

IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE PLAY ON!

FOLLOWING THE METERS OF COMPANY ARTISTS LUKE REED AND ALEXANDER SOVRONSKY

by Elizabeth Aspenlieder

“Music is always the one design element that connects the contemporary audience with the immediate action of the play unfolding before them, making the stories seem current and essential for the time. Many playwrights have used music and musical references in their works but none as masterfully as Shakespeare,” says Company actor and composer Alex Sovronsky. “Shakespeare used music very similarly to how he used rhetoric. Music in his plays help the audience and actors signify status (for nobility and royalty), offstage action (such as battles), time and place, weather conditions, and even magic in plays like *Midsummer*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest*. Shakespeare utilizes not only original lyrics & music, but songs that the audiences would have been familiar with. Throughout all the plays, his characters constantly use musical metaphors and quote lyrics from popular songs. This consistent peppering of recognizable musical references was placed there to consciously draw the audiences further into the worlds of the plays. Shakespeare is also quite a genius when it comes to using recognizable tunes and original ones; he is acutely aware of the audience’s relationship to each. The ways in which songs are used to connect the audience to the play is astounding and indicates his distinct awareness of the power of music. Even after Shakespeare’s death, the plays were still performed

but the music was constantly updated to reflect the fashion of the time in which it was being presented.”

Luke Reed, also a Company actor and composer, adds, “To work on material written by such a vibrant poet/playwright as Shakespeare is a joy. I find that he has a real knack for song—meaning he fully understands why a moment needs to be musicalized in some way. For example, *Twelfth Night* is a play that just sings. With ‘If music be the food of love...’ Shakespeare tells you right from the beginning that this play is built upon a foundation of music. ‘The Wind and the Rain,’ being the play’s final moment, feels like the final note in his symphony, bringing the story to a bittersweet conclusion. It’s a needed release, which happens to be deeply moving because it is done in song.”

Shakespeare’s genius has affected countless artists who flock to his works for inspiration—bands such as the hip ‘Titus Andronicus’ drew from his play of the same title to create their name. Company artists Luke Reed and Alexander Sovronsky are no exception when it comes to their respect of the Bard and other great writers. William Shakespeare wrote songs for many of his 37 plays that the Globe Playhouse musicians played music during his performances. Reed and Sovronsky are charged with both tasks as well. As Lady Macbeth says, they are ‘not without ambition.’



Alex Sovronsky playing violin at Dixon Place in NYC.



Luke Reed working on music for *Romeo and Juliet*, 2014.



Alex as Fabian in *Twelfth Night*, 2009.

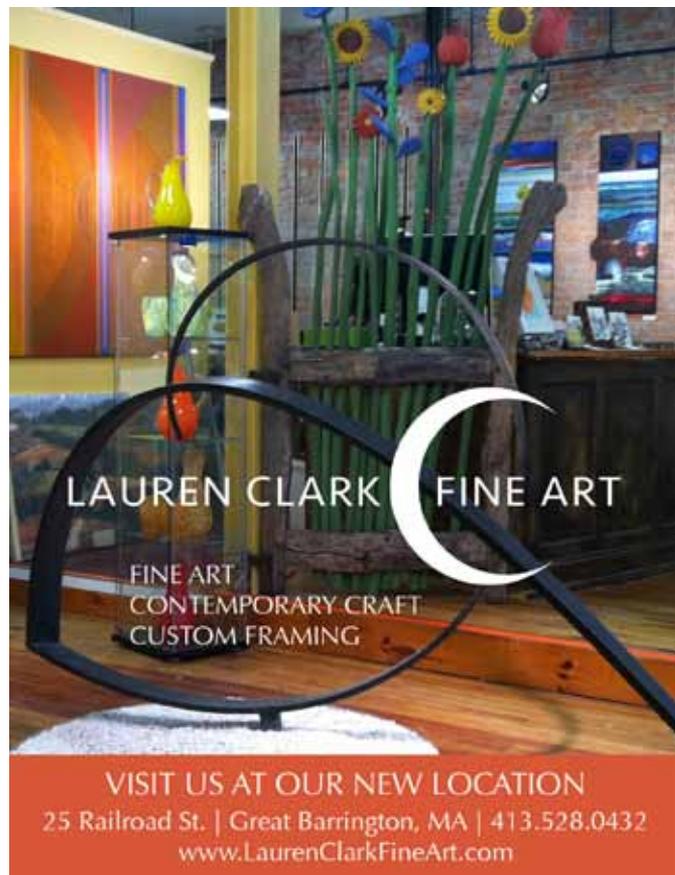


Luke Reed at the rehearsal of *Tartuffe* on the Rose Footprint, 2012.

Both Sovronsky and Reed are musicians, actors, and composers who use their imaginations and artistry to delve into the themes of some of the world's greatest playwrights. "When I'm composing music for a character to sing or perform," Sovronsky continues, "I put myself in the shoes of the character to find out what they are trying to express with the song. I work with the actors involved to make sure that their character's intentions and needs are being explored and communicated through the music. I then have to balance that with the director's vision of the moment, my own musical design, and the needs of the production. As an actor and composer, I am switching back and forth between many different viewpoints and angles from which to view the play—it makes me feel connected, closer to the core of the storytelling." Luke Reed interjects that "as an actor, my job is to be in the story, living moment by moment, not know what's ahead. As a composer my job is to step outside and think about the big picture—Where are we going? What is the rhythm of this world? How does it sing? What does this part of the story need to keep it alive and interesting? Composing, like any other art, is about expression. There's a reason why in musical theater the composer's fingerprints are the most evident: music is a language and the composer is a writer. I am sitting in the writer's chair with the playwright trying to find a musical vocabulary worthy of the play. The sound and feel of the music is just as important as the words it's set to; it's informative as well as expressive."

Music is deeply connected to the fabric of a culture. People need to sing, play, and dance, it's in our blood. Our bodies have a natural rhythm, as does the world around us; music is simply an auditory explosion of who we are and what we see.

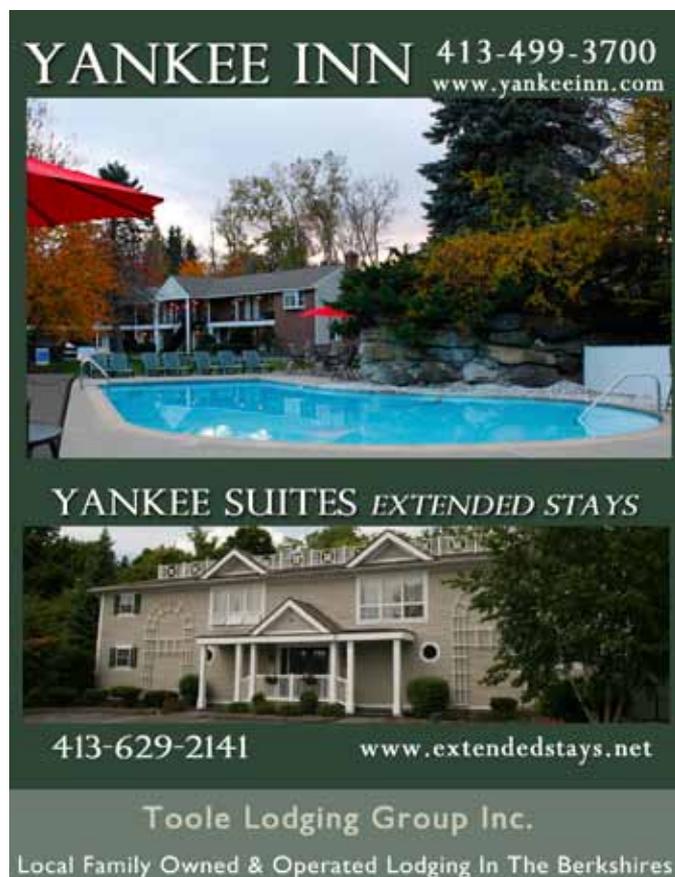
Reed is acting in and composed the music for *Romeo and Juliet* and will also be composing music for *The Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni and our holiday show *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. Sovronsky is composing/sound designing *Shakespeare's Will* as well as acting in, and composing/sound designing for, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Henry IV*. The result—creative, compelling, and moving music that succeeds in supporting the director's vision of the play, the playwright's text and the actors' work on the stage, will, as Oberon says 'rock the ground upon where these lovers be.'



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