

# 7 Questions with Alexander Sovronsky

*by Shakespeare & Company (August, 2008)*

Alexander Sovronsky makes his Shakespeare & Company debut as Dumaine Soldat and a musician (and assistant music director) in *All's Well That Ends Well* this summer. He'll be heading out on the road this fall as Rosencrantz/Fortinbras in Shakespeare & Company's National Tour of *Hamlet*.

## **1. What was your first experience with Shakespeare & Company?**

In 2003, I was a sophomore double major at SUNY Geneseo studying theatre and violin performance. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life yet but I knew that before I decided, I wanted to get more training in classical theatre. I wanted to study Shakespeare and there wasn't much of a classical program at Geneseo. I was hungry for it so I decided to spend my summer at the Summer Training Institute at Shakespeare & Company. The production of *King Lear* that I saw here in 2003, directed by Tina Packer, changed my life. I had no idea that I could feel that connected to a classical play. I laughed, I cried, I was entertained and I was transfixed. I snuck out of my room in Larry Hall nightly to catch the final hour or so of almost every performance of *King Lear* that summer. The following season, I returned to Lenox as a participant in the Month-Long Intensive. I made sure to keep in touch with Tina, Dennis [Krausnick, Director of Training] and Dave [Demke, Associate Director of Training].

## **2. What came next after your undergraduate training, and professional actor training here at Shakespeare & Company?**

In the summer of 2007, I was acting and playing music in The Public Theater's New York Shakespeare Festival production of *Romeo & Juliet* starring Lauren Ambrose [herself an alumna of S&Co's actor training]. Tina and Dennis came down to NYC to see it and we reconnected. It was great to see them after all those years and I mentioned that I was very interested in working for the company the following summer. A few months later, I was cast in the Broadway production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, starring Kevin Kline and Jennifer Garner. I not only acted in the production, but also co-wrote original music for the show as well as performed it on violin, mandolin, flute and drums. After this step up in my career as an actor/musician, I decided the time was right to return to the place that began my journey as a classical actor—I auditioned for Tina on *Valentine's Day* and the rest, as they say, is history. I couldn't be happier to be here this summer. I've been able to combine my two loves—theatre and music—on *All's Well*... and I couldn't be having more fun. It's an absolute dream come true.

**3. Do you find a large “market” for actor-musicians out there? And do you at all have a preference for musical roles over non-musical ones?**

I began classical violin studies at age three with Suzuki instructors, Tal & Jo Schifter, on Long Island, where I grew up. I continued to study violin all through college and picked up many instruments along the way. My arsenal, as you can call it, of musical instruments really began to increase when I worked at a local music store while I was in college—Buzzo Music in Geneseo, NY. I began to teach myself how to play the guitar and mandolin while I was there. Being surrounded by instruments all day long was a dream come true. I learned almost every instrument I could get my hands on. I spent all of college being told that I had to decide what I wanted to do—either music or theatre—but as soon as I graduated and moved to NYC, my first job was as an actor/musician. As it turned out, my multiple talents have been an advantage in the theatre world, rather than a hindrance. The market for actor/musicians is ever-increasing. My ideal job is actually exactly what I’m doing in *All’s Well*... I have a great time playing Dumaine Soldat and I also get to play some really rockin’ music. I thank my lucky stars every night that I get to go onstage and do what I do.

**4. You are also playing *Rosencrantz and Fortinbras* this season in the upcoming national tour of *Hamlet*. What can you tell us about that?**

We’ve actually just begun rehearsals for *Hamlet* and it’s quite exciting. It’s a revival of the 2006 production consisted almost entirely of the original cast. In going from *All’s Well That Ends Well* to *Hamlet*, it’s been pretty amusing to see the similarities between my characters in both plays. Both Dumaine Soldat and Rosencrantz live in a world of service. Dumaine Soldat serves the King of France and looks after Bertram, while Rosencrantz serves the King of Denmark and tries to look after Hamlet. In addition, both characters are one half of a pair—the Dumaine brothers and Rosencrantz & Guildenstern. By being part of a pair, it’s great to always have someone to play off of and touch base with. In both cases, these characters “tag team” Bertram and Hamlet, trying different tactics in order to accomplish their objectives. I’m having a blast working with Jacob Knoll, who plays Guildenstern. It’s just a dream to be working with such a talented cast as this.

Not being the original actor that played Rosencrantz and Fortinbras, I was a bit concerned that I would have to fit into whatever the other actors before me had created, but Eleanor Holdridge, the director, has been very generous with allowing me to find my own way. It’s going to be a great production; I can just feel the electricity in the room. Very exciting stuff.

**5. You’ve done a lot of work with the Classical Theatre of Harlem. Can you tell us a bit about them and the work you do with them?**

CTH really is responsible for giving me my big break in NYC. I was a year out of school and I had just come off of a 9-month national tour with Chamber Theatre Productions. I was living on the upper west side and I heard about a theatre company up in Harlem, just

north of me. They were doing a production of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*, which is one of my favorite plays. They set it on a rooftop in a giant swimming pool. They installed a pool in the theatre and built a house in it and covered it with water. This was in the summer of 2006, right after Hurricane Katrina, so the set immediately brought to mind the images of the people of New Orleans on their rooftops in flooded areas waiting for help. Pozzo entered in an inflatable raft, being pulled by Lucky in the water, up to his neck. It was an astounding production and when it was over, I immediately walked over to one of the ticket takers and asked if the director was around. He pointed me to the Artistic Director of the company, Alfred Preisser, and I told him of my strong reaction to his company's work and my desire to become a part of it. He said, "what are you doing tomorrow?" The next day, I showed up at the theatre, auditioned for him with a monologue and played some music on my violin and mandolin. He was very impressed and asked me if I was free that evening. I began rehearsals that night for their summer production of *Macbeth*.

I've worked on many shows with the company since then, serving as an actor, a musician and a fight director. They do really amazing work, combining a very modern, visceral and physical approach to theatre with classical texts. With them, I had the wonderful opportunity to play *The Fool* to Andre DeShield's *King Lear*, which also starred Shakespeare & Company actor, John Douglas Thompson as Edgar.

#### **6. You also do a lot of work as a fight director. What does that kind of work entail?**

I began my studies as a stage fighter many years ago while I was still in college. In the spring of my senior year at Syosset High School, I had the opportunity to play the title role in *Hamlet*. Since I had spent many years as a fencer, the director (who was a trained stage fighter), worked with me to create the fencing duel in the final scene of the show. I fell in love with stage combat and really enjoyed the creative process of it. When I got to college, I was one of the only students in my class with any stage combat experience, so many of my friends recruited me to choreograph various projects of theirs. I took classes with various fight organizations in NYC. I also began assisting professional fight directors on various productions in NYC. After a year or so of this, I started choreographing on my own with the Classical Theatre of Harlem. I love being able to tell the story of a play on a different level. When words aren't enough, people resort to physical violence. I also enjoy bringing a real sense of danger in my fights, rather than a more traditional "stagey" sort of fight. It's a constant process of exploration and expansion, and I love it.

#### **7. Do you have a favorite Shakespeare quote?**

My favorite quote seems to change as I grow and mature, but at this stage of my life, I am very drawn to a line of Hamlet's:

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

It is this view of life that keeps me optimistic in the face of many negative and difficult times. It's all about how you look at a situation—if you are able to just slightly alter how you view something, it can turn from being a bad experience to being one that you can

learn from. In the world of theatre, where rejection can be a part of daily work life, it is important to remain strong in the face of negativity. There is something to be learned from every experience. Every step taken is a step forward.

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