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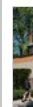
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CULTURE CITY Updated April 22, 2012, 9:12 p.m. ET

# Shakespeare for Everybody

By PIA CATTON

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In the new Broadway play "Peter and the Starcatcher," the pirate villain considers what style of verse to use for a poem: "Iambic?" he asks, then instantly rejects it: "Box-office poison."



Enlarge Image

Paul Koinik

George Balanchine's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' seen here with Joaquin de Luz and Maria Kowroski, returns to New York City Ballet.

That's not actually true, but the line gets laughs because it lets many people admit how they feel about Shakespeare: conflicted, and possibly in need of an adrenaline shot. If you're in that camp, you can surely blame the wounds inflicted by high-school English classes. Were you subjected to forced-march readings, followed by period performances on VHS tapes played in a darkened AV rooms? Makes me sleepy just thinking about it.

But one of the redeeming qualities of adulthood is being able to correct the past by seeing Shakespeare plays that engage you—quite literally—where you are now. This season, there are productions around town that slice and dice the Bard so that no one gets hurt, but everyone gets it. Here

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## 'MACBETH'

Upper West Side:  
*Rose Theater (Broadway at 60th St., July 5-14)*



Enlarge Image

Albert Watson

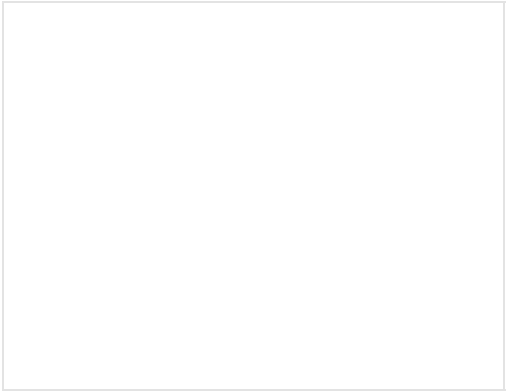
Alan Cumming in his one-man production of 'Macbeth.'

Alan Cumming stars in this one-man version of the Scotland-set play, presented by Lincoln Center Festival. Teasing out the text's references to mental illness—hallucinations, obsessive-compulsive disorder, paranoia—this National Theater of Scotland production sets Mr. Cumming in a psych ward, under surveillance, recalling events. It's meant to distill the play—and to creep you out. "It's 'Macbeth' meets 'Paranormal Activity,'" said co-director John Tiffany.

"If there's anything I love as much as Shakespeare, it's horror films."

Chelsea:  
*Stage Left Studio (214 W. 30th St., through July 12)*

Coincidentally, actor and playwright Tom Gualtieri is reviving his one-man "Macbeth," written with Heather Hill. "That Play: A Solo Macbeth" is about 75% Shakespeare, but there's also a narrator present to clarify murky bits. "It's like the greatest hits of 'Macbeth': you get all the major speeches and scenes," said Mr. Gualtieri, who designed the play to relate to real people, especially those who haven't seen "Macbeth" before. "What's your secret? What would you never cross the line to do?"



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Shakespeare for Everybody

Hell's Kitchen:

*47th Street Theater (304 W. 47th St., through May 26)*

If you like your Shakespeare straight and to the point, Epic Theatre Ensemble's "Macbeth" sticks to the original—though it trims the text keep it under two hours. The setting is still Scotland, and the look is both militaristic and contemporary. "The witches are like workers at Evil Inc.," said director Ron Russell. "They punch in on a time clock. There's a work whistle and postal-service-looking uniforms. They are people who walk among us." Created as a part of the National Endowment for the Arts' program Shakespeare for a New Generation, the emphasis here is on clarity.

#### 'AS YOU LIKE IT'



Enlarge Image  
 Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal  
 Virginia Baeta, left, and Elizabeth Attrens rehearse at ART/NY Studios for the Queen's Company's production of 'As You Like It.'

TriBeCa:

*Walkerspace (46 Walker St., May 4-20)*

In the Queen's Company's "As You Like It," cross-dressing goes even deeper than Shakespeare intended: the cast is entirely female. Actors are dressed to reflect their character's gender, but the casting gives women roles they wouldn't otherwise land. Director Rebecca Patterson, who founded the Queen's Company in 2000 to present all-female classical theater, says women are

especially good at evoking the nuances and intricacies of relationships and characters. "Male classical actors might be better at playing men. But women are better at playing human beings," said Ms. Patterson. "And Shakespeare is about human beings."

Central Park:

*Delacorte Theater (June 5-30)*

The Public Theater is presenting two plays in its Shakespeare in the Park season, but only one is by the Bard: "As You Like It," which will be presented with original music composed by comedian Steve Martin and played by a live bluegrass band. Directed by Daniel Sullivan, the cast includes Lily Rabe as Rosalind, Stephen Spinella as Jaques and Oliver Platt as Touchstone.

#### 'A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM'

Upper West Side:

*David H. Koch Theater (20 Lincoln Center Plaza, June 5-10)*

Words, shmerds. At New York City Ballet, Shakespeare's plot meets George Balanchine's choreography and Felix Mendelssohn's colorful, theatrical score (which contains the famous "Wedding March"). In this charmer of a production, the story is clear, but enhanced by the magic that only ballet can deliver to a tale set in an enchanted forest.

Lower East Side:

*Theatre for the New City (155 First Ave., April 25-May 19)*

The Hive Theatre Company plays with sexuality and fetishes in "A Midsummer Night's (Queer) Dream." Here, Hermia and Lysander are lesbian lovers, while Demetrius and Helena are a gay couple. Incubated by the theater collective known as the Cell, this production is a send up of gender and taboos.

Write to Pia Catton at [pia.catton@wsj.com](mailto:pia.catton@wsj.com)

*A version of this article appeared April 23, 2012, on page A23 in some U.S. editions of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Shakespeare for Everybody.*

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#### About Pia Catton

Pia Catton has written for publications including The New York Sun, The Weekly Standard and The New York Post. She is the co-editor of "Be Thrifty! (Not Cheap)," published by Workman in May 2010.

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