



Allen Winter plays Master Ford at a recent outdoor performance of William Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" at the South Huntington Public Library.



Christian Harris, left, Tom Brown, Tom Ciorciari and Katie Ferretti star in Carriage House Players' production of "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

# Summertime soliloquies

Shakespeare classics get some creative new spins in outdoor productions

BY BARBARA SCHULER  
Special to Newsday

**A** grim tragedy set in American Colonial times, a slapstick romance that takes place at a picnic, a comedy with a circus theme. And all three were written by the same playwright, none other than William Shakespeare. Welcome to Shakespeare in the Park, Long Island edition, as local theaters put their own spin on the classic works of the Bard.

## CARRIAGE HOUSE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Carriage House Players' annual Shakespeare Festival at the Vanderbilt Museum in Centerport features three works that couldn't be more diverse — the haunting tragedy that is "Macbeth" and the lighthearted comedies, "Two Gentlemen of Verona" and "Love's Labour's Lost." "We try to make a balanced season," says executive director Evan Donnellan. "We make sure we have something that people recognize" — this year, that's "Macbeth" — along with some of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays, he adds.

The company likes to put a creative spin on these age-old works. "Macbeth," a haunting story of greed and political ambition, is set in Colonial America, says Donnellan, who also directs. "It's almost a horror story, with the inclusion of the witches," he says. "I thought the setting would work in a time period where you have all these separate communities rising up." "Two Gentlemen," he says, is a "silly story with foolish outlaws" set in the 1930s American southlands. Director Jordan Hue thought the play lent itself to a silent film aesthetic — think Laurel and Hardy.

With its story of confused sweethearts, "Love's Labour's Lost" will be done with a bohemian vibe, mixing rococo with punk. One of the exciting things about performing at the Vanderbilt, says Donnellan, is that we can reflect the way these plays were originally performed. People come early, walk around the grounds, have a picnic. "It's a wonderful, magical space to see a show." **WHEN | WHERE** All performances are at 8 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays and 7 p.m. Sundays. "Two Gentlemen of Verona" runs through Sunday; "Macbeth," July 7-Aug. 4;

and "Love's Labour's Lost," Aug. 11-Sept. 8; Vanderbilt Museum, 180 Littleneck Rd. Centerport **INFO** \$20, \$15 seniors and students; 516-557-1207, carriagehouseplayers.org

## THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

"Think of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' as the original spinoff," says Danny Higgins, president of EastLine Theatre, which presents the play in 11 local parks this summer. He says that the play was written because Queen Elizabeth I was so taken with the character of Falstaff in "Henry IV" that she paid Shakespeare to write another play about him. "It takes this character . . . and puts him more firmly in a comedic element," says Higgins. The comedy is full of slapstick, says Higgins, and interesting because two women lead the plot. "It's not 'Hamlet,'" says Higgins, but it's "unique and that's what drew us to it."

This is EastLine's third year doing outdoor Shakespeare, and it's approach is unique this season — there's no director. Instead, the production is a collaboration among veterans from the past two years. "If the room agrees, it's a good idea," he says. The vibe, Higgins adds, is a picnic. The play opens with the actors playing croquet, with baskets and blankets spread about. And the company invites audiences to join them. "We want people to picnic with us," says Higgins. **WHEN | WHERE** 6:30 p.m. Friday, Mineola Memorial Library; noon July 8, Half Hollow Hills Library,

Dix Hills; 4 p.m. July 9, Phelps Lane Park, North Babylon; 6 p.m. July 14, Gerry Pond Park, Roslyn; 11:30 a.m. July 15, Wyandanch Plaza; 5 p.m. July 16 and 23, Amityville Beach; 6:30 p.m. July 19, Morgan Memorial Park, Glen Cove; 6:30 p.m. July 28, Planting Fields Arboretum, Oyster Bay; 6 p.m. July 29, Mary Jane Davies Green, Manhasset **INFO** Free; 516-749-5047, eastline theatre.org

## THE TEMPEST

P.T. Barnum meets the Bard in "The Tempest," this year's summer Shakespeare production from South Shore Theatre Experience in Lindenhurst. Director Thaddeus Plezia says he decided to set the show in the 1900s with a circus, carnival theme. "Think back to when P.T. Barnum started," he says, noting the freak shows, clowns and other acts all going on in the ring. "I thought it would be a fun way to tell the story," he says, explaining that it's about a crew that gets dispersed on an island after a shipwreck. He promises comedy, music, even some magic. Really, though, the production is a love letter of sorts. Plezia says his mother, the theater's artistic director Deborah Cascio Plezia, is a big fan of the play. "I'm doing it for her." **WHEN | WHERE** 6:30 p.m. July 23 and Aug. 2, 6 and 16, Argyle Gazebo, Babylon; and 6:30 p.m. July 26 and 30 and Aug. 9 and 13, Lindenhurst Gazebo **INFO** Free; 631-669-0506, southshoretheatre.com