

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Optimist Theatre and BMO Harris Bank to Present 2014 Free Shakespeare in the Park's Production of "The Winter's Tale"

MILWAUKEE, WIS. – With great confidence that southeastern Wisconsin will have put the harsh winter of 2013-2014 behind them sufficiently by June to appreciate William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale," Optimist Theatre and BMO Harris Bank announce the dates of 2014's Free Shakespeare in the Park. The romantic comedy will be performed across three weekends: June 13-15, June 19-22 and June 26-29. There will be a media preview on June 12. Shakespeare in the Park will return to COA Youth and Family Centers' amphitheater in Alice Bertschy Kadish Park for a second year.

The expansion of the season from two weekends to three was made possible, in part, by the organization's achievement of a \$20,000 challenge grant from 2014's Presenting Sponsor BMO Harris Bank. Though fundraising for the free performances continues, the sponsorship of BMO Harris enables planning for the extended fifth season to proceed.

In addition to announcing the season for Shakespeare in the Park, Optimist Theatre further revealed the casting of "The Winter's Tale." The production will be directed by M.L. Cogar, who has been both the Dramaturg and Assistant Director for all four of Shakespeare in the Park's previous productions.

Cogar is particularly drawn to "The Winter's Tale" as "a panoramic adventure-romance that showcases some of Shakespeare's richest language. The story stretches between two fairy tale kingdoms, across the genres of tragedy and comedy...it offers us a jealous king, a wrongly accused queen, a brave princess, a comic shepherd, and a singing thief—in other words, plenty of room for our team of local artists to explore the parallel inventiveness of both performance and production." The audience, she explains, should "expect clear language and storytelling, evocative movement and music, and technical artistry that celebrates imaginative theater traditions. And puppets."

The cast for "The Winter's Tale" includes:

Allie Babich as Perdita
David Bohn in the Ensemble
James Carrington as Dion / Ensemble
Liz Fraglia as Dorcas / Ensemble
David Franz in the Ensemble
Ron Scot Fry as Antigonus
Cassandra Gresl in the Ensemble
Ethan Hall as Florizel
Jeffrey James Ircink as the Shepherd
Ashley Jordan as Mamillius / Ensemble
Mary Kababik as Paulina
Megan Kaminsky as Mopsa / Ensemble
Patrick Lawlor* as Polixenes
Linda Loving in the Ensemble
Brian Miracle as the Clown
Beth Monhollen as Cleomenes
Emmit Morgan as Camilio
Beth Mulkerron* as Hermione / Autolycus
Tom Reed* as Leontes
Genessee Spridco as Emilia
and

Susan Scot Fry as the Bear

*Member of Actor's Equity Association

The cast includes the return of several actors from prior seasons of Shakespeare in the Park, alongside a number of Optimist Theatre debuts. Tom Reed, Optimist Theatre Associate Artistic Director and Shakespeare in the Park Producer, as well as the production's Leontes, is "pretty darned excited to collaborate with this cast and crew. Each of our productions arises from the chemistry of the people we pull together. This cast of local professionals is so multi-talented—we have singers, actors, dancers, musicians—I almost can't wait for the audience to see the results. We'll be using all those talents to the best of our Optimistic abilities!"

About "The Winter's Tale"

Generally believed to have been written later in Shakespeare's career (1610-1611), "The Winter's Tale" is a romantic comedy of jealousy and suspected infidelity, revenge, and ultimately, of redemption and reunion. It contains one of the most famous stage directions in English literary history: "Exit, pursued by a bear." Some speculate that, because the Elizabethan theaters were housed in the same sketchy entertainment district as the "bear baiting" pits, it is possible that one or more performances featured a live bear.

Of further interest to historians, the plot, in which a monarch falsely accuses his consort of adultery, appears to parallel the fall of Queen Anne Boleyn, second wife to King Henry VIII, and may have been an allusion to which the Bard's audience would have been attuned.

About Optimist Theatre

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. 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 SSFry@OptimistTheatre.org or 262/498-5777 or Artistic Director, Ron Scot Fry at RSFry@OptimistTheatre.org or 262/498-9788.



The Optimist Theatre logo



Public domain art for "The Winter's Tale"

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