

# The Chesapeake Shakespeare Company



May 22, 2012

To Whom it May Concern,

It is my sincere honor to write on behalf of Colleen Kelly who is being considered for the position of Head of Graduate Acting at the University of Virginia. I have known Colleen for several years, primarily through her work at the American Shakespeare Center, and she ranks among the very finest artists and teachers I know. What's more, her personal qualities and her penchant for blending scholarship and practice make her, in a word, unique. I cannot imagine a better choice for any prestigious program, and I urge you to consider her candidacy most seriously.

I first met Colleen when she served as Education Director for ASC. During her tenure in that position – and, later, as their resident fight choreographer – I had the pleasure of attending a workshop she offered (this took place, if memory serves, at a Blackfriars' Conference). What struck me immediately was her ability to engage with each participant in the room, and with her ability to communicate her faith in us. In subsequent years, as she turned her attention exclusively toward period combat choreography at ASC, I had the pleasure to see her work again and again on the Blackfriars' stage, and one cannot underestimate the degree to which her contributions helped create the wonderful ethos that pervades that space.

We began to be on each other's radar more frequently due to our respective theatre companies' membership in the Shakespeare Theatre Association. For STA's annual conference in January, 2011, I organized the pre-conference, a three-day practicum for professionals to train in a specific area of stagecraft. I reached out to Colleen to ask if she would do a series of three master classes in period combat – the “set piece” of the pre-conference. Colleen, in typical fashion, agreed at once, and she went to work creating what was, by all accounts, one of the great experiences that has ever occurred at a meeting of the Shakespeare Theatre Association.

She offered three master classes: 1) “The Fight: Shakespeare's Action Figures, Using textual clues, embedded stage directions, and components of heightened language (meter, rhythm, rhetoric, etc.) to explore how to figure a fight”; 2) “Fighting by the Book of Arithmetic, Using period manuals of defense for creating stage pictures and fight choreography” and; 3) “The Code Duello: Shakespeare's Fight'n Words, How to recognize the language of the code duello and explore how Shakespeare used it to reveal character and further plot.” I offer these descriptions to give you a sense of the *scope* Colleen covered in such a short period of time. As a participant with about twenty other seasoned actor-directors, I can only say that it was like my eyes were

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opened to the plays in a whole new way. Not only did Colleen introduce (and, in many cases, re-introduce) fundamental elements of fight choreography, but she provided all of us with a lens through which we could understand the relationships and stakes at work in Shakespeare's plays – namely, the lens of the Code Duello. I will never be able to look at the opening of *Romeo and Juliet* without hearing the “code” of combat at work between the Capulets and the Montagues. And, honestly, I feel that, until that point, I had not really understood that opening moment properly. That feeling – the sensation of discovering something startlingly *new* – is what the very, very best teachers make possible. They inspire. They change lives. Colleen Kelly *is* this teacher.

I remember going up to Colleen after one of her sessions to thank her, and she – very typically – said with a shy smile, “Oh, I love this stuff!” She comes by her humility naturally, and one can indeed sense just how very much she *loves* the work she does, the history and practice of choreography and theatre, and, most importantly, the teaching of students. To go on would be to continue to heap superlatives – superlatives that she so richly deserves. So I leave you with this: Colleen Kelly is precisely the kind of teacher, scholar, and leader any institution could hope for. She knows how to respond to many constituencies, and she has the passion as a scholar-practitioner to further distinguish any high-profile program. But most of all, she has my deepest admiration for her commitment to the most important calling in the world: teaching.

If I can be of any additional support to Colleen's candidacy, I hope that you'll not hesitate to call me on my cell (716-207-1494), on my direct office line (410-581-4796), or by email ([costa@chesapeakeshakespeare.com](mailto:costa@chesapeakeshakespeare.com)).

Sincerely,

Kevin J. Costa, PhD

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