

# Shakespeare festival returns to Claremont with a vengeance

The play's the thing for Ophelia's Jump, which will present two plays by the Bard during the second annual Midsummer Shakespeare Festival held Friday, July 16 to July 26.

On alternating nights, the three-year-old repertory company will perform Shakespeare's comedy **Twelfth Night** and his tragedy **Titus Andronicus**. Pomona College again serves as co-sponsor for the festival, offering its beautiful Sontag Greek Theatre as an open-air venue.

Guests are invited to come early and enjoy a picnic. Shows will be preceded by live music, an appearance by the Shakespearean improv group The Mechanicals, snack and beverage vendors plus the chance to browse arts and crafts wares.

**The Twelfth Night**, a gender-bending comedy featuring the classic Shakespearean motif of mistaken identity, is performed often enough—though not usually with a Rhode Island setting and costumes and live music hearkening to the 1920s. **Titus Andronicus** is more rarely undertaken because, as a revenge play, it's a bit macabre.

The level of strife is indicated by the synopsis: "In Fourth Century Rome, Titus returns to the city after a period of bloody conflicts with the Goths. Upon his triumphant return, the Goth queen Tamora and her three sons begin a cycle of revenge that ultimately destroys them all."

Between a comic cleaver-wielding scene in **Twelfth Night** and the blood-drenched blades of **Titus Andronicus**, it's a good thing Ophelia's Jump has access to a fight choreographer. Yes, that's a real job, and it's performed by Cyle Conley.

Mr. Conley, who was also part of last year's Midsummer Shakespeare Festival, plays Saturninus in **Titus Andronicus** and Sir Andrew in **Twelfth Night**.

He was trained in violence choreography through Dueling Arts International. Mr. Conley finds this niche of the dramatic arts to be exhilarating, whether he's mimicking an episode of domestic violence or marking out the dance of swordplay.

"You generally think of a story being told in words. But violence can also be a really effective method of telling a story. Good sword-fighting can tell you everything you need to know about a character," he said.

**Titus Andronicus** offers a smorgasbord of opportunity for a fight choreographer, but it's a tricky task, according to Mr. Conley.

"Titus is an extremely gory, over-the-top, melodramatic play," he said. "I had to find the balance of telling the story without being repulsive."

Last year, the Greek theatre provided an al fresco ambience perfect for Shakespeare in the round. This year, performers will have even more impact, thanks to an elaborate new set.

"The stage is a raised platform thrust further out, making the audience another character—the way Shakespeare wanted it to be," Ophelia's Jump co-founder Randy Lopez said. "You'll feel like you're a part of the action."

Ophelia's Jump is very much a family affair. Mr. Lopez started the company along with his wife, Beat-

## The Basics

**WHAT:** Midsummer Shakespeare Festival

**WHEN:** Friday, July 16 to July 26

**WHERE:** Sontag Greek Theatre

**TICKETS:** \$22 to \$25

**INFO:** Call (909) 541-5850 or [www.opheliasjump.org](http://www.opheliasjump.org)



COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff

Orsino, played by Hero Carlisle, confesses his love for Olivia and hatches a plan for winning her affections during the opening scene of **Twelfth Night** recently at Pomona College.

rice Casagran, and his daughter Caitlin Lopez. Ms. Casagran is directing **Titus Andronicus**, while Ms. Lopez is helming **Twelfth Night** with the help of co-director Jenny Lockwood. Ms. Lockwood has also taken on the role of Olivia.

The ladies are having a great time bringing off the play, which features original songs as well as period compositions performed by a live band.

"We're music fiends and Shakespeare nerds, so this production marries both of those passions," Ms. Lopez said. "I think **Twelfth Night** is one of Shakespeare's more accessible comedies. There's a childish quality and an innocent view of love that people tap into."

Ms. Lockwood agrees. "It's such a non-cynical way of looking at love," she said. "It's as simple as you take off your hat and it's, 'You're a girl. I love you.'"

Luckily for Ophelia's Jump, there are plenty of Shakespeare aficionados around—those who like to watch the action from the crowd and those waiting in the wings for their moment to shine.

Brendon Anderson is playing the clownish character Feste in **Twelfth Night** and Demetrius in **Titus**. He recently moved from Minnesota to the Los Angeles area after finishing school, and is delighted to have found Ophelia's Jump.

"It's hard to find companies that do true repertory, where they change out and do a different show every day. It's tough on the actors and it's cost-prohibitive," he said. "For me, the chance to work on multiple things at the same time is really enticing."

Mr. Anderson is a Shakespeare buff, having gone to school in England where he earned a master's degree in acting, with an emphasis in the classics.

Asked why Shakespeare's works continue to draw theater-lovers, he only had to think a moment.

"I think his plays are magical. There are really great images. And listen to it," he said, indicating the actors as they practiced. "It's almost melodic, the way words were used back then. 'Who does molest my contemplation?' It's such a wonderful way of saying it, and we all know what it means."

**Twelfth Night** will be performed on July 16, 18, 24 and 26 at 8 p.m. **Titus Andronicus** will be per-



Sir Toby, played by Troy Whiteley, has his friend Sir Andrew (Cyle Conley) in a headlock during rehearsal for Shakespeare's **Twelfth Night** on Monday at Pomona College. The comedy, along with the relatively obscure tragedy **Titus Andronicus**, will be presented by Ophelia's Jump in the second annual Midsummer's Night Shakespeare Festival beginning July 16.

formed July 17, 19, 23 and 25 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$22 to \$25. For tickets and information, visit [www.opheliasjump.org](http://www.opheliasjump.org) or call (909) 541-5850.

—Sarah Torribio  
storribio@claremont-courier.com