

What Happened While Hero Was Dead Dramaturg's Note

Active Listening

In Shakespeare's time, people would go to hear a play. Nowadays, we're used to focusing on the visual elements of a play but listening to its words and sounds carefully can bring us towards a deeper understanding. Notice what you hear, and think about what each sound is designed to do—what *action* are they taking? The list below is designed as a source of inspiration to give your ears a starting place.

It might be useful to read through this list once before watching and again when the show ends. Let your ears lead you and leave behind what doesn't serve you. "Make passionate your sense of hearing."

- ◆ This show has a mixture of speech patterns— can you hear the shifts in language? What does it change about your feelings towards the characters speaking? Do you feel closer to them or farther away when they pronounce things "trippingly on the tongue," like in Shakespeare's time?
- ◆ What's happening offstage? This show imagines the scenes that are missing in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Shakespeare's scenes and ours have swapped places; what are the other characters doing while our show is happening? Where are they coming from, and where are they going when they leave?
- ◆ There are many scenes where the chorus takes us out of reality. These moments of counterpoint might give you a different perspective on the rest of the story. Notice how their movements and the different sounds (are they singing? shouting? yelling?) in those scenes make you feel about the more 'normal' scenes before and after them. Do they comment on the action, give you a break from the plot, or something completely different?
- ◆ Whose stories are not being told on this stage? What kinds of people are excluded from this play, or are forced to the background? No story can encompass everyone's experience, but what can you learn about ours from the ones we chose not to tell? (Like jazz, it's sometimes all about the notes you don't play). Some starting places might be the races, genders, and sexualities of the characters and actors. When do you hear from oppressed voices, and when are others speaking on their behalf?
- ◆ This show contains a good deal of obscenity, and discussions about things we usually don't talk about in public. What is your first reaction to hearing people talk about sex onstage? Does it make you feel uncomfortable or intrigued? Try to keep an open ear: the words the playwright chose are there to resonate. Do they create harmony or dissonance?

Happy listening,
Jenna Rowell & Camille Matlock