

Chicago Shakespeare Theater welcomed 600 students
for a free performance by

Sir Ian McKellen

One Knight Only

Onstage with Gandalf, Shakespeare, and YOU!

The legendary actor shared his illustrious career and reprised some of his most famous performances, taking questions and interacting with an audience of young people from Chicago and beyond



Chicago—January 30, 2026—Last night, **Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST)** welcomed 600 students, young people, and teachers from the Chicago area to a free performance of *One Knight Only! Sir Ian McKellen Onstage with Gandalf, Shakespeare, and YOU!* The esteemed actor took the stage in *The Yard* to share his illustrious 60-year career and reprise some of his most iconic roles from Shakespeare and beyond. He also took questions from the audience, and invited participants to share the stage with him at times throughout the evening.

Students and teachers from 22 high schools and three universities across the Chicago area, along with young people from A.B.L.E. (Artists Breaking Limits and Expectations), Steppenwolf Theatre's Young Adult Council, and Goodman Theatre's Youth Art Council, were in attendance.

With two performances of *Short Shakespeare! Hamlet* running concurrently in the Courtyard Theater alongside the *One Knight Only!* student performance, CST welcomed nearly 1,700 students in a single day to experience Shakespeare live onstage.

The event, which McKellen generously gifted to CST, recognizes the Theater's commitment to Shakespeare and young people. CST serves more students and teachers than any theater in Chicago, annually providing more than 20,000 students with deeply subsidized tickets to performances and free learning programs. CST is a leader in introducing the next generation to Shakespeare's work, with 83% of student participants reporting that they are experiencing Shakespeare for the first time. CST believes that theater is for everyone and can transform lives, with programs that support the development of young people's crucial skills, including social-emotional competencies,

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critical literacy, and meaningful collaboration in classrooms and in life. No matter where an individual is on their learning journey, CST fosters a space to explore, absorb, create, and build community through lifelong learning programs.

“I am immensely grateful to Ian for giving Chicago students such a unique opportunity to spend an evening in his company, which expresses his and our deep commitment to Shakespeare and to future audiences,” shared CST Artistic Director **Edward Hall**. “He shares our belief that it is every young person’s right to have access to Shakespeare and to the shared experience of theater.”

This performance marked McKellen’s first return to Chicago in 40 years.

This evening, McKellen will give a ticketed benefit performance, with all proceeds going to support Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s mission.

ABOUT 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.

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