



My Friends...

We have so much to be grateful for here at MSIP. In a time when the theatre continues to struggle across the US and beyond, with dwindling audience numbers, decreased levels of giving, and infrastructure challenges, MSIP continues to flourish and remains resilient. Our audience numbers continue to grow, more young people are expressing their excitement for our programming, and our artists remain invested in returning year in and year out to further build their relationships with our communities.

The foundation of this sustainability has been your continued generosity and enthusiasm for our mission, which for over fifty-one years has paved the way for MSIP's remarkable growth and success. Together, with your friends, families, and neighbors, your continued appreciation and generosity has made it possible for our engagement to reach over 65 communities and 110 schools across our region.

At the core of our mission is building relationships through collaboration and mutual commitment to investing in community. It is inspiring to witness how

we are able to unite through the power of unique storytelling and continue to encourage all ages to come together in both our schools and parks where we share the joy and relevancy of Shakespeare's words and build long lasting friendships. Jointly, our artists and you—our friends and patrons—have built sustaining and endearing relationships, centered in mutual respect, admiration, and inspiration. This is confirmed by over a half-century of performances and audiences showing up to engage in not only live performance, but also the experience of community togetherness, regardless of age, demographics, or political affiliation.

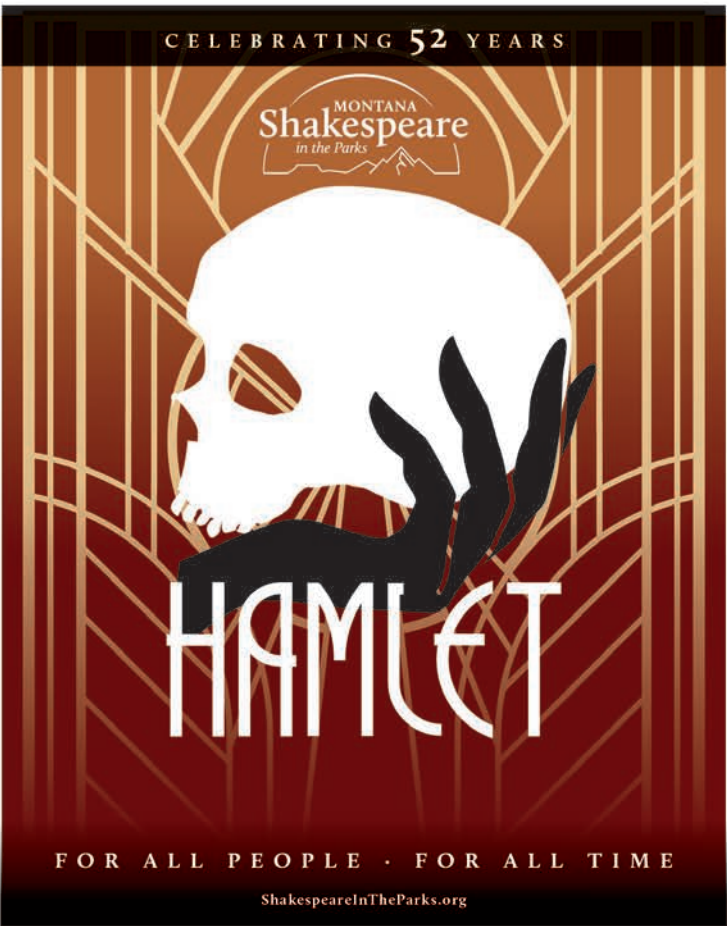
Our upcoming season featuring *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale* will provide us with a unique opportunity to further deepen our relationships and continue to foster the communities we build together. Some exciting news for this season is that we will have nine alumni returning, and we are thrilled to announce that our steadfast tour leader and actor, Riley O'Toole will both be taking on the title role of Hamlet and joining our fulltime staff as our new Associate Artistic Director. Please join us as we welcome Riley to this exciting and new opportunity for MSIP and our communities!

For many years, both in the parks and educational programs, Riley has epitomized the heart and soul of MSIP's mission, highlighted by the intersection of his engagement with your communities and expert storytelling. His elevated role within our organization will provide us with new and exciting opportunities to build upon our existing relationships and help to foster new outreach from across our wonderfully supportive state, and beyond.

We remain humbled and hold it as an honor to serve you all with timeless stories and community engagement. All of us here at MSIP are grateful for your passion and excitement for our programming and outreach efforts, and most importantly, your continued generosity and desire to cherish our relationships with you and your families. It is through friendship that we are able to persevere. As Shakespeare reminds us: "So we grow together, like to a double cherry, seeming parted, but yet a union in partition."

 **Kevin Asselin**
Executive Artistic Director
Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

INTRODUCING THE 2024
SUMMER TOUR



OUR MISSION

The mission of Montana Shakespeare in the Parks is to engage and enrich both rural and underserved communities with professional productions of Shakespeare and other classics and, through educational outreach, to inspire creative expression and appreciation of the arts in young audiences.

INTERVIEW WITH EVA BRENEMAN

DIRECTOR OF *THE WINTER'S TALE*



What inspires you to do what you do?

I've spent most of my career in the theatre as a dialect and voice coach and have had the privilege of being in some wonderful rehearsal rooms. Equally I've been in ones that were less than ideal. These experiences have inspired me to try to create my favorite type of room: warm, easy, creative, and collaborative.

I've done over 300 plays as a coach and have filed away ideas for years about how I'd like to direct a play. I am so excited to bring out these mental files and get the chance to put them into action with MSIP's amazing actors.

What directors have impressed or inspired you?

I did my undergraduate work in acting at NYU, and while there met an amazing director. These many years later, Melissa Kievman's imagination, way of working with actors, and beautiful storytelling still shine out from my memory.

A few years ago I was lucky enough to coach a show directed by Aaron Posner. It was a delightful process in every way: the play was fun and funny, the actors extraordinary, and Aaron's direction flawless. I was deeply impressed by his whimsical storytelling and, even more, by how he guided the actors into deep, multi-layered performances.

***The Winter's Tale* is often considered by scholars to be one of Shakespeare's "problem plays" because it swings from intense drama to comedy. Can you talk a little bit about the themes in the play, and what excites you about it?**

The Winter's Tale has had the misfortune of being dubbed a "problem play," and as a passionate fan of the play I'm always rushing to defend it! It is really a romance—which is a combination of comedy and tragedy with a healthy dash of magic.

I'm interested in the aftermath of disasters; I'm interested in investigating the consequences of horrific actions. Multiple people in this play behave badly at one point or another and come to repent their

actions. I want to register both the bad behavior and the consequences of that behavior in a deep, simple, and human manner.

The play is one of Shakespeare's last, and as such is blessed with a writer who really understood how



Stage sketch (center) by Miguel Salazar with other inspirational drawings.

to manipulate the form to achieve new heights of storytelling. I love how the verse flows from one speaker to the other, each person sharing their verse lines with the next so the dialogue is fast and conversational, even as the imagistic writing is heightened.

What are you most excited about in working with Montana Shakespeare in the Parks?

MSIP's history and mission are so thrilling to me. I can't wait to be part of this amazing company. Bringing Shakespeare out into the world—beyond towns or even villages—is a worthy goal in itself; the fact that admission is and always has been FREE is truly extraordinary.

I'm lucky in that I get to work with so many returning actors! I've had the opportunity to get to meet them and see their amazing work, and I can't wait to dive in.

"MSIP's history and mission are so thrilling to me. I can't wait to be part of this amazing company."

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DEAN'S LETTER

DEAN ADAMS | DEAN, COLLEGE OF ARTS & ARCHITECTURE



Greetings!

I am excited for the upcoming season of Montana Shakespeare in the Parks! In 2024, we are connecting with new communities and new partners and continuing long-lasting relationships throughout the Intermountain West. I am also inspired by the amazing work MSIP does through their educational programs, *Shakespeare in the Schools* and *Montana Shakes!* during the school year.

Recognizing that Shakespeare belongs to everyone, the talented actors and designers, insightful directors and hardworking staff work together to enrich the lives of Montanans and residents of neighboring states through the timeless tales of William Shakespeare. They effectively integrate the cultural traditions of theatre and literature with contemporary experiences to explore universal truths and the human condition. In collaboration with community members and teachers, and with the support of donors, MSIP embodies the Montana State University land grant mission of integrating education, creation of knowledge and art, and service to communities.

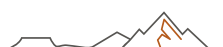
The MSU College of Arts & Architecture, the home of MSIP, hopes you will enjoy this season's program and discover the beauty, emotion, triumph, and agony explored through MSIP's world-class performances presented around our wonderful region. We thank you for your ongoing support! We could not achieve all we do without you.

Here's to a wonderful season!

Warmly,

Dean Adams

Dean, College of Arts & Architecture
Montana State University



INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN ASSELIN

DIRECTOR OF *HAMLET*

Kevin, this season you celebrate 10 years as Executive Artistic Director, and prior to that, 13 years working as an actor, director, and fight director for MSIP. What does it mean to you to be a part of this organization for so many years and what has made you continue to dedicate your life to MSIP?

I was first introduced to MSIP as an actor and had the opportunity to tour many of our incredible communities across the region. I grew up in a rural environment on the East Coast where we didn't have much exposure to the arts. So, when I came to Montana after spending years in Chicago, I was able to get reacquainted with my history of growing up in a rural environment.

Being on tour is an experience you can't really prepare for. It was so special to be a storyteller and become part of all these individual communities, and to collaborate with so many incredible artists. There is a family-like atmosphere. You realize that your role within the organization is so much more than just being an actor; it's about being a community member and an ambassador for a highly unique mission.

To be able to then come into my current position and shape the way in which the organization not only maintains its footprint in terms of our mission and traditional values, but also to look at the ways in which we can bring new perspectives and a deeper relevancy to the 21st century has been very exciting.

It has been great to find new ways to reach out to these communities and get new audience members. A lot of that has come from engaging our younger audiences and empowering the education programs at a deeper level. It also means engaging members of our communities as Tour Coordinators, donors, or simply new friends of the organization. All these avenues have helped MSIP evolve, and I've been proud of that.

This is a special season because MSIP is welcoming back nine alumni actors and more than 85% of our production staff from previous years! What is it that you think keeps artists coming back to MSIP again and again?

I think MSIP's mission is a very special one for artists to embrace. We are a service organization. We're our own cultural arts soup kitchen in terms of what it is we are working to create and to provide to communities, many of which might not have access to the cultural arts otherwise.

I also think giving artists the opportunity to freely express their creative selves and to aspire to produce material that is exciting for 21st century audiences is attractive to many of our artists. We're not producing Shakespeare in a museum-like presentation but working hard to continue to deepen the approach of bringing Shakespeare's themes to modern audiences.

For the actors, a big component of their memorable summer is the welcome they receive in every town they visit. They're met with such enthusiasm, often being fed and housed by people in the community. It's such a unique experience, for both the actors and audience, to have ample time to get to know one another on a deeper level.

Lastly, I'm proud of the way that our annual team works hard to foster an environment focused on hospitality and customer service, while also creating special experiences for our actors in Bozeman where we build these shows. It's fun and communal. It's an artist's haven where we can express creativity at a high level and work with inspiring colleagues to create a unique experience.

What does your creative process look like when you first begin directing a new play for the season? Are there any habits or routines you go through when beginning this process?

In terms of selecting the play, we try to produce plays in windows of 10 years or more. So, it's been over 10 years since we've produced *Hamlet*. In this case I look at my predecessor, Joel Jahnke, and what his concept was and work to ensure that we're approaching it from a different angle to give the audience a fresh perspective.

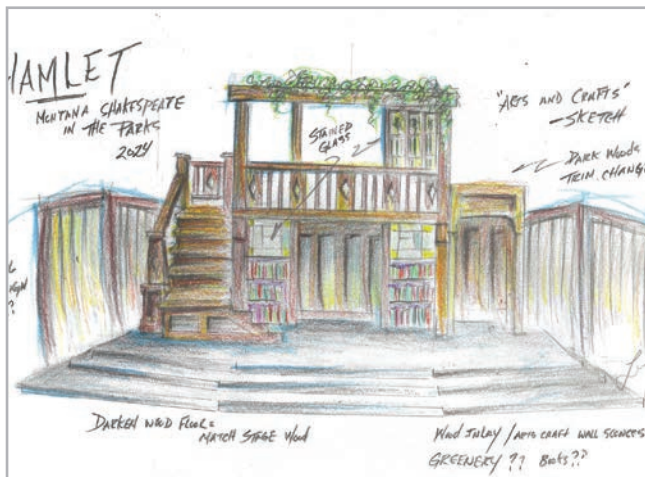
When bringing the creative team together for the new season, we take a lot of things into consideration. Based on feedback from the previous season, I think about the designers I'm working with—Jeremy Floyd, one of our costume designers, and Tom Watson, our set designer, for example. They are two designers that I've worked with for a long time. I'm always thinking about their individual aesthetics and how they like to work.

We like the idea that this year *Hamlet* will be its own art installation. Tom and I are trying to accomplish two things this year. First, we're trying to create the visual impact and scenic storytelling related to the play's concept. And second, we are exploring ideas for changes we can make to MSIP's historic set itself. What might we try to repair for this upcoming season? How can we pare down components of the stage for easier transportation?

Then, when considering the actors, my goal is to allow them their individual freedom and self-expression while they're building characters and the relationships between

"It's an artist's haven where we can express creativity at a high level and work with inspiring colleagues to create a unique experience."

"I think we are all individually a version of Hamlet and can relate to the character on some level."



Stage sketch by Tom Watson.



them. All of the actors inform the approach. The show really leans into the actor, the actor's personality, and how we can give each one an opportunity to self-express.

It's a collaborative effort. Theatre is probably the most collaborative art form that exists. Utilizing the viewpoints and creativity that come from the ensemble—both actors and crew—is really important.

Why *Hamlet* and why now? What are you most excited for in sharing this play with our audiences?

Arthur Miller once said that he believes *Hamlet* remains one of the most contemporary plays ever written. I think the universality of that idea gives us this sense that *Hamlet* is timeless. I do believe that all Shakespeare's plays are timeless, but *Hamlet* has a point of view that everybody can identify with. I think we are all individually a version of Hamlet and can relate to the character on some level.

Beyond the character of Hamlet itself are the themes and relationships delivered throughout the play: conversations related to existentialism, the mother-son relationship, the young love relationship, the best friend component, and the loss of a father. All these relatable themes, paired with the language's familiarity, make *Hamlet* timeless.

Regarding language, I think our audience's ears can really grab hold of what is being said in the play. I find with *Hamlet* that it's easier for us to connect with it and to follow it. So, I get excited about sharing it with our audiences so that they experience a deeper connection with the play. A 10-year-old is going to be able to connect with this play as much as a 90-year-old. That fact encompasses what we do at MSIP, focusing on diverse generations and communities.

We joke about the fact that my viewpoint on the play is that, though there are tragic elements and really challenging conversations happening throughout the play, there are also many comedic and enlightening conversations happening as well. We must embrace the sarcasm and the playfulness that *Hamlet* has. The missteps that occur throughout the course of the play, both comedic and tragic, are relevant for the 21st century. I really want to work to elevate that for our audiences to grasp.

The play is not about Hamlet necessarily. So often we are focused solely on the character of Hamlet and forget that every character that surrounds Hamlet has a significant journey that cannot be overlooked. I'm excited about how we can go further with fleshing out every character in this play and not lean so heavily into the title character because it's got so much more to do with the impact that Hamlet has on the lives around him.



Scan the QR code or visit our website for entry form & more details

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks is pleased to announce our SECOND ANNUAL poster design contest for the 2024 season.

The artist of the winning design will be awarded a cash prize of \$100 and have their artwork featured on this season's commemorative poster that will travel to 65 communities across the Rocky Mountain West.

ALL PEOPLE
are encouraged to enter!

Submissions Due April 28th

MSIP ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Robert Ford, Cast of the 1987 MSIP Summer Company

Hey, Bob! Tell the folks a little bit about yourself and how you found out about MSIP.

I'm an actor, playwright, novelist, and musician. I grew up in Michigan and New Jersey, and until the mid-90s was based in the tri-state area, where I studied flute and then acting and later screenwriting. I left to attend grad school in Austin, Texas, and thence to Fayetteville, Arkansas, after meeting my now wife—the actor/director Amy Herzberg—there at a new play workshop where she was the lead in the play I was directing.

My roommate at Rutgers, where I was studying for my acting MFA in the late '80s, was April Curtis. In those days she was a regular costume designer for MSIP. She recommended me and my friend Craig MacDonald to Joel Jahnke. I couldn't believe it when we squeezed into Craig's Mercury Capri, bound for – no way! – Montana. I credit MSIP with waking me up to the notion that great theatre can, and should, happen away from the coasts and Chicago.

So, what year did you tour with MSIP and what roles did you play?

I was fortunate enough to be hired in the summer of 1987 to play Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet* and Speed in *Two Gents*. Joel discovered I was a professional flutist — next thing you know, Benvolio's a piccolo player!

What is one of your favorite memories from touring with MSIP?

It's hard to isolate one favorite memory from the best theatre summer of my life. Maybe it's the moment I paused during stage set-up, glanced up at the mountains – was it around Big Fork, Missoula, or Cody?, I can't recall. In that pause, that beat, the thought occurred, "I could do this for the rest of my life. Breathe this air. Live under this Montana sky. Put up a set with some of the happiest people



Robert Ford (Benvolio), and Craig MacDonald (Tybalt) in the 1987 Montana State University Theatre Arts production of *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*.

on the planet. Jump on the boards. Utter the best language ever written in the English language. Tear the boards down and do it again and again."

How about one of the wackiest memories?

I think we were in Miles City. Right after set-up, half the cast grabbed sandwiches from a nearby outdoor canteen. Looking back, best anyone could guess, the mayo had been left out in the sun too long. The image that flashes up in my memory: actors, in full costume, lying flat-out in the grass backstage until the last possible second before their entrances, acting the hell outta their scenes, then running off stage, puking – then lying down again until their next entrance. The show came off. It was a miracle. It was brutal. And, sorry guys, brutally funny.



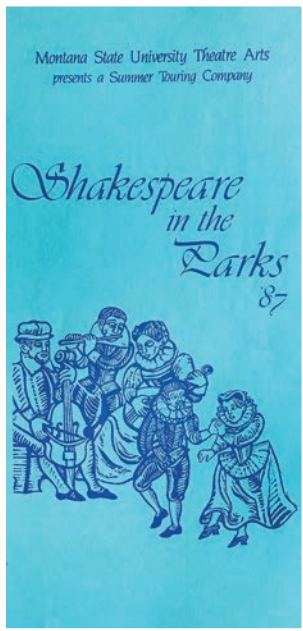
ABOVE: MSIP summer acting company, 1987.

And what are you up to now?

I'm the artistic director of TheatreSquared, the Obie-winning regional theatre in Fayetteville, Arkansas, which I helped found 20 years ago. We focus on new and newish work – though we're about to produce our second Shakespeare play next season in partnership with the National Asian American Theatre Coalition. I'm also writing a new play called *In the Grove of Forgetting* that we'll premier in 2025, and an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Last, we'd love to know; What is it about Montana Shakespeare in the Parks that you feel is different from any other experience you've had?

It's Montana itself, which is beyond beautiful. Spending a summer roving that glorious place. And meeting its Montanans. The way they joyously embrace Shakespeare, and the performers of Shakespeare. And how MSIP has woven itself into the fabric of Montana life, the parks, the cities and towns, the ranches—exploding the myth that theatre is only for city folk. It was a privilege to be part of that, even for just one summer.



The Montana State University Theatre Arts 1987 playbill.

TOUR SPONSORS

All sponsors above \$1000 as of March 11th:



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Contact Riley O'Toole at riley.otoole@montana.edu or (406)-994-3906



DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

Hamlet:
“Now I Am Alone”

BY GRETCHEN E. MINTON, PH.D

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which was written around the turn of the seventeenth century, is one of the most popular works of literature the world has ever known. The play dominates Shakespeare’s canon, just as the title character dominates the play. For 425 years audiences have enjoyed watching the Prince of Denmark in the largest role Shakespeare ever wrote, as countless stagings, adaptations, and allusions bring famous lines to life: “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”, “To be or not to be: that is the question”, “The play’s the thing”, “Alas, poor Yorick”, “The rest is silence”, and so many more.

In Elizabethan England playwrighting conventions allowed characters to speak alone onstage, either addressing the audience or simply speaking their thoughts aloud. These soliloquies offer a unique glimpse into a character’s innermost thoughts, and thus it is no surprise that Hamlet, the most introspective of Shakespeare’s characters, has so many. During these moments, the Prince bares his soul, mourning the death of his father, expressing disgust at his mother’s behavior, debating the ethics of revenge, and of course contemplating suicide.

One of Hamlet’s soliloquies begins with the telltale words “Now I am alone”. This is in some sense a natural set-up for a soliloquy, but that simple statement speaks volumes when it comes to Hamlet’s situation. He is beset by people—King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, who insist that he stay at court and not far from their sight; his supposed friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have been hired to keep track of him; Polonius, who is constantly meddling in his affairs and spying on him; and even the Ghost of Hamlet’s father, who haunts him quite literally. It is no wonder, then, that Hamlet thinks of Denmark as a prison. When one inhabits a place of omnipresent surveillance, to be alone is a rarity, so Hamlet relishes any opportunity to untangle his thoughts, to deal with his complex feelings as his situation becomes more and more dire.

In our current decade it is easy to relate to a world in which there is no opportunity for privacy—where there is always a way for people to get in touch with us, to

see where we are, to track where we are going or even what we are buying. Words and images bombard us incessantly, making it almost impossible to be alone. And yet while we may long for solitude, the paradox is that the condition of never being alone can cause the greatest loneliness of all. Hamlet knows this too: he understands that the world is a beautiful place, that humans are a remarkable piece of work with unparalleled thoughts and abilities, and yet he is unable to connect with them. His own mother, Gertrude, dismisses his deep mourning for his father; his college friends don’t seem to know anything about him; and even his love interest, Ophelia, chooses obedience to her father over her love for Hamlet. Given the behavior of those around him, Hamlet takes refuge in his disguise; he has decided to pretend to be mad in order to protect himself, but this madness also becomes a defense mechanism that prevents others from getting close to him. Even Horatio, his one true friend, has limited access to Hamlet. Hamlet insists that he has “that within which passes show”—in other words, much deeper thoughts and feelings than can be observed from his outward appearance—but only the audience is privy to that depth. For the observers all around him, he remains puzzlingly opaque, perhaps even mad indeed.

Although we know a great deal about what Hamlet is thinking, we know very little about the inner lives of the other characters. The only other character who delivers soliloquies is Claudius, who feels pangs of guilt for killing his brother, while also being determined to do whatever it takes to protect himself, so his soliloquies provide a window into his tortured psyche. What do the others onstage think or feel? We know very little of what we most want to know: what Gertrude knows about the death of her first husband; how Ophelia truly feels about Hamlet; whether Horatio believes everything that



LEFT: Costume sketch by Jeremy Floyd, costume designer, *Hamlet*. ABOVE: A collection of images for inspirational research.

Hamlet says. Shakespeare could have given us windows into these characters as well, but the refusal to do so creates a space for our imaginations. The most famous example of telling the story of *Hamlet* from another perspective is Tom Stoppard’s 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, but many other adaptations, stagings, and discussions have taken up the question of the inner lives of other characters as well.

We are, of course, always the center of our own life stories; other people play significant roles, but on some level remain a mystery. *Hamlet* focuses on this experience, offering profound insights into what it is like to be alone, both unknown to and unknowing of those around us. The famous moment in which Hamlet holds up the skull of the court jester, Yorick, and gazes at it is not only a reflection on mortality, but a desperate attempt to remember and fully comprehend someone we have lost. Yet the play itself suggests that lives, memories, and ideas do not have to be lost. Storytelling itself is the medium for connection. Hamlet’s dying wish is that Horatio will draw his breath in pain to tell Hamlet’s story after he is gone. In this spirit of continual storytelling, each production of *Hamlet* gives us the opportunity to listen more closely, to watch the reactions of those onstage and consider their perspectives too. Paradoxically, the tragedy of Hamlet’s aloneness brings us together as audience members and inheritors of this story.

DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

The Winter’s Tale:
A TRAGICOMEDY FILLED WITH WONDER

BY GRETCHEN E. MINTON, PH.D

In 1595, an English poet named Sir Philip Sidney complained that too many plays of the era were “neither right tragedies, nor right comedies”, but something in between, and playwrights even had the audacity to “mingle kings and clowns.” Sidney was attempting to assert a clear distinction between “high” tragic matter and “low” comic matter, suggesting that they didn’t belong in the same play. But as writers like Shakespeare were well aware, such mixtures make for good drama. After all, when Polonius in *Hamlet* announces the arrival of the players, he says that they are “the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral”. This is of course a joke at the expense of the long-winded Polonius, but it is also a boast about the remarkable possibilities of hybrid genres. The gravedigger-clowns in *Hamlet* likewise attest to Shakespeare’s interest in inserting a bit of comedy into the midst of tragedy (not to mention mingling a prince with some clowns).

Beginning in 1599, when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, he focused his attention more insistently on tragedy, authoring *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony & Cleopatra* in quick succession. Yet as the first decade of the seventeenth century drew to a close, his interest changed again, and he wrote plays that can be best thought of as “tragicomedies”. With their thorough commitment to mixing tragic and comic subject matter and their investment in supernatural elements, *The Tempest* and *Cymbeline* are examples of tragicomedies. *The Winter’s Tale* (c. 1610) is another—and possibly the best example of this hybrid genre.

The structure of *Winter’s Tale* doesn’t mix tragedy and comedy throughout the entire plot like some plays, but instead completely bifurcates them. We begin in Sicily, the kingdom of King Leontes and Queen Hermione. This portion of the play is wintry, dark, and quickly propelled into dire circumstances. As an insanely jealous husband, Leontes wrongly accuses his wife of infidelity with his best friend, Polixenes. Leontes refuses to hear pleas, to see reason, to change his course in any way, which causes the action to take a decidedly tragic turn. This interrogation of jealousy echoes *Othello*

quite closely, but whereas that play ends as a heart-wrenching tragedy, in *Winter’s Tale* Shakespeare allows us to imagine another outcome of such events. The second half of the play thus takes place first in Bohemia, the kingdom of Polixenes and his son, Florizel. When the action unfolds in this setting, it is as if we have awoken, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, into a world bursting with vibrant colors. Suddenly it is warm, there is music and dancing, and the characters include shepherds and clowns. There are still obstacles to happiness in this pastoral world, of course, but the festive energy is reminiscent of comedies like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It*, where being close to the natural world allows an avenue for healing, revelation, and of course marriage. As we know from reading comedies like these or fairy tales in general, the main characters will be able to overcome the complications arising from class, identity, or misunderstandings.

How do we as audience members reconcile the tragic and the comic? How do we manage the imaginative journey from Sicily to Bohemia and back again? Shakespeare’s answer to this is simple, and yet profound: Time. A character representing Time appears at the beginning of Act 4, and this Chorus-like presence explains to the audience that 16 years have passed between the previous scene and the following one. Given this significant passage of time, perhaps we as audience members are less like the sleeping Dorothy and more like Sleeping Beauty. By acknowledging the wide gap in *Winter’s Tale*’s chronology, Shakespeare encourages us to consider how time heals—and sometimes doesn’t heal—the traumas of tragedy.

Winter’s Tale is set in an ancient world where the Oracle at Delphi speaks truth, and where events seem to be guided by forces beyond the human. Sometimes uncanny things occur too, as stipulated in Shakespeare’s most famous stage direction: “*Exit, pursued by a bear.*” The terrifying prospect of a bear attack is not unknown to us in Montana and is not likely to seem like the beginning of something positive, but in *Winter’s Tale* this surprising event ushers in life as well as death. As one character

exclaims, “thou met’st with things dying, I with things newborn.”

This play is filled with wonder, for it takes seriously the notion that some things which are lost really can be found. In the final scene, the intricacies of time’s knot are untied and we are witnesses to the life-giving powers of art. Throughout his career Shakespeare encouraged the audience to appreciate the great possibilities of theatrical illusion, but nowhere is this exploration more wondrous and more profound. In the end, however, *Winter’s Tale* shows us that the greatest miracle isn’t the intervention of the gods or even the power of art. Instead, the greatest miracle of all lies in the power of humans to forgive one another.



Costume design sketches by Elias Dennis, costume designer *Winter’s Tale*

2024 ACTING COMPANY



CALVIN ADAMS:
Claudius - Hamlet
Polixenes - Winter’s Tale



SAM CHEESEMAN:
Laertes - Hamlet
Leontes - Winter’s Tale



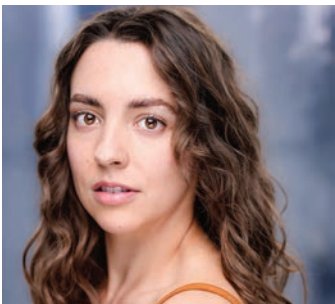
MARCUS CUNNINGHAM:
Polonius - Hamlet
Antigonus - Winter’s Tale



MIKEY GRAY:
“Horatio” - Hamlet
“Autolycus” - Winter’s Tale



EMILY HAWKINS:
Marcellus - Hamlet
Hermione - Winter’s Tale



JAMIE HERB:
Ophelia - Hamlet
Perdita / Oracle - Winter’s Tale



AVERY JOHNSON:
Bernardo - Hamlet
Florizel - Winter’s Tale



BEN MURPHY:
Rosencrantz - Hamlet
Shepherd - Winter’s Tale



RILEY O’TOOLE:
Hamlet - Hamlet
Shepherd - Winter’s Tale



JUSTINE RYAN:
Guildenstern - Hamlet
Paulina - Winter’s Tale



EMILY MICHELLE WALTON:
Gertrude - Hamlet
Camillo - Winter’s Tale

2024 TOUR SCHEDULE

JUNE

12	Bozeman	Hamlet	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
13	Bozeman	Hamlet	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
14	Bozeman	Hamlet	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
15	Bozeman	Hamlet	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
19	Bozeman	Winter’s Tale	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
20	Bozeman	Winter’s Tale	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
21	Bozeman	Winter’s Tale	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
22	Bozeman	Winter’s Tale	8:00pm	MSU Duck Pond
24	Big Timber	Hamlet	6:30pm	Lion’s Club Park
25	Laurel	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Town Square Park
26	Forsyth	Hamlet	6:30pm	Rosebud County Courthouse Lawn
27	Ekalaka	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Dahl Memorial Nursing Home Lawn
28	Beach, ND	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Beach Swimming Pool Park
29	Glendive	Hamlet	6:30pm	Makoshika State Park Amphitheater

JULY

1	Sidney	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Veterans Memorial Park
2	Wolf Point	Hamlet	6:30pm	Faith Nursing Home Park
3	Malta	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Trafton Park
4	Lewistown	Hamlet	6:30pm	Creekside Marketplace & Pavilion
5	Hobson	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Utica Women’s Clubhouse
6	Zortman	Hamlet	6:30pm	Antelope Creek Campground
7	Miles City	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Riverside Park
9	Roundup	Hamlet	6:30pm	Roundup City Park
10	Colstrip	Hamlet	6:30pm	Rye Park Pavilion
11	Birney	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Poker Jim Butte
12	Sheridan	Hamlet	6:30pm	Kendrick Park Bandshell
13	Worland	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Sanders Park
14	Red Lodge	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Lions Park
15	Silver Gate	Hamlet	6:30pm	Silver Gate Park
16	Powell, WY	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	Washington Park
17	Cody, WY	Hamlet	6:30pm	Canal Park
19	Hardin	Winter’s Tale	6:30pm	South Park
20	Billings	Hamlet	6:00pm	North Park
21	Billings	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	North Park
22	Fishtail	Hamlet	6:00pm	Fishtail Family Park
23	Columbus	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Heritage Park
24	Gardiner	Hamlet	6:00pm	Arch Park
25	Chico	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Chico Main Lawn
27	Big Sky	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Town Center Plaza
28	Driggs, ID	Hamlet	6:00pm	Teton County Courthouse Lawn
29	Afton, WY	Hamlet	6:00pm	Kodiak Mountain Resort
30	Pocatello, ID	Hamlet	6:00pm	ISU Hutchinson Memorial Quadrangle
31	Pocatello, ID	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	ISU Hutchinson Memorial Quadrangle

AUGUST

1	Salmon, ID	Hamlet	6:00pm	Sacajawea Interpretive, Cultural & Educational Center
2	Dillon	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Montana Western Legacy Plaza
3	Deer Lodge	Hamlet	6:00pm	Old Prison Yard
5	Helena	Hamlet	6:00pm	Anchor Park
6	Helena	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Anchor Park
7	Great Falls	Hamlet	6:00pm	Gibson Park Bandshell
8	Fort Benton	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Fort Benton City Park
9	Conrad	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Swimming Pool Park
10	Choteau	Hamlet	6:00pm	Weatherbeater/TASGA Grounds
11	Cut Bank	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Cut Bank City Park
12	Kalispell	Hamlet	6:00pm	Woodland Park
14	Eureka	Hamlet	6:00pm	Tobacco Valley Historical Village
15	Libby	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Libby Elementary School Amphitheater
16	Sandpoint	Hamlet	5:00pm	Lakeview Park
17	Liberty Lake	Winter’s Tale	5:00pm	Pavilion Park
18	Trout Creek	Hamlet	5:30pm	Trout Creek Park
19	Plains	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Sanders County Fairgrounds
20	Polson	Hamlet	6:00pm	Boettcher Park
22	Charlo	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Palmer Park
23	Superior	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Mineral County Fairgrounds
24	Hamilton	Hamlet	5:00pm	Sapphire Lutheran Homes
25	Hamilton	Winter’s Tale	5:00pm	Sapphire Lutheran Homes
26	Seeley Lake	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	Double Arrow Lodge
27	Missoula	Winter’s Tale	6:00pm	The Oval
29	Missoula	Hamlet	6:00pm	The Oval
30	Philipsburg	Winter’s Tale	5:30pm	Winninghoff Park
31	Anaconda	Hamlet	5:00pm	Washoe Park

SEPTEMBER

1	Townsend	Winter’s Tale	5:00pm	Heritage Park
2	Butte	Hamlet	5:30pm	Stodden Park
4	Boulder	Hamlet	5:30pm	Jefferson County Fairgrounds
5	White Sulphur	Winter’s Tale	5:30pm	Castle Museum Lawn
6	Livingston	Hamlet	5:30pm	The Blake Pavilion at the Shane Center
7	Pony	Winter’s Tale	5:00pm	Pony Park
8	Whitehall	Hamlet	5:00pm	Star Theatre - Main Street Green
9	Twin Bridges	Winter’s Tale	5:30pm	Soccer Field at Riverside Park / Fairgrounds
10	Bozeman	Hamlet	5:30pm	Grant Chamberlain Park

MSIP STAFF & PRODUCTION COMPANY

- Kevin Asselin** – Executive Artistic Director & Director – *Hamlet*
- Eva Breneman** – Director – *The Winter’s Tale*
- Adam Fedock** – Production Manager
- Hannah Jacobsma** – Dir. Of Community Access & Engagement
- Riley O’Toole** – Associate Artistic Director
- Vicki Stenberg** – Executive Associate
- Jeremy Floyd** – Costume Designer – *Hamlet*
- Elias Dennis** – Costume Designer – *Winter’s Tale*
- Tom Watson** – Scenic Designer – *Hamlet*
- Miguel Salazar** – Scenic Designer – *Winter’s Tale*
- Harmoni Thompson** – Stage Manager – *Hamlet*
- Sara Stanek** – Stage Manager – *Winter’s Tale*
- Paige Wisneski** – Assistant Sage Manager – *Hamlet*
- Sierra Riley** – Assistant Sage Manager – *Winter’s Tale* / Production Specialist
- Laura Tapia** – Assistant Director – *Hamlet*
- Simone Dietrich** – Assistant Director – *Winter’s Tale*
- Toy Deiorio** – Sound Designer – *Hamlet*
- Andrew Hansen** – Sound Designer – *Winter’s Tale*
- Stacy Hostetter** – Properties Designer
- Jonathan Dove** – Lighting Designer
- Chris DuVal** – Fight Director – *Hamlet*
- Gretchen Minton** – Dramaturg
- Kathy Logelin** – Text / Verse Coach
- Rae Scott** – Production Apprentice
- Angela Cateora** – Shop Manager/Stitcher
- Isabella Wieand** – Draper
- Sean Castro** – Draper
- Perey Bridges** – First Hand
- Morgan Brooks** – First Hand
- Juliette Walsh** – Stitcher
- Sean Hannah** – Costume Design Assistant
- Laila Sisson** – Costumes/Properties Craftsperson
- Nora Tjernagel** – Costume Shop Apprentice
- Eric Sanchez** – Carpenter
- Ashley Milleson** – Carpenter
- Blake Watson** – Carpenter
- Peter Fedock** – Master Electrician

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IMPACTFUL DONORS

An Interview with James and Beth Burroughs

Our donors provide so much more than the dollars they give. They are dear friends, woven into the fabric of our history, and are truly a part of the MSIP family. We are deeply honored to share the voices of a family that has shown support and benevolence to MSIP for decades. Thank you, James, Beth, Owen, Hugh, and Johnny, for your many years of friendship to the MSIP actors, staff, and greater communities we visit.

Tell us a little about yourselves and your family!

Beth is professor and department head of Mathematical Sciences at Montana State University in Bozeman, and James is administrator for a research center at MSU. Our oldest son, Owen, is an MSU alum and is now a graduate student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Our youngest son, Johnny, will be a sophomore at Bozeman High School in the fall. And our middle son, Hugh, will start college in the fall to study acting—no doubt in part because he watched so many talented MSIP actors over the years.

Can you share a bit about your history with MSIP and how the company has been a part of your family over the years?

We've been fans of live theatre, including Shakespeare, since we were each young, but when we moved to Montana in 2007 we didn't even know about MSIP. It was a wonderful surprise. We enjoyed the Bozeman shows first, bringing our sons when they were very young, but it wasn't long before we discovered the magic of seeing the summer tour around the state, where the audience experience can be so different and the actors really thrive on their engagement with members of each community. For years these road trips were our family *thing*. Naturally we got to know and love many of the returning actors over the years, and today so many of them are like members of our family. For the past seven years we've also had the honor of hosting the welcome cookout for the summer cast and crew and the amazing MSIP staff, and it's always such a privilege to see our returning friends and to meet new ones who are just starting their adventure. As we tell members of this company, new and old, they have given so much to our family these past 17 years that we can never hope to repay them. All we can do is be the biggest fans and supporters we can be.

What is one of your favorite memories from a summer with MSIP?

There are so many! One that sticks out is one of the first performances of *The Comedy of Errors* in Bozeman in 2016. Riley O'Toole had a scene that took him into the audience, as his character charmed his way through the complexities of mistaken identity. He stopped near our blanket and, to the delight of our kids, helped himself to some Oreos that were part of our picnic. It made our sons feel special, like they were chosen to be part of the action of the play. To this day, we bring Oreos to those Bozeman shows, just in case an actor needs a reason to stop by our blanket.

Incidentally, that was Riley's first tour with the company. At some point we started keeping track of how many times we've seen the returning actors perform over the years, and to date we've seen Riley perform 129 times—and counting!

The actors often look out to see your smiling faces in the front row! How many MSIP shows do you typically see over the summer? Where are your favorite spots to watch the shows on the road?

It's true that we like the front row. That started when our sons were small and it was the best way to keep them engaged with the play. Now we just think seeing the actors up close reveals their talents to an even greater degree. And we can send them some positive energy in return.

We are slowing down a bit in recent years as our sons have grown, but over the past seven years we've averaged close to 20 shows a summer. We set our family record of

“All we can do is be the biggest fans and supporters we can be.”

“MSIP is truly of the people and for the people of Montana and our region, so the day when we as audiences stop supporting this company is the day it fades away.”



The Burroughs family pose for a picture with the 2022 Montana Shakespeare in the Parks cast.

28 performances back in 2021. That was a special summer cast charged with leading MSIP back after the pandemic and the “lost year” of 2020. They needed some extra love, so we tried to give it to them.

People often wonder, “Why so many shows?” The simple answer is that Shakespeare is so rich that every performance offers new charms, and the MSIP productions evolve significantly over the summer. All season long, the actors are exploring the plays and figuring out characters—even to the very end. There is so much to enjoy for the first time in every repeat viewing.

We do have some favorite communities. We try to see the show in Birney whenever we can. There's no experience quite like it. Other beautiful settings we enjoy are Makoshika State Park, outside Glendive, and Charlo, to the west. But we also enjoy shows in some of the communities closer to Bozeman, such as Big Timber, Columbus, Chico Hot Springs, Red Lodge, Townsend, Absarokee, and Gardiner. Each one is unique!

Why do you think MSIP is so important to the communities and schools it visits each season?

It really is true that the one or two MSIP performances in some communities and schools are the only theatre arts they see all year. To have that one performance be a Shakespeare play of such professional quality, and *free*, is really an extraordinary gift. We've seen how kids light up when the Shakes! tour comes to their school. And on the summer tour, some communities have hosted an MSIP show each year for *generations*. Birney is a case in point. Ranching families come together from miles around for an evening of togetherness, food, and fun, with some hugs from their favorite returning actors. It's delightful to watch that as a guest.

You and your family are monthly donors with MSIP and have been for quite some time. Why do you continue to support MSIP in this way and why do you feel it is important for people to invest in this company, whether it's \$5 a month or \$500?

MSIP is truly of the people and for the people of Montana and our region, so the day when we as audiences stop supporting this company is the day it fades away. We hope it will never come to that! Riley, as company manager, says that donations are like buying a ticket for someone else who might otherwise not get to experience these plays. We take that to heart. Corporate sponsors and grants are wonderful, and we're all grateful for those. But this company belongs to *us* as community members, so it's our collective responsibility to ensure its future.

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BEYOND THE BARD

By Hannah Jacobsma, MSIP Dir. of Community Engagement

In 2023 Montana Shakespeare in the Parks continued to bring world-class performances to communities and schools across the region as it has for the last 51 years. But during the weekly staff meetings on MSU’s campus, a conversation began to unfold among the core team. One that went beyond the Bard.

“The past couple of years, we really have been talking a lot about the fact that Montana Shakespeare in the Parks is not, dare I say, about Shakespeare,” says Kevin Asselin.

Though the mission is to share Shakespeare’s timeless tales with rural and underserved communities and schools across the region, the company has always connected with their audiences on a deeper level.

“Shakespeare is merely the vehicle for a much greater opportunity to bring every aspect of community together,” Kevin says.

In other words, the play is what sets the scene for meaningful moments shared over a picnic basket before the performance. For making students feel seen through conversations with actors at their lunch table. For creating space for dialogue between neighbors who share different views.

Last summer, our team focused on creating opportunities for local artists representing communities we visit to showcase their diverse talents on MSIP’s historic stage through special pre-show performances. Various towns hosted 18 pre-shows throughout the summer featuring traditional native dance, local youth choirs, community acting groups, and many more.

Imagine the MSIP stage nestled in a grove of trees on the County Courthouse lawn in Forsyth, MT. An audience of around 200 souls enjoy their picnics and each other’s company before the performance. Music sounds, and two dancers enter the stage. It’s Shandin Kaline and her auntie Alaina Buffalo Spirit, both members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe. Alaina shares a traditional Northern Cheyenne dance and Shandin a jingle dance, performed as a healing ritual. The audience is captivated.



Shandin Kaline, right, and her auntie Alaina Buffalo Spirit, both members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe perform on the MSIP stage in Forsyth, MT.

Susan Wolfe, MSIP Tour Coordinator for the Forsyth community says, “I loved that moment. Seeing them step up on stage in their full regalia and perform their craft. It allowed people to experience a little bit about what the dance form can bring.”

For Alaina, opportunities like this mean having the chance to share her tribe’s culture with neighbors who might not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with it.

“It’s very important to show our neighbors that we are still here and that we have positive activities like dancing, storytelling, and artwork,” says Alaina. “I wanted to be involved to show that sometimes the media only covers the negative aspects of Northern Cheyenne home life. We still have our ceremonial ways and our community. That’s very positive.”

Following the performance, Susan invited Alaina and Shandin to join the actors for dinner at her home where they shared stories and learned more about each other’s art forms.

Inviting local performers to represent the communities MSIP visits through their own art and culture is

“Shakespeare is merely the vehicle for a much greater opportunity to bring every aspect of community together.”

**Kevin Asselin,
Executive Artistic Director MSIP**

incredibly special. In our 52nd season, we hope to offer pre-show performances in more communities than ever and want to thank our Tour Coordinators for helping us make that possible!

Back in MSIP’s home base of Bozeman, MT, partnerships with local organizations allow for creative collaboration within our community: The Bozeman Symphony, Thrive, Random Acts of Silliness, Big Sky Youth Empowerment, and KGLT, to name a few.

One such collaboration is Symphony Storytime with The Bozeman Symphony, a program to encourage a love of music, literacy, and discovery. Actors are paired with musicians from the symphony to tell a story through spoken word and music. The program is free and visits HRDC’s Head Start classrooms in Bozeman and Belgrade and The Bozeman Public Library.

“The Bozeman Symphony’s musicians are master storytellers through music, so partnering with Shakespeare in the Parks is an exciting and special way to partner with other skilled storytellers to give picture books more life for young audiences,” said Education and Community Engagement Coordinator Cierra Wallace.

This season, we look forward to more collaborations than ever before with artists and organizations across the region. For more information on pre-show and other community engagement opportunities, contact MSIP Director of Community Engagement, Hannah Jacobsma.