

## No Holds Bard

Dan Beaulieu jokingly compares himself to Sid, the evil re-engineering teen from *Toy Story*. Like Sid, Beaulieu is fond of reassembly. Unlike Sid, he's gracious and affable. And he's reworking the plays of William Shakespeare, not toys. His goal is to make these performances accessible. "There are so many barriers to entry for Shakespeare and so many myths to debunk," he says.

Beaulieu, 32, is the cofounder and artistic director of Seven Stages Shakespeare Company in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He divides his weeks between the New Hampshire seacoast, where he was born and raised, and Brooklyn, New York. In April, he appeared in *Pericles: Recomposed*, a production by Passion in Practice, an esteemed British Shakespeare company. Every other week, he and Seven Stages' managing director, Kevin Condardo, discuss all things Shakespeare on their podcast, *No Holds Bard*.

An unlucky break—or lucky, depending upon your point of view—led Beaulieu to theater. After he fractured his knee playing ice hockey, his parents enrolled Beaulieu in a theater program. "I became addicted," he says. He studied musical theater at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), discovering Shakespeare while studying in London his junior year. Beaulieu draws on his athletic experience when directing or acting. "I think of theater as a sport and rehearsals as practice," he says.

Beaulieu met Christine Penney, another UNH theater grad, during a performance



of *Julius Caesar* in 2009. Penney established Portsmouth's Shakespeare in Prescott Park in 2011 and asked Beaulieu to direct *Much Ado about Nothing* the following year. Together they founded Seven Stages in 2012; Condardo, also a UNH alum, joined in 2013.

Beaulieu enjoys restyling the Bard's work, making it more appealing to modern audiences. Keenly aware that Shakespeare's works were written to be heard, not read, he and his codirectors present what he calls "dirt-on-our-knees Shakespeare:" live performances presented in a variety of environments around Portsmouth, including scenic Prescott Park overlooking the Piscataqua River and, occasionally, 3S Artspace. The company's most popular effort, ShakesBEERience, brings bar patrons at the Press Room together with actors reading Shakespeare while sipping beer.

Some Seven Stages performances are topical and even political. In 2014, amid controversy over local noise ordinances and a resident's suggestion that art belongs behind closed doors, actors gathered in downtown Portsmouth to perform *Coriolanus*, a play about a Roman leader's tragic defiance of popular rule. The entire play was whispered. "It was a peaceful protest," says Beaulieu.

↑ Dan Beaulieu, artistic director of Seven Stages Shakespeare Company in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

→ Poster by Tim Jacobs

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"We wanted to point out that if you take away the artist's voice, what are you left with?"

Beaulieu and Condardo's *No Holds Bard* podcast was recently chosen by National Public Radio's earbud.fm as one of its top 200 podcasts. From tackling hapless high school students' English assignments to advising listeners how to inject Shakespeare phrases into everyday conversation, the duo breathes life and humor into



what could easily be a dry subject. They've dissected their fantasy baseball and hockey teams—populated entirely by Shakespeare characters—and mused about who to include on a Shakespeare pizza. "A big part of the dynamic is having a conversation like we're sitting on the couch or talking over a beer," Beaulieu says. "I'd like to think it's our erudite conversation skills that draw people in, but we have fun."

—Debbie Kane

[7stagesshakespeare.org](http://7stagesshakespeare.org)