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Malkia Stampley Returns Home to Play Shakespeare

By Christie Manussier

MILWAUKEE, WIS. – Milwaukee native Malkia Stampley* is performing in July month with Milwaukee's Free Shakespeare in the Park™ -- and the show is free!

You may recognize Stampley's face from her ads for the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee. This former Milwaukee Repertory Theater intern and founding member of Milwaukee's Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, and is making her Shakespeare in the Park (SitP) debut.

Milwaukee's Free Shakespeare in the Park is presented by Optimist Theatre, and will perform the much-loved "A Midsummer Night's Dream" July 9-12 and 16-19. This staging is set in 1967 during the Summer of Love and the action of the show will reflect the social phenomenon of Haight-Ashbury. Stampley stars as Titania and Hippolyta opposite Milwaukee-area favorite and Shakespearean theater regular Todd Denning* as Oberon and Theseus. Headliners are rounded out by In Tandem Theatre Artistic Director Chris Flieller as Bottom and SitP Associate Artistic Director Tom Reed* as Puck.

With local credits including at First Stage in "A Midnight Cry" and In Tandem in "Burying the Bones" – performances that she identifies as among her favorites, Stampley has received acclaim from audiences from the Midwest to Japan. Her performance of Lorrell in "Dreamgirls" for St. Louis Black Repertory Theater earned her the Woodie King Jr. Award and Best Supporting Actress in a Musical, and she toured Japan as Nala in a concert tour of "The Lion King." She appeared with elder brother Nathaniel Stampley, himself a 2015 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow, in the Rep's "The Color Purple" in 2014.

Stampley is a graduate of Marquette University and alumna of Skylight Music Theatre's Resident Artist Program. After her years of touring internationally, and living and working in New York, Stampley and husband Chiké Johnson brought their family back to Milwaukee to their roots and the more relaxed lifestyle of the Midwest. In addition to performing, Stampley and Johnson give back to the community through work like teaching Peace Skills Through Arts as part of Milwaukee Public Theatre's residency program and Ripple Effect Drama Troupe (Red-Ts).

Engagement in the community comes naturally to Stampley. Her father is the Rev. Nathaniel Stampley, who for more than 20 years has led the Least of These ministry serving victims of natural disasters and those in need.

Stampley recently took a few minutes from her hectic rehearsal schedule to answer a few questions:

What brought you to acting?

My mom loved watching old TV musicals and I grew up watching my older brother in musicals. I also sang a lot in choirs and small groups around town, so the desire to perform came naturally. Acting in high school was my way of doing something different from the music performing I knew.

What did 10-year-old Malkia think she'd be when she grew up?

I remember not knowing what I wanted when I was ten and was so frustrated that I couldn't figure it out. I guess I should have gotten a clue from all the pretend soap opera scenes I played out by myself in my room!

What is the greatest challenge that you anticipate in playing Titania and Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

For each of them, connecting the dots throughout their journey, and finding the playfulness when both of them can be so serious.

What do you hope that Shakespeare in the Park fans will take away from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

That Shakespeare can be enjoyed by all ages! And, hopefully, those new to Shakespeare will enjoy the show and understand the storyline.

Who should play you in the feature film of your life?

Zoe Saldana or a younger Sanaa Lathan.

What Shakespeare character do you most resemble?

Cleopatra.

What's your superpower?

Keeping a mental calendar...for everyone in my family!

Tragedy, comedy or history?

Tragedy.

Truth or dare?

Truth.

Guilty pleasure?

Splitting a pint of Luna and Larry's Salted Caramel Coconut Ice Cream with my husband while watching episodes of "A Different World!"

*Member of Actor's Equity Association

About Optimist Theatre and Free Shakespeare In The Park™

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 and the Milwaukee 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, or contact Managing Director Susan Scot Fry at

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Malkia Stampley



Shakespeare in the Park logo



The Optimist Theatre logo

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