



WHAT'S ON @ Takapuna Library



We Read Auckland 2023: Author Talk Rising, Falling, Rising
 Tuesday 8 August, 6pm-8pm, Level 1

Join authors Josie Shapiro (Everything is Beautiful and Everything Hurts) and Tessa Duder (The Sparrow, Alex: The Quartet) in conversation with author and Olympian Angela Walker (Ideals Are Like Stars: The Dame Yvette Williams Story). Hear their kōrero on coming-of-age stories, competing against others and yourself, and how lives can be broken and rebuilt stronger than before.

Tickets available via Eventbrite: <https://tinyurl.com/vzk22vzp>

Always wanted to learn embroidery?

The North Shore Embroiderers Guild will be hosting open sessions at Takapuna Library from 1pm to 3pm on the last Sunday of each month. This is your opportunity to meet them, see what they do in meetings and look at their current projects.

Fall prevention workshop

Tuesday 22nd August 10.30am

Falling over doesn't have to be part of the ageing process. The good news is that many falls are preventable and having good strength and balance is the key to staying on your feet. Join our free fall prevention workshop run by Harbour Sport community strength and balance trainer Lou Bartlett to ensure that you keep your independence.

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Actor recycles Shakespeare tips

Actor Peter Feeney says the students he has coached for the combined Westlake Boys and Girls High Schools production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* are benefiting from his own mentoring by a renowned expert on delivering the bard's works.

Years ago, Feeney was encouraged by the late Cicely Berry, voice director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), to take a physical approach to acting rehearsals. It's a technique he used in a recent all-day workshop with the large student cast, focusing particularly on encouraging its understudies.

Like the principals, they will all have a turn in the spotlight during the comedy's run, which starts next week.

All the understudies will step up for one night, and have to be ready for more performances if required, as is more likely in the Covid era.

Feeney, a familiar face on New Zealand and Australian screens, is a Castor Bay father of three. His two eldest children—Arlo, aged 16, who attends Westlake Boys, and Frankie, 14, who is at Westlake Girls—are in the production. Its director, Mary-Jean Milburn, who is head of senior literature and a drama teacher at Westlake Girls, asked him to help out.

With a long-established sideline in running acting workshops, Feeney was ideally suited to the role.

And he knows from his own experience in getting started in acting as a young adult 30 years ago that understudies particularly appreciate some attention. "They're the people who can get neglected."

From his RSC mentor—who tutored the esteemed company's classically trained actors and also took drama classes to prisons and low-decile schools as part of its arts funding agreement—Feeney learned that breaking down barriers with action aided comprehension and was a greater "leveller" than just reading scripts.

"They're owning it with their bodies and it starts to give the words an energy they need."

As to any difficulties working with his lively teenaged children, Feeney says the respect they have for "MJ" [Milburn] made it easy.

The duo, and younger sibling Tilly, 10, are well used to working with their father. Each has a part in a drama series, *Blind Bitter Happiness*, he developed during lockdown and is marketing overseas. It is to be screened by RNZ online next month.

In *As You Like It*, Arlo plays the lead role of Orlando. Frankie is understudy for the smaller role of Phoebe and an ensemble player.

The play was the first Feeney himself appeared in, as Orlando's friend Oliver, in

a University of Auckland production after returning from a few years overseas.

By then he had a politics degree and had done graduate study in Russia, but contracted the acting bug.

Feeney was in several children's TV series, including *Secret Agent Men* and *The Cul de Sac*, but he says he is most remembered for the comedy-horror film *Black Sheep*, which came out in 2006.

"People do recognise me vaguely," he says, "but I don't think it will last."

Alongside writing, he continues to act and direct regularly, appearing in the last few years on *The Brokenwood Mysteries* and having stints on popular Australian series such as *Playing for Keeps*.

All the Feeney children are keen on pursuing the profession, perhaps more so than their parents, with both Peter and wife Nicola, a magazine art director, apt to suggest other more secure occupations.

"We spend most of the time trying to distract them with other career choices, but they do have agents," Feeney admits.

It was from hanging around on sets with their father when childcare fell through, and being nabbed for a magazine photo shoot by mum when she was desperate, that they first got drafted into work.

"They might get it out of their system," he laughs.

But even last week during a family holiday on the Gold Coast, he was happy to give Arlo some tips on his part, including how to interpret some of Shakespeare's writing. "When you have to get up and say it, it's challenging."

For her part, Milburn says Shakespeare's universality means his work continues to endure, but as a Shakespeare specialist she aims to make it approachable in the classroom and on stage.

"Not only does a project like *As You Like It* challenge our young performers and encourage creativity, a sense of humour, and resilience, it also speaks, in a really modern way, to their concerns," she says.

Heroine Rosalind is quick-witted, cheeky, and madly in love with Orlando, she says. But Rosalind is also anxious as to whether he is trustworthy, wanting to know if his affections are more than surface level and that he won't run off when things get difficult.

Orlando is also a young person trying to find his place in the world, she says. "He wants room to grow and is challenging the boundaries set by his guardian and brother, Oliver."

Aside from emphasising these relevant themes, Milburn has set the play in the 1960s

"There is just everything they need to know as professional actors... it's the best training"

for school casts – including two very familiar faces



Acting up... Ahead of appearing in the annual Westlakes Shakespeare production, Arlo (left) and sister Frankie took school-holiday time out with dad and acting coach Peter Feeney on a break in Queensland

to help it appeal more to modern audiences: Think a Woodstock-inspired forest, full of vibrant colours and sounds.

In all, *As You Like It* involves nearly 80 students from both schools, including a cast of 17 males and 22 females. Most were auditioned late last year, with some students who were new to the schools added early this year, before rehearsals got under way in earnest.

A combined crew of 40 is handling tech, props, makeup and costumes, and coaching choreography.

Milburn describes the production as "the perfect tonic for this grey and wet winter".

The play ends in a jubilant dance medley, which the cast enjoyed putting together.

UK choreographer Darren Royston who has worked with big names in the West End, gave tips to the student team on a recent New Zealand visit.

He is a friend of Westlake Boys head of drama Nick Brown, who also got him to help with the combined schools' other big production this year, the musical *Into the*

Woods, which has a different cast and was being staged this week.

Feeney says the standard and scale of big school productions like these are the perfect introduction for anyone wanting to go on to a performing arts careers or just stretch themselves. "There is just everything they need to know as professional actors... it's the best training."

• *As You Like It*, 25-29 July at Westlake Girls High School Events Centre. Book at iticket.co.nz