



COMMONWEALTH
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

“**O Brave New World**”



OUR MISSION

Commonwealth Shakespeare Company (CSC) is dedicated to artistic excellence, accessibility, and education. We present plays of the highest artistic caliber that celebrate ideas and language to create dialogue around compelling issues of our time. We eliminate barriers – physical, economic, and cultural – to bring live theater to audiences throughout Greater Boston. We cultivate in young artists the value of community engagement and collaborate with educators to bring literature to life in the classroom.



FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A Risk Worth Taking



When I look back over the year that just ended — our 25th — I am struck by what we were able to accomplish under unimaginably difficult circumstances.

When the year began, we had no idea how long the pandemic restrictions would last or how the absence of live theater might affect our community. We acted quickly to secure funding to pay our staff and launched innovative online programming to keep our audiences engaged. We focused on our core training initiatives, pivoting to online delivery of our Apprentice Program, which attracted a record 80 students. We doubled down on our partnership with the Front Porch Arts Collective, Co-Lab, an intensive training program for Black Actors and Indigenous and POC Allies.

Finally in May we received permission from the City of Boston to go ahead with the summer's production of *The Tempest*. At that point we had about two months to do what we normally would have been working on all year. But we knew that the core of our mission was to provide free Shakespeare on Boston Common, and that cancelling for a second year would be damaging to our organization, perhaps irreparably.

There were significant risks: the pandemic restrictions could change again (as they did multiple times); cast and crew might get COVID and force us to close down; audiences might be reluctant to attend, even though we put extensive safety protocols in place. Ultimately even with all these risks, we decided to forge ahead, since we felt that the risk of NOT performing would be greater for CSC in the long run.

Well, you all know the rest. *The Tempest* was a smashing success with both critics and audiences. For our actors, production crew, and administrative staff, the joy of reconnecting with live audiences and having the opportunity to tell this timeless story reinforced the importance of what we do. We are humbled and gratified by the outpouring of support we received from all corners of our community, and we look forward to continuing our work for another 25 years!

All the best,

Steven Maler

Founding Artistic Director



THE TEMPEST ON BOSTON COMMON

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE • DIRECTED BY STEVEN MALER •
WITH JOHN DOUGLAS THOMPSON AS PROSPERO

For our 25th production of Free Shakespeare on the Common we chose *The Tempest*, the compelling — and timely — tale that deals with themes of isolation and loneliness, betrayal and revenge, and ultimately forgiveness and healing. We were honored to have renowned actor John Douglas Thompson in the role of Prospero; Boston Ballet principal dancer John Lam as the sprite Ariel; Nora Eschenheimer as Prospero's daughter Miranda; Nael Nacer as Caliban; and an extraordinary group of talented actors, designers, production, and administrative staff.

Even with COVID restrictions that required us to limit audience capacity, we still saw some **25,000 people in attendance at 15 performances**, including long-time theater-goers and new audiences alike.



“This is the best production of *The Tempest* that I have ever seen, one of those where you go, ‘Well, I never have to see [insert title] again, because nothing will top this.’”

— *New York Stage Review*

“Whether you’re a newcomer to *The Tempest* or a veteran, this might possibly be the Prospero against which you measure all others you see in the future.”

— *The Boston Globe*

“It’s such a great play and this production is brilliantly done (I should say ‘as usual’ because CSC has done a brilliant job in every production I’ve gone to).”

— Audience member

(Facing page) Top: Audience members at *The Tempest*. Bottom: John Douglas Thompson (Prospero) and John Lam (Ariel). Photos by Evgenia Eliseeva: (This page) clockwise from top left: Michael Underhill (Ferdinand) and Nora Eschenheimer (Miranda); Nael Nacer (Caliban) and Fred Sullivan Jr. (Stephano); John Douglas Thompson; Audience members. Photos by Evgenia Eliseeva

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our Commitment to Future Generations

We at CSC are committed to keeping Shakespeare alive for future generations. Our education offerings are aimed at educators and students in middle and high schools; these include Stage2, annual productions for young audiences that are specifically geared to works being studied in schools, and workshops and materials for teachers to use in classrooms. Our training offerings include our Apprentice Program, an intensive course for college-aged and early-career actors, and CSC2, a company of early-career actors who perform both in Stage2 productions and in our shows on Boston Common. Our newest program is Co-Lab, an actor training program by and

for Black actors that also welcomes allies from Indigenous communities and People of Color. Presented in partnership with the Front Porch Arts Collective, a professional Black theater company, this program has just completed its second year.

The pandemic required us to move all our programs online. The Apprentice Program was conducted entirely on Zoom, and attracted 80

participants from 27 states and one foreign country in two sessions. Co-Lab has been conducted online in both of its two years, with eleven students this year. Since we were unable to bring young audiences to our Stage2 production, we instead created a series of Shakespeare scenes on video that were used by 18 schools serving 1,830 students.



An Apprentice Program class on Zoom

“We have all found a way to come together in this hard time to create a safe space where we can let our voices be heard. I am forever grateful for that.”

— An Apprentice

“I’ll think back to Co-Lab as deep and fun and enlightening, and as one of the most useful parts of my training.”

— A Co-Lab student

“I found this collaboration really energizing and inspiring. [The actor-teachers] were warm, enthusiastic, and skilled facilitators who were able to reach through the computer screen and engage our students in new ways.”

— A public middle-school teacher



Jes Bedwinek (Titania) and Anthony Cason (Bottom) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, CSC2, 2016. Photo by Nile Hawver

“CSC has given us the preparation to do this work. They’ve demystified Shakespeare and truly made it feel accessible to anyone.”

— An Apprentice



“Following the success of 2020’s pivot to a Virtual Apprentice Program, we knew we could provide a robust learning experience despite continued physical separation from our students. In fact, it was another terrific summer! We were able to coach 80 aspiring actors and lovers of Shakespeare from all across the country — and even internationally! Although we long to return to an in-person format, I am so pleased that our Apprentices had such a positive experience online with CSC.”

— Bryn Boice,
Associate Artistic
Director

Seth Gilliam and Steve Maler in "The Actor's Craft" online discussion



OFF THE COMMON: PLAYON@CSC

Keeping Our Audience Engaged

When the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of live theater productions in 2020, we developed a series of programs to keep our artists and audiences engaged with us and our work. PlayOn@CSC comprised three series of digital programs that gave audiences a unique behind-the-scenes look at how productions are put together, how actors interpret their characters, and how filmmakers have used Shakespeare's stories as a springboard for their own distinct works of art.

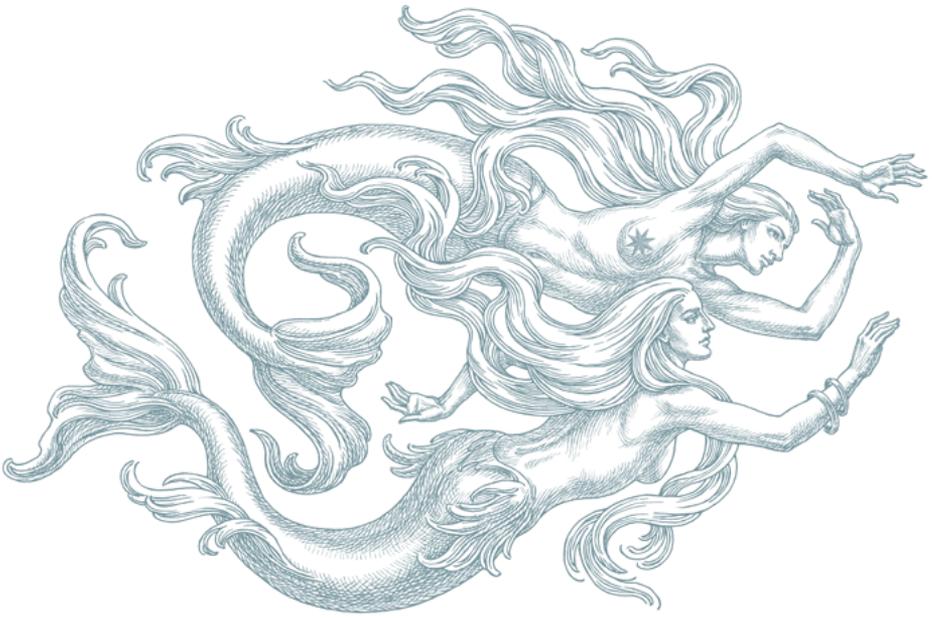
The Actor's Craft featured actors performing brief scenes and soliloquies from one of Shakespeare's plays, interspersed with discussion with Artistic Director Steven Maler of how the actor brings a character to life. Performers included Seth Gilliam, Jason Butler Harner, Amy Ryan, and Denis O'Hare. The series was named one of the Top Ten Theater Events by *The Boston Globe*.



Shakespeare Reimagined, presented in collaboration with the Coolidge Corner Theatre, brought together film and theater experts to view a film and to discuss how the filmmaker took themes and stories from Shakespeare and repurposed them to their own cinematic visions.

"What an incredible treat! I hadn't realized how much I'd missed performances of every kind for so many long barren months." — Audience member at "The Actor's Craft"

"Loved tonight's program! It was a great combination of learning how an actor works, how a director works with an actor, getting an overview of the play, and hearing/seeing these powerful speeches! Definitely left me wanting more." — Audience member at "The Actor's Craft"



Tempest Talks gave audiences a behind-the-scenes look at our production of *The Tempest* in the months leading up to our opening on the Common. The series featured Associate Artistic Director Bryn Boice in conversation with the show's director, designers, actors, and accessibility coordinators.



Will Lyman in *A Christmas Carol*

A CHRISTMAS CAROL AT DOWNTOWN CROSSING

In December 2020, CSC was invited by the Downtown Boston Business Improvement District to participate in its "Stage Windows" initiative, which included installations by four of Boston's top performing arts organizations in downtown storefronts. We created a 40-minute version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* with a combination of a filmed performance by Will Lyman and digital projections of scenery.



Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On

Celebrating 25 years of Free
Shakespeare on Boston Common!



“The city takes on a different glow after an event like this, partly from the communality of sharing a work of art, partly from the pride of living in a city that finally got the wherewithal to put it together. And the city physically seems different — there’s an air of mystery and romance, a sense that more things are possible here.”

— Ed Siegel, *The Boston Globe*, 1996 inaugural review



(L-R) Daniel Duque-Estrada (Posthumus) and Nora Eschenheimer (Imogen) in *Cymbeline*, 2019. Photo by Evgenia Eliseeva; Seth Gilliam (Othello) and James Waterson (Iago) in *Othello*, 2010. Photo by Andrew Brilliant

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Tempest 2021

Cymbeline 2019

Richard III 2018

Romeo & Juliet 2017

Love’s Labour’s Lost 2016

King Lear 2015

Twelfth Night 2014

The Two Gentlemen of Verona
2013

Coriolanus 2012

All’s Well That Ends Well 2011

Othello 2010

Comedy of Errors 2009

As You Like It 2008

A Midsummer Night’s
Dream 2007

The Taming of the Shrew
2006

Hamlet 2005

Much Ado About Nothing
2004

Macbeth 2003

Henry V 2002

Twelfth Night 2001

The Tempest 2000

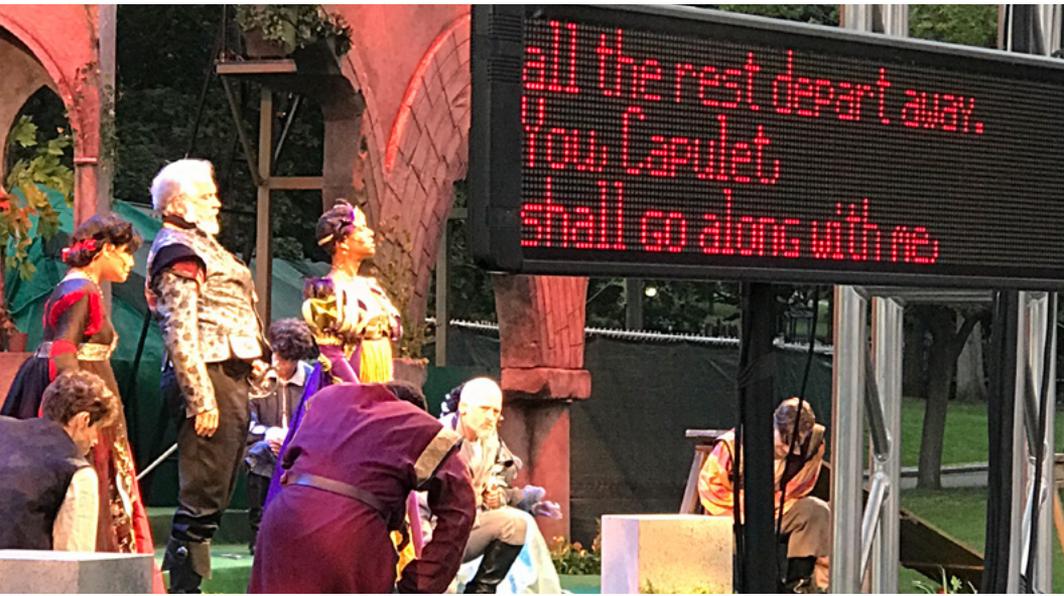
Julius Caesar 1999

As You Like It 1998

Romeo & Juliet 1997

A Midsummer Night’s
Dream 1996

(Facing page) Clockwise from top: Nash Hightower (Damian), Justin Blanchard (King), Jason Bowen (Berowne), Dalton Davis (Longaville) in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 2016. Photo by Andrew Brilliant; Robert Walsh (Macduff) and Jay O. Sanders (Macbeth) in *Macbeth*, 2003; Gracyn Mix (Juliet) and Ramona Lisa Alexander (Nurse) in *Romeo & Juliet*, 2017. Photo by Evgenia Eliseeva; Jeanine Kane (Regan), Will Lyman (Lear), Libby McKnight (Cordelia), Deb Martin (Goneril) in *King Lear*, 2015. Photo by Andrew Brilliant;



Open captioning at 2017 *Romeo & Juliet*

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS

Welcoming To All

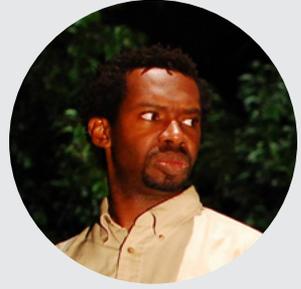
CSC was founded to provide people from all walks of life access to great theater. We recognize that in order to truly fulfill that vision we need to be firm in our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

Our Free Shakespeare on Boston Common is a highly visible and emblematic part of Boston's cultural landscape, so we have an opportunity and obligation to reflect the demographics and ideals of our city's multi-faceted communities.

We are constantly working to understand 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 — can contribute to an unwelcoming atmosphere; and we are committed to addressing the structures that perpetuate it. Our productions have always been intentionally diverse, in the strong belief that our activities need to represent all the communities of the Greater Boston area we serve. We engaged an anti-racism consultant during the year to work with our staff, and we continue to make DEIA a part of every staff meeting.

Our work on accessibility for people with disabilities is extensive. We added an Access Advocate position to our permanent staff this year to ensure that accessibility is taken into account in everything we do. Our performances on Boston Common are fully accessible to people with mobility challenges, and we offer assisted listening devices and large-print programs at every performance. We also offer ASL interpretation, open-captioning, and audio description at selected performances.

“At CSC, our accessibility services are provided by persons *with* disabilities and not just *for* persons with disabilities. We are not passive about the work; we are collaborators with the persons that we serve. Every service we provide is not tethered exclusively to the expense it is for us; we believe that losing the value of our connection to any other human due to program or structural barriers is a capital loss.” — Christopher Robinson, CSC Access Advocate



HISTORY OF BOSTON COMMON

CSC's production of Free Shakespeare takes place on land now known as The Boston Common, which is on the traditional lands of the Pawtucket and Massachusett tribes, as well as the historic lands of the Wampanoag nation.

The Boston Common has a violent history toward Indigenous peoples that is seldom discussed. We wish to express our sorrow for this history and extend our deepest gratitude for the use of this space. We invite our community to learn more about this history, the process and importance of land acknowledgement, and ways to support Indigenous communities who are still here; materials are posted at commshakes.org/la.

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Steve Maler and Board of Directors Chair David Friedman at *The Tempest* on Boston Common.

Thank you to our supporters!

We gratefully acknowledge the following individuals, corporations, and foundations who have made gifts and pledges to support CSC's fiscal year 2021 (October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021). To learn more about how you can help support CSC, please visit our website, commshakes.org, or call us at 617-426-0863. If your name was inadvertently omitted or misspelled, we apologize and ask that you contact us so that we may correct your listing for the future.

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PRELIMINARY FINANCIAL RESULTS

Year Ending September 30, 2021

Despite the challenges of 2021, CSC ended the fiscal year in a solid financial position, with an operating surplus of just over \$160,000 and cash on hand of approximately \$380,000. We acted quickly to secure funding through several pandemic-related government programs, including the Paycheck Protection Program and Shuttered Venue Operators Grant. On the earned revenue side, we were successful at pivoting our Apprentice Program to a virtual format, enabling us to maintain both the momentum of this popular program and its financial solvency. And we were overwhelmed by the generosity of many of our foundation and individual donors who recognized the importance of this organization and stepped up to maintain or increase their support. We are deeply grateful to all of them.

COMMONWEALTH SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENSE (UNAUDITED)
 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30, 2021

Revenue

Contributed Revenue: Individual Giving	\$559,814
Contributed Revenue: Corporate and Foundation	\$119,641
Contributed Revenue: Government	\$543,372
Earned Revenue: Education	\$31,892
Earned Revenue: Performance	\$63,811
Total Revenue	\$1,318,530

Expenses

Production	\$593,093
Education	\$78,907
Administrative	\$286,303
Fundraising	\$199,665
Total Expenses	\$1,157,530
Net Surplus	\$160,562

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Erin Coffey, Director of Development

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COMMONWEALTH
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

101 Arch Street, 8th Floor
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“**Brave New World**”

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW