

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

15 January 2014

### **Optimist Theatre Announces Free Shakespeare in the Park's "Unsphere the Stars" Fundraiser**

MILWAUKEE, WIS. – Milwaukee's Optimist Theatre, presenter of Free Shakespeare in the Park, has announced its "Unsphere the Stars" fundraiser in support of this summer's performance of the comedy "The Winter's Tale." As has become the organization's custom since the establishment of Free Shakespeare in the Park in 2010, the fundraiser will take the form of a variety show with silent auction. The event has been set for Wednesday, February 12, 2014 at Milwaukee's Turner Hall Ballroom (1034 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street). Doors open at 7 p.m., and the show begins at 8 p.m. Tickets are available at Optimist Theatre's website, [www.optimisttheatre.org/support](http://www.optimisttheatre.org/support).

Mr. Philip Earl Johnson, master of physical and musical comedy, will headline the entertainment of "Unsphere the Stars." Johnson's credits include live performances of juggling, ropewalking and comedy as MooniE the Magnif'Cent – described by one columnist as "nearly Cirque du Soleil good," as well as a variety of stage and television appearances, primarily in the greater Chicago area. He has performed in many roles for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, including Macbeth, Cyrano de Bergerac, Coriolanus and Marc Antony.

Proceeds from "Unsphere the Stars" will fund the free presentation of William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale" at the COA Youth and Family Centers' amphitheater in Alice Bertschy Kadish Park in June 2014. The new season will mark the fifth year of production of Free Shakespeare in the Park and will see its run grow from its previous two weeks to encompass three weekends, and a total of 12 performances. All receipts from the fundraiser will be matched by BMO Harris Bank, Shakespeare in the Park's Presenting Sponsor, as part of a \$20,000 challenge grant.

Tickets may be purchased individually for \$35 each (\$20 of which is tax deductible) or by table (of six) for \$300. 100% tax-deductible donations may also be made at the Optimist Theatre website. "Unsphere the Stars" will also include a silent auction offering a variety of donated items and services, including several one-of-a-kind works by local artists.

#### **About "The Winter's Tale"**

Generally believed to have been written later in Shakespeare's career (1610-1611), "The Winter's Tale" is a romantic comedy of jealousy and suspected infidelity, revenge, and ultimately, of redemption and reunion. It contains one of the most famous stage directions in English literary history: "Exit, pursued by a bear." Some speculate that, because the Elizabethan theaters were housed in the same sketchy entertainment district as the "bear baiting" pits, it is possible that one or more performances featured a live bear.

Of further interest to historians, the plot, in which a monarch falsely accuses his consort of adultery, appears to parallel the fall of Queen Anne Boleyn, second wife to King Henry VIII, and may have been an allusion to which the Bard's audience would have been attuned.

The "Unsphere the Stars" title of the 2014 fundraiser is taken from a speech by Hermione from the play's first act:

Verily!  
You put me off with limber vows; but I,  
Though you would seek to unsphere the  
stars with oaths,  
Should yet say 'Sir, no going.' Verily,  
You shall not go: a lady's 'Verily' 's

As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?  
Force me to keep you as a prisoner,  
Not like a guest; so you shall pay your fees  
When you depart, and save your thanks. How say you?  
My prisoner? or my guest? by your dread 'Verily,'  
One of them you shall be.

Hermione, THE WINTER'S TALE, Act 1, sc. ii

### **About Optimist Theatre**

Optimist Theatre is a 501(c)3 non-profit theatre company and an affiliate member of UPAF, the United Performing Arts Fund. Free Shakespeare in the Park is supported in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board. In addition to Free Shakespeare in the Park, Optimist Theatre offers interactive educational outreach performances such as "To Be! Shakespeare Here and Now." The organization's goals include reaching artists and audiences across the economic, ethnic, and experiential landscape by creating art that is accessible to all people. They aspire to educate, entertain, and inspire through creative works of artistic integrity and, in doing so, to serve as a "gateway" theatre experience, bringing new audiences to the arts. To learn more, visit [OptimistTheatre.org](http://OptimistTheatre.org), or contact Managing Director Susan Scot Fry at [SSFry@OptimistTheatre.org](mailto:SSFry@OptimistTheatre.org) or 262/498-5777 or Artistic Director, Ron Scot Fry at [RSFry@OptimistTheatre.org](mailto:RSFry@OptimistTheatre.org) or 262/498-9788.



*Mr. Phillip Earl Johnson*



*The Optimist Theatre logo*



*Art for The Winter's Tale*

###

**OPTIMIST THEATRE MEDIA CONTACT:**

Susan Fry

2010 N. 1<sup>st</sup> Street

Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53212

[SSFry@OptimistTheatre.org](mailto:SSFry@OptimistTheatre.org)

262.498.5777

[www.OptimistTheatre.org](http://www.OptimistTheatre.org)

[www.facebook.com/OptimistTheatre](https://www.facebook.com/OptimistTheatre)

[www.optimisttheatre.wordpress.com](http://www.optimisttheatre.wordpress.com)