

About **SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS**

SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS is an unexpectedly delightful documentary that follows the casting, rehearsal, and presentation of Shakespeare's play, **THE TEMPEST**, by convicted felons inside Kentucky's Luther Lockett Correctional Complex. Winner of eight film festival awards, **SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS** smashes many of our long held notions about prisoners and criminals as we watch these remarkably unique actors prepare. Ultimately, we get to see the human psyche unfold in all of its complexities, as these men, ostracized from society, reveal their kindness, generosity and faith. In the process, we accompany them as they discover the power of truth, forgiveness and transformation.

"A remarkable, moving experience. Surprising and satisfying. The film poses tough questions about the nature of forgiveness [with] a generosity of spirit."

-- James Greenberg, Hollywood Reporter

Marking their seventh year as an acting ensemble, the inmates cast themselves according to their lives, and in relation to the crimes for which they were convicted. Just as in Shakespeare's day, men play all the female roles. They swear that the roles "pick them," and this proves to be an uncanny truth, as many of the men experience powerful epiphanies while exploring their characters. Twice a week, the inmates work with volunteer director Curt Tofteland, who pushes them to find their own truth within their roles in *The Tempest*, a play fittingly about forgiveness.

Striking parallels arise between actor and inmate, the text and their lives. On the surface level, the men rehearse with Tofteland, alone in their cells, or with each other on the yard. They experiment with different ways to deliver lines and gestures - how to change the meaning of a scene with one subtle stroke. On a deeper level, this constant searching within a character mirrors the constant search within the men themselves to find meaning in their past actions and present lives. The film shows men who are, in some ways, stuck in time, constantly replaying the text and gestures of their own crimes, wondering what subtle stroke would have changed their fate. But it also shows these men searching deeply to discover the reasons that they committed murder, rape, or robbery, and trying to come to terms and move forward.

SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS does not glorify these men or excuse their crimes, but rather attempts to take a more humane look at them as human beings, not merely felons. Over the course of the year and the film, we see these men changed - enriched, challenged, awakened, and fulfilled.

"Profoundly moving. Any minute of this documentary packs more punch than the entirety of most triumph-of-the-human-spirit blockbusters."

-- Jan Stuart, Newsday

"Riveting. The timelessness and eternal relevance of Shakespeare is once again proved in the most unlikely of settings with the most unlikely of players. Truly moving."

-- David Noh, Film Journal

Illinois Shakespeare Festival & The Documentary Project
present

SHAKESPEARE BEHIND BARS

Shakespeare Behind Bars

Film Screening followed by a Q & A with Curt L. Tofteland,
Founder & Artistic Director of Shakespeare Behind Bars
Wednesday, February 11, 2009, 7:00 p.m.
Normal Theatre

Interdisciplinary* Colloquium & Reception

School of Theatre, School of Communication
Thursday, February 12, 2009, 1:00-3:00 p.m.
University Galleries, Center for the Visual Arts, Room 110

*This is an opportunity for faculty, staff and students in theatre, communications, criminal justice, education, English, social work, psychology and sociology to join together to respond to the film and the issues it raises.

Co-sponsors

Criminal Justice Sciences, MECCPAC (A dean of Students Diversity Initiative),
SAGE Fund, School of Theatre and Women's Project

Contact

- Janet Wilson, School of Theatre, 8-8949 or jmwilso4@ilstu.edu
- Please let Janet know what sections of what classes (and how many students are in them) that will be required to attend these events.

"Fascinating. A one-of-a-kind look at a world most of us never have to deal with."
-- Jeffrey Lyons, NBC's Reel Talk

"**** Extraordinary. Thrilling to watch." -- Ken Fox, TV Guide.com

"Powerful. Ingenious." -- Matt Singer, Village Voice

"Marvel at the transformative power of art. Find freedom in performance and release in words." -
- Jeannette Catsoulis, New York Times

"Uplifting. Gives hope that forgiveness and redemption are possible."
-- Jami Bernard, NY Daily News

-  Documentary Competition – Sundance Film Festival
-  Official Selection – Edinburgh Film Festival
-  Special Jury Prize – Independent Film Festival of Boston
-  Director's Choice Award – Bluegrass Film Festival
-  Best of Show – Bend Film Festival
-  Audience Award – Orinda Film Festival
-  Best Feature Film – River's Edge Film Festival
-  Crystal Heart Winner – Heartland Film Festival
-  Best Documentary – Bethel Film Festival
-  Best Documentary – Ojai Film Festival
-  Opening Night – Bethel Film Festival
-  Opening Night – Williamstown Film Festival

Nashville Film Festival, Woodstock Film Festival, Aspen Film Festival, Provincetown Film Festival, Maine Independent Film Festival, Tahoe International Film Festival, Waterfront Film Festival, Leeds International Film Festival

Released in association with Shout Factory!

A Philomath Films Production in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and the BBC.