



SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS

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Shakespeare Festival St. Louis Announces Productions for New, In the Works Programming

'Romeo & Juliet' Opens June 1 at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park

ST. LOUIS (April 26, 2018) – “Into the Breeches,” a play written by George Brant and directed by Nancy Bell, will be the main stage production of Shakespeare Festival St. Louis’ new fourth pillar of programming, In the Works. The month-long, ticketed event, scheduled for late fall at the Grandel Theatre, will culminate the 2018 season that includes the Education Tour, SHAKE 38, the main stage production of “Romeo & Juliet” (June 1-24) and the Shakespeare in the Streets’ production of “Blow, Winds,” (June 15-16).

In addition to “Into the Breeches,” In the Works will include staged readings of “The Thousand Natural Shocks,” by playwright Michael Sáenz, and a family show, “A Most Outrageous Fit of Madness,” inspired by “The Comedy of Errors” and written by Bell, the Festival’s playwright and literary manager. Deep-dive talkbacks and art-making workshops for kids will round out the events.

“Into the Breeches’ is a hilarious and deeply human exploration of Shakespeare’s continued impact on us as individuals and as a community,” Bell said. “Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has been working toward this next step of enhancing its programming with new works developed by artists across the country.”

“Into the Breeches” is a comedy about the Oberon Play House, a fictitious theater group, in Providence R.I. It’s 1942, and with the men away at war, the director’s wife sets out to produce an all-female version of “Henry V.” She assembles an unexpected cast that showcases how art and comedy can come together in even the darkest times. The play had its critically-acclaimed world premiere in January 2018 at Trinity Repertory Company. This will be its first production in St. Louis.

“The Thousand Natural Shocks” tells the story of a high school student who explores his identity through experiences at a private military academy. The title character is encouraged and challenged by his role in the school’s production of “Hamlet.” Sáenz was commissioned by the Festival to adapt the story from his book of the same title. The story draws inspiration from the It Gets Better Project, which leads a global movement to empower LGBTQ youth worldwide. Webster Conservatory alumnus Kern McFadden will direct.

Gary Wayne Barker will direct the family play, “A Most Outrageous Fit of Madness,” Bell’s story of resilience, identity and family. Casting for all three productions will be announced in July.

Generous support for In the Works is provided by Karen and Mont Levy.

Romeo & Juliet: June 1-24, Shakespeare Glen

On June 1, Elena Araoz, a critically acclaimed New York-based director of opera and theater, will bring to life the tragedy of star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park. The production will feature a garage band trio from Omaha, hanging lanterns and streamers in the trees, an ultra-modern and uniquely lit set, and of course, the infamous balcony and a colorful moon for the two teenaged characters. The show, which begins at 8 p.m., is scheduled nightly June 1-24, excluding Tuesdays. Preview performances are scheduled May 30-31.

“Romeo and Juliet is such a timely story for today’s audiences, both here in St. Louis and beyond,” said Elena Araoz, director. “It’s all about big love, and how we must take great care of our young people, and remind ourselves every day that our greatest duty is to provide them with a sense of hope for the future -- that our identity is not defined by the exclusion of another.”

The set, designed by Peter and Margery Spack, is described as “omniprism,” meaning that it has a mix of both contemporary and Shakespearean elements, such as neon lights and a garage door coupled with a “Verona” style brick tower and Italian sign, for example. The set will consist of three layers: “Old Verona” designated by painted brick structures and a faded Italian welcome sign; scaffolding structures that show an attempt for the present community to restore Verona to its glory days; and a layer of unexpected explosions of light and color that represent the love, hope and power the young characters bring to the crumbling and divided community. The set will extend into the audience with a series of lanterns and bistro-style lights that will make the audience feel as if they are sitting on a hilltop in Verona. Costumes worn by the cast will have a classic contemporary look, with Renaissance features, including brocade patterns, floral prints, and doublets.

Show highlights will include an original score by Dust Ensemble, a percussion trio, featuring musicians Daniel Ocanto, Graham Ulicny and Sean Smith, all of Omaha, Nebraska. Araoz most recently worked with the group on a play by Mac Wellman titled, “Chronicles of Madness” at the New York Theatre Workshop. For the St. Louis production, the group will perform on the stage as Verona’s resident garage band, playing up to seven instruments, including keyboard and drums.

In addition, a new concession tent will enhance the guest service experience in the park lobby. The new, larger tent will house the gift shop, Will Call, and some concessions. Its location will be moved to the center of the upper lobby area. In addition, the portable restrooms will be scattered throughout the Glen for easier access and convenience.

The four Thursday performances during the production run will be signed for the deaf and hard of hearing. In addition, Mind’s Eye Radio will audio describe a performance for the visually impaired; the date will be confirmed later.

The nightly Green Show will begin at 6:30 p.m. and feature local musicians, the Bard’s Buzz (a synopsis of the play), and roving performers. Free backstage tours will begin at 6:30 p.m. in front of the main stage. A 20-minute mini-play of “Romeo & Juliet” will be performed Thursday through Sunday by the Festival’s advanced teen ensemble, the Shakespeare Squadron.

Open lawn seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Premium seating, priced at \$10 and \$20, can be reserved online starting in early May at www.sfstl.com, until noon the day of the show, or purchased after 5:30 p.m. in the Glen. Visit www.sfstl.com for details.

Picnic fare, including sandwiches, snacks, beer, wine, soda, and water are available for purchase, provided by the Saint Louis Zoo. Audiences will be able to purchase Schlafly's Forbidden Ale, available exclusively at the production in Forest Park, as well as at Shakespeare in the Streets (June 15-16). Schlafly is the official beer of Shakespeare Festival St. Louis. Cash, debit, and credit cards are accepted in Shakespeare Glen.

Butler's Pantry and the Festival will offer picnic boxes that will include a full dinner and dessert, plus optional reserved blanket or chair seating for the show. Picnics must be ordered in advance online or by phone and will be available for purchase in early May.

Reynaldo Piniella and Sigrid Wise will play parts of Romeo and Juliet. Joining them are Festival veterans Gary Glasgow (Friar Laurence, cast member of Festival's original "Romeo & Juliet"), Michael James Reed (Lord Capulet), Cherie Corinne Rice (Lady Capulet), Antonio Rodriguez (Benvolio), and Pete Winfrey (Paris/Prince). Newcomers include Patrick Blindauer (Chorus/Peter/Sampson/Apothecary); Patrice Foster (Lady Montague); Dakota Granados (Tybalt); Karl Hawkins (Balthazar); David Heron (Lord Montague); Jane Paradise (Nurse); Chris Ware (Friar John); and Terrell Wheeler (Mercutio); along with Webster Conservatory students Harrison Farmer and Esmeralda Garza.

In addition to the Spacks, creative team members include Dottie Englis (Costumes), John Wylie (Lighting), Rusty Wandall (Sound), Paul Dennhardt (Fight Choreographer), and Joanna Battles (Voice & Text), all of whom worked on previous Festival productions.

About Shakespeare Festival St. Louis

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. In 2012, the Festival shut down its first street, Cherokee, to present a community-based play In the Streets. Leadership support for Shakespeare Festival St. Louis' 2018 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. For more information, please visit www.sfstl.com, or call 314-531-9800.

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