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Where art thou?



Shakespeare in the Parking Lot.
 The show moves to Bryant Park and a Norfolk Street parking lot this summer. PAGE 02

Shakespearean actors Eric Paterniani, left, plays "Launce" and Drew Valins, right, plays "Speed," the two "idiots" in Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." / MILES DIXON, METRO

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Eric Paterniani, left, plays "Lauce" and Drew Valins, right, plays "Speed," the two "Idiots" in Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" at Bryant Park. / MILES DIXON, METRO



Bryant Park's bard has New York accent

Performance art. The iconic outdoor show will park itself in an unusual open space this summer.

Drew Valins, 39, an actor dressed in crisp white kitchen gear and red bandana, is used to his voice bouncing off the buildings surrounding a grimy parking lot on the Lower East Side. But on a recent warm Wednesday afternoon, he was playing a Shakespeare character, Speed, at one end of Bryant Park. Curious tourists and workers on their lunch breaks gathered to watch and obliviously barge through the middle of the scene.

Checkered tablecloths that suggest Mulberry Street far more than Verona make a pretty strong statement about this theater company's message. The Drilling Company has been responsible for Shakespeare in the Parking Lot for nearly two decades. Though it looked as though they were going to be forced out of the parking lot last year, the com-

The Drilling Company's summer schedule	
In Bryant Park:	of the Shrew"
• May 15-31: "Two Gentlemen of Verona"	In the new parking lot on Norfolk Street:
• July 17 to Aug. 2: "Romeo and Juliet"	• July 9-26: "As You Like It"
• Sept. 4-20: "The Taming	• July 30 to Aug. 15: "Macbeth"

pany is back to take over Bryant Park and then their new parking lot digs this summer.

"That parking lot was an amazing thing," Valins said about the original parking lot on Ludlow Street, "It's unique and it was a great way to train and to learn how to handle curve balls of any kind. Because in the parking lot anything goes, really. ... It was the true spirit of Shakespeare, it felt like."

Getting Shakespeare onto the streets is at the center of Shakespeare in the Parking Lot's mission: to make those universal Shakespearean themes of love, revenge and humanity accessible to crowds that might not make it to the theater district, or even get tickets to the Central Park production with

the lottery ticket system that's notoriously impossible to beat.

The company lost its parking lot space last year after the council decided to start charging them a fee to use it for their performances at night. For over a decade, up until the end of last summer, you could find a motley collection of Lower East Side residents and young New Yorkers from around the city engrossed in Shakespeare like they'd never seen it before. That's something the company's founder and artistic director, Hamilton Clancy, is determined to keep presenting.

"We're doing "Two Gentlemen of Verona," and we're setting it in Little Italy. And a lot of the actors are speaking the Shakespeare with a New York

accent on purpose. Everybody should feel like they just popped out of New York," said Clancy.

"Trust me, normally, if you do Shakespeare with a New York accent people think that you're probably wrong. But it brings out the fun, raw side of it that people don't explore very often," he said. Clancy says he founded The Drilling Company to reach broader audiences than what he says is the narrow target audience of traditional theater. Initially, the company worked with another group in the parking lot — but then took over a few years into the collaboration.

"We realized this is who is coming to the parking lot, this incredibly diverse audience — every socioeconomic group, every race you could meet because of Shakespeare's universal appeal and because of the accessibility of the parking lot, it was just tremendous," he said.

Last year, the city started charging the company for its use of the parking lot, Clancy said — something a company that doesn't charge any entrance fees just couldn't afford.

Luckily, the company

had already caught the eye of Bryant Park organizers — who have commissioned them this summer for three productions: "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "Romeo and Juliet" and finally "The Taming of the Shrew."

"We have the potential to be the most accessible Shakespeare in the whole city because you don't have to stand in line to get tickets. ... There's an unlimited number of seats, and you couldn't pick a more accessible park because it's smack dab in the middle of the city," he said.

But it looks like they'll be even busier than that over the next few months. Just after finding out about Bryant Park, Clancy said they managed to track down another parking lot, still on the Lower East Side, and they couldn't resist the opportunity.

"As You Like It" and "Macbeth" will come to life in the parking lot connected to the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Education Center (CSV) on Norfolk Street between Delancey and Rivington.

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