

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

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Media Office | 312.667.4957

Hannah Kennedy

Director of Communications
hkennedy@chicagoshakes.com

Emma Perrin

Associate Director of Communications
eperrin@chicagoshakes.com

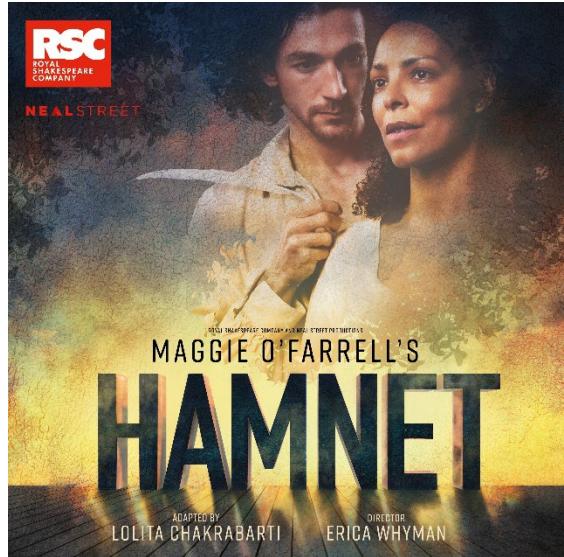
Casting announced for the US Stage Premiere
of the Royal Shakespeare Company's

Hamnet

Based on the bestselling novel by Maggie O'Farrell

Adapted by award-winning playwright Lolita Chakrabarti and directed by Erica Whyman

February 10-March 8, 2026 in The Yard



Chicago—January 13, 2026—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#) (CST) announces casting for the US tour of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#)'s *Hamnet*, based on the best-selling novel by **Maggie O'Farrell**, adapted by award-winning playwright **Lolita Chakrabarti** (*Life of Pi*, *Red Velvet*, *Hymn*), and directed by **Erica Whyman**. A co-production with the RSC and **Neal Street Productions**, *Hamnet* pulls back a curtain on the story of the greatest writer in the English language and the woman who was the constant presence and purpose of his life. *Hamnet* is a love letter to passion, birth, grief, and the magic of nature. The US premiere features **Kemi-Bo Jacobs** as Agnes and **Rory Alexander** as William and begins its US premiere at Chicago Shakespeare Theater in **The Yard**, February 10-March 8, 2026. The production will then transfer to **Shakespeare Theatre Company** in Washington, DC, from March 17 to April 12, 2026, and **American Conservatory Theater** in San Francisco from April 22 to May 24, 2026.

Warwickshire, 1582. Agnes Hathaway, a natural healer, meets the Latin tutor, William Shakespeare. Drawn together by powerful but hidden impulses, they create a life together and make a family. When the plague steals 11-year-old Hamnet from his loving parents, they must each confront their loss alone. And yet, out of the greatest suffering, something of extraordinary wonder is born.

The original production of *Hamnet* played to sold-out audiences in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2023, breaking box office records at the Swan Theatre. It later opened to the biggest box office advance in the Garrick Theatre's history when it transferred to the West End and was hailed as "pure theatre gold" by *The Mail on Sunday* and "elegant and beguiling" by the *Evening Standard*.

Kemi-Bo Jacobs plays Agnes. Jacobs' recent stage credits include *Coriolanus* (National Theatre), *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chichester), *Ocean at the End of the Lane* (West End and National Theatre Tour), *All My Sons* (Manchester Royal Exchange and UK Tour), *Wild East* (Young Vic), *The Winter's Tale* (RSC) and *The Sweet Science of Bruising* (Southwark Playhouse). Her screen credits include *Million Days*, *The Letter for The King* (Netflix), *The Great* (Hulu), *McMafia*, *Thirteen*, *Delicious*, *London Has Fallen*, *The Honorable Woman*, *Lewis* and *Doctor Who*. **Rory Alexander** plays William. Alexander can currently be seen starring as a young Murtagh Fitzgibbons Fraser in the *Outlander* prequel *Blood of My Blood* for Starz, and was longlisted for a BIFA for Best Breakthrough Performance for his leading role in *Inland* opposite Mark Rylance and Kathryn Hunter. He has recently completed filming on Justin Chadwick's latest feature *Untamed* with Emily Barber and Matthew Steer. Alexander can also be seen playing the role of Boogie in Danny Boyle's *Pistol* alongside Louis Partridge, Thomas Brodie-Sangster and Maisie Williams for FX/Hulu (US) and Disney+(UK). Other notable film and television credits include Element Film's *Dark Windows*, *Dark Game* with Ed Westwick, Kenny Swinney in Sky's *Then You Run* with Leah McNamara, Eric in Amazon's *Alex Rider S2* with Vicky McClure, and Netflix's *Anxious People*.

The cast also includes **Troy Alexander** (Bartholomew), **Nigel Barrett** (John/Will Kempe), **Haydn Burke** (Ensemble), **Ajani Cabey** (Hamnet), **Saffron Dey** (Judith), **Victoria Elliott** (Joan), **Heather Forster** (Eliza), **Thalia Gambe** (Ensemble) **Karl Haynes** (Ned), **Ava Hinds Jones** (Susanna), **Nicki Hobday** (Jude), **Penny Layden** (Mary), **Matilda McCarthy** (Tilly/Catherina), and **Bert Seymour** (Burbage/Father John).

[continued]

"We're delighted to welcome the Royal Shakespeare Company back to Chicago for this moving and illuminating production of *Hamnet*," shared CST Artistic Director **Edward Hall**. "The play gives a fascinating window into Shakespeare's life from a new perspective that imagines in such vivid detail what his family might have been like—a valuable new contribution to understanding the family and the writer behind the plays we know and love. And it's wonderful to be welcoming playwright Lolita Chakrabarti back to CST, whose writing so sensitively brings to life the characters in Maggie O'Farrell's beautiful novel."

RSC Co-Artistic Directors **Daniel Evans** and **Tamara Harvey** shared, "We are delighted to share casting for the first US tour of *Hamnet*. It's wonderful to be coming back in 2026 with Lolita Chakrabarti's beautiful adaptation of Maggie O'Farrell's best-selling novel, which offers a compelling new perspective on Shakespeare through the eyes of Agnes Hathaway and their children. We can't wait to share this intimate and moving story with US audiences."

Playwright **Lolita Chakrabarti** added, "*Hamnet* brings to life the Shakespeare family—William, his sister and their parents, Agnes, his wife, and their three children. You will see why William went to London and discovered the theater, how his family lived without him and how the profound loss of a child gave us one of the most important plays in the western world. *Hamnet* is a heartwarming and heartbreakingly exploration of family, loss, and the stories we tell ourselves in order to survive."

Director **Erica Whyman** said, "I am delighted to be revisiting this extraordinary story for US audiences, and to be making this production with a stellar line-up of performers. Kemi-Bo Jacobs and Rory Alexander are bringing Agnes and William alive on the stage with a luminous intelligence and a profound and shocking understanding of the love and loss that shaped their lives. They are joined by a wonderful company bringing a wealth of experience and spirited invention to Lolita's searing adaptation. The play explores Agnes's remarkable spiritual gifts and her relationship with both the natural world and the future with an imaginative theatricality, and audiences should expect beautiful music, movement and sound design on Tom Piper's stunning set. This is, at its heart, an intimate story of family which finds eternal expression on the stage—to see it in the theatre is to bear witness to the astonishing resilience of the human spirit."

Hamnet has sold over 1.5 million copies worldwide and was named both Waterstones Book of the Year and winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in 2020. The novel also saw Maggie O'Farrell named the winner of the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction; the UK's most prestigious annual book award celebrating and honouring fiction written by women. As the No. 1 Sunday Times Bestseller in 2021, *Hamnet* was shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction (2021) and British Book awards 'Fiction Book of the Year' (2021).

The production features set and costume design by **Tom Piper**, lighting design by **Prema Mehta**, sound design by **Simon Baker**, music by **Oğuz Kaplangı**, casting by **Amy Ball CDG**, and movement by **Ayşe Tashkiran**.

Tickets (starting at \$58) are on sale now.

More information at www.chicagoshakes.com/hamnet or on social media at @chicagoshakes.

Royal Shakespeare Company and Neal Street Productions
Maggie O'Farrell's

Hamnet

Adapted by Lolita Chakrabarti

Directed by Erica Whyman

February 10-March 8, 2026

The Yard

PERFORMANCE LISTING

- Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. (no matinee February 11)
- Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.
- Fridays at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturdays at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (no matinee April 18)
- Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Chicago Shakespeare strives to make its facility and performances accessible to all patrons. Accessible seating, assistive listening devices, large-print and Braille programs, and sensory tools are available at every performance. Enhanced performances include:

- **Audio-described performance – Sunday, February 22 at 2:00 p.m.**
A program that provides spoken narration of a play's key visual elements for patrons who are blind or have low vision.
- **Open captioned performance – Wednesday, February 25 at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.**
A text display of the words and sounds heard during a play, synced live with the action onstage.
- **ASL interpreted performance – Friday, February 27 at 7:00 p.m.**
All dialogue and lyrics are translated into American Sign Language by two certified interpreters

CREATIVE TEAM

Lolita Chakrabarti - Playwright
Erica Whyman - Director
Tom Piper - Set and Costume Design
Prema Mehta - Lighting Design
Simon Baker - Sound Design
Oğuz Kaplangi - Music
Amy Ball, CDG - Casting
Ayşe Tashkiran - Movement

CAST

Rory Alexander - Will
Troy Alexander - Bartholomew
Nigel Barrett - John/Will Kempe
Haydn Burke - Ensemble
Ajani Cabey - Hamnet
Saffron Dey - Judith
Victoria Elliott - Joan
Heather Forster - Eliza
Thalia Gambe - Ensemble
Karl Haynes - Ned
Ava Hinds Jones - Susanna
Nicki Hobday - Jude
Kemi-Bo Jacobs - Agnes
Penny Layden - Mary
Matilda McCarthy - Tilly/Catherina
Bert Seymour - Burbage/Father John

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 Marilynn 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. www.chicagoshakes.com

THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY (RSC)

The RSC is a leading global theatre company that sparks local, national and international conversations that build connections, create opportunities and bring joy. We passionately believe that great storytelling can change the world, and that theatre offers its own unique form of storytelling: it's live and shared, and transforms a group of strangers into audiences who, together, experience a story come to life in front of their eyes. We collaborate with the most exciting artists to tell the stories of our time, and through a range of programmes we nurture the talent of the future. We perform on three stages in our home in Stratford-upon-Avon, in London and in communities and schools across the country and around the world. Our transformative Creative Learning and Engagement programmes reach over half a million young people each year.

www.rsc.org.uk

NEAL STREET PRODUCTIONS

Neal Street is one of the UK's most respected production companies, producing film, television and theatre. Founded 2003 by Sam Mendes, Pippa Harris and Caro Newling, it makes distinctive, popular award-winning projects on both sides of the Atlantic. TV includes *Call the Midwife*, *The Franchise*, *Britannia*, *Penny Dreadful*, *The Hollow Crown*. Films include Mendes' *Empire of Light*, *1917* and *Revolutionary Road*; *Hamnet* and *The Magic Faraway Tree*. Currently in development *The Beatles* project for Sony Pictures - four distinct theatrical feature films about the greatest band in history, conceived and directed by Sam Mendes. Theatre originated by Neal Street includes *The Lehman Trilogy*, *The Motive and the Cue*, *The Hills of California*, *Hamnet*, *Local Hero*, *The Ferryman*, *Shrek the Musical*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Bridge Project 2010 - 2012*, *Three Days of Rain*, *The Vertical Hour*. West End transfers include *The Fifth Step*, *Walking with Ghosts*, *The Moderate Soprano*, *This House*, *The Painkiller*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *South Downs/The Browning Version*, *Red*, *Enron*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Mary Stuart*. The theatre slate is overseen by Newling together with producer, Georgia Gatti. In 2015 Neal Street moved under the umbrella of parent company, All3Media, which is owned by RedBird IMI.

www.nealstreetproductions.com