



SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS

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**The Bard's 'King Lear' will be the Inspiration
for the 2017 Shakespeare in the Streets Production**

*The free, nightly production will occur on the streets in front of
St. Louis Public Library's Central Library in downtown St. Louis*

ST. LOUIS (July 10, 2017) – Playwright Nancy Bell will use the Bard's *King Lear* to create an epic theme that encompasses the entire city, not just one neighborhood, in the 2017 Shakespeare in the Streets: ONE CITY production that will be performed Sept. 15-17, at the St. Louis Public Library's Central Library (1301 Olive St.). The play will be titled *Blow, Winds*.

Bell, playwright-in-residence at Shakespeare Festival St. Louis and author of the past five SITS productions, will create the adaptation for the 2017 event, along with creative team members Tom Martin (director), Peter and Margery Spack (set designer) and Lamar Harris (musical director and composer). The cast will be announced in August.

The team has been meeting with city residents and community leaders for the past year inviting them to share their community stories. The resulting production will feature the combined talents of professional actors alongside local residents. The script is a reflection of Shakespeare's plays, real conversations with residents, and Bell's impressions.

"After focusing on specific neighborhoods the past five years, we're looking forward to bringing the entirety of the St. Louis region together to ask ourselves, 'What does it mean to be a St. Louisan today?'" Bell said. "The play draws from the whole city for its source materials. It also seeks to revisit the themes and the people from all previous SITS shows, so it is a broader, more epic story. This is the first time we've adapted a tragedy, so while there will still be a lot of fun and laughs, this production will also feature sorrow and loss."

Bell's inspiration for the play resonates in the lines from *King Lear* that are sometimes referred to as "Lear's Prayer on the Heath," in which Lear meets a ragged beggar in a story and suddenly empathizes with the poor for the first time, falling on his knees to say:

*Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.*

"During our frequent conversations with residents this past year, we heard many stories about their love for St. Louis and the pride they have in their neighborhoods," Bell said. "But we also heard about their frustration with problems that seem to be ingrained not only in our city but throughout the world including inequality, injustice, and violence. This project sheds light on what there is to celebrate in our city, while still acknowledging the problems we all face. Our fate belongs to one another."

Shakespeare in the Streets is produced in partnership with the St. Louis Public Library. In conjunction with the production, the library will present an interactive exhibit, "We are Shakespeare," in the Great Hall of Central Library, Sept. 5 through Nov. 4, highlighting the work of William Shakespeare. The exhibit will consist of a series of hands-on displays and activities, as well as a selection of visual and print materials from the SLPL's collection, a 30-foot mural and a professional Shakespearean actor to engage patrons. The exhibit is free and open to the public during library hours.

In support of the exhibit, SLPL will also present a variety of programs at multiple library locations in the City of St. Louis including Baby Bard, a Shakespeare themed storytelling and craft activity program for preschool aged children offered in SLPL neighborhood locations. Other programs, featured artists, speakers and workshops will also be announced at a later date.

As part of the ONE CITY partnership programming, the St. Louis Public Library hosted a free Shakespeare camp led by Shakespeare Festival St. Louis teaching artists. The camp was offered in June at SLPL's Carondelet Branch for children grades 3-5.

"Our 'We are Shakespeare' exhibit will bring the language of the page and to the public," said Waller McGuire, executive director of the St. Louis Public Library. "It is not literature in the classical sense. Shakespeare needs to be heard and experienced. We all speak Shakespearean words in our everyday English. In the realm of human insecurity, not a lot has changed in 400 years. Shakespeare wrote about love, greed, revenge, family, betrayal, gender identity and war. His work is incredibly relevant today,

and we have created an experience where everyone can play with and understand Shakespeare.”

This year’s street event is underwritten by PNC Arts Alive, part of the company’s multi-year initiative to support visual and performing arts groups with the goal of increasing arts access and engagement in new and innovative ways. Additional support for ONE CITY comes from the Whitaker Foundation, the William E. Weiss Foundation, the Strive Fund, Spire, and Spencer Fane. The Urban League of St. Louis is serving as a community partner providing meeting space and support for collaboration amongst local residents and artists.

Bell, a 2017 St. Louis Visionary Award honoree, is the author of the Shakespeare in the Streets adaptations: “*Remember Me*” (Maplewood, 2016); “*The World Begun*” (Old North; 2015 St. Louis Theatre Circle Award for Outstanding New Play); “*Good in Everything*” (Clayton, 2014); “*Old Hearts Fresh*” (The Grove; 2013 St. Louis Theatre Circle Award for Outstanding New Play); and “*The New World*” (Benton Park West, 2012).

Since its inception in 2001, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has surpassed the one million mark in attendance through its work In the Schools, In the Streets and In the Park with more than 710,000 people attending the free main stage productions at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park. The organization has reached an additional 300,000 students In the Schools through its educational programming. In 2010, the Festival launched SHAKE 38, a marathon participatory presentation of Shakespeare’s entire 38-play canon community wide. Leadership support for Shakespeare Festival St. Louis’ 2017 season is provided by the Whitaker Foundation. The Festival is also funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Missouri Arts Council, the Regional Arts Commission, and the Arts & Education Council of Greater St. Louis. In 2017, the Festival was named Arts Organization of the Year by the Missouri Arts Council. For more information, please visit www.sfstl.com or call 314-531-9800.

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Shakespeare in the Streets

- 2016 *Remember Me* (a mash-up of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo & Juliet*)
Sutton Boulevard, Maplewood
- 2015 *The World Begun* (based on Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*)
N. 14th Street, Old North
- 2014 *Good in Everything* (based on *As You Like It*)
Central Avenue, Clayton
- 2013 *Old Hearts Fresh* (based on *The Winter’s Tale*)
Manchester Road, The Grove
- 2012 *The New World* (based on an adaptation of *The Tempest*)
Cherokee Street/Benton Park West

