

# Myth and magic at Tynemouth Priory



■ The Tempest starts on Monday, July 16.



■ Fun and games at Tynemouth.

NEWCASTLE-BASED theatre group 1399's new production *The Tempest* kicks off next week for a month-long stretch at the picturesque Tynemouth Priory, which will be turned into an open-air stage.

One of Shakespeare's most challenging works, it will be taking place from next Monday, July 16 through to August 11 - and the cast are praying the weather doesn't have its own tempest!

"Because it is in the open air, the audience tend to come well prepared anyway but we've found in the past that if the weather is bad it tends to bring the audience together," explained producer Paul O'Shea. "And if the worst comes to the worst, Bainbridges has donated 100 umbrellas..."

Paul established the group in 1998 with an objective to make theatre more accessible to a wider audience.

"We aim to do this by staging our productions in often overlooked and underdeveloped medieval castles and historic buildings," said Paul. "*The Tempest* is a big project and no-one has attempted to try what we have planned. I suppose that is one of the reason why we do it, because nobody else has. It's certainly a huge challenge for all the team, including the technicians who have to wire the whole venue for lighting and sound."

The company has previously produced *Hotspur* in the grounds of Warkworth Castle and *Macbeth* in Newcastle's Castle Keep.

"Under the direction of Kevin Saint, the company has gained an excellent reputation for creating vivid, dynamic and spectacular theatrical events," said Paul.

"Last year's *Macbeth* was a resounding success and sold out every night. People enjoyed it because it was different. The setting really captured the imagination of the audience and word got round very quickly about how good it was.

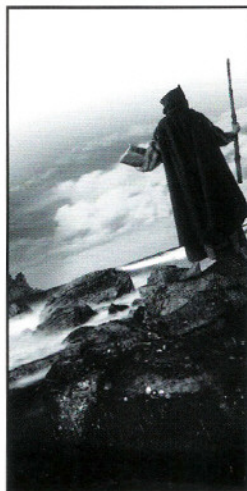
"The audience was pulled into the world of the play, which brings the likes of Shakespeare to life. We had kids seeing theatre for the first time and describing it as 'wicked'."

*The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last masterpiece and is a tale of a magician dispensing revenge to a crew of shipwrecked mariners. It's full of illusions, spells, spirits, romance and mythical creatures - and will be a spectacular event set in the ruined priory on the Tynemouth headland.

"We want to transform the Priory into a deserted and enchanted island," explained director Kevin Saint. "The venue is located on a headland and surrounded by the sea on three sides, which will enable us to create a unique atmosphere. Instead of the audience watching a play in one area, we are going to use six main locations and utilise the many fascinating features of the site. For example, the play begins with a huge stormy shipwreck, which is staged on a first world war gun battery.

"We aim to create vivid, dynamic and spectacular theatrical events. By pulling the audience directly into the world of the play, we want them to leave with a greater sense of involvement, having shared a unique, atmospheric, theatrical experience."

Tickets are now on sale from Whitley Bay Playhouse on (0191) 252 3505 and Newcastle Tourist Information Centre on (0191) 277 8003. Alternatively, visit the company's website on [www.1399theatrecompany.co.uk](http://www.1399theatrecompany.co.uk). The play takes place Monday to Saturday, at 8pm. Be prepared in case the heavens open!



■ Prospero.