









CHICAGO
SHAKESPEARE
THEATER

IMPACT REPORT 2025/26









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Photos by Justin Barbin

A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP



We look back on this past season with tremendous gratitude for all of you who have made a lasting, positive impact on Chicago Shakespeare Theater. As a cultural organization, our work is inextricable with impact. We see that in the thousands of audience members who come through our doors and leave feeling just a bit more connected to the world and wonder around them. We witness the transformational power of live theater for young people experiencing a performance, maybe for the first time. We are proud to be part of a vibrant creative sector that is Chicago's third largest industry, generating $50 billion in annual economic impact. We hear the personal stories of artists, staff, audiences, and community members moved by the work and by the vast possibilities that creative collaboration reveals. None of this would be possible without your partnership. As we approach our 40th Anniversary season, we look forward to what our future holds —and to building that bold vision with you.

Edward Hall
Artistic Director
Carl and Marilynn Thoma Chair

Kimberly Motes
Executive Director



It was an honor to be the Chair of CST's Board of Directors, especially during a season as ambitious and expansive as this. Beyond the extraordinary artistry on the stage, Chicago Shakespeare Theater continues to lead the way with innovative producing models, dynamic education programming for students and teachers, and by being a leading voice in our City's cultural community. I am humbled by the steadfast commitment of our Board of Directors, whose dedication when combined with the exceptional leadership of Edward Hall and Kimberly Motes, is stewarding the organization into a bright new future. It is your support that truly makes every performance, every student, and every story possible. As we look ahead, your generosity ensures that Chicago Shakespeare Theater continues to inspire, educate, and bring people together through the transformative power of live theater. Thank you.

Paulita A. Pike
Chair, Board of Directors



CST Board of Directors

OUR 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.

OUR 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.



Brokeback Mountain, photo by Kyle Flubacker

SHAKESPEARE AT THE CENTER

There's nothing quite like experiencing Shakespeare's stories live on stage. Larger-than-life characters, the epic stakes of battles and betrayals, love's fiery passion, and the sharpest turn of wit expressed through some of the most beautiful poetry ever written. **As the nation's largest year-round theater dedicated to the work of the Bard, we keep Shakespeare at the center of our mission.** We are proud that our 2025/26 Season featured more performances written by or inspired by Shakespeare than any in the last decade.

At CST, you can see Shakespeare's plays fully realized with a scale and scope unlike anywhere else: large companies of actors led by best-in-class directors, hundreds of bespoke costumes and design elements, and an authentic commitment to elevating the humanity and artistry of the work onstage. We treat Shakespeare as a modern writer for our modern times—not only relevant, but revolutionary. His work challenges us to face the complexities of our human experience and inspires us to revel in the wonder of our world.



54% of performances this season
were written by or inspired by Shakespeare

25% of attendees to Shakespeare plays were new to CST

Large casts of exceptional Chicago actors bring Shakespeare to life in full scale

- The Merry Wives of Windsor: **25 actors**
- Much Ado About Nothing: **22 actors**
- Rome Sweet Rome: **15 actors**
- Short Shakespeare! Hamlet: **11 actors**





2025/26 SEASON
PRODUCTIONS WRITTEN BY OR INSPIRED BY SHAKESPEARE

Shakes in the City:
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Rome Sweet Rome
Inspired by Julius Caesar

Much Ado About Nothing

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Suzy Eddie Izzard
Talks Shakespeare N'Stuff [Forsooth]

One Knight Only! Sir Ian McKellen
Onstage with Gandalf, Shakespeare, and YOU!

Short Shakespeare! Hamlet

The Royal Shakespeare Company and Neal Street Productions'
Hamnet

REDEFINING ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE

Every performance at Chicago Shakespeare Theater is an opportunity to be wowed, to be entertained, to discover new depths of our shared human existence. In addition to work by Shakespeare, CST curates compelling stories from fresh artistic voices of today. We continue to be Chicago's foremost presenter of international theater and a prolific producer of North American and world premieres. We always ask ourselves, "Why this production, and why now?" Like Shakespeare's plays, these are unforgettable stories that need to be told. The commitment to artistic excellence on our stages has distinguished CST as a premier destination for artists to create the most exciting work—for Chicago audiences, and for future life on Broadway, national tours, and stages around the world.

THIS SEASON FEATURED:

387 performances across all 3 venues and around the city

3 World Premieres

3 North American Premieres

3 international presentations
(Ethiopian Dreams, Hamnet, Mrs. Krishnan's Party)

3 special engagements
with Sir Ian McKellen, Suzy Eddie Izzard, and Jason Alexander

293 artists employed

300+ technicians engaged

85% Chicago-based actors

20 Jeff Award Nominations

- In April 2026 for Shakespeare's birthday, all three of CST's venues were active simultaneously for the first time since 2018, and for only the second time in the Theater's history



2025/26 SEASON
COMPELLING STORIES FROM FRESH ARTISTIC VOICES OF TODAY

Circus Abyssinia's
Ethiopian Dreams

Billie Jean*

Paranormal Activity*

80 Minutes Around the World: Immigration Stories

Indian Ink Theatre's
Mrs. Krishnan's Party

Fault*

Brokeback Mountain*

As Long As You're Asking: An Evening with Jason Alexander

**World or North American premiere*

Left: *Short Shakespeare! Hamlet*, photo by Justin Barbin; Left Top Inset: *Hamnet*, photo by Kyle Flubacker; Left Bottom Inset: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, photo by Kyle Flubacker; Right: *Paranormal Activity*, photo by Kyle Flubacker; Right Inset: *Billie Jean,* photo by Justin Barbin

BRINGING THE WORLD TO CHICAGO...

Just as Shakespeare is a global phenomenon, we too have a global vision and perspective. We welcomed audiences from around the world, engaged dozens of international artists, and shared our artistry with co-producing partners nationwide and on tour around the globe.

This season, **we welcomed audiences from all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, and 45 countries.**



Royal Shakespeare Company's HAMNET
from the UK





Special events by two international superstars SUZY EDDIE IZZARD and SIR IAN MCKELLEN
from the UK



Circus Abyssinia's ETHIOPIAN DREAMS
from Ethiopia

Indian Ink Theatre's MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY
from New Zealand

...AND SENDING CHICAGO TO THE WORLD.

- ***Paranormal Activity*** went on to play across North America, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Toronto, and Boston. In Fall 2026, it became CST's 4th production to open on Broadway.
- ***SIX*** continues its hugely successful Broadway run, hitting 2,000 performances in June 2026 and becoming the longest-running show to play the Lena Horne Theatre. The musical continues its North American tour, which initially launched in 2022.
- ***The Notebook*** launched a national tour in September 2025, playing 56 cities with performance dates scheduled through May 2027.
- ***Sunny Afternoon***, directed by Edward Hall and featuring many members of the CST cast and creative team, received rave reviews in a tour of 26 cities across England.



CST continued to elevate our profile with major national coverage:

The New York Times · Chicago Tribune · AV CLUB · V MAGAZINE · VARIETY · The Late Show stephen colbert

Photos by Frederic Aranda (*Sir Ian McKellan*), Kyle Flubacker (*Hamnet*), Liz Lauren (*The Notebook*), Carol Rosegg (*Sunny Afternoon*), David Rubene (*Circus Abyssinia*), Ankita Singh (*Mrs. Krishnan's Party*), and courtesy of @paranormalbroadway (*Paranormal Activity*)

THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK IN ACTION



LIFELONG LEARNING HAPPENS HERE

Audiences deepened their engagement with Shakespeare's plays and the work on our stages through our Rowe Lifelong Learning series programming.

- **3,000+ individuals** participated in Pre•Amble talks led by scholars, post-show discussions, and workshops led by artists—including an adaptation workshop with acclaimed playwright Lolita Chakrabarti.
- In Spring 2026, CST inaugurated the first-ever **"Demystifying Shakespeare"** course led by Artistic Director Edward Hall in partnership with the Newberry Library. **232 adult learners** registered for the four-part seminar which covered the context of Shakespeare's world, the techniques that artists use to crack open the text, and a visit to the Newberry collection of artifacts.



EXPANDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS WITH SHAKES IN THE CITY

With free performances across north, west, and south sides of Chicago, Shakes in the City brought *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to new audiences in their own neighborhoods.

18 free performances

318.2 miles traveled across the city

3,600+ community members engaged, a **38% increase** from 2024

PARTNERSHIPS POWER OUR PROGRAMMING

Our work doesn't end at the doors to the Theater. Forging partnerships allows us to expand our impact and reach communities.

- Programming around *Billie Jean* and *Brokeback Mountain* engaged the LGBTQ+ community through **sold-out Pride Nights, special lobby activations, and a post-show panel discussion** as part of the national "Seven Days in June" campaign.
- Edward Hall led a training seminar with the **coaches of the Chicago Fire FC Academy**, bridging the worlds of Shakespeare and sport to unlock arts-based strategies for team building and communication.
- CST has been a part of the annual **DESTINOS: Chicago Latino Theater Festival** since the very beginning. This season, we presented Nestor "the Boss" Gomez and his deeply impactful project, *80 Minutes Around the World: Immigration Stories*.
- Our team engaged in promotional partnerships with **African and South Indian cultural organizations** around international presentations to develop new audiences and foster authentic relationships with local immigrant communities.
- We were proud to host major community organizations like**The Chicago Network, Chicago Innovation, Press Forward Chicago, and Navy Pier Partner Meetings.**

Billie Jean King (third from left) at Chicago Shakespeare Theater for World Premiere production of *Billie Jean*, photo by Justin Barbin;.Top Inset, Edward Hall's Demystifying Shakespeare; Bottom Inset, *Shakes in the City: A Midsummer Night's Dream*



SERVING MORE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS THAN ANY CHICAGO THEATER

We believe in the transformative power of theater. Chicago Shakespeare Theater's education programs support the development of young people's crucial skills, including social-emotional competencies, critical literacy, and meaningful collaboration in classrooms and in life.

Nearly 20,000 students and teachers engaged across student matinee performances, Chicago Shakespeare SLAM, Bard Core, and workshops—more than any other theater in Chicago

262 public, private, and parochial schools participated from across Chicagoland

108 students participated in Chicago Shakespeare SLAM

16 educators completed the Sheldon and Bobbi Zabel Bard Core Program, a yearlong professional development intensive for Chicago Public Schools teachers.

546 students and teachers experienced a FREE performance by Sir Ian McKellen

38 dedicated student matinee performances this season

7% increase in student attendance since FY25

83% of students said they would like to attend another CST production

"Events at CST show my students that the arts, especially Shakespeare, are for everyone! It's both deeply personal and a shared social experience to go to the theater."

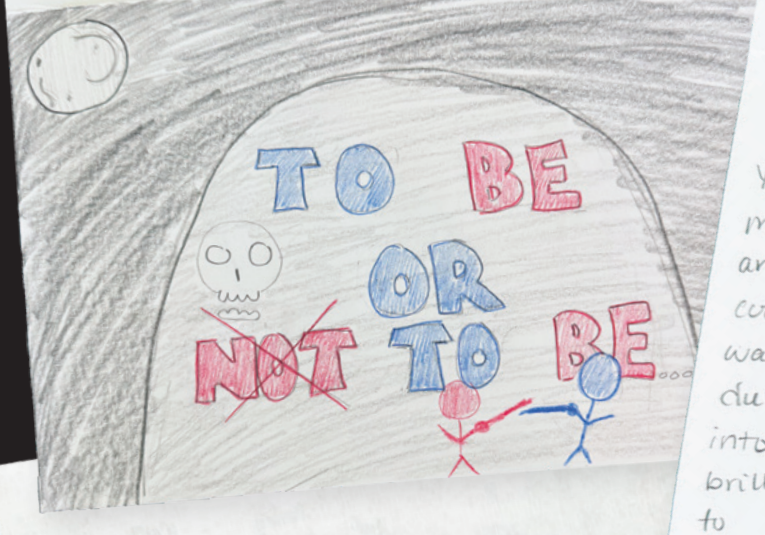
Teacher, Morgan Park High School

"Experiencing an exciting live performance is so different from students' everyday life and it reminds them of the power of human connection. To be honest, putting their screens away for an hour or more is a gift to them as they get to enjoy something very real in the moment."

Teacher, Sullivan House High School



SLAM 2026, photo by Justin Barbin



Dear Joseph,

Your role as Laertes stood out to me the most. When you had to portray anger, grief, and persistence, the audience could feel it. Your execution of Laertes was amazing. The grief you acted out during Ophelia's funeral that quickly turned into fury when Hamlet arrived was brilliant. You showed what it's really like to embody Laertes' character.

Sincerely,
Iris

Jan. 30, 2026

Dear, Hamlet.

I am very impressed with this play. It was so good! I had ~~seen~~ a lot of fun, and I think that you're a very good actor. And, a good person. You made the play feel real, and that is REALLY important to me. It's very cool how you're able to act the way you do! I had the best experience, and I can't wait to attend another one!

Thank you, for such a good play!

Sincerely,
Henry Clay Student



Jan/30/2026

Dear opehlia

you are My favorited character from the book because I like how you are so brave and nice, you try to to help hamlet but someone you can't and that what I love about you I was so sad you died, you could of had a happy ending.

OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE



162,000+ people of all ages and identities engaged with productions and programming

16 productions across all 3 theater venues

Audiences hailed from **45 countries and all 50 states** (plus DC and Puerto Rico)

43% of audiences were first-time CST attendees

20,000+ students and teachers served through education programming

3,654 subscribers, an increase from FY25

64% of subscriber households have returned 10+ seasons and 24% for 20+ seasons

6,447 young adults participated in the $30 UNDER 30 discounted ticket program

Successfully completed a **$400,000 Challenge Match** for new Bard Circle members ($1,000+) and increased gifts

32% increase in average individual gift

AUDIENCE TESTIMONIALS

"I've met so many amazing people at CST who **share my passion** for live theater."

"Everything is always done to such a **high level**."

"We are **consistently impressed** by the performances we see at CST."

"This is by far **the best value for your dollar** when it comes to live entertainment."

"We feel the theater is an important and **urgent voice in the community**."

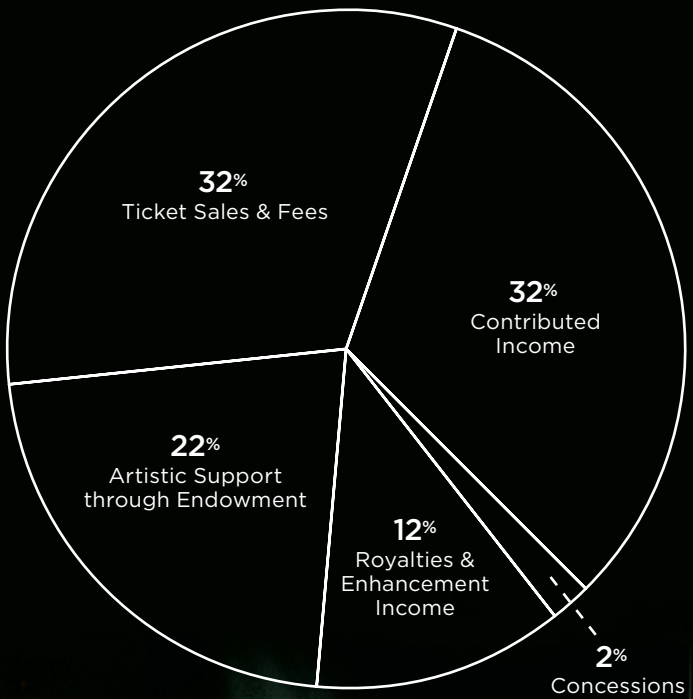
"This is a **beautiful, world-class theater** with world-class productions."



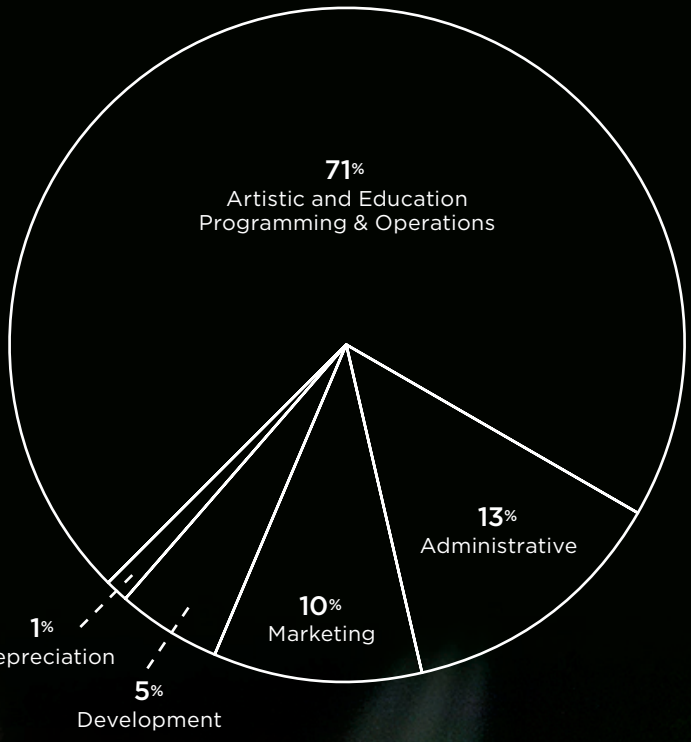
Photos by Justin Barbin

INVESTMENT IN OUR MISSION

REVENUE | $21,144,936



EXPENSES | $20,791,773



Financials projected as of September 2026



BE PART OF THE IMPACT

As we celebrate all that we've accomplished together this year, we invite you to invest in the future of Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Your annual gift sustains world-class artistry, expands educational opportunities, and ensures that the transformative power of live theater continues to thrive for generations to come.

GIVE TODAY!

Photo by Kyle Flubacker

REVEL IN RUBY GALA

CST kicked off our 40th Anniversary celebrations with the Revel in Ruby Gala on Friday, June 12, 2026. The evening raised $1.3 million, honoring four decades of powerful theatermaking and fueling the artistry, education, and community engagement that have come to define CST. 350 attendees from Chicago's civic and cultural community gathered for a lively cocktail hour and seated dinner with a program in The Yard, followed by desserts and dancing in the Jentes Family Courtyard Theater lobby.

During the event, CST presented the **Spirit of Shakespeare Awards**, honoring those who embody Shakespeare's spirit through community engagement and artistic leadership, to new recipients:

- The Artistic Honoree was award-winning Chicago actor **Kevin Gudahl**, who holds the record for appearing in 65 CST productions.
- This year's Civic Award recognized **Gary Gerst, William R. Jentes, Raymond F. McCaskey,** and **Pam Walter** for 30 years of continuous service to Chicago Shakespeare's Board of Directors.



Kevin Gudhal

$1.3 million
raised breaks CST Gala records—exceeding goal by **35%**

75% increase
in number of Gala sponsors



"For 40 years, Chicago Shakespeare Theater has shaped artistic life in Chicago, educated and engaged young people, and contributed to the economic and creative vitality of Illinois. This theater has become a global destination for ambitious storytelling, and it stands as a powerful example of what a cultural institution can accomplish when art, education, and civic engagement come together."

—Governor JB Pritzker, in a surprise appearance at the event

Thank you to Gala 2026 co-chairs **Steve Brodsky** and **Carole Segal**, as well as committee members: **Brayton Alley, Kate Blomgren, Jillisa Brittan, Liz Brodsky, Aaron Hoffman, Judith Loseff, Richard W. Porter, Lance Richards, Steve Solomon, Jamie Stone O'Brien,** and **Donna Welch.**



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Edward Hall, Artistic Director, *Carl and Marilynn Thoma Chair;* Barbara Gaines, Founding Artistic Director; Kimbery Motes, Executive Director



Pam Walter, Civic Honoree *(Left)*



Gary Gerst, Civic Honoree *(Right)*

Photos by Justin Barbin

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$100K+

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Sue Reamer
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