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Production photos now available for
Chicago Shakespeare Theater's
Play On!

The timeless jazz tunes of quintessential American composer Duke Ellington bring to life Shakespeare's beloved comedy *Twelfth Night*

Now playing through October 18 in The Yard



Chicago—September 16, 2026—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#) (CST) opens the Theater's [40th Anniversary Season](#) this week with *Play On!* Featuring the timeless tunes of quintessential American composer **Duke Ellington**, this joyful jazz musical brings Shakespeare's beloved comedy *Twelfth Night* to joyful new life. *Play On!* was originally conceived by director **Sheldon Epps**, who returns to the three-time Tony-nominated musical with a newly updated book by **Cheryl L. West** for the first time in 20 years to stage Shakespeare's story for a new generation. Broadway veterans **Hailee Kaleem Wright**, **Krystal Joy Brown**, **Alan H Green**, **James Harkness**, and **Edred Utomi** lead a cast that also features **Uria Bennett**, **Kaylah Janssen**, **James Earl Jones II**, **Marquez Linder**, **Alanna Lovely**, **Selena Robinson**, **Dylan C. Smith**, **Joey Stone**, **Shelbi Voss**, and **Danny Dwaine Wells II**. The production runs through October 18 in The Yard.

Aspiring songwriter Vy takes the A-Train to Harlem in the swinging 1930s with big dreams of a career in showbiz, only to find that it's a man's world. She disguises herself to reach the inner circle of renowned band leader, The Duke—but plans backfire when she catches the eye of Lady Liv, the star singer of the Cotton Club, and mistaken identities make way for romance. Music is indeed the food of love with big band pizzazz and Ellington's hit songs "It Don't Mean a Thing," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "I'm Beginning to See the Light," and many more.

"Over the last couple of years, Cheryl and I took a deep dive back into the book of the show," shared Epps. "Our credo in all of this has been to enhance and heighten the celebration of Black Excellence, Black Brilliance, and Black JOY. The Excellence being the celebration of the artists who inspired these characters and the actual cast onstage; the Brilliance is that of Mr. Shakespeare and the Duke of Ellington; and the Joy is consistently the experience of the audience that we hope to achieve with each performance. In simple but very effective ways, we have and will continue to focus on the fact that the show is all about the search for LOVE, and removing the masks that we often wear that keep that hoped-for goal from entering our lives fully."

"*Play On!* couldn't be a better production with which to begin our 40th Anniversary Season," added CST Artistic Director **Edward Hall**. "It perfectly reimagines Shakespeare's story with the indelible music of Duke Ellington, two geniuses of their craft whose work transcends time to speak directly to us today. This show promises virtuosic performances and infectious joy, and we look forward to sharing it with our audiences this fall."

Joining Sheldon Epps on the creative team are Choreographer **Edgar Godineaux** (Lucille Lortel, Outer Critics Circle, and Drama Desk nominee for *The Harder They Come* at the Public Theater), Music Director **Theodis Rodgers, Jr.** (world premiere of *safronia* at Lyric Opera), Scenic Designer **Beowulf Boritt** (Tony Award winner for *New York, New York* and *Act One*), Costume Designer **An-Lin Dauber** (credits at ACT, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Seattle Rep, and many more), Lighting Designer **Adam Honoré** (Tony Award nominee for *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* and *Ragtime*), Sound Designer **Ray Nardelli** (*Lookingglass Alice* at Lookingglass Theatre Company and Off-Broadway, *Fault*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Tempest* and more at CST), and Wig, Hair and Makeup Designer **Kevin S. Foster II** (credits at Carnegie Hall, Signature Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, and many more). The production also features the work of The TRC Company - **Claire Burke, CSA** and **Kevin Metzger-Timson, CSA** (New York Casting), **Bob Mason** (Chicago Casting), **Christopher Chase Carter** (Associate Director), **Kaeli Carr** (Associate Choreographer), **Nathanael Wilkerson** (Associate Music Director), **Shartoya Jn. Baptiste** and **Alexis Distler** (Associate Scenic Designers), **Trey Brazeal** (Associate Lighting Designer), **Emily Hayman** (Associate Sound Designer), **Heather Boehm** (Musicians Contractor), **Rolando Linares** (Production Stage Manager), and **Katrina Herrmann** (Assistant Stage Manager).

[continued]

Opening is set for **7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 18.**

Special events include:

- **Black Creativity Night – Tuesday, September 22**

Join CST to celebrate the legacy of Black Excellence, Black Brilliance, and Black Joy across music, dance, and art. This lively pre-show event will feature signature cocktails, music, an artistic conversation, and space to gather in community. Special guests and speakers to be announced.

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:

- **Open captioned performances – Thursday, September 17 at 7:00 p.m. & Wednesday, October 7 at 1:00 p.m. & 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, October 9 at 7:00 p.m.**
All dialogue and lyrics are translated into American Sign Language by two certified interpreters
- **Audio-described performance – Sunday, October 11 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.

Play On! is presented by special arrangement with **MMaxwellMedia**, **Alyssa Melani**, and **Willette Klausner**. CST thanks Principal Production Sponsor **Bulley & Andrews** and Lead Production Sponsor **Ropes & Gray** for supporting this production.

PERFORMANCE LISTING

- Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (*no matinee September 16*)
- 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 September 12*)
- Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Creative Team

Sheldon Epps – Director
Edgar Godineaux – Choreographer
Theodis Rodgers, Jr. – Music Director
Beowulf Boritt – Scenic Designer
An-Lin Dauber – Costume Designer
Adam Honoré – Lighting Designer
Ray Nardelli – Sound Designer
Kevin S. Foster II – Wig, Hair and Makeup Designer
The TRC Company – New York Casting
Claire Burke, CSA
Kevin Metzger-Timson, CSA
Bob Mason – Chicago Casting
Christopher Chase Carter – Associate Director
Kaeli Carr – Associate Choreographer
Nathanael Wilkerson – Associate Music Director
Shartoya Jn.Baptiste – Associate Scenic Designer
Alexis Distler – Associate Scenic Designer
Trey Brazeal – Associate Lighting Designer
Emily Hayman – Associate Sound Designer
Chels Morgan – Intimacy Choreographer
Rolando Linares – Production Stage Manager
Katrina Herrmann – Assistant Stage Manager

Cast

Krystal Joy Brown – Lady Liv
Alan H Green – Rev
James Harkness – Jester
Kaylah Janssen – CC
James Earl Jones II – Sweets
Alanna Lovely – Miss Mary
Edred Utomi – Duke
Hailee Kaleem Wright – Vy
Uria Bennett – Ensemble
Marquez Linder – Ensemble
Selena Robinson – Ensemble
Dylan C. Smith – Ensemble
Joey Stone – Ensemble
Shelbi Voss – Ensemble
Danny Dwaine Wells II – Ensemble
Natalie Henry – Understudy
Olivia Pryor – Understudy
Maurice Rex Randle – Understudy
Maxel McCloud Schingen – Understudy

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. 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. Shared humanity and unforgettable stories—now THIS is Chicago Shakespeare. www.chicagoshakes.com