

All about Shakespeare

Opera House festival continues through June 26 in Elgin

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ELGIN — Four plays and multiple special events make for a full schedule at the inaugural Opera House Shakespeare Festival, which began Friday, June 17, and continues through June 26.

The festival is put on by the Opera House Shakespeare Company and includes performances of four separate works, each on a different stage: on the Elgin Opera House's main stage and outdoor stage, and at the new Hale Turner Little Theatre and Jewel Theatre housed together on Alder Street.

Organizers Terry Hale and Grant Turner provided the following descriptions of each play:

A Merchant of Venice
(Adapted by Bill Alexander):

Fresh from the London stage, this is the North American premiere of this adaptation of "The Merchant of Venice." A young man is in love with a wealthy heiress. To impress her, he borrows money from a merchant, his best friend, but that friend too needs to borrow, as most of his assets are tied up. They borrow money from a local Jewish moneylender, whom their prejudices forbid them from treating with respect. He agrees to loan them what they need, and as a joke, requests no interest, only

a pound of flesh if the money can't be repaid. All is well until the merchant's assets are all lost at sea.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Performed by the Opera House Youth Actors, this comedy will be the perfect way to introduce young ones to Shakespeare. Set in the forest of Athens, three separate groups — a quartet of young lovers, a band of amateur actors and the King and Queen of the Fairies (and their retinue) — all intermix on a crazy, fantastical summer evening. Directed by Anne Turner.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona: This is one of Shakespeare's earliest plays. "It's all about what it means to be young, in love and alive," said Grant Turner, the production's director. "Think of it as spring break. Two young men (the title gents), best friends, leave Verona to explore the resort town of Milan. One is in love with a girl back home (who decides to follow him in disguise to keep an eye on him), the other is a confirmed bachelor (who has no time for women). Well, wouldn't you know it, once arrived in Milan, the bachelor almost immediately falls for a girl, and the best friend, seeing his friend rave about his new obsession, decides to make a move on her as well! When his disguised girlfriend shows up, high jinks ensue."

Othello: Like "A Merchant of Venice," "Othello" addresses



Abigail Hale (left), and Carly Elder star in "Two Gentlemen of Verona," one of four plays presented at the Opera House Shakespeare Festival in Elgin. Elgin Opera House/ Contributed Photo

the impact of bias and prejudice on people and society. Othello, a valiant Black general, has secretly married the daughter of a well-to-do white Venetian. But before her unapproving father can wrench her back, Othello and she are sent to Cyprus, where he is tasked with quelling a military skirmish. The battle done, the newlyweds hope to settle in to domestic bliss, but "honest" Iago, Othello's right-hand man, because of his own jealousy, plants the seeds of her unfaithfulness.

THE SCHEDULE, JUNE 23-25

THURSDAY, JUNE 23

- 7:30 p.m.: Two Gentlemen of Verona (Opera House main stage)
- 7:30 p.m.: Othello (Jewel Theatre)

FRIDAY, JUNE 24

- 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.: Free kids' workshop (Opera House main stage)
- 7:30 p.m.: A Merchant of Venice (Hale Turner Little Theatre)

SATURDAY, JUNE 25

- 2 p.m.: A Merchant of Venice (Hale Turner Little Theatre)
- 4 p.m.: Tea with Imogen Stubbs (Opera House north lawn)
- 5 p.m.: A Midsummer Night's Dream (Opera House outdoor stage)
- 7:30 p.m.: Othello (Jewel Theatre)

SUNDAY, JUNE 26

- 2 p.m.: Othello (Jewel Theatre)
- 5 p.m.: A Midsummer Night's Dream (Opera House outdoor stage)
- 7 p.m.: "Soldier On" staged

reading (Opera House main stage — for VIP ticket holders)

TICKETS

Tickets to individual performances are \$20; VIP passes that include admission to all festival events are \$200. Individual tickets can be purchased online at www.elginoperahouse.com, and passes can be purchased by contacting Kathy Bonney at 541-663-6324 or at kathy@elginoperahouse.com.

Find full details, visit www.elginoperahouse.com/shakespeare.

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