



Press Release

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Montana Shakespeare In The Parks Featured in New MontanaPBS Documentary

Bard in the Backcountry is the story of Shakespeare in Montana. It's a behind-the-scenes look at a summer of Montana Shakespeare in the Parks - from first read through to final performance. For twelve weeks the actors work in an awe-inspiring landscape, getting to know rural populations who define "rugged individualism." Communities statewide love their Shakespeare in the Parks, and this film highlights the way this love and landscape impact these young actors.

Bard in the Backcountry chronicles a summer with the ten actors who make up this professional theater company based in Bozeman, Montana, as they cover over sixty-five hundred miles to perform Shakespeare in the rural towns of this vast region. Along the way they encounter an array of characters, many of whom have been watching Shakespeare every summer for over forty years. We learn about the teamwork required to deliver a performance every evening in a new town and how the actors are also their own drivers, roadies, make-up artists, and set builders. *Bard in the Backcountry* reveals the mutual impact the tour has on the lives of these young actors and the people who put in the effort to bring Shakespeare to town. This journey provides a glimpse of the relevance that classic Shakespearean theater still holds in the lives of everyday people across the region.

The film is a co-production of Cindy Stillwell's Hybrid Media LLC production company based in Bozeman MT, and MontanaPBS. Stillwell is the producer, co-director and editor of the film. She and co-director, Tom Watson, both teach in the School of Film and Photography at MSU Bozeman as does the film's post-production supervisor, Theo Lipfert. The three professors were excited to collaborate on the film: "I love that my colleagues and I were able to work on this film

together with MontanaPBS. It was a real ‘made in Montana’ experience because the subject was Montana itself, really, with the home grown Montana Shakespeare in the Parks having an amazing national reputation housed right next store to our film and photo school; then MontanaPBS, also headquartered in the same building as the film and photo school. It was a collaboration waiting to happen,” says Producer Cindy Stillwell.

“*Bard in the Backcountry* is a film I have been trying to make for over ten years. I knew this would be the right combination of people to make it a reality!” says co-director and associate professor Tom Watson. Watson teaches theater classes in the School of Film and Photography. He has also directed theater productions of his own and is the resident scene designer for Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, but this is his first documentary film. “We are so excited to share this film with the community. It really highlights some themes many of us relate to. The young actors are mostly new to Montana the summer they come out for the tour—and then, wow, what a tour they get! They go all over the state and we get to meet some of the long-time fans and characters that are faithful to this company. We meet these amazing characters through the eyes of the actors, who are outsiders, yet they are so cherished as they bring the words of the Bard to town,” says producer and co-director Cindy Stillwell.

Free Public Screening:

A public screening of *Bard in the Backcountry* will take place in Bozeman on Tuesday, May 5th in the Emerson Cultural Center’s Crawford Theater, at 7pm. Admission is free and doors open at 6:30pm.

MontanaPBS’ statewide broadcast of *Bard in the Backcountry* is scheduled for Monday, May 11th at 8pm.

High resolution promotional images and additional information about *Bard in the Backcountry* can be found at: <http://www.montanapbs.org/BardintheBackcountry/> Press screeners of the film are available upon request.

Official Bard in the Backcountry website: <http://www.montanapbs.org/BardintheBackcountry/>