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**ST. LOUIS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES CASTING AND SCHEDULE FOR  
SHAKESPEARE IN THE STREETS x THE VILLE COLLABORATION**

***The Ville: Avengence!***

**A new play from the legendary northside neighborhood.**

**September 9, 10 & 11**

**8:00 p.m. outside Annie Malone Children's Home**

**Free, no reservations required.**

**Written by Mariah Richardson and Directed by Thomasina Clarke.**

**Featuring Ville residents, area actors and The Legend Singers choir in partnership with 4theVille**

September 1, 2021 -- St. Louis Shakespeare Festival (Tom Ridgely, Producing Artistic Director) presents its tenth Shakespeare in the Streets neighborhood collaboration and new play, "The Ville: Avengence!" beginning Thursday, September 9, 2021 for a three night only run. The world premiere play is based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and is the culmination of two years' work with residents of The Ville. It is part of the Festival's ongoing work in partnership with 4theVille and Sumner High School. Festivities begin at 7:00 p.m. with performances from 8:00-9:15 p.m. nightly outside Annie Malone Children's Home (2612 Annie Malone Dr, St. Louis, MO 63113).

"**The Ville: Avengence!**" is written by St. Louis playwright and Sumner High School graduate **Mariah Richardson** and directed by life-long Ville resident **Thomasina Clarke**, and shares stories of the everyday people and legends that have impacted the world from this notable one-square mile of north St. Louis.

Richardson and Clarke are joined on the creative team by musician and composer **Tre'von Griffith (Tre-G)** who will be composing original music for the production and attended the now shuttered Turner Middle School in The Ville; **Peter and Margery Spack** (Scenic Designer) who's previous Festival designs include *Such Sweet Thunder*, *Dress the Part* and the 2019 Shakespeare in the Streets "Blow, Winds!"; **Hatsephi Kushma** (Costume Design) most recently a dresser for HBO's *Lovecraft Country*; and **Bryant Powell** (Lighting Designer).

The story of the neighborhood will be brought to life using the ghost story central to the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The cast includes multi-talented voice actor and Sumner graduate, **Michelle Dillard** (as Annie Malone); **Brandon Ellis** (as Hamlet) who returns home from Chicago, IL where he performs at *Second City*, **Arthurine Harris** (as Gertrude/Sharon) making her acting debut; **Alex Jay** (narrator); and **Tylan Mitchell** (as Hopeless). Returning to the Festival stage are **Victor Mendez** (Horatio) and **Carl Overly, Jr.** (as Josh/ John).

**The Legend Singers**, the oldest choir dedicated to preserving African American songs in the country, will also play a large role in the soundtrack of the program. The choir was founded by Sumner High School graduate Dr. Kenneth Brown Billups in 1940 at the age of 22 with eighteen members of the school's acapella choir. In its current form, the choir with members from around the region continues to honor the music and hymns of African Americans and will perform two songs during the production.

“There is no more quintessential - or consequential - St. Louis story than that of the Ville,” said production artistic director Tom Ridgely in a statement. “And Mariah Richardson has captured it in a way that only someone intimately familiar with it could have. Thomasina Clarke’s production bristles with the righteous frustration and boundless hope that the Ville’s always had - and sets it soaring on the music and poetry that changed the world. It’s hands down the most important work the Festival’s ever been a part of.”

The Festival worked closely with **4theVille**, a community organization deeply committed to uplifting residents and businesses in the neighborhood through tourism, arts and education and **Sumner High School**, the oldest African-American high school west of the Mississippi where many famed Ville residents went. The stories of the current Ville residents, business owners and Sumner alumni were collected over the last two years and inspired Richardson’s writing of the play.

**Event details:** “The Ville: Avengence!” will be performed on September 9, 10 & 11 at 8:00 p.m outside the Annie Malone Home (2612 Annie Malone Dr, St. Louis, MO 63113). The events are free, outdoors and open to all. Guests should provide their own chairs or blankets for seating. For more information visit [www.stlshakes.org/theville](http://www.stlshakes.org/theville).

The **Young Friends of the Ville’s** third annual **Northside Trap Run** will take place prior to the performance on Saturday, September 11. This is St. Louis’s first hip-hop themed 5k run/walk and features area DJs on the route. Vendors coordinated by **For the Culture STL** will be set up beginning at 4 p.m. and the race begins at 5 p.m.

Shakespeare in the Streets is made possible with generous support from Missouri Foundation for Health, National Endowment for the Arts and Incarnate Word Foundation. The Festival's 2021 Season is underwritten by Edward Jones with additional support from The Whitaker Foundation; Emerson; Regional Arts Commission; R.C. Kemper Jr. Charitable Trust - UMB Bank, N.A., Trustee; The Strive Fund; Arts & Education Council; Trio Foundation of St. Louis; Missouri Arts Council; The Mary Ranken and Ettie A. Jordan Charitable Foundation; JP Morgan Chase & Co.; Buckingham Strategic Wealth; The Gertrude and William A. Bernoudy Foundation; Enterprise Holdings Foundation; Horncrest Foundation; Ameren Corporation; Clifford Willard Gaylord Foundation and Pershing Charitable Trust.

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**Shakespeare in the Streets** ([www.stlshakes.org](http://www.stlshakes.org)) is an internationally-recognized program that celebrates local stories and takes high-quality professional arts directly to those who may not otherwise experience it. A Festival playwright, designer, and director spend a year conducting conversations and

research in a community. The playwright draws directly from the stories shared to write an original play, inspired by the neighborhood, and based on the work of Shakespeare. With Festival resources, the community then comes together to perform the new play in a weekend-long outdoor celebration.

**Mariah L. Richardson (Playwright)** A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Richardson received her BA in Communications from the University of New Mexico and an MFA from Smith College in Playwriting. Recipient of the Regional Arts commission \$20,000 Artist Fellowship 2016, Richardson was named to the Confluence Regional Writers Project with Shakespeare Festival St. Louis for 2019. In 2018 she was their playwright fellow and helped rewrite Shakespeare in the Streets' performance of *Blow Winds*. Mariah is the author of the plays: *all that...*, *Sistahs Indeed!*, *Delilah's Wish*, *iSoy Yo!*, *Idris Elba is James Bond*, and *Chasing the White Rabbit*. Her last play, in partnership with Jazz St. Louis and commissioned by A Call to Conscience Theatre for Social Change, *Next to Normal: The Thelonius Monk Story*, premiered to sold-out crowds.

**Thomasina Clarke (Director)** is a life-long resident of The Ville and retired Drama School Educator with St Louis Public Schools. Has written, produced and directed many plays and previous cast member of St. Louis Shakespeare Festival mainstage in Forest Park. She been nominated three times for a Kevin Kline Award; worked with some of theatre companies across St Louis including The Kutana Players, Unity Theatre Ensemble, Metro Theatre Company, That Uppity Theatre Company, Upstream Theatre Company, The St Louis Black Repertory Company and developed an improvisational Theatre Company called JustUs.

**4theVille** is community-based tourism and arts organization created by multi-generational Ville residents and volunteers to restore pride in the legacy of The Ville, a historic African American community in the heart of St. Louis, Missouri, and inspire reinvigorated community ownership.

The **St. Louis Shakespeare Festival** strives to foster community and joy across the St. Louis region through the Shakespearean tradition of art for all. Since 2001, the Festival has grown from producing a single production of Shakespeare in the Park to a year-round season of impactful programming in exciting and accessible venues throughout the bi-state area. Artistic and education programs reach over 50,000 patrons and students each season and have served over one million since 2001. In 2020, the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Bloomberg News* featured the Festival's stand-out virtual and in-person programs.