COMMONWEALTH SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

What's Past is Prologue

— Prospero, *The Tempest*

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

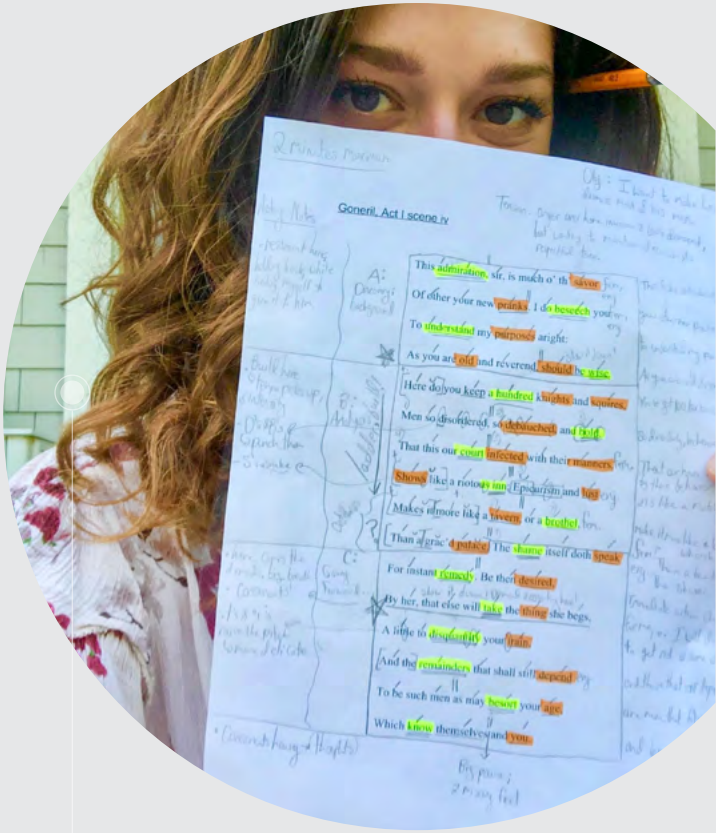
looking back

What a year this has been–a year of great change–both for Commonwealth Shakespeare Company and for the world. A year of tumult, transition...of tempests. And a year of opportunity.

Our 2020 fiscal year began in October 2019 with two big changes. First, CSC and Babson College were winding down their six-year-long partnership that provided CSC with important support and a home. Second, CSC lost Abigail Rollins, who managed CSC since 2010 and led the Company through substantial growth to financial stability. To balance the disappointment of those losses, we were excited to welcome Adam Sanders—Associate Artistic Director since 2011— as Managing Director to take over Abi's work and Bryn Boice to take over Adam's responsibilities as Associate Artistic Director. The team was also eager to relocate the office to Boston and enjoy the amenities of city work-life again! Despite the changes, the future definitely didn't look dull. Early 2020 saw a screening of our virtual *Hamlet 360* at the Moxy Hotel in Boston and plans moving full steam ahead for our annual gala, our Stage2 Shakespeare for Young Audiences' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and our 25th anniversary production of Free Shakespeare on the Common, *The Tempest*.

That all came screeching to a halt in mid-March with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world around us changed dramatically, we quickly adapted to remote office work and began re-imagining our programs. During the spring and summer, we found ourselves constantly shifting and refocusing as we explored new ways to bring much needed programming to our audiences virtually. This year saw tremendous collective uncertainty and pain, but also hope and resilience. We invite you to take a look back with us at the past year with CSC.

—**Steve Maler**, Founding Artistic Director



3
fall 2019

5
winter 2020

9
spring 2020

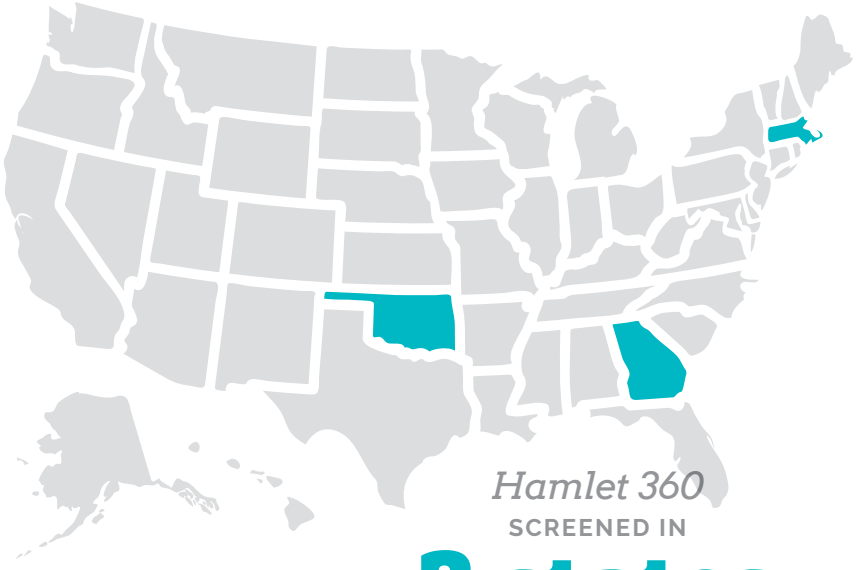
15
summer 2020

21
looking ahead

fall 2019

I remember, as I was preparing to take over management of the Company, thinking back over what we accomplished during our partnership with Babson and what new assets we had gained during the partnership. From 2013 to 2019 we produced acclaimed indoor work, developed the wildly successful CSC2 program, and deeply enriched our Apprentice Program. We also gained insights into working with an academic partner, and serving new audiences. I was excited to take this learning back to Boston and use it to shape a new chapter of CSC's life. To be sure, there were still lots of challenges to sort through, but also lots of opportunities to improve our organization and pursue our mission in new ways. And besides, we had amazing teams coming together for both *Midsummer* and *The Tempest*. There was a lot to look forward to!

—**Adam Sanders**, Managing Director



Hamlet 360
SCREENED IN
3 states

10/01

Adam Sanders is appointed as Managing Director.

Bryn Boice is appointed as Associate Artistic Director.

10/09–10/10

Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit, CSC's virtual reality adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* is screened at **Babson College**.

10/23–10/24

Hamlet 360 is screened at **Georgia College**.

11/07–11/09

Hamlet 360 is screened at **Oklahoma City University**.

11/08–11/11

Auditions take place for **CSC2**, CSC's cohort of early-career actors.

Casting begins for ***The Tempest***.

OCTOBER **NOVEMBER**

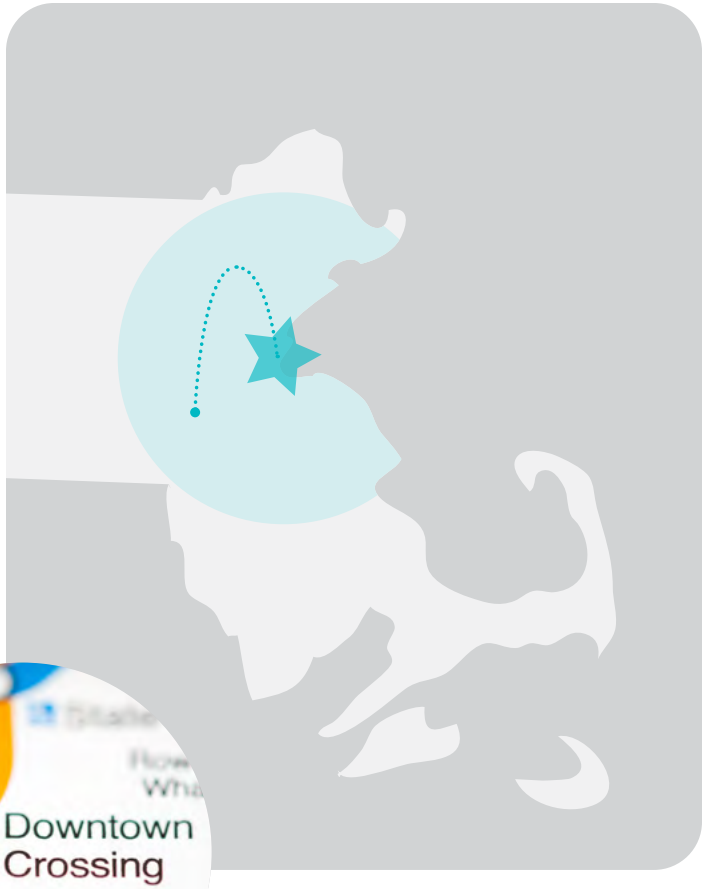
winter 2020

Early 2020 felt like a time of rebirth and renewal for CSC. We were so excited to be back in the center of Boston, a stone's throw from our site on the Boston Common and in such proximity to so many esteemed colleagues. At the top of the year, we hosted viewings of our virtual reality experience *Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit*—a collaboration with Google—at the Moxy Hotel in Boston for sold-out performances. We engaged our fans and welcomed new audiences who were excited by the intersection of Shakespeare and cutting-edge technology.

—**Steve Maler**, Founding Artistic Director

01/01

Recruitment for the **2020 Apprentice Program** begins. The CSC Apprentice Program is an intensive summer training program for young actors who are actively studying theatre.



82

applications
RECEIVED

01/15

CSC moves its office from Wellesley to downtown Boston.

JANUARY

01.29

Hamlet 360 launch party held at Moxy Downtown Boston

On January 29th, CSC held the official launch party of *Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit* at Boston's newest theater district hotspot, Moxy Downtown Boston. This groundbreaking and cinematic telling of Hamlet's story originally premiered in 2019. The viewer is cast as Hamlet's deceased father, experiencing an all-knowing narrator's perspective. Over 150 people witnessed the production during its sold-out showings.

This virtual-reality adaptation was made in partnership with Google and WGBH, and produced by Graham Sack and Quentin Little. It features CSC alumni Brooke Adams, Jack Cutmore-Scott, Anthony Rapp, Jay O. Sanders, and Faran Tahir.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

What was the best thing?

Feeling like I was a part of the story.

CSC has such an innovative approach to theater with this piece. The possibilities are endless as to how it could be used for education, etc. It could do for VR what *Hamilton* did for musical theater.

What stood out to you the most?

Jack Cutmore-Scott's acting, feeling like I could touch the water, or might be pierced by a sword, feeling the floor drop out, having the actors look right at me close up and not feeling uncomfortable under their direct gaze.

Drama students from Lynn English High School after attending the *Hamlet 360* viewing

48,000+

views

ON YOUTUBE

spring 2020

Our work with education on the CSC2/Stage2 production of A *Midsummer Night's Dream* got off to a great start in early March with 12 talented early-career professional actors. It was a terrific group; but when the pandemic hit, we knew we quickly had to shut down rehearsals—and cancel the show for the nearly 3,000 area students that were slated to see it. In order to provide some virtual curriculum support for teachers who might have been counting on our programming, I decided to record a series of short, informative videos showing how actors and directors parse Shakespeare's text. We sent the links to all interested area teachers and received some great feedback.

—**Bryn Boice**, Associate Artistic Director

03/10

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker declares a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

03/04

Diana Lobontiu joins the team as Management and Development Associate.

03/13

Out of a desire to protect the health and safety of its audience, **CSC makes the difficult decision to cancel two cornerstone programs:**

- The **2020 CSC gala,** originally slated for March 28
- The **CSC Stage2 production** of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* originally scheduled to run from April 2–10 with seven student matinees and one public performance

03/26–05/18
Virtual education

STAGE2

After our Spring 2020 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was canceled, our artistic team worked to create a series of three virtual lessons led by Associate Artistic Director Bryn Boice. Teachers and students used these videos to support their English studies, after suddenly being forced to teach and learn from home. These lessons were provided for free to a targeted list of nearly 2,000 teachers.

free lessons

PROVIDED TO NEARLY

2,000

teachers

CSC2

Despite the **disappointing cancellation of *Midsummer***, we were excited to bring 6 of the CSC2 ensemble back to work with us in our on-line reading of *The Tempest* as well as mentors/coaches of our 2020 Virtual Apprentice company. We plan to mount *Midsummer* as soon as it's safe to do so and will bring back as much of the original cast as we can!

04/17

Steve Maler announces the **principal cast for *The Tempest*,** including award-winning Shakespearean actor **John Douglas Thompson** in the role of Prospero.

CSC announces a **commitment to pay the artists and artisans** involved with the company, even in the event that COVID-19 restrictions require a postponement of the production.

05/18

CSC announces that the **2020 Apprentice Program** will be run virtually.

05/18–06/04

CSC runs a series of **Zoom workshops in partnership with Rupert A. Nock Middle School in Newburyport, MA.** Over the course of three weeks, two hundred eighth-graders examine selected scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* with the help of CSC actors.

APRIL MAY

Arts and cultural organizations have been among the most profoundly affected by COVID-19 related cancellations. At CSC we've certainly felt these effects. Early on in the pandemic, we established a "rain or shine" fund dedicated to paying the artists and artisans who had committed to participate in this summer's production of Free Shakespeare on the Common, regardless of whether the production was able to take place as planned or not. With the help of many generous supporters we were able to do just that, and the company in turn repaid us with a beautiful virtual reading of *The Tempest* which garnered over 3,400 YouTube views. The number of donors who stepped up to support this initiative was truly heartening.

—**Erin Coffey**, Director of Development

virtual content

As we pivoted in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the restrictions on live performance, we focused on connecting with our audiences digitally. We launched the Shakespeare on the Common Encore Series on our YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages. Over 30 artists participated and shared a monologue or favorite moment from their time performing on the Boston Common.

05/25

George Floyd's murder sparks worldwide protests. CSC responded by embarking on a long-term evaluation of our role in structural racism, especially in the Boston theater community, which eventually led to the statement below.

CSC'S COMMITMENT TO RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Commonwealth Shakespeare Company was founded to provide people from all walks of life access to great theater, and we recognize that in order to truly fulfill that vision we need to take our commitment to anti-racism much further. As the producers of Free Shakespeare on the Boston Common–a highly visible and emblematic part of Boston's cultural landscape–the choices we make have a magnified impact. We have an opportunity and obligation to not only reflect the demographics of Boston in our theater making, but also the ideals of our City's multi-faceted communities.

We are committed to understanding how the structure of our artistic and education programs, our hiring and casting processes, our operations, and our board governance–along with a long history of Eurocentrism in classical theater and specifically Shakespeare–have all contributed to exclusion and racism in our theater community. We are committed to transforming the existing structures that perpetuate such exclusion. We are committed to taking anti-racist action to eliminate the harm experienced by our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community members. We are committed to collaborating with artists who will advance our work and strengthen our community.

To help us in our initial stages, we have engaged the Anti-Racism Collaborative consulting group to guide a multi-phased engagement to help our team navigate this process with purpose; set concrete goals; and ensure long-term sustainability for anti-racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at CSC.

We recognize that this is only a beginning and that we must hold ourselves accountable not only to anti-racist action, but to all aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We invite you to read our full anti-racism statement and action plan at **commshakes.org**

summer 2020

Our Apprentice Program is one of my favorite activities we engage in all year. It is so rewarding to foster a young artist's transition to the professional world and provide opportunities for personal growth and development. We were devastated at the thought of not meeting in person, not being able to welcome all of these young artists–accepted from all across the country–to our program and to our home on the Boston Common. However, the ingenuity and resiliency of our staff, teaching artists, and students prevailed; and we were able to pivot to an engaging virtual curriculum. In fact, we welcomed the largest class ever! There was a new kind of magic in all of us meeting, learning, and performing together from our homes, struggling through similar challenges, and making even more meaningful connections because of them. It was such a joy to watch our program continue to have such a transformative impact and to foster a whole new generation of artists at a time when they need it the most.

—**Victoria Townsend**, Artistic Programs Manager

STUDENT REACTIONS

> Having been one of the only apprentices who didn't devote their undergrad to theatre, I felt like such an imposter the first week. But you and all the other staff made me feel so welcome, and now, have given me such confidence to go forward with a sense of belonging in this sphere.

06/12

Press release postponing *The Tempest*.

After months of working closely with city and state officials and forming our own pandemic task force, CSC made the difficult decision that there was not a safe way to produce an event on the scale of Free Shakespeare on the Common in 2020. For the first time in 24 years, Free Shakespeare on the Common would not be presented to Boston audiences.

06/29

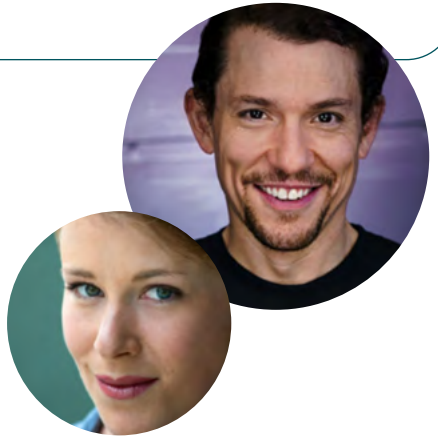
Virtual Apprentice Program begins with 40 students

Recruitment for the 2020 Apprentice Program began in January 2020. This program was originally slated to be eight weeks in-person from mid-June to early August. By May it became clear that an in-person program would not be safe due to COVID-19, and we made the decision to switch to a virtual format. Our virtual program ran for six weeks from late June to early August. An unprecedented total of 40 students took part from their homes in 14 states. Students took classes in voice and text and enjoyed various masterclasses with high-profile artists such as Anthony Rapp, Seth Gilliam, Faran Tahir, Jason Butler Harner, and Flora Diaz. The program culminated in a showcase of virtual scenes and monologues that were live-streamed to audiences via YouTube.

40
PARTICIPANTS

JUNE

> CSC could have easily called the whole thing off, as many other theaters did this summer; but you persevered and gave me an experience I'll always hold dear.



08/04

Virtual Apprentice Showcase, culmination of 8-week program

07/23

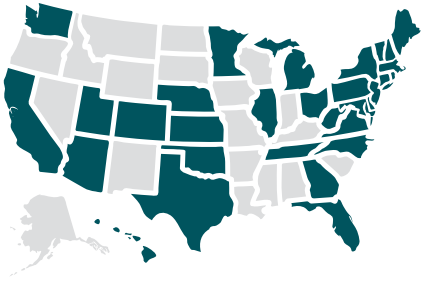
The Tempest online announced

JULY **AUGUST**

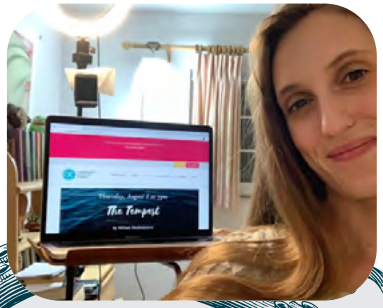
08/06

The Tempest on YouTube

On August 6, CSC went virtual for *The Tempest* with a cast and crew of 36 scattered across the country. This unique opportunity allowed us to bring in notable stage actors such as John Douglas Thompson and Miguel Cervantes. It also featured CSC favorites Remo Airaldi, Siobhan Juanita Brown, Nora Eschenheimer, John Kuntz, Nael Nacer, Richard Noble, Maurice Emmanual Parent, Fred Sullivan, Jr., Michael Underhill, and several CSC2 actors. Over the course of four days, the production and its ASL and audio-described companions were viewed on YouTube over 3,400 times, streaming from 31 different states!



3,400
VIEWS



Co-Lab

In keeping with CSC's commitment to promoting racial equity in the theater world, CSC partnered with the Front Porch Arts Collective (a Black theater company committed to advancing racial equity in Boston through theater) to pilot a new program called Co-Lab. Co-Lab is an online training program focused on and taught by artists of color, linking the heightened language of William Shakespeare, August Wilson, and other contemporary writers of color. The program ran from August 10-15 in an online format and was free of charge to the initial class of 20 participants.

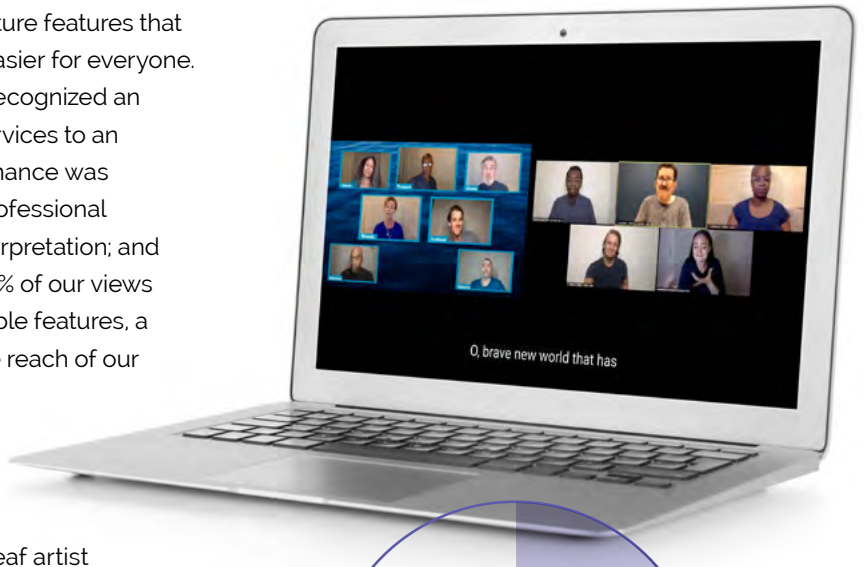
20
PARTICIPANTS

The program consisted of voice and text classes, facilitated conversations with highly esteemed BIPOC theater professionals, and coaching sessions with nationally recognized BIPOC actors. Guest artists and lecturers included John Douglas Thompson, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Cote de Pablo, Seth Gilliam, Nikkole Salter, Nehassaiu deGannes, and Pascale Florestal.

commitment to accessibility

CSC has a long history of providing accommodations that make our work on the Boston Common accessible to audiences that require access services to participate, including ASL interpretation, Braille and large-print programs, and infrastructure features that make movement on the Common easier for everyone. With a switch to digital content we recognized an opportunity to bring accessibility services to an even broader audience. Our performance was offered in three formats: one with professional closed captioning; one with ASL interpretation; and one with audio descriptions. Over 15% of our views were through a version with accessible features, a significant increase compared to the reach of our in-person access services.

We also provided ASL interpretation for the Co-Lab training program. This was the first time we were able to serve a Deaf artist in one of our training programs. It will not be our last. We are currently exploring ways to engage actors that are Deaf, blind or low-vision, or who have other disabilities in our training and in the creation of our artistic programming, both in-person and digital.



15%

ACCESSIBLE VIEWS OF ONLINE PERFORMANCES

looking ahead

While the return of in-person performance remains uncertain, art, theater, and togetherness have never felt more necessary."

—**Steven Maler**, Founding Artistic Director

The year ahead will certainly look different from past seasons—probably in ways we cannot even imagine right now—but we are committed to bringing our audiences together through excellence, access, and education. We have an exciting roster of virtual programming in the works (check out our website for more details), and we'll be growing our education and training programs to serve students even amid the pandemic.

As we consider programming during the time of this pandemic, three priorities will guide our decisions: first and foremost is the health and safety of our staff, seasonal artists/artisans, and our audiences; the second is the long-term sustainability of CSC; and third is maintaining and enriching the traditions and expectations of our programs.

As of now we hope to present *The Tempest* on the Common in summer 2021. If there's a safe and responsible way to share in the magic of Shakespeare on a breezy summer night, surrounded by friends, family, and fellow theatre lovers, we will find a way to make it happen. We'll see you at our next production!

If there's a safe and responsible way to share in the magic of Shakespeare on a breezy summer night, surrounded by friends, family, and fellow theatre lovers, **we will find a way to make it happen.**

COMMONWEALTH
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

commshakes.org | 617-426-0863