

# ARTS: A PLACE KIDS CAN REALLY “ACT OUT”

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What if Shakespeare went to Japan? Imagine “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” with sword-fighting and a Puck-ish trickster who is more like a demon than a fairy. That’s the project that a summer acting class at the Seattle Public Theatre will be taking on. Children aged 9-14 will present “The Tengu of Kami” by Edward Mast during the weekend of July 25-27.

Chosen by SPT’s Artistic Director Shana Bestock, this production will involve a host of local talent. The show’s director and the class’ teacher, Carmel Baird, is also the founder and Artistic Director of Sweet Pea Cottage Preschool of the Arts.

Baird was interested in the project both because of the play selected and the theatre that selected it. Artistic Director Bestock, Baird says “is dedicated to community, children and theater arts.”

Baird also reports a great interest in Japanese history and theatre forms. “I have directed Yukio Mishima’s work three times and find it to be consistently intriguing,” she says.

Playwright Mast is also a Seattle local. “I am thrilled to be working with him,” Baird says. Baird plans to encourage collaboration between Mast and the students in the classroom. She says, “It is so rare that a young age group can work with a playwright.”

She hopes that the students will discover new things both Japanese and American culture through this production. “I believe that the arts are the magic window in exploring other cultures and yourself,” she says. “Working with new rhythms and customs will be an adventure for them.” Baird also hopes that her students practice more fundamental skills of cooperation and patience.

To create theatre, “you must learn to work together as a group, listen, and create a product with a beginning middle and end,” she says. “What wonderful lessons for adulthood.”

She expects students to gain an increased appreciation for delayed gratification: "You must wait until after the performance to say that it was completed."

Although Baird won't be holding students to the same expectations that she has for adult actors, she says two key things are crucial for any theatre cast: Respect and listening.

And what else will be crucial for this particular cast? Skill-building with swords, says Baird. "I have a great fight choreographer, Tim Hyland, whom I have worked with before and who I look forward to working with again," Baird says. She expects great rewards from furthering SPT's mission and "working with a fantastic group of families."

And although theatre can be unpredictable, Baird already knows one outcome: "The children will want more fight time."

*"The Tengu of Kami" runs through July 25-27, 2008, at Seattle Public Theatre, Seattle.*