

leading the charge

KNIGHTHORSE THEATRE COMPANY KEEPS SHAKESPEARE SIMPLE

by tom keer



If Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* lived happily ever after, they would found the Knighthorse Theatre Company.

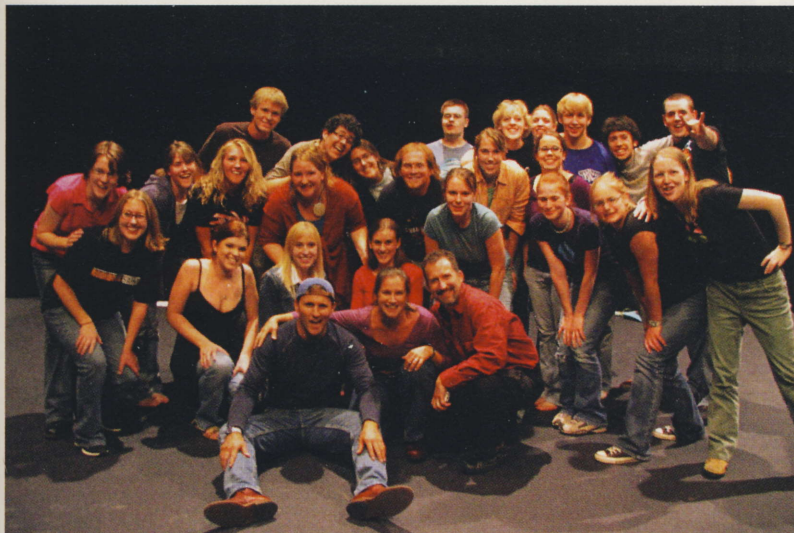
In an ending contrary to the Bard's tragic tales, that is precisely what happened when Tyrus Lemerande, a Californian, met Amy McLaughlin of Marshfield. After completing master's degrees in fine arts in theatre—his from Penn State and hers from the Trinity Rep Conservatory—fate brought them to Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, a traveling acting troupe based in Virginia. Lemerande and McLaughlin were cast as *Romeo and Juliet* and a true-to-life love story ensued. The former football standout and U.S. Naval Reserve Lieutenant Commander married the professional actress shortly thereafter.

But even before they tied the knot, the couple bound themselves to each other in the summer of 2003 by founding the Knighthorse Theatre Company. The couple wanted to spend more time acting and less time with the bureaucracy of a large repertory company.

"We want the audience to see what we see," Tyrus said. "Shakespeare's themes are archetypal and they are as relevant today as they were in the 1500s. We work hard to understand him, and our goal is to help our audience understand what they formerly might not have."

The traveling troupe performs throughout the United States as well as in venues overseas. School systems, typically high schools and colleges, hire Knighthorse to supplement their curriculum. In classroom workshops, they work with students to enlighten specific plays.

The company's Shakespearean Jukebox is a frequently requested performance. In it, the audience asks a ques-



The Knighthorse Theatre Company engages its audience and sheds new light on Shakespeare's classics.

tion about a specific act or character and Lemerande and McLaughlin spring into action with a series of scenes from that play. Moments later, Shakespeare's words and themes come to life. It is like a jukebox in that they move from scene to scene, from work to work, in an impressive display of Bardology.

Knighthorse's minimalist stage, lighting and costume design, is a departure from the big budgets typically associated with Shakespearean products. The couple travel with a few period costumes and a trunk of props. Performances are reminiscent of the Total Theatre tradition, initiated in classic Greek theatre and advanced by Richard Wagner; the actors are completely immersed with their audience. It's common to see them step off the stage and into the crowd, to request audience participation, or to escort brave volunteers onto their stage. In a nutshell, they are the proverbial one-man (and one-woman) band.

Morgan Wolfe, a Cape Cod elementary school student, experienced Shakespeare for the first time at Knighthorse's performance overlooking Mayo Beach in Wellfleet.

"They were funny, had lots of energy, and I couldn't wait to see what came next," says Wolfe. "They picked me out of the crowd to remind Romeo that he needed to return to Juliet. I was nervous and excited, all at the same time."

Becky Rosenberg, the director of the Wellfleet Recreation Department, says, "'Free Shakespeare on the Beach' is our biggest event of the year. Ty and Amy play to the biggest crowds of the summer and will be back in 2008. The harbor setting with the sun going down adds drama to their theatrics."

For centuries, Shakespeare has frustrated students, young and old. If you're one of them, check out a Knighthorse Theatre Company production and maybe you'll dig out those dusty books and read with renewed vigor. It goes without saying that a Knighthorse production guarantees you won't need Cliff Notes.

—Tom Keer

Knighthorse Theatre Company; Tyrus Lemerande and Amy McLaughlin Lemerande, www.knighthorse.org; 814-442-6072

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Knighthorse Theatre Company will be presenting Free Shakespeare at Mayo Beach every Monday and Tuesday night in July and August at 7 p.m. at the Baker's Field Tent in Wellfleet.

Mondays, the "Shakespearean Jukebox" will be turned on for an evening of interactive and inspiring fun. Tuesdays, Knighthorse will perform their original two-person adaptation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" titled "What Fools These Mortals Be."

Both shows are appropriate for audiences of all ages. Come on out and experience the wonder of Knighthorse Theatre Company. They are unlike anything you have ever seen. They make Shakespeare "cool" again.