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How Online Social Media is Revolutionizing Shakespearean Theatres

By Amanda Wilk



Introduction

In the past few years online social media tools (OSM) such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have changed the way

people are interacting and communicating with one another. Young adults are one demographic that has widely adopted these new technologies. Classical theatres have begun utilizing online social media to market themselves to the public. Interestingly, they have also gone beyond using these tools for marketing, and have developed new performances that incorporate OSM tools. The development of new marketing strategies and new performances are beginning to result in the creation of new audiences engaged with Shakespearean and Classical theatre.

New Marketing

Theatres have begun to use online social media tools to market themselves to audiences. The use of online social media has proven to be successful for recruiting new audiences and developing a community of theatre supporters. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival – the largest Shakespearean theatre company in North America (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.) – has utilized all of the aforementioned tools to attract new audiences. This had been extremely beneficial as it has made their theatre appear more approachable and has allowed people of all ages (including young

adults) to connect with this theatre festival. Links to the Stratford Shakespeare Festival's Facebook page, Twitter feed and YouTube channel are provided below. Their YouTube channel could be of particular use to teachers or librarians as it provides insight into many theatrical works.

Facebook:
<http://www.facebook.com/StratfordFestival>

Twitter:
<http://twitter.com/stratfest>

YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/stratfordfestival>

New Performances

Social media has not only changed the way theatres are marketing themselves to audiences – it has also completely changed some performances of Shakespearean theatre.

For example, Twitter has been used to recreate one of Shakespeare's most famous plays: *Romeo and Juliet*. In April of 2010, the Royal Shakespeare Company developed the first professionally acted Twitter Shakespearean play entitled: *Such Tweet Sorrow* (Cimolino, 2010). Over a five week period, actors tweeted to one another and their followers from the point of view of

characters in *Romeo and Juliet*. They roughly followed the storyline set out by Shakespeare, but reset the story in modern day London (Cimolino, 2010, *Such Tweet Sorrow*, n.d.). This daring theatrical experiment is only one example of how theatre companies are beginning to use online social media to develop new kinds of performances, and in the future we are likely to see even more experimentation using social media tools.

But don't let theatre companies have all the fun. Developing a Shakespearean Twitter performance would be a great programming idea for a public library, or could even be implemented as an assignment in an English classroom.

Conclusion

Online social media is changing the way we interact with the world around us. It is also changing how theatre companies are attracting new audiences. Interestingly, online social media is not only being used by theatres for marketing and promotion, but is also being used to recreate Shakespearean performances in a new setting. Performances like *Such Tweet Sorrow* show how social media can successfully be used to recreate the works of Shakespeare. Such performances can be used to introduce

young adults to Shakespeare and demonstrate to them how accessible and relevant Shakespeare remains today.

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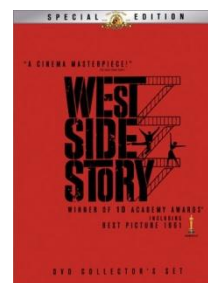
Modern Musical Adaptations

By Amanda Wilk

Introduction

One reason the works of Shakespeare are so brilliant is because the stories that he tells are timeless and can be reinterpreted and retold, illuminating countless themes in any time period. The following four musicals demonstrate how transferable the works of Shakespeare are and illustrate the timelessness of his works.

West Side Story



West Side Story is a musical retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which is reset on the streets of New York (Background Book, 2009). The story focuses on two gangs vying for control of the streets: the Jets: Native New Yorkers and the Sharks: Puerto Rican immigrants (Background Book, 2009). Tony, a reluctant member of the Jets meets Maria, the sister of the Sharks leader at a dance and they fall in love (Background Book, 2009). Though Maria and Tony try to live in peace they are