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The Society of American Fight Directors

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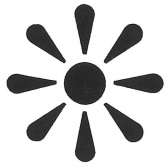
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MOULINET: An Action Quarterly



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MOULINET: An Action Quarterly

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WE WANT YOUR STORIES! Our goal is to bring you news, information and anecdotes on the topic of stage combat. We can't do it without your contributions, so tell us what you want to know or what you think we should know. Got some fighting words? Send them to *Moulinet: An Action Quarterly*.

Articles, interviews, features – 300-1000 words. Reviews – 100-300 words.

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ADVERTISEMENTS – \$5 for 1-25 words, \$10 for 26-50 words. (Boxes, graphics, etc., \$10 with camera-ready copy.)

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DAVID KRAJEC calls himself one of the "old teeth" of the Milwaukee Fight scene, being a former member of the Ring Of Steel stunt troupe until their demise in the mid-eighties.

TOM TAYLOR appeared in the 2003 Oak Park Festival production of *As You Like It*. He has also been seen in *Xena Live! Episode 2* and *Around The World In Eighty Days*.

MICHAEL GOLDBERG has appeared at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, directed touring productions of *Casper* and *The Mask*, and co-ordinated fights and special-effects for *Casper* at London's West End.

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MARTA COLLAZO coaches disabled athletes at the Rehabilitation Center of Chicago and is a member of the Vietnam Veterans Against The War.

COMING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF MOULINET: AN ACTION QUARTERLY!

On location in Las Vegas with the SAFD! Reviews of Hanlon-Lees Action Theater's Buffalo Bill show, productions of *Rose Rage: Henry VI*, *Alcatraz*, *Close My Eyes*, *North Shore Fish*, *Frodo-A-Go-Go* featuring the Babes With Blades, and MORE!

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THE GALLERY BOOKSTORE at 923 West Belmont Ave. has back issues of *Moulinet: An Action Quarterly*. They are now also available on-line through Advanced Book Exchange, Gallery Bookstore Ltd. inventory number 060 (Abe@Abebooks.com). Price, \$4.00 per issue. For further information, phone William Fiedler at Gallery Bookstore (773) 975-8200 or e-mail; ChgosOldst@voyager.net



Check out the
**Society of American
Fight Directors**
website
at
www.safd.org

COLD STEEL IN CREAM CITY: DAVID KRAJEC AND THE ROGUES AND SCOUNDRELS

by Mary Shen Barnidge

It's mid-April, over a month past the equinox, but David Krajec has cautioned me to dress warm. I acknowledge the wisdom of his warning upon stepping into Rogues And Scoundrels Fencing Club's unheated quarters above the MATA Community Media station at 26th and Clybourn, a desolate stretch on Milwaukee's near South Side flanked by Interstate 94 on one side and a ghetto-under-gentrification on the other. But this is the place where a small band of itinerant swordpersons meet weekly to practice their skills and swap shop talk.

A workshop on Italian Rapier by Maestro Ramon Martinez having been conducted in Milwaukee recently, and another on Spanish Rapier, also by Martinez, in Chicago, those techniques comprise the focus of this session's activity. I am given a short demonstration of both by Bruce Aller and Mario Baleywah while I wait for their instructor to arrive after the long commute from Cardinal Stritch College far north of the city. After Krajec and I are seated by the small campsite-heater that provides the room's solitary warmth, the fencers continue to spar with one another, their voices—amplified by the cinder-block walls and concrete floor—providing aural background for my chat with their mentor.

MARY SHEN BARNIDGE: I first heard of your group when you were meeting above the Café Voltaire [now closed] in the Hotel Wisconsin. Where did the Rogues And Scoundrels start?

DAVID KRAJEC: We are one of two groups, the other being Sword And Masque, my partner Steve Covey's theatrical fighting troupe. Back in the mid-1970s, Covey and another gentleman formed the Milwaukee Fencing Club, whose purpose was to teach competitive foil, épée and saber. That lasted until 1980 when the building next door to ours burned down, and our fencing-hall was in danger of tipping over without *that* one supporting it. After that we moved around: we were at St. Hedwig's church for awhile, and in the gym at Kenwood Methodist across from UWM [University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee], and the ballroom above the

Hotel Wisconsin on Third Street. Mario found us our current home here at Milwaukee Cable.

MSB: How about you, yourself? How did you come to be doing this?

DK: I started in high school gymnastics—trampoline and tumbling. Later in college, coming from that sports perspective, I branched out into fencing and things like that.

MSB: How did you move from tournament athletics to theatrical combat?

DK: It was around that time—between '79 and '81—that Robert Dawson formed the Ring Of Steel, probably the premiere group—in Milwaukee, anyway—doing stage combat and theatrical swordplay. Dawson eventually left for Florida, taking a lot of the company with him. After a time, those of us who stayed re-formed the group as Ring Of Steel Entertainment, out of which came Sword And Masque, whose focus is the teaching of stage combat but not limited to swordplay. Covey himself does special effects stunts—he did the *Batman* show at Great America.

MSB: The Society of American Fight Directors was inaugurated around 1979.

DK: Yes, I recall hearing about it from Kent Shelton. They asked if Ring Of Steel wanted to join. I didn't see any problem, but the fear among many of our people was that it would become like a union. And we didn't want a closed shop, we wanted to keep it open. Looking at it now, it turns out that fear was unfounded, but that was the reaction at the time.

MSB: So your sentiments nowadays—

DK: The Rogues And Scoundrels aren't trained through them. I've worked with J.R. Beardsley and SAFD people before—

MSB: But there's no bad blood between you—

DK: No. (laughing) Not *yet*, anyway. Who knows what starts a fight? Covey's and my philosophy on stage combat, and what we stress in teaching, is that the only right way to stage a fight is to make it effective and to make it safe.

MSB: So you share the same principles as the SAFD, without the membership requirement—

DK: Yes. Exactly. We've been doing this since 1978 and haven't had any casualties yet. Except age, but that's not really a casualty, that's an inevitability.

MSB: As an instructor, do you emphasize the weapons or the technique?

DK: Yes. (chuckles) When I teach, I tell my students that every weapon has a language. It speaks to you as you pick it up. As the person who is going to use it, your job is to learn what it's saying to you. At first, it's gibberish—you don't speak its language, it doesn't speak yours, you're both looking at each other and thinking "what is this?"—

MSB: Is this a dagger I see before me?

DK: Exactly! I show the student how to move, but in the meantime, I say, "Here, hold this thing and get familiar with it. Here's what it does, here's what it doesn't, what can *you* do with it? Sure, you can use it for a hammer, but that's not the idea."

MSB: Theatres in Wisconsin all seem to hire their fight directors from Illinois or Minnesota. Where around here can one learn stage combat?

DK: No place that I'm aware of. Fight training entails a lot of time and *could* entail a lot of money, if you're going to do it the right way, with insurance and a proper facility. Unless you have a large theatre community to support this kind of activity, you're not going to find much of a market for it. And actors are notoriously poor—how do you then make it affordable?

MSB: But they do Shakespeare here, and in Madison, too. And for *that*, you need fight-trained actors. Don't the schools in these parts include it in their theatre curriculum?

DK: They usually don't emphasize it enough. At one time UWM had a professional actor's training program, with a movement specialist, Society-trained and certified. But ten or fifteen weeks is not enough to make a capable swordsman of someone whose knowledge of a sword is assessed by looking at a butter knife. That's how we do it in America, though: you have an opening date fixed in stone and you bring people in at the last minute because it's cheaper that way. It's the "just in time" school of play production.

MSB: So just who *does* show Wisconsin actors how to fight?

DK: What most often happens around here is that you'll have an actor—who may, or may not, be certified—but who has stage combat skills and done

enough of it that the producers think he knows what he's doing. And he usually does—but what Steve and I have been trying to get producers to understand is that a fight choreographer is not a crutch, but someone who should be brought in from Day One. Too many directors think that stage combat is something every actor already knows.

MSB: What about the people in *Rogues And Scoundrels*? What do they know? Where do they come from?

DK: Most of them are interested in the historical aspect of fencing. Many are into re-enactments—British civil war, American civil war. Pick an era and there's probably a re-enactment group for it.

MSB: Agincourt?

DK: Umm, we *did* go back that far once. Eight years ago, Marquette University did one of the *Joan Of Arc* plays and had a whole Medieval Day celebration. This was a good excuse to do something from an earlier era. Since the play is centered around a military operation, we did pipe drills, showing how to move with metal-tipped staffs in *unison*, so that you don't get all tangled up and finish looking like a giant game of pick-up sticks. Also, some of the engineering students built a *trébuchet* [a siege weapon, something like a catapult]—or tried to, anyway. They were going to throw it away afterwards, but we said "Wait! We'll take it!". It's stored in a barn somewhere now.

MSB: If someone wanted to join your—uh, fight club, what would they do? Do you have any kind of publicity campaign?

DK: We haven't actively recruited because we weren't sure where we'd be meeting. This place is fairly stable, because it's unheated and nobody else wants it, but we've always been at the whim of the owning institution. (Calls to Aller, who is beginning to remove his jacket, "Don't get undressed! I wanna pick a fight with you before we leave!") It's still word of mouth nowadays, but we might establish a website soon. This isn't the way to do business, but it's our *only* way at this point.

MSB: How do they find you?

DK: Well, we meet here every Thursday at five o'clock. For anyone who wants to practice fencing—as I said, we're mostly historical, but we do theatrical if that's what someone wants—we have this space for two hours a week. And we never turn away interested people.

SLAPSTICK, SWORDPLAY, SHOWERS AND SHAKESPEARE: SUMMER OUTDOOR COMBAT 2003

by Mary Shen Barnidge, reprinted from *Windy City Times*

When we think of Shakespeare's plays, we recall rapier duels bitter with fury and indignation (Hamlet and Laertes, Tybalt and Mercutio). Atrocities meted out to innocents (Banquo, Desdemona, Ophelia). Bloody battles on Bosworth Field and Salisbury Plain, replete with Alarums and Excursions. Plots propelled by extraordinary violence reflect not only the author's craft at building suspense, but a society in which "dead men tell no tales" was a policy more frequently employed by those in power than—we would hope—it is today.

But what about the comedies? What place does untimely death or crippling accident have in a universe celebrating life's pleasures and glory? Impulsive actions in comedies differ from those in tragedies in that they are rarely spurred by truly malicious intent and seldom result in irreparable injury. But if the psychological dynamic of comic fights far more elusive, the physical prowess required for their performance is undiminished—indeed, compounded in the outdoor productions so popular in balmy summer climes. Participants in such seasonal fare recount stories of floors rendered hazardous by sudden downpours, indigenous wild creatures intruding on the action, and mental alacrity impaired by heat-associated discomforts.

The Chicago area's 2003 summer season featured three citronella-circuit Shakespeares, all of them comedies marketed for family audiences. The plot of *As You Like It* at Oak Park's Festival Theatre calls for the young hero to tussle with a pro wrestler. That of Talisman Theatre's *Two Gentlemen Of Verona* proposes two chums in love with the same girl—a situation certain to lead to testosterone-fueled scuffles. And that of First Folio's *The Comedy Of Errors* has a pair of servants chivvied by their employers, one of whom is himself strong-armed by police officers. How is this rude behavior to be presented as harmless horseplay?

Says Tom Taylor, Festival Theatre's fight choreographer (who also plays Orlando, wrestling with Dan Marco as Charles, the King's Champion), "I didn't want anything too grim. The text suggests Charles' strength and skill enough without the match being a Thunderdome thing. I was glad that we had a big guy like Dan playing Charles. A lot of the moves we chose for the fight came out of the

difference in our body types: Charles uses a lot of muscle moves—throws, locks and bear hugs. Orlando tries a few of these and gets soundly planted. Finally, he comprehends that he has to out-*finesse* his opponent, using *speed* to his advantage."

"None of the three fights we added to the play are specifically mentioned in the script." claims Kevin Heckman, fight choreographer for *Two Gentlemen Of Verona*, "I didn't even go with the idea of fights in the play until after I'd cast Brian [Plocharczyk] and Matthew [Tucker], who both have some background in stage combat.

"The costumes suggested a kind of military environment, and since competition and games often play a key role in male friendships, I introduced a smallsword bout at the very beginning of the play. In that scene, they're just playing around. But in the next fight, Proteus has fallen in love with Valentine's fiancée, and so the fight, while still friendly, has a serious edge to it. The problem in the final fight is that Valentine has only six verse lines to go from being angry with Proteus to forgiving him. I had that anger provoke Valentine to attack Proteus—but Proteus comes out on top and then apologizes to Valentine, rather than killing him. Since it's clear Proteus' remorse is genuine, Valentine's subsequent forgiveness makes more sense in that context."

The Comedy Of Errors at First Folio offers fewer opportunities for formal fights, but plenty for slapstick action—including a hapless sidekick left dangling from a balcony and a working prop fountain into which various characters are ducked in the course of the play. Recalls Michael Goldberg, "During previews, several times, we had to deal with sprinkles about half an hour before curtain. Even after wiping the stage down, its surface is still slick, making the actors tentative in their movements. So we limited our use of the fountain so as not to deposit more water on the stage. Also, we didn't want to soak the actors' costumes—I believe they *are* washable, but I don't think there's anything explicit in their design for wicking away moisture."

This brings up the matter of performing outdoors, where Nature—except in the play's text—obeys no Stage Manager. What do the choreographers have to say about their pastoral surroundings?

"Being outside doesn't affect us much since the actual stage [in Elgin's Wing Park bandshell] is covered." says Heckman, "They just have to slow down a touch when the ground is wet. But actors often start speeding up over the course of a run,

anyway, so this is sometimes a good thing.”

“Staging the wrestling match on the green meant sticks, acorns, mud, and that itchy feeling you get lying on the grass without a shirt.” notes Taylor, “But I knew I was going to be on the ground a *lot*, because I was going to be *losing* most of the time, and a nice, soft patch of earth is much more comfortable for falling. I’m barefoot for the fight, so when the grass is wet, I just slide a bit. Fortunately, Dan is able to act through any delays until we can continue the match.”

“Rain, trains, planes and automobiles,” shrugs Goldberg, “The only thing you can do is remember that safety is the primary concern and keep refocusing on the stage. With most actors, once they become accustomed to their work environment, this is no problem. And audiences generally don’t seem to mind the distractions either. The joy of doing outdoor theatre is being outside on a beautiful night, under the stars.”

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

LOOKING FOR FIGHTS AT THE BRISTOL RENAISSANCE FAIRE

12250 120th Street/Russell Road west of I-94:
Kenosha, Wisconsin

HANLON-LEES ACTION THEATER

Their storyline went deeper than simple good guy-bad guy with last year’s commentary on over-zealous patriotism. The 2003 joust scenario is likewise complex, revolving around an exile’s return to absolve himself of the charges leading to his punishment. But by the time the wronged man has his justice—won not by proof of his innocence, but through slaughter of his accusers—his seems less the triumph of Right than Might.

Anchoring the plot is the masked stranger who proves to be the banished Sir Andrew, played by Steve Cowan with not one, but *two* of the eccentric dialects that have become his stock-in-trade. His chief adversary is Sir William DeBracey, a veteran of many wars now beset by aural hallucinations, portrayed by William Burch, riding his stageworthy percheron, Prince. (“Go, psycho knight!” cheered a supporter.) They are flanked by Kent Shelton and Joe D’Arrigo, with Joseph Hunt as the big-voiced Master of Arms. The roles of Sir Edmund Tilney,

the Master of Revels, and Elizabeth Regina herself have been expanded to involve them more in the dramatic action, albeit in a nonviolent capacity.

A loose saddle-girth on opening weekend caused Sir Andrew to come unhorsed on his first entrance (Cowan quickly recovered, boasting to the crowd, “That’s the *last* time I fall from my horse!”), while the shattering wood during the mounted jousts brought forth cries of “Corked Lances!” from fans of the Chicago Cubs. But the banter is seductively humorous in the calm before the atmosphere grows grim, and swaggering challenges give way to Sir Edmund’s sorrowful regret that four of “her majesty’s best men” must forfeit their lives in pursuit of a “Righteous Victory”—commentary that continues to haunt us long after the thrill has faded.

THE SWORDSMEN

There may be two authorized acts d.b.a. The Bold And Stupid Men roving fairegrounds across the United States—Jeff MacLane’s Bolt Upright and Mike Mahaffy’s Gianni Vespa on the west coast, John Bellomo’s Dash Valiant and J. Alex Cordero’s Garibaldi Fortissimo on the east—but nothing beats the originals. David Woolley and Douglas Mumaw promise new material when they play St. Charles’ Pheasant Run Resort over the holidays, but their fans at Bristol were happy to sing along with the familiar drills, reveling in the pranks vested on newcomers by the cavaliers still as agile of foot, swift of speech and audacious of attitude as at their debut performance in 1988.

THE SCHOOL OF COMBAT ARMS

With combatants as young as twelve or thirteen taking—and frequently passing—certification exams for the Society Of American Fight Directors, fight lessons for children seem only logical. The safety factors are strictly observed in those overseen by Skip Fox and Glenn Buechele (the latter an instructor at the College Of Lake County), with pupils from six years old armored like Mongol warriors in quilted coats and collars, their screened masks crested with balloons—the designated target area—to further focus the action away from unprotected legs and feet. Until a stage combat equivalent to the Golden Gloves leagues is founded, such activities as these provide amateurs a risk-free taste of buckle-swashing.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

The peripatetic nature of this progressive narrative, whose scenes are played at various sites around the fairegrounds throughout the day, reminds us with each glimpse that we are doomed to miss some other segment of the amiable hi-jinks. The episode entitled, "The Wedding Of Maid Marian and the Sheriff"—the only I managed to see in my excursions—was directed by resident fight co-ordinator Gary Boeck with plenty of found-object slapstick, a rip-snorting chick fight between Elizabeth Styles' Maid Marian and Jennifer Glueckstein's Lady Payne, and a spectacular final melee climaxing in a thrilling wire-slide from the topmost tower of the Cheshire Chase stage.

A NIGHT WITH THE FIGHTS

THE TOURNAMENT OF KINGS

Excalibur Hotel & Casino: Las Vegas, Nevada

You can do some really nifty things with an indoor arena and a lotta money: Pinwheel lights swooping over the house like waltzing UFOs. Treetop-tall bursts of butane fire swaying like ghostly ninjas. A magnificent quasi-*Star Wars* music score by Scot Rammer. The clash of steel-on-steel foleyed in from offstage over the amplifiers. Dragon-head helms as towering and richly-detailed as *Lion King* masks. A villain—played with relish by Inspector Javert-lookalike Paul Fidler—dressed in Mad Max drag. And the tiltyard's sandy carpet (polymer, so that it "fluffs up") is always clean, dry and *just* the right texture.

The scenario involves the tournament that gives the show its title. Participating are the monarchs of Spain, France (Jess Jones, whose horsemanship clearly outstrips that of his comrades), Russia, Norway, Ireland, Austria and Hungary. Their sporting competition is disrupted by the evil Mordred's champion, who meets his defeat at the hands of Arthur's young son Christopher (played by the WB-pretty Travis King). Providing relief from the rough stuff are a fozzly Merlin and his jester, a robust drinking song at the Round Table, a squad of luscious female dancers—whose costumes for one number weigh nearly as much as the knights' armor—and a guest appearance by the west Asian troupe calling itself the Acrobats of Argos.

But even though the Excalibur joust might

appear precisely the kind of big-budget circus we expect from Las Vegas, its foundation still lies in old-fashioned stage combat. Fight choreographer Ivan Caullier's swordplay—chiefly broadsword, dagger and much wrestling in the dirt—holds focus for every thrilling operatic-sized moment despite the distractions of its sumptuous surroundings.

FIELD DISPATCHES

ROLLING AND ROCKING

The first time I ever saw Nomez, he was wearing a Davy Crockett cap. He had eyes that glowed kind of like a Buddha's—or maybe like a madman's. Somebody told me that he had a background in Martial Arts. And I heard that he'd once danced—in his wheelchair—with a professional company. Everything was a statement with Nomez.

I was attending the 1995 Chicago Rehabilitation Center awards banquet with one of the weight-lifters whom I'd coached. But when we walked into the Holiday Inn—my date on his crutches—the first thing we saw was this long Hollywood-looking *staircase* leading to the banquet room! And no sign of an elevator *anywhere!* I couldn't believe it! How could a public building offer to host an awards dinner for disabled athletes and then not give them a way to *get* to it?

Then we spotted Nomez, all dressed up, with his wheelchair right up at the top of the stairs. He was smiling down at the catering staff getting the banquet room all ready for the ceremonies. And before we could guess what he was up to, he had *thrown himself out of his chair* and was *rolling* down the stairs, all the way to the bottom!

Now, those of us who *knew* Nomez weren't alarmed—we've seen him do things like this before. But the hotel people were *horrified*—shouting and screaming, pointing at the staircase and running up to him lying there on the floor! When all the fuss settled down, it turned out there *was* an elevator—if you already *knew* where to look for it—and so the other wheelchair athletes could get to the banquet. But I'll *bet* that hotel has its elevators more clearly marked now, after Nomez called the problem to their attention like he did.

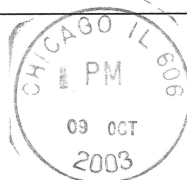
I haven't seen him in years. The last I heard, he was in film school at Columbia College. Nomez was always very dramatic.

—Marta Collazo

**“War is as much a conflict of
passion as it is one of force.”**

—General Omar N. Bradley

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