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New webseries Blank Verse places Shakespeare and company in a contemporary classroom

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[Tessa Perkins](#) | Photos By [Charlie Allison](#)

What if Shakespeare lived today as a university student? What if he studied with Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe, and what if the head of their school's creative writing department was Professor Elizabeth Tudor? The new webseries *Blank Verse*, created by UBC theatre and film graduates, brings Shakespeare into the modern world.

The show had its premiere on August 25 and a new episode is released online every Sunday at blankverse.tv. The first season is divided into five acts, each with four episodes, and every act is created by a different writer and director.

The first season aims to cover the themes of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. The show doesn't follow the plots of these plays, but instead they colour the mood and style of each act.

"The show is the brainchild of Amanda Konkin and it was developed by her and Ryan Caron," explained Xander Williams, who plays William Shakespeare. "The show asks what would these famous historical figures be like if born today . . . with our problems in the artistic scene."

Williams described one major difference: "It was a hard market for Shakespeare, but it wasn't as saturated as it is today. There are seven billion people now, and anyone with a word processor can write."

With a BFA in acting from UBC, experience acting in a few of Shakespeare's plays, and the opportunity to study with Neil Freeman, "One of the greatest Shakespeare minds in my opinion" (also the director of act five), Williams feels like he is prepared to take on the role of Shakespeare himself.

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- Xander Williams, William Shakespeare

Aaron Adams, a recent English Literature graduate of SFU and writer for act two of season one, agrees. "What's really fun is to think if we didn't have Shakespeare, what would we have? We brought Chaucer forward and now there are lots of Chaucer jokes." He also talked about the audience that the show will most likely appeal to: "people in their twenties who are just starting out in their lives, they know they have talent, or greatness, and they are trying to figure out how to make it work. I think we assume greatness is automatic, but it comes with a lot of doubt and work."

Of course there are always things to overcome when working on a creative project. "My computer was destroyed a few days ago, and it is kind of ironic because that happens in the episode we were working on. . . I guess it's an example of life imitating art," laughed Adams.

"The general rule is not to look at YouTube comments, but we've had nice comments so far," said Xander Williams. "It's hard when you're not there with the audience; it's difficult to gauge — other than by likes. With film at least you have premieres, but there's nothing like that for a webseries. . . it's a funny industry."

While Shakespeare is the main focal point of the show, Williams assures me that the other characters will be explored as well, creating many perspectives — all the while asking the question “Why Shakespeare?”

“There are a lot of ancillary items surrounding the series. We’re trying to create a world in real time. Usually stories happen in the past, but we’re trying to make it happen in the present,” said Adams. The characters will all have their own twitter accounts, and they plan to tweet before each episode. Some might even start blogs during the series. If you ever wanted to follow William Shakespeare and his friends on twitter, now’s your chance.

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