

# What fools these mortals be

VSC presents 'Midsummer' for second season, to open July 27

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Valley Shakespeare Company at Western Oregon University is back for its second season, this time weaving the playwright's most famous comedy, inspired by the foolishness and craziness of love. "A Midsummer Night's Dream," opens at Western Oregon's Leinwand outdoor stage on July 27 and runs through July 30.

Director David Janoviak has re-set the play in the mid-1800s, just after the Civil War has ended.

"We're contrasting rigid, southern plantation culture against the culture of Haitian voodoo in Louisiana," he said. "So you have this very rigorous culture, and the world of voodoo comes in, which is very earthy and round and spiritual in a different way."

Janoviak has 11 years of professional experience with outdoor Shakespeare companies. In 2015, he was in-

spired to make use of WOU's outdoor stage for Shakespeare during the summer.

This year, the show will start later — 8 p.m. — which is the same time Oregon Shakespeare Festival starts its productions, Janoviak said.

"What's nice about that is, the magic really starts when it gets dark," he said. "We have this lit up stage outside."

The show runs about two hours, and as the evening draws on, it can get a little chilly, even on a warm summer day. Blankets, chairs and picnics are encouraged.

The cast is made up of Western Oregon students, alumni, community members and professional guest actors.

Declan Hertel said performing outdoors is a "massive challenge."

"You've got to be heard to have a good show," he said.

Janoviak said Rice Auditorium's walls provide some help acoustically, and that the actors are rising to the challenge of learning how to



Jeff Presler, right, and Sarah Cotter rehearse a scene from "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

## See the magic:

**What:** Valley Shakespeare Company at Western Oregon University presents Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

**When:** July 27 through July 30, 8 p.m.

**Where:** Leinwand outdoor stage, next to Rice Auditorium at WOU.

**Admission:** Free.

**Of note:** Bring a picnic, chair and blankets to this family friendly production.

use their voice healthfully and well.

Belladina Starr said it's more than just projecting vocally.

"The outdoor stage presents a challenge to lots of your

acting," she said. "You have to be bigger and more expressive in everything you do, in your face and body, because everybody needs to see you."

That includes the intimate scenes.

"To make that work, you have to scream at someone who's less than an inch away from your face," Starr said. "It feels insane, but it looks good."

Jeff Presler said outdoor theater forces the imagination to work.

"You have to accept the world," he said. "Inside the theater, you're not going to hear a car drive by or the neighbor mow his lawn."

In the play, three worlds collide and mesh.

"We have basically three different types of music in this," said Ollie Bergh. "We have a jug band; we have old-school Dixie hymn, and kind of a Haitian call-and-response thing."

Janoviak said the music defines the three main worlds of the play: the



Actors receive instructions during play rehearsals.

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Sarah Cotter and Jeff Presler work on showing emotion through movements for "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

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world of the court, the world of the forest, and the world of the mechanicals.

The play is perhaps the

most family friendly one Shakespeare wrote, Janoviak added.

"It's a great way to introduce your kids to Shakespeare," he said. "It's a farce. Everything is taken to the extreme."

That doesn't take away from the entertainment value for Shakespeare buffs.

"Every show you see is different," said Sarah Cotter. "So even if you think you know 'Midsummer,' you should come see it, because it's going to be different from anything you've seen before."



Sarah Cotter practices a scene from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at Western Oregon.

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