

Shakespeare fest starts Sat.

Posted By Ronald Zajac, Staff Writer

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There are plenty of universal themes in Shakespeare's work, and this year's St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival will cast a comic light on two of them: the hypocrisy of power and a woman's indomitable spirit.

The festival's seventh season gets underway this week and next at the Kinsmen Amphitheatre with two plays, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Measure for Measure*, performed by plenty of familiar people making the Fort Town a summer home.

"It's the community that keeps me coming back here," said Craig Walker, director of *Measure*.

"The relationship between the theatre company and the audience is more positive and richer than you usually get anywhere else."

Walker, who is spending his fourth season with the local festival, was artistic director of Theatre Kingston from 1997 to 2007.

"I love working in the outdoors. I love working in summer theatre," added Janet Irwin, of Ottawa, who is directing *Shrew*.

The latter play opens on Saturday and runs until August 15, while *Measure* opens Wednesday, July 15, and also runs to August 15.

Shrew tells the story of Kate, an independent-minded woman with a reputation for being tempestuous, who must be married off before her younger sister Bianca can marry the man of her dreams.

Measure, meanwhile, is the tale of Angelo, the duke of Vienna whose moral rigidity and religious zeal in office is undermined by his own hypocrisy.

"*Shrew* is the last really well-known comedy that we haven't done yet," said festival artistic director Ian Farthing.

Measure is not as well-known, but Farthing is intrigued by its statement on political morality. And while it is also fundamentally a comedy, it has, like last year's *Merchant of Venice*, a darker undercurrent.

Walker has chosen to set Measure in a fictitious Vienna of the late 19th century, a point in that city's history when it was shifting from a liberal outlook to a more "right-wing" society.

Kris Joseph, who plays Angelo, said the duke comes to power wanting to enforce the letter of the law, but is ultimately tripped up by his own hypocrisy.

It's a challenging role to tackle.

"He's a difficult character to like, that's for sure," said Joseph, adding one of the most challenging aspects of the role is "a very deep religious undercurrent that is a little more unfamiliar to our current society."

Irwin, for her part, has set Shrew in 1950s North America, a reflection on the fact recent productions have given the story a post-feminist reading.

Kate is rebellious not because of a political agenda, said Irwin. Rather, her behaviour is simply natural for an unhappy, intelligent woman in a rigid society.

Petruchio, played by Walker in decidedly James Dean attire, is very much Kate's match, said Irwin.

Alix Sideris, Rosalind in last year's As You Like It, is thrilled to take on the role of Kate.

"She's so much fun," said Sideris. "She's a wild child."

At the same time, Kate carries a great deal of "baggage," said Sideris.

"She carries with her a lot of anger. It's misplaced and displaced and she lashes out."

Kate's final speech is often seen as a "submission speech," but Sideris rather reads it as a condemnation of the cruelty inherent in the story's society.

"It's a speech about love. It's a speech about treating one another with gentleness," she said.

Tickets to the Shakespeare Festival are \$22 for adults, \$18 for seniors, \$16 for students and free for children 12 and under.

Performances run Tuesday through Saturday at 7 p.m., with Saturday matinees at 2 p.m.

More information is available by calling 925-5788, or online at www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca.