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Optimist Theatre Announces 2022 Shakespeare in the Park Touring Production

"Twelfth Night: Or, What She Will" to run June through August

MILWAUKEE, WI – Milwaukee's Free Shakespeare in the Park (SITP) is pleased to announce its 2022 summer production will be *Twelfth Night: Or, What She Will*. Building upon the success of the company's 2021 first fully touring show, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Lovers' Tale*, this year's *Twelfth Night* will also be a touring production. SITP will continue its mission of bringing Shakespeare to neighborhoods throughout the city and beyond with a fully mobile set specially designed for the company.

Twelfth Night: Or, What She Will is set to open June 18 and close on Aug. 7. Optimist anticipates approximately 12 to 14 live matinee performances in multiple outdoor locations in the greater Milwaukee area. Confirmed locations include Lincoln Park, Forest Home Cemetery, Lake Park, the Marcus Performing Arts Center lawn, and the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center. As always, performances will be free to attend, although online registration will be available to help with planning.

Twelfth Night: Or, What She Will will be directed by M.L. Cogar, Optimist Theatre's resident dramaturg. Veteran Optimist team member Melissa Wanke will return as Stage Manager. As with 2021's wildly successful *Midsummer*, Cogar has crafted a shorter version of the play for a smaller cast of actors, some playing multiple roles. Cogar has pared back the story to focus on the relationship between Olivia and the shipwrecked Viola, who comes to Olivia disguised as a young man sent to plead for Olivia's love on behalf of Duke Orsino. The drunken Toby Belch, gullible Andrew Aguecheek, stick-in-the-mud Malvolio, wise fool Feste, and all-too-clever Maria will also delight audiences as part of Olivia's household.

According to Cogar: "We were thrilled to find that adding the fully local tour last year allowed us to welcome far more Milwaukeeans to Shakespeare than ever before by coming right to their own backyards or to ones they've longed to visit." Optimist Theatre Executive Director Susan Scot Fry adds: "Once we saw our free, professionally produced Shakespeare in a beautiful Milwaukee greenspace on a summer day last year, we knew we could never let that magic go."

More information on the production is available on the Optimist Theatre website at www.optimisttheatre.org. For the very latest developments, follow Shakespeare in the Park on Facebook at 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.

Shakespeare in the Park and No Holds Bard are productions 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. No Holds Bard began in 2020 to use the virtual sphere as a means of keeping the Optimist mission alive during the pandemic. 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 Shakespeare in the Park is important – to Milwaukee, to the community – and a vital element of a city with a rich theater tradition. They are also supported by grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Marvin W. Haesle Fund for the Arts, Bader Philanthropies, The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Herzfeld Foundation, the Milwaukee Arts Board, the United Performing Arts Fund, and others.