



BEYOND THE STAGE

Dramaturgy Notes for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival



THE WINTER'S TALE LEADS TO SUMMER STORIES

Since 2015, the Sutter Family Shakespeare Scholarship has helped promising acting students in the School of Theatre and Dance at Illinois State University. The Sutter Family Shakespeare Scholarship is part of a generous donation from Craig B. Sutter, in memory of his mother, G. Jean Sutter, and father, H. Everett Sutter, who were themselves longtime patrons of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival (ISF). Sutter has previously helped provide for the ice cream socials where Festival attendees and the cast have had a chance to mingle while enjoying a cold bowl on a warm night, often with a backdrop of stars.

NOVEMBER 2019

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Students who are interested in the scholarship complete a competitive auditioning process, using Shakespearean monologues as a base to help them show case their acting talents. While many students

audition for the scholarship each year, there is only a single recipient. The lucky recipient gains valuable professional work experience as an intern in the Illinois

Shakespeare Festival, and a monetary scholarship that will follow them through their undergraduate years at Illinois State.

This year's newest scholarship recipient is Nora McKirdie, a freshman from the Chicago Academy for the Arts. The scholarship was awarded at ISF's 2020 Season Announcement on October 28, where McKirdie performed a selection from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. At the Chicago Academy for the Arts, McKirdie both acted and directed theatre. Interestingly enough, she was in the ensemble of *She Kills Monsters* in 2017, the same year the production went up in the School of Theatre and Dance. McKirdie also performed in the academy production of *columbinus*, a docudrama about high school students that includes dramatization of events at Columbine, and directed scenes from *Parlour Song* by Jez Butterworth, which included dialect work as well.

We asked McKirdie about her performance history, the scholarship, and her plans for her future at Illinois State University and with ISF:

1. What attracted you to Illinois State University and the School of Theatre and Dance (SOTD)?

The rigorous program. The endless opportunities to be involved in theatre. Coming from a performing arts high school, I was given a taste of what it was like to practice my art on a daily basis, and I did not want to



Nora McKirdie performing a monologue at ISF's 2020 Season Announcement.

lose that. The SOTD offers great training that will allow me to better myself as an actor.

2. What does your performance history look like, any stand-out roles? Anything that was particularly powerful to you?

I first started performing when I was three years old in *The Field* and have been performing ever since. In high school, I played Mrs. Martin in *The Bald Soprano*, Armande in *Learned Ladies*, Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cloten in a gender-bent production of *Cymbeline*, and Elinor in Kate Hamill's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, which was a lot of fun. I was also involved in a production of *columbinus* that was especially challenging and powerful. The cast bonded in a really amazing way as we handled the heavy subject matter with care and caution so that we could deliver the fears of high school students in America responsibly to an audience.

3. How did you feel about the Sutter Scholarship audition process?

I was excited about the opportunity that the Sutter Scholarship brings. Every audition is nerve-wracking, but I was happy to showcase my monologue and hear some great feedback that helped me approach my piece differently.

4. What was your monologue? How did you choose it?

I did Paulina's monologue from *The Winter's Tale*. I had played her before in my senior year of high school. I

have never felt stronger than when I portrayed her, so I thought it would be the best piece to bring into an audition room. I would like to play her for many years to come.

5. Were you familiar with the Illinois Shakespeare Festival before the auditioning process?

Yes, and I had hoped it would be part of my future one day.

6. What are your hopes for the 2020 ISF season, and is there a show that you are particularly excited for?

I just hope to absorb as much information as possible from the experience. I am sure that it will be a positive foundation for my pursuit of a professional future in theatre. I am excited about *Measure for Measure*. I have only had the pleasure of reading it so I cannot wait to see it on its feet.

We at ISF cannot wait to see what McKirdie brings to the Festival and how we can mutually grow from the experience.