UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Dose of Levity

Let’s say you’re part of a theater company and you’re itching to do Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” in front of a live audience after 18 months of virtual shows. What do you do? You take it outside.

And that’s what UC Santa Barbara’s acclaimed Naked Shakes has planned: live performances of the Bard’s romantic comedy on the Commencement Green next to the Campus Lagoon.

Performances are Friday, Oct. 1, at 4 p.m., Oct. 2 at noon and Oct. 3 at 1 p.m. Those who wish to attend any show must fill out a COVID-19 screening survey in advance. Guests should bring a chair or blanket as seating will not be provided on the lawn. Snacks and drinks are welcome, but alcohol is not permitted. Maintain a six-foot distance from others and wear a mask.

If a dose of theatrical levity feels like the right thing to do after 18 months of pandemic, it’s entirely intentional, said Irwin Appel, who adapted and directs the play.

“ ‘Twelfth Night’ is a play about reunion, about coming back together,” said Appel, professor and chair of the Department of Theater and Dance. “That’s what makes it a perfect play for this moment.”

As Appel notes, many people don’t know that Shakespeare had a son named Hamnet who died at age 11. His twin sister, Judith, survived. Early in his career Shakespeare wrote a zany farce about twins, “The Comedy of Errors.” But in

“Twelfth Night,” he tells the story of twins, a boy and a girl, who are separated in a shipwreck and seemingly dead to one another.

“In the end they are reunited in a beautiful final scene in the play,” Appel said. “So Shakespeare did with ‘Twelfth Night’ what he couldn’t do in real life: He brought brother and sister alive and together again. This fact about the passing of Shakespeare’s son, along with the knowledge that ‘Twelfth Night’ was probably written soon after his death occurred, has always been very moving to me.

“Also,” he added, “for over 20 years I’ve wanted to open ‘Twelfth Night’ down by the UCSB Lagoon with a boat coming up the water. In this production, we are finally going to make that happen. At least I hope we can pull it off!”

This being the middle of a pandemic, the company had to take special precautions, Appel said.

“Of course we’re all nervous about the delta variant, and we are attempting to be as safe and cautious as possible,” he said. “Every member of the cast is vaccinated and it was the cast members’ idea to volunteer to be tested every week. The students are very serious about this production succeeding, and I am thrilled to be part of this with them.”

For Naked Shakes, “Twelfth Night” represents new territory of sorts: It’s the first time they’ve performed outdoors. Appel says it won’t be the last.

“Pandemic or no, we believe this is the start of something very exciting — outdoor theater at UCSB,” he said. “We should have done it years ago! We hope our audiences will enjoy coming out in the beautiful weather, sitting on their blanket or camp chair soaking in the beauty of the play and the locale. We hope everyone will be caught up in the emotion of the celebration and that we will all feel like the twins, Viola and Sebastian, that we have been reunited at last!”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary

collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.