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Excitement already for next Shakespeare season

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PRESCOTT -- The final sonnets of The Bard's plays rang out Saturday night in Prescott as the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival received a standing ovation for its ninth season.

"Saturday night was a great way to close. It was our largest crowd of the summer, and everyone gave a fantastic performance," artistic director Ian Farthing told The Recorder and Times Monday.

Lightning lit up the sky during the final performance of Twelfth Night, which had alternated with All's Well That Ends Well this year.

Around midway through the festival's season, attendance was down about five per cent, which Farthing attributed to the heat wave, though he noted traffic from out-of-town visitors was up.

He said crowds grew gradually as the weather cooled down in August.

Finals numbers aren't even in yet, and already Farthing said focus has shifted to next season and the company's big 10th anniversary celebration.

"This season has been extremely well received by both audiences and critics, so now we are moving full speed ahead for our 10th anniversary," said Farthing.

Prescott has an abundance of anniversaries in 2012, including the fifth anniversary of the new Loyalist Days, the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, and the 40th anniversary of the Leo Boivin Midget Hockey Showcase, so the Shakespeare Festival is taking the opportunity to get involved in the cross-promotion.

"We have a really great celebration planned for our tenth. We are going to take the gripping tragedy of Othello and set it during the War of 1812, and A Midsummer Night's Dream will also tie into 1812," said Farthing.

The festival has already lined up Quincy Armorer, a two-year veteran of the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival, to play the starring role of Othello next season.

"Quincy got a lot of good reviews, I really enjoyed his work. He gives very clear, very clean performances, and, let's be honest, the women swoon over him," said Farthing.

Though he downplayed the swooning, Armorer did say he had a fantastic time in Prescott and can't wait to put his spin on Othello.

"To say that I'm excited is probably a major understatement," said Armorer.

"It's a role that I've of course had on my bucket list for a long time, and the opportunity to get to do it is fantastic," he added.

As for the unique 1812 setting, Armorer joked that he "clearly has some homework to do before next season."

"Othello is a military general so it seems like a logical setting. I'm excited to sit down with Ian (Farthing) and see how it all unfolds," said Armorer.

Next year's festival runs from July 7 to August 11 and tickets are already on sale through the festival's website.

Farthing said even regular attendees and veterans of the festival will be pleasantly surprised by what they find next year.

"The festival gets stronger and more talented every year and as the reputation grows across the country we can use that to attract from of the best actors from across Canada to come to 'lil old Prescott," said Farthing.

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