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All the City's a Stage, and All the Admissions Free, This Time of Year

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John Michalski, left, and Donald Grody in "King Lear," by the New York Classical Theater.

For some theater buffs summer in New York City usually includes a trip to the Delacorte to see the annual Shakespeare in the Park productions from the Public Theater. But real aficionados know that plenty of other free outdoor shows pop up year after sweltering year, seeming to ask, "What about us?" and offering Elizabethan comedy and drama to the sweaty masses. These shows may not offer the starry casts that the Public does, but they are happily lacking something else too.

"It's an alternative to waiting in line for tickets, for taking a day off to wait for tickets," said Tim Errickson, the artistic director of Boomerang Theater, which is performing "The Comedy of Errors" this summer.

Stephen Burdman, who runs New York Classical Theater, agreed that convenience was a major selling point for his company's current production of "King Lear."

"It's all about access," he said. "We bring an Off Broadway production to your neighborhood for free. We make it as easy as possible." Another factor is cost. They're all free. And these days, a ticket price of zero dollars and zero cents is likely to be very welcome.

Outdoor Shakespeare is somewhat ubiquitous in New York each year, and plays have been known to pop up in Tompkins Square Park, Washington Square Park and other places, usually free. Some companies pass a hat after the show, but by then you will have either wandered off or been happily entertained and thus willing to cough up a few bucks.