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All the City's a Stage, and All the Admissions Free, This Time of Year

By [STEVEN McELROY](#)

For some theater buffs summer in New York City usually includes a trip to the Delacorte to see the annual [Shakespeare in the Park](#) productions from the [Public Theater](#). But real aficionados know that plenty of other free outdoor shows pop up year after sweltering year, seeming to ask, "What about us?" and offering Elizabethan comedy and drama to the sweaty masses. These shows may not offer the starry casts that the Public does, but they are happily lacking something else too.



"It's an alternative to waiting in line for tickets, for taking a day off to wait for tickets," said Tim Errickson, the artistic director of Boomerang Theater, which is performing "The Comedy of Errors" this summer. "Audiences are sometimes surprised by that. They are in the habit of having gone to the Delacorte for so many years."

Stephen Burdman, who runs New York Classical Theater, agreed that convenience was a major selling point for his company's current production of "King Lear."

“It’s all about access,” he said. “We bring an Off Broadway production to your neighborhood for free. We make it as easy as possible.” Another factor is cost. They’re all free. And these days, a ticket price of zero dollars and zero cents is likely to be very welcome.

From the traditional summertime staple “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (at least four productions are on offer this summer) to heavier texts like “Hamlet” (at least two versions are scheduled) the entire city — not only Manhattan — is crawling with melancholy Danes, thankless children and unrequited lovers, not to mention fools, fairies and sprites. Here are some of the highlights.

INWOOD [SHAKESPEARE](#) FESTIVAL The West Side of Manhattan is probably the most fertile Shakespearean stomping ground in the city this summer. Starting way up north, this company, celebrating its 10th anniversary, will take over the Inwood Hill Park Peninsula, presenting “The Merchant of Venice,” through Saturday ([moosehallisf.org](#)).

NEW YORK CLASSICAL THEATER A bit farther south the aforementioned “King Lear” runs first in Central Park at West 103rd Street, through Sunday, and then at Castle Clinton in Battery Park, June 23 to July 7 ([newyorkclassical.org](#)). **HUDSON WAREHOUSE** On the North Patio of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument at West 89th Street and Riverside Drive the company that bills itself on its Web site as “the other free Shakespeare in the Park” will present a three-show season of “The Tempest” (through June 28), “Hamlet” (July 9 to Aug. 2) and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (Aug. 6 to 30; [hudsonwarehouse.net](#)).

HIP TO HIP THEATER COMPANY This Queens company will offer both a comedy and a tragedy this summer, the company’s third. A week of “Midsummer Night’s Dream” (Aug. 11 to 16) will be followed by a week of “Romeo & Juliet” (Aug. 18 to 23), both presented in several parks in the borough, including Fort Totten and Crocheron Park ([hiptohip.org](#)).

Outdoor Shakespeare is somewhat ubiquitous in New York each year, and plays have been known to pop up in Tompkins Square Park, Washington Square Park and other places, usually free. Some companies pass a hat after the show, but by then you will have either wandered off or been happily entertained and thus willing to cough up a few bucks.