

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Optimist Theatre Announces 2024 Summer Shakespeare Series

*“Optimist Presents: Shakespeare in the City” Expands Summer Offerings*

MILWAUKEE, WI – Optimist Theatre, creators of Milwaukee’s Free Shakespeare in the Park (SitP), is pleased to announce its 2024 summer series: *Optimist Presents: Shakespeare in the City*, which will expand its offerings from 10 to nearly 50 performances. Building upon the success of the company’s first three fully touring shows, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream: The Lovers’ Tale* (2021), *Twelfth Night: Or, What She Will* (2022), and *Cymbeline* (2023), this year’s production will continue to perform in public green spaces throughout the greater Milwaukee area. New this year, the performance dates will feature multiple show offerings from several companies. The expanded programming will continue SitP’s mission of bringing free, professionally produced Shakespeare to neighborhoods throughout the city and beyond.

Optimist is embarking on an ambitious expansion in programming. In addition to producing a Shakespeare play, it will tour three additional titles and add structured theatre games sessions, giving audiences an opportunity to see multiple shows per weekend. These will include *Hamlet*, produced by Optimist Theatre and directed by former Door Shakespeare Director Michael Stebbins. This one-person production will star SitP regular Libby Amato. The other offerings include *Another Midsummer Night’s Dream*, an original piece written and directed by Milwaukee Playwright Liz Shipe and performed by The Available Players, and *The Comedy of Romeo and Juliet: Kinda Sorta*, written and directed by Patrick Schmitz and featuring the Schmitz n Giggles Shakesparody Players. Pocket Park Puppet Players will present *MacBeth* as can only be accomplished by puppets. Optimist will also present Shakespeare-focused theatre games and workshops with *The PLAY’s the Thing*.

The nine-week season is set to open June 15 and close Aug. 11. Shows will take place in more than 18 outdoor locations in the greater Milwaukee area, including Forest Home Cemetery and Arboretum; the Marcus Performing Arts Center grounds; Humboldt, Sherman, Mitchell, Lincoln, and Lake parks; and small “pocket” parks. 2024 will also debut Milwaukee’s first Shakespeare Festival on Aug. 4 at Forest Home Cemetery. The full day of activities will offer multiple performances of all the shows. To help cover the costs, the Shakespeare Festival will have a small suggested donation. All other performances will continue to be free to attend.

Transitioning to this multiple show, multiple company format is a big change for Optimist, but one that the company felt was the next step in its mission to bring Shakespeare to more Milwaukee communities. Executive Director Susan Scot Fry explains: “When Shakespeare in the Park transformed into a touring company three years ago, we had no idea how fast demand for shows would exceed capacity. This ambitious expansion provides us with the opportunity to accomplish three important goals. First, to meet that demand; second, to add shows crafted to appeal to a broader audience; and third, to showcase the work of other local theatre companies. This summer-long showcase is also what prompted the name change for the 2024 season from Shakespeare in the Park to Optimist Presents: Shakespeare in the City. After all, as Shakespeare said in *Coriolanus*, “What is the city but the people?”

More information on the production is available on the Optimist Theatre website at [www.optimisttheatre.org](http://www.optimisttheatre.org). For the very latest developments, follow Shakespeare in the Park on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ShaxParkMKE](https://www.facebook.com/ShaxParkMKE) or sign up for the e-newsletter on the website. For more information on Optimist Theatre and all its various programs, email Susan Fry at [ssfry@optimisttheatre.org](mailto:ssfry@optimisttheatre.org).

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Shakespeare in the Park is a production of Optimist Theatre, a 501(c)3 nonprofit theatre company whose roots date to 1993. Since 2010, SITP has presented free, professional live theatre to a cumulative audience of more than 25,000, plus untold others via its pandemic-era web series, *No Holds Bard*, in 2020. Together, these productions have employed more than 300 Wisconsin-area actors, crew, suppliers, and vendors, primarily from the greater Milwaukee area.

All shows are free to see, yet all cast and crew are paid, thanks to donations from individuals who believe that free, professionally produced theatre in the parks is important – to Milwaukee, to the community – and a vital element of a city with a rich theatre tradition. They are also supported by grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Bader Philanthropies, The Bradley Foundation, Herzfeld Foundation, the Milwaukee Arts Board, the United Performing Arts Fund, CAMPAC – the Milwaukee County Arts Fund, and others. Optimist is especially grateful to Wisconsin Lutheran College for their support in preparing to present 2024's ambitious expansion.