

# The Utah Shakespeare Festival / Southern Utah University Annual Shakespeare Competition

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## Abstract

The Utah Shakespeare Festival / Southern Utah University Shakespeare Competition brings upwards of 3,000 students from over 100 high schools and middle schools to Cedar City, Utah each fall to compete in one of the longest-running programs of its kind in the nation. The Competition, mixing elements of competitive and non-competitive gatherings, provides a centerpiece for early academic-year educational programming in Shakespearean literature, theater, dance, and music. The Competition provides significant opportunity for "service Shakespeare," not only for competing students, but also for the sponsoring Shakespeare Festival and University and for many of the University's students, while raising and addressing questions in the controversy over competitive versus non-competitive educational programming. The Competition has developed within a cultural milieu that has contributed significantly to its success.

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Two young actors stand atop a six-foot-high platform, flanking another standing at a microphone, each in a drab-green military overcoat. A mid-twentieth-century sounding recorded voice recites the opening lines of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. As it reaches, "In the deep bosom of the ocean buried" (1.1.4),<sup>1</sup> the two flanking characters each place a hand on a shoulder of the one at the microphone, and one of them stabs him. The soldier-assassins pull from the area of their victim's wound a red cloth meant to suggest the stylistic gushing of blood, which reveals itself to be a Nazi flag, the swastika at its center visually echoing those on the player-soldiers' sleeves. The stabbed character falls behind the flag and disappears from the platform. From the moment of the stabbing, the dozen other actors standing below the tall platform, dressed as concentration-camp internees, begin to shriek. Appearing among them at center stage is Richard, Duke of York. The shrieks turn

to lines from the play, and the chorus soon falls into a repeated chant of the refrain spoken by the spirits of Richard's victims who appear to him before the battle of Bosworth Field: "despair and die."<sup>2</sup> The internee chorus members fall to the stage, where they remain as the scene turns to Richard's wooing of the lamenting Lady Anne. After the victorious Richard asks his audience whether any woman was ever in this "humour woo'd" and "won" (1.2.232-33), Elizabeth, widow of King Edward IV and mother of the young boys sent to the Tower, confronts him and demands her children. She too urges Richard to "despair and die." The assassin-soldiers from the opening moment now accompany Richard and carry machine guns. The Duke of Clarence insists that his brother Richard loves him. Two murderers disabuse him of this filial expectation and take his life. The action returns to the scene in which Elizabeth had confronted Richard, but now it is Richard's mother, played by a high-school actress of extraordinary talent well beyond her tender years, who warns Richard that "Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end; / Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend" (4.4.195). As she speaks, Richard mounts the tall platform as the flag revealed in the beginning moments rises up behind him. A warning siren blares as two spotlights, operated by members of the company hidden behind the tall platform, search the skies. The two armed soldiers line up the internee chorus at center and force them to their knees. As a brown-shirted soldier offers the fascist salute, the armed soldiers fire their machine guns, and the internee chorus falls again. The armed soldiers take up positions on the platform's steps below and to Richard's sides as the spotlights continue their scanning. Richard speaks from a combination of the play's opening monologue, where he decries being "Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time / Into this breathing world, scarce half made up" (1.1.20-21), and his final scene, where, awakening from his dream, he despairs that "No creature loves me" (5.3.201). Then, since he "cannot prove a lover," Richard determines to "prove a villain" (1.1.28 and 30), and pulling a luger from his coat, presses its barrel under his chin and fires. He tumbles backward off the tall platform as the Nazi flag behind him emulates his fall. A chanted prayer for the dead intones briefly, and the company ends its scene to thunderous applause, which continues even as the players and their fellow crew members begin rapidly disassembling their set to make way for the next group to perform.

In just somewhat over ten minutes, this group of high-school students from American Fork, Utah, directed by Neal Johnson, has performed an expressionistic and constructivist, re-historicized rendering of this early Shakespearean historical tragedy. In the process, the students have grappled not only with challenging language some four hundred years removed from their own, but also questions of history, team preparation, and the particulars of performance. They have come together towards a common goal, rehearsed extensively, and delighted an auditorium full

of young persons and others, inspired by their efforts. In addition to this opportunity to perform, this group had the benefit of feedback from a panel of theatrical professionals and professional educators, who in a brief, class-like setting, have praised them for their efforts and pointed the way toward further improvement.

Members of this group, like the two-and-a-half to three thousand of their fellows joining them in Cedar City, Utah on the first weekend of October 2012, have participated in workshops given by other professional theater-makers and educators, seen the work of many other groups performing and competing at this event, and had the chance to attend full performances not only of the Southern Utah University Theatre Department's production of *As You Like It*, but the resident, Tony-Award winning Utah Shakespeare Festival's production of *Hamlet*.

The Utah Shakespeare Festival (USF) and Southern Utah University (SUU) annual Shakespeare Competition brings together hallmarks of both a competition and a festival and provides the impetus for many hours of effort, educational opportunity, and enjoyment for students from Southern California to Wisconsin and beyond. While some theater and Shakespeare educators disagree about the relative value of competitions and non-competitive performance festivals, the popularity of this event, the feedback from its participants, and the ways in which it impacts its stakeholder communities leave little doubt but that it serves its constituencies well. These communities include not only the students in attendance, but those participating in preliminary festivals and competitions at their middle and high schools or in their local communities, their families, friends and larger communities, and the hosting Shakespeare Festival and University.

What follows describes the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, its origins, development, and organization and the process of the competition for students. It goes on to discuss the logistics of the Competition, the coaches/instructors bringing students and some of the feedback they have provided, and some of the controversy around the question of competitive versus non-competitive gatherings of this sort. The latter part of this discussion considers types of "service Shakespeare" engaged by the Competition, non-competitive aspects of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, and the cultural milieu in which the Competition has developed and thrived.

### Origins, Development, and Organization

The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is one among a field of school competitions and festivals based around performance of the work of William Shakespeare. The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition has been operating nearly continuously for longer than even some better known regional and national competitions organized by much older organizations, such as that of the Drama Teachers Association of Southern California (DTASC), featured in the 2011

documentary *Shakespeare High* (Rotaru 2011).<sup>3</sup> With the exception of a year in the 1990s, when those involved with the Competition kept the tradition going with a similar event in a nearby venue, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition has been held annually in Cedar City since 1977, some fifteen years after Fred Adams founded the Utah Shakespeare Festival there. Serving between 2,500 and 3,000 students annually, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is among the largest in the nation. The mission of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition states that it "cultivates the art of theatre, dance and music, by providing active observation of peer and professional performances, educational creations based on Shakespeare's plays and poems, and personal evaluation by working theatre and dance professionals."

In the 1970s, Ray Jones, a drama teacher from Provo, Utah, had been participating in the Foothill Shakespeare Festival in Bakersfield, California, created by revered Bakersfield secondary teacher Peg Pauley. Jones would stop into Cedar City with his students and suggest to USF Founder Fred Adams and Managing Director R. Scott Phillips that they should organize a Shakespeare competition in southern Utah, reminding them that they possessed all of the necessary resources. Adams and Phillips heeded Jones's call, and in 1977 hosted ten schools, traveling three hours or more to Cedar City to join in the new Competition. It was an instant hit, and interest in the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition spread widely.

Some five years later, in 1982, this article's co-author, then high-school student Michael Bahr, won a scholarship to study at SUU (then Southern Utah State College), competing as what he refers to as "the world's smallest Petruchio." Bahr still recalls the adjudication that he received, and the extraordinary experience he enjoyed. By 1982 there were somewhere between twenty and thirty schools participating — all high schools, of varying size.

The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition continued to grow, and by the end of the 1990s was hosting some four to five dozen schools. The competing schools were divided into four separate divisions with other schools of like size, including students from Arizona, Nevada, California, and Idaho, as well as both public and private schools within Utah. The "non-sanctioned" Competition had grown more popular even than the Utah High School Activities Association (UHSAA) drama contest that took place in the spring, in part because the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, drawing on personnel from and the wide reach of the University and the Shakespeare Festival, featured a higher and more consistent quality of adjudicators, and adjudication standards that were well-defined and regularized.

In 2000 and 2001, the UHSAA went through a philosophical shift, leading to a de-emphasizing of competition in school events. The spring drama competition was reconceived as a festival, along

the lines of music competitions that provide a type of adjudication but not on a competitive basis. In the wake of this non-competitive reconceptualization, participation plummeted. Participating schools were no longer clear about how to prepare. At the same time, participation in the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition grew significantly.

The next phase in the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition was the development of a "Tech[nical]. Olympics," which roughly followed the format of technical theater competition from the American College Theater Festival (ACTF). The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition Tech. Olympics featured events such as hanging and focusing lighting instruments, establishing sound reinforcement, organizing property tables, rigging scenery, and executing aspects of theatrical stage management. Participation in the Tech. Olympics required a minimum of six participants from a particular school. After participants competed, adjudicators would provide instruction to the less experienced students. The Tech. Olympics took on a decidedly teaching-oriented format. This portion of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition has proven to be a great success.

In the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, now SUU Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Shauna Mendini, suggested the inclusion of a dance division, with performances based on Shakespeare's works. Along with dance, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition added musical performance, initially based on madrigal works. Musical performances could be conceived of as creatively as students and their instructors might choose, just as Shakespeare's work might inspire a wide range of possible dramatic performance. The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition sported monologue, duo-scene, and ensemble competitions, and at the request of some instructors, the duo-scene category expanded also to include trio work. Scenes featuring four or more performers are entered in the ensemble competition.

As the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition developed, the Divisions came to be configured as follows: the largest schools, of over 2000 students, joined the Buckingham Division; schools of 1,701-2000 students joined the Oxford; those of 801-1,700 students filled the Cambridge Division; and schools of under 800 students participated in the Westminster Division. The Stratford Division hosted junior high and middle school students, and the Essex Division featured students from schools that were not part of the UHSAA. As of the 2012 competition, 106 schools participated.

Because of funding cuts and challenges in acquiring on-campus space for the Competition, the host organizations decided to cancel the 1997 Competition, with the intention of regrouping and returning the following year in a non-competitive festival format. A secondary school educator in northern Utah at the time, Michael Bahr wrote a pointed letter to then USF Education Director Gary Armagnac, imploring him not to cancel the Competition that year. Bahr called the Competition the most important event of the year for his program and his students, described how this fall event

set the pedagogical tone for the academic year, and mentioned that once his students had been able successfully to perform the work of Shakespeare, they were able to do anything dramatic that they chose. The work of modern playwrights became easy by comparison. Bahr was not alone in harboring these feelings, and a number of drama teachers got together and planned to run their own competition that year, holding it at a performance space near St. George, Utah, about an hour's drive south of Cedar City. The format was non-competitive, featuring ratings as per music festivals. While the event was not officially sponsored by USF/SUU, a number of regulars from both organizations participated. The following year, the Competition returned to USF and SUU in a competitive format and was organized again by R. Scott Phillips, who had originated the Competition some twenty years earlier. Yet one year later, Bahr was hired as Education Director for the Utah Shakespeare Festival and took over organization and management of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, the popularity of which continued to grow at a substantial rate. The UHSAA, which had shifted earlier to a non-competitive format, decided to re-embrace the competitive model of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition.

The present organization of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition features a wide variety of schools, including a mix of public, private, and charter schools, but also home-school groups and individuals from a community not school-affiliated, that banded together to compete. Geographical representation has increased as well, beyond the inter-mountain region and southern California, regularly including a group from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and another from Sacramento, in northern California. Competition performances have been given not only in English, but also in Spanish. Some of the schools participating include Utah schools for visually and hearing-impaired students, including notable performances by students from the Jean Massieu School for the Deaf, which has performed with spoken interpretations for hearing members of the audience. This outstanding group was chosen to perform in the Showcase round during the 2012 Competition, held before the closing awards assembly, for an audience of some 800 other students, coaches, and adjudicators. Upon completion of its performance of a scene from *Richard III*, all of the students in the audience waved their hands in the air silently, in the American Sign Language sign for applause. The hearing interpreter tapped performers on the shoulders to draw their attention to the audience's response. A similar response from an audience of more than twice that size at the 2013 Competition Awards Ceremony greeted the winning of an award by another group of non-hearing students.

In recent years, overall numbers of students participating have ranged from about 2,500 to 3,000, including participants from schools in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Wisconsin, and sometimes Wyoming. Some fifteen to twenty of the schools participating are junior high or middle schools. Some of the smallest schools bring seven students; others bring sixty to

ninety. Ensemble scenes can feature fifty to sixty students. Students in the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition often perform scenes and speeches from plays that most school students have never heard of, from *Troilus and Cressida* or *Cymbeline* to the multi-numbered history plays. Dance groups often feature from fifteen to twenty or so performers.

Of the 106 schools participating in 2012, about half were from Utah. About half of the Utah schools are from the greater Salt Lake Valley area. Overall of Utah Schools, about two-thirds are from somewhere along the Wasatch Front, with the other third from farther outlying areas.

The process and elements of the Competition are organized around the students' experience of it. Groups usually travel on the Thursday before the Competition. Events begin on Friday morning, with about 800 of the students and their instructors/coaches attending an opening ceremony, where they hear from those involved in the Competition and from representatives from the University, including often the University President or Provost, the Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts, the Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance and the Program Director of Theatre, and SUU's Director of Shakespeare Studies, among others. Many students attend a special 9:00 a.m. Friday performance of the Utah Shakespeare Festival's fall Shakespeare offering: in 2012, the production was *Hamlet*, featuring long-time Oregon Shakespeare Festival actor and former Utah Shakespeare Festival regular Danforth Comins in the title role, directed by well-known west-coast actor and director Marco Barricelli. 2013's offering was the somewhat more challenging *Richard II*, starring USF Co-Artistic Director David Ivers and directed by former Oregon Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director and well-known actor and director Henry Woronicz. The other USF fall shows are running during this time, and all are sold out during the Competition weekend. Performers are treated to theaters full of extremely energetic and focused young audience members. Actors describe loving these audiences and the energy that they bring. An on-stage kiss, for example, can elicit a much more vocal response than may be the case at other performances. The Shakespeare Festival offers reduced-price tickets during this weekend, including half-price seats for Competition participants.

The intention behind the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is not to develop a competitive environment that just creates winners and losers, but rather one that enables a learning environment, both during the competition itself and in the students' local preparations before coming to Cedar City. Students come to the Competition to be adjudicated on their work, but in the process have the opportunity to share that work with a large number of other students, who learn not only about the quality of the interpretive offerings of their fellows, but also about the interpretive possibilities of the plays. Students competing gain professional adjudication, which takes the form of classroom-style evaluation. Judges are trained to be both very positive and usefully critical in their in-person

teaching sessions that form the live adjudication, as well as in the written comments that they provide, which instructors and coaches often share with students during their bus rides home afterward. The Competition-cum-festival also provides a wide variety of workshops, mentioned below.

Every student performing a monologue or in a duo/trio scene performs three times, each time before a different judge and alongside perhaps five or six different competitors, and in addition to written evaluations, will gain in-person feedback from each round's judge at the end of that round. Ensemble scenes perform only once, but for a panel of three judges who, in addition to filling out independent adjudication forms, provide spoken critiques of the scenes afterward. Ensemble judges do not confer with one another before providing their critiques. Competitors receive both a rating and a ranking. Each monologue or scene is rated by each adjudicator as being either Fair, Good, Excellent, or Superior. Judges are discouraged from marking a presentation as Fair. Judges choose one of these four ratings and are not allowed to mark in spaces between these ratings, enabling quantitative assessments by those tabulating judges' results. Judges select a rating for each of several component parts of the students' work: Voice, Body, Character, and facility with Text. Each of these categories has individually rated subcategories. Larger group scenes also are rated on Ensemble-specific criteria. Dance groups are adjudicated similarly, with the categories of Craftsmanship, Performance, and Text themselves broken into subcategories. Based on the ratings in these categories, judges assign a level of Overall Effectiveness, reflecting the average or dominant labels (of Fair, Good, Excellent, and Outstanding) assigned to each of the particular categories.

In addition to these ratings, judges assign rankings. Within each competitor grouping, the adjudicator(s) will assign each competitor or competing group a numerical ranking from one through five, indicating an estimation of relative accomplishment within that particular adjudication group. Only one competitor or ensemble within each competitive group can receive a ranking of one, two, or three. While the ranking system has five possible places, in practice no individual or group is ranked lower than fourth. In this way, there is no last-place finisher, regardless of how many individuals or groups make up that particular competitive group. No matter how much improvement may be possible, no one "loses." In addition to ratings and rankings, judges are asked to provide copious narrative evaluation at the bottom of each evaluation sheet. The judges providing these ratings and rankings, and offering in-person coaching to the students after their performances are primarily actors, directors, dancers, choreographers, and educators, professionals who come from all over the country. Many of the judges are members of the Utah Shakespeare Festival acting company from the summer, fall, and touring seasons. In selecting



judges for the acting and dance competitions, USF particularly seeks to engage excellent teaching artists, who possess developed capacities for assessing and developing student work, and who are skilled at articulating performance principles. For the Tech. Olympics, USF selects artists and artisans who work extensively in each of the designated practice areas.

Because monologue and duo-/trio-scene participants perform against a different group of participants each round, they get to see some fourteen to seventeen other students/groups perform in their adjudicated rounds. Each competitor also is assured that she or he will not be in an adjudication group with anyone else from her or his school, and will never perform before the same judge twice. Accomplishing these requisites depends upon a computer program developed by Competition organizers to provide random assignments within Divisions that accomplish these objectives.

Adjudicators are asked whether each scene might be designated as particularly stellar, and should be considered for inclusion in a non-competitive "Showcase" round. This round takes place while the rest of the tabulations are being accomplished, in advance of the Competition's concluding Awards Ceremony. The Showcase round, which takes place simultaneously in multiple performance venues, each with upwards of 800 attendees, features some of the most remarkable performances at the Competition. This opportunity, a reward in and of itself, also allows attendees to see standards that some might aspire to in subsequent visits to the Competition. Primarily, the Showcase round provides the chance for large numbers of students to watch the performance of Shakespeare for its own sake. The remarkable performance described in this article's opening pages was one such Showcase entrant. The designation of a performance as worthy of the Showcase round may result from adjudicators' evaluation of its novelty, risk-taking, interpretive acumen, or other perhaps less tangible factors that may not necessarily correlate with a performance's likelihood of winning its respective Division. As such, students sometimes can be concerned about why a piece may have been invited to the Showcase round, yet not be designated as a Division winner. This feature expresses one of the ways in which the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is a hybrid event, comprised of elements both of competition and festival.

During the Showcase round, the "Tabulation Room" is busy determining which performances have won, placed, or shown within their respective Divisions, and which student performers from ensemble scenes, based on judges' recommendations, are in line to win scholarships for Utah Shakespeare Festival educational programs or to attend Southern Utah University. Judges sometimes recommend scholarship winners who are not playing leading roles in their respective scenes, but who otherwise possess special talent and/or apparent work ethic and capacity to excel. Once tabulation is complete, the Awards Ceremony begins. Some of the most extraordinary

performances eligible for the Showcase round are shared instead as a prologue to the passing out of awards. These Awards-Ceremony performances are made up of scenes and dance performances.

### Logistics

The logistics of the Competition are affected by many factors. For many schools, funding is a challenge. Some are only allowed a certain total number of trips per academic year, whether for football, baseball, arts programming, or otherwise. As a secondary school teacher, Michael Bahr once brought a group of highly motivated students with him to a school board meeting seeking special dispensation to travel to the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition. Despite the challenges posed by the most recent recession, the overall numbers of students attending the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition in recent years has held steady. While some of the larger public schools have had challenges bringing students to Cedar City, charter school participation has increased. Major costs for attending schools include those for transportation, housing students in or near Cedar City, food, and competition participation fees. Many schools engage in fundraising to help meet the costs of bringing students to the Competition, including through such events as evenings of Shakespearean performance and bake sales. Fees cover the costs of administrative preparation and conduct of the Competition, the myriad workshops made available to participants, and rental of some spaces from the University. Fees also help subsidize transportation, housing, meals, and modest honoraria for many of the non-resident professional theatrical practitioners and educators brought in to adjudicate the many rounds of the Competition.

Around the time when Michael Bahr took over running the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, in 1998-99, about fifty schools participated, bringing approximately 1,200 to 1,500 students. The total cost for running the Competition then was about \$12,000. The doubling in size of the Competition over the past fifteen years has increased costs by about \$10,000, which includes adding dance events and the Tech. Olympics. The average cost for running the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is about ten dollars per student participant.

The logistical challenges for the hosting Utah Shakespeare Festival and Southern Utah University, as well as those for Cedar City, are significant. Some thirty-five or more rooms on campus are dedicated solely to the event, which takes place at least in part while classes are underway. Six separate performance venues are required for ensembles (including all available theater spaces, some of which are hosting University and professional performances during this period). An additional ten or more rooms are needed for the large number of workshops offered. Running the Competition requires more than 150 volunteers. Master of Fine Arts Arts-Administration students facilitate logistics for the Competition, including ten graduate students

who serve as members of the administrative inner circle, along with five additional staff members of the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Some six to eight more volunteers/staff members are involved in running the Tabulation Room, calculating adjudicators' handiwork. Student volunteers act as timers, easing the burden on judges, and as runners, moving scoring sheets and other information and hard goods to keep the Competition running smoothly. Staff on campus are likewise put to the test, as the campus population of some 8,000 students, only a portion of whom are on campus at any given time, swells by upwards of 3,000 persons, who are on campus almost the entirety of each day of the Competition. The Competition is a particularly busy time for food service workers and those in the bookstore. Perhaps most impacted are members of the custodial staff, who are charged both with cleaning up after the student-competitor invasion, and at times, arranging rooms again in ways that support the normal workings of the University. Overstating the impact in a way that some found mean-spirited, a political cartoon in the student newspaper once depicted a line of buses driving away over the mountains, with the SUU campus left behind in rubble, captioned "High School Shakespeare Competition." The Competition clearly puts the resources of the hosts to the test, but the hosts are more than happy to endure extra effort and expense for the opportunities and rewards created by the Competition. Michael Bahr was once approached by a member of SUU's custodial staff following a Competition. The Custodian had encountered a massive pile of refuse on top of and in the immediate vicinity of a trash can, but on the top of the pile found a note from a student-attende of the Competition. It apologized for the amount of trash for which he and his fellows had been responsible, acknowledged the work of SUU's custodial staff, and specifically thanked the custodian who might find that note for his or her efforts. The custodian was both moved and energized by the thoughtfulness and respect exhibited by that anonymous competitor.

The instructors and coaches bringing students to the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition wear many hats. These often extremely talented educators not only prepare their students as instructors and coaches, but often direct, design sets, lights, and sound, publicize and fundraise for the schools' activities, and provide advocacy for the work within their local communities and schools. Success at the Shakespeare Competition, and far more than in terms of winning trophies and accolades for students, tends to follow the best instructors and coaches, and Michael Bahr has seen new schools excel when an excellent coach has relocated. Likewise, he has seen schools drop out of the Competition following the departure of an energetic instructor/coach. It is clear that a great deal of the good that results from the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition is a result of the caliber of work done at the local level by instructors and coaches who are motivated to make the efforts necessary to create from the Competition the quality pedagogy that leads to student success.

Remarkably, in 2012 coaches/instructors from seventy-eight of the 106 schools responded to a post-Competition survey. The responses expressed a wide variety of opinions, but enormous and overwhelmingly positive support for the Competition and its organization. Some instructors/coaches felt, for example, that costumes should not be allowed, suggesting a possible competitive advantages for schools able to afford nice ones, and hurt feelings for schools not so able. Some appreciated how much time students had to socialize during the Competition. One mentioned being offended by the inclusion of a quite-amazing student performance from *Titus Andronicus* that referenced the play's off-stage ravaging of Lavinia, suggesting that the representation of rape was not appropriate for an event for high-school students. Some instructors/coaches advocated yet additional Showcase opportunities and a further downplaying of the event's competitive aspects. Others mentioned feeling somewhat defeated when competing against a charter school whose focus is on theatrical performance. Many described the joy and enlightenment provided by seeing other schools' efforts, and related the extraordinary experiences that their students gained, both as producers and consumers of Shakespearean performance, and how the Competition created the opportunity and focus for extensive and rewarding work at the local-school level.

### Competitions vs. Festivals

An area of controversy concerns whether such events are best conducted in a competitive or non-competitive, festival-type environment. Those on the two sides of the divide approach the question from varying standpoints on matters of culture and philosophy. Competitive performance models have a significant history, not only in the United States, but some would suggest, back to the beginnings of the history of dramatic performance. The surviving plays of classical Greece were entrants in the competitive Festival Dionysia. Other advocates of competition describe the art and craft of theater as innately competitive, where there are always only so many positions for the often significantly larger numbers of would-be participants. Theatrical performance, even on the school level, always features winners and losers when it comes to gaining roles. Those advocating festival-style events suggest that the key should be opportunity over competition, and argue that the educational environment does not benefit from an imposition of an artificial opposition that may stifle student interest, creativity, and enjoyment. The value is in each student's opportunity to have a close encounter with dramatic text, to create from it and to share the results of that work, with both creator and audience member able to appreciate and learn from the experience.

One of the leading advocates of the festival model is Patrick Spottiswoode, the Director of Education at Shakespeare's Globe in London, and the third full-time staff member hired as part of Sam Wanamaker's quest to build a replica of Shakespeare's open-to-the-air playhouse.

Spottiswoode describes the festival model as "more nurturing, mutually respectful, collaborative and celebratory." Spottiswoode describes how he had worked once with a student in North Carolina who told him that a festival with which Spottiswoode was associated "was the first time [that student and his colleagues had] worked in co-operation with other schools in their area rather than in competition trying to 'beat them.'"<sup>4</sup> Spottiswoode describes Shakespeare competition as having an unsavory "X-Factor" or "Idol" approach, in which "the wrong sort of adrenalin is excited." He points out that "the emphasis is placed on results rather than process." Spottiswoode has worked on a variety of these types of events, both at Shakespeare's Globe and across the greater globe, and finds that "the festive approach allows students to enjoy/respect each other's work without worrying/questioning as to 'are they better than us?'" The more collaborative vision of such events "fosters a celebration of each other's work." One of Spottiswoode's concerns is for students who may seem to be appreciating the work of their fellows at competitions, but somewhere inside, are urged by the nature of competition to hope for their competitors' failure, in order to boost their own chances. From the co-author's observations of the behavior of students at the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition, such competitive ill-wishing seemed rarely if ever to be discernible. Spottiswoode points out, and the co-authors are very much in agreement with him, that competitions featuring students presenting recitations of Shakespeare's sonnets are very far indeed from being about "playing" Shakespeare, and are rather much more about competition. Sonnets are of a non-dramatic literary form and lend themselves neither to collaboration nor performance. Under Spottiswoode's leadership, the Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA) sought to urge the English Speaking Union to move from its competitive, often sonnet-recitation-focused competition to embrace a festival approach. The ESU, however, chose not to embrace the STA's suggestion.

Spottiswoode is by no means alone in his preference for a festival approach. Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts offers its Fall Festival of Shakespeare in a non-competitive manner, where more than 500 young persons involved in preparing Shakespearean performances at their local schools have the opportunity of performing on the company's main stage. The Shakespeare's Globe Center New Zealand hosts with the University of Otago the Sheila Winn Shakespeare Festivals, a series of twenty-three springtime festivals featuring five- and fifteen-minute scenes performed by high-school students, along with a national festival held in Wellington and featuring scenes by groups from across the country.

Competitive models include the ESU's National Shakespeare Competition, where students recite monologues or sonnets from Shakespeare in regional competitions feeding state and national gatherings, leading to the recognition of a national winner. The sponsoring ESU,

which seeks to promote English language, literature, and culture more broadly, has chapters in fifty-eight countries beyond the United Kingdom. Its competition in the United States regularly sports celebrity adjudicators, including well-known performers and members of the larger Shakespearean community. Other competitions include those of the Drama Teachers' Association of Southern California, whose annual competition is the subject of Alex Rotaru's documentary film *Shakespeare High* (cited above), and a variety of state competitions, including the annual UHSAA drama competition.

There are losers in a competition, something of concern not only to festival advocates, but also organizers of competitions. Competition is a common feature across a variety of disciplines in the United States, from sport to business to artistic endeavor. One of the questions surrounding a competitive model is whether it is possible to have winners and thus gain the motivational advantages of competition without having losers, and risk the negative reinforcement associated with competition. The USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition seeks to accomplish a hybrid form that uses both elements of competition and festival, which accounts in part for its success.

Michael Bahr finds that fair competition can be a powerfully motivating force and hearkens to the Latin root of the term "compete," *competere*, which is "to strive after (something) in company or together" (*OED* v.2). The attitude some coaches advocate, of "win-at-all-costs," does a disservice, according to Bahr, to true competition. Bahr's ideal for establishing competition is the creation of a level playing field. He believes that the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition accomplishes this objective, including through the quality of its adjudicators and its computerized system of assigning performances, as well as its ranking system, which recognizes winners but does not designate losers. As Bahr describes, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition annually spends some five thousand dollars on "pieces of plastic," the trophies that are spread widely among the Competition's many entrants.

The feedback provided by adjudicators is organized as a performance-classroom environment might be and is offered in a non-competitive manner, though indeed judges also assign letter ratings and rankings on scoring sheets. One of the important questions for Bahr is the extent to which instructor/coaches are capable of using feedback gained during an adjudicated session as a teaching opportunity for their students. By and large, Bahr finds that the evaluations help to drive an overall raising of the level of the work.

The events that for many students precede entry into the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition are logistically necessary. There simply are not enough hotel rooms in the vicinity of Cedar City to accommodate all of the students who begin on the local level, seeking to make it to the larger Competition. Indeed, the combination of the thousands of student-competitors, their instructors/

coaches, friends, and families, together with the relatively small number of non-Competition-related USF patrons that weekend far exceed the number of hotel rooms available anywhere nearby, and hotel rooms from well north of Cedar City south to St. George are booked as much as a year in advance for Competition weekend.<sup>5</sup> While the festival sponsored by Shakespeare & Company in Massachusetts is non-competitive, it only is able to provide space for twenty-five schools. Bahr finds that the events in Cedar City are only the tip of an iceberg, with the larger weight of work taking place at the schools in advance of the gathering on the SUU campus. Bahr believes that the more important question in the matter of competition versus festival is how each actually is implemented. Bahr describes having taken students to a particular festival-format gathering when he was a secondary school teacher and found it to be "dark and dangerous." He values the notion of measuring one's work against the work of others, and finds that such measurement leads overall to better work, deeper commitment, and ultimately more meaningful learning opportunities for students. Bahr describes secondary students as valuing structure, as wanting to know what they can and cannot do. While a festival format has the potential to provide such structure, Bahr finds that the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition clearly provides it. Bahr finds the value of structure to be even greater for students in at-risk schools, where a high proportion of students are statistically more likely to drop out or otherwise fail academically. A number of students from such schools regularly attend the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition. Bahr says that students "want to be challenged . . . want to be pushed," and benefit even from the perhaps-artificial challenge that is competition. He finds that the Competition's structure helps students to achieve the goal of obtaining a close, creative encounter with some of the best dramatic literature available. With each performance adjudicated by three separate judges, students are likely to gain feedback that speaks in different ways to the issues at hand, increasing the likelihood that such feedback will strike a given student in a way that she or he is able to process. Many schools, with long distances to travel at the end of the Competition, choose to forego the Awards Ceremony, and do so with the full blessing of Competition organizers. The motivation for these schools is not vanquishing opponents, but doing their best. Bahr describes as the norm at the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition seeing many students from different schools hugging one another and applauding wildly for each other.

The co-authors are by no means opposed to the festival format, but Bahr wonders what would happen if the arguments applied to the competition-festival debate were likewise applied to athletics. There is nothing innately competitive about the skills of throwing and catching. Should these arts be pursued only for their own sakes, as showcasing the skills involved, and not be turned into the win-lose structures that are, for example, high-school baseball? Would the participating

athletes be motivated to train as hard, reach as far, and please their constituencies as fully? Bahr is also quick to point out that the Shakespeare Competition, while a flagship endeavor of the Utah Shakespeare Festival Education Department, is by no means its only one, the rest of which are not competitively oriented. These other activities include a schools tour, a great deal of class and performance opportunity, and the Bard's Birthday Bash, a gathering of some 2,500 students from nearby elementary schools celebrating the work of Shakespeare through students' performances, games and other activities. The Shakespeare competition-versus-festival debate is a larger one about competition in education more generally.

One of the ways in which the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition goes beyond a competitive model is in the additional programming that it offers. Crucially, the Showcase round of the Competition provides large numbers of students with the chance to see the work of others in a non-competitive format. The University and professional performances on offer are, for many, highlights of the Competition. Additionally, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition offers a variety of workshops to students attending. A number of these workshops are offered by judges who also are members of the USF acting company, some of whom are extremely accomplished teachers. Workshops are scheduled in multiple blocks throughout the Competition, so that students may attend when not performing. There are at least thirty-six acting workshops offered on a variety of performance topics, including but also going well beyond Shakespeare, and with such titles as "Playing with Original Practices," "What Are Judges Looking For," "Augusto Boal," "Rehearsing Like a Pro," "Stage Combat," "First-Folio Shakespeare," "The Actors' Breath," and a very popular workshop on "Juggling." Technical workshops are offered as well, including in the areas of scenic painting, lighting, sound design, and specialty topics, such as how to build a staircase, fantasy and non-human makeup, LED lighting, projections, fog and special effects. Multiple dance workshops host large numbers of students and cover a variety of techniques, including jazz, modern, ballet, African, hip-hop, tap, and others, and topics such as improvisation, body conditioning, and composition. The 2012 USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition featured sixty-seven workshop offerings on some thirty different topics.

One of the very popular offerings for students interested in the technical arts involves opening up the process of changing over the set in the Randall Jones Theatre from one play to the next. During the 2012 Competition, this event allowed over four hundred students to witness the changeover from *Les Misérables* to *Hamlet*, accompanied by a discussion from USF technical staff members talking the students through it, including breakout discussions after the main changeover work.



One of the instructors/coaches attending the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition describes an experience that captures the level of immersion that students gain at an event such as the Competition, and the buffet of Shakespearean options that students have the chance to sample. While in the men's room, this instructor/coach heard one student saying to another that he had just seen the greatest scene: there was this girl, and she goes up, and she has this guy stand on this molehill and put on the crown, and says something about taking this handkerchief, and it was dipped in someone's blood. The student said that he thought it was from a particular one of the plays, when a young voice from inside one of the stalls piped up, saying, "No, it's from *Henry VI*."

With so many events taking place, one may count on encountering the unexpected. A student may take ill and another need to step in at a moment's notice; a group might learn that it has been selected to perform in the Showcase round, but hasn't the time to get back to the bus and put on costumes again and must perform without props and in street clothes. A student might perform an incredible monologue before the Awards Ceremony, and only later do the judges and others learn that the student is severely affected by Asperger's syndrome.

Together with the service that the Competition provides educationally for students who take part in it, and in the myriad local competitions that precede it, the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition provides multiple other instances of "service Shakespeare." It helps to develop audiences for the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and for Shakespearean performance more broadly. It becomes an extremely effective recruiting tool for Southern Utah University. During a start-of-academic-year meeting for SUU Theatre majors, co-author Weingust heard Michael Bahr ask those assembled how many had participated in the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition while high-school students. Weingust witnessed approximately half of the students in the room raise their hands. The Competition also provides an outlet for significant numbers of at-risk students, who find in Shakespeare an alternative to some of the riskier temptations teens may face, and even provides opportunities for students participating from youth correctional facilities. Through volunteering options, the Competition also provides a great deal of service-learning opportunity for SUU students. Many SUU theater, dance, and music students serve as volunteers, often gaining the opportunity of sitting in on, hearing, and assisting the professionals who provide participants with oral evaluations in addition to the written ones.

### Cultural Milieu

The Competition, the larger success of the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and of Southern Utah University's focus on Shakespeare more widely, is in some ways connected with their relationship to the cultural/religious composition of the State of Utah. The dominant culture in

Utah revolves around the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (or LDS, whose members are often referred to as Mormons). LDS members comprise approximately 62 percent of the State's population (Canham 2012). Outside of Salt Lake City, which has a slightly non-Mormon majority, the population density of LDS members can be even higher. There are ways in which LDS culture and Utah's pioneering history, along with the State's broad political ideological leanings, with regard to theater in general, Shakespeare specifically, and notions about competition, can be said to be inextricably bound up with the success and longevity of the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition.

Unlike in some Christian cultures, the LDS Church has a long and warm history with theatrical and musical representation. Brigham Young, Joseph Smith's successor as Church leader who brought members west in the 1840s, is famously reported to have said, "If I were placed on a cannibal island and given the task of civilizing its people, I would straightway build a theatre for the purpose" (Pearson 1984, quoting Hansen 1967). Young also is reported to have said that, "Many preachers of the day have said that fiddling and music came from Hell, but I say that there is no fiddling or music in Hell. . . . Music belongs in Heaven, to cheer God, angel[s], and man" (Collier 1987). Indeed, before completion of the Temple in Salt Lake, Brigham Young ordered the building of a theater, which became a key stop on the major railroad lines, bringing important theater companies and actors to the Salt Lake Valley.

Theater might even be said to be structurally a part of the Church, in that many LDS churches contain alongside the sanctuary what is called a "Cultural Hall," which contains not only a basketball court but also a stage. According to Bahr, Utah Shakespeare Festival founder Fred Adams recalls a time when the Church would purchase royalties for a play and distribute it to the young men's and women's improvement organizations to help facilitate productions. Similar actions take place to this day, where large stakes (units of the Church made up a number of congregations) in California might put on large productions of plays<sup>6</sup> or hold dance festivals.<sup>6</sup>

While other denominations make use of scripture in modern vernacular, the LDS Church makes use of the King James version of the Bible. Young persons attending church on Sundays, engaged in religious instruction, and sharing Bible passages during the practice of "family home evening" hear passages from the Bible not in the vernacular that they speak with their friends, but in the vernacular of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. For a young member of the LDS Church, hearing a service at a church of another denomination using a more modern translation of the Bible is jarring, as might be a performance of Shakespeare to an experienced audience member if performed in present-day English rather than in the original. Likewise, other foundational LDS

texts, such as *The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine of the Covenants*, or the *Pearl of Great Price* are written in verse and very much have the sound of early modern English. For example, usage of the more intimate second-person pronoun forms "thee," "thy," and "thou," which are unfamiliar to most persons in the United States today, would not feel particularly strange to a young person accustomed to hearing them regularly in worship. The co-authors believe that this familiarity with early modern English from a very young age makes the language of Shakespeare more accessible to a significant proportion of young Utahns. The language of Shakespeare clearly is one that can be accessible to young persons. Elementary-age students in the United Kingdom read Shakespeare as a part of their curricula. Michael Bahr believes that for students so accustomed to an early modern vernacular, at the elementary level there is little difference for students between the language of Shakespeare, and, for example, Dr. Suess; it is not until junior high or middle school that students are made to think that Shakespeare is somehow particularly difficult. Both Shakespeare's work and the text of the King James Bible are dense, have rhyme, meter, and some outlandish words, and are made up of themes and plot lines. The co-authors believe that Utah is fertile ground indeed for the incorporation of Shakespeare into the curricular and extra-curricular work of students.

Utah is perhaps the reddest of red states along the political spectrum. President Barack Obama lost the Utah vote to John McCain in 2008 by twenty-nine percentage points (CNN 2008), and by forty-eight points to LDS Church member Mitt Romney in 2012 (Utah Secretary of State 2014). In a state so leaning, an emphasis on competition might be considered a mainstay of political ideology. All of these factors make the Shakespeare Festival and Competition congenial to their local constituencies.

The Utah Shakespeare Festival / Southern Utah University Shakespeare Competition provides a focus for the study and performance of Shakespeare for thousands of students each year. The Competition serves a number of constituencies, not the least of which are these students, but which also include the larger communities from which participants hail, the host organizations, and one might even suggest, arts culture and society more broadly. The Competition is deeply connected to the dominant culture within which it developed, but transcends any particular group or groups. The question of whether competitive or non-competitive performance events serve their constituencies best is open to debate, but clearly the USF/SUU Shakespeare Competition has thrived by combining elements of a competition and of a non-competitive festival. As evidenced by the educational choices made by many of the Competition's participants, this event has had a significant impact on the lives of very many, and promises to continue to do so.

1. Citations to *Richard III* are to Hammond 1981.
2. A version of this curse is offered by the Ghost of Prince Edward at 5.3.121, then verbatim by the Ghost of Henry the Sixth at 5.3.127 and by other characters afterward.
3. *Shakespeare High* may be described as being of a sub-genre with Hank Rogerson's documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (Rogerson 2005) and the later *Still Dreaming* (Rogerson forthcoming; still in production as of this writing in early January 2014), as what may be considered as "Shakesploitation" films, which use Shakespearean performance as a lens for examining significantly personal experience. I offer this generic ascription as an alternative to the use of the term as applied to teen-oriented Shakespeare films by Richard Burt (2002). After events in 1964, 1974, and 1975, beginning in 1983 the DTASC competition became a regular event (held in all but two years); the competition of the English Speaking Union of the United States (ESU) was founded in that same year. Both DTASC and the ESU were founded as organizations in 1920.
4. Quotations from Patrick Spottiswoode are taken from personal correspondence with co-author Don Weingust in July of 2013.
5. Even when the Utah Shakespeare Festival is in full swing during its summer season, there are never more than 1,600 patrons in its theaters during any performance times. Most patrons making the trip to Cedar City stay multiple days to see several different performances.
6. For a discussion of the LDS Church's association with contemporary drama, see Oppedisano 2009.

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