

# Shakespeare in the Park returns to Metro

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Politics is a dirty business. It always has been, and with an election coming it is pretty certain that someone will be stabbed in the back.

But here, we are not talking about local politics, but about Shakespeare and his political thriller *Julius Caesar*.

Hubcity Theatre returns to Moncton's Victoria Park this month for its annual Shakespeare in the Park festival, bringing one of the most famous political intrigues of all time to the stage.

"We did sort of a lighter show last year," says Paul Power, the director. "I was also inspired by the political scandals going on both federally and municipally. I felt like some of our political characters have been in hot water this year, and this play would be relevant because this is the original political scandal."

The *Tragedy of Julius Caesar* was penned by William Shakespeare, probably in 1599. It is the story of a conspiracy against the Roman dictator Julius Caesar, his assassination and the defeat of the conspirators at the Battle of Philippi around 44 BC. It is one of several plays written by the Bard based on true events from Roman history, which also include *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The play is really more about Brutus, who has four times as many lines as Caesar. It is a psychological drama about the struggle of those who hold public office to navigate the world of honour, patriotism and friendship.

And there has been enough graft, awarded contracts, affairs and senate scandals in our world for us to see that really, not much has changed in the last 2000 years.

"I think it was Shakespeare's take on the abuse of political power – or the combination of that and whether the choices you make in power are for your own benefit or for the community," Paul says. "There are internal struggles going on with the characters. Beyond that Shakespeare tried to show that the general public can be swayed easily."

The plot at its simplest is about members of the senate who feel Julius Caesar, as the emperor, is going to disband the senate and rule as a king.

Hubcity has chosen to set the play in modern times. Aside from the contemporary feel and the fact that the cast have taken some liberties with the genders of characters, it stays true to the original text.

Paul says that they wanted to update it in order to be more fair with the role that women now play in politics, and also around the role media can play in swaying public opinion. There are also challenges involved in performing outside and in the elements. This play in particular may be easier however as a lot of the scenes are supposed to be taking place out in the Italian countryside.

Shakespeare wrote his works for performance in open air theatre in the round, surrounded by the audience, which at times almost took part in the action. Performing Shakespeare in the park may just be getting back closer to the original intent, and it certainly allows an experience that differs from normal classical theatre.

"On the other hand," Paul says, "performing outside allows us to be true to what we want to do with the plays, which is to present them free of charge in a way that allows everyone to see them and engage in the arts."

He believes people will be more likely to give Shakespeare a chance if it's free, and it takes place in a park, a venue that allows people of all walks of life to get to know the Bard's great stories.

"The arts give people a chance to get involved in something that is a bit more creative," Paul says. "Theatre, if done right, is acceptable and open to anyone. There was a study that came out a week or two ago that theatre also contributes to the overall wellness of people because you are interacting with other people and it raises your mood and it gives an opportunity for people to come together and share their experiences."

Shakespeare in the Park is a labour of love. The cast is made up of volunteers who love the stories and believe in the power of the medium. Each year the company builds on past successes.

"This year we decided to expand our performance schedule to give more people an opportunity to see the show," says Paul. "So many times we hear people were away on vacation and then of course there's always the threat of rain cancelling a performance day. This schedule gives us more days to work with."

Shakespeare in the Park has become an annual community event in Moncton, thanks in part to support from the City of Moncton which allows Hubcity Theatre to provide free performances.

"I think it is a great night of free entertainment," Paul says, "with amazing quality and entertainment value. We have put together an exciting show with a fabulous cast, and we are staging it within Victoria Park."

"Other than that, it is also important to come out and support your local art community, and your local theatre community – there is a great value that the performing arts brings to the community."

## Show facts

What: Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, presented by Hubcity Theatre