

Casting announced for Chicago Shakespeare's production of *Hymn*

Directed by three-time Jeff Award winner Ron OJ Parson
Starring Chicago actors Chiké Johnson and James Vincent Meredith

April 29–May 25 in the Courtyard Theater



Chicago—March 27, 2025—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater \(CST\)](#) announces today the cast of [Hymn](#). Legendary Chicago director **Ron OJ Parson** leads a powerhouse Chicago cast and creative team to bring this deeply resonant tribute to male friendship to the stage, starring **Chiké Johnson** and **James Vincent Meredith**. Playwright **Lolita Chakrabarti** has transposed her play to the South Side of Chicago following an acclaimed premiere at London's Almeida Theatre, hailed by *The Standard* as a "Rich and moving ode to male friendship." The creative team also includes scenic and projection designer **Rasean Davonté Johnson**, costume designer **Yvonne Miranda**, lighting designer **Jason Lynch**, and sound designer and composer **Willow James**. The production runs **April 29–May 25, 2025**, in the Jentes Family Courtyard Theater.

Two men from two very different neighborhoods meet as strangers, but before long—they're singing the same tune. Benny is a loner anchored by his wife and children. Gil longs to fulfil his potential. They form a deep bond, but as cracks appear in their fragile lives, they start to realize that true courage comes in different forms. Set on Chicago's South Side and brimming with the sounds of R&B, gospel, and house music, this soulful play takes an honest look at love, faith, and friendship in all of life's beautiful complexities.

Chiké Johnson plays Benny, making his Chicago Shakespeare debut. Johnson is a company member of Remy Bumpo Theatre and has worked on many stages in Chicago and around the country, including Broadway credits *Time to Kill* and *Wit*. His recent Chicago credits include *Toni Stone* at Goodman Theatre, Northlight's production of *Birthdays Candles*, Remy Bumpo's world premiere production of *Galileo's Daughter*, and the world premiere of *When Harry Met Rehab* at the Greenhouse Theater Center. Johnson's other credits include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *King Lear* at American Player's Theatre, *Ruined* at Manhattan Theatre Club, *RunBoyRun* at New York Theatre Workshop, and New York City Center's Encores *Lost in the Stars*.

James Vincent Meredith plays Gil. Meredith returns to Chicago Shakespeare with credits including the title role in *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Julius Caesar*. He is a Steppenwolf ensemble member with 19 credits including John Proctor in *The Crucible* and most recently *Noises Off*. His Broadway credits include *The Book of Mormon*, *The Minutes*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *Superior Donuts*. Meredith's other Chicago theatre credits include work at the Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Writers Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, and Court Theater, and he has appeared on TV in *Chicago Med* (NBC), *Your Honor* (Showtime) *FBI* (CBS) and *Fargo* (FX).

Ron OJ Parson is the co-founder and former artistic director of Onyx Theatre Ensemble, a resident artist at Court Theatre, and an ensemble member at TimeLine Theatre. In 2022, he received the Zelda Fichandler Award from the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation and was recognized as the *Chicago Tribune's* Chicagoan of the Year for Theater. He has won three Jeff Awards for directing for *Relentless* at TimeLine Theatre, and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* and *Fences* at Court Theatre. Other credits include *East Texas Hot Links*, *The Lion In Winter*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II*, *Radio*

Golf, Five Guys Names Moe, Gem of the Ocean, Seven Guitars, Jitney, and The Piano Lesson at Court Theatre, *Trouble in Mind, Too Heavy For Your Pocket, and A Raisin in the Sun* at TimeLine Theatre Company, *Toni Stone and Sweat* at Goodman Theatre, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *East Texas Hot Links* at Writers Theatre.

"I've long admired the work at Chicago Shakespeare, during my theater journey here in Chicago," said Parson. "I am truly honored to be working on *Hymn* by world renowned playwright Lolita Chakrabarti. As my journey continues, what better play than a play about brothers, family, love, faith, and hope. What the world needs a lot of. Peace."

CST artistic director **Edward Hall** said, "In my brief time in Chicago it has not taken me long to get acquainted with the work of the brilliant Ron O J Parson. Both Lolita and I felt he was the missing piece in this delicate jigsaw, and I am deeply happy that the play resonated so powerfully with him. This will be Ron's Chicago Shakespeare debut, and I am delighted to be welcoming the director of such a huge and important body of work into our company."

Lolita Chakrabarti won the Olivier Award for Best New Play for her adaptation of Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, which later went on to a Tony Award-winning Broadway run and a national tour. Her adaptation of Maggie O'Farrell's novel *Hamnet* premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the West End last year. Chakrabarti's debut play *Red Velvet* enjoyed an acclaimed run at CST in 2017.

"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."

Parson is joined on the creative team by scenic and projection designer **Rasean Davonté Johnson**, a two-time Jeff Award winner returning to Chicago Shakespeare after *Measure for Measure* and *It Came From Outer Space*, with other recent credits including *Romeo and Juliet* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Lucha Teotl* at Goodman Theatre, and *Her Honor Jane Byrne* at Lookingglass Theatre; costume designer **Yvonne Miranda**, who makes her CST debut with recent credits including *Leroy & Lucy* at Steppenwolf Theatre, *Primary Trust* at Goodman Theatre, and *The Hot Wing King* at Writers Theatre; lighting designer **Jason Lynch**, a Jeff Award winner returning to CST after *Beauty and the Beast*, with other credits including *Layalina* and *the ripple, the wave that carried me home* at Goodman Theatre and *Choir Boy* at Steppenwolf Theatre; and sound designer and composer **Willow James**, who returns to CST after *Twelfth Night*, with other credits including *A Christmas Carol, The Penelopiad*, and *The Nacirema Society* at Goodman Theatre.

The press opening for *Hymn* is scheduled for **Saturday, May 3 at 7:00 p.m.**

More information at chicagoshakes.com/hymn or on social media at [@chicagoshakes](https://twitter.com/chicagoshakes).

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER (CST)

A Regional Tony Award recipient, Chicago Shakespeare Theater produces a bold and innovative year-round season that includes Shakespeare, original plays, musicals, family programming, and international theatrical events. CST is committed to serving as a cultural center across its three stages—the 700+ seat Yard, 500 seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, and the 200 seat Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater Upstairs as well as in classrooms, neighborhoods, and venues around the world. CST has a deep commitment to education and lifelong learning with robust programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted theater—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that illuminate the complexities, ambiguities, and wonders of our world. www.chicagoshakes.com

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