

**COVER
STORY**
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
IN JORDAN VALLEY PARK

Make time for a play date



STEVE J.P. LIANG / NEWS-LEADER

Allan Ansell (Lysander), Cassie Tweten (Helena) and Whitney Ice (Hermia) rehearse for "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The tale of love gone awry opens today at Jordan Valley Park; performances are **FREE**.

Bard's classic "fairy tale" opens at JVP.

By Sony Hocklander
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Soak up the magic of Shakespeare for free, when "A Midsummer Night's Dream" comes to Jordan Valley Park today through Sunday and June 5 through 8.

Grab a blanket or lawn chairs for you, your date, your family and friends during the 2008 Springfield Shakespeare Festival, where music, jugglers, swordplay and more begin long before the show starts. Want supper? Pack a picnic or buy a box dinner at the park.

"Jordan Valley Park is such a great fit for what we want to do with this," says Jeff Jenkins, who is co-producing the show with support from the city, Springfield Park Board and Springfield Regional Arts

Council.

"It gives the park something unique out there, and it's free for the whole family. So it fits."

Sara Buffamanti, a professional actress from New York, plays Titania.

Titania's a fairy and a queen who's also a very human character going through a bad point in her marriage, Buffamanti says.

It's difficult to condense the plot of this particular Shakespeare romp, she adds. She describes it as being about four lovers who go into the woods to battle it out and hopefully get matched up with their true loves. At the same time, they get mixed up with fairy mischief and hijinks. Meanwhile, a duke is getting married and five workmen are trying to create a play for the celebration.

"And all their lives become entwined somehow," she says.

Buffamanti, who is part of a small professional acting troupe in New York, met director Stacy Parker while they both attended Columbia University. Parker teaches in Missouri State University's theater and dance department.

Parker says Buffamanti is a classically trained actress, an expert in Shakespeare plays and a trained clown.

"She has a mastery of the language and she's so funny. ... And I can't say enough good things about all of the cast. They are so talented and willing to think outside the box."

For so many reasons, the play works wonderfully for outdoor theater, Parker says.

"It's fun. It's an exploration of love and all of its joy and hilarity and sadness. All of what makes love exciting is in 'Midsummer.'

"And it's just a rip-roaring good time."