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## Cal Shakes' new season opens May 22

By *Sophie Braccini*



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adds that he gets to revisit these stories at different points of his life, and they hold a different meaning each time.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" opens the season as a conversation with the natural world. Ting says that Tyne Rafeali's direction is thought with contemporary audiences in mind, emphasizing the humor and wit of the play where young lovers lost in the woods are confronted with an upside down world. Ting says that the first Shakespeare play he saw was "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and his first Shakespearean role was Bottom. As the team under his direction composed the program for this season, the "Dream" came as an obvious choice because of the gender and nature themes in the beloved play.

"The Good Person of Szechwan" will be the first Bertolt Brecht play performed at Cal Shakes. It will be directed by Ting, who says that Brecht exemplifies what he is looking for in non-Shakespeare authors: a theatrical vision that shares the present of the audience and carries a political message. Ting adds that this play is in a way about the gender differences and wealth gaps between different strata of society, something that he is very sensitive to in our own Bay Area. The central character in "The Good Person" has to create a male cousin alter ego in order to defend herself in the community she is living in. The play is also a reflection on the nature of human society and the (im)possibility to do good, a complex and timely question.

"House of Joy," the third play this year, fulfills Cal Shakes' promise to support local playwright talents. This play by Madhuri Shekar is what Ting calls a new classic. The action takes place in a harem in India in the 17th century; in the words of Ting it is "a company of women kicking ass." Tension is created between what is supposed to be a perfect paradise world inside the harem and the world outside. The central character is a female guard, who understands what her role and responsibilities are to her sisters, but there are choices to be made. This is the third play by a female playwright that Cal Shakes has produced.

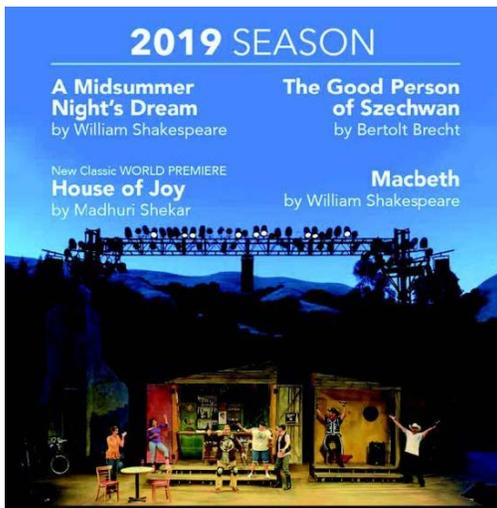
The last play is "Macbeth," with a Filipino-American director from the Bay Area, Victor Malana Maog. Ting says that "Macbeth" was chosen as one of Shakespeare's plays where strong women are celebrated. It is also a conversation about the consequences of our actions, and the aftermath of desire; Ting adds that the play also sheds light on what celebrity does to one person.

This season is Ting's third full season as executive director. For Ting, who learned English as a second language, Shakespeare is about the discovery of language and poetry. He has made central to the mission of the company to bring this experience to a non-traditional audience.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" opens in the Bruns Amphitheater on May 22 and will run through June 16. Information can be found at <https://calshakes.org/>.

As the days become longer and the Orinda woods more enticing, Cal Shakes actors get ready to take over the verdant space of the Bruns Amphitheater for its 28th season. Executive Director Eric Ting and his team offer four plays this season, exploring traditional and modern classics through the lens of modern themes such as gender bias or climate change. As usual, it will be half Shakespeare and half new plays that, like "Black Odyssey" in the previous season, are written by contemporary playwrights, embracing our reality with timeless themes.

Ting explains that the season's tone is his responsibility, but that he involves the entire team in a collaborative effort. He adds that his vision of Cal Shakes is that of a theater, not a museum. "We have to reinvent things and build bridges, we give this timeless work to be heard through contemporary ears," he says. For himself, he



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Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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