

SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL PARTNERS WITH THE ZOO FOR A WILD ADAPTATION OF ROMEO AND JULIET

BY ABBY WOJCIK

The St. Louis Shakespeare Festival is teaming up with the St. Louis Zoo for a wild new take on *Romeo and Juliet*, featuring life-size puppet creations by the esteemed Michael Curry Design Co. — the creative force behind Broadway’s *The Lion King* and *Frozen*. This zoo-inspired adaptation, called *Romeo & Zooliet*, is an original play written by Jennifer Joan Thompson and directed by Tom Ridgely, the producing artistic director for the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival. It’s based on a comic book by Ian Lendler titled *The Stratford Zoo Midnight Revue Presents Romeo and Julia*.



“That’s where the idea came from of zoo animals doing Shakespeare at night,” Ridgely said. “So, the red panda is an actor *playing* Mercutio. And, you know, they’re animals, so

things go well sometimes and not so well other times, but they’re putting it on for their fellow zoo animals.” Michael Curry Design Co. is creating hand puppets and life-sized marionettes for a variety of characters and spectacles, from traditional hand puppets to an American take on Bunraku style, in which the puppeteer is in view to the audience. Bunraku is a form of traditional Japanese puppet theater.

It’s been a rewarding project for everyone involved because of the rare creative freedom of a “blank canvas” they’ve all been given, Ridgely said. This play has never been done before, and a large-scale theatrical performance such as this has never been executed at the zoo. “That’s what was so exciting about it,” Ridgely said. “The aspect of this at the zoo and in partnership with the zoo, and that it has these incredible works of art — these puppets are really astonishing — and so those are two things that I never would have imagined ever getting to do.” This innovative partnership was established as a two-year agreement with the potential to extend. The organizations also hope to



A rendering of the “Romeo & Zooliet” stage is designed to resemble a set made by zoo animals.

inspire similar collaborations between zoos and local theater groups in other cities. Their vision is to model and encourage a new way of blending culture, community and entertainment that brings fresh energy to both the zoo and the performing arts.

The full-scale production level of this play makes it great for all ages. *Romeo & Zooliet: Shakespeare in the Zoo* will run July 8 through Aug. 1 in the Historic Hill section of the Zoo, and tickets are available now at stlshakes.org.



Director Tom Ridgely with a seal at the St. Louis Zoo.

OUTSTANDING CREDENTIALS

PERSONALIZED SERVICE

UNMATCHED MARKET KNOWLEDGE

COLDWELL
BANKER
REALTY - GUNDAKER

Since 1983

mittelstadt

EXCLUSIVELY SERVING THE CENTRAL WEST END

CWerealestate.com

Amy Mittelstadt
314.566.3098

UNDER CONTRACT

4545 Lindell Blvd, #12
List Price: \$1,250,000

AVAILABLE

4386 Westminister Place
List Price: \$989,000

UNDER CONTRACT

Chase Park Plaza
232 N. Kingshighway, #1502
List Price: \$685,000

AVAILABLE

4411 McPherson Avenue, #3
List Price: \$665,500

UNDER CONTRACT

4237 Laclede Avenue, Unit B
List Price: \$597,500

UNDER CONTRACT

4431 McPherson Avenue
List Price: \$857,500

COLDWELLBANKERHOMES.COM

LADUE OFFICE 314-993-8000