

Interview with director Michael T. Kachingwe

Written by Steve Peterson

Michael, thanks for setting aside time from your schedule to answer some questions about directing Shakespeare's *TWELFTH NIGHT*, which has a six-week run April 5th through May 12th, at Actors Co-op's David Schall Theatre in Hollywood, CA.

Many know you as a performer. When and where did you first get bitten by the performance bug?

I started performing when I was six years old in Bloomington, Illinois when my siblings and I used to sing at church services with our father. After which we had a family band that traveled around the Midwest doing concerts.

In addition to working as an actor in theatre, film and TV, you have also directed more than 50 theatrical productions. What was the first professional play you directed, and what did you learn from that experience?

My first professional play I directed was coincidentally *Romeo and Juliet* at Riverside Theater in Iowa City. My first Actors Equity production I directed was *Blues for an Alabama Sky* at the Unicorn Theater in Kansas City. Both experiences taught me how to be patient and trust in the work put in and not to strive for results and outcomes but focus on the process to lead you where you need to go.

How long have you been a member of Actors Co-op Theatre Company? What productions have you worked on with them and in what capacity?

I've been a member of Actors Co-op since the summer of 2021. I was part of the acting ensemble of *The Gift of the Magi*, and played the role of Walter Lee in a reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

How did your directing Actors Co-op's production come about?

As a member of the production committee, I was part of the decision making on productions. Due to last-minute unforeseen circumstances, we needed a director, so I stepped forward.

What drew you to direct TWELFTH NIGHT in particular?

The play has such humor and vibrant characters. Most importantly, it gave me the opportunity to have original music to tell the story of love.

Have you worked with any of the actors or production team members in the past?

I acted in *The Gift of the Magi* with *TWELFTH NIGHT* producer Lorinda Hawkins Smith.

I directed Britny Horton (Maria in *TWELFTH NIGHT*) when she was a graduate student at the University of Iowa.

I directed Victor Rodriguez (Sebastian in *TWELFTH NIGHT*) when he was my student at Cal Poly Pomona in the ACTF selected production of "Spinning into Butter" that traveled to Hawaii.

Set designer Hanalei Vasquez, lighting designer Jesse Rodriguez, and costume designer Kelly Tsan all designed for me while they were students at Cal Poly Pomona.

Tell us a bit about the play.

This version of TWELFTH NIGHT is a story told in a nonconventional way to highlight the universal impact of what love is and can be. The setting is in the South Pacific somewhere between Tahiti and Bora Bora in a time not too long ago in the present past! The emphasis is on the power of love and how some love power, yet know not how to control it. In our play, love is fickle and untrustworthy because what we see and think we love can be elusive. As in a mirage, the closer you get to it the more likely it is to vanish. Our setting is resort culture because it seems like life is like a bubble there, and it is temporary with an intensity of passion as are some relationships.

Is there anything about this production of TWELFTH NIGHT that might make it stand out among other productions that an audience member might have seen?

The music and the connection to the world and environment of this Ilyria will make the audience remember how much music the food of Love is!

I understand that Thulani Kachingwe has composed original music and that it is part of his sound design for Actors Co-op's production. Can you tell us how the music is used to enhance the play?

The score is fully original music created for this production by my son Thulani. No samples, no licensed music. All new and original. From Thulani: "The score of *TWELFTH NIGHT* will take you into the tropical world of Ilyria. Surrounded by beautiful beaches filled with clear water and coconut trees, the music resembles an island feel that the locals embody themselves. The smooth sounds represent how the characters are feeling throughout the story and will take the audience to that world."

What do you want the audience to take away from having seen Actors Co-op's production of TWELFTH NIGHT?

When it comes to love, do not be deceived or fooled by external aspects such as looks, gender, sex, but trust the heart in the matters of love!

What's in the near future for Michael T. Kachingwe?

As a man who cherishes living in the moment, the near future is in God's hands.

Is there anything you'd like those reading this interview to know about the production or about you?

I dedicate this production to my loving family who have always supported my artistic endeavors. This is the first collaboration with my son in a theatrical setting and I couldn't be prouder.

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