

# "I gave you wings and tonight you decided to fly - Shakespeare the Stanbridge way"

*"At Stanbridge Earls School, Romsey, it is the last night of the run and the audience is privileged to experience the creation of a new whole entity - when a team of youngsters have learned what it is to stick together, to support each other and to take a corporate pride in what they can achieve - if they will. It is a magical, mystical event!"*

enthuses **Kyria Richardson**, Head of Theatre Studies.

Each year Stanbridge Earls pupils, and a production team of volunteers, enact one major drama production, under the inspirational guidance of Director, Kyria Richardson. This year was no exception, and this is how it is achieved.

## The Plays

Stanbridge's chose Shakespeare's 'What U Will', setting it in modern times: 'Twelfth Night' - in the '30s and 'The Taming of the Shrew' - in the '50s, giving three public performances on 8,9,10 November 2007. The settings gave the actors great

scope to explore the rich and complex language and humour in Shakespeare's dialogue. They enjoyed the fun of lacing the productions with popular songs from shows - like 'South Pacific' and 'Grease', featuring iconic styles and objects of the time, such as bobby sox, bubble gum, hula hoops and sideburns,

## Overcoming personal obstacles

The decision to perform two plays meant wider opportunities for the performers and their support team - and greater challenges - with some pupils choosing to take large roles in both plays! This was quite remarkable as they would give their performances against a background of dyslexia and other learning difficulties, hindrances to short-term memory and, at times, to speech! They needed to balance learning how to inter-act with each other, in the right way at the right time, while mentally grappling with memorising the script and songs.

## Methods of learning

The secret to success against this background is to start early! Rehearsals began in summer term, simply familiarising pupils with the plots, the characters and the language, script reading, choosing songs, watching extracts, plus theatre games and improvisation.

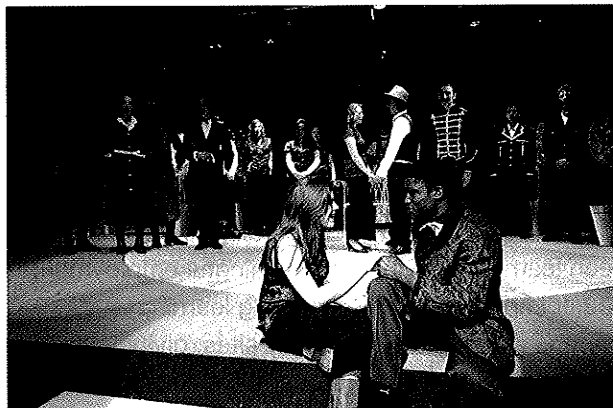


Standing on the Corner boys watching girls walk on

The autumn term saw actors knuckling down to learning their lines – by different methods – listening to specially created recordings which they then personalised, or having line-learning group sessions and learning lines in intensive one-to-one sessions with their literacy tutor. Watching various versions of the text was helpful too: observing *Helena Bonham Carter*, *John Cleese*, for example, playing their roles! For sheer gimmick value we couldn't beat showing them the recent movie, *'She's the Man'* to help with the issue of gender switching in *'Twelfth Night'*. A giant-size screen was positioned in the theatre so that, as the actors sung and moved, they could take inspiration from the stars!



Twins Viola and Sebastian in foreground.



Viola and Orsino, with Maria and Sebastian and cast in background.

Choosing to give three performances meant that, on the first night, actors got the feel of having an audience and on the 2nd and 3rd nights, they'd make the play their own, with real performances emerging. When performing the actors fed off each other and their characters became secure – and inspiring to others. Interaction developed, with the production becoming an integral whole – absorbing and thrilling. They became a troupe!

**“The show must go on”**

Headmaster, **Geoff Link** commented: *“Working together enabled the performers to overcome an unexpected difficulty*



Katherina, Petruchio and cast.

*which occurred shortly before opening night. Following the sad loss of a valued member of the production team, they were inspired to redouble their efforts – the show had to go on, for their colleague's sake, and it did.*

*“Also, when an actor had an accident right before the first night, a hastily enlisted stand-in pulled out the stops and learned his lines in one hour! I am full of admiration for them all – the actors, the production team, our Musical Director, Zoe Boyle, whose sympathetic incidental music was the perfect foil for the production, and Kyria Richardson, the Director, who brought the whole show together.”*

**The Result**

**Kyria Richardson** summed up: *“After months of preparation in many different ways it is the three days of performance that is a unique learning experience. The learning is way beyond how to do a play – it is a life-changing, life-affirming journey, giving confidence and joy, and helping youngsters to believe in the value of co-operation.”* **S**