

An Elizabethan flair in Hillsboro

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Photo courtesy of Bag & Baggage Productions Amanda Jane Long, who plays Juliet, rehearses her lines from "Romeo and Juliet" at the Civic Center Plaza in downtown Hillsboro. Performing outdoors has forced the cast to adjust their acting, including training themselves not to face other actors while speaking because the audience won't be able to hear them. A team of volunteers will line the plaza to try and ensure the actors aren't disrupted by people walking by during the shows.

HILLSBORO -- When the script calls for Romeo to focus his entranced gaze on Juliet, Shakespeare didn't factor in the passing ice cream truck blasting "The Entertainer." The bard also neglected to include the basketball dribbler entering stage left when Romeo discovers his dead lover.

These are the realities of outdoor performances that Scott Palmer knows all too well. But they won't deter the artistic director from taking theater to the streets where honking cars and barking dogs are expected.

More than 10,000 fliers and 500 posters distributed in Washington County tout the performance as the first professional outdoor Shakespeare performance in Hillsboro.

[Bag & Baggage's](#) adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet" caps a four-show inaugural season at the [Venetian Theatre](#), the company's permanent new home. The legendary feud between the Capulets and Montagues will run 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays until Aug. 2 at the Civic Center Plaza.

Outdoor theater is another sign that Hillsboro's arts scene is growing up, Palmer said.

"This is the mark of a kind of culturally advanced community," Palmer said. "From Ashland to Seattle, every major community -- they have summer Shakespeare. It is a standard summer offering all over the world."

Summer performances are offered elsewhere in the county including the Portland Actors Ensemble's "King Lear," which played in Beaverton in June. The group also performed "Two Gentleman of Verona" in Hillsboro's Shute Park in 1984. It's unclear whether that was a professional production with paid actors. Other Portland metro area companies

Meet the cast

- **William Goblirsch Jr.**
Romeo
Recently received a Master of Science in theater from Portland State University. Some of his favorite roles include Orestes in Sophocles' "Electra," Polo

with summer performances include the newly formed Willamette Shakespeare company in McMinnville and Original Practice Shakespeare Festival in Portland.

Both Bag & Baggage and the city are trumpeting Hillsboro's Elizabethan affair. The city contributed \$2,500 from its economic development fund to production costs, and former mayor Tom Hughes gave \$1,000 from a gift fund established after he left office last year.

John Southgate, Hillsboro economic development director, said the show is significant because it's part of citywide efforts to revitalize downtown through more arts and cultural offerings. He said Washington County's 520,000 residents are enough to sustain a thriving cultural arts scene outside of Portland.

"Rather than be a faceless, nameless, soulless suburb, Hillsboro has its own distinct character and identity and authenticity" Southgate said.



OLIVIA BUCKS/The Oregonian Amanda Washko, playing Tybalt, practices a sword fight routine during Bag & Baggage Productions' "Romeo and Juliet" rehearsal at Lincoln Street Elementary School in Hillsboro.

Bag & Baggage's season ticket sales also reflect growing interest in theater.

Season ticket sales have more than doubled to 450 compared with last season's 220, Palmer said. He added it was a good sign considering there are still three months before "Death of a Salesman" debuts. The company will nearly double its number of performances next season.

Palmer is not a stranger to relinquishing the comforts of an indoor theater, including better acoustics and comfortable seating, for fresh air. The Hillsboro High School graduate was founding artistic director of a Shakespeare company in Scotland where he directed more than a dozen outdoor performances. For the past three years, Palmer has run the Bard in the Quad Summer Shakespeare festival at Oregon State University.

"It's just so much more challenging and creative to figure out," Palmer said.

Palmer's challenge is to bring fair Verona to Hillsboro's plaza, sandwiched between Main Street mom-and-pop shops and a high-traffic Starbucks and the nearby Washington County Courthouse and fire station. Bag & Baggage increased staffing from two to seven people and added 13 volunteers to help set up each night and prevent bicyclists or babies from wandering into performances.

Jeremy Lillie, who is directing "King Lear" for the Portland Actors Ensemble, said an emphasis for outdoor theater is to keep the audience's attention with more exaggerated gestures and louder voices so as to compete with anything else going on.

"The concentration and energy level is higher," Lillie said. "If a scene lacks focus, then

Electra, Fate in "Burn This" and Valentine in "The Two Gentleman of Verona."

• **Amanda Jane Long Juliet**

A Hillsboro native and graduate of Hillsboro High School, Long recently starred in Bag & Baggage's "The Comedy of Errors." She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Southern Oregon University.

• **Dallas Myers Mercutio** Meyers' previous roles with Bag & Baggage include Antipholus of Ephesus in "The Comedy of Errors," Donner in "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" and Robin Starveling in Bard in the Quad's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at Oregon State University. This fall, he will pursue a master's in teaching at Willamette

there are far more distractions than the regular theater."

Even before opening night, the cast has encountered challenges.

Reciting lines outdoors took a toll as some actors came close to losing their voices, including Amanda Jane Long who plays Juliet.

That "immediately made me have insomnia," Palmer said.

The actors are required by contract to wear SPF 35 sunblock or greater to avoid a lobster red-tinted Romeo or Lady Capulet.

Jacob Morehead, who plays a voyeur, said it's difficult when sunscreen and sweat drip and the actors need to be expressive while "trying not to show that your eyes are burning."

During the final week of rehearsals, the cast gathers at Lincoln Street Elementary School. Cones spread on the lawn outline the rough dimensions of the plaza. Kids shout as they run around a nearby play structure. The sound of basketballs pounding pavement echo throughout the neighborhood.

And as Romeo begins his lines, another ice cream truck creeps by. A jingle thumps from its speakers. But Romeo continues with his lines, never once glancing at the sugar box on wheels.

He has a date with destiny.

-- *Melissa Navas*;
melissanavas@news.oregonian.com

"Romeo and Juliet" by Bag & Baggage Productions

When: 7:30 p.m. every Thursday through Sunday beginning today through Aug. 2. Opening night will feature a dinner and gala fundraising and auction event to support the theater company's 2009-10 season at the Venetian Theatre in Hillsboro.

Where: Civic Center Plaza, 150 E. Main St., Hillsboro

Tickets: \$18 general admission; \$15 for students, seniors, veterans and military personnel; \$12 each for groups of 10 or more. Tickets are available at www.bagnbaggage.org or at the box office, open each performance night from 6:30 p.m. at the plaza.

Closure: Main Street will be closed between First and Second streets from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on performance nights.

Categories: [Hillsboro News](#), [Washington County Weekly](#)

Comments

Footer

University.
 • **Lesli Okorn**
Benvolia
 Okorn is starring in her third Bag & Baggage production. Her other roles include Algernon in "The Importance of Being Earnest" and Angela the Jeweler in "The Comedy of Errors."
 • **Amanda Washko**
Tybalt
 Washko has appeared in several productions at Willamette University and recently attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art where she played in "The Beau Defeated" and "Macbeth." She will graduate from Willamette University with a bachelor's degree in theater in May.
 • **Jacob Morehead**
The Voyeur
 Morehead's favorite shows include "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," "Translations" and "Man of La

COVER

Mancha." This is his third time performing Romeo and Juliet in his 15 years in theater performing, directing, teaching and writing. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in performance studies from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

• **Christine Shields**

Lady Capulet
Shields is involved with her second Bag & Baggage show; in the first she played Ouiser in "Steel Magnolias." She is a professional voice actor and has done radio and television spots for clients including Fred Meyer, Oregon Health & Science University and AAA.

• **Leslie Grasa**

Lady Montague
Grasa is in her third show with the company. She appeared as Witch/Macduff in "Macbeth" and stage managed "A

Christmas Carol." Grasa received her Master of Arts degree in theater from Florida State University.