



***Walter Borden reads sonnets by  
William Shakespeare  
to the music of  
Fernando Sor  
performed by Paul Martell***

**A Teacher's Guide**  
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Original painting by Kasber

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**A Teacher's Guide**

The sonnets of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and the music of Fernando Sor (1778-1839) share a distinct lyrical quality that transcends time and style. With over two hundred years separating the two artists, one might think they would have little in common. The performances on this CD prove otherwise. Walter Borden's readings bring a whole new dimension to the sonnets. His sensitive, passionate interpretation allows for a clearer, more personal insight into the essence of Shakespeare's writings.

The choice of compositions by Sor as accompaniment to the sonnets was serendipitous for the most part. The musical presentation consists of fourteen of Sor's famous twenty studies for the guitar. As challenging as they are musical, Sor's studies are an eloquent compliment to the sonnets. Paul Martell's fluid, artistic playing provides a melodic stage on which the readings dance freely, allowing each sonnet to work its own special magic.

- Liner notes from the Compact Disc

The sonnets of William Shakespeare stand the test of time as one of the quintessential expressions of a man's heartfelt experiences regarding love, passion and the darker sides of human emotion such as jealousy and hatred. He wrote 154 fourteen line poems connected by these various themes. Shakespeare was one of the most prolific writers in history; producing poetry and many famous plays

The one quality that sets the sonnets apart from the rest of his work is that these poems were of a deep personal nature that reveal much about the writer. There are hints of a love triangle between himself, a young man and a mysterious woman, often referred to as the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, whose identity remains unclear to this day.

To inspire students to delve into Shakespeare's works, they should be heard in the spirit in which they were written. With the emotional edge, depth of feeling and the eloquence of Walter Borden, they invariably take on an undeniably personal and contemporary feel. The initial understanding comes from the lyrical tempo and timbre of the voice. The more one reads, listens and learns, the easier the sonnets are to understand and enjoy but most of all, to be able to relate.

One becomes truly aware of the gift of true artistry and mastery of expression through language that was possessed by Shakespeare; the beauty and fluidity of the lines. The depth of meaning though maybe not seen at first, will become obvious with time.

**1. How does a teacher go about turning students of the New Millennium into appreciators of the sonnets of William Shakespeare or the music of Fernando Sor?**

**2. How does one apply the Shakespeare Compact Disc to that end?**

It is obvious that in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries there was no such thing as multi or mass media - no MTV or MuchMusic. It was a much slower time and people had to be quite inventive in order to entertain themselves. They would express and amuse themselves culturally through music and dance, as well as through language via stories, books or plays.

Because many people of the day could not read, entertainment that utilized the spoken word was of great importance.

It is essential to stress the point that once the language barrier is broken, the emotions expressed in the sonnets are as contemporary as the day they were written. Nothing about the range of the human emotional experience, from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of despair has changed in thousands of years, let alone in the last three or four hundred years. This is most evident in the 30 sonnets selected for this CD as well as in the other 124. For example, the following is one of the most beautiful and well-known of the sonnets:

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**SHALL I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate,  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed.  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of the fair thou owest,  
Nor shall Death brag thou wandrest in his shade,  
When in eternal line, to Time, thou growest.  
So long as men can breath or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.**

Throughout the sonnets there are numerous references to Love, Death and Time. On many occasions, Shakespeare tells the recipient of his affections that the person, as seen through Shakespeare's eyes at the moment of writing, will live on through his verse, regardless of the permanence of Death and the endlessness of Time. The teacher should allow each student to give his or her interpretation of the meaning of each sonnet discussed.

Walter Borden's wonderful interpretation of the thirty sonnets on the CD gives the students an opportunity to hear them expressed by an expert reader and experienced actor.

Transmitting the full range of Shakespeare would be difficult artistically for most teachers. Hearing them read properly may provide the student with the added incentive to delve further into the sonnets to discover how this poetry relates to them. While many of the individual lines themselves would require some explanation, the overall mood of each sonnet is conveyed by the voice itself. Of course, the guitar music that accompanies each sonnet is purposely there to assist in the creating of the moods expressed.

The sonnets themselves were written during a particularly tumultuous time in Shakespeare's life. Being able to relate to the meaning of the verse, once it is understood, can make students realize that people from other periods in history were not so different from themselves. The means of expression may certainly be different but the emotions were fundamentally the same as ours are today. The teacher may suggest that students pair off to select a sonnet or two to rehearse and perform to each other in order to achieve basic understanding of the poetry and feel comfortable with reading aloud.

The next step is to encourage the students to write or even improvise poetry of their own that reflects his or her personal feelings about some of the subjects contained in the sonnets. The teacher can incorporate what has become a fad in some cities like New York where they have what are called **Poetry Slams**. On any given night, where young people congregate, anyone can get on the stage and recite poetry - original or otherwise. Sometimes, it's one on one with the audience. At other times, two persons may perform onstage to each other.

## A MORE DETAILED METHODOLOGY

There are even improvisation competitions. Students are given a time limit to write a short poem to read to the class, or to another student or they can improvise, depending on how confident the person may be.

Under controlled situations in a classroom, this can be an effective method for allowing students to express their feelings through poetry and also have some fun doing it. Addressing the need for and allowing the freedom of personal expression is the main purpose of these sessions.

The teacher can maintain a certain amount of control by possibly setting a few basic ground rules so things do not get out of hand. Ultimately, he or she must constantly be aware of assisting the students in adding quality of construction to their poetry. Encouraging the effort and offering constructive criticism and guidance.

To summarize, the students should understand that saying what you feel is one thing. Expressing those feelings eloquently, to the point and in an artistic manner is the result one must always strive for. With the teacher continually referring back to Shakespeare and the methods by which *his* innermost feelings are expressed can serve as a guide to the importance of this craft. It's not what you say but how well you say it. Approaching the teaching of the sonnets in this way shows that understanding the language and construction of great poetry reaches far beyond the classroom and in some manner help shed new light on contemporary problems or simply in the day to day dealings with others.

1. The first thing that should be discussed at length in class is the personal history of William Shakespeare as well as the general history and language of the Elizabethan period. A certain amount of time should also be devoted to discussing the life and times of Fernando Sor. Remember one can always go back to these discussions. The more disinterested students may require moving on to the next step a little sooner for them to "get with it", as it were.

2. When the teacher feels that enough time has been spent on the historical background, it is then time to bring a CD player with good sounding speakers into the classroom.

3. The first piece that should be played is a very recent hip-hop, rap or other contemporary tune. The surprise of hearing this music will allow the students to loosen up for the session. Let the tune play until everyone has gotten into the rhythm of the tune and then the volume should be faded out.

4. The teacher would then query the students as to what the most noticeable characteristics of the music they have just heard. The two most likely answers are the beat and the lyrics. Therein lies the rub, so to speak.

5. The teacher should then pick another tune; preferably at a different tempo.

6. Ask the same question as to the characteristics that are most noticeable and the answers should be similar.

7. The teacher should then play a selection from the sonnets CD. Rather than ask any questions the teacher should immediately play another selection.

8. Have an open discussion with the students stressing the point that poetry and music, whether they be the works of Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson; the music of The Beatles or the latest hip hop band; what they all have in common to the reader or listener is rhythm and meaning.

9. The Teacher should then point out that the difference of time, 200 years, between Shakespeare and Sor does not in any way affect the compatibility of the two but rather that they compliment each other in a way that is quite magical. Discuss this point with the class.

10. Next, the teacher should ask each student to memorize any one of the 154 sonnets within a period of two weeks and then recite it to the class. It doesn't matter if students choose the same sonnet. It may be interesting to discuss the individual's interpretation. The teacher should stress the importance of timing and that the student must find his or her own rhythm when reading the poem and not to be influenced by anything except the lyrical feeling the words evoke.

11. The next step is to delve more into the sonnets themselves. Who was the Dark Lady of the Sonnets? Who was the young man who was the subject of 126 of the sonnets? In conjunction with the process of going through the sonnets on the CD, and to show their relevance to modern times, the teacher should organize Poetry Slams occasionally as described earlier. These can be carried out with the class as a whole or the class can be divided into smaller groups. Of course, how the sessions are carried out will depend on the number of students in the class and the size of the classroom.

Once the teacher has decided how to proceed, the methodology is the same.

However, if there is more than one group involved, a responsible student in each group should conduct the session as would the teacher.

#### **The outcomes of these experiences are:**

**1) students will gain some familiarity and understanding of the works of William Shakespeare and Fernando Sor and their respective historical periods.**

**2) students will be learn to experiment with poetic improvisation.**

**3) receiving a certain amount of freedom within the parameters of the exercises will encourage personal expression and feelings of confidence on the part of the student.**

**4) the students will be assisted in developing the ability to communicate with others; skills that will benefit them in the future.**

This guide has been developed to help the teacher incorporate the Compact Disc "**Walter Borden Reads Sonnets by William Shakespeare**" within an established course in the curriculum that deals with the study of English Literature. With all the available information this basic guide should be expanded upon by the teacher to suit the needs of the students. The most informative book on Shakespeare is the "Riverside Shakespeare" and is available at most libraries.

Teachers and students can also visit our web site at **[www.svpproductions.com](http://www.svpproductions.com)**. The complete 154 sonnets of William Shakespeare are available for downloading. There are short biographies of William Shakespeare and Fernando Sor as well as links to informative sites.

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Thanks to Dr. Rob Finlay at Université Sainte-Anne for the tip on Poetry Slams and to Kathleen Rosborough for her helpful suggestions.

Please Note:

1. There is a continuing debate on authorship with regard to some of the plays attributed to William Shakespeare. Internet sources vary with numbers ranging from 28 to 37. I have also discovered discrepancies in dates and historical facts. Much information found on the Internet must be taken with a grain of salt. It is always a good rule of thumb to cross-reference.

Usually, one can find the *most* reliable sources of information outside the Internet in a library or book store. One of the best resources available for any information relative to Shakespeare is "**The Riverside Shakespeare**" © 1974 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Other books dealing specifically with the sonnets are "**An Introduction to Shakespeare's Sonnets for Historians and Others**" by J. Dover Wilson and "**The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets**", interpretive essays by R.P. Blackmur, Leslie A. Fiedler, Northrop Frye, Edward Hubler, Stephen Spender and Oscar Wilde ("The Portrait of Mr. W.H.").

2. The actual birth date of Fernando Sor is not known. Historical records show that he was baptized on February 14, 1778. My original source for the birth date listed in the CD notes was from a music publication of Sor's famous 20 guitar études transcribed by Andres Segovia published in 1945. The birth date given was 1780. I have revised it for this guide.

3. On the CD, in **Sonnet 27**, the last line should read "For thee and for *myself* no quiet find". Walter read the word "thysself". The mistake went unnoticed until much later when I was proof-reading and cross-referencing the sonnets for the CD insert. We do acknowledge the error but there were several reasons why it was not re-recorded;

the most important of which was that the overall performance captured the essence of the poem so well, that it simply would not be worthwhile making the attempt to duplicate it.

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**The Sonnets of William Shakespeare**

Originally published in 1609, William Shakespeare's sonnets are 154 poems that scholars believe were written in the 1590s. Uncertainty continues on several points: the sequence of composition, whether the sonnets have a chronological and thematic order, and the identity of the people addressed.

Many of the first 126 sonnets were apparently written to a young man, and some of those numbered 125-154 are addressed to a mysterious "dark lady." Shakespeare, or his publisher, dedicated the volume to a "Mr. W. H.," whose identity has never been established.

Unlike the Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnets, Shakespeare's sonnets, also called Elizabethan or English sonnets, consist of three quatrains (4 lines) and a rhyming couplet (2 lines), with a rhyme scheme of abab c-d-c-d e-f-e-f g-g. They cover a variety of philosophical themes such as time and death, love, friendship, and the immortality of poetry.

Based on The Grolier Encyclopedia



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