

# Outdoor festival brings Shakespeare to life

Stand how Lindsey Mergener feels about Shakespeare. In college, I had the opportunity to perform the role of Juliet in one of the scenes from *Romeo & Juliet* on stage. I still know many of the lines by heart. It's funny how great words tend to stick with you.

Shakespeare is timeless and appeals to audiences of all ages. Even though only 19, Mergener would travel anywhere to experience the mystery and magic of the Bard. For the past two years the Farmington Hills resident's faithfully gone to the Michigan Shakespeare Festival in Jackson's Ella Sharp Park. This season she's particularly interested in seeing *Romeo & Juliet*, one of two tragedies rotating from July 18 to Aug. 4 in the eighth annual festival. *Othello*, directed by John Neville. Andrews the festival artistic director, opens Thursday, July 18.

"I'm interested in seeing if it will be played as a love story or as a lust story," said Mergener, who's been studying theater

and English at Yale University since graduating from Farmington High School. "I've read *Romeo & Juliet* more than once but never seen it performed live and always wanted to."

"The Michigan Shakespeare Festival is unlike anything else around here. It's an incredible authentic experience. The stage is just like in Shakespeare's times with a balcony. The nice thing about it is it's outside. As the performance goes on you'll see the night sky. I saw *Macbeth* last year. It kind of paralleled the nature elements. It makes for really cool shadows and effects as the sun's going down."

Like Mergener, Paul Riopelle appreciates the words of Shakespeare so much that he doesn't mind rehearsing seven hours a day, six days a week. The New York actor plays *Romeo* in the production directed by John Silber and Terry Heck. This is his second season with Michigan Shakespeare Festival. Last year he played Richard III.

"It's really a play about coming of age," said Riopelle. "They both really grow up within a matter of days. By the end they've grown up to the point where they've developed love and devotion to each other that they're willing to kill themselves."

Although Riopelle's performed in productions ranging

## MICHIGAN SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

What: *Romeo & Juliet* and *Othello*

When: Opens with *Othello* 8 p.m. Thursday, July 18, and continues 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Thursday-Sunday to Sunday, Aug. 4

Where: Ella Sharp Park, Jackson.

Tickets: \$16, \$8 children age 12 and under. For information or directions, call (517) 788-5032 or (517) 780-4808

Family Show: Alice Through the Looking Glass 5:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, July 20-21, 27-28 and Aug. 3-4. Tickets \$6, free for children when accompanied by paid adult

from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at Meadow Brook Theatre in Rochester Hills to *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* at the Performance Network in Ann Arbor and *Ghosts by Moonlight* at Battery Park City Parks in New York, his most memorable roles were with the National Shakespeare Company in New York, Cincinnati and Shennandoah Shakespeare Festivals, and the Michigan festival.

"Shakespeare is my first love because of the language," said Riopelle who grew up in Riverview. "He's able to express things exactly the way we're feeling."

"*Romeo* is a role I've really wanted to play. A *Romeo* is only as good as his Juliet (played by Victoria Walters). If

there's not a genuine chemistry between actors that's hard to fake. She makes it an easy job to go out every night and fall in love with her."

Richard Redman finds playing Juliet's father equally as attractive but he's also having fun with the characters Brabantio and Gratiano in *Othello*. Redman formed a love for Shakespeare at John Glenn High School in Westland and has spent the last three years enjoying a variety of roles at the festival in Jackson. In *Othello*, Redman dies and returns to talk about it.

"Playing Lord Capulet in *Romeo & Juliet* is wonderfully challenging to make him a human being," said Redman. "He's not a very nice person."

He's very autocratic. You probably wouldn't want him for a dad. In *Othello* I'm only in the first three scenes as Desdemona's father Brabantio then I die and come back as Gratiano. The director made them twin brothers to save money.

"But the outdoor setting in the park is what's special to me. It's glorious but allows an element of intimacy."

The setting is one of the reasons Brady Mason loves playing *The Nurse* in *Romeo & Juliet*. Mason has more than 40 years experience as an actress starting in high school in Toronto where she was born and raised. She's done productions all over including Meadow Brook Theatre's Jewish Ensemble Theatre in West Bloomfield, The Purple Rose in Chelsea, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, and San Francisco Repertory Company. This is her first performance at the Michigan Shakespeare Festival and she's excited

about all of the plays. "Outdoor Shakespeare is the only way to go," said Mason. "It's the way it started. It throws me back to Elizabethan times because it's very casual. We're not as impromptu as Shakespeare's players but there's still a sense of anything can happen."

"Anybody who has not seen Shakespeare for the fear of it being too far above their heads should try it. Most amazing are the fight scenes that young men would totally enjoy. Set in the 18th-19th century, *Romeo & Juliet* is romantic. Anyone coming to see long flowing dresses won't be disappointed even though the directors move it ahead a few centuries."

"*Othello* is with the same company. It's a contemporary version of military today and there's also a family show *Alice Through the Looking Glass* that's a great way to introduce young children to theater."

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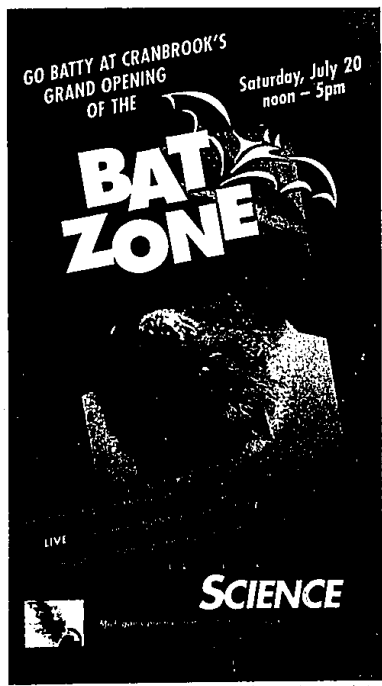
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CHAIKOVSKY: The Nutcracker (excerpts)

MUSSORGSKY: Night on Bald Mountain

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 5 (1st mvt.)

ELGAR: Pomp and Circumstance

### Roman Festival

SATURDAY, JULY 20 AT 8 PM

Paul Maki, conductor

Cecile Licad, piano

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