

Hello and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. We invite you to listen carefully to learn about the world. And you can improve your American English reading and speaking at the same time.

Today we talk about sports and Vietnam. The country recently said, "thanks," but "no thanks," regarding the Asian Games. We'll tell you why.

Then we say happy birthday (number 450) to English writer William Shakespeare. He wrote some of the most memorable words ever put on paper. But one acting group in the United States is putting on his plays ...without speaking! How is that possible?

Stay with us and discover our world ...As It Is.

Last week, the government in Vietnam surprised some observers with its decision not to hold the Asian Games in 2019. However, many people inside the country have welcomed the decision. Reporter Marianne Brown is in Vietnam's capital, Hanoi. June Simms has her story.

Vietnamese fans at any big football match can show lots of energy when supporting their country at international sporting events. Football generally creates the most excitement. Vietnamese often wear the colors of top teams, like Manchester United and Barcelona, on their motorbikes and clothing. But other sports, like badminton, are also popular.

That is why the Vietnamese government's decision not to hold the 2019 Asian Games came as a surprise to many observers. One of them is Carl Thayer, a Vietnam expert from the University of New South Wales.

"This is a country that likes to be a centerpiece, and that is sports mad. It just surprised me because Vietnam usually, is always, grabs these opportunities to showcase itself."

However, the reaction from inside the country suggests that many Vietnamese had expected the decision. In a statement last week, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said Vietnam did not have enough experience at hosting large sporting events.

The statement said that hosting an international sporting event can “contribute to social-economic development, promoting the country’s images and increasing its position.” But if the event is not successful, “the effects will be reversed.”

Hanoi won the right to host the Asian games in 2012, beating the Indonesian city of Surabaya. But some Vietnamese criticized the expected costs.

Local media have estimated the cost of holding the 2019 games at \$150 million. But some reports set the price much higher.

The decision led some people to say that Vietnam was concerned about bad publicity after Russia’s experience with the Winter Olympics in Sochi. But Professor Thayer does not think this was likely.

“Who except for a handful of people would be worried about the expense? You know, I mean, high speed rail, that’s an expense that the Prime Minister loses. But on the Asian Games, it would be circuses for the masses.”

Hoang Quoc Vinh is director of international cooperation at the Viet Nam Sports Administration. He told VOA that the government has invested a lot in this area, especially in supporting young people. In his words, it is a “pity” Vietnam is not hosting the Asian Games. He described the feeling as being like when a football is almost inside the goal, but suddenly changes direction and finally lands outside the net.

In the past, two other countries decided against the Asian Games: South Korea in 1970; and Pakistan in 1978. I’m June Simms.

## Could You Please Speak A Little Louder?

Today, April 23rd, marks the 450th anniversary of the birth of playwright William Shakespeare. An American theater company recently marked Shakespeare's birthday with a revival, or new production, of his play Hamlet. But this version of the play is performed without spoken words. Caty Weaver has more.

Synetic Theater Company is based in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. Paata Tsikurishvili and his wife Irina launched the company 12 years ago. The Tsikurishvilis moved to the United States from Georgia in the 1990s. They starred as Hamlet and Ophelia in Synetic's first silent version of Hamlet.

Paata Tsikurishvili says that is how the critically praised "Silent Shakespeare" series began.

“Hamlet opened the door for us in a theater community and brought us many awards and recognition. That was a start for Synetic Theater that spread the word about the theater company that we are doing Shakespeare without text, which is unusual and the same time very accessible.”

The company uses music, dance and facial expressions to tell the story.

This time, Irina appeared in the play as Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother. She says that Shakespearian language is widely understood and permits a lot of creativity.

“We’ve done so many different ways Shakespeare. We’ve done Shakespeare in (the) Twenties. Recently, we’ve done Twelfth Night; we had also Shakespeare on the sand. It was King Lear. And we’ve done The Tempest on the water.”

Actor Alex Mills has performed in many Synetic productions. He says playing the part of Hamlet was difficult, and a huge responsibility.

“For Paata to pass it along to me, having it been a role that he developed originally, in a way it feels like passing along a torch, you know, entrusting me to carry that role in the show.”

The part of Ophelia was a childhood dream for 20-year-old Irina Kavsdze.

“My first interaction with Shakespeare was silent. Before I started reading Shakespeare on my own or in school, I saw this Hamlet for the first time. I was nine years old. I hadn’t read any other Shakespeare.”

Since opening in 2002, the Synetic Theater Company has received 24 Helen Hayes Awards and 92 nominations. The awards recognize theater excellence in the Washington, D.C. area. Victor Shargai is chairman of the awards committee.

“What they have done for Washington theater is really very, very important. For national theater, for the entire country.”

In January, Washingtonian magazine honored Paata and Irina Tsikurishvili as “Washingtonians of the Year” for their work in the local theater community. I’m Caty Weaver.

And I’m Jim Tedder in Washington. Whenever I think about Shakespeare, I remember the line from Hamlet.

“To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

I have always thought it meant to be honest with yourself. What do you think it means? Send us an email or a letter with your ideas.

That’s all for now, but more Learning English programs are coming up. And there is world news at the beginning of the hour on VOA.





