

## "Regarding 'The Shakespeare Project'"

*The Shakespeare Project* is an Acting Company made up entirely of members of Actors' Equity Association, dedicated to the exploration of the complete works of William Shakespeare and other playwrights. The group had its genesis as a Special Project of Equity Library Theatre Chicago and currently presents "Theatrical Readings" of the plays of Shakespeare that achieve a clarity usually only accomplished by fully producing the plays. Assembled by *The Shakespeare Project's* Artistic Director, Mara Polster, these exceptionally skilled actors have been seen on the stages of the Shakespeare Repertory, The Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre and many other theatres in the Chicago area and around the country.

*The Shakespeare Project* performed its first public reading in November of 1995. In January of 1996, monthly performances began at The Chicago Cultural Center, at 78 East Washington Street. These readings are presented as a Special Project for Equity Library Theatre. In June of 1996, The Chicago Park District adopted *TSP* as a sponsored organization to present its monthly readings as a survey course with discussion to follow at The Berger Park Cultural Arts Center, 6205 North Sheridan Road. *TSP* will continue performing at both of these locations throughout 1997 and plans to work in a full production on two into the 1998 schedule.

This year, *The Shakespeare Project* presents its 1997 Theatrical Reading Series, entitled "A History of the English Kings (as presented by Elizabethan Dramatists)". We hope you will join us as we take you through eleven of the Elizabethan history plays in chronological order. Next month, we present Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second*. All readings begin at 1:00 p.m. and are free to the public. *TSP* is a nonprofit organization and may receive tax-deductible contributions. If you wish, you may send contributions to *The Shakespeare Project*, 2706 North Albany Street, Chicago, Illinois 60647. For further information or to book a reading, contact *TSP* at 773/252-8544. Fax number 773/252-5433. Email address [TSPchicago@aol.com](mailto:TSPchicago@aol.com).

### Regarding ELT

Formed in 1952 to let producers know that a talent pool of actors existed in Chicago, Equity Library Theatre remains the Midwest's only ongoing producer of showcases. ELT is open to any and all members of Actors' Equity Association who are in good standing with that union.

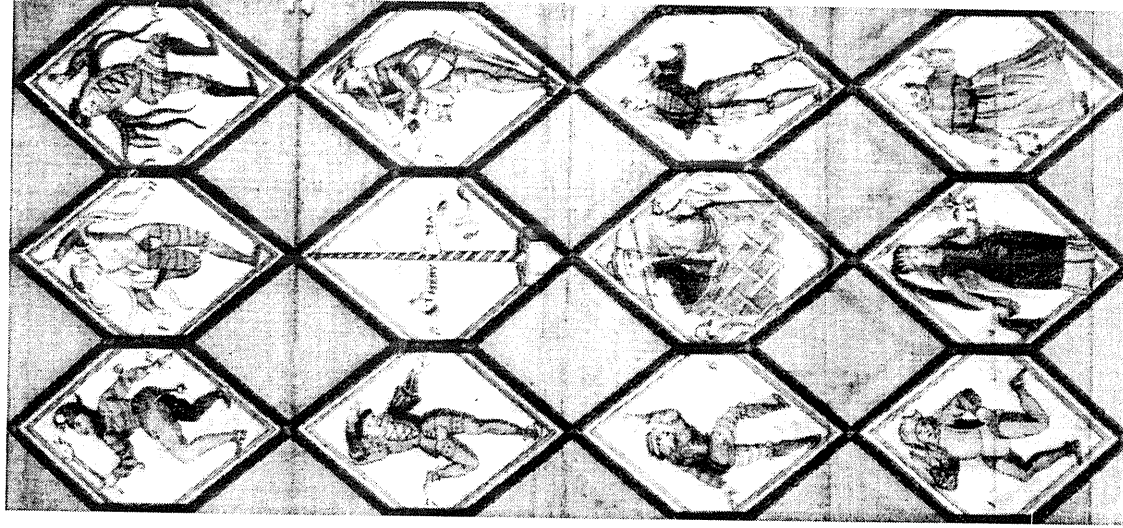
ELT offers performance opportunities to actors in many venues from full performance staged readings, from scene showcases to various workshops and discussion with sitting artists.

Members are encouraged to bring ideas for new projects to one of four yearly meetings. The Alternative Classic Theatre Project began this way in 1986 and has become one of the most successful ventures ELT has produced. Another was the establishment of *The Shakespeare Project*.

In 1993 ELT became a resident theatre of The Chicago Cultural Center. Each year ELT provides high quality, low cost theatricals to the downtown area, three to four fully produced plays in the Studio Theatre, plus 6-12 one hour presentations in the main theatre on the second floor. Our last production at the CCC was William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and our next production will be in February - Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

Equity Library Theatre is a nonprofit organization and as such may receive tax deductible contributions. If you would like to contribute to ELT, please send any contributions to: Treasurer, Equity Library Theatre, 4738 North LaPorte Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60630-3801. A confirmation letter for tax purposes, will be sent by return mail.

## *The Shakespeare Project* presents



*Theatrical Reading*

of

*The Life and Death*  
of

*King John*

*Directed By: Peter Wittrock*

*"The Shakespeare Project" is sponsored by*



*All of the actors with The Shakespeare Project are members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of professional Actors and Stage Managers. All T.S.P. presentations at The Chicago Cultural Center are produced as a Special Project of Equity Library Theatre, for which the actors contribute their talents under a Special Agreement between T.S.P., E.L.T. and A.E.A. All performances at The Berger Park Cultural Arts Center are sponsored by The Chicago Park District.*

## Director's Notes

Good afternoon and welcome to our reading of William Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John*. This reading, the first in our 1997 Theatrical Reading series "The History of the English Kings", begins a new year for *The Shakespeare Project* with our first public reading of a history play. We plan to present eleven Elizabethan history plays this year in chronological order and we hope you will choose to be a part of this exciting project.

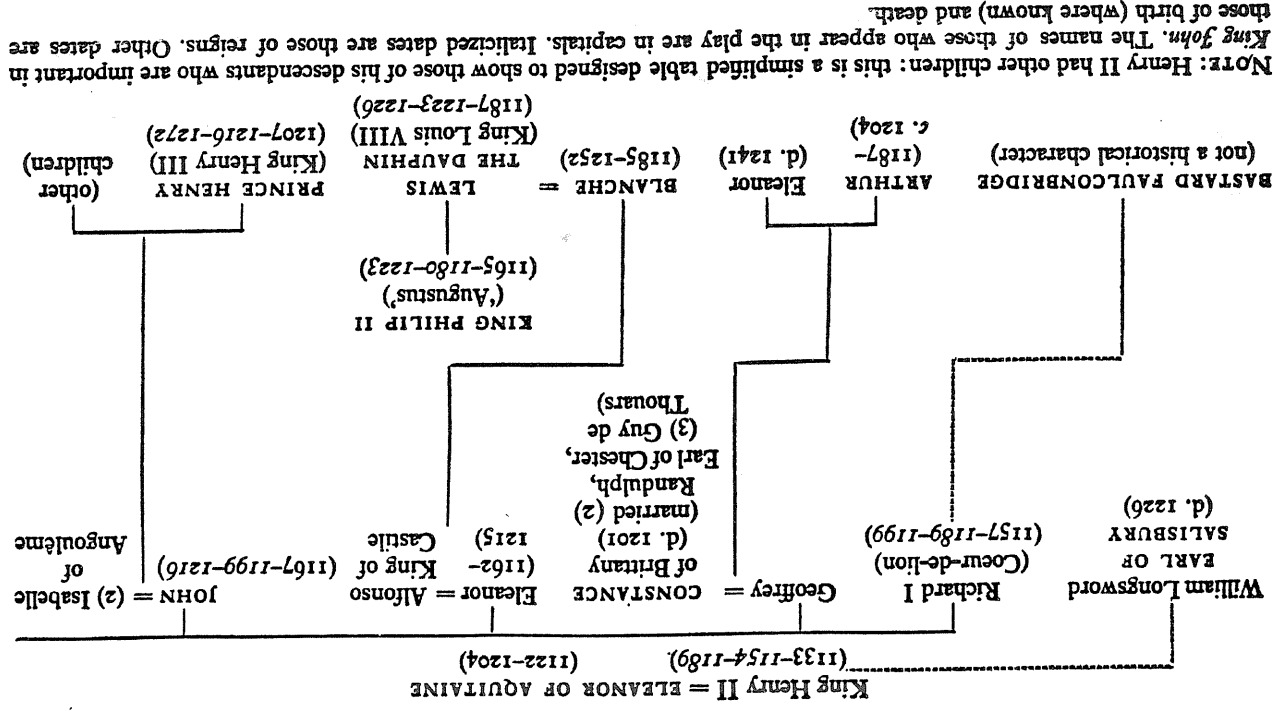
History, for Shakespeare, never stood in the way of creating a good drama. Set at the beginning of the twelfth century, the events in *King John* seem to take place over the course of a few weeks. In historical time, some 11 or 12 years elapse from the beginning of the play to the end. Things aren't always in the correct order either, so the history part of the history plays is often very debatable. What is clear from the play *King John* is that Shakespeare is more concerned with humanity than with historical fact. Through the brilliance of Shakespeare's imagination we see in *King John* fallible human beings acting out the myth of power.

There is something recognizable in King John - he is a man for our times - for many scholars say that the modern age begins with the twelfth century and John epitomizes the power politicians of that time. But isn't there also a hint of Richard Nixon in John's real politic and subsequent capitulation. Does not Philip Faulconbridge, resemble Jack Kennedy in his audacity with language, his political genius, his charisma and his way with the ladies? When considering Bosnia or Sadaam Hussein or even the legacy of Viet Nam, must we not admit that we struggle today with the issues of shameful peace and honorable warfare just like John and Philip did.

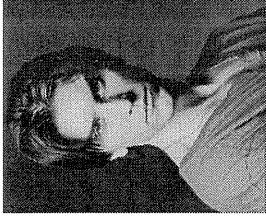
And what of the women in this play? Blanche; the submissive political wife, Constance; the betrayed single mom, and Queen Elinor; that most formidable woman, hearken us to an appreciation of the limitations imposed by society on woman's autonomy. There is nothing new under the sun. Shakespeare's century precedes our own by as many years as John's does Shakespeare's, but the similarities are many. What Shakespeare attempted to portray in this play is as relevant to our time as it was to his.

Peter Wittrock

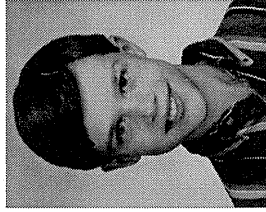
GENEALOGICAL TABLE: THE FAMILY OF HENRY II



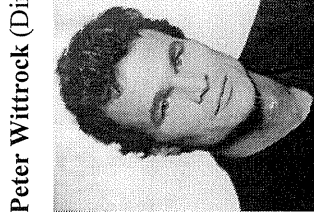
NOTE: Henry II had other children: this is a simplified table designed to show those of his descendants who are important in *King John*. The names of those who appear in the play are in capitals. Italicized dates are those of reigns. Other dates are those of birth (where known) and death.



**Marcus Vaughn** (Robert Faulconbridge, Lewis the Dauphin) has acted in many readings with *The Shakespeare Project*, and composed and performed the musical accompaniment for *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Marcus received his B.A. in Anthropology and Theatre from The University of Notre Dame in 1993 and moved east, continuing his acting studies at The American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York. An audition led him west where he performed in Las Vegas for two years, and now Marcus is happy to be in the mid-west and working in Chicago.



**Finn Wittrock** (Arthur) is happy to be reading his third role for *The Shakespeare Project*. He has been seen recently as Mamilus in *The Winter's Tale* and Boy MacDuff in *Macbeth*. Finn has also acted in plays for the Evanston Children's Theater and for the Theatre School at DePaul. With his friends in Massachusetts he helped form "Shakespeare and The Very Young Company" and produces and acts in his own Shakespeare productions during the summer there. Finn likes to dance and play the clarinet, has a 357 batting average and really enjoys tormenting his brother Dylan.



**Peter Wittrock** (Director, Narrator) is delighted to be directing his first readings for *The Shakespeare Project*. He has appeared in recent readings for the Project as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Macduff in *The Scottish Play*, Angelo in *Measure for Measure* and as *Coriolanus*. Peter has dallied with the Bard at "Shakespeare and Company", a Classical Theatre and Training Center located in the wilds of western Massachusetts. While there, he studied with the renowned voice teacher Kristin Linklater and currently teaches voice for actors and non-actors alike. Peter returned to his native Chicagoland with his family to teach at DePaul University. Meanwhile he has done stints acting, teaching and directing at places like the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Colorado College in Colorado Springs, and the University of Pittsburgh. Peter is currently finishing a degree in Psychology and Theatre at DePaul University. Peter is also unbearably proud that his son Finn is stealing all of the good scenes again, and thanks his mother Kate and his brother Dylan for being so supportive.



**Mara Polster** (Artistic Director) believes- much to the general discomfort of her friends- that *The Shakespeare Project* is divinely guided. The Project began as a "fire in the belly" and has grown to an object of much pride and promise with little more than imagination and a love of the words (plus a brilliant Acting Company). Mara ran from Ohio to **The Webster Conservatory of Theatre Arts and Dance** in St. Louis, to major in both Acting and Music, while minorning in dance. She has acted on most of the stages here in Chicago and many others across the country. Favorite credits include *The Roads to Home*, *Macbeth*, *Our Town*, *Top Girls*, and more musicals than she cares to name. Since May of 1995 *The Shakespeare Project* has enabled her to explore dream roles such as Katherina, Isabella and Paulina, to provide the same opportunity to other actors and to exercise that directing muscle everyone pesters her about. *TSP* is grateful commemoration of Samuel E. LaMacchia, (the sower of the seed) and Michael A. Wilson.

# The Shakespeare Project

Presents

The Life and Death

of

King John

The Players

(in order of appearance)

<b>King John</b> .....	Gary Houston
<b>Chatillon</b> , ambassador from France.....	Fredric Stone
<b>Queen Elinor</b> , widow of Henry II,.....	Judy Blue
Mother of King John	
<b>Earl of Pembroke</b> .....	Ron Butts
<b>Earl of Salisbury</b> .....	Mark Ulrich
<b>Robert Faulconbridge</b> .....	Marcus Vaughn
son of Sir Robert Faulconbridge	
<b>Philip, the Bastard</b> , his half-brother.....	Jason Eric Hays
(also called Richard)	
<b>Lady Faulconbridge</b> .....	Nancy Nickel
widow of Sir Robert Faulconbridge	
<b>Philip</b> , King of France.....	Dennis Sook
<b>Lewis</b> , the Dauphin.....	Marcus Vaughn
<b>Constance</b> , mother of Arthur and ..... widow of Geoffrey, John's elder brother	Maureen Gallagher
<b>Arthur</b> , Duke of Britain, nephew to the King.....	Finn Wittrock
<b>Lymoges</b> , Duke of Austria.....	Ron Butts
<b>Blanche of Spain</b> ..... daughter to the King of Castile, niece of King John	Nancy Nickel
<b>Hubert De Burgh</b> .....	Peter Garino
<b>Cardinal Pandulph</b> , the Pope's legate.....	Fredric Stone
<b>Melune</b> , a french lord.....	Dennis Sook
<b>A Messenger</b> .....	Judy Blue
<b>A Messenger</b> .....	Maureen Gallagher
<b>A Messenger</b> .....	Finn Wittrock
<b>Prince Henry</b> , son to King John..... Afterwards, <b>King Henry III</b>	Nancy Nickel

The scene: Partly in England, and partly in France

There will be one 10 minute intermission



**Judy Blue** (Queen Elinor) has been seen as Viola in Shakespeare Festival of Dallas' *Twelfth Night*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* at Stage West and Phebe in *As You Like It* at the Dallas Theater Center. In Chicago, roles included Desiree in *A Little Night Music* at The Goodman Theatre and Arlene in Apple Tree Theatre's *Baby*. She has appeared opposite Timothy Busfield in *Fool For Love* and in his production of *A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking* at B Street Theatre in CA. She is known for her work in the title roles of *Evita* and *Piaf* and for creating the roles of Alice and Elizabeth in the world premiers of Jack Heifner's *Homefires* and Horton Foote's *Valentine's Day*.



**Ron Butts** (Pembroke, Duke of Austria) has appeared in many of the readings with *The Shakespeare Project* since the spring of 1996. Ron has worked at New American Theater (Rockford), Asolo Theatre (Sarasota), Missouri Repertory (Kansas City), and The Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis). Past roles include Warren G. Harding in *Camping With Henry & Tom*, Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Cowboy in *I'm Not Rappaport*, and Adolphus Cusins in *Major Barbara*.



**Maureen Gallagher** (Constance) has appeared with *The Shakespeare Project* as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Thaisa in *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, Lady Macduff and 2<sup>nd</sup> Witch in *Macbeth*, and as Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar*. Elsewhere in Chicago she has performed at The Goodman Theatre, Body Politic Theatre, Next Theatre, Remains Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, Wisdom Bridge Theatre, Shakespeare Repertory, The Court Theatre and for Shaw Chicago.



**Peter Garino** (Hubert) For *T.S.P.*: Camillo in *The Winter's Tale*, Banquo in *Macbeth*, Titus Lartius in *Coriolanus*, Lord Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar*, Gratiano in *The Merchant of Venice*. Direction: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Pericles*. Other credits include work with Steppenwolf Theatre, Organic Theatre, Body Politic Ensemble, Equity Library Theatre and Oak Park Festival Theatre. Company member: Illinois Shakespeare Festival 1981, 1982, 1984, Hofstra University Shakespeare Festival 1974-77 and National Shakespeare Company Conservatory 1976.



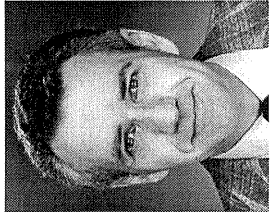
**Jason Eric Hays** (Philip the Bastard) is really excited about the work being done by *The Shakespeare Project*. As an aspiring director, the readings are invaluable as a source of inspiration and exploration of the Bard's works. As an actor, they offer a wondrous opportunity to play with Shakespeare's words. He has been with the group for many of its recent projects: *Pericles*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Prior to working with *T.S.P.*, Jason had the pleasure of performing at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, and also with Chicago's Shakespeare Repertory. Jason will direct the reading of *Henry V* for *T.S.P.* later this season.



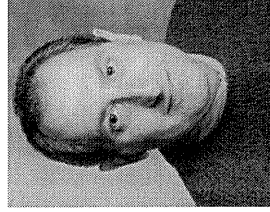
**Gary Houston** (King John) has appeared in several of *The Shakespeare Project* performances, including *The Taming of the Shrew* in which he played Petruchio. Last year he directed *The Merchant of Venice* for the Project. Currently his production of *Camping With Henry & Tom* is playing at the Illinois Theatre Center. Recently Gary acted in *Emma's Child* at The Victory Gardens Theatre, *Blake and Damon*, *Ring & F. Scott* at Writers' Theatre Chicago, and also in the film, *Fargo*.



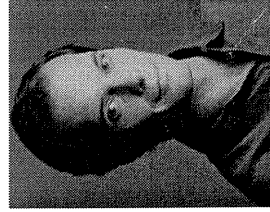
**Nancy Nickel** (Lady Faulconbridge, Blanche, Prince Henry) has taken part in many of *The Shakespeare Project's* readings, most recently playing Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. She has performed at the National Jewish Theatre, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Illinois Theatre Center, and Shakespeare Repertory in their award-winning production of *The Tale of Cymbeline*. In addition, Nancy finds joy working with teenagers in the outreach program for The Jane Adams Resource Corporation. When not speaking in verse, Nancy also enjoys prose.



**Dennis Sook** (King Philip, Melune) most recently appeared as a poker player in *The Odd Couple* at Candlelight's Forum Theatre. He's glad to be back in Chicago after working in New York for several years, where he appeared in commercials, on the soaps, and Off-Broadway in *New Mexican Rainbow Fishing* and the baseball comedy *A Perfect Diamond*. Dennis was also in the Actors' Studio production of Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*. His career began touring with the National Shakespeare Company for two seasons. Dennis earned his Master of Arts degree from the City College of New York.



**Fredric Stone** (Cardinal Pandulph, Chatillion) is glad to be part of *The Shakespeare Project's* mission to bring these works to life for you. Fred has worked at Shakespeare Repertory in *The Winter's Tale*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Shakespeare's Greatest Hits*. He has created his own one person show in collaboration with Mr. Shakespeare called *Will and Testament (a life after death comedy)*, touring to colleges, high schools and performing arts centers. Should you have school contacts, let him know. Thanks for coming.



**Mark Ulrich** (Salisbury, English Herald) enjoys wilding in the streets in Armani suits, eel fishing in the Mojave, and keeping his teeth as chipped as a carry worker's. He also acts from time to time. Mark appeared as Don Pedro in the November reading of *Much Ado About Nothing* and is happy to be back with the group again for this reading of *The Life and Death of King John*.