

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Shakespeare in the Park returns to the Marcus Center's Peck Pavilion for the 2018 Production of "King Lear," Headlined by Jim Pickering

MILWAUKEE, WIS. – Milwaukee's Free Shakespeare in the Park (SITP) is pleased to announce their 2018 production of "King Lear". Mr. James Pickering*, a legend of the Milwaukee stage, will appear in the title role and, in her return to Milwaukee, Ms. Lisa Gaye Dixon will direct. One of William Shakespeare's most famous works, the tragedy will play on three weekends: July 5-8, 12-15 and 19-21, with a weekday matinee on July 17. Optimist Theatre, producer of SITP, is also delighted to return to the Peck Pavilion at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts for a second season as part of the **LIVE @ Peck Pavilion** performance calendar.

"The script may be 400 years old, but the tale is timeless," offers Dixon. The story "illustrates the human condition. My motivation is to tell a ripping good yarn about love, tenderness, arrogance, foolhardiness, stubbornness and finally, redemption. 'Lear's' themes make us think about the loyalty of the few we sometimes overlook – friends and family – while seeking something else that's ever out of reach."

Optimist Theatre's Artistic Director, Ron Scot Fry, comments on the storm that lies at the heart of "King Lear," calling it a "perfect maelstrom of passion and experience, resources and drive. Shakespeare in the Park has eight seasons under our belt, under all sorts of weather. James Pickering, who launched us as Prospero in "The Tempest" (another stormy play), has a career, a skill-set, and a passion that demand he play the role of Lear. Our partners at the Marcus Center share their jewel of the Peck Pavilion, with space and facilities to create this theatrical storm and share it with as many people as possible. Lear himself calls for the storm, 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!' His wise fool knows, 'This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.'"

Dixon explains that her direction "always looks for the relate-able moments of lightness, from wry irony to downright slapstick. Ultimately, I enjoy working with the actors to incorporate their thoughts and ideas to create something that is truly greater than the sum of its parts. I am exceedingly excited to get to bring this great work to life!"

The Cast

Pickering was one of the founding company members of Milwaukee's Shakespeare in the Park in 2010 when he portrayed Prospero in "The Tempest." His brilliant comedic turn as Dogberry in 2017's "Much Ado About Nothing" marked his return to SITP. Pickering has performed on many of the region's stages, including as Scrooge at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre's "A Christmas Carol" for nearly 20 years. He has also performed extensively with Door Shakespeare, American Player's Theatre, Next Act, Renaissance TheatreWorks, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, and InTandem. He is a former Milwaukee Arts Board Outstanding Artist of the Year and the narrative voice of the Emmy Award-winning "Making of Milwaukee" on PBS.

Ms. Lisa Gaye Dixon has an extensive Midwest directing career, and has worked professionally across the country and around the globe, including at the former Milwaukee Shakespeare theater company. Ms. Dixon began her professional career with the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, and has been seen on the stages of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the New Globe Theatre in London and the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. Most recently she appeared as the Ghost

of Christmas Present at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Film Credits include: “The Trouble with Men and Women” (BBC/IFC), the award-winning “Leading Ladies” and “USING.”

The full cast of “King Lear” is:

J.T. Backes as Burgundy
Bob Balderson in the Ensemble
Ryan Cappleman as Cornwall
Molly Corkins in the Ensemble
Zachary Dean in the Ensemble
Mohammad ElBsat as France
Ibraheem Farmer in the Ensemble
Danielle Levings in the Ensemble
Bryce Lord as Kent
Emmit Morgans as Albany
James Pickering* as King Lear
Tom Reed* as Edgar
David Sapiro as Oswald
Robert Spencer* as The Fool
Malkia Stampley* as Cordelia
Jacque Troy as Goneril
Jonathan Wainwright* as Edmund
Sam White as Gloucester
Kat Wodtke as Regan

*Member, Actors’ Equity Association

The Theater

The Peck Pavilion, located downtown on the corner of Kilbourn Avenue and North Water Street on the Downtown Riverwalk, is the only outdoor performance space in Milwaukee that was designed specifically for spoken word theater. Audiences for 2017’s production of “Much Ado About Nothing” responded enthusiastically to the amenities, as inferred from an increase in attendance of more than 68% over the average of Shakespeare in the Park’s first seven seasons.

“The Marcus Center is thrilled to be partnering with Optimist Theater,” said Paul Mathews, Marcus Center President and CEO. “Adding their performances to our free **LIVE @ Peck Pavilion** season helps us to continue broadening our reach into the community and allows us to help Optimist make Shakespeare accessible to everyone.”

“King Lear”

An aging king, facing his mortality, divides his kingdom among his children. Anguish, bloodshed and a world turned upside down are the fruits of his faulty and spiteful decisions. In a keen illustration of the universal and timeless themes of Shakespeare’s plays, “King Lear” reflects current day upheavals on scales both large and small, from the nationalistic struggles and civil wars that rend whole countries, to dysfunctional family relationships, and the loss of the self that an aging person experiences. “King Lear” is a searing epic of loyalty, power and madness, good and evil, justice and cruelty, misogyny, social class, and – ultimately – compassion.

About Shakespeare in the Park

2018 marks the ninth season of free Shakespeare in the Park. To-date, SITP has played to a cumulative audience of more than 19,000 people, offering a professional outdoor theater experience

while employing 250-plus Wisconsin actors, crew, suppliers and vendors, primarily from the greater Milwaukee area.

Shakespeare in the Park is the creation of Optimist Theatre, a 501(c)3 non-profit theater company in existence since 1993 and producing SITP since 2010. Their shows are free to attend but far from free to produce. A substantial portion of their funding comes from donations of individual community members 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 Brico Fund, the Isabel and Alfred Bader Foundation, the Harry & Lynde Bradley Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Herzfeld Foundation, the Milwaukee Arts Board, and others.

About the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts

Established in 1969, the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts is the premier performing arts community gathering space in Southeastern Wisconsin. As the Marcus Center moves into its 48th year, it continues to build bridges between diverse members of our community through high-quality arts entertainment in the region and the state. The touring Broadway series, sponsored by Associated Bank, is recognized as bringing the best of Broadway entertainment to Milwaukee for the past 20 years and provides opportunities to educate, entertain and engage audiences. The Marcus Center is also the home to the Milwaukee Symphony, Milwaukee Ballet, Florentine Opera, First Stage plus a variety of other important community and family events throughout the year. For more information about events visit the Marcus Center website at www.MarcusCenter.org. The Marcus Center is a private non-profit 501(c) 3 corporation and is a dedicated veterans memorial in Milwaukee.



The Optimist Theatre logo



Shakespeare in the Park logo



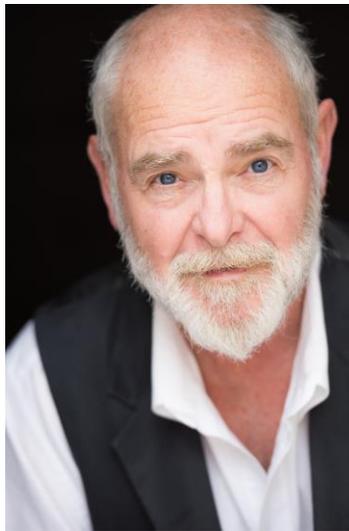
Marcus Center for the Performing Arts logo



Live at Peck Pavilion logo



Lisa Gaye Dixon



James Pickering – Member, Actors' Equity Association

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