

This reading series has been crafted with the theatre lover in mind; we celebrate what engages us, excites us, inspires us about this mysterious, wondrous pastime of telling stories from a wooden platform.

THE SEEDS OF BANQUO

by Angela Iannone

I confess, Shakespeare's *MACBETH* holds a special place in my heart. For one, the title character is one of very few anti-heroes in the canon, offering a daunting challenge to play fully, without hope for a great cathartic reward at the end. On a lighter note, however, my second attempt remains extremely memorable, since that's what brought Ms. Deborah Staples into my life as "my" murderous partner, Lady M.

The play also figures prominently in Bill Cain's *EQUIVOCATION*, which depicts Shakespeare in the flesh in 1606, poised to write one of his darkest, most powerful tragedies. It's fascinating to be a fly on the wall as a great play takes shape under the master's hand.



This confluence of "The Scottish Play" [Substitute name for *MACBETH* to avoid bad luck.] at Next Act will be made complete with a highly animated reading of Angela Iannone's remarkable creation, *THE SEEDS OF BANQUO*. Her play chronicles two rehearsal days in the life of famed American tragedian Edwin Booth, during which he reveals his brilliant psychological in-

sights about *MACBETH*, as well as his need for command and control within his theatrical troupe. Iannone has captured what was certainly Booth's great charisma, his intensity, wit, intelligence and theatrical power as shown in a mere rehearsal setting.

At this one-night reading of *THE SEEDS OF BANQUO*, Next Act audiences will enjoy the double reflection of the inner workings of a great Shakespearean play and a legendary actor's approach to mining the deep, complex truths which lie within.

THE SEEDS OF BANQUO
Monday, February 12 • 7:30 PM
Tickets \$15

THE BOOK OF WILL

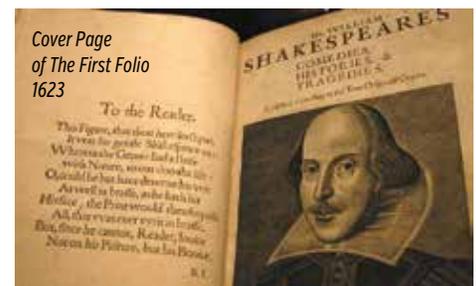
by Lauren Gunderson

Back in the ol' days, 1980-86, I had the distinct good fortune to serve as a founding acting company member of the fledgling Shakespearean troupe, American Players Theatre, in Spring Green. Those were formative, if turbulent, years for many of us as young actors. That theater on the hill was my apprenticeship studio where I developed a deeper appreciation for an art form which, up until then, I had treated more lightly than it deserved.

We went our own way out at APT, guided and inspired by the artistic founders who wanted to give back to Mr. Shakespeare his clear, unfiltered voice, unencumbered by heavy directorial concepts, inept movie stars or the slicing and dicing of the texts. Some judged us artistically naive, but the impulse to clear the way for the three most powerful tools at our disposal - language, thought and imagination - was the right one, and still applies to any sort of play which depends upon words.

Another formidable tool which came to be deployed at APT was a weighty volume of the Shake-

spearean collection of plays known as The First Folio. This collection was compiled primarily by two of Shakespeare's closest friends and colleagues, actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. The book was actually an act of belated desperation, partly spurred by the death of Shakespeare himself, then of lead actor Richard Burbage, suggesting the imminent dissolution of the "old guard" of players, scribes, prompters and managers who had known, spoken and lived the plays. Many did not exist in printed form; there was a real danger much of Shakespeare's work would be lost, or bastardized beyond all recognition.



A LOVE AFFAIR

Lauren Gunderson's love for Shakespeare has drawn from her this heartfelt homage to the passionate, determined men and women whom we have to thank for the best preserved copies of most (but not all) of The Bard's remarkable plays. She channels her love through Henry and John, who, when the chips are down, seek refuge and inspiration from within their chosen way of life, the theatre. And as we hear why they trust in make-believe, we believe also, in the power and glory of the art of storytelling. Gunderson's play aims straight for the heart of theatre lovers, and we can't wait to share her story with you. Please join us.

THE BOOK OF WILL
Tuesday, February 20 • 7:30 PM
Tickets \$15