

A SSOCIATED E VENTS

Shakespeare's Journey: written and directed by Leroy Clark

Friday

Much Ado About Nothing

Swing meets Shakespeare in the University of Miami Ring Theatre's WWII version of the timeless romantic comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, April 13-21.

Set in a USO Canteen in wartime Europe, the Ring adaptation retains nearly all of Shakespeare's language and characters while making minor textual changes to reflect the 20th-century setting. Military uniforms and fashions from 1943 along with swing music and dancing all help support the transported time and place.

True to Shakespeare, the plot still revolves primarily around Benedick and Beatrice, two bickering lovers who are now a U.S. Army Major and USO Entertainer. Dogberry, a constable in the original, is now an M.P. Sergeant. The Ring version has been adapted and will be directed by University of Miami Theatre Professor Matthew T. Gitkin, a professional ballroom dancer with special experience in swing dance. His professional acting experience includes *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Guys and Dolls*. He has acted in movies with Robin Williams, Bill Murray, Geena Davis, Susan Sarandon, and Ralph Fiennes. For *Much Ado* Mr. Gitkin has edited the original to shorten the playing time to under two hours. He has included renditions of 1940's hits sung by the show's USO entertainers, and he has choreographed several swing dance numbers into the production.

The University of Miami Department of Theatre Arts has BA and BFA programs in theatre. The historic Ring Theatre has been producing in the Miami area since 1946.

The theatre is located at 1312 Miller Drive, Coral Gables, on the University of Miami campus, and is accessible from the hotel by Metro Rail.

Tickets for *Much Ado* are offered at a reduced rate of \$8 to all who register for the SAA meeting (see page 8 of this bulletin). The SAA has reserved a limited number of seats for the performance, April 13 (Friday) at 8 p.m.

Saturday

Shakespeare's Journey

Playwright Leroy Clark began research for *Shakespeare's Journey* in 1996. Fifteen drafts later—following a production directed by J. David Blatt at Wichita State University, a staged reading at the 1999 Region V American College Theatre Festival directed by Aaron Cabell, feedback from the Chicago Dramatists' Workshop, and a reading in New York—*Shakespeare's Journey* will be performed at Florida International University April 5-15.

This romantic biographical drama, written in the style of an Elizabethan play, focuses on the universal struggle between career and family. We follow Shakespeare through 16th- and 17th-century London and Stratford, meet his family and fellow players, and see him in the context of his times dealing with the major events of his life.

Critics' comments include Evan Blake's (Chicago Dramatists Workshop), who says "There is a great deal to like in this play: The subjects are fascinating; the language is wonderful—heightened, period-appropriate, and frequently witty; the characters interesting, believable, and often charming." Joseph Fedorko (Chicago Playwrights Workshop) claims he "can already see the tag line for the play: 'What happened AFTER Shakespeare fell in love?' I love the premise, I love the language, I really, REALLY love the theatricality." And Harry Parker (Chair of the Region V American College Theatre Festival) adds: "It is a brave work. One of the great accomplishments of the piece is the handling of the language. What appealed to me

about the acting was the sense of scale. The stakes were high. The play deals with major issues—bigger than life—and the actors played it like it was Shakespeare."

Costumes, designed by Marilyn Skow and Marina Pareja, are historically accurate Elizabethan dress with colors, trim, texture and material selected to fit each character. *Dark Lady* and *Lawrence Fletcher*, for instance, are richly dressed throughout, while the growing prosperity of Shakespeare and the actors is reflected gradually.

The action is continuous without black-outs. Sets and lighting, designed by Douglas Molash, show a bare stage with a players' wagon from which the actors take crates and trunks and other props to create various locales. At the end of the play the actors pack up the wagon for Will and Anne's trip from London back to Stratford, leaving the stage as it was seen at the opening.

Playwright Leroy Clark, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at Florida International University, is the author of 25 plays and the recipient of numerous awards including the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Award, a Shubert Playwriting Fellowship, a Kennedy Center Fellowship, and the Salt and Pepper Mime Company National Award.

Tickets for *Shakespeare's Journey* are offered at a reduced rate of \$8 to all who register for the SAA meeting (see page 8 of this bulletin). The SAA has reserved a limited number of seats for the performance, April 14 (Saturday) at 8 p.m. The Wertheim Performing Arts Center, Main Stage, is located on the corner of Southwest 107 Avenue and Coral Way on the Florida International University Park Campus, which is a thirty-minute drive from the Hotel Inter-Continental. Vans will be available at no cost for transportation between the hotel and the theatre. An after-performance discussion with the playwright/director is planned.

Saturday

Ayabonmbe

The Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting will close, as it has thirteen times before, with the sublime and ridiculous SAA/Malone Society Dance. **Ayabonmbe**, lauded by the Miami New Times as the "best Haitian band" around, promises to make this year's dance a memorable one. Five percussionists and a fire-eater form the core of Miami's own Haitian supergroup. *Ayabonmbe's* far-reaching rasin music fuses the trance-inducing rhythms of Vodou rites with reggae, rap, soul ballads, and pulsing ra ra,—the music of Haitian Carnival street processions. Lead vocalist Kiki Wainwright and his Vodou posse sing ballads and political anthems in both Creole and English. Be there or be square. (Leave the chickens at home).

Tickets are \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door. A cash bar will add to the festivities.