

wherefore art, park?

Two local companies make merry with the Bard in the woods of Eagan.

Ten years ago, when a storm damaged or killed many of the trees at Anthony Caponi's namesake art park in Eagan, the local sculptor and former chairman of the Macalaster College art department "responded like a surgeon." While removing damaged trees from the park's 60 wooded acres on Quigley Lake, Caponi discovered the storm had cleared a natural amphitheater. Inspired, he installed a round concrete stage at its base.

Since 2000, this wooded space has been the site of music and theater performances, including this month's annual Shakespeare Festival, featuring free performances of two Shakespearean comedies: Minneapolis's Cromulent Shakespeare Company will bring its production of *Love's Labour's Lost* and Burnsville-based Chameleon Theatre Company will perform *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. "Performing Shakespeare at the Caponi Art Park really clicks," says *The Merry Wives* producer Garrick Dietze. "The sound acoustics in the amphitheater are wonderful, and the audience is very receptive. Younger people, older people, families...they bring cheese and crackers and make a little picnic out of it."

"The place lends itself quite well to Shakespeare," adds Caponi, who, for more than 30 years, has been working not only to populate his yard with his sculptural creations—which range from figurative to abstract—but also to turn the land itself into a sculpture. The land is now a public park partially administered by the city of Eagan, and visitors are invited to walk along curving cobble paths past thousands of stones stacked and embedded in arrangements that highlight the natural contours of the land. To hear him tell it, Caponi is just another suburbanite tending his lawn. "Everybody works in their backyard," he says. "My backyard project just became bigger and bigger."

Caponi, who aims to achieve "a synthesis of all the arts" at his park, is proud of the amphitheater's success. "I was responding to the storm's devastation. An artist responds to ugliness more than beauty. Beauty you just sit back and enjoy, but ugliness inspires you to revive." +

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR
produced by Chameleon Theatre Company
June 13, 6:30 p.m.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST
produced by Cromulent Shakespeare Company
June 14, 6:30 p.m.
Caponi Art Park, 1205 Diffley Rd., Eagan
651.454.9412; caponiartpark.org



Action shots from last year's Shakespeare Festival at Caponi Art Park.