supported this concept with contemporary trousers on the men in this production that are actually black jeans or black leather pants; all this, I think, helps make the issues of the play sadly tragic and frighteningly contemporary for a modern audience.

Flachmann: Thank you. Several of you have said that you start with the script, and then your relationship with the script is changed through the rehearsal process. I wonder if you can share specific examples without revealing any dark secrets about the production. Can you think of any moments that were changed because of your interaction with Jim and the other actors?

Wochley: In act 1, scene 3, my interaction with my father actually changed a lot. At first, I was playing the relationship as if I cared about him [laughter]. But I found out through rehearsal that she really doesn't care at all. He wasn't there for her in her life. Othello is all I need now. I don't need my father at all. He's just a weight around my neck. After Jim and I talked about that relationship, my understanding of the scene changed a lot.

Flachmann: Lindsey, is the insight that your father hadn't cared for you textually supported, or is it a back story that you and Jim came up with in rehearsal?

Wochley: I think the text is ambiguous enough that you can interpret it in any way you choose. So I guess I would have to say it's a back story.

Flachmann: Jamie, any special moments for you, sir?

Newcomb: Jim and I had talked a lot about the scene on the dock in Cyprus at the beginning of act 2. I had this idea about Iago's relationship with Desdemona and how she's a catalyst for Iago's growing villainy and malice. This prompts the question about his motivation, which is one of the great ambiguities in Shakespeare. I don't actually think his motives are ambiguous at all. There are a lot of reasons why he behaves the way he does. It's an accumulation of circumstances that lead to a specific decision to go deeper into his plot. I think he's certainly immoral and unethical, but opportunities that are available to him allow his further unscrupulous behavior

One of the most crucial moments for me is on the dock with Desdemona when we're waiting for Othello, and she prompts me to entertain her. I tell a series of bawdy jokes, but I'm also wooing her because I think she's quite attractive. Desdemona has qualities

no other woman possesses, and every guy who sees her is smitten by her, and Iago is certainly one of them. And then he has this very unfortunate epiphany as he is looking at this young, beautiful woman he would never be able to possess, never could have possessed, and there's a shocking juxtaposition with Emilia on the dock and with Desdemona and myself, because you have to remember that nobody loathes Iago more than himself. And it's a stark realization to see Cassio come up and take her by the palm, to witness this suave, slick Florentine work his magic on women. It suddenly shifts into something much uglier, and so Jim and I wanted to make this scene with Desdemona a real turning point in the production.

Flachmann: That section is often cut in production, isn't it?

Newcomb: Yes, that part is generally cut. Jim wanted to delete it initially, too, but we had a talk about it and reinstated it in that context.

Flachmann: Corliss, I'm assuming you'd like to respond to that.

Preston: If rehearsals are a true collaboration, you start to find out why these scenes are necessary. Even if you decide to cut them, you need to know why they are there. You have to at least understand what you are missing. In rehearsals, Jim spent a lot of time trying to guide me away from certain character strengths so I could save them for the end. When you are first in rehearsals and you're reacting to everything, you're pretty much wearing your heart on your sleeve. So Jim would try to say, "Yes, that's all underneath. Now let's try to put something on top of it." So I think it was a true collaboration in the creation of my character between the playwright, the director, myself, and the people I was on stage with.

Flachmann: Thanks, Corliss. Justin any epiphanies for you during the rehearsal process?

Gordon: Absolutely. In act 2, scene 3, when I lose my lieutenancy, my initial approach to it was shell shock, complete shell shock, and I think the first choice I made was to underplay it too much. And then Jim and I talked about Cassio's youth, and it's almost like he has a temper tantrum that an adolescent would throw when he disappointed his parents, which felt a lot more right, especially with everything Cassio has on the line up until that point and how embarrassed and ashamed he feels for failing Othello. So that was a definite change for me.

Flachmann: Jonathan?

Peck: I talked earlier about the production I did in Tennessee, which toured through a lot of small towns. One morning we're in Maresville, Tennessee, and the director says when we go into these rural high schools, we want to be very careful with the kiss. If you've ever been to a high school assembly, the football team always sits up front. So we do the kiss, and we're used to high school kids kind of rumbling, but we heard this sort of low growl come out of the football team during the kiss [laughter]. So I looked around for an exit [laughter], and I walked over and said, "You guys crank up the van and keep that motor running, because if I have to leave, you're on your own" [laughter]. I like what Jim has done in that opening scene because it's clear from the staging that the marriage has been consummated. We got that whole question out of the way early so people could focus on the story. During the Renaissance, to prove your newly wedded wife was a virgin, you'd go to the window and hang out the bloody sheet. Rather than do that, we have a moment with the handkerchief that says they've consummated the marriage. I agreed with Jim that we needed to communicate that at the top of the play. Let's get the kiss out of the way, too. Let's just tell the story.

Flachmann: I'm glad you brought that up, Jonathan. What about some of the other back stories? Would any of you feel comfortable talking about extra-textual decisions you made about your characters' lives before the play begins?

Preston: Well, we've already discussed certain moments that changed in rehearsal, because once you get on stage with each other you start to create this whole other universe. One decision, which was actually determined in the casting, was that Iago and Emilia are a middle-aged couple as opposed to a younger couple, which helped us heighten certain aspects of the roles. Jamie and I started talking about how they were two kids from the Bronx [laughter], and they had a lot of potential. They were both ambitious, and they thought they were going to achieve all these dreams and go all these places, and then they end up twenty years later, and none of these dreams has happened. Their great potential has gone nowhere, which is a real disappointment to them. Nor have they any hope of a future generation fulfilling their fantasies because they are childless. We also discussed the possibility of a physically abusive relationship, but the more we talked about it, the more interesting the emotional abuse seemed [laughter]. I know so many marriages that are messed up on that level: how many buttons you push and how you can manipulate each other and how you can still want that person to love you even though they

don't give you anything you need. Dysfunction is always fun . . . when it's not your own life [laughter].

Newcomb: There's a co-dependency in this relationship, and of course we're living in a patriarchal society. Iago is undeniably intelligent, but he's not very savvy politically. He's never risen above anything but an ensign, and he's forty-seven years old (as we say in the play). So we hit upon this idea that Emilia is desperate for some kind of affection from him, which I can give her on occasion, but I can also pull it away. After Othello is sent to Cyprus, our station is elevated. Othello has put Emilia in charge of his wife, which means we are going to make ourselves collectively indispensable to Othello and Desdemona, which will help me in my attempt to get the lieutenancy from Cassio. We were probably pretty sharp cookies early on, pretty hip, and saw the world in that light. We were smart and the rest of the world wasn't. That kind of conceit ultimately becomes quite toxic.

Flachmann: Thanks. I want to get Jim in on that question. So these guys go out to breakfast and come back to rehearsal and say they've got this play all figured out [laughter]. What role do you have in these decisions? Were you keen on this concept?

Sullivan: That's what I expect them to do. Because of our repertory rehearsal schedule, we don't get to the play more than sixteen guaranteed hours a week. It's difficult to build momentum in rehearsal for something that's as complex and rich as this play. For me, it's largely a matter of taking what they bring to the room and shaping it. But you expect them to investigate the script on their own. That's what they do: Through the words in the text, they make relationships with each other that are authentic and honest. They avoid the actor's nightmare by knowing who they are and what they're about. The combination of this level of talent at the festival and the difficult rehearsal schedule always makes the work richly fulfilling for me and hopefully also for our audiences.

Newcomb: Yes, I'm just so proud of Emilia for what she's done. Getting Desdemona to plead for Cassio fits in perfectly with my plan.

Flachmann: While Jamie has the mic, I wonder if we should talk a little bit about the soliloquies in the play and especially about the relationship between the characters and the audience. What kind of special bond is that? I'd be interested in hearing from Jamie and Jonathan on that question.

Newcomb: I find direct address in Shakespeare fascinating because I know there's a dramatic convention in which the character is speaking to the audience, but in the world of the play, whom is

he really talking to? I have a line early in the first scene with Roderigo where I say, "Heaven is my judge," and I sort of laugh at the idea of it because I don't think Iago is a very religious character! [laughter] Since Iago is a pragmatist, there isn't any empirical proof of God in a staunchly Catholic world. One day in rehearsal, I had a wonderful idea: What if God was right in front of me? What if all these people in the audience are God? And I'm going to tell you exactly what I plan to do. To date, nobody has stood up and said that's enough of that [laughter].

During the course of the play I have the three direct-address soliloquies in a row, which get progressively meaner, and I'm looking right at you as I'm saying all these horrible things and asking you an implied question: Are you going to do anything about this? [laughter] Near the end of the play, when I have the scene with Desdemona and Emilia and say everything's going to be all right, I have a silent soliloquy, which was an idea Jim and I had about turning to the audience and not saying anything, just letting the thought sit there unspoken. At that point, I don't have to say anything to you any more. And I actually wonder if God is going to do anything to help these characters. I guess not [laughter]. So that is the context for my direct address, and I think it's important for the actor doing the soliloquy to have a very specific idea about whom he is talking to.

Flachmann: Lovely. Jonathan, do you want to add anything to that?

Peck: I see many of my soliloquies as "interiors" rather than "direct address." For example, when I say, "Haply, for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have," I think this is a thought rather than a statement directed to the audience. However, there is something I'd like to say about Jamie's direct address [laughter]. He has a moment . . . let's get this out now [laughter].

Newcomb: Just before Othello enters in one scene, I do an impression of a monkey. And the audience always responds strongly. Sometimes they even laugh nervously.

Peck: And sometimes, I think most times, there is an audible gasp. Since we know that what he's doing is horribly racist, the question becomes, "How complicit is the audience in Iago's racism?"

Newcomb: Yes, that's the first moment of complicity. Anybody who laughs at that extremely rude gesture is implicated in the play's racist attitude.

Peck: It's one of the reasons things deteriorated in Germany in the 1930's. Does your silence make you complicit? If you guys would like to talk about it later, I'd sure like to do that [laughter].

Flachmann: Let's discuss character arcs a little more, how the characters change as the play progresses. Jonathan, do you want to start?

Peck: I think this play is where Shakespeare shows his maturity in writing characterization. Othello's arc to me is so clear. It begins with his new love and his joy in his marriage. Then he descends from that love to suspicion and then to outright jealousy and then to my favorite part: the madness that comes with jealousy.

At my house on the back of my bedroom door, I have a growth chart for my daughter: "Look at you: you grew 5 inches last year" [laughter]. In a sense, this play is like that for me. You learn how to deal with the verse; then you figure out the character arc, which goes from happiness to jealousy to madness and finally to death. As an actor, you learn how to tell the story, and then you start to fill in the blanks with all the little details. I've never been jealous before because I am not that kind of person. And when you finally feel that and the attendant madness, it is the green-eyed monster. The madness that comes with that discovery makes the story just so much clearer!

Flachmann: Good job. Lindsey?

Wochley: I think the moment my arc changes is when he asks me for my handkerchief. When he starts telling me this story about the sibyl who "In her prophetic fury sew'd the work," it all starts going downhill because I don't know what's wrong. I don't know what's happened to him. He won't tell me; he won't talk to me. All I know is I lost his handkerchief, and he's livid about it.

Flachmann: Jamie, we talked about a moment at which you lose control in the play. I wonder if that's part of your character, when things spiral out of control?

Newcomb: For Iago, there's a very clear dramaturgical arc. I trick Roderigo, then do the gulling of Cassio, and then move on to the big guy. I drive him all the way until he falls to the ground in a fit, and that's a huge moment of triumph for Iago. Up to that point, I've done my work mostly in two-person scenes: Iago/Roderigo, Iago/Cassio, or Iago/Othello. Suddenly, Cassio comes in during the fit, and three people are involved. And I say now I'm going to bring Bianca into it, and I'm going to have Othello stand behind this screen and watch the action, so it starts to get more complicated. Later, when Lodovico comes in with Desdemona, I have to orchestrate even more people. In act 5, scene 1, Iago is

dancing as fast as he can; luckily, Bianca shows up at the wrong time, and I blame it all on her.

Flachmann: Corliss, what about your character arc?

Preston: I was fascinated throughout the rehearsal process with the idea of Emilia's identity and how she discovers who she is through the course of the play. I read an article by Simone de Beauvoir about the role of women in a patriarchal society. What was really fascinating to me is that women will bond with males of their own class before they will bond with another woman. I come from a working class environment; based on my own experience, I think that insight is true. I have no problem stealing the handkerchief.

For Emilia, the problems in the play are always somebody else's fault, until she takes responsibility for her own actions at the end of the production and chooses to tell the truth. There's a level of enlightenment there. She's starting to discover who she really is, and she's willing to risk death to find herself. But I'm also intrigued when Desdemona lies about the handkerchief. I'm ready to fess up, and then you lie about it, and I think, wow! this is interesting. Then all of a sudden Emilia starts to bond with Desdemona as one woman to another, and that progression continues when she starts to reveal what she thinks. The ultimate betrayal is the realization that her husband set her up through the whole thing.

Flachmann: Thanks. Justin?

Gordon: If you listen to Cassio's language early on, he's very courtly in the way he praises Desdemona and when he talks to Othello and Iago. Cassio is rigid when he describes Desdemona because he's being very careful to do a good job as the lieutenant. He has the office, but I don't think he fully owns it yet. And then when he loses his office, he almost looks to Iago as a kind of mentor, as a guide. He's helping me, he's teaching me how to be more like one of the soldiers. And I think he finally becomes a man when he walks into act 5, scene 2 and sees the carnage. He sees his best friend kill himself. The man whom he has trusted has betrayed everyone. The woman he has loved on a variety of levels is dead before him.

Everything that he knows is gone. When he becomes governor of Cyprus, he's attained the highest status, but he's had to lose everything to get it. I think that's when Cassio becomes a man. There's even a shift in his language at the end when he says very simply, "Dear General, I never gave you cause. . . . I found it in my chamber." Everything is very direct at this point; he has lost all the airs he had at the beginning of the play. So for me, that's the arc.

He goes from being an eager, officious upstart, wanting to prove himself, to a real man by the end of the play.

Flachmann: Great, thank you. Jim, you have the responsibility, of course, of coordinating all these characters' arcs. Do you feel like a juggler in a three-ring circus?

Sullivan: No, I'm an audience for them throughout the process. When these events happen in rehearsal, moving to the point where you can have all these arcs interacting with one another and interacting with an audience, it's a real miracle. That's why we do it.

Flachmann: I wonder if Jonathan and Lindsey could say a few words about their relationship, particularly the age and ethnic differences? What is it, Lindsey, that attracts you to Jonathan's character? "She loved me for the dangers I passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them." I wonder if that's a solid foundation for a marriage? [laughter]

Wochley: For Desdemona, it is. The script explains that she has had all these suitors and that she didn't want to marry any of them. And then Othello comes along and tells her these fantastical stories; it's a dream world, and he's my knight in shining armor. With reference to the age difference, I also see him as the father figure I never had, which adds so much more to my love for him. It's only two days before he kills me, right? We really don't know each other at all. Our relationship at the beginning—well, throughout the whole play—is purely based on attraction, and I don't really know him as a man. So when he switches from "I love you" to calling me a whore, I think this isn't the man I married. This isn't the man I fell in love with. I keep thinking it's a little bump in the road. We'll get through this. I don't have any family or friends. Emilia is the only woman I've ever been close to in my life, and I've only known her for a few days.

Flachmann: Jonathan, anything to add?

Peck: Yes. Othello is basically used to protect trade routes and the economic viability of Venice. But Desdemona is the one who has actually listened and who has an idea of who I am and what I've gone through in life. When you find a person like that, they are very special to you, particularly when you are a stranger in a strange land. Justin and I have talked about this a lot. What Othello really does is send Cassio to talk to her. Now as I think back on my life, I remember doing that in ninth grade [laughter]. I sent Cedric to talk to Debra, and the next thing I know, they're going out. Why'd you do that, man? [laughter]

Cassio is suave: He's a Florentine, and he's good looking, and he's of her own ethnicity and class. So it's easy to take that to the next level and say, what did he tell her when I sent him to talk to her? Why wouldn't she fall in love with him? He is familiar to her, and I am not. I look at her father and say, "She thanked me." I work for these other guys, and they never thank me. They write me a check, and I'm gone. The woman actually looks at me and says, "Thank you for telling me these stories. Thank you for entertaining me." And I think that's the basis of his love for her.

Flachmann: Thanks, Jonathan. What about the balance of the characters in the play? Whose play is it?

Sullivan: That's a very good question. I never think of a play, even Hamlet, as dominated by one character. To me, the ensemble makes it happen. But the weight of this play, the spring of action, is certainly with Iago. I'm reminded of a phrase from Melville's Billy Budd, "the mystery of iniquity," and I think that's the compelling aspect of the play. And it's the one that compels us still. We've created pop entertainment around it, certainly. Mass culture broods about it. The nature of evil is the meditation of the play, and that makes it the catalyst for the action of the play. Iago works though other people's hands until the very end. When he's caught and brought back, he has a kind of stoicism, which turns the final act into his ultimate creation at this point. Consequently, I have shifted the production to that focus because that's what I find most intriguing.

Flachmann: That's part of the enigma of Iago not speaking at the conclusion, isn't it? One of the definitions I love of "great art" is that it is inexhaustible. We keep looking into it and finding new and wonderful discoveries. Jamie, anything to add here?

Newcomb: I think Iago starts bad and gets worse as the play progresses. He's one of those unfortunate individuals who have very large egos and terrifically low self-esteem. It's all a sport for him. When someone loses his scruples and his ethics, the world gets out of his way because we depend on each other's innate goodness. When somebody can take advantage of that and see what a person's weakness is and manipulate it, that's a pretty scary prospect, and it's empowering in a very negative way. As I worked on the role, I found there was a kind of quirky "slouchiness" that Iago has early in the play; as he gets more successful, he becomes more still, upright, and powerful as the play progresses. So by the end of each performance, of course, we find there wasn't ever any core to Iago. There's no "there" there. He's the nowhere man. By the end of the play, what you see is emptiness. His last line is,

"From this time forth, I never will speak word." There's a terrible stillness in that moment.

Flachmann: Jonathan, how does your descent into madness happen? What percent is your own gullibility, and what percent is Iago's brilliance at manipulating the people around him?

Peck: Iago says, "The Moor is of a free and open nature, / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, / And will as tenderly be led by the nose / As asses are." He assumes that everyone around him is honest and truthful and that we are all working towards the same goal. This realization allows this Machiavellian ensign to create a web that ensnares Othello. In society, in politics, we often see people who cannot stand watching someone else who is truly good. They have to tear them down because it makes them feel like a lesser entity.

Flachmann: Jim, a closing comment from you?

Sullivan: Iago's words are an infection in the ear of Othello. He unleashes a disease that turns this man of elegance and accomplishment into a monster; he destroys a marriage and turns rapturous love into murderous jealousy. As the catalyst, as the infecting agent, he stands back and is astonished and delighted by his own creation. That way he's an audience within the audience sometimes.

Flachmann: What a lovely comment to end on. Please join with me in thanking these wonderful actors and this brilliant director for spending so much time with us this morning [applause]. We appreciate the opportunity to gain some insight into your art and lives. My thanks also to the organizers of the Wooden O Symposium, especially to Michael Bahr, Matt Nickerson, and Jessica Tvordi; to Scott Phillips and the Utah Shakespearean Festival; and, finally, to all of you in the audience who support this beautiful theatre. You are the most important ingredient we need to make these plays come alive each year [applause].