



Philip Parr*

Working Title: A Collaboration Made in York

Creatives: Mariia Stopnyk, Ivan Blindar, Dara Klymeko, Vika Skirak, Iryna Muza, Nick Jones, Ian Giles, Katie Coen, David Richmond, Daria Furmanova, Carter Lown, Andrea Mitchell, María Victoria López, Skylar Mabry, Lynne O'Dowd, Charis McRoberts, Elizabeth Stanforth-Sharpe, Victoria, Alia, and Kate and Philip Parr. Performed at the Creative Centre Auditorium, York St John University, on Saturday, 20 April 2024, within the York International Shakespeare Festival, UK, 22 April – 4 May 2025.

Actor: How shall we begin?

Actor: Does anyone have a script?

Actor: What did we agree in rehearsal?

Actor: Did we talk about how to begin?

Someone asks for a translation – it's explained in Ukrainian that no one knows how to begin.

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A pause.

Actor: Perhaps..... (but they change their mind)

Actor: What about.....

Actor: I could.....

Actor: Don't look at me.....

A pause

A long speech in Ukrainian about how the director probably said something about it in rehearsal but no one really understood it.

Meanwhile, Ivan clearly has a thought, and idea for how to start....

Others notice – they encourage him.

Go on.

You know you want to.

Go on Ivan.

Finally he moves to centre-stage and declaims in English:

Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York!

The others applaud him.

A pause

And so, it began. For one night only, one glorious performance built in a week of playing, improvisation, games, trust, singing, drawing, caring, learning, sharing. An exploration, starting from words and phrases, and with the words of Shakespeare embedded throughout, in English and Ukrainian, but also in Spanish and other languages.

Working Title was an idea built from the need to foreground and elevate the displaced Ukrainian community in York, and a desire to build on the successful Ukrainian presence at the 2023 York International Shakespeare Festival, when the Molodyy Theatre from Kyiv presented their much-admired *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 2024, we wanted to go further and to create something in York, so we invited the Ivan Franko National Academy of Music and Drama Theatre in Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine, to send us two actors to be part of a new creation – and we

were honoured to have Ivan Blindar and Mariia Stopnyk come and join us for a week. Ivan and Mariia were generous, energetic and vastly talented. They showed us how to be brave in leaving our performing comfort zones, – and Ivan, who would look up hurriedly, whenever the fighter jets from the local airbase flew low over York – reminded us of the weight of responsibility they carried even far from home.

Actors were invited from across York and Yorkshire to join the project; there were students, veterans, and local freelancers, and some came from the Ukrainian community, glad of a chance to be welcomed at last into a familiar environment, in a still strange land. All giving their time to this experiment. Generations of actors with worlds of experience and inexperience. The spirit of collaboration and learning from one another was paramount. Nothing felt impossible. *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nightingale and the Lark speech, with Romeo played in Ukrainian and wearing an army uniform and Juliet in English – two lovers parting at a station, was heart-wrenching. A found poem on dreams made everyone laugh at the absurd comedy. Shakespeare ran through everything. Exploring the idea of home, one of our Ukrainian team spoke of fleeing first from Crimea to Kyiv, and then from Kyiv to York, and quietly said that she did not think she could find the strength to move again. Charis McRoberts wrote us a new piece exploring staying and leaving in a chain of relationships, interwoven with Hamlet and Ophelia. York St John University students joined us for a day of dramaturgy, bringing fresh ideas and brushing away our self-indulgences.

Scenes were separated by Iryna Muza, re-finding her concert pianist-trained touch after a year away from a keyboard. All the while, our artist Lynne O'Dowd constantly created drawings through every rehearsal, her work somehow mark-making the actors' flashes of inspiration immortal. During the show, Lynne continued to draw live, with the images projected onto the back wall to create our scenery. As Ivan Blindar and Mariia Stopnyk work in a theatre in a city named after a poet, we translated a poem by Ivan Franko – heard for the first time in English: *Love Appeared to Me Three Times*. And if you have been with Ukrainians for long enough, you will know that they sing whenever they can. So we sang: all the Ukrainians taught us a song in Ukrainian, which became the end of our show – and we sang as only friends can sing, when words alone are not enough:

To you, dear little river,
Spring will return, spring.
And youth will not return,
She will not return!

It was an unforgettable evening, for those who created it and for the many Ukrainians and others from York and beyond who came to see it. For our Festival,

the determination became fixed then, that although it might only be a little contribution, we will present and celebrate Ukrainian Shakespeare, and will empower our local Ukrainian actors in York, for as long as it is needed.

Opening projected text:

A week ago a group of people came together to make this performance

From York

From Yorkshire

From Ivano Frankivsk

From Ukraine

And from other places too

We threw balls to each other

We told stories

We played games

We ate biscuits and drank tea

We told each other stories, about ourselves, about our lives, about our thoughts

We sang songs

We read Shakespeare

We became friends

We made this