

QUEENS TIMES LEDGER

Woodside-based Theater Company Mounts Shakespeare Fest

By Morgan Rousseau
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Voelker Orth Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park.

"Macbeth," directed by Hip to Hip co-founder Jason Marr, a Sunnyside resident, is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. The story is a psychological thriller about a soldier haunted by a supernatural prophecy, and incited by his wife's ambitions.

"As a director, my goal is to tell the story that Shakespeare wrote in a vivid, exciting and celebratory way," Marr said. "I am very lucky to have such accomplished actors with which to work, because they bring a lot to the table."

The costumes were designed by Ashley Gardner. The concept of the costumes begins with the time period. Gardner recreated the looks of the historical period while exercising artistic freedom to find variations.

"As a company, we are committed to honoring the time period about which Shakespeare is writing," Marr said. "So for 'Taming of the Shrew' it is Italian Renaissance and for 'Macbeth' it is 11th century Scotland."

This year, the company features more than a dozen professional actors who perform in a classic repertory fashion with plays being performed on an alternating schedule. The actors get to mix it up, performing in both comic and tragic roles.

"This is also a great deal of fun for the audiences as well and is close to what the audiences in Shakespeare's time would have experienced. Shakespeare wrote his plays for his specific acting company," Marr said.

"Macbeth" will be performed in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Gantry Plaza Park, Fort Totten Park and Forest Park.

On Aug. 27 "Macbeth" will be performed at Agawan Park in Southampton, L.I., and on Aug. 28 "Shrew" will be performed at the same venue. Shows start at 7:30 p.m., with the exceptions of Aug 15 and Aug 29.

The plays feature performances by more than a dozen actors. Most of the actors in this season's company auditioned, although a few are returning actors from past years. The company is able to function through the volunteerism of everyone involved.

"Our ambition is to some day be able to afford a proper Equity contract for all of our artists. In our early years, however, we have been dependent upon volunteerism," Marr said.

The theater company began in 2007, founded by Marr and his wife Joy, local actors who were particularly passionate about Shakespearean plays. Their hope was to boil down a performance to its essence — text, actor and audience. In doing so, characters are brought to life through skillful and enthusiastic performances with limited technical production.

"We started the company because we wanted to enrich our community at the same time as exercising our craft," said Jason Marr, who will appear as Petruchio opposite his wife as Kate in "Taming of the Shrew."

All performances are free and open to the public and run 90 minutes. Donations are welcome at every performance. Spectators are encouraged to bring blankets, chairs and refreshments.

Hip to Hip's funding is split evenly between grants and individual donations. For the second year in a row, the group is receiving grants from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the Decentralization Program of New York State Council on the Arts, both of which are administered by Queens Council on the Arts through its Arts in Communities grant program. Since the company is nonprofit, it is totally dependent on its donors, and the Marrs are always in search of new supporters and underwriters.

For More: www.hiptohip.org