

since 1991



GREATER VICTORIA Shakespeare Festival



CYMBELINE

Shakespeare's epic tale of romance & adventure

DIRECTED BY KAREN LEE PICKETT

JULY 3rd - 15th

at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific

JULY 16th - 18th

at Esquimalt Memorial Park

CHILDREN 12 & UNDER FREE!

VICSHAKESPEARE.COM

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



CYMBELINE

directed by Karen Lee Pickett

GVSF 2021

July 1-15: Horticulture Centre of the Pacific

July 16-18: Memorial Park, Esquimalt

Director's notes

Once upon a time...people gathered to hear stories. They sat together, bodies in a space, and watched lives unfold, in comedies, tragedies, romances. They breathed together – a deep laugh, a sharp gasp, a muffled sob – as they helped create the story.

Does this feel like a myth from a time long past? It's really only been 16 months since most of us gathered in this way, but each day of those months has contained lifetimes of experience, as we all have figured out ways to navigate during multiple crises. And along the way, we've collected more stories.

There is so much work to do. The pause of the pandemic has allowed eyes to open to our responsibilities to the Earth our home, and to our human siblings, as we unlearn and repair centuries of colonialist and racist ways. We lean on stories for this work: listening to the stories of the past and allowing them to change our future, and creating stories of our now, collectively envisioning and creating the world we want to live in.

Stories are the way to the heart. And in the heart is where the change happens. I am deeply grateful to be back telling stories with you.

--Karen

CAST (in alphabetical order)

Danica Charlie	<i>Imogen</i>
Cam Culham	<i>Iachimo</i>
Nathaniel Exley	<i>Posthumus/Cloten</i>
Grace Fedorchuk	<i>Arviragus</i>
Aidan Guerreiro	<i>Guiderius</i>
Carter Gulseth	<i>Pisanio</i>
Chris Gabel	<i>Belarius</i>
Kelsey Launier	<i>Cornelius/Spaniard</i>
Grace Martin	<i>Cloten's Lord/Frenchperson</i>
James McAndrew	<i>Caius Lucius/Dutchperson</i>
Sarah Pitman	<i>musician</i>
Ariel Slack	<i>Queen</i>
Willis Taylor	<i>Cymbeline/Philario</i>

Production:

Carolyn Moon	Production Stage Manager
SJ Valiquette	Assistant Director/Combat Choreographer/ Covid-19 Safety
Michelle Mitchell	Costume Design
Sarah Pitman	House Manager
Sarah Nicole Faucher	Costume Assistant

Staff:

Candace Woodland	General Manager
Karen Lee Pickett	Artistic Producer/Director

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*: And so begins our tale(s)

Near the middle of *Cymbeline*, a virtuous young man leads a funeral song that includes the lovely phrase, "Golden lads and girls all must, / As chimney-sweepers, come to dust." Some critics take these lines as a simple allusion to the idea that all human life ends with earthly stuff: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Others have claimed that, because select English dialects call dandelions "golden lads," this is a more complex, metaphorical image comparing human life to a yellow flower that has moved past the stage when it is a puffball (resembling a chimney sweeping broom) and scattered into fluff. The resonance of both possibilities suggests how we might best encounter this play, a creation full of romance and comedy and happiness but also suffused with death; that recycles plot conventions as common and beautiful as wildflowers; a play suffused with the dust of death and villainy and betrayal and cruelty and just-plain-foolishness that somehow seems as full of life as an airborne seed.

As a literary creation, *Cymbeline* resembles a bountiful garden filled with plants sprouted from seeds carried in from multiple sources. Its title character and plot thread concerning a British king battling the Romans derive from history as recorded in *Holinshed's Chronicles* (the same book that provided Shakespeare with factual information about the Wars of the Roses). But we also find scattered across this plot stories from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (notably a tale about a husband wagering that his wife is the most virtuous) and prose romances (especially narratives of in which royal children are spirited away from court but have their true identities revealed by distinctive birthmarks). Still other tendrils creep in from folktales and fairy tales: an evil stepmother, a vial of poison that turns out to be a sleeping potion, and a princess who ends up with her true love and her father's blessing. The effect of so many – almost too many? – stories being told and retold in the context of one play is somehow both laughable and utterly delightful. Even before it culminates in a final scene full of improbable revelations and resurrections, the play invites us into a green world in which evil is punished, virtue rewarded, and long-lost children and beloved spouses return from the dead.

Through the door of theatrical performance, this play lets us enter the realm of myth. In any production of *Cymbeline*, look for moments when theatrical effects twist to manifest the logic of dreams or magical spells. Shakespeare's theatre relied on costumes to help audiences identify characters – not only because the same actor might play a Danish prince in a tragedy on Tuesday and a prodigal London gentleman in a romantic comedy on Wednesday but also because one performer in the same play could take up parts ranging from a shepherd to a court messenger to a general to a god. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen insists that she values the "meanest garment" of her husband Posthumus more than she cares for her stepbrother Cloten; her words manifest into weighty reality when she finds Cloten's beheaded body dressed in Posthumus's clothes and mourns for the death she believes these garments signify rather than for the life lost. Given that the text makes it possible for the same actor to double as both Posthumus and Cloten, and a number of productions make

this casting choice, Imogen may actually be lamenting both men even as the actor playing Imogen weeps over a costume associated with both characters.

Given the importance of props in any theatrical performance, it's worth noticing how often *Cymbeline* allows characters and the props that signify them, people and objects, to get conflated. When Posthumus compares the virtuous Imogen to his diamond, Iachimo chides, "She's outpriz'd by a trifle." Although her husband corrects course, insisting "You are mistaken: the one may be sold or given. The other is a thing not for sale, and only the gift of the gods," Iachimo has correctly described the dream logic that will ultimately lead Posthumus to reject Imogen – he takes a trifle for reality, not just Iachimo's account for evidence but the bracelet he gave her for Imogen herself. Only after he comes to see through signs to what they signify – to understand that standing before him is not a boy named Fidele but Imogen disguised as a boy who manifests her perfect fidelity – can Posthumus achieve happy reunion with his beloved.

In the context of *Cymbeline*, the dead boy over whom the beautiful funeral song is sung is not dead and, of course, is not a boy. But the funeral song sung over "his" body invoking golden girls and chimney sweeps remains a true expression of pure human connection. The effect is not dissimilar to the play itself – the many stories it contains are neither individually plausible nor elegantly combined, but together they effervesce with a sweetness that lingers in the memory.

**Erin E. Kelly, Associate Professor
Department of English
University of Victoria**

SYNOPSIS

King Cymbeline's daughter by his first wife, Imogen, has married her childhood companion, Posthumus, without her father's permission. This is a crisis because Imogen is Cymbeline's only remaining heir – her brothers Guiderius and Arviragus were stolen from court as infants and are presumed dead. As the play opens, Imogen and Posthumus are separated as her new husband is banished. Meanwhile, Cymbeline's new Queen schemes to get Imogen betrothed to her son from a previous marriage, Cloten.

Having arrived in Rome, Posthumus declares that his beloved Imogen is the most virtuous woman on earth. An Italian gentleman named Iachimo persuades Posthumus to wager on Imogen's chastity – while Iachimo will pay a huge fortune if Posthumus's description proves true, Posthumus will give Iachimo the diamond ring Imogen put on his finger if the Italian can seduce her. Iachimo travels to Britain and realizes Imogen is incorruptible. By hiding himself, Iachimo gains access to Imogen's bedchamber and notes details of her room and body before stealing from her arm a bracelet that was a gift from Posthumus. When Iachimo shares his observations with and shows the bracelet to Posthumus, the young man sends orders to their

servant go-between Pisanio to kill Imogen. The princess is already in danger because the Queen has met with a doctor to obtain poison she intends to use to kill Imogen. The doctor does not trust her, so substitutes a sleeping potion; the Queen passes this “poison” to Pisanio, telling him it is a powerful medicine.

Pisanio receives Posthumus’s letter telling him to slaughter his mistress, and he allows her to travel with him to Milford Haven, where Imogen thinks she will be reunited with Posthumus. Once there, Pisanio reveals his orders and helps Imogen to disguise herself as a boy before leaving her to hide.

In Wales, Imogen finds a cave in which an old man, Morgan, and his two sons, Polydor and Cadwal, are living and introduces herself to them as Fidele. Imogen is warmly welcomed by this new family but, sick at heart because of Posthumus’s rejection, when alone she takes the “medicine” Pisanio left with her thinking it will make her feel better. Having found her missing from court, Cloten arrives at the cave seeking Imogen; he has put on Posthumus’s clothes and, with the intention of punishing her for rejecting his suit, he plans to rape her. Cloten first meets the young men and insults them, however, so Polydor fights with and beheads Cloten. The young men find what appears to be Fidele’s dead body, and lay the corpse next to Cloten. When Imogen awakes, she believes the body is that of Posthumus.

While Imogen is away from court, Cymbeline receives word that the Romans will go to war against Britain for his failure to pay tribute. The first clear sign that the invasion has begun is when the Italian Iachimo and the Roman general Lucius find Imogen (still in disguise as Fidele) weeping over the headless trunk. Believing this is a boy mourning his dead master, Lucius takes Fidele as a servant. Meanwhile, the young men Polydor and Cadwal decide to fight the Romans on behalf of Britain. Posthumus arrives in Britain with Roman forces but decides he should defend his native country; he disguises himself as a British peasant before going into battle.

Having defeated the Romans, Cymbeline brings together the young men who fought heroically on his behalf as well as the Roman prisoners. The doctor brings word that the Queen is dead, revealing that she had planned to poison the king and Imogen. The imprisoned Lucius begs Cymbeline to spare his servant Fidele, and the disguised Imogen uses this moment to force Iachimo to reveal how he duped Posthumus. Posthumus then identifies himself and takes responsibility for murdering Imogen – who soon makes plain that she has been present all along as Fidele. Morgan confesses to the king that he is Belarius, who was banished as a traitor, and makes plain to Polydore and Cadwal that they are actually Guiderius and Arviragus, Cymbeline’s lost sons. The reunited family celebrates, and Cymbeline gives his blessing to Imogen and Posthumus’s marriage before officially pardoning everyone and declaring peace between Rome and Britain.

SPECIAL THANKS:

Rockrose Farm: Ariel, Steve, Rosie and Sam
Kate Rubin
The Monk Family
Marilyn Hitch
Canadian College of Performing Arts
All our wonderful sponsors & donors

2021 Victoria Shakespeare Society Board of Directors

Alison Balabuch	President
Cam Culham	Vice President
Lisa Canzi	Secretary
Holly Lam	member at large
Brooke Gallup	member at large
Asa O'Connor-Jaeckel	member at large

Advisory Board:

Shona Slack
Lori Fisher
Ian Case