

# The Sun Looking with a Southward Eye upon Us: Shakespeare in South Florida

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## Abstract

Since 1990, the Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival (PBSF) has operated out of Jupiter's Carlin Park, a mere two hundred yards' walk from the now-dilapidated Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre. PBSF's successes and failures are likely to resemble the experiences of many theater companies, big or small, Shakespearean or community. I focus, though, on what might be the most Floridian, or South Floridian, conditions under which the festival works. Based on years of local press support and criticism, interviews with co-founder and producing artistic director Kermit Christman and English actor Paul Prescott, and my own testimony as a PBSF founding company member and Associate Artist and Director, I examine how PBSF has survived in a sometimes hostile cultural and theatrical environment.

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*David's going to help me produce my one-man Hamlet off-Broadway and the world is going to rediscover a major talent! . . . I'm not going back to Florida, noooo how! You try playing Willy Loman in front of a bunch of old farts eating meatloaf, chewing and slurping and spitting out their pits, every night listening to them coughing and hocking and retching. I was in HELL! — Soapdish*

In the pouring rain stands The Opa-Locka Theatre; below its name, in neon, blinks "Florida's Finest Steak House." Every five seconds, "Steak" flashes to "Play," and tropical birds and palms illuminated underneath the marquee confirm that the establishment would certainly be consigned to the lowest circles of a thespian's Inferno. Tonight, former soap opera star Jeffery Anderson is giving his Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Inside, fluorescent pink flamingos and larger palms line the back of the stage. Patrons (all of whom are octogenarians) come and go in motorized wheelchairs, glasses and silverware clink and rattle, snores punctuate the sounds of dishwashers humming in the kitchen, waiters collide and trays crash to the floor, and hearing aids fail. When a coffee cup is overturned, an audience member frantically calls for a server and is silenced only when Anderson — barely managing to stay in character but still delivering his lines — steps off the stage and wipes the table himself. The woman leans forward, pats Anderson on the hand, and

with an accent that suggests she has spent many years in New Jersey says, "You're doing so well up there." After the performance, in his dressing room a dejected, vodka-swilling Anderson removes his Willy wig and tosses it onto a bronze bust of William Shakespeare.

This scene from *Soapdish* (1991) is a disturbingly accurate picture of a large slice of south Floridian theater, particularly during the years 1980-1990, when both ends of Palm Beach County were home to and theatrically dominated by two long-running dinner theaters: the Royal Palm in Boca Raton and the Burt Reynolds in Jupiter, quite literally on the county's southern and northern borders, respectively. The only minor inaccuracy in *Soapdish*'s hilarious send-up is show choice. As a lad, I saw Vincent Gardenia play Willy Loman at the Burt Reynolds Dinner Theater, but by 1980 there were no other "classics," modern or early modern, offered from either company. By 1990, neither theater would have dreamed of putting a remotely "serious" play on their stages; "serious," by then, meant "non-musical." Instead, one could see the entire Rogers and Hammerstein canon performed regularly (interrupted only by dashes of *Hello, Dolly!* and *Gypsy*) and, if one alternated theaters, *Fiddler on the Roof* annually.

Obviously, dinner theaters do not often include in their seasons plays that keep audiences from being happy, and I am not suggesting that they should. But *Soapdish* says a great deal about the void between "bad" and "good" theater, and it says even more about Florida theater. Anderson nightly reminds himself of an exalted theatrical world elsewhere as he drinks his way into costume and makeup under the stony gaze of Shakespeare's bust. One night, the hotshot New York producer of *The Sun Also Sets* (the soap opera from which Anderson was fired many years ago) arrives backstage and identifies himself. Anderson moans that his performance that evening was especially awful, but the producer reassures him, "I've seen dinner theater before. I know real talent when I see it." The producer offers Anderson a second chance at television stardom; amazingly, the actor's first response is not to negotiate salary, screen time, script approval, magazine covers, or dressing room space, but to fantasize about a one-man *Hamlet* project that he longs to bring to the New York stage. The *Hamlet* is, in fact, his only condition; "thing is though . . . I'd need time to develop that," he says cautiously. Back in the studio, Anderson attacks old enemies with the tirade that is this paper's epigraph. He decorates his new apartment with an RSC poster of Ian McKellen in *Romeo and Juliet*. The fact that Anderson is played by Kevin Kline, a Tony- and Academy-Award-winning actor who has many notches on his Shakespearean bedpost (including two Broadway *Hamlets*, one of which was televised on PBS) provides a final and delicious irony.

*Soapdish*'s onstage spoofs do not necessarily reflect all dinner theaters (though they certainly nail South Floridian audience demographics). They do, however, reflect the comforts that many South Florida audiences require — playwright, frequency of dance numbers, and free dessert —

in the face of artists who sometimes would rather be doing "real" performance work. The cliches are impossible to deny or ignore: Florida is a tropical retirement home and a cultural wasteland, it's always raining, dinner theater is what represents "drama," no "major talent" is ever discovered or rediscovered there, and even though television is where actors make or break their careers and establish their financial well-being, Shakespeare is where the "serious" acting happens.

### "And what's her history?": The Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival

Since 1990, the Palm Beach Shakespeare Festival (PBSF) has operated out of Jupiter's Carlin Park, a mere two hundred yards' walk from the once-flourishing Burt Reynolds Dinner Theater, which became the ultimately bankrupted Jupiter Theatre, which became the Dilapidated Empty Theatre, which finally became the newly-christened Maltz Jupiter Theatre. I am interested in documenting how PBSF has produced Shakespeare in its home environment. True, PBSF's successes and failures, its trials and tribulations, are likely to be the experiences of many theater companies, big or small, Shakespearean or community. I hope to focus, though, on the specifically Floridian, or South Floridian, conditions under which the festival works. My examination uses support and criticism from the local press, interviews with co-founder and producing artistic director Kermit Christman and *Palm Beach Post* theater critic Hap Erstein, and my own testimony as a PBSF founding company member and Associate Artist and Director to explore how PBSF has survived in a sometimes hostile cultural and theatrical environment.

From 1988-1990, PBSF co-founders Christman and Jacqueline Siegel produced events in association with the Chamber Theatre of the Palm Beaches and Young Audiences of Palm Beach County. Their success led to the incorporation of PBSF, in January 1990, as a "not-for-profit, 501.C3 arts and education theatrical organization," the "first and only professional company in Palm Beach County to produce the works of William Shakespeare on an annual basis" ("PBSF Mission Statement" 2005). Having seen my Orsino in a collegiate *Twelfth Night*, Christman asked me to join the original company, which I did eagerly. Most of us were professional or semi-professional actors who just wanted to do Shakespeare. (I had worked at the Royal Palm Dinner Theatre since the age of nine, and had played as many newsboys in knickers and tap shoes as I could stand.)

Following an inaugural 1990 indoor *Macbeth*, PBSF premiered *Twelfth Night* in its outdoor home, Carlin Park. After three successful, if rustic, years there, the Palm Beach County Commission and the Palm Beach County Department of Parks and Recreation designated the park a "North County Cultural Site" and built a "natural" amphitheater that PBSF opened in January of 1996. The amphitheater is a large, bowl shaped hill that slopes down to the park's lakeshore. There

are no concrete terraces, and there is no permanent stage or bandshell. Stages are sometimes put in, and a few shows have played on the grass itself. *Hamlet* (2000) had a six-foot-high scaffolding stage with three levels; *Much Ado About Nothing* (1999) brought in truckloads of beach sand to create a Mediterranean shoreline, with a shipwrecked pirate's galleon rising out of it. After the Carlin Park Amphitheater opened, PBSF produced Shakespeare there annually and continued to work indoors throughout the community and across the country. For nine years, from 1991-2000, PBSF presented the feature theatrical event at the annual literary festival Bookfest of the Palm Beaches, including the modern world premiere of "Shakespeare's *Cardenio*" (Crawford 2003; Erstein 1995).

### The Ecology of Early Modern Drama in South Florida

Until 1990, there were few non-collegiate productions of Shakespeare in Palm Beach County. Smaller rep companies, such as Actor's Rep or Florida Repertory Theatre, were doing critically acclaimed work — tragical-comical-musical-tropical — but financial woes kept those companies from operating a full decade. The longest running professional companies in the county now are the Caldwell in Boca Raton (who have, with their consistent good work, built a huge subscription base and found lots of Boca money) and Florida Stage, located in inconvenient Manalapan (and originally backed by the money of Lois Pope, the *National Enquirer* heiress). Both theaters do probing, sometimes controversial contemporary work, but studiously avoid almost anything written before *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Each summer they mount musical revues, which usually consist of nothing more than six performers around a piano singing the songs of whatever composer was picked that year. These revues, of course, sell out for a month and a half and finance most of the following season.

The Caldwell does not do early modern drama. Artistic director Michael Hall has voiced his concerns for doing "anything English" for South Florida audiences, noting that they "aren't good listeners" (Erstein 2004c). The Florida Stage, likewise, does so rarely. Indeed, we have only two offerings from Florida Stage to indicate how their producers view the classical theater scene in Palm Beach County, in spite of the audience numbers PBSF manages to attract. PBSF's first season in Carlin Park presented a September *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* in March. Both were well received by critics, and each played to crowds averaging 1,000 a night over the course of a four-night weekend run. One month after PBSF's *Tempest*, Florida Stage produced *The Taming of the Shrew*. Performed at the newly ground-broken site of the Palm Beach County School of the Arts, it was billed as supporting and representing the "future" of Palm Beach County theater. It was staged one block from the multi-million dollar Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, which, as the home of the Palm Beach Opera and Ballet Florida, loomed over the production as another

stamp of cultural "authority." Pope's money fueled the project, an entire Equity cast and crew were assembled, a respected regional director was flown in, and it played to huge crowds for a month. I saw it, and left more in sorrow than in anger (no doubt stoked by the "excess of wine" that Hal mentions).

I love adaptations and appropriations, but Florida Stage put up a *Shrew* blatantly tailored to a predominately dinner theater-going crowd and threw in heaping spoonfuls of sugar to help audiences get the playwright down without gagging. Petruccio arrived in Padua in a 1920s roadster, which could only move about ten feet because of set design and stage dimension, but that was enough to produce cries of pleasure. The early bartering for Bianca in 1.1 had Baptista blithely driving golf balls off the stage into a neighboring construction site, which at least got the men in the audience clapping for nice shots, but Baptista's constant teeing up completely undercut what is surely at the very least a minor sense of frustration and urgency in that scene. (PGA National is barely twenty miles away, though, and there are at least five courses in between, so I suppose it might have seemed negligent not to have golf in the show.) Peter Smith, writing for the *Palm Beach Post*, delighted in the production's constant Hollywood allusions to non-Shakespearean, palatable fare: "You can see the movie-based casting through the show, and it all works: Gordon McConnell's Fred Astaire-styled Hortensio and Warren Kelley's uncanny Eddie Bracken takeoff as Grumio are especially funny. Curt Becker does a sharp Maxie Rosenbloom take as Biondello and Michael George Owen plays Gremio as an aging Edward Everett Horton" (Smith 1991b). The no-turning-back-dinner-theater moment: during Kate and Petruccio's first scene together, right after he had pondered the technicalities of his tongue in her tail, they burst into a full-fledged song and dance number — Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off."

Critical press was very supportive of both shows. Of PBSF's effort, Smith wrote that "Shakespeare By The Sea is presenting a chopped and channeled version of *The Tempest* at Carlin Park this weekend, and like their past production of *Twelfth Night*, it's not only great fun, but it's minute for minute the best entertainment bargain in town . . . miss it at your own risk" (Smith 1991c). For Florida Stage's *Shrew*, he remarked that for "the eminently reasonable price of nothing you can go to a big field next to the Kravis and catch the wildest, most frenetic production of Shakespeare's *The Taming Of The Shrew* it has ever been my good fortune to witness" (Smith 1991b). I know that, logically, Kate and Pete have every right to debate the pronunciation of "tomato," and that this kind of musical tinkering is not uncommon in the history of Shakespearean comedy on stage. I couldn't help but wince, though, when I heard audience members say at the interval, "Well, that play in Jupiter about the storm was nice, but this is so much more fun."

In December 1992, Christman and I directed *As You Like It*, which played to thousands and which was named by the *Palm Beach Post* as one of the "Top Ten Plays" of the year that "lit our imaginations" (Smith 1993). Two years later, Florida Stage did a musical version of *As You Like It*, set in Brazil. All I remember are lots of fruit baskets on the women's heads, even more maracas, the world's only cheerful Jacques (how could he not be?), and an opening parade that won't be found in any edition of the play: "In addition to such existing poetry as 'Under the greenwood tree,' which he set to music, New York composer Sid Cherry also came up with a completely original opening number. The song, titled Sa Oyu Keli Ti, is written in a mock Portuguese based on anagrams of the play's title. 'I created a gibberish language for the number that sort of sounds like Portuguese,' says Cherry. 'I wrote an original lyric in English, and I scrambled it up'" (Erstein 1997). I protest that my minor grumbling is not based on territorial disputes or personal rivalry. Both of Florida Stage's Shakespeares used PBSF actors, and PBSF has regularly employed Florida Stage talent; I was a high school intern with Florida Stage's first incarnation, the Theatre Club. I am also not complaining about high-concept productions. Headlines have both praised and damned PBSF for a "Heavy Metal *Hamlet*" that was a "Prince of a Play," a "*Night's Dream*" that "dared" a "perverse, complicated twist," and a "Shakespeare in Future Shock" for its *Road Warrior*-esque *Richard III*; we have not done a show without a concept (Erstein 2000a; Smith 1991a; Stemle 1992). I do not ask, either, "Why do it at all, if it's going to be altered so radically?" because I have always found that question to be myopic (we wouldn't have *Throne of Blood*, *Kiss Me Kate*, or even *Shakespeare in Love* if that question were posed to the wrong director). But one of the most accomplished professional companies in the county twice chose to accentuate and encourage stereotypes of South Florida theater and patronizingly told audiences that they could not handle the real deal without extra-textual songs, vaudeville percussion for slapstick violence, tap shoes, pineapples, or a nine iron to reassure them that they were still safely at home. Polished though the productions were, they did not embody the sense of trusting Shakespeare with which PBSF had embarked.

For PBSF's premiere season, *Macbeth* was produced indoors in the Watson B. Duncan Theater at Palm Beach Community College's (PBCC) main campus. The late Duncan was a local legend, having taught literature at PBCC for nearly forty years; Burt Reynolds often credits Duncan as the inspiration behind his pursuit of a film career. Christman dedicated the season to Duncan, which prompted Reynolds to send a warm press release, graciously encouraging us to use his message as a frontispiece and offering to serve as Honorary Chairman for the season: "I have always envisioned a Shakespearean theatre in Palm Beach County that would bring classical drama to audiences of all ages. Join me in believing that Shakespeare has come alive in Palm Beach County." This *Macbeth*, with eleventh-century costumes and bare stage, played for one extended weekend, sold well, and

closed. Strangely, it seemed then, there was no statement by or attendance from Reynolds — protestations of both notwithstanding — and no indication that PBCC was considering any future theatrical relations with PBSF. (It would later become clear that Reynolds's initial good wishes were overshadowed by fear for his own theater's stability.)<sup>1</sup>

### Homeless Night Watchmen and Very Loud Ducks

Undeterred, Christman turned his sights to Jupiter, the northernmost point of the county and, then at least, very much in the sticks.<sup>2</sup> The draw was virtually unused Carlin Park, situated on the Atlantic Ocean. Straddling the beachside highway A1A, the park's ocean side consisted of picnic pavilions, snack bars, and softball fields. Across the road, there were twenty acres of overgrown scrub and trees, and no running water or electricity. Palm Beach County's Department of Parks and Recreation, under whose auspices the park's events were controlled, liked the idea of an outdoor festival, and essentially granted PBSF the space as a co-sponsor. Christman wanted to perform in the park's undeveloped west grounds, on the banks of a shallow lake. Parks and Recreation provided the park and garbage services, but left everything else to us — including police and sheriff fees for traffic control, power, waste management, portable toilets, insurance for alcohol consumption, power, and so on. We needed lots of extension cords.

Space does not permit a show-by-show history of PBSF's seasons, and for the purposes of this account, I will move to the broader issues with which PBSF has concerned itself in South Florida and Palm Beach County. Until the amphitheater was built, there were floods, fire ants, exploding generators, fire trucks, drunk and disorderly audiences (and actors), tripped-over extension cords that plunged scenes into darkness, stolen equipment, deputized homeless night watchmen, and very loud ducks. After a first-year loss of some lighting equipment, Christman gave me a stack of five-dollar bills to distribute among the few homeless men who camped in the woods on the park's borders. In the course of three years, they thwarted two robbery attempts by running across the street to a phone and calling the county sheriff's office as trucks backed into the park in the middle of the night. Now, there are locked gates to prevent that from happening. The amphitheater now provides road access, gated security, bathrooms, running water, power, and better audience sightlines. Phase Three, as the county is calling it, will spend another two million dollars next year and put in a permanent multi-leveled and covered stage, underground dressing rooms, more power, and a much larger amphitheater bowl.

Producing outdoor Shakespeare in tropical South Florida necessarily involves a number of meteorological concerns. In 1990, Carlin Park was simply a large dusty field surrounded by trees. No one wanted to use it for anything, so we could produce whenever we wanted. From

1990-1993, PBSF put up productions in September, March, August, May, and December. After the amphitheater was built and opened in 1996, Parks and Recreation understandably felt that they had more of a vested interest and began suggesting that plays be done in early season, preferably October or November. PBSF respects and seriously considers every request that comes from the municipal body that gives us our home, and we chose to follow the wishes of Parks and Recreation. Those years of fall shows from 1996-1998, though, created major problems that should have been foreseen by both parties.

The attraction of potential seasonal audiences is more than understandable, but Parks and Recreation ignored the fact that there is a *lot* going on during the season. The largest county in Florida, Palm Beach is home to just over 1.1 million residents year-round, and nearly 125,000 seasonal residents. The Palm Beach Tourism Development Council estimates that during the fiscal year 2002-2003, there were 2.2 million hotel guests and 4.4 million visitors to the county (Palm Beach County Tourist Development Council 2005). Three-quarters of those travelers arrived between October and April. During that period, PBSF is not the only group aware of those numbers and vying for the attention of potential audiences. Visitors and residents can choose from all kinds of diversions, including ballet, opera, smaller community theater, countless movie complexes, gambling cruises, and dining. PBSF's shows during those years still charged a minimal entrance fee to the Park (never more than \$8, once as low as \$3.25; shows have been free since 1998). Cheap, but still a haul north for many audiences, when so much was at hand locally. In its early years, PBSF's May and September shows played to large audiences because there was comparatively little going on anywhere else in the county, especially for a few bucks. PBSF should have been more firm with Parks and Recreation and backed up its arguments to avoid heart-of-season production work with hard numbers. Advertising budgets shoot through the roof during seasonal campaigns, because non-seasonal shows require less press and yield more audience. Seasonal audience numbers did not dwindle *that* badly, and time has healed the wounded pride that came from playing in front of 800 instead of 1,000 people. There was, however, a more devastating seasonal problem that Parks and Recreation, having dealt with it before, should have been worried about: mosquitoes.

### A Chicken with a Headache

Considering the theater-closing plagues that afflicted early modern companies, I should be thankful. But pestilence has, as Pistol would say, played the huswife with PBSF more than once. Rarely a year goes by in which Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties are not under medical alerts for all mosquito-borne diseases, particularly different strains of encephalitis, which mosquitoes spread after feeding on the blood of infected birds. West Nile virus, which causes brain swelling,



is rare, but eastern equine and St. Louis encephalitis, different forms of the disease, are relatively common in Florida (thankfully, they cannot be spread from person to person). All three encephalitis strains produce the same symptoms: fatigue, headache, dizziness, fever, light sensitivity, and confusion. Only about one of every two hundred people infected shows those symptoms, and babies and the elderly are most at risk; eastern equine encephalitis is the most fatal of the three, St. Louis encephalitis the least. Depending on the year and on age demographics, fatality rates may be anywhere between three and thirty percent. St. Louis encephalitis has historically been the major threat in South Florida, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that from 1964-1998, 375 cases were reported in Florida. Large outbreaks are rare but can be severe, a reality many take seriously when reflecting on 1977's 110 cases, or, during our premiere season of 1990, the 223 reported incidents. Why do I know all this? Because in South Florida mosquitoes thrive in the early morning and late evening hours, especially from late summer through October or November. Because when Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation controls a theater company's land, that land has on it a shallow and nearly stagnant lake, and the county's Department of Health announces that all evening and night-time activities will be suspended indefinitely until the mosquitoes are dead, *The Winter's Tale* does not open.

In 1990, PBSF's September *Twelfth Night* closed successfully and was awarded a nice grant from Mobil Land Development for the express purpose of bringing it to northern Martin County, thirty miles up the coast, the following month. After a technical crew had moved the stage and lighting and sound equipment, and right after we had finished our brush-up rehearsals, two days of heavy rains flooded the park in which we were now ready to perform. Standing water is, of course, where disease-ridden insects gather, so Martin County allowed our production to go up with the proviso that we do only matinees. Since Mobil had paid for it all, we proposed waiting one week to let the area drain and to talk *their* health department into letting us go at night. They agreed; the following Wednesday, it poured again. The budget would not sustain another week's waiting, so under a blazing weekend sun, on we went at two in the afternoon, to crowds of forty or fifty uncomfortable people who gamely tried to sit on the muddy ground with their blankets and picnics, the traffic of U.S. Highway One roaring by about fifty feet behind us (for evening performances, those blocks would have been detoured; the volume of daytime beach-going traffic eliminated that option). No money loss, but disheartening.<sup>3</sup>

The bugs left us alone for a while, and our jumping all around the calendar kept us out of the danger zone for some years. In 1997 — one of our "fall-show-only" years — the bugs were back on a mission, and after I had just finished blocking Act One of *The Winter's Tale*, Parks and

Recreation called. A bird was ill in Pahokee, far away and on the banks of Lake Okeechobee, with encephalitis symptoms. Another night ban was proclaimed, and as we looked ahead to the cooler months, which kill the mosquitoes, the only slot open in Carlin Park was Super Bowl weekend.

For reasons that I still don't understand (I was only directing it and playing Leontes), producers and backers decided to go ahead and attempt a Sunday matinee. The *Palm Beach Post* offered its usual pre-show support, recalling that "a funny thing happened on the way" to Carlin Park that year, pointing to our encephalitis snag in an attempt to justify what many found to be a misguided "show-must-go-on" decision (Erstein 1998b). A running joke during press meetings was that men could barely be dragged to see Shakespeare when there is nothing on television. Shakespeare vs. Super Bowl XXXII? The Broncos did better that weekend than we did. One headline roared, "Group's Shakespeare production a 'Winter' of discontent," and the accompanying review noted that the supporting cast "seem[ed] at sea with an [sic] iambic pentameter" (Erstein 1998a). I could blame the production's failure on the decision to cut Autolycus entirely after the encephalitis postponement caused an actor to jump ship (my fault) or a very weak performance from Perdita (her fault). But I just know those mosquitoes had something to do with it.

The bugs and seasonal competition were major factors in PBSF's and Parks and Recreation's joint decision to reschedule permanently the festival's outdoor season. Since 1998, productions have been put up in June or July, when there is virtually nothing happening on the rest of the county's stages. Crowds are huge, sometimes 1,200 people a night; the amphitheater can barely contain them, and announcements encouraging audiences to "move their blankets and chairs closer together" are common. There are a few mosquitoes, but no encephalitis scares. Ninety-five-degree temperatures are a drawback, although mostly for the actors; there is usually a wonderful breeze coming off the ocean, but the configuration of the bowl allows only the audience to benefit from it. Aeolus is not the only force of nature that conspires to keep PBSF actors drenched, however.

### Playing in the Rain

All outdoor festivals contend with the elements. PBSF's 1998 decision to produce its outdoor Shakespeare in June or July, though, was a hubristic act of defiance in the face of Florida's rain gods. Palm Beach County's rainy season runs from June through October, although flooding can and does occur year round, contributing to an average annual rainfall of 61.7 inches. Moreover, as a flat, low lying, heavily developed coastal county that experiences frequent, intense rains and periodic tropical storms, Palm Beach County is especially prone to flooding.<sup>4</sup> I wish I had a penny for each time I have stood in Carlin Park and watched audiences scramble to pack up their picnics and beach chairs as it rained down on them. Rain though it did, there was at first no official "rain

delay policy." For nearly ten years, we have had an annual conversation in which Christman wants to cancel and I argue for "waiting to see what the clouds will do." The rain problem is a peculiar psychological game that PBSF plays with summer weather. It never rains during the day in June or July; clouds start forming in the west, like clockwork, at 3 pm. They may move eastward and pour for an hour or two, but it is nearly impossible to determine when and for how long.

The ambiguity of not knowing and the frustrations of preparing the grounds for an outdoor performance in a rain that the crew hopes will stop in time for things to dry, has led us to cancel performances that could and should have gone on despite a network of resources, including an undercover connection to high-tech meteorological equipment. Sometime PBSF performer Alan Gerstel happens to be a top-rated newscaster in the area for Palm Beach County's CBS affiliate, and he makes inside calls to Channel Twelve's "Weather Center" for ongoing "Doppler 12000" updates.

Foolishly, PBSF has also underestimated the resilience of South Florida audiences. They know it's going to rain, and they know it will stop sometime; if they want to go see free Shakespeare in a park, they'll go, rain or shine. Before the first Sunday evening performance of *Hamlet* in 2000, it began drizzling at 7:30. By 8:00, crowds were still arriving, and no one had left. Announcements were made that the company needed to wait for the rain to stop and for the stage to be dried for safety reasons, and the audience sat there until we started at 8:45 (the crew got a huge ovation as they were mopping the stage). Nevertheless, the following year we called off a show at 7 pm because it was raining steadily, even though audiences were already filing in. The skies were clear by 8:15. PBSF's official policy now is that cast and crew arrive and prepare even if they have to drive through a tropical storm, and no decisions are made until 8:00.

## Conclusion

Where are things headed now on stages in Palm Beach County and down the block from PBSF? Todd Alan Price, one-time associate producer at Miami's Coconut Grove Playhouse, spent ten years acquiring the former Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre and turning it into a not-for-profit company to "rival" the efforts of the Caldwell and Florida Stage (Erstein 2004b). His aspirations were realized when the newly christened Maltz Jupiter Theatre opened in February 2004 with *My Fair Lady*. Grand opening events clearly yearned to successfully transport audiences to the dinner theater hey-day of the 1980s; summer 2004 audiences were given *Golf: The Musical* (Erstein 2004a). Downtown West Palm Beach, about thirty miles south of Carlin Park, has seen an immeasurable period of development in the past ten years, and new theaters are moving in. Palm Beach Dramaworks has entered its fifth season, Actor's Rep has reopened for acting and directing classes and will present an as-yet-undetermined season of four plays next year, and the city is

wooing Louis Tyrell from Florida Stage to join its ranks. Mayor Lois Frankel hopes that "the more theaters we have here, it gives people another reason to be here. It would be great if we had our own little mini-Broadway" (Erstein 2004b).

PBSF will continue to produce Shakespeare in Carlin Park and work indoors at the Eissey Theatre. Phase Three will hopefully see not only additions to the existing amphitheater, Christman hopes, but even more financial support from the county and Parks and Recreation. He and I both look forward to the summer that we can afford to put two shows in rep in the park. That will really confuse the ducks and bugs.

The climax of *Soapdish* wraps up the film's on- and off-camera soap opera antics with a live broadcast that includes brain transplants, actors going off script, mutes recovering the power of speech, and Anderson improvising to his soon-to-be-lobotomized lover, "Good night, sweet princess." The broadcast climaxes with a revelation that Montana Moorehead, the soap's buxom and villainous nurse, was born Milton Moorehead. A high school annual is produced, on national television, to confirm that viewers have been afforded the opportunity to enjoy Montana's wicked machinations only after Milton went through what must have been a series of expensive operations. Moorehead screams and runs off the set as jaws drop and costumers faint. Then follows a pleasant, if formulaic, denouement, replete with daytime Emmy awards, families reuniting, and renewed high ratings for the soap. The film's final shot, however, is of the Opa-Locka, on which it continues to rain. The dinner theater is still producing *Death of a Salesman*, only there has been a slight cast change. Tonight, Milton Moorehead, banished from *The Sun Also Sets*, is giving his Willy Loman.

### Notes

1. After PBSF's third Carlin Park show, the Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre artistic director Richard Akins attended a Jupiter Town Council meeting, and accused Kermit Christman of trying to "shut down" the Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre, urging the town to charge PBSF park rental fees that were comparable to his mortgage payments (Christman 2004).
2. The Town of Jupiter's population has exploded since PBSF first performed in Carlin Park. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of year-round residents increased from 25,000 to 40,000. By 2002, the number had reached just over 42,000, and the county projects that by 2010, there will be more than 61,000 residents in Jupiter. For these and all other statistics, I include a series of pertinent Websites in the Related Online Resources.
3. The cancellations do buy volumes of free press, though. See Sommerville 1990 for a representative account.

4. The county's weather service notes: "virtually the whole county has proven to be susceptible to short term localized flooding . . . Palm Beach County likely surpasses the national average of 25% of flooding occurring outside National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) designated Special Flood Hazard Areas" ("Flood Facts" 2005).

### Online Resources

"Chart: Confirmed and Probable St. Louis Encephalitis Cases, Human, United States, 1964-2000, by State." Center for Disease Control [cited 17 February 2005]. Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/arbor/cases-sle-1964-2000.htm>.

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