

MUCH ADO ABOUT SEBASTOPOL

•A Very Special Renaissance Faire•

PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES



Rydell Downward • Artistic Director
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WHAT IS A "FAIRE"?

In old England, towns were given royal charters to hold faires on certain holidays such as Saint's Days. These were festive occasions at which much business was done and much merriment was made. They were the social and commercial highlight of the year when people were able to obtain goods they might not otherwise have had available to them and gather together to celebrate in fellowship. The local alehouses shut their doors and moved their operations to the faire, and some laws were relaxed for the duration.

A **RENAISSANCE FAIRE** is a depiction of just such an event; a holiday faire held near a town or on its common. The intent is to create an immersive "time travel" experience which not only entertains the attending patrons, but informs and enlightens them about the world of the 16th century.

The streets are alive with the sights, sounds, entertainment, seasonal rituals and most importantly, the people who would be present at a holiday faire; the citizens of the local community from all walks of life, free of their laborious daily routines, celebrating this extraordinary occasion; traders from afar coming to sell their wares or make business deals with the local merchants; young lovers flirting and chasing one another through the lanes; diplomats and dignitaries following the train of the Queen hoping to secure an audience with her. Handcrafted items offered for sale to the public and hearty period food enhance the experience.

As much as possible the patrons are included as part of the show - as yet another traveler who's come to enjoy the pleasures of the faire. What we offer is something lacking in modern life; the opportunity to do more than passively receive entertainment through an electric box; at the faire the audience is able to interact with its entertainment - to engage in make-believe in a lively, dynamic and safe environment wherein they have an effect on the outcome of any encounter. They laugh and play and lose themselves in the illusion without realizing they're actually being taught some history in the process.

THEMATIC COHESION:

In order to assure that this historically-oriented environment is realistic and believable, that the illusion is complete, it is vital that all of our participants are committed to painting a picture as close to historically accurate as possible. While the public may not know anything about the 16th century, they will be able to recognize cracks in the illusion created by inconsistencies and anachronisms. And, since our purpose is in part educational, it does not serve our purpose to offer our public false or confusing representations of history.

On the other hand there are some harsh realities to 16th century life which we do not wish to depict. Everyone is perfectly aware of the imperfections of the past: Poor sanitation, racism, sexism, abject poverty, plague, brutal and unfair law enforcement, but portraying them would do little to create a friendly, festive atmosphere to which our patrons would like to return. What we put forward is the best of the Elizabethan world and what makes it fascinating.

There are also concessions to modern realities we must make. Adherence to fire, safety and health codes are vital, and their manifestations are always present. However, if we are weaving our web of illusion well enough, those artifacts will fade into the background to be barely noticed.

Otherwise, everything the patrons see, hear and experience should contribute to the illusion that they have walked into OUR place and time.

EDUCATION:

In order to be sure that we do not present an unclear or confusing picture of our place and time, it is important that all participants be well educated in the period; in the lives and customs of the people. We are not only entertainers, but teachers who use our performance to teach, and as teachers we need to know our subject.

Our period has an astounding amount of material written about it, and to absorb even a fraction of it is a daunting proposal, but we ask that everyone do their best to learn.

At very minimum we highly recommend that each participant read *The Compendium of Common Knowledge, Life in Elizabethan England* (<http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/home.html>), compiled by Maggie Pearce Secara. It is available as an interactive website, a PDF download or in a book form. It is written in a breezy, easily absorbed style, and is constantly being updated. Reading this alone will improve anyone's knowledge and understanding of the period enough to portray a basically believable character of the time, and it may inspire enough curiosity to spur studies into other areas.

WEBSITES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL:

<http://www.stgeorgenorth.org/resources>

<http://www.elizabethan.org/sites.html>

CHARACTERS:

In order to portray a three-dimensional character capable of realistic, spontaneous interaction, each participant needs to know the character they are portraying; who they are, what their place in life is, what they do for a living, who they're related to, what their relationships are to the people around them, what they're doing at the faire that day, what their chief personality traits are. This requires on every participant's part some careful thought and study. The more one knows about the people and the period, the easier it is to answer these questions and to portray a believable character.

The reality put forth at the faire is an amplified version of reality. For the most part, a true depiction of most people's daily lives, past or present, would be somewhat dull to observe; washing the dishes and reading the paper don't hold much fascination. What we present are the more memorable or revealing moments of the lives of our characters during an extraordinary occasion. A "pure" historical re-enactment such as at Colonial Williamsburg might feature a goodwife demonstrating how to churn butter, but how much more exciting would it be if she spent the entire time gossiping about her neighbors or arguing with her recalcitrant daughter?

There are countless resources available for study, and the depth to which one wishes to develop a character is limited only by one's own imagination and ambition. But care should be taken not to adopt a character of too much complexity or which falls too far outside of what would be considered "ordinary" as they stretch an observer's credulity, or require far too much exposition than your average encounter can accommodate. The characters should be based in sound reality and represent the "mean". When the unusual becomes the norm, the norm gets lost in a sea of gypsy changelings and Mongolian warriors.

Think about the people who would most likely be found at a holiday faire in the heart of England; people from the community: Farmers, husbandmen, artisans, laborers, craftsmen, yeomen, merchants, gentlemen. Then think about why they're there. What are they hoping to find? Who did they come with? Are they there to buy something or sell something? What does this event mean to them? There are strangers and foreigners present - how does your character feel about them?

Then think about all of the other bits and pieces that make up your character: Who are they married to? What religion do they espouse? What experiences have made them who they are? What do they aspire to? What are the person's morals and ideals? Most importantly, how can you express these to the audience in a way that is interactive, entertaining and informative?

COSTUMING

The way we look is one of the chief ways we help transport our audience to our place and time. In order for us to present a consistent and convincing look, it is necessary that all participants adhere to a homogenous costume standard that is based on current historical research rather than the whims of faire fashion and fancy. While the audience might not be well-versed in the details of the clothing of our era, they will notice inconsistencies and anachronisms as cracks in the illusion that we are trying to create.

The faire audience loves to dress up and become part of the fantasy, and in some cases their costumes are quite good. But if we construct our costumes in the spirit of authenticity, paying attention to period color, fit, fabric and accessories, we will stand out from the crowd of costumed visitors and appear as true Elizabethans wearing our everyday clothes.

Those who have been participants at other renaissance festivals may not be familiar with some aspects of our standards, and in some cases they are a departure from what has elsewhere been understood as "correct". We understand that costuming can be an expensive and time-consuming activity and that asking everyone to acquire new costumes more in line with historical fact may be unrealistic. However, new participants or those constructing new costumes should make themselves familiar with our standards and design accordingly.

These standards may be found at http://www.stgeorgenorth.org/much_ado_about_sebastopol

As our event develops, it is our goal to bring all of our performers in line with these standards.

IN CONCLUSION

Many thanks for volunteering to help bring this fascinating era to life for our audience, and for your willingness to help aid the local schools in this time of constrained public budgets.

Rydell Downward

Artistic Director

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