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HYMN



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Photo by Justin Barbin

Welcome

Welcome to this beautiful new play and world premiere which celebrates Chicago with such warmth and joy.

Bringing Playwright Lolita Chakrabarti to Chicago and introducing her to director Ron OJ Parson has created a partnership that brings so much happiness to this play. Ron has been lighting up the Chicago theater scene for many years and it is wonderful to finally get him to CST along with his gifted creative team that includes Chicago actors Chiké Johnson and James Vincent Meredith to illuminate Lolita's story. Set on Chicago's South Side, *Hymn* is a story that you will both recognize through its setting and people and discover—as it explores male vulnerability and friendship, a subject not often dramatized on stage.

This play is an example of our commitment to new work sitting alongside Shakespeare. *Hymn* explores themes of family, community, platonic love between two men, and more—themes that resonate so deeply alongside much of Shakespeare's work. Whether it's Sebastian and Antonio from *Twelfth Night*, Leontes and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*, or even Othello and Iago, there is much we hope you can reflect on here as you watch *Hymn*.

Our dedication to Shakespeare is demonstrated next season with an expansion of his work (and Shakespeare adjacent work) on our stages including Lolita's beautiful adaptation *Hamnet* coming to us next year which explores the life that the Shakespeare family may have led in Stratford. Then, dip your toes into a shortened version of *Hamlet* itself before luxuriating in the delicious comedy that is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This summer, we take our Shakes in the City out into neighborhoods throughout Chicago—and in the fall, come into the Courtyard Theater to experience Q Brothers Collective's *Rome Sweet Rome* based on *Julius Caesar* and then a glorious production of *Much Ado About Nothing* for the holidays. It's exciting to us that more than half of our performances in the coming season are devoted to Shakespeare and that you will get a chance to see how the Elizabethan world reflects our contemporary world and vice versa as you enjoy the new plays in the season.

Thank you for choosing live theater and for entrusting us with the task of giving you a memorable evening in the company of *Hymn*.

Gratefully,

Edward Hall
Artistic Director
Carl and Marilyn Thoma Chair

Kimberly Motes
Executive Director

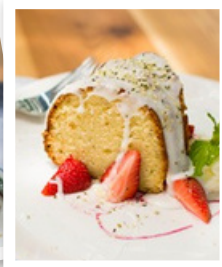
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CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

MISSION

To create vivid, entertaining theatrical experiences that invigorate and engage people of all ages and identities by illuminating the complexity, ambiguity, and wonder of our world. Shared humanity and unforgettable stories—now THIS is Chicago Shakespeare.

VISION

We deliver excellent, powerful, life-changing theater that challenges our preconceptions of everything. We are an open and inspiring destination to meet, talk, and share experience through community and live performance that is available to everyone. We build a better future with those who watch, work, create, and participate.

ABOUT CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

A Regional Tony Award recipient, CST 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 Upstairs Studio 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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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In Memoriam

Richard J. Franke

* Denotes Executive
Committee Members

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Julie and Roger Baskes



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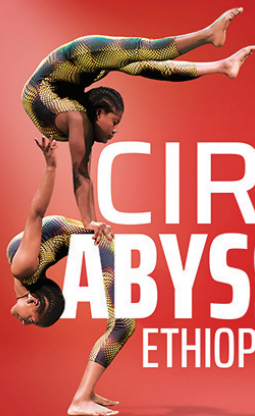
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THEATER

2025/26
SEASON



CIRCUS ABYSSINIA

ETHIOPIAN DREAMS

JUL 10–AUG 3

ROME SWEET ROME



SEP 23–OCT 19

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

A NEW STORY LIVE ON STAGE

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OCT 15–NOV 2

RSC HAMNET



FEB 10–MAR 8

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR



APR 2–MAY 3

BILLIE JEAN



JUL 18–AUG 10

AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'

THE FATS WALLER MUSICAL SHOW

SEP 3–28

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING



NOV 18–DEC 21

Short Shakespeare! HAMLET



JAN 31–FEB 28

MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY




APR 7–26

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN



MAY 28–JUN 28



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2025/26 SEASON

THIS is Chicago Shakespeare



**CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE
THEATER**

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

EDWARD HALL
Artistic Director
Carl and Marilyn Thoma Chair

KIMBERLY MOTES
Executive Director

presents

HYMN

Written by **LOLITA CHAKRABARTI**

Scenic & Projection Design
RASEAN DAVONTÉ JOHNSON

Costume Design
YVONNE MIRANDA

Lighting Design
JASON LYNCH

Sound Design & Composition
WILLOW JAMES

Casting
BOB MASON

Production Stage Manager
DEYA S. FRIEDMAN

directed by **RON OJ PARSON**

PREMIERE PRODUCTION SPONSOR **Ray and Judy McCaskey**

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The performance runs approximately 100 minutes with no intermission.

If we can help accommodate you during your visit, please speak with our House Manager. For your safety, we ask that you keep aisles and doorways clear. We request that you refrain from taking photography or capturing any other video or audio recordings of the production.

Audience Notice

Explores themes of addiction and mental health, including mention of suicide.
If you or someone you know needs support now, call or text 988
or chat at 988lifeline.org.

First performed at and streamed from the Almeida Theatre, London on 17 February 2021.
This production has been licensed by special arrangement with The Agency (London) Ltd,
24 Pottery Lane, London W11 4LZ; e-mail: info@theagency.co.uk

Company

CAST

Benny
Gil

CHIKÉ JOHNSON*
JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH*

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance: **Donald Fitzdarryl** for *Benny*; **Stetson Pierre** for *Gil*.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

DEYA S. FRIEDMAN*
KATRINA HERRMANN*

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Dramaturg
Assistant Director
Assistant Scenic Designer
Assistant Scenic Designer
Assistant Lighting Designer
Assistant Sound Designer
Associate Projections Designer
Boxing Consultant
Music Consultant

KAMESHA KHAN
CRISTIN CAROLE
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ANDRES FIZ
AJA SINGLETARY
FELICIA P. FIELDS

**Member of Actors' Equity Association,
the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Hymns are normally sung by a choir. Today we are a choir of 2, singing this Hymn, of life, love, and family.

Like a song there are many ebbs, and flows. Sometimes we don't know where life will take us, the hills and valleys we may ride, the peace we strive for. Please, let's find the love in family and cherish it—and sing your song, find your Hymn, before its too late.

Thanks to Chicago Shakespeare Theater for allowing us to sing ours.

Peace.

—Ron OJ Parson

Ron would like to dedicate this production to the memory of Jonathon Wilson and Donald Moore.

Profiles



CHIKÉ JOHNSON
(*Benny*) **CHICAGO**
SHAKESPEARE:
Debut. **CHICAGO:**
Birthday Candles
(Northlight
Theatre); *Galileo's*
Daughter (Remy

Bumpo Theatre Company); *Toni Stone* (Goodman Theatre); *When Harry Met Rehab* (Greenhouse Theater Center, World Premiere). **BROADWAY:** *Time to Kill, Wit*. **OFF BROADWAY:** *Another Shot*. **NEW YORK:** *Ruined* (Manhattan Theatre Club); *RunBoyRun* (New York Theatre Workshop); *Lost in the Stars* (New York City Center's Encores). **REGIONAL:** *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *King Lear* (American Player's Theatre). Johnson is a core ensemble member of Remy Bumpo Theatre.



JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH (*Gil*)
CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE:
Othello in *Othello*,
Much Ado About
Nothing, *The*
Merchant of

Venice, *King John*, *Measure for Measure*, *Julius Caesar*. **BROADWAY:** *The Book of Mormon*, *The Minutes*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *Superior Donuts*. **CHICAGO:** *Describe The Night*, *Noises Off*, *The Crucible*, *Pain and the Itch*, *Between Riverside and Crazy*, *Carters Way*, *Clybourne Park*, *Hot L Baltimore*, *Doppelgänger* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Lottery Day* (Goodman Theatre); *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Radio Golf* (Court Theatre); *the Duchess of Malfi*, *Othello* (Writers Theatre). **FILM:** *Widows*, *Knives and Skin*. **TELEVISION:** *BOSS* (Starz); *FBI* (CBS); *Emperor of Ocean Park* (MGM+); *61st Street* (AMC); *Your Honor* (Showtime); *Fargo* (FX). Meredith is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company.



DONALD FITZDARRYL
(*Understudy*)
CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE:
Debut. **CHICAGO:**
Carter in Warm
on the Coolin'
Board (Ma'at

Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theatre); *Twilight: Gods* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); Bayard Rustin in *Eye of the Storm* (ETA Creative Arts); Marvin Gaye Sr. in *The Marvin Gaye Story* (Black Ensemble Theater, Black Theater Alliance Award for Best Leading Actor in a Musical Winner). **TELEVISION:** *61st Street* (AMC). **EDUCATION:** Chicago Actors Studio.



STETSON PIERRE
(*Understudy*)
CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE:
Debut. **CHICAGO:**
Splash Hatch
on the E Going
Down (Definition

Theater) **REGIONAL:** *Black Girl Magic*, *Robin B. Goode* (Chelsea Theater); *Freedom Calls*, *Just Past the Beyond*, *Concrete Dreams* (TC Squared Theater). **FILM:** *The Diary of Michael J. Shiner* (UMKC); *Bachelors* (Dead Clown Productions). **TELEVISION:** *The Other Wife* (PYNC Productions); *Shorty Do Wop*, *Frank and Freddy* (Late Bloomers Media). **EDUCATION:** Company One Theater, TC Squared, Anthony Meindl's Acting Workshop.

RON OJ PARSON (*Director*) Ron OJ Parson is a director and actor based in Chicago, Illinois. He hails from Buffalo, New York, and is a graduate of the University of Michigan's professional theatre program. He is a Joyce Foundation Grantee Resident at Chicago's Court Theatre, a company member at Timeline Theatre Company, and a former associate artist at Writers

Theatre and Teatro Vista. He is co-founder and former Artistic Director of The Onyx Theatre Ensemble. Selected Chicago credits include at Chicago Theatre Company, Victory Gardens Theater, American Blues Theater, American Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago Dramatists, Court, Black Ensemble Theatre, Congo Square Theatre Company, Northlight Theatre, Urban Theatre Company, City Lit Theatre Theater, ETA Creative Arts, and Writers Theatre. Selected Regional credits include at Studio Arena Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Milwaukee Repertory, Ensemble theatre of Cincinnati, American Players Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Pasadena Playhouse, Geva Theatre, Virginia Stage Company, Roundabout Theatre, Wilshire Theatre, Studio Theatre, Center Stage Baltimore, St. Louis Black Repertory, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Signature Theatre (New York), Kansas City Rep, Portland Stage Company, Paul Robeson Theatre (Buffalo) Ujima Theatre Company, and Indiana Repertory Theatre. In Canada, he directed the world premiere of *Palmer Park* by Joanna McClelland Glass, a World Premiere at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. He is a member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and SDC. www.ronjparson.net

LOLITA CHAKRABARTI (*Playwright*)

Lolita Chakrabarti OBE, an award-winning playwright and actress, trained at RADA and has been working on stage and screen for thirty-five years. As a writer, her first play *Red Velvet* earned her the Evening Standard Charles Wintour Award for Most Promising Playwright 2012; The Critics' Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright 2013; AWA for Arts and Culture 2013 and an Olivier Award nomination 2012. Chakrabarti's adaptation of *Life of Pi*, her second play, based on

Yann Martel's Booker-prize winning novel, premiered at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield in 2019. Following critical acclaim, the production transferred to London's West End in November 2021. Chakrabarti won the Olivier Award for Best New Play, a WhatsOnStage Award, UK Theatre Award, and CAMEO Award amongst others. *Life of Pi* opened at ART in Boston 2022 and Broadway 2023. To date, it has travelled across the US, the UK, Canada, Middle East and Asia. The production has garnered countless awards including 5 Olivier Awards, 4 UK Theatre Awards and 3 Tony Awards. Other writing credits include: *Calmer* (BBC Radio 3); *Hymn* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Almeida Theatre, Sky Arts); an adaptation of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (MIF and Brisbane Festival); *Stones of Venice* (New Vision Arts Festival in Hong Kong); curator of *The Greatest Wealth* (The Old Vic) and dramaturg on *Message in a Bottle* (ZooNation, Sadler's Wells) and *Sylvia* (ZooNation, Old Vic). Acting credits include: *Summer 1954* (Theatre Royal Bath and UK tour); *The Hunt* (St Ann's Warehouse, NY); *Fanny and Alexander* (The Old Vic); *Hamlet*, playing Gertrude opposite Tom Hiddleston, directed by Sir Kenneth Branagh (RADA); *Silo* (Apple TV+); *Vigil*; *Showtrial*; *The Casual Vacancy*; *Wheel of Time* (Amazon Prime); *My Mad Fat Diary* (E4); *Beowulf*; *Return to the Shieldlands* (ITV); *Riviera* (Sky) and *Criminal* (Netflix);

RASEAN DAVONTÉ JOHNSON (*Scenic & Projection Designer*)

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*, *It Came From Outer Space*. **CHICAGO:** *The Book of Grace*, *The Brothers Size*, *The Great Leap*, *Ms. Blakk for President*, *La Ruta*, *The Burn*, *You Got Older*, *BLKS* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Betrayal*, *Lucha Teotl*, *Fannie* (Goodman Theatre); *Frankenstein*, *Lula Del Ray*, *Fjords* (Manual Cinema); *Her Honor Jane Byrne* (Lookingglass Theatre).

OFF BROADWAY: The Public Theatre, The Sheen Center. **REGIONAL:** Yale

Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Geva Theatre Center, McCarter Theatre Center, Berkeley Rep, Alliance Theatre, Seattle Rep. **INTERNATIONAL:** *Farewell My Concubine* (Ningbo Song and Dance Theatre); *Damage Joy* (BFloor Theatre). **OPERA:** *The Central Park Five* (Portland Opera); *Freedom Ride* (Chicago Opera Theatre); *Die Kathrin* (Chicago Folks Operetta); *Blue* (Toledo Opera); *La Cenerentola* (Yale Opera); *Cunning Little Vixen* (Opera Theatre at Yale College). **CONCERT:** *The March to Liberation* (NY Phil). **EDUCATION:** MFA in stage design, Yale University School of Drama. **AWARDS:** Joseph Jefferson Award, Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award, Robert L. Tobin Director-Designer Showcase. Johnson is the director of design for TAPS at the University of Chicago.

YVONNE MIRANDA (*Costume Designer*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** Debut. **CHICAGO:** *Sweat, Hand to God, Next to Normal, Little Shop of Horrors* (Paramount Theatre); *Somewhere Over the Border* (Teatro Vista); *The Hot Wing King* (Writer's Theatre); *Flood* (Shattered Globe Theatre); *Primary Trust* (Goodman Theatre); *Leroy and Lucy* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company). **OFF BROADWAY:** *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Red Bull Theatre, Fiasco Theatre). **REGIONAL:** *Once on this Island* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Fat Ham* (Cleveland Playhouse); *The Stranger* (Peninsula Players Theatre); Nina Simone: *Four Women* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre); *The Royale* (American Players Theatre); *Into the Woods, The Odyssey-Public Works Dallas, Our Town* (Dallas Theatre Center); *Seven Guitars* (Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park). A United States Marine Corps war veteran and a nominee of the 2022 Helen Hayes Award for Best Costume Design for her work on Woolly Mammoth Theatre and Baltimore Center Stage's co-

production of *Ain't No Mo* and has been named *American Theatre's Role Call People to Watch*. www.yvonnemirandadesigns.com

JASON LYNCH (*Lighting Designer*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** *Beauty and the Beast, I, Cinna, I, Banquo*. **CHICAGO:** *Ashland Avenue* (upcoming), *Fat Ham, Inherit the Wind, Lucha Teotl, The Nacirema Society Requests the Honor of Your Presence at a Celebration of Their First One Hundred Years, English, Layalina, the ripple, the wave that carried me home, Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer, School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play, I Hate It Here, Ohio State Murders, The Sound Inside, Lottery Day* (Goodman Theatre); *The Book of Grace, 1919, Choir Boy* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company). **OFF BROADWAY:** *You Are Here: An Evening with Solea Pfeiffer* (Audible Theatre, Minetta Lane Theatre). **REGIONAL:** Alley Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, City Theatre Company, Dallas Theater Center, Denver Center Theatre Company, George Street Playhouse, Geva Theatre Center, Goodspeed Musicals, Great Lakes Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Kansas City Repertory Theatre Long Wharf Theatre, McCarter Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Trinity Repertory Company. **OPERA:** Chicago Opera Theater, The Dallas Opera, Portland Opera, The Santa Fe Opera. **FILM:** *The Half-Life of Marie Curie, School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Theatre Squared). **AWARDS:** 1 Joseph Jefferson, 2 Black Theater Alliance/Ira Aldridge, Michael Maggio Emerging Designer, Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design (International Black Theatre Festival). www.jasondlynch.com @jasonlynch.design

WILLOW JAMES (*Sound Designer & Composer*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** *Twelfth Night*, Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks *The Hero Within*. **CHICAGO:** *Fat Ham* (Goodman Theatre, Definition Theatre); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Court Theatre); *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* (Northlight Theatre); *The Hot Wing King* (Writers Theatre); *Chlorine Sky* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company). **REGIONAL:** American Players Theatre, Phoenix Theatre Indianapolis, Alleyway Theatre. **EDUCATION:** BA in theatre, Connecticut College. **AWARDS:** Joseph Jefferson nomination for Sound Design, 2022 and 2023; Black Theater Alliance Award for Best Sound Design.

BOB MASON (*Artistic Associate/Casting Director*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** 150 plus productions over 24 years, including 35 plays in Shakespeare's canon under current Artistic Director Edward Hall and Founding Artistic Director Barbara Gaines. Also at CST: nine productions of Stephen Sondheim musicals under the direction of Gary Griffin. **CHICAGO:** *Bounce*, *Light in the Piazza* (Goodman Theatre); **REGIONAL:** *SIX* (CST, American Repertory Theater-Artios Award, Ordway Center, The Citadel); *Ride the Cyclone* (CST, Fifth Avenue Theatre/A Contemporary Theater, Alliance Theatre); **OFF-BROADWAY:** *Ride the Cyclone* (MCC); *Rose Rage: Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 and 3*, directed by Artistic Director Edward Hall (The Duke on 42nd Street); *Marionette Macbeth* (New Victory); **BROADWAY:** *SIX*, *The Notebook*; **INTERNATIONAL:** *The Lord of the Rings: A Musical Tale* (Auckland, NZ); *Pacific Overtures* (Donmar Warehouse-Olivier Award, Outstanding Musical); *Henry IV, Parts One and Two* (RSC). Prior to casting, Mason enjoyed a career as a Joseph Jefferson Award-winning actor and singer and has been a visiting educator at Northwestern University and multiple college programs across the country.

DEYA S. FRIEDMAN (*Production Stage Manager*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King John*, *Cymbeline*. **CHICAGO:** *WipeOut*, *Spay* (Rivendell Theatre); *Pump Boys and Dinettes* (Porchlight Music Theatre); *Day of Absence* (Congo Square Theatre); *Miracle the Musical*, *Bombitty of Errors*, *Forever Plaid* (Royal George); *Murder for Two* (Marriott Theatre); *Unspeakable* (Broadway in Chicago); *Cloud Tectonics*, *Wings*, *Spic-O-Rama* (Goodman Theatre); *The Glass Menagerie*, *Fences*, *Man of La Mancha* (Court Theatre); *The Immigrant*, *The Good War*, *Cookin' at the Cookery*, *At Wit's End*, *2 Pianos*, *4 Hands* (Northlight Theatre); *Broken Eggs* (Teatro Vista). **REGIONAL:** *The Tin Woman*, *Saloon*, *Opus*, *Making God Laugh*, *Heroes*, *Unnecessary Farce*, *Cabaret* (Peninsula Players); *The Whipping Man*, *Moonlight and Magnolias*, *Black Pearl Sings!*, *Copenhagen* (Clarence Brown Theatre).

KATRINA HERRMANN (*Assistant Stage Manager*) **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE:** *Shakes in the City: Twelfth Night*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*. **CHICAGO:** *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *Seussical*, *Rock of Ages* (Drury Lane Theatre); *Mary Page Marlowe* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *The Hundred Dresses*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (Chicago Children's Theatre); *Kill Floor*, *The Royale*, *Sons of the Prophet* (American Theater Company); *Juno* (TimeLine Theatre Company). **REGIONAL:** *The King's Speech* (National Tour); *Diana the Musical*, *Queens*, *The Cake*, *At the Old Place* (La Jolla Playhouse); *The Garden*, *Twisted Melodies* (Baltimore Center Stage). **OFF BROADWAY:** *The Flick*, *Kin*, *The Whale*, *The Big Meal*, *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*, *The Burnt Part Boys*, *Circle Mirror Transformation* (Playwrights Horizons); *Close Up Space* (Manhattan Theatre Club); *In the Wake* (Public Theater).

EDUCATION: BFA in stage management, DePaul University; MBA, Adams State University.

EDWARD HALL (*Artistic Director, Carl and Marilyn Thoma Chair*) Acclaimed director Edward Hall joined CST in October 2023, directing *Richard III* starring Tony nominee and Paralympian Katy Sullivan. In the 2024/25 season, he is directing *Henry V*, *Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Sunny Afternoon*. He previously directed the *Rose Rage trilogy* (2003) which transferred to New York. He was the founding Artistic Director of the multi-award-winning Propeller Shakespeare, touring globally for over twenty years. 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 100+ world premieres. He has served as an Associate Director at the National Theatre and Old Vic. His extensive film and television credits include *The Heist Before Christmas*, *Blithe Spirit* starring Dame Judi Dench, multiple HBO and BBC series, and the *Downton Abbey* season 4 finale. He is a member of The Arts Club of Chicago and the Economic Club of Chicago.

KIMBERLY MOTES (*Executive Director*) Esteemed arts leader Kimberly Motes joined CST in October 2023, bringing 25+ years of senior leadership experience within the performing arts and higher education. Motes served as Managing Director of the Tony-winning Children's Theatre Company (CTC). During her seven-year tenure, CTC produced 46 plays/musicals including 15 commissioned works and six co-productions/transfers. Previous roles include Senior Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the University of St. Thomas, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the College of Saint Benedict, Managing Director at Theater Latté Da, and Executive

Director at the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts. She spent 13 years in Washington, D.C., where she was 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. Her career began at The Washington Ballet. She is a member of the Economic Club of Chicago, The Chicago Network, and the Chicago Club.

Chicago Shakespeare productions are made possible in part by the Illinois Arts Council Agency and a CityArts Grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

Chicago Shakespeare is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group, Inc., the national service organization of non-profit theaters; Shakespeare Theatre Association; Arts Alliance Illinois; the League of Chicago Theatres; and Ingenuity, Inc.



Actors' Equity Association (AEA), founded in 1913, represents more than 45,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. www.actorsequity.org



The Director of this production is a member of the **STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY**, a national theatrical labor union.

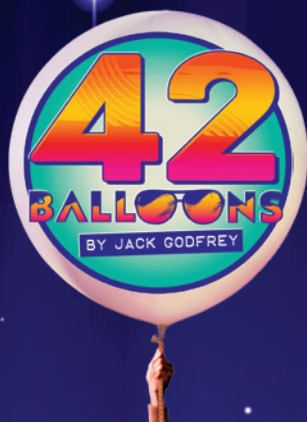


The set, costume, lighting, sound, and projections designers of this production is represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of IATSE.

CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE
THEATER

SPRING GALA

Friday, June 6



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UPCOMING ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCES

Hymn

OC May 14, 1:00 & 7:30

6g May 16, 7:30

AD May 18, 2:30

42 Balloons

6g June 20, 7:00

AD June 22, 2:00

OC June 25, 1:00 & 7:00

6g ASL interpretation **AD** Audio description **OC** Open captioning



James Vincent Meredith, Chiké Johnson. Photo by Jeff Sciorino

Sympathetic Resonance

Playwright Lolita Chakrabarti in conversation
with *Hymn* dramaturg Kamesha Khan

KAMESHA KHAN: What inspired you to write this play?

LOLITA CHAKRABARTI: I really wanted to see two Black leading men playing opposite one another, and to see what sparks would fly. I also wanted to explore the often-unseen nuance of a relationship between straight men—the insecurity, fussiness, vanity, fun, and affection that I’ve seen between my male friends. I hadn’t seen that on stage before, a play of equals.

KK: Given that the story centers on two men, Benny and Gil, the title invites consideration of its homophone: him. What is the relationship between these two words, and how do you see their meanings playing out?

LC: The title conjures up music and men. I knew it was a play for two male actors and that music was going to be part of it. I love how music can transport you back in time. Music and memory are very linked. I learned about sympathetic resonance,

which is when a tuning fork vibrates because it feels the vibration of another tuning fork without ever touching it, they share a harmonic likeness. I thought wow, what a beautiful idea. You have these two characters who can tune into each other and sing each other’s tune. Music and men.

KK: Can you tell us about your process of relocating this play to Chicago?

LC: I always thought the play would work beautifully in America. British and American people of color have a similar standing in society I think, but our history and navigation of life is very different. In Britain, most of us are second-generation with immigrant parents whereas in America your history goes back further, is deeper, and more brutal. These two versions of migration and subsequent integration make for really different stories. So, in transposing the play to Chicago, it has changed.

When I approached Artistic Director Edward Hall and suggested relocating the play to Chicago, he brought me over to the city to do some invaluable and intensive research. I met the Music Director at Trinity United Church of Christ, and went to a Sunday service. It was extraordinary! What really struck me was the social justice aspect, which is very different from the services I attended as a kid. That really changed my feelings for the character of Gil. I also went to the DuSable Museum and Grant Park, did a walking tour of Hyde Park and Kenwood, enjoyed dinner in Bronzeville, and experienced my first chicken and waffles!

In the play, there is a statue that has been torn down because of conflicting public opinion and colonial history. This was based on the statue of Edward Colston, a wealthy Victorian merchant and slave trader. When people in Bristol found out about Colston's background, they tore down his statue. The outrage was surprising because people were demanding its return. So, I needed an equivalent in Chicago. I quickly got the same answer from everyone: the Christopher Columbus statues. I went to Grant Park and saw the empty pedestal. There was nothing there, that's a whole story in itself. The communities demanding its return are different, but the arguments are similar. It was fascinating to get a flavor of the richness of Chicago's culture.

KK: There are several offstage female characters that we never see whose backstories reveal a lot about Gil and Benny. Why did you decide to keep them invisible, and how does their absence enhance the storytelling?

LC: It was important to me that I made this world real and far-reaching.

The world doesn't work without women, we are the mothers, sisters, wives, colleagues, and workers of the world. The women's contribution is vitally important to the story. In some ways, they feel more powerful for not being seen because we see them through the eyes of the men. They feel imposing and strong. I like that.

KK: You've described *Hymn* as an exploration of men falling in love in a way that is neither physical nor romantic. Why was it important for you to tell a story about this kind of male intimacy?

LC: When the play was on in London, I had so many men—friends, acquaintances, and even strangers—contact me to say thank you, they felt the story reflected them. I didn't realize that it was hitting something that really isn't dealt with because we are often looking at men as the authoritarians, the leaders of the story. Many are not. I have noticed a lot of my male friends are aware of how they might be judged so they contain their frustrations in public. With this play, I wanted to see two Black middle-aged men just be honest and be themselves.

KK: Why present *Hymn* now, in 2025?

LC: There is so much divisive separation, judgment, and prejudice now, even within groups that used to be united. I hope this story of two opposing individuals who meet each other, and find a deep common bond, reminds us of the importance of connection. It is a simple tale of cooperation and care, a universal story of finding commonality and love. I want the audience to travel emotionally, to really engage with these men, and understand their lives. And perhaps see a little of themselves too. ■

“Sympathetic resonance is when a tuning fork vibrates because it feels the vibration of another tuning fork without ever touching it.”

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Bard Circle members chat with Royal Shakespeare Company actor Zach Wyatt. Photo by Ty.Optix Photography

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