
BY MARGARET GRAY

Shakespeare at Botanicum

The essentials: Back in the 1950s, Will Geer built a theatrical haven for his fellow blacklisted actors and singers on his rustic property in Topanga. The outdoor amphitheater is still a refuge for city dwellers and theater fans — and Geer's family members still run the show.

Every summer Botanicum offers five plays in repertory, and this weekend it opens the first two offerings, "Coriolanus" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (the latter the one constant from season to season).

Why this? There may not be anything more fun than Botanicum in the summer. Shakespeare couldn't have asked for a better set designer — especially for "Midsummer" — than leafy Topanga, or better lighting than the filtered afternoon sunshine or the woodsy darkness. Take kids, grandparents, friends and tourists, along with a picnic and some cushions (because the seats are kind of hard).

Details: Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum, 1419 Topanga Canyon Blvd., Topanga. "Coriolanus" opens at 8 p.m. Saturday, "Midsummer" opens at 4 p.m. Sunday. See website for repertory schedule. \$25-\$38.50. (310) 455-3723 or www.theatricum.com

The 99-Seat Beat appears every Friday. Our reviewers shortlist offerings with an emphasis on smaller venues. Some recommendations are shows we've seen; other picks are based on the track record of the company, playwright, director or cast. Comprehensive theater listings are posted every Sunday at latimes.com/arts.