

Summer Theater Festivals: From the Fringes to Center Stage

Photo



Wayne T. Carr (in “Pericles”) will be at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Credit Jenny Graham

AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATER

SPRING GREEN, WIS., JUNE 6-NOV. 22

This Wisconsin mainstay is one of many theater events around the country that does not have the word “festival” in its name, but it bursts to life with a flurry of shows for several months, then hibernates during the winter; so it’s certainly festive. Productions of “A Streetcar Named Desire,” Athol Fugard’s “The Island” and Noël Coward’s “Private Lives” are on the calendar, alongside Shakespeare’s “Othello” and “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” and other productions staged indoors and outside. Don’t forget to visit to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin estate a few miles away. (americanplayers.org)

CHAUTAUQUA

CHAUTAUQUA, N.Y., JUNE 27-AUG. 30

Theater is just one element in this arts festival, where each week has a theme — “Redefining Europe” and “Creating Livable Communities” are among the topics this summer — and a series of lectures and other entertainments allow for an immersive experience. On Chautauqua’s stages, catch “Our Town,” “Henry V”

and Lynn Nottage's "Intimate Apparel," and staged readings of new works by Jason Wells and David West Read ("The Dream of the Burning Boy"). The director Andrew Borba will lead a joint effort of the theater company and the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra for one special performance (July 16) of "Ellis Island," by Peter Boyer. (*theater.ciweb.org*)

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATER FESTIVAL

SHEPHERDSTOWN, W.VA., JULY 10-AUG. 2

The activist performance art of the punk group Pussy Riot will overtake Shepherd University in West Virginia soon, or at least its story will. "We Are Pussy Riot," by Barbara Hammond, is one of five plays in the 25th season at this pioneering festival. Shepherdstown might not immediately spring to mind as a breeding ground for new work, but since Ed Herendeen started this festival in 1991, more than 100 new plays, many of them world premieres, have been staged. Works by Michael Weller, Johnna Adams, Sheila Callaghan and Steven Dietz are also planned. (*catf.org*)

EAST TO EDINBURGH

NEW YORK, JULY 7-26

It's far away, expensive and it rains a lot, but plenty of theater artists care not and head to the Scottish capital each summer to participate in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the biggest and oldest Fringe festival of all. Once again, 59E59 Theaters will allow New Yorkers who are not en route to Scotland in August to catch some homegrown works before the productions head over. About a dozen American shows, including "Bette Davis Ain't for Sissies" and "Gary Busey's One-Man Hamlet," will be presented during the eclectic three-week event. (*59e59.org*)

FRINGE FESTIVALS

VARIOUS SITES AND DATES

Since the first one in Edinburgh in 1947, fringe festivals have become increasingly ubiquitous. It might make for an interesting (if rather zigzag and possibly insane) road trip, actually, to hit the Hollywood Fringe Festival (June 11-28), then head to the St. Lou Fringe (June 17-27), over to Maine for the PortFringe (June 20-28), down to the Capital Fringe in Washington (July 9-26) and finally to the New York International Fringe Festival (Aug. 14-30). An optional extension could include Boulder (Sept. 16-27) and Houston (Sept. 23-27). There are many of these; surely one is close to you.

HILLS ALIVE

VARIOUS SITES AND DATES

This new collaboration has several arts organizations in southern Vermont joining forces and convincing some of us that you could do far worse than spend the entire summer there. Theater-wise, the Dorset Theater Festival season includes John Patrick Shanley’s “Outside Mullingar” (July 30-Aug. 15) among its many offerings; at Weston Playhouse, “Peter and the Starcatcher” (July 16-25) and “The Glass Menagerie” (Aug. 27-Sept. 5) are a couple of the options, and down in Bennington, “Cabaret” (July 10-Aug. 2) will be one of several productions staged at Oldcastle Theater. (hillsalive.org)

Photo

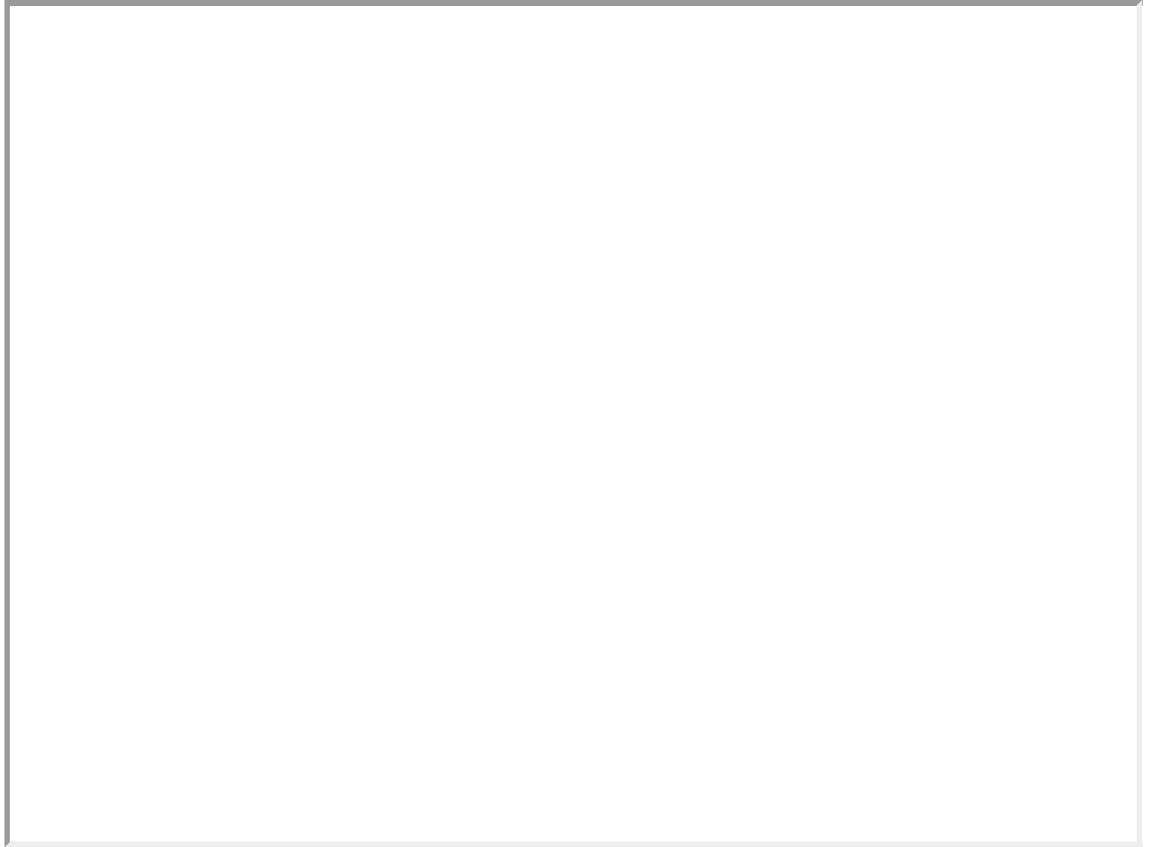


A scene from the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. Credit William Marsh

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

GARRISON, N.Y., JUNE 9-SEPT. 1

For serious theatergoers, outdoor Shakespeare is a must in the warm weather, and where better to take it in than this spot by the edge of the Hudson River? The natural backdrop is breathtaking and the work consistently strong. “The Winter’s Tale” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” are the contributions this year in a season to also include “The Arabian Nights” and “An Iliad,” the adaptation by Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare that has been performed in many theaters — including in Manhattan at New York Theater Workshop — over the past few years. (hvshakespeare.org)



Continue reading the main story

A look at "The Tempest" at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Ore. Video by Oregon Shakespeare Festival

OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

ASHLAND, ORE., THROUGH NOV. 1

This popular destination is celebrating its 80th season, but it's no stodgy old-timer. In fact, Ashland recently announced three new play commissions, part of its ambitious series "[American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle](#)," devoted to new works focusing on significant periods of change in American history. Shakespeare still has pride of place here, and "Pericles," "Much Ado About Nothing" and "Antony and Cleopatra" will be presented this season alongside several other productions. If you can't get your fill in the busy, long season, there's a [Shakespeare-theme cruise](#) to look forward to in December.

(osflashland.org)

POWERHOUSE THEATER

POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y., JUNE 26-AUG. 2

"Rain," with a book by Sybille Pearson and music and lyrics by Michael John LaChiusa, is one of several workshops coming up at this annual collaborative new-works festival, a joint effort of New York Stage and Film and Vassar College. A lot looks intriguing on the schedule, including another new musical from Duncan Sheik and a workshop of "Desire," an evening of six short plays based on stories by Tennessee Williams, by the writers Elizabeth Egloff, Marcus Gardley, Rebecca Gilman, David Grimm, John Guare and Beth Henley. *(powerhouse.vassar.edu)*

Photo



Simona Sala in "Armine, Sister." Credit Irena Lipinska

SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

MAY 21-JUNE 7

We tend to associate this time of year with lightness — vacation season is coming! But meaningful theater is always an option, and an important centerpiece to this Bay Area festival is “Armine, Sister.” This American premiere from the Polish company Teatr ZAR reflects — with the help of Anatolian monadic chants — on the annihilation of nearly 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks in 1915. The show comes 100 years after the initial atrocity (which the Turkish government has refused to call genocide). This festival focuses on international artists, and Teatr ZAR is one of many en route to San Francisco.

(sfiarf.org)

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY/BERKSHIRE THEATER GROUP

THE BERKSHIRES, MAY 22-NOV. 1 (SHAKESPEARE) AND JULY 1-AUG. 23 (BERKSHIRE)

Western Massachusetts explodes with the arts every summer, and these two institutions are vital to that scene. At Shakespeare & Company, John Douglas Thompson, who has played the title roles in “Othello” and “Richard III” there, will star in Lolita Chakrabarti’s “Red Velvet” as Ira Aldridge, the first African-American actor to play Othello. The full season includes several other productions, some by Shakespeare.

(shakespeare.org) Berkshire Theater also has an impressive summer lineup, on three stages — two in Stockbridge and one in Pittsfield. *(berkshiretheatregroup.org)*

Photo



From left, Melanie Phillipson, Julie Martell and Kimberley Rampersad in "Sweet Charity." Credit Emily Cooper

SHAW FESTIVAL

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, THROUGH NOV. 1

With titles as non-Shavian as “Peter and the Starcatcher,” “Sweet Charity” and “The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism With a Key to the Scriptures” on the to-do list in the coming months, this Ontario institution might seem to have strayed from its mission. But in fact, the writings of George Bernard Shaw have long been a jumping-off point, offering the artistic director Jackie Maxwell the opportunity to be inventive as she programs work both by and reflective of Shaw. Fear not, purists, the namesake writer will be represented by “Pygmalion” and “You Never Can Tell.”

(shawfest.com)

Photo



Samuel Valentine and Cassie Layton in “Romeo and Juliet” by Shakespeare’s Globe. Credit Helena Miscioscia

SPOLETO FESTIVAL U.S.A.

CHARLESTON, S.C., MAY 22-JUNE 7

I don’t know about you, but I’ll be at the Dock Street Theater in Charleston soon to catch the first United States performance of “Romeo and Juliet” by Shakespeare’s Globe of London. The show is one of several theater offerings in Charleston’s annual multi-arts feast. The Canadian company 2b will present its live-action graphic novel “When It Rains,” too, and remember to also look into Piccolo Spoleto, the accompanying smorgasbord of theater, dance, comedy and more that runs during Spoleto. There, productions of “A Steady Rain” and “The Last Five Years” can round out your Charleston visit, along with, naturally, a Charleston Ghost Tour. (spoletousa.org and piccolospoleto.com)

STRATFORD FESTIVAL

STRATFORD, ONTARIO, THROUGH OCT. 18

Henry VIII had many wives, but only one outlived him, and Katherine Parr’s life was hardly humdrum — she was married four times herself. “The Last Wife,” a new play about Parr by Kate Hennig is one of more than a dozen shows in the current season at this venerable Canada festival. “Pericles,” “Hamlet” and “The Taming of the Shrew” are some of the Shakespearean offerings, but there’s plenty of range — “The Sound

of Music” is on the calendar, too. Although you’ll be busy, save time for visits to Chocolate Barr’s and Revel Caffe. You’re welcome. (stratfordfestival.ca)

Photo



Audra McDonald and Will Swenson Credit Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATER FESTIVAL

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS., JUNE 3-AUG. 23

You cannot start listing names (Audra McDonald! Cynthia Nixon!) of performers appearing in the next summer season at this place (Kyra Sedgwick! Estelle Parsons!) without leaving important actors out. (Don’t forget Blair Underwood, Jessica Hecht, Eric Bogosian and David Greenspan!). The impressive roster extends to directors and designers, too, and this summer looks to be especially rich, with “Off the Main Road,” a never-before-produced play by William Inge; several world premieres; and Eugene O’Neill’s “A Moon for the Misbegotten,” directed by Gordon Edelstein and starring Ms. McDonald and Will Swenson. (wtfestival.org)