

“Sharing Shakespeare” the Willow Globe Way Theatrical Event: “Sharing Shakespeare”,
Organizer: the Willow Globe, July 4th and 10th, 2016

Writing about the “Sharing Shakespeare” event, about the Willow Globe – Shakespeare Link in Wales, UK, and particularly about Susanna Best and Philip Bowen, the people behind all these, is an exercise of both incredible pleasure and tremendous responsibility – it is a story of the beauty of Wales, the magic of the Willow Globe and the incredible natural and familiar way in which theatre and community are linked to each other and to Shakespeare. In short, it is about things made out of love.

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The Willow Globe is an outdoor theatre build out of willow trees in the backyard of Susanna Best and Philip Bowen’s most wonderful home. It is a smaller version of the London Globe, but with at least the same amount of magic and character. It hosts various activities, from workshops to productions, professional and community based. The Willow is administered by Shakespeare Link, a company founded by Susanna Best and Philip Bowen, both of them being experienced theatre professionals, with projects developed at companies such as Royal Shakespeare Company, the English Shakespeare Company, the Royal Opera House and the Old Vic. As stated on their website, “at the heart of Shakespeare Link’s work, there is a passion for bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds to explore and enjoy these amazing plays” – and so it was for this event!

Between July 4th and 10th, 2016, the Willow Globe organized “Sharing Shakespeare”, an event which put together delegates from different places of the world (UK, USA, Canada, Latvia and Romania) with locals (professionals or theatre goers and volunteers), offering them the time and space to present their work on Shakespeare, developed in different communities. The multitude of events combined presentations of the delegates’ Shakespeare projects with talks by guests via Skype, workshops with students, have a goes, numerous live theatre performances, culminating with “Timon of Athens” from the Factory, presented under a superb circus tent, put up next to the Willow, and a live relay of a “Romeo and Juliet” production from London at the local art centre. It was a most powerful experience to encounter theatre professionals who have developed theatre projects using Shakespeare’s plays with people in Mozambique, India, in the Calais “Jungle” refugee camp, in a Romanian prison or with children in Italy and from the dark neighborhoods of New York and so many others. The power, importance and naturalness of community theatre never felt stronger, and so did Shakespeare’s stories and spirit.

These were, in short, the “writable” activities, numerous and attractive, intelligently and carefully combined, each one mirroring different facets. “Sharing Shakespeare” was an experience for mind, heart and soul. What Sue Best and Phil Bowen are doing through Shakespeare Link at the Willow Globe is, possibly, one of the best melting pots possibly imagined, combining different cultures and types of creating theatre, which they manage to bring together at a highly personal and professional level, at the very same time.

What stands behind these activities – sharing silent moments, taking walks, eating and singing together, Sue and Phil cherishing and patiently nourishing each one of the guests, introducing them to the others and making sure that everyone has a voice – is the layer that won’t fit in any kind of description.

The combination between these two layers, between the “what” and the “how” rarely converges as beautifully and elegantly as it did in this case. It is probably a mirror of the magical combination of Sue Best and Phil Bowen’s (and of their wonderful supporters of all kinds) energy and imagination and generosity to bring together people and the spirit of Shakespeare – which was their main goal. And their home, in the heart of nature, is the perfect environment for connecting people, among each other and with Shakespeare’s work, in a serene combination between culture and nature, for empowering people to meet, talk, collaborate, and to bring hearts together through theatre.

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