

Shakespeare brings Malawi to Cape Town

'The Comedy of Errors' – The Fugard Theatre – Friday, 13th March – 7.00 p.m.

The Shakespeare Schools Festival is celebrating its tenth anniversary in South Africa. Our Festival in Malawi (Central Africa) is only in its fourth year but has already come a long way. Last November some four hundred young people and their teachers, representing twelve schools and one youth group from all three regions of Malawi, gathered at Kamuzu Academy to perform shortened versions of twelve Shakespeare plays and more sonnets. They included primary and secondary schools, the children of government ministers and subsistence farmers, schools which lack books (let alone desks) and the 'Eton of Africa'. Two deaf schools were especially welcome! It was a remarkable occasion and it proved the power of Shakespeare (in words known well to all South Africans) to effect '!ke e: |xarra ||ke'. You will find the record of our work at <<http://shakespeare.fritillary.org>>.

We have been supported in this endeavour by friends in many countries, but especially by Kseniya Filinova-Bruton, director of the Shakespeare Schools Festival – South Africa. Over four years her encouragement has been unfailing and her support in providing texts and material generous and unstinting. At the end of our Festival in Malawi we are able to present certificates attesting to participation in the South African Festival. The sense of belonging to a pan-African movement is important to those involved: few have seen Africa beyond Malawi, and some are leaving their home villages for the first time. Although independent, we are pleased to consider our work in Malawi a daughter to the South African Festival, which is a constant inspiration.

Many Thanks (Baie Dankie and Zikomo Kwambili) to Kseniya for her invitation to bring together our two Festivals in Cape Town! On Wednesday, 11th March eleven pupils and three teachers from Kamuzu Academy will travel from Lilongwe to Cape Town. The Kamuzu Academy Drama Club (under the direction of Lloyd William Parker, himself a graduate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and Dionne Wright) will perform a shortened version of 'The Comedy of Errors' at the Fugard Theatre on Friday, 13th March. This will be the Drama Club's first experience of performing (or indeed, of watching drama) in a professional theatre, and pupils look forward both to the challenge and to engaging with young people similarly involved from South African schools! They will have a few days to see the 'Mother City' before returning to Malawi on Tuesday, 17th March.

Kamuzu Academy was selected to represent Malawi as the host institution. (Although it is hoped that other Malawi schools will travel to South Africa in future, and indeed, that South African schools will travel to Malawi.) It was established by the first post-Independence President of Malawi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda to be the 'Eton of Africa'. It is located in rural Kasungu district at the site of the kachere tree under which the Ngwazi sat to learn his alphabet as a boy. A distinctive feature of the school is the teaching of Greek and Latin. Lloyd, together with the Drama Club, has re-established a tradition of annual Greek plays, which has proven just as successful as the Shakespeare Festival. Last year Athol Fugard's 'The Island' was also performed, providing an immediate connection to Cape Town (and Madiba's incarceration on Robben Island). Kamuzu Academy's party includes two Government scholars, representing Likoma and Mulanje districts, who won their places at the school against competition from all other pupils in the country. Their airfare is being met by kind friends in South Africa and the UK.

Kamuzu Academy is delighted and honoured to have been invited to represent the 'Warm Heart of Africa' at the tenth Shakespeare Schools Festival – South Africa in Cape Town. We look forward to seeing you on the night and we hope you enjoy the performance!

Richard L. Hewitt

Director, Shakespeare Schools Festival – Malawi