

Artistic Director Edward Hall and Executive Director Kimberly Motes announce inaugural season for Chicago Shakespeare Theater

2024/25 Season features a powerful lineup of thrilling theatrical events, international partnerships, and productions of Shakespeare



Chicago—April 9, 2024—Artistic Director Edward Hall and Executive Director Kimberly Motes announce today their inaugural season for **Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST)**, featuring 10 productions over 12 months that bring internationally acclaimed artists and companies to Chicago, launch North American, US, and regional premieres, and create dynamic Shakespeare productions for multi-generational audiences. CST brings the Royal Shakespeare Company back to Chicago after 30 years in a new, ongoing partnership and welcomes Teatro La Plaza from Peru.

The season of nearly 350 performances will begin with two summer productions: the US premiere of *The Lord of the Rings – A Musical Tale*, in a new staging by Paul Hart, as well as an adaptation of the beloved children’s book *Corduroy*, directed by Amber Mak. Edward Hall leads the fall season with *Henry V* and the **Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)** returns to Chicago with their new co-artistic director Tamara Harvey’s inaugural production of *Pericles*. The winter begins with the Broadway hit *Jaja’s African Hair Braiding*, written by Jocelyn Bioh and directed by Whitney White, followed by the hilarious and

uplifting *Avaaz*, created by Michael Shayan. The season continues with an expanded run of 40 student matinee performances of **Short Shakespeare! *A Midsummer Night’s Dream***, adapted and directed by Edward Hall; Peru’s **Teatro La Plaza** brings their inventive and eye-opening interpretation of *Hamlet*; next comes the North American premiere of the Olivier Best New Musical Award winner *Sunny Afternoon*—Ray Davies and Joe Penhall’s story of the groundbreaking British rock band, The Kinks; then the award-winning playwright Lolita Chakrabarti reframes her celebrated play *Hymn* in Chicago.

“It is a huge pleasure to introduce this first season of work which looks forward to a year of adventure, entertainment, and thought-provoking theater made by artists in the US and across the globe,” says **Edward Hall**. “The range and scale of work is something to be celebrated by audiences everywhere as we illuminate the vitality of Shakespeare’s genius alongside leading contemporary writers of our day.”

“We have been energized and inspired by the audiences, artists, donors, students, and community leaders we have met over the past six months as well as by our board and staff,” says **Kimberly Motes**. “This season is an expression of their encouragement and the dynamism of Chicago as a city of world class theater, arts, and culture. It’s a joy to celebrate a multitude of powerful creative voices reflective of the many communities in our city.”

The 2024/25 Season

As part of a continued commitment to introducing young audiences to the magic of live theater, Chicago Shakespeare begins this summer with *Corduroy* (June 18–July 14, 2024 | **Jentes Family Courtyard Theater**). Based on the cherished children’s books *Corduroy* and *A Pocket for Corduroy* by **Don Freeman** and adapted for the stage by **Barry Kornhauser**, this 60-minute play had its world premiere at the Tony Award-winning Children’s Theatre Company in Minneapolis in 2018. Corduroy’s button has gone missing and he can’t go home with the kindhearted Lisa without it. Audiences follow the beloved bear on a rollicking and delightfully destructive journey through the department store as he searches high and low in this imaginative tale of friendship and belonging. Esteemed Chicago director **Amber Mak** returns to CST after last summer’s smash-hit production of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, bringing a wealth of experience directing shows for young audiences.

“*Corduroy* has been a beloved book for over 50 years as an enduring, lovable story of friendship, home, and being accepted just as you are today,” says Mak. “I am excited to bring these characters from the book to life on the Pier in a very fun, whimsical, and imaginative adventure that multi-generational audiences can experience together.”

Beginning in July, *The Lord of the Rings – A Musical Tale* (July 19–September 1, 2024 | The Yard), based on the books by **J.R.R. Tolkien**, comes to the stage in a US premiere production directed by **Paul Hart**, who created the acclaimed new staging in 2023 at the UK’s Watermill Theatre. This adventure through the multi-dimensional world of Middle-earth has been beloved by generations of readers and adapted into an Academy Award-winning film trilogy by Peter Jackson. As the Hobbits celebrate Bilbo Baggins’ eleventy-first birthday in the Shire, he gifts his nephew Frodo his most precious belonging—a gold ring. This fateful moment launches Frodo on a legendary and perilous quest across Middle-earth to the darkest realms of Mordor to vanquish evil with his loyal Fellowship. With book and lyrics by **Shaun McKenna** and **Matthew Warchus** and original music by Academy Award winner **A.R. Rahman** (*Bombay Dreams*, *Slumdog Millionaire*), Finnish folk band **Värttinä**, and Tony Award winner **Christopher Nightingale** (*Matilda the Musical*), this theatrical event celebrates the magical world of Middle-earth, making for an unforgettable experience for longtime fans and newcomers alike.

“Sharing the Watermill’s wonderful expression of *The Lord of the Rings* on stage with audiences across the globe beginning this summer in Chicago, with the US premiere of Paul Hart’s and Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s collaborative re-imagining, is a dream come true for all of us at Middle-earth Enterprises,” says Fredrica Drotos, of Middle-earth Enterprises.

Following his groundbreaking production of *Richard III* this season, Artistic Director **Edward Hall** opens the start of the fall season with *Henry V* (September 6–October 6, 2024 | Jentes Family Courtyard Theater). This gripping tale of youthful ambition and adventure explores the thrill and destructive power of war, examining nationalism at its most dangerous and seductive. From the evocative opening line, “O for a Muse of Fire,” *Henry V* includes some of Shakespeare’s most famous speeches and stirring poetry. Hall’s approach reflects his belief in Shakespeare as a modern writer for our modern world, exploring the themes of conflict, patriotism, and legacy through a contemporary lens. Prior to taking the helm of CST as artistic director in October 2023, Hall staged acclaimed productions of Shakespeare’s plays in London’s West End, New York, and on tour around the globe as the founder and artistic director of Propeller Shakespeare.

“*Henry V* remains one of the most revealing plays about war, nationalism, the consequences of both, and our need for common causes to bind us together,” says Hall. “There has never been a more prescient moment to explore our reflex for conflict through the prism of a story that contains some of the greatest writing in the English language.”

One of the world’s preeminent theater companies, the **Royal Shakespeare Company** returns to Chicago for the first time in 30 years as part of a new, ongoing partnership with CST. Direct from a run in the Swan Theatre at the company’s home in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK comes the mystical *Pericles* (October 20–December 8, 2024 | Jentes Family Courtyard Theater). In her and Daniel Evans’ first season as the RSC’s co-artistic directors, **Tamara Harvey** directs this major new production of Shakespeare’s moving tale of love, hope, and miracles. When Prince Pericles flees for safety, he finds himself on an epic voyage through storms, shipwrecks, abduction, and loss. This exclusive limited engagement marks CST’s 100th international production of bringing the world’s great artists to Chicago.

“It’s a joy to be renewing our relationship with Chicago Shakespeare Theater in 2024, in this moment of transformation for both companies,” said RSC co-artistic directors Tamara Harvey and Daniel Evans. “The RSC’s connection with Chicago dates back to 1913 and many of our audiences and company remember welcoming CST to Stratford-upon-Avon as part of our Complete Works Festival in 2006. As the RSC’s new co-artistic directors, we share Edward Hall’s passionate commitment to collaboration across borders and to providing a platform for exhilarating theatre that speaks with immediacy to the world we live in today. Bringing this production of *Pericles* directly from our inaugural season marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter between our two companies. We can’t wait to share it with CST’s audiences.”

Straight from a twice-extended Broadway run, *Jaja’s African Hair Braiding* (January 14–February 2, 2025 | The Yard) will have its regional premiere at CST in a co-production with Arena Stage and Berkeley Repertory Theatre. This comedic play, which had its world premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club in 2023, offers a glimpse into one sweltering summer day in the lives of a group of West African immigrant women who find community in a Harlem hair salon. Love blossoms, dreams flourish, and secrets are revealed in this dazzling production. Written by acclaimed playwright **Jocelyn Bioh** (*School Girls, or the African Mean Girls Play*, *Nollywood Dreams*), the production is directed by Chicago native and Obie Award winner **Whitney White** (*Our Dear Dead Drug Lord*, *What to Send Up When It Goes Down*). *Jaja’s African Hair Braiding* is presented in association with Madison Wells Live and LaChanze.

“I am thrilled and honored that audiences beyond Broadway will get to come to ‘the shop’ and meet the vibrant women of *Jaja’s African Hair Braiding*,” says Bioh. “This play means so much to me as both a native New Yorker and as a first-

generation Ghanaian American as it speaks to the heart of what makes our country so beautifully unique: its rich diversity of people and culture. There is a real universality to these women's experiences, and I can't wait for audiences to connect and fall in love with each of them."

Also beginning performances in January, following a sold out, critically acclaimed East Coast debut, ***Avaaz* (January 21-February 9, 2025 | Carl and Marilynn Thoma Theater Upstairs)** is a "powerful, defiant, celebratory" (*Washington Post*) exploration of family and the immigrant experience, written and performed by Emmy Award nominee **Michael Shayan** and directed by Tony Award nominee **Moritz von Stuelpnagel**. Shayan—playing the role of his own larger-than-life Iranian-Jewish mother, Roya—welcomes audiences into her home to celebrate the Iranian New Year and shares her quintessential American journey from Tehran to "Tehrangeles," California, formerly known as Westwood. Rich in extravagant humor and heart, *Avaaz* is at once deeply personal and universal. This production, hailed as "ingenious" and "masterful" by *BroadwayWorld* and *DC Theater Arts*, is designed by a Tony and Emmy Award-winning creative team. It successfully premiered at the Olney Theatre Center and its time at Chicago Shakespeare marks the continuation of a US tour. A Fellow with the Sundance Institute and Lambda Literary, Shayan was recently recognized on *Out Magazine's* OUT100 list of the most impactful and influential LGBTQ+ people. A Harvard-trained writer, performer, and illusionist, Shayan offers a perspective rarely seen on stage. von Stuelpnagel's credits include the upcoming *Judgment Day* at CST and *Present Laughter* and *Hand to God* on Broadway.

"It's an honor to take *Avaaz* across the country with Moritz and this incredible team, particularly at a time of overwhelming anti-immigrant sentiment," says Shayan. "*Avaaz* offers a different narrative and grapples with complex truths in a fabulous, decadent, larger-than life party on stage. I can't wait to share the magic of 'Tehrangeles' with audiences in Chicago and beyond!"

Chicago Shakespeare will increase the number of student performances from 30 to 40 and welcome 20,000 middle and high school students from across the region to ***Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream* (February 4-March 8, 2025 | Jentes Family Courtyard Theater)**. Adapted and directed by **Edward Hall**, Shakespeare's beloved romantic comedy captures the exhilaration, foolishness, and delight of young love, as the chaos of magic and enchantment turns the world upside down. In addition to the five-week run of school matinees, this 75-minute production will offer public performances on Saturdays.

"It's a joy to be creating this Short Shakes production as part of CST's ongoing commitment to providing the best theater for young people," says Hall. "I have had some of my most exciting experiences in the theater making work in this forum and look forward to sharing a comedy that warms the heart and delights the soul, inspiring young audiences and artists of the future."

In partnership with the **Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA)**, CST introduces **Teatro La Plaza** from Lima, Peru to Chicago audiences with an original and energetic reimagining of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (**March 13-23, 2025 | Carl and Marilynn Thoma Theater Upstairs**). Blending Shakespeare's text with personal anecdotes from their lives, a group of young performers with Down syndrome take the stage in a lively and profound theatrical experience directed by Teatro La Plaza's founder **Chela de Ferrari**. Together, the performers explore the central question "To be or not to be?" using pop music, dance, and wry humor to create an original and joyful celebration of self-expression.

"CLATA is excited to see Teatro La Plaza's *Hamlet* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, not only because this is such a different adaptation of *Hamlet* but also because it's a very unique representation of Latine actors that also deserves to be experienced," says Jorge Valdivia, CLATA's executive director. "There is so much that we can learn from this unique adaptation. We're thrilled about our ongoing partnership with CST and seeing our city give Teatro La Plaza a warm welcome."

Winner of four Olivier Awards including Best New Musical, ***Sunny Afternoon*** makes its North American premiere (**March 21-April 27, 2025 | The Yard**). It tells the story of the rise to stardom of **The Kinks** through their own prolific catalog of chart-topping songs including "You Really Got Me," "Lola," and "All Day and All of the Night." With an original story, music, and lyrics by The Kinks' legendary **Ray Davies** and a script by **Joe Penhall**, this musical is an unforgettable rock-and-roll journey through the soaring triumphs and devastating lows of an iconic band that influenced generations. **Edward Hall** returns to this show after directing the world premiere at London's Hampstead Theatre and in the West End.

"Anyone who knows The Kinks knows we're a series of catastrophes turning into glorious triumph," says Davies. "This is not an interpretation...it's coming from my perspective and very personal to me. Most of the stories come from the family in the front room where everyone played an instrument, and everyone collaborated. Yet what's come through is that it's a kind of timeless story. Yes, there's a setting, but hopefully the songs transcend time. It's about characters and situations and people trying to get through their lives."

In the spring, Olivier Award-winning playwright **Lolita Chakrabarti** returns to Chicago with her celebrated play *Hymn* (**April 29–May 25, 2025 | Jentes Family Courtyard Theater**). Originally set in London in its premiere at the Almeida Theatre, Chakrabarti will reframe the play for CST to be set in Chicago. This soul-affirming story charts the lives of two middle-aged Black men as they form a deep bond in an intimate exploration of the loyalties and betrayals of brothers, fathers, and sons. Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet* enjoyed an acclaimed run at CST in 2017; other notable credits include *Life of Pi*, now on tour across North America, and *Hamnet*, a stage adaptation of Maggie O'Farrell's novel that premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company last year.

"I wanted to write a story of two Black men who find love with each other—a familial, platonic love," says Chakrabarti. "My own male friends have often surprised me with their sensitivity, femininity, fussiness, insecurities, fun, kindness, and warmth—the list goes on. *Hymn* was born out of my desire to tell a different story. To reframe this play for Chicago is very exciting indeed, and I believe it will lend itself beautifully to this city's rich culture."

Chicago Shakespeare Theater will also continue its longstanding commitment to creative community engagement this summer with **Shakes in the City**, an evolution of Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks. Pop-up performances of *Twelfth Night*, directed by **Tyrone Phillips**, and opportunities to engage with artists will activate green spaces, neighborhood festivals, and events across the city. This new iteration of the program builds upon CST's 12-year history of summer programming in community spaces and aims to broaden engagement with audiences across Chicago.

"I couldn't be more excited to work on this new chapter of CST's community programming and partner in its reimagining," says Phillips, who directed a production of *Twelfth Night* in the Courtyard Theater last fall. "Chicago is my home, and I love creating here. This is a city that gets what it means to be a human, what it means to be a neighbor, and to bring this warm and joyful play that is fundamentally about community directly to people across the city in this new way is really special."

For information on purchasing tickets, visit www.chicagoshakes.com or call the Box Office at 312.595.5600. A variety of flexible season ticket packages are on sale now, offering savings over single tickets and guaranteeing seats at every production. Discounted tickets are available for groups of 10 or more.

ABOUT CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

A Regional Tony Award recipient, Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST) produces a bold and innovative year-round season—plays, musicals, world premieres, family productions, and theatrical presentations from around the globe—alongside education programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Located on Chicago's iconic Navy Pier, CST's campus features the Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, The Yard, and the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater Upstairs. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted cultural center—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that connect and inspire.

Edward Hall (*Artistic Director, Carl and Marilyn Thoma Chair*) joined CST in October 2023 and directed his debut production as Artistic Director, *Richard III*, earlier this year. He previously directed the Jeff Award-winning *Rose Rage* trilogy at CST in 2003. An internationally recognized director, Hall has built his love of Shakespeare around original interpretations of the Bard's plays, staging acclaimed productions in London's West End and on tour around the globe. He led the UK's Hampstead Theatre for nearly a decade, transforming it into one of the nation's most successful theaters for new work development, with over 100 world premieres. He was the founder and Artistic Director of Propeller Shakespeare for twenty years touring across the US, Europe, Asia, and beyond. He has served as an Associate Director at the National Theatre and Old Vic in London. His extensive film and television credits include *The Heist Before Christmas* starring Timothy Spall, *Blithe Spirit* starring Dame Judi Dench, multiple HBO and BBC series, and the season 4 finale for *Downton Abbey*. He is a member of The Arts Club of Chicago.

Kimberly Motes (*Executive Director*) joined CST in October 2023 after serving for over seven years as Managing Director for the Tony Award winning Children's Theatre Company (CTC), the nation's largest and most acclaimed theatre dedicated to multi-generational audiences. She produced 46 plays/musicals including 15 commissioned new works and six co-productions/transfers, increased contributed income, completed a \$25 million capital campaign, and achieved the highest ticket sales in its history. Motes held leadership roles in Minnesota including Senior Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the University of St. Thomas, Vice President of Institutional Advancement for the College of Saint Benedict, Managing Director at Theater Latté Da, and Executive Director at the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts. Kimberly spent 13 years in Washington, DC where she was the Director of Development at Arena Stage and led adult arts education programming and a ballet training program at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. She has served on grant panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Minnesota State Arts Board. She is a member of the Economic Club of Chicago.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's 2024/25 Season

(as of press time)

**SUMMER FAMILY FUN ON NAVY PIER BASED
ON THE BELOVED STORYBOOKS**

Corduroy

Based on the books entitled *Corduroy* & *A Pocket for
Corduroy*

by Don Freeman

Adapted for the stage by Barry Kornhauser

Directed by Amber Mak

Jentes Family Courtyard Theater

June 18–July 14, 2024

**A MUSICAL TALE OF MAGIC AND ADVENTURE IN
AN UNFORGETTABLE US PREMIERE**

The Lord of the Rings - A Musical Tale

Based upon the books by J.R.R. Tolkien

Book & lyrics by Shaun McKenna & Matthew Warchus

Music by A.R. Rahman, Värttinä, & Christopher

Nightingale

Directed by Paul Hart

The Yard

July 19–September 1, 2024

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EDWARD HALL STAGES
SHAKESPEARE'S ROUSING EPIC**

Henry V

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Edward Hall

Jentes Family Courtyard Theater

September 6–October 6, 2024

**THE RSC RETURNS TO CHICAGO
AFTER 30 YEARS IN A NEW PARTNERSHIP**

The Royal Shakespeare Company's

Pericles

From the UK

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Tamara Harvey

Jentes Family Courtyard Theater

October 20–December 8, 2024

**DIRECT FROM BROADWAY: REGIONAL PREMIERE
OF ACCLAIMED NEW PLAY**

Jaja's African Hair Braiding

Written by Jocelyn Bioh

Directed by Whitney White

A co-production with Arena Stage & Berkeley

Repertory Theatre

The Yard

January 14–February 2, 2025

**CELEBRATING THE IRANIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANT
EXPERIENCE THROUGH TRADITIONS AND HUMOR**

Avaaz

Written & performed by Michael Shayan

Directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel

A production from the Olney Theatre Center

Carl and Marilynn Thoma Theater Upstairs

January 21–February 9, 2025

**75-MINUTE SHAKESPEARE MAKES THE PERFECT
INTRODUCTION TO THE BARD'S BELOVED COMEDY**

Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

Adapted & directed by Edward Hall

Welcoming thousands of young people for weekday

student

matinees with public performances Saturdays at

11am

Jentes Family Courtyard Theater

February 4–March 8, 2025

**SHAKESPEARE'S ICONIC PLAY INTERPRETED BY
AN**

ENSEMBLE OF ACTORS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

Teatro La Plaza's

Hamlet

From Peru

In partnership with Chicago Latino Theater Alliance

(CLATA)

Written & directed by Chela De Ferrari

Carl and Marilynn Thoma Theater Upstairs

March 13–23, 2025

**NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE OF HIT MUSICAL
CHRONICLES PIONEERING ROCK BAND, THE KINKS**

Sunny Afternoon

By Joe Penhall with original story, music, & lyrics by

Ray Davies

Directed by Edward Hall

The Yard

March 21–April 27, 2025

**SOULFUL STORY OF MALE FRIENDSHIP
TRANSPORTED TO CHICAGO SETTING**

Hymn

Written by Lolita Chakrabarti

Jentes Family Courtyard Theater

April 29–May 25, 2025

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