

Did you know that Shakespeare knew who Robin Hood was? For those of you who attended our *As You Like It* in Willow Street park, you may have noticed the reference—Duke Senior has been banished to the Forest of Arden with his men “and there they live like the Robin Hood of old.” Of ‘old’ is right! The legend of Robin Hood was already hundreds of years old in Shakespeare’s time—in *Henry IV, Part 2*, the character Silence sings the ballad of “Robin Hood, Scarlet and John” as a reference to what many in Shakespeare’s time considered England’s “Golden Age.” But was it as golden as they believed? We sat down with Doug Brook, the playwright behind #SVShakes’ World Premiere production of *The Hood of Sherwood* to discuss the famous outlaw, the World Premiere script, and the playwriting process.

**Q: Why Robin Hood?**

A: For our 20th season, we talked about doing a classic that doesn’t get seen onstage often. The first time I saw this stage in the woods, seeing *The Taming of the Shrew* here in 2006, one of the first things I thought was, “this would be a great place for a Robin Hood play.” Also, it didn’t hurt that some of Shakespeare’s contemporaries (Ben Jonson and Anthony Munday) wrote Robin Hood plays.

**Q: There are LOTS of Robin Hoods out there. Some with accents. Some without. Some dashing. Some scary. What makes your take a unique one?**

A: This Robin Hood is more like the earlier stories portray him rather than how movies have ‘Hollywoodized’ him. He lost fights, he was an outlaw, he made mistakes... What makes this play different is these elements that make him more human. We also dig into characters that we don’t usually see represented: Alan-a-Dale, Ellen-a-Dale, and the Prioress. One of the intentions of the play is that it’s about the entire community, the neighborhood - the actual “hood” of Sherwood.

**Q: What kind of relevance does *The Hood of Sherwood* have on today’s modern audience? What would you like audiences to take home with them?**

A: Robin Hood’s story has been around 1000 years, so it obviously has timeless qualities. Oppressive and oppressed, what is against the law vs. what actually harms society, what makes a hero—especially in this play. People will find relevance from a lot of these characters and a lot of events probably even beyond what I might think is relevant, and that’s part of the point. I want people to take away that they were entertained, that there’s more to a lot of these stories than we’re used to hearing and whatever might strike them on deeper levels.

**Q: Robin Hood vs. Spiderman. Who wins?**

A: There’s no way to say. With Robin Hood’s location in Sherwood Forest, he couldn’t get to Spiderman. And Spiderman’s super powers don’t include time travel.

**Q: What’s the most surprising thing you discovered during your research?**

A: How well Robin and the Sherriff of Nottingham got along! There are numerous stories where Robin invites the Sheriff to the forest and they have dinner, and chat...and there are times where he goes to visit the Sheriff. It was a lot more interactive and civilized than we are used to seeing. I found the quantity of it surprising and very refreshing! Villains are so often the curlicue-

mustached characters—it reminds us that they're real people and that there are more levels than just right and wrong.

**Q: Shakespeare never wrote an actual Robin Hood play, although Robin was a popular figure in drama during Shakespeare's time. In your research, did you come across any of these plays?**

Yes, many! I am not a fan of some of the Robin Hood plays I read. I loved Ben Jonson's play "The Sad Shepherd" although it was never finished, and I think it's indicative of what a Shakespeare play might have looked like. I think it would have been epic. So many historical characters are colored by how Shakespeare portrayed them...Cleopatra, Julius Caesar... I think it would be fascinating to see how Robin Hood would have been perceived NOW if Shakespeare had created him as a character.

**Q: There was a public workshop of this play in April of 2017. Did you find that workshopping the script was helpful in developing the final product?**

A: Greatly! There were a few drafts and table reads, but there is nothing like getting it in front of an audience to see what is working. It showed things that could be emphasized, things that could be cut, it revealed where questions were going to be asked and we got to decide which ones to answer and which ones could be left open ended. I got extremely valuable feedback from female audience members. It was important to me that the female characters in *Hood of Sherwood* were not only represented well in regards to the folklore, but also in regards to themselves as complete characters. We saw things that the audience reacted to that we didn't expect. It's always immensely helpful because if you go straight from writing to rehearsal, you're working in a vacuum—scripts aren't literature, they're instruction manuals and the only way to really see if they're working is to put them to work. It's just like when you read Shakespeare rather than putting it on stage—it wasn't meant to be simply read, it's meant to be living on stage.

**Q: And speaking of women... Can you elaborate a bit more on what drove you to spend a little more time exploring and featuring the female characters in this production?**

A: While there were many, many male characters throughout the Robin Hood sources, there were few women. I wanted as balanced a play as feasible, so I pulled in almost every one I could find, happy to expose people to some characters they probably don't know. The few people giving me regular feedback during the writing process happened to be women. After the workshop performance, one of the actors lamented that all female characters don't have to be romantically involved with men. All the merry women had been, though not by design. So, after the workshop performance, I redid one of them. In trying to decide who she is, I figured to have her be Earine, a character from Ben Jonson's Robin Hood play. As Robin says in the play, "in my experience, one woman has the sense of ten men." That might get me in trouble with some guys, but oh well.

**Q: What would you say to an audience member coming to see your play for the first time?**

A: Enjoy! Be prepared to see things you don't expect, and hopefully to be inspired by characters who are a little more real and a little more relevant to our everyday lives than we might be used

to from many Robin Hood stories. Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare, “He was not for an age, but for all time” – much like Robin Hood has proved to be.