

'An Australian Stratford?' Shakespeare and the festival

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Delegates at the opening ceremony of the eighth World Shakespeare Congress in Brisbane, Australia, on 16 July 2006, saw some quaint footage from the 1955 Swan Hill National Shakespeare Festival. The film provided a silent glimpse of a period in Australia's history in which Shakespeare's prestige was riding high, when staging Shakespeare and an arts festival seemed to go hand in hand. Ironically, the biennial Brisbane Festival, which began the same week as the World Shakespeare Congress, presented relatively little in the way of Shakespeare performance, prompting John Henningham to complain in the local *Courier-Mail* that 'our theatre establishment has failed its audiences, its performers and its city'. Under the heading 'Lean visit for Bard hungry', Henningham noted the absence of big-ticket performance events apart from Bell Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and lamented the fact that Queensland's professional and subsidised theatre companies seemed to have forgotten the Bard at a time when so many Shakespeare lovers were visiting the state.¹

Shakespeare's comparatively low profile within the 2006 Brisbane Festival program reflects a wider trend throughout Australia. While many communities have picked up the baton from Swan Hill and are continuing to produce vibrant local Shakespeare festivals, it seems that Shakespeare no longer appeals to the directors of the country's major arts festivals. Their priorities, quite understandably, are with new writers and new approaches to performance. Nevertheless, it is surprising to look back and see just how quickly and emphatically big festivals have changed direction away from a time when Shakespeare would be an expected, if not inevitable, festival centrepiece.

Contemplating the forthcoming Olympic Arts festival, Robert Turnbull described Australia as 'Festival-Mad' in *The New York Times* in January 2000², and it does still seem that Australians can mobilise just about anything—from wooden boats to bananas—to provide occasion for a festival. Arts festivals have proved particularly important to Australian cultural life in recent decades. As one-off, high-profile events they can generate audiences and commercial support for local productions that might otherwise not get off the ground, and they can counteract cultural isolation by drawing together a range of artists from interstate and overseas. The festival phenomenon has played a major role in expanding and shaping public tastes, offering a much wider cultural choice than what was once, according to Turnbull, 'an opera scene dominated by Joan Sutherland and an Anglicised theatrical life that looked toward London's West End'. Given the contribution Shakespeare has made to the festival and the contribution the festival has made to Australian cultural life, it is worth asking: what has happened to Shakespeare within the arts festival scene? This paper considers the functions Shakespeare has served within the development of a festival culture in Australia

and the ways in which festival programs reflect shifting perceptions of Shakespeare and of what an arts festival should be.

Australia's first attempt at a major Arts festival was the Festival of Perth, inaugurated in 1953, but drama festivals had been taking place in many regions of Australia for some time before this. According to *The Companion to Theatre in Australia*, the Great Depression brought about a general fragmentation of the theatre industry in Australia, after which local drama festivals became a valuable means of bringing amateur and semi-professional theatrical groups together.³ The festival became an important meeting place for isolated theatre groups. Professional festivals began to develop out of the amateur movement in the 1950s and 1960s and soon became international in focus. Melbourne's Moomba Festival began in March 1955, the biennial Adelaide Festival of Arts was established in 1960, Brisbane's first Waranna Festival was held in October 1962, the Festival of Sydney began in January 1977, and Darwin's Bougainvillea Festival was launched in 1979. Currently the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals draws together the Energex Brisbane Festival, the UWA Perth International Arts Festival, the Sydney Festival, the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and Tasmania's Ten Days on the Island.

Strangely, the Shakespeare Festival has not yet emerged as a strong cultural presence in Australia. Canada and the United States have well-established annual festivals such as the Ontario Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the Oregon Ashland Shakespeare Festival, as well as ambitious undertakings such as the 2007 Shakespeare in Washington Festival which includes over 100 events presented between January and June. In comparison, Australian Shakespeare festivals are on a much smaller scale. They have cropped up in several regional centres around the country, but they tend to be relatively localised events: none have as yet developed a national profile. Their productions of Shakespeare are usually devised locally, specifically for the festival with which they are associated, and they only run for a few days. They contrast sharply with the major Australian arts festivals, which focus on new works and are generally cross-cultural and assembled from pre-packaged elements that have toured elsewhere.

If we look back a bit, however, we can see that Shakespeare's standing in the festival scene used to be considerably higher in Australia, and that the gulf between the regional Shakespeare festival and the capital city arts festival was not always this wide. The story of Swan Hill's Shakespeare festival shows just how effectively Shakespeare was used to generate a sense of local cultural identity and community pride for mid-twentieth-century Australians. Swan Hill became so devoted to Shakespeare that it instigated an annual festival that continued for three decades. Local interest in Shakespeare was engendered by Mrs Marjorie McLeod, described by the *Argus* as 'a volatile high-pressure saleswoman who has made it her business to sell Shakespeare to Swan Hill'.⁴ After the second world war, a theatre group allied with the Australian National Theatre in Melbourne through Marjorie McLeod was formed in Swan Hill. In 1947 McLeod persuaded the Swan Hill National Theatre to perform scenes and highlights from *Romeo and Juliet* in honour of Shakespeare's birthday, and at the same time local businesses were organised to create floats for a Shakespeare procession through the main street.⁵

Around thirty Shakespeare productions were mounted in the Swan Hill Memorial Hall over the years and many associated events took place outside in the streets and local park. The festival week grew to include street processions, film screenings, fairs in the park, puppet shows, Shakespeare readings, lectures by visiting scholars, and a fancy dress Arts Ball. Local shops carried window displays promoting the festival, and in 1955 a colour film of the event was made and screened in the town hall. Feature articles about the festival appeared in *Woman's Day*, *The Women's Weekly*, *The Weekly Times*, and *The Argus*, expressing amazement at the breadth of community involvement. In *The Argus* in 1951 Norman Dunbar wrote:

At Swan Hill something completely new to country life has got the town by the ears. Schoolboys are giving their play time, youngsters their lunch hours, town councillors their unconditional support, and young men and women many after-work hours ... Instead of being an excuse for vivid costuming and violent enunciation by an amateur company, Shakespeare in Swan Hill is the cause of a nearly 100 per cent community effort.⁶

Locally, the festival was fortunate in having one of its founders, Duncan Douglas, as Mayor of Swan Hill for several years, but they also managed to draw in many distinguished guests to legitimise the event. In 1953 they were able to read out a specially recorded message from Sir Anthony Quayle, then on tour in New Zealand.

The program for 1954 shows a typically packed week of activities including a production of *The Tempest* with a cast of 40, lectures and a screening of Olivier's *Henry V*, and a Saturday street procession, an old English Fair, and a night-time program of 'Comedy, Music and Dancing' in Riverside Park. Students from the local high school built a scale model of Anne Hathaway's cottage for one of the floats, and Swan Hill Stores constructed a giant white swan over a car which produced extra excitement when its driver steered into the town clock. The week was rounded off with a Sunday night broadcast on 3SH of scenes from *Henry VIII* performed by Sybil Thorndyke and Lewis Casson. A colour pictorial spread in *AM* magazine claims that *The Tempest* drew an audience of more than 1,000 and that most of the 5,500 inhabitants of Swan Hill turned out for the street procession.⁷

In Swan Hill, Shakespeare provided occasion for strong community bonding and the development of a sense of an elite cultural identity. The local paper, the *Guardian*, eagerly reported the regular doses of praise the festival received from its visitors and often carried headlines hailing the town as the 'Stratford of Australia'.⁸ The figure of the swan was persistently exploited as an emblem of the town's Shakespearean connections, and the inconvenient presence of two real Stratfords in Victoria and New South Wales was ignored.

Marjorie McLeod, with her background as a playwright, president of the Melbourne Dramatist's Club and co-founder of the Melbourne National Theatre, had the expertise and enthusiasm needed to transform a country church acting group into a major local power-base, but Swan Hill's willingness to get involved is still surprising. It may perhaps be explained by the area's postwar prosperity and its readiness for any form of communal celebration, but it must also have had a lot to do with the social make-up of the farming community and a shared belief in Shakespeare as a mark of cultural value. This assumption was confirmed by

comments such as Norman Dunbar's in the national press: 'it is the healthiest sign of cultural development I have seen in any country town in this State'.⁹ Implicit within Swan Hill's bardolatry and self-conscious 'cultural development' was an affirmation of loyalty to the empire, evidenced by the succession of governors, OBE recipients, and members of the RSC and the British Council who were invited to open the festival. Appropriately, Sir Robert Menzies became the festival's patron.

The Swan Hill Festival contains interesting contradictions. It stood for an unashamedly imperialist, Anglophile world view, but it engendered enormous pride within the rural community, helped young people develop new skills and, by recruiting children at local schools, drew in many members of the community who would ordinarily have had little interest in theatre, Shakespeare or historical re-enactment. Many activities took place on the banks of the Murray River, where Malley gums establish a distinctively Australian atmosphere for the Riverside park. Festival directors felt free to play with Shakespearean texts, cutting and pasting according to their needs, writing their own songs, and even pioneering the use of modern dress and Australian settings. *Twelfth Night* was produced in modern dress as early as 1959, and *As You Like* the following year was promoted as being in modern dress with an Australian setting.¹⁰

The community's devotion to Shakespearean celebrations persisted for a remarkably long time, but finally waned in the 1970s when local history provided occasion for a new style of 'Disneyfication' of the surroundings. There were a few attempts to combine the Shakespeare Festival with the developing Pioneer Festival, but the two did not mix. In 1976 the festival's last Shakespeare production, *Macbeth*, was poorly attended, whereas *Dimboola* played to capacity audiences at the Oasis Hotel. The love affair with Shakespeare was over and Swan Hill moved on.

Swan Hill's enthusiasm for things Shakespearean was extraordinary in mid-twentieth-century rural Australia, but a comparable commitment was evident in the city of Perth, Western Australia. In Perth, Shakespeare played a crucial role in the establishment of its Arts festival scene, arguably thus igniting the whole phenomenon in Australia. The Festival of Perth has the distinction of being Australia's first major capital-city arts festival. It was established in 1953 and grew out of the entertainments that the Adult Education board had fostered at the Somerville Auditorium and Sunken Garden in conjunction with the annual University Summer Schools. In the beginning, the aim was to produce a modest, open-air version of the Edinburgh Festival of Arts¹¹, but the festival rapidly expanded, and was soon occupying several venues and attracting international and interstate participants. One estimate states that 65,000 people attended the various festival entertainments by 1959.¹²

The first festival included outdoor symphony concerts and film screenings, but its central feature was an ambitious open-air production of *Richard III* at the Somerville Auditorium. The University of Western Australia Archives retain a large collection of materials relating to the production, including correspondence, financial statements and production notes. Sifting through these materials conveys a strong impression of the size of the undertaking and the effort needed (particularly on the part of the director of Adult Education, Fred Alexander) to

secure funding, properties, sets and special effects. Financial records report a total gross expenditure, exclusive of any payments to members of the cast other than its star, of £5,218.¹³ Much of this amount was expended on the set, which presented a castle amidst the auditorium's Norfolk pines, with towers, stairs, and multiple playing areas, including an apron stage, from which the action would occasionally spill into the audience. Letters were sent all over the country in a quest for tights and wigs, and army engineers were recruited to produce ten explosions for the battle scenes.

The West Australian reports that the production 'carried us into medieval England with all its pageantry and rich colour' and that the 'apron stage, the exuberance of the crowd scenes and the close proximity of the audience to the actors all helped to make last night's presentation a stirring experience'.¹⁴

Although the director, Michael Langham, and his Richard, James Bailey, were British, the production drew primarily on home-grown talent, including several children, and, as Bill Dunstone has pointed out, it became an event that seemed to draw in the whole city, involving people from many different walks of life.¹⁵ *Richard III* generated a strong sense of local ownership which inspired the city to plan future festivals on a grander scale; festivals with the same emphasis on the open-air and, in the 1950s and 1960s at least, on Shakespeare.

Probably because of its strong links with the University of Western Australia and its Shakespeare-oriented venues—especially, from 1964, the New Fortune theatre—the Festival of Perth has been more consistent than most in including Shakespeare in its program. Local Shakespeares featured strongly in the first decades of the festival, then waned somewhat in the 1980s, and then the decade between 1989 and 1999 saw several imported Shakespeares including Cheek by Jowl's *The Tempest* and *Measure for Measure*; the ESC's *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Richard III*; the RSC's *Comedy of Errors* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*; Leicester Haymarket theatre's *Hamlet*, as well as a Japanese *Lear*. The increasingly international focus of the festival led to the programming of several high-profile overseas productions and then to a shift away from Shakespeare altogether. From 1999 to 2006 Shakespeare virtually disappeared from Perth's festival programs, although the 2007 festival seems to have reversed the trend somewhat, with productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* by the all-male British company, Propeller, and a surtitled *Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Yohangza Theatre Company from Korea.

The Adelaide Festival of Arts began seven years after the Festival of Perth and soon earned its reputation of being Australia's premier arts festival. It is held every second year in March and presents a packed and diverse program over a period of two to three weeks. The first festival in 1960 was promoted as an event which would draw together exceptional artists and performers to showcase local, national and international work. Unlike Perth, Adelaide's first festival did not include any Shakespeare at all. In fact, although Adelaide has brought some high-profile Shakespeare productions to Australia over the years—from companies such as the RSC, Prospect Theatre Company, and Cheek by Jowl—Shakespeare productions have never been a prominent part of the festival's programming. A search under 'Adelaide Festival of Arts' in the AusStage database lists 981 festival events between 1960 and 2007, but a search within this list turns up only 22 events

related to Shakespeare. On closer inspection several of these are radical adaptations or excerpts, leaving only twelve actual productions of the plays.¹⁶ The relatively small proportion of Shakespeare productions paints a fairly accurate picture of festival priorities.

Adelaide's early festivals did feature one Shakespeare production that was promoted as a festival highlight: the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's tent production of *Henry V* in 1964. The production was originally scheduled to premiere at the Perth Festival, before moving to Adelaide in March, but this was cancelled fairly late in the day. A Perth editorial in the *Critic* notes that the official reason for the cancellation was the expense of bringing the whole production, including all the actors, from the east, but the editors also touch on inter-state rivalry:

An uncharitable observer might also wonder to what extent the committee of the Adelaide Festival of Arts was involved. The Adelaide Festival is regarded by many as the only worthwhile Festival in Australia. Little if anything, to the discredit of the local Festival Committee, is known about the Perth Festival in the East. Adelaide would no doubt be very anxious to see *Henry V* premiere there.¹⁷

In the next issue Max Harris depicts the cancellation as 'cultural treachery' by the Trust, but argues that it was not 'prompted by Adelaide's passion for premiere presentation, for the simple reason *Henry V* ranks low in its list of cultural occasions'.¹⁸ Harris claims that unlike Perth's small rival show, Adelaide's festival is swamped with music and that 'of some 34 individual occasions in 1964, only one, *Henry V*, is a fair dinkum play'.¹⁹

By the time the 1964 Adelaide Festival began, however, *Henry V* had been heavily promoted as the opening event. John Bell was cast as Henry V with Anna Volska as Princess Katherine. The director, Tom Brown, had worked with Tyrone Guthrie at the Shakespeare Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, and, according to Bell, the production was 'pretty much a straight replication' of Guthrie's, right down to the circus tent, thrust stage, costumes, sound effects, staging, and choreography.²⁰ Like Perth's 1953 *Richard III*, the aim of the production was to create an environment in which the audience would be 'brought into close emotional communication with the acted drama'.²¹ Audiences obviously enjoyed the carnival atmosphere: *Henry V* was enormously popular, both in Adelaide and later in Rushcutters Bay Park in Sydney, apparently drawing an audience of 17,647.²²

The Adelaide festival presented a rash of major Shakespeare productions in the early 1970s, virtually nothing in the 1980s (apart from *Measure for Measure* in 1988) and then a marked increase in the 1990s. The latter seems largely due to the Glenn Elston 'Shakespeare under the stars' phenomenon. Elston's *Midsummer Night's Dream* was transferred from Melbourne to the Adelaide Festival in 1990 and became a 'sold out hit' according to the 1992 Festival Booking Program. Elston followed up with transfers of *Twelfth Night* in 1992, *Romeo and Juliet* in 1996, *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1998 and *Much Ado about Nothing* in 2000. Ironically, the popularity of these events soon precluded them from the main festival program. Shakespeare in the park seemed to arrive each summer, whether it was under the festival umbrella or not, so it shifted to the festival fringe. The fact that Elston's picnic productions toured widely elsewhere—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* went to Sydney in 1993, to Brisbane in 1994, and to King's Park

in Perth in 1997, followed by several subsequent productions—meant that they lost the gloss of novelty so essential to festival fare. In Adelaide a number of local theatre groups also started producing Shakespeares as part of the festival fringe during the 1990s, most notably Lightning Strike with its ongoing garden productions at Carrick Hill, and Rough Magic whose productions have included *The Tempest* at Adelaide Zoo and *Macbeth* at Adelaide Gaol.

From the start the directors of the Adelaide Festival of Arts attempted to establish a distinctly different profile from Perth, positioning the festival as a national rather than a regional event, with a stronger emphasis on music and the avant-garde. Although it has presented several exciting Shakespeares since its inception, its emphasis remains on new work. Just one Shakespeare event featured in the crowded main program for the 2006 Adelaide Festival of Arts, yet even this had to have its avant-garde credentials confirmed in a promotional piece by Tom Richardson:

The concept of an Adelaide festival featuring a performance of one of the bard's best-loved tragedies may seem a tad conventional to some, but they have not reckoned with Stephen Dillane's unique one-man rendering of *Macbeth*.²³

If we shift the focus to the Eastern States, Shakespeare has an even lower profile in the programming for major festivals. The Island theme has so far precluded him from Tasmania's ten-day festival and Sydney festival Shakespeares are rare: apart from the Bell Shakespeare Company's *Troilus and Cressida* at the Olympic Arts Festival in 2000 and Theatre de Complicite's *The Winter's Tale* in 1992, the only recent inclusions have been foreign-language productions, namely Declan Donellan's brilliant all-male Russian *Twelfth Night* in 2006 and the Yohangza Theatre Company's Korean *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2007. Some Shakespeare productions have been associated with Melbourne's Moomba Festival: one-off performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were presented by the Monash Players on 9 March 1963, and by the Melbourne Theatre Company on 1 March 1985, and the MTC's highly regarded *Henry IV, Part 1* (with Robin Ramsay as Prince Hal and Frank Thring as Falstaff) was presented under the Moomba umbrella in 1969. An AusStage search for Melbourne's International Festival of the Arts, however, gets a list of 249 events between 1991 and 2007, within which the only Shakespeares are the Bell Shakespeare Company's *Coriolanus* in 1996, the MTC's *Tempest* in 2001, and two multi-lingual productions of *Titus Andronicus* in 1993. These are accompanied by a handful of interesting productions from the Melbourne Fringe, including an acrobatic *Dream* in 1994 and a puppet theatre *Twelfth Night* in 1996.²⁴

Like Melbourne's Moomba, Darwin's Bougainvillea Festival began as a community festival to celebrate the city's environment. It was launched in 1979 as a way of marking the anniversary of self-government and the city's recovery from Cyclone Tracy. As the festival grew, the Darwin Theatre company produced a number of local Shakespeares under its umbrella, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1989 and *The Tempest* in 1993. In recent years, however, the re-named Darwin Festival has developed a stronger focus on local Indigenous culture and the region's Asian connections. It has been described as shifting from 'a flower show with artistic trimmings' to something 'more curated, more "artsy"'.²⁵ Darwin has moved on from its festival parade and its local Shakespeares, but it has

recently been associated with touring productions from the Bell Shakespeare Company and Glenn Elston's Australian Shakespeare Company.

Brisbane's story has echoes of Perth and Adelaide. Shakespeare was a prominent part of the Warana Festival for a while, through a series of Queensland Theatre Company productions in the Albert Park Amphitheatre between 1979 and 1987. The first of these, Alan Edward's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, purportedly cost \$116,000 and was promoted as the theatrical highlight of the festival. It included 'singers from the Queensland Opera, dancers from the Queensland Ballet and the Australian Youth Ballet, music from the Queensland Theatre Orchestra, even dogs from the dalmation society'.²⁶ Its elaborate open-air set required four miles of electric-lighting cables and three miles of sound cables²⁷, and veteran actor Reg Cameron, dressed up as Shakespeare to promote the event in Brisbane's city streets. Subsequent productions were similarly ambitious. *The Tempest* in 1982 coincided with the Commonwealth Games and drew an audience of 19,000. *The Tempest* appeared again under the Brisbane Festival umbrella in 1999 in a landmark production directed by Simon Phillips in collaboration with Indigenous dance company, Jagera Jarjum. Generally, however, since the 1980s, Shakespeare productions have been much less prominent within the Brisbane Festival program; even the concurrent 2006 World Shakespeare Congress did not engender any major local productions.

Concluding remarks

Brisbane's *Dream* in 1979, Adelaide's *Henry V* in 1964, and Perth's *Richard III* in 1953 were produced as Festival centrepieces and functioned as a means of galvanising community involvement. While they may have been much more professional and costly than the festival events staged in Swan Hill for 29 years they share something of that spirit: a conviction that Shakespeare is what arts festivals are all about. Things have clearly changed now. If Shakespeare appears at all within a major Australian festival it is usually as a radical adaptation or in a foreign language with English surtitles. 'Straight' Shakespeare has been consigned to the festival fringe, in productions that are generally perceived as popular family entertainment. I do not want to suggest that this is something to lament. It is heartening that Shakespeare is losing the stigma of elitism, and it is only to be expected that arts festivals will keep reinventing themselves, seeking out new and challenging work.

Some disquieting questions do arise from this shift in priorities, however. In the process of being re-defined as accessible entertainment, has Shakespeare also been re-classified as less challenging, less relevant and therefore less worthy of festival funding and promotion? Have festival committees and state theatre companies lost confidence in their ability to present Shakespeare productions that might be compared with touring productions from overseas companies or, since 1991, from our own national specialists, the Bell Shakespeare Company?

In *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*, Richard Fotheringham describes a Shakespeare Industry in Australia that, at the end of the twentieth century, was increasingly losing out in the subsidy stakes. Under the heading, 'The marginalisation of Shakespeare', he writes:

in the 1990s, with government support for the arts at record levels ... funding policies have shifted radically away from Shakespeare and towards supporting new Australian work. Companies centrally concerned with staging the Bard have found themselves on the unfunded or marginally-funded fringes of the subsidised theatre industry.

He continues:

In the subsidised theatre system, Shakespeare has moved from the vanguard of the drive for government arts subsidies, as it was from Allan Wilkie's time, through to the establishment of the State theatre companies in the 1960s and 1970s, to being today what public funding is explicitly *not* intended to promote ... The unacknowledged tension between different funding agendas has caught out Shakespeare, that suspiciously foreign figure, probably a political conservative and monarchist, too long dead to receive royalties, unable to be claimed as a national achiever, never likely to be Australian of the Year.²⁸

Comparable tensions between different programming agendas have also caught out Shakespeare in relation to the Australian arts festival in recent years. Unless radically adapted or staged, the plays are perceived as too conventional to produce the buzz of excitement that is expected from each new arts festival program.

If Shakespeare's festival associations in Australia are going to be reinvigorated, it is most likely to happen through the establishment of a successful long-running festival entirely devoted to Shakespeare. Although Swan Hill may no longer be in the running to become an Australian Stratford, smaller communities around the country continue to go to extraordinary lengths to organise comparable regional festivals. Victoria's Stratford is a small country town with its own Avon river and has held a 'Shakespeare on the River' festival since 1991. The town is part of an international Stratford Cities group whose members all celebrate their Shakespeare connection by holding Shakespeare festivals. The University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales, has held an annual festival based around a production on the lawns of 'Boooloominbah' coinciding with University graduations since 2000, and a 'Shakespeare on Avon' festival has been held in Gloucester, New South Wales, since 1999. In Canberra, Looking Glass theatre started up what it called 'The National Summer Shakespeare Festival' in 1995, with plays produced on Aspen Island and, later, at Gorman House Arts Centre; and a 'Shakespeare on the Mount' festival also developed at Thredbo Village. A festival at Montsalvat in Melbourne was inaugurated in 2004, and in the same year Toowoomba's Shakespeare in Queens Park festival began with the aim of becoming 'a local, national and hopefully international draw card for the city'.²⁹

A significant part of the attraction of the Shakespeare festival is the opportunity it provides to engage culturally with local space. At the Queensland Shakespeare Festival in Brisbane's Roma St Parkland in 2005, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night* were performed in the Parkland amphitheatre alongside a 'Theatre History village complete with Elizabethan-era street entertainment, roving jesters and characters, education, food, drink and even "the bard himself" for questions and photo opportunities'.³⁰ Toowoomba's 2007 festival includes Sonnets at Breakfast in the Botanical Gardens with entertainment from singers, jongleurs and sonneteers. David Wiles notes, in *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, that 'processions' and 'theatre' were closely intertwined in the pre-modern world

and that from the time of ancient Greece through to the seventeenth century, festivals were focussed around processional performance. He argues that whereas processional drama once took over public spaces like churches, markets and streets, since the eighteenth century western cities and towns have been designed to discourage processional drama, confining entertainment and celebration to specifically demarcated spaces.³¹

Many modern-day festivals revive processional drama's engagement with streets and recreational spaces and fulfil a desire to appropriate public space for play. Shakespeare festivals in Australia are nearly always constructed in such terms. Fairs, feasting, open-air performances and street processions mark Shakespeare festivals as family entertainment, designed to attract broad community involvement and to downplay associations with 'high art'. They also draw upon a widely felt sense of nostalgia for an idealised communal past, removed from the alienating effects of globalisation and technology. Such associations can help explain the remarkable persistence of the idea of an 'Australian Stratford'. For all that the international arts festival may have expanded and reshaped the Australian cultural appetite, making Shakespeare seem a 'tad conventional', the notion of the Shakespeare festival can still generate extraordinary effort and engagement within local communities and potentially some innovative and stimulating productions as well.

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