

QUEENS Chronicle

FREE SHAKESPEARE IN QUEENS PARKS ALL MONTH

by Stephanie G. Meditz, Associate Editor
August 7, 2025

Get thee to your local park throughout August for a free evening of laughs, tears and poetry by the Bard himself.

Hip to Hip Theatre Co. is back for its 19th season, bringing Shakespeare plays to outdoor public spaces across Queens. This year, folks can take their pick of comedy, tragedy or both, as one cast of actors presents “The Tempest” and “Hamlet” on rotation.

Both are shows that co-founders Jason and Joy Marr have put on before — they have produced all but 10 of the Bard’s 38 plays, and Hip to Hip condenses them to about 90 minutes to engage audiences from all walks of life.



“One of the things that we really pride ourselves on is making all of our plays accessible,” Jason Marr said. He and his wife try to preserve as much of the plot, characters and poetry as possible while maintaining a digestible runtime.

They achieved just that — the Chronicle attended Hip to Hip’s Aug. 5 performance of “The Tempest” at Queens College, joining community members on the quad as the actors told a tale of love, magic, revenge and ultimately forgiveness.

Not only was the show free and public, but it was brought to life such that the plot and the characters’ emotions were unmistakable, even if one did not recognize every word in a given line.

After being usurped as Duke of Milan, the sorcerer Prospero, portrayed masterfully by Jason Marr, seeks revenge by conjuring a storm that shipwrecks his enemies, including his brother Antonio, played by Katie Braden. Other characters are on their own quests for love, freedom and vengeance.

Caliban, Prospero’s slave, portrayed as a silly, scaly fish-human by Anzi DeBenedetto, tries to overthrow his master, but not before his absurdity and penchant for wine elicit plenty of

giggles. Antonio and Sebastian, portrayed by Anna Belden, try to assassinate Alonso, the King of Naples, played by Erick González.

But love ties the piece together, from the sweet romance between Miranda, Prospero's daughter, portrayed by Bree Marr, and Ferdinand, played by Wangai Maina, to the familial ties that are affirmed at the play's conclusion.

Julia Witcher gives a standout performance as Ariel, Prospero's sprite-servant who does his magical bidding. She lures the shipwrecked sailors to a deep sleep with her strong, yet delicate and entrancing voice and seamlessly transitions into whatever Prospero demands of her, with various costume changes.

"'The Tempest' is just a really special piece," Jason Marr said, adding that it has "something for everybody," from fairies and monsters to drunkards.

And no one is too young to appreciate Shakespeare. Hip to Hip's "Kids & the Classics" program invites children aged 4 to 12 to partake in workshops 30 minutes before each show, in which they preview the plot and connect it to their own lives.

Some families who once attended with small children still come back, even when the kids move on to high school and college, Joy Marr said.

"We always see ourselves as sort of a gateway experience, because there's no cost," she said. "And so we hope that in doing that, we are possibly creating new theatergoers, because people come and see us and then they'll say, hey, maybe I'll go see something else at the theater."

In addition to co-directing both shows with her husband, Joy Marr also plays Hamlet, the tortured prince of Denmark with a revenge plot of his own.

"These plays do sort of offer you two perspectives on what to do when someone's wronged you," she said.

Hip to Hip is bringing "The Tempest" and "Hamlet" to public spaces through Aug. 23. One may visit hiptohip.org for the full calendar. Guests are encouraged to bring a blanket or low chair.

"The Tempest" brought Queens Village's Judith Rycar back to her alma mater — the regular Hip to Hip attendee studied English at Queens College, she told the Chronicle.

"I've gone to see them for a number of years, and I have always had a wonderful time when I go," Rycar said. "They just do a fabulous job."