

Playbill

Montford Park
Players 54th
Season



OTHELLO

by
William
Shakespeare

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This project receives support from the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Dept of Cultural Resources, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, through ArtsAVL.

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THE MONTFORD PARK PLAYERS PRESENTS

Othello

By

William Shakespeare

Directed by

Stephanie Hickling-Beckman

Mikhale Sherrill, Stage Manager

CAST

Othello	Chesney Goodson
Iago	Travis Lowe
Cassio	Aaron Ybarra
Desdemona	Molly Wilson
Roderigo	Kai Strange
Emilia	Sonia D'Andrea
Brabantio/Gratiano	Paula O'Brien
Montano/Duke	Darren Marshall
Lodovico / Senator	Alex McPherson
Bianca	Rachel Huneycutt
Officer	Zay Hickling Beckman

PRODUCTION STAFF

DIRECTOR	Stephanie Hickling Beckman
STAGE MANAGER/ASST. DIRECTOR	Mikhale Sherrill
COSTUMES	Ida Bostian
LIGHTING DESIGN	Jason Williams
SET DESIGN	Stephanie Hickling Beckman
SET BUILD	Walker Linkous
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY	Michael Dickinson
SOUND DESIGN	Stephanie Hickling Beckman

TO OUR PATRONS

- Thank you for joining us this evening. We hope you enjoy our 2026 Season as presented by The Montford Park Players, North Carolina's longest running Shakespeare Festival.
- There will be one twenty-minute intermission. Concessions will be available at the entrance to the amphitheatre. Many thanks to The Matt & Molly Team for sponsoring Shakespeare's Tavern, where you will find a delightful selection of wines and local beers on tap.
- We are pleased to accept all major credit/debit cards, cash, checks, Venmo and PayPal for your donations and concessions. One of our actors will be in the audience each night with a credit card reader for your convenience.
- Please turn the volume off on all cell phones and pagers to avoid distracting your fellow audience members.
- Flash photography is not permitted in the theatre.
- Canine companions will be given a treat at the concession stand.
- Unattended children will be given a double espresso, an energy drink and a free puppy .
- The Montford Park Players is going GREEN! Please help us conserve the environment by depositing your empty cans in the marked recycle bins

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments by phone at (828) 254-5146, email at info@montfordparkplayers.org, or snail mail at Montford Park Players, PO Box 2663, Asheville NC 28802-2663. You can also follow us on Facebook (Montford Park Players) or on Twitter (@MontfordPlayers) or on Instagram (@montfordparkplayers).

WELCOME FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



On behalf of the board of directors and the members of The Montford Park Players, I want to personally welcome YOU to our 54th season of free theatre, sponsored by ExploreAsheville!

We're pleased to tell you that ALL our shows are free-of-charge – all season long! We at MPP envision a world in which everyone can experience exceptional live theatre, regardless of the ability to pay. Therefore, all of our shows are donation only. "Pay what we're worth." "Pay what you can." Some may even call it crazy. Call it what you will – and enjoy the show!

Here's our summer 2026 schedule:

- May 1 – 30 The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (non-musical version) directed by Erin McCarson – 5 weeks/14 performances
- June 5 – 27 Othello directed by Stephanie Hickling-Beckman – 4 weeks/11 performances
- July 1 – Aug 1 Taming of the Shrew directed by Jason Williams – 5 weeks/14 performances
- Aug 7 – 29 The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel – World Premiere, directed by David Doersch – 4 weeks/11 performances
- Sept. 4 – 26 Romeo & Juliet directed by Kristi DeVille – 4 weeks/11 performances
- Oct. 2 – 24 The Hope of Oz – World Premiere, directed by Gabby Bailey – 4 weeks/11 performances

All performances are Friday, Saturday and Sunday, starting at 7:30 pm. Final show for each run is on a Saturday.

Making the most of your visit:

We want you to fully enjoy your experience with us. Feel free to bring a picnic and your favorite beverage, or purchase wine, sodas, local beers and snacks at our concession cart. Four-legged friends are always welcome! (There are treats for them at the concession stand, too!)

We are so grateful to our current donors, sponsors, and advertisers and YOU, our faithful audience, without whom we could not exist. Now sit back, relax, and be ready to laugh, cry, and be entertained as the curtain rises on another great production by the Montford Park Players.

John Russell
Executive Director



MONTFORD PARK
PLAYERS

MEET THE CAST & CREW



in *Hamlet*, Richard III in *Richard III*, Elyot in *Private Lives*, Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Travis is also one of WNC's most produced local playwrights. His own magical romance, *Love and Other Vices*, is currently being produced throughout June by Different Strokes! Performing Arts Collective at the Tina McGuire Theatre, if you're the type who likes a bit of feel-good comedy after being captivated by a timeless tragedy.

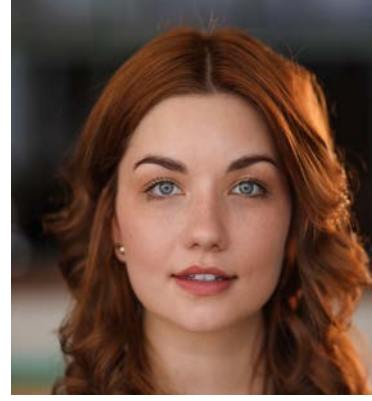


Aaron Ybarra (Cassio) Aaron is humbled and grateful to be returning to the Montford stage after having performed there in productions such as *"A Midsummer Night's Dream"* (Flute/Thisbe) and *"Hamlet"* (Horatio). They have had the pleasure of working with Stephanie and Travis before in Travis' *"Mixed Fandango"* and have served up Shakespeare in various other theaters in the WNC area, most recently including Hendersonville Theatre's *"Much Ado About Nothing"* (Margaret/Conrade)



Sonia D'Andrea (Emilia) Sonia is an Asheville native and has performed with local theaters for the past twenty years. Favorite roles include Milady in *The Three Musketeers*, Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Roxane in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, all with the

Montford Park Players. She has also worked with Nemesis Theatre Co. as Tullus Aufidius in *Coriolanus* and American Myth Center as Benvolio and the Nurse in *The Ballad of R&J*. When not onstage, she is usually singing, snuggling cats, or singing to cats. She is deeply grateful for her community. Enjoy the show and thank you for supporting local theatre!.



Molly Wilson (Desdemona) Molly is returning for her third Montford Park Players season, after joining to play Doll Tearsheet and Lady Mortimer in *Henry IV*; the Chorus, Alice, and the Boy in *Henry V*; Miss Quickly in *Merry Wives of Windsor*; and Cordelia in *King Lear*. Most recently, she appeared in Hendersonville Theatre's *Much Ado About Nothing* as Borachio. Before moving to Asheville, Molly spent many years on stage as part of various troupes, playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Moira in *The Shaughraun*, among others. In her free time, Molly can usually be found writing, baking, or wrangling her dog, Reginald.



Rachel Huneycutt (Bianca) Rachel is so thrilled to be back with Montford Park Play-

ers for her favorite Shakespearean tragedy, Othello! She is also a recent graduate of UNCA, with a BA in creative writing. You may have most recently seen Rachel on the Montford stage as Evil Gabbi, as one head of the Tiamat, and as a really dramatic vampire who got her skull caved in during *She Kills Monsters*. Her final role as a UNCA student was as Fraulein Schnieder in UNCA's *Cabaret*, directed by the one and only Stephanie Hickling Beckman. Rachel fell in love with Othello through her junior level humanities course at UNCA. All of the raw emotion shoved into the classic trope of the ultimate misunderstanding had Rachel hooked almost immediately. She knew she had to be a part of it somehow, so she is so thrilled to be here now. Rachel thanks her fabulous friends and family all over North Carolina and beyond for their love and support, especially Stephanie and Koen. She hopes you'll be as floored as she is! Enjoy the show!



Kai Strange (Roderigo) Kai is an actor local to the Asheville area, and has been performing on the Montford stage for many years. This role feels very special to him since it was the first Shakespeare role he was able to perform 11 years ago at age 12. A wonderful beginning to a lifetime love of Shakespeare and Theater! If you frequent the Montford Park Players productions you might have seen Kai in *The Little Prince* (Little Prince), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Dogberry), or *Hamlet* (Gravedigger). Kai hopes you enjoy this production of Othello.

Chesney Goodson (Othello) Chesney is an actor and comedian based out of Asheville, North Carolina. Armed with seventeen years' experience in stand-up comedy he has opened for names like: Amy Schumer, Damon Wayans, Jeff Dye and Tom Arnold just to name a few. In Theatre he has been in several productions such as, *Cost of living*, *Dear God* and his own one man show for the play festival! *369*, *Who voted for this?* His comedy has been described as bold, raw and relatable with a twist of absurdity. Using the skills and knowledge he's acquired in the world of stand-up, he applies that same method with acting, committing himself to bringing the words and characters on the page to life



Travis Lowe (Iago) Travis most recently portrayed one of his literary heroes in last year's, *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Now he's delighted to be stepping onto the Montford stage again to play an anti-hero in one of Shakespeare's most infamous villains. Other recent roles include the dashing Dr. Aster in *Life Sucks: Sort of Adapted from Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov*, Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, and Wadsworth in *Clue*. Montford fans might also recognize him from many past seasons playing Claudius



The outdoor theatres listed here are only a small fraction of theatres across the country where you can experience thrilling live performances in an amazing variety of venues. Discover beautiful parks, desert canyons, mountainside theatres, and performances by the sea. We hope that you will join us for an evening under the stars!

Montford Park Players: North Carolina's longest running Shakespeare Festival, now in its 53rd season, May 9 - Oct 25, Fri-Sun at 7:30 pm. All shows are FREE. www.montfordparkplayers.org 828-254-5146.

The Lost Colony: The story of the first attempt of English colonization in America, told on the site where these events actually occurred, now in its 88th Anniversary season. The 2025 season runs from May 31st-August 23rd, Monday-Saturday at 8:30pm. 1409 National Park Drive, Manteo, NC 27954. www.thelostcolony.org or 252-473-6000.

Unto These Hills: The compelling story of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians from first contact with Europeans through the removal west on the infamous Trail of Tears. The drama celebrates its 75th Anniversary Season in 2025, including a special recognition on July 1st. The 2025 season runs from May 31st - August 23rd, Monday - Saturday at 8pm. 688 Drama Rd, Cherokee, NC 28734. www.cherokeeadventure.org or 828-497-2111.

Shakespeare In Delaware Park: Celebrating 50 years of FREE Shakespeare in Western New York. 2025 season-TWELFTH NIGHT June 19-July 13 and RICHARD III July 24-August 17 Tuesday-Sunday 7pm. 199 Lincoln Parkway Buffalo, NY 14222 on Shakespeare Hill www.shakespeareindelawarepark.org 716-856-4533.

TEXAS Outdoor Musical: "TEXAS" fictionalizes the stories, struggles, and triumphs of the settlers of the Texas Panhandle in the late 1800's! Featuring vibrant characters, song, dance, and special effects set against the backdrop of the beautiful Palo Duro Canyon State Park, TEXAS is celebrating its 59th season in 2025. Performances 6 nights a week in June-August at 8:00pm. 1514 5th Ave, Canyon, TX 79015. www.texas-show.com or 806-651-2181.

Piedmont Shakespeare Company: Celebrating its inaugural season of free Shakespeare in the Piedmont region of North Carolina with HAMLET, touring Alamance, Guilford, and Forsyth counties, June 12-29. www.piedmontshakes.org 216-374-8000

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant: An outdoor drama sharing the childhood story of Laura Ingalls Wilder and her family in Walnut Grove, Minnesota during the late 1800's. Grasshoppers, prairie fires and the Olesons help tell the story in its 47th year during the first three weekends in July. More information check the website at <https://walnutgrove.org/pageant/> or follow us on Facebook.

Tecumseh!: Witness the epic life story of the legendary Shawnee leader as he struggles to defend his sacred homelands in the Ohio country during the late 1700's. The 2025 season runs from June 12-August 31st, Tuesday-Saturday at 8:00pm. 5968 Marietta Rd. Chillicothe, OH 45601. www.tecumseh-drama.com or 740-775-4100.

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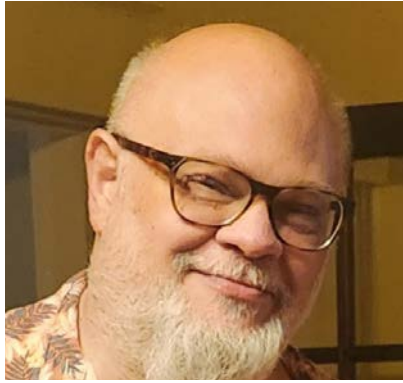
MEET THE CAST & CREW



Alexandra McPherson: (Senator/Lodovico) Alex is delighted to be returning to the amphitheatre with this talented cast and crew under Stephanie's insightful direction. Favourite MPP roles include: Duchess of York in *Richard III*, Agamemnon in *Troilus and Cressida*, and Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Alex has also performed locally with The Autumn Players of Asheville Community Theatre, Different Strokes PAC! , Hendersonville Theatre, Foothills Community Theatre and Black Mountain Center for the Arts. She thanks you for your support and hopes that you remembered to bring your bug spray & your brolly.



Zay is very excited to be back on the Montford Stage. His Favorite roles include Tiny Tim at Asheville High School, fun roles in *The Wizard of Oz*, *Finding Nemo*, *Madagascar*, and *High School Musical*, at Asheville Community Theatre, and the Montford Park Players' production of *The Sword and the Stone*, and *School House Rock* at Odyssey Community School. Zay played MacDuff in IC Imagine's High School production of *MacBeth*, and acted in *Juked* and a staged reading of *A Raisin in the Sun* with Different Strokes Performing Arts Collective. Zay thanks his moms for introducing him to theatre and their continued support



Darren Marshall (Montano/Duke) Darren showed up to audition for *The Tempest* in 2006. The director was so intimidated by Darren's booming presence that he was cast out of fear. He's still here. No one is really certain where he came from, but rumor has it there is a lot of corn there. He is definitely not a cookie, but he may just be a Muppet wearing a human suit.



Paula O'Brien (Brabantio and Gratiano) Paula has been a frequent performer in the Asheville theater scene since moving from the Northeast in 2017. Her most recent credits include portraying Scarecrow in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and both mothers in *Tonya and Nancy: The Rock Opera*. She is incredibly grateful for the opportunities she's found in North Carolina and, as always, gives heartfelt thanks to her husband, Andrew, for his unwavering support.



Stephanie Hickling Beckman (Director) Step-

nie moved to Asheville NC in 1997 and has been attached to theatre in one way or another ever since. Though she is proud to say that she has worked with most of the theatre companies in Western North Carolina, as an actor or director, Stephanie has lent her voice to several projects including recurring gigs with "In The Moment" as a screen actor as well as a voice actor. She is currently the voice of "Granny Underwood" on the *Old Gods of Appalachia* podcast. Over the last 13 years she has devoted the bulk of her time to Different Strokes Performing Arts Collective, as the Company's founder and Managing Artistic Director. Different Strokes! Has been the Company in residence at the Wortham Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Asheville since 2019



Mikhale Sherrill (Assistant Director/Stage Manager) Mikhale actor, stage manager, stage hand, gardener, and pet parent living in Asheville, NC. Mikhale has recently performed at Asheville Community Theatre in *39 Steps* and *Flying West*; Attic Salt Theatre Company's production of *Cry It Out*; Mars Hill University's production of *Doubt, A Parable*



Michael Dickinson (Fight Choreographer) Michael has lived and worked in Asheville NC for the past 24 years. His passion for fight choreography comes from years of martial arts training and teaching. Michael was a co-owner and Master instructor at a local martial arts school for over 10 years. He has spent the past 5 years

working in the mental health and addiction field. When Michael is not working, he spends time with his wife, two adult children and five dogs. On a perfect day Michael will have gone fishing, played flag football, and sat with a guitar to make up some songs.

Ida Bostain (Costume Designer)- Ida is pleased to be working with Montford Park Players for the second time! She is a costume designer based out of Black Mountain, North Carolina and is the costume and makeup professor for Brevard College. Ida has worked with many theatres in the area during her long time in the area including Different Strokes, Parkway Playhouse, La Zoom, Asheville Community Theatre, The Warehouse Theatre and GLOW. She is especially fond of designing for Historical theatre and pieces that have a strong message. This was a wonderful fit for Ida and she had a great time helping to create this special world for *Othello*.



Jason Williams (Lighting Design) is an actor, director and designer that works for many local theatre companies around Asheville and WNC. Recent designs include: *Next to Normal* and *The White Chip* at HART Theatre, *Silver in the Pines* for Asheville Contemporary Dance Theatre, *Appropriate* for Hendersonville Theatre, and *Hadestown Teen Edition* for Asheville Performing Arts Academy. He would like to thank you for coming to see the show tonight. He sees theatre as a valuable life experience and an important part of the cultural fabric. If you enjoyed tonight's show he encourages you to seek out other performances in our vibrant local theatre scene, and please consider an additional donation or sponsorship to keep the area theater scene thriving. hool production of *MacBeth*, and acted in *Juked* and a staged reading of *A Raisin in the Sun* with Different Strokes Performing Arts Collective

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The Seldoms photo by Andrew Glatt; courtesy of Trillium Arts

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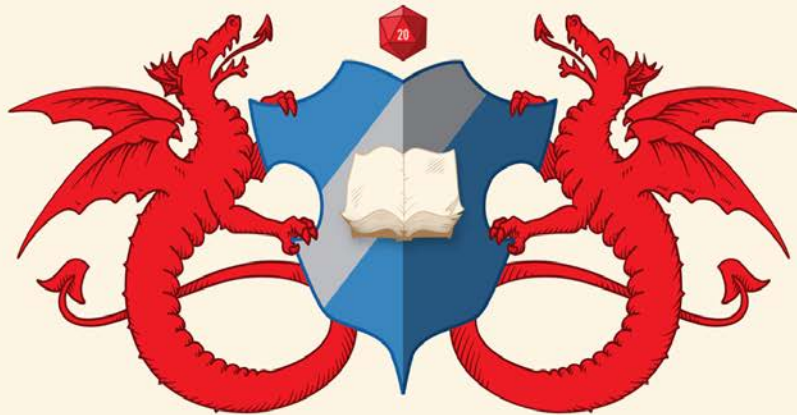
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Note: Plays marked with LR are now commonly referred to as the "late romances". Plays marked with PP are known as the "problem plays". The three plays marked with FF were not included in the First Folio.



Montford Park Players

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..... (List Complete as of May 25, 2026. If we made a mistake, please let us know.).....

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Directing Othello as a Black woman has meant stepping into a world where the text is familiar, but the lens through which it has been interpreted for centuries is not one I can wholly relate to, agree with, or feel good about. I've embraced this story, with lived knowledge of what it means to be seen and unseen at the same time. I know the feeling of being desired and feared in the same breath, and I know what it is like to have my brilliance celebrated while my humanity is questioned. That duality is not theoretical to me; I leaned into it hard during my preparation and the rehearsal process for this play.

For generations, Othello has been filtered through intellect that could dissect his tragedy but missed the mark when depicting his truth. Too often, Othello has been flattened into a symbol of rage or jealousy rather than a man navigating a world determined to remind him of his difference. I refuse to let him be reduced to that. I see the tenderness in him, the vulnerability, the hunger to belong, and the cost of constantly negotiating his worth in spaces that were never built for him. I see the way love becomes both refuge and risk. I see the way isolation becomes a weapon long before Iago ever speaks.

I didn't come into this to rescue Othello from the text or even lighten his load. My primary objective in directing this play was to reveal the parts of him that have rarely been centered. Having played Othello myself, it was important to me to create a room where the Black actor playing him does not have to translate his own experience for someone else's comfort. I set out to build a world where Desdemona's courage, Emilia's clarity, and even Iago's cruelty are understood within the larger machinations of power that shape them all. This production is not about villainy or innocence. It is about the systems that teach us who is allowed to be complicated and who must be controlled.

I direct this play with the knowledge that representation is not decoration. It is responsibility and reclamation. I directed this play because the people most affected by a story deserve to shape how it is told. My hope is that you feel the humanity in these characters, understand the urgency in their choices, and hear the echo of the world we live in now.

Thank you for coming. May this story move you to make a difference in your world.

Stephanie Hickling Beckman,
Othello Director



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upon my sleeve



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