

Hip to Hip Takes on the Bard's Aces in Green Spaces

by Kristen Guglielmo, associate editor Aug 8, 2024

As the summer sun ascends, so too does Hip to Hip Theatre Co. as it kicks off its 17th season of free Shakespeare in the Park. The group will be hitting six parks across the World's Borough for performances of two of the Bard's plays throughout August.

The troupe performs shows in repertory — a system of play production in which an acting company rehearses multiple plays and performs them on a rotating basis.



This season, the cast is performing “The Winter’s Tale,” directed by David Frederick Mold, and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” directed by Jason Marr, co-founder of Hip to Hip.

Asked about the two play selections, Marr told the Chronicle, “One of our unofficial goals as a company has been to work through the entire canon. So we have been doing that over the last 17 years.”

He added, “We’ve been getting to some of the later Shakespeare plays or ones that are just not as frequently produced.”

Hip to Hip co-founder Joy Marr said, “This year is especially amazing because each actor plays multiple roles within each show, which means they are preparing four to five Shakespearean roles at once.”

“The Winter’s Tale” follows King Leontes as he falsely accuses his pregnant queen of adultery with his best friend. He makes a series of decisions that tear his family apart. Sixteen years later, the king tries to rectify his errors.

“I find audiences are captivated by Shakespeare’s telling of this tale, from the powerful and emotional first acts to the surprising final scene” said Mold, who said the play intrigued him since he first saw it more than 30 years ago. “It’s a decades-long journey of personal and political reconciliation and redemption.”

It is Jason Marr’s fifth time working on “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” a play following four young lovers who escape to a magical forest for love. That night, the king and queen of the fairies declare war on each other, and a company of amateur actors meet to rehearse a play.

Pairing it with ‘The Winter’s Tale’ offers audiences an added treat because the plays complement each other so well. Beyond the summer-winter contrast, they provide thematic echoes such as love and marriage, personal freedom, magic and the healing power of nature.”

A half hour before each performance, children in attendance are welcome to participate in “Kids & the Classics,” an interactive workshop for ages 5 through 12. The activity gives children a chance to interact with the play’s text by previewing the story, creating links between the text and their own lives through theater games and close reading.

“We developed this program over 10 years ago,” Marr said. “It gets kids loosened up and having a good time And also teaches a little bit about theater etiquette, just so that they can enjoy the show and allow their parents to enjoy the show.”

He added, “My wife and I run the company and we have children, so we know how valuable it is to be exposed to theater as a kid — not just to create theater artists of the future, but theatergoers of the future.”

The repertory cast is Neev Bar-David, Konnor Brown, Chaunice Chapman, Nicole Marie Hunt, Dayron Leon, Axel Marr, Bree Marr, Jason Marr, Joy Marr, Mikaya Martin, Nancy Nichols, Parmeet Singh and Stephanie Jeane Toussaint.

The production team is Nancy Nichols, Timmy Costello, Anna Belden, Terry Chun, Mikayla Carleo, Kiki Sanchez and Xavier Rodriguez.

Performances take place throughout parks in Queens, in Sunnyside, Bayside, Flushing, Long Island City, Astoria and Fresh Meadows. The Queens show dates are Aug. 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21 and 22. More information can be found at hiptohip.org.

Audience members are encouraged to bring a blanket or low chair. Seating is first-come, first-served.