

ROUNDUP

Playing with Shakespeare

By Janos Gereben
Special to *The Examiner*

A one-man show about two worlds in a three-ring circus: that's Roger Rees' "What You Will," a 90-minute whirlwind from, about and over Shakespeare. The show is onstage at the American Conservatory Theater through Aug. 9.

The two worlds, explored equally by Rees, are the soaring poetry of Shakespeare as recited superbly by the actor, and the term paper/Web abuse of the Bard — the latter, as exemplified in outbursts from the young crying "wish Shakespeare was dead" all the way to Voltaire saying that those plays constitute "an enormous dunghill, appreciated only in London and Canada."

Rees, who received an Oliver and a Tony Award for playing the title character of "Nicholas Nickleby" and was a famed member of the Royal Shakespeare Company for two decades, may be best known to Americans for numerous television appearances. Dressed casually, alone in the spotlight, Rees is a frantic presence — even at age 64 — but pleasantly and entertainingly so.

He mixes recitals of the great soliloquies with popular put-downs of the Man from Avon and adds personal recollections — funny ones — from his life in the theater.

He also reads from fascinating stories about Shakespeare from great writers. Rees' telling of James Thurber's "The Macbeth Murder Mystery" — in which an American tourist to England absolves both the Scottish king and "Mrs. Macbeth" — is well worth the price of admission.

As all British stage actors, Rees paid his dues by spending years performing nonspeaking minor roles; a "mime artist," he calls it.

In the 1970s, at the RSC, Rees and Ben Kingsley worked together in a shared supernumerary limbo. "Well," intones Rees, "Kingsley has been knighted and he won the Academy Award, but me? I made it to 'Grey's Anatomy.'" And so he did, as Dr. Colin Marlow, happily patting the posterior of Sandra Oh's Dr. Cristina Yang.

He also was Lord John Marbury on "The West Wing" and the charming criminal Robin Colcord on "Cheers" — and so on.

Still, his career and the play "What You Will" always return to the holiest of holy: Shakespeare.



SHOWING HOW IT'S DONE

Roger Rees is a pleasant but frantic presence in "What You Will," a performance mostly about Shakespeare, playing at the American Conservatory Theater through Aug. 9.

WEDNESDAY

'Damn Yankees'

Hillbarn Theatre Conservatory presents "Damn Yankees," the 1950s Broadway musical. The story involves a middle-aged baseball fanatic who trades his soul to the devil for a chance to lead his favorite team to victory in the pennant race against the New York Yankees.

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

WHERE: Hillbarn Theatre, 1285 E. Hillsdale Blvd., Foster City

PRICE: Tickets are \$12

INFO: Call (650) 349-6411 or visit www.hillbarntheatre.org

THURSDAY

'A Bowl of Rose Leaves'

Imaginative Productions presents "A Bowl of Rose Leaves," a world-premiere play by Fred Smith. An abandoned son tracks down his long-lost father; and the consequences of his actions create a humorous conflict between the artistic and rational worlds in this three-act comedy.

WHEN: 8 p.m. this Thursday only and Friday-Saturday through Aug. 30

WHERE: Studio 300 Theatre, 442 Post St., fifth floor, San Francisco

PRICE: Tickets are \$23 to \$25

INFO: Call (888) 410-8355 or visit www.abowlrosetheatre.com



FRIDAY

Kronos Quartet

The Kronos Quartet, one of the most celebrated string quartets in the world, performs music from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, India and Kazakhstan. The concert is part of "Music Without Borders," a weekend series of international artistic explorations presented by the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

WHEN: 8 p.m.

WHERE: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, 700 Howard St., San Francisco

PRICE: Tickets are \$25 to \$30

INFO: Call (415) 978-2787 or visit www.ybca.org

Lorca Summer Festival

Federico García Lorca's three great tragedies — "Blood Wedding," "Yerma" and the "House of Bernarda Alba" — are produced by Pangst Theater.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday

WHERE: Intersection for the Arts, 446 Valencia St., San Francisco

PRICE: \$12 to \$25

INFO: Call (800) 838-3006 or visit www.pangsttheater.com

THEATER REVIEW

Roger Rees' 'What You Will'

WHERE: American Conservatory Theater, 415 Geary St., San Francisco

WHEN: 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays; closes Aug. 9

TICKETS: \$29 to \$59

CONTACT: (415) 749-2228 or visit www.act-sf.org

COURTESY PHOTO