

'Ancient grudge' yields to Bravo! for area's culture

**By Barry Densa Community Crank
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I think it's fair to say that I tend to be rather cynical and sarcastic. On my better days, some might consider me snide and obnoxious. And, if you haven't noticed, I complain a lot.

Nonetheless, there are occasions when my dark vision of surrounding circumstance surrenders, kicking and screaming, to a bright, grateful and complimentary observation.

So let me now tell you of an out-of-the-ordinary tale of pleasant surprise and surrender. It takes place against a backdrop of tragic murder and suicide.

As we all know, it's much easier and sometimes safer to say "no" rather than "yes" when dealing with a spousal request. So when the wife asked if I'd like to see "Romeo and Juliet" at the Carlin Park amphitheater, I of course said no.

Generally speaking, I don't go to the theater — and for an admittedly odd reason.

I spent a good 10 years of my long-ago youth as a professional actor. Maybe you remember me from "General Hospital." Maybe not. If you blinked too often, you missed me as one of those endless doctors crisscrossing the screen.

Or, if you frequented off-off-off-Broadway in the early seventies, well, you probably missed me again.

Anyway, I eventually boxed up the grease paint, shunned my infatuation with fame, fortune, and the pursuit of Tony, Emmy and Oscar (with attendant well-practiced acceptance speeches) and moved on to other, well, equally frivolous pursuits.

Yet, as time passed, and I found myself on the other side of the proscenium arch (in the audience) viewing either a stunning or pitiful performance, I'd squirm with resurgent desire to go for it again.

The cure was to remove the temptation by absenting myself from the theater in all capacity and allow myself to only view movies wherein mindless action and special effects — not acting — was the star attraction.

So now here comes the wife, decades later, suggesting that I sit on the grass, under a brutal Florida summer sun and watch a bunch of amateurs for two hours butcher what with all my years of intensive

and formal training, I was ever hesitant to approach: Shakespeare.

No, absolutely not!

So we went.

The program read: Shakespeare By The Sea.

I sniffed at the obvious comparison to Joseph Papp's Shakespeare in the Park, of New York City's Central Park fame. Irritating me further was the fact that we had arrived nearly two hours early, thanks to the wife misreading the schedule.

I heard once, or made it up and thought I heard it, that life is a matter of attitude. Accordingly, I forced a smile and hoped it would transform me from the outside in.

Then the audience, young and old, began to slowly troop in from every direction. They carried coolers and wicker picnic baskets, folding chairs and tables, linen and silverware, even vases with flowers. I was impressed. This was an experienced audience exhibiting engaging spirit and enviable elan. By comparison, my wife and I felt like paupers.

So, as punishment for bringing me in the first place, I sent her, the daughter and her friend home to prepare a picnic for us, while I zealously guarded our patch of grass up front.

By the time they returned there were nearly a thousand people camped on the hillside, and I, now with glass of wine in hand, was getting into the swing of things. I marveled at the stage and scenery design and the exotic Middle-Eastern music playing in the background.

Then, finally, the curtain went up (so to speak). An hour later it came down, for intermission. The wife turned and asked me if I had had enough. If I wanted, she'd allow me to go home.

Well, I chose to stay.

For sure, most of the actors on stage should not consider giving up their day jobs. Romeo and Mercutio were acceptable though, and Juliet had a few rare moments. Nevertheless, it was the ensemble — the production, the majesty of Shakespeare's genius, the evening sky, the audience and Jupiter itself — that was worthy and memorable.

Everyone, actors included, had clearly enjoyed themselves that evening. And for the provision and transmission of that joy, for the artistic expression, for that sense of community, and to the town of Jupiter and its sponsors for granting us the opportunity to revel in what can only, if inadequately, be described as culture, I say Bravo!

