

# CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Billie Jean King and Ilana Kloss attend performance of  
Chicago Shakespeare Theater's world premiere

## *Billie Jean*

Based on the life of sports icon and equality champion Billie Jean King  
by Lauren Gunderson and directed by Marc Bruni  
Starring Chilina Kennedy in the title role

Through August 10 in The Yard



Chicago—August 6, 2025—Billie Jean King and her wife Ilana Kloss attended the August 5 performance of [Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#)'s world-premiere play *Billie Jean*. The production runs July 18–August 10, 2025, in The Yard at Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

Sports icon. Champion for equality. Billie Jean King is a relentless competitor with her eyes on the prize, even as she faces discrimination and defeat on a playing field that is anything but equal. From Wimbledon Centre Court to the court of public opinion, personal and professional battles pave the way for Billie Jean to summon the courage to boldly proclaim this is who I am, this is who I love—and this is what I'm not willing to lose. One woman rallies the collective forces for change in an exhilarating, fast-paced journey of sacrifice, resilience, and self-discovery. This thrilling world premiere play from award-winning playwright **Lauren Gunderson** is the theatrical event of the summer. Love is just the beginning... game, set, match!

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's world premiere production of *Billie Jean* is developed by special arrangement with four-time Tony-winning producer **Harriet Newman Leve** (*Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, *War Horse*, *Stomp*) and **Stephanie Sandberg** (Country Lane Productions), with **Lily Tomlin** and **Jane Wagner** (powerhouse creative duo in television, sound recording, film, theater, and animation for more than 40 years).

Chilina Kennedy stars as Billie Jean King, leading a cast that also features Julia Antonelli, Dan Amboyer, Elena Hurst, Courtney Rikki Green, Wynn Harmon, Carolyn Holding, Jürgen Hooper, Callie Rachelle Johnson, Lenne Klingaman, Nancy Lemenager, and Murphy Taylor Smith. Understudies include Miles Borchard, Sydney Feldman, Kelli Harrington, Nathe Rowbotham, Hannah Ruwe, Marlene Slaughter, and Jocelyn Zamudio.

Playwright **Lauren Gunderson** has been one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015, topping the list thrice. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the winner of the William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theatre Award, the Lanford Wilson Award, and a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn

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Prize. Her plays have been translated into a dozen languages and are produced across the world including the West End. Her anthology, *Revolutionary Women*, is published by Bloomsbury, where her play *I and You* is a “modern classic.”

Director **Marc Bruni**’s credits include *The Great Gatsby*, currently running on Broadway and the West End as well as the Tony, Grammy, and Olivier Award-winning *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* on Broadway, in the West End, US and UK Tours, and in Australia. He also directed *Trevor: The Musical* which was filmed Off-Broadway at Stage 42 and now streams on Disney+. Bruni was Jeff Award-nominated for Chicago credits *Trevor* at Writers Theatre and *Old Jews Telling Jokes* at the Royal George, and his many additional credits include *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Music Man*, *How to Succeed in Business...*, *50 Years of Broadway* (Kennedy Center), and *Hey, Look Me Over!*, *Paint Your Wagon*, *Pipe Dream* and *Fanny* (City Center Encores!).

*Billie Jean* features movement direction by **Steph Paul** (*Sanctuary City* at Steppenwolf Theatre, *Nobody Loves You* at American Conservatory Theater), scenic design by **Wilson Chin** (*Cost of Living* and *Pass Over* on Broadway), costume design by **Linda Cho** (*Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Othello*, and *Mary Stewart* at CST, Tony Award winner for *The Great Gatsby* and *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* on Broadway), lighting design by **Jen Schriever** (Tony Award nominee for *A Strange Loop* and *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway), sound design by **Jane Shaw** (credits at Theater for a New Audience, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons and many more), and video and projection design by **David Bengali** (Tony Award nominee for *Water for Elephants*). The creative team also includes **Chels Morgan** (Intimacy Coordinator), **Eva Breneman** (Dialect Coach), **Tom Watson** (Hair & Makeup Designer), **The Telsey Office | Karyn Casl CSA & Charlie Hano CSA** (Casting), **Bob Mason** (Chicago Casting), **Amy Marie Seidel** (Associate Director), **Lily Tomasic** (Assistant Scenic Designer), **Herin Kaputkin** (Assistant Costume Designer), **Colleen Doherty** (Assistant Lighting Designer), **Taylor Edelle Stuart** (Associate Video Designer), **Kristi J. Martens** (Production Stage Manager), **Amanda Blanco** (Assistant Stage Manager), and **Ethan Coon** (Production Assistant).

More information at [chicagoshakes.com/billiejean](http://chicagoshakes.com/billiejean) or on social media at [@chicagoshakes](https://www.instagram.com/chicagoshakes).

### **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER (CST)**

CST is a leading international theater company and the nation’s largest year-round theater dedicated to the works of Shakespeare. Under the visionary leadership of Artistic Director Edward Hall and Executive Director Kimberly Motes, the Regional Tony Award recipient is committed to creating vivid, entertaining theatrical experiences that invigorate and engage people of all ages and identities by illuminating the complexity, ambiguity, and wonder of our world. Each year, nearly a quarter of a million people experience CST’s artistry through more than 12 productions. With Shakespeare at the heart of the artistic work, CST also produces compelling, contemporary stories from fresh voices of today. CST brings the world to Chicago and sends Chicago out into the world as Chicago’s foremost presenter of international theater, and consistent producer of North American and world premieres. Serving more students and teachers than any theater in the city, CST annually welcomes more than 20,000 students to performances and programs like Chicago Shakespeare SLAM, alongside professional development opportunities for teachers. CST activates its campus with three venues: 700-seat The Yard; the 500-seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater; and the 200-seat Carl and Marilyn Thoma Upstairs Studio. Free programs like Shakes in the City bring performances to parks and community spaces across Chicago’s 77 neighborhoods. Shared humanity and unforgettable stories—now THIS is Chicago Shakespeare. [chicagoshakes.com](http://chicagoshakes.com).

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