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Summer Shakespeare, Outside and Urban

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Joseph Papp first presented free [Shakespeare](#) performances in Central Park more than 50 years ago. Today, like heat advisories and smelly subway stations, Shakespeare among the elements is intrinsic to summer in the city.

While Papp's legacy — the [Public Theater](#) presentations at the Delacorte in Central Park — is the best known of the productions, there are myriad offerings from smaller companies, and some of them are already under way.

For some purveyors of outdoor theater, the appeal lies partly in one of Papp's original goals, to bring Shakespeare to the people. Hip to Hip Theater Company, for example, performs in parks in Queens.

“To these people the Delacorte might as well be in Montana,” said Jason Marr, the artistic director. “It appeals to my political sense that we are doing something in the community and for the community.”

Several artistic directors said that when admission was free and audiences could wander in and out as they pleased, they were more likely to sample Shakespeare or other classical plays, even if they were unfamiliar.

“It brings people in who would not go to see Shakespeare, no matter what level of education,” said Ted Minos, the artistic director of the Inwood Shakespeare Festival.

Such settings can also enrich the Shakespeare experience. “Many of the plays have natural outdoor themes because they were all performed outdoors originally, and that’s something not to forget,” said Stephen Burdman, the artistic director of New York Classical Theater.

“Shakespeare’s language is so nature-oriented, whether he’s going on and on about fishing, which he does, or we learn about the Forest of Arden” in “As You Like It.”

“You hear the frogs croaking and the crickets chirping,” Mr. Burdman said of the outdoor theatergoing experience. “In our case you see the turtles and the fish and the egrets flying over the lake.” Or ducklings walking past rehearsals, as happened the other day. “I said to someone, ‘You know I couldn’t pay for that.’ ”

One unexpected benefit of an outdoor setting, some directors said, is intimacy. “It’s kind of an odd thing because we are in a giant park with helicopters and police cars and all kinds of things,” said Tim Errickson, who runs Boomerang Theater, “and yet it’s a very personal experience.”

Outside, audiences might be involved in literal ways, too, following actors when scenes move or suffering through the same bad weather. In the case of the Drilling Company’s Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, on the Lower East Side, productions take place in an actual working lot. Sometimes, said the artistic director, Hamilton Clancy, a car owner

might walk right across the “stage” to retrieve a vehicle midperformance.

“Everybody picks up their chair and they let the Chevy pull out, and everybody just waves to the car,” Mr. Clancy said, adding, “And then we sit down and we get back to doing Shakespeare. I can’t think of anything more American than that.”

Here are some free outdoor productions running or coming up around the city. In many cases, audiences can bring chairs, blankets and picnics. Check company Web sites for schedule and location details.

INWOOD SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL Presented at the Inwood Hill Park Peninsula by Moose Hall Theater Company, the festival this year is not limited to Shakespeare. Performances of “The Comedy of Errors” (through June 19) will be followed by “Tombstone (Saga of Americans: The West)” (July 14-31), a western that brings Wyatt Earp and others to life in a story about the 1882 shootout at the O.K. Corral (inwoodshakespearefestival.com).

HUDSON WAREHOUSE The focus is on classics, not just Shakespeare. The North Patio of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument in Riverside Park is the stage, and the Greek tragedy “The Trojan Women” (through June 27) is the first play in the summer lineup. Productions of “Cyrano de Bergerac” (July 8-Aug. 1) and “Romeo and Juliet” (Aug. 5-29) will follow (hudsonwarehouse.net).

NEW YORK CLASSICAL THEATER This company subtitles its season “Shakespeare on the Run,” since audiences will follow the actors as scenes unfold in different locations. “Richard III” is now running (through June 27) in Central Park at West 103rd Street; coming up is “Much Ado About Nothing,” in Battery Park City (July 17-Aug. 1) and then Central Park (Aug. 5-29) (newyorkclassical.org).

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK This is the behemoth, presented in Central Park at the Delacorte Theater by the Public Theater, the company founded by Papp in 1954. This summer the Public will present

two plays in repertory (June 9-Aug. 1): “The Merchant of Venice,” starring [Al Pacino](#) as Shylock, and “The Winter’s Tale” ([shakespeareinthepark.org](#)).

GORILLA REPERTORY COMPANY The company that mounted “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” annually in Washington Square Park from 1989 to 2002 is returning to the show, this time at Summit Rock in Central Park, near 83rd Street and Central Park West (Thursday-June 20). Audiences should expect to move with the action ([gorillarep.org](#)).

BOOMERANG THEATER COMPANY On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, anyone wandering down the bridle path off the Central Park entrance at West 69th Street is likely to encounter Boomerang’s production of “The Tempest” (June 19-July 18) ([boomerangtheatre.org](#)).

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARKING LOT Forgoing the idyllic for the urban, the Drilling Company will present two productions in the lot at the corner of Ludlow and Broome Streets: “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (July 8-24) and “Julius Caesar” (July 29-Aug. 14) ([drillingcompany.org](#)).

HIP TO HIP THEATER COMPANY In its fourth season, this troupe will offer “The Taming of the Shrew” and “Macbeth” in repertory (Aug. 10-29) in several Queens parks, including Crocheron, Agawam and Sunnyside Gardens ([hiptohip.org](#)).

SHAKESPEARE ON THE SOUND Attending this production of “Othello” in Connecticut would involve transportation costs for New Yorkers, of course, but otherwise it is free. The show, directed by Joanna Settle, will feature original music and songs by [Stew](#) and by Heidi Rodewald, the collaborators behind “Passing Strange,” meaning that it might be worth the trip. “Othello” will be presented first at Pinkney Park in Rowayton (June 15-26) and then at Roger Sherman Baldwin Park in Greenwich (July 2-11) ([shakespeareonthesound.org](#)).