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Cal Shakes Season Set to Sizzle

By Lou Fancher



Erika Chong Shuch (Ariel) and Michael Winters (Prospero) in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, directed by Jonathan Moscone and choreographed by Chong Shuch. Photo Kevin Berne

invite everyday citizens to tell their stories and definitions of "home" in *Imagine Oakland*, a series of online and in person "experiments."

The work of Noel Coward scares up the dead with *Blithe Spirit*, directed by A.C.T. Associate Artistic Director Mark Rucker, beginning August 8.

The chilliest spot in the outdoor theater season is reserved for *Hamlet*, returning to Cal Shakes for the first time since 2000. Director Liesl Tommy, whose *Ruined* in 2010 at Berkeley Rep was anything but ruinous to the organizations' ticket sales, will bring the season to a ground-shaking finale. Chills from the Shakespearean thrills-or from the weather, which sometimes calls for down jackets by Act II-can always be relieved by renting a soft, fleecy-green Cal Shakes blanket.

Falk says her favorite Cal Shakes tradition is quickly becoming sharing the theater-and Classic Catering's chili-with her seven-year old daughter. "Last summer was her first summer being old enough to watch an entire play at night," she recalls. "Her father was the lighting designer, so she refused to watch a matinee and miss 'daddy's lights.'"

As with all of the Cal Shakes productions, bonus special events abound.

Inside Scoop, held a few weeks before each play's opening night, serves up ice cream and Peet's coffee in a 60-minute free-for-all with each play's director, several members of the cast, and Cal Shakes' incomparable dramaturg, Philippa Kelly. There's no charge, except in the energized delivery of the presentations-it's a great way to glimpse the backstage machinations involved in the productions.

Grove Talks, also free, occur 45 minutes before each curtain. Surrounded by singles, couples and families picnicking under eucalyptus trees, speakers give audiences energetic warm-ups for the show.

Meet the Artists, Teen Nights, InSight post-show talks and Tasting Nights (so popular there are now six of them per show) are aimed at drawing in the reluctant theater-goer, but sophisticated enough to satisfy longtime attendees.

With a mission to make "boldly imagined and deeply entertaining interpretations of Shakespeare and the classics," Cal Shakes' glorious tangle of tradition and avant-garde theater is made perfect with sweet treats, swift insights and a breathtaking setting.

Dates: *The Tempest*, May 30-June 24

Spunk, July 4-29

Blithe Spirit, Aug. 8-Sept. 22

Hamlet, Sept. 19-Oct. 14

Performance Times:

Previews (Wed-Thu-Fri before opening) at 8pm

Weeknights (Tue-Thu) at 7:30pm

Weekends (Fri-Sat) 8pm

California Shakespeare Theatre is smashing. From a record-busting \$173,000 raised for a single youth program in a live auction at the annual fundraiser in March to Paul "Buddy" Warner, the new board president who has not missed a production since Cal Shakes moved to Orinda in 1991, to solid ticket sales in the wake of a flagship renovation to the Bruns Amphitheater, the 2012 season is already knocking down and exceeding expectations.

"We're also excited to be hosting our largest sculpture exhibit yet," says Susie Falk, Managing Director. "This year's Works in Nature exhibit, co-curated by board member Sharon Simpson and artist John Toki, includes 16 pieces, all in ceramic."

First up on the mainstage is *The Tempest*, and for this, Cal Shakes has bundled the too-many-to-list talents of Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone, Choreographer Erika Chong Shuch, television's Michael Winters, Set Designer Emily Greene, and a dancing, story-telling cast including Cal Shakes regulars, James Carpenter, Catherine Castellanos and Nicholas Pelczar.

Spunk, George C. Wolfe's adaptation of three vignettes by Zora Neale Hurston, is the season's second presentation. The play has inspired Cal Shakes' Triangle Lab-a collaborative program with Intersection for the Arts-to

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Matinees (Sun) at 4pm: select Saturdays at 2pm
Grounds open for picnicking two hours prior to curtain.

Venue: Bruns Amphitheater
100 California Shakespeare Theater Way, Orinda, CA 94563

Tickets: Single tickets go on sale in May; season packages and group tickets are available now.
Box Office: (510) 548-9666

Website: www.calshakes.org

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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