

Free in the Parks: Sun, Shade and Shakespeare



By **STEVEN McELROY**

TRY saying the following, and be sure to enunciate clearly, speak loudly enough for a crowd to hear and really hit those T's: "She thrusts her fists against the posts and still insists she sees the ghosts."

The actors David Berent and Paulo Quiros chanted this and a few other tongue twisters as they warmed up

their voices before a recent rehearsal of Molière's comedy "The School for Wives," being produced by a small company called Extant Arts. Moments later a plane flew overhead, crystallizing the importance of being in strong and articulate voice when performing outside, as these gentlemen are preparing to do. Directed by Greg Taubman, Extant's artistic director, they were rehearsing at Mineral Springs in Central Park, where the show will run next month.

"The School for Wives" is one of many productions, mostly of classical works, that are popping up in city parks and other outdoor locales, as they do each summer. The number of viable — if challenging — theater spaces in New York increases significantly in the summer, when inventive theater folk offer free, open-air performances. The granddaddy of them all, of course, is the Public Theater in Central Park, where "As You Like It," part of the 50th-anniversary season of free Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacorte, began preview performances a few days ago.

Another "As You Like It" began the very next day in Inwood Hill Park, courtesy of the Moose Hall Theater Company. And on a recent evening more than 200 people followed a cast of about a dozen actors around Central Park just inside the 103rd Street entrance as the New York Classical Theater presented its roving production of "Twelfth Night."

New York City's annual unofficial summer season of alfresco freebies, which seems to expand each year, has begun, and during the next couple of months Hamlets, Dromios and other characters will bemoan their fates and rail to the heavens in open-air settings from Crotona Park in the Bronx to Flushing Meadows in Queens to Carroll Park in Brooklyn. Some current and coming productions are listed below. In most cases, you'll want to bring a chair or blanket, and be sure to check individual Web sites for detailed schedules and location-specific information.

HIP TO HIP THEATER COMPANY Flushing Meadows, Fort Totten, Gantry Plaza. ... This Queens company continues to expand, planning performances in 10 parks in that borough, with "Hamlet" and "The Comedy of Errors" running in repertory (July 25 to Aug. 18); hiptohip.org.

Full list omitted.