



COMMONWEALTH
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

“Look Into the Seeds of Time”

2023
YEAR IN
REVIEW



OUR MISSION

Commonwealth Shakespeare Company (CSC) is dedicated to artistic excellence, accessibility, and education. We present plays at the highest artistic level, and 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.

CSC makes high-quality theater experiences in the Boston area accessible to all.



A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Strength in Community



At CSC, we're as passionate about artistic excellence as we are community engagement.

With our Year in Review, we are delighted to give you an inside look at the work you support and enjoy throughout the year! The piece you're holding walks through our programs, events, and partners, beginning with the start of our 2023 fiscal year in October 2022 and sharing the stories from this past fall, winter, and spring, culminating in a gripping, acclaimed summer show on the Boston Common.

There is so much to celebrate from this past year. We experienced programmatic growth, recovery, and community connection beyond what we could have hoped when we laid our plans last fall. We grew our audiences, partnerships, programming, and accessibility this year, all in service of our mission. CSC strives to provide artistic excellence to the Boston community, across all barriers, and we're proud to have shared these timeless stories with tens of thousands of people from all walks of life.

In addition to the outstanding theater CSC produced, our points of pride include access initiatives like providing open captioning systems for all Shakespeare on the Common and Stage2 performances, as well as best in class ASL interpretation, all of which make it easier for everyone to enjoy the language and stories of Shakespeare. We continued to provide multiple opportunities to engage with Shakespeare through our educational performances, training programs, and film series that took place throughout the year. We leveraged transformative new funding from our deeply supportive public partners to make our summer productions more financially sustainable, ensuring they will serve our community for years to come.

CSC overcame many challenges this year. Along with the rest of the theater sector, we continued to face the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on production costs and our labor force. Through careful financial management and contributions from a range of donors and partners, we delivered our full slate of outstanding programming. We faced severe weather conditions, forcing us to cancel three performances of *Macbeth* due to thunderstorms and to perform through two other rainy evenings, yet we welcomed some of the largest audiences we've ever seen on the Boston Common.

Thanks to CSC's world-class performers and artists, we create exceptional professional theater every summer and make this incredible art free and open to all. CSC strengthens our community's connection to theater through the accessibility of our productions, the excellence of our training programs, and the conversations and connections we hope to inspire through the power of Shakespeare to illuminate and celebrate what makes us human.

We are thrilled to share the story of our year with you, and for the momentum it gives us as we push forward. We're grateful to have you along for the ride, and hope you'll join us as we continue to expand our vital and joyful work.

Warm Regards,

Steven Maler, Founding Artistic Director



(Cover) Faran Tahir. Photo: Nile Scott Studios

(This page) Top: Elijah Brown, Daniel Rios Jr., Alexa Cadete, Joe Penczak, John Blair, Marianna Bassham, Jesse Hinson, Bella Grace Harris, Lily Ayotte, Jessica Golden, Nael Nacer, Cleveland Nicoll, Xander Viera, and Nick Baum. Photo: Nile Scott Studios. Bottom: Faran Tahir, Joan Moynagh, and Steven Maler. Photo: Liesl Clark



THE PROSPERO SOCIETY

Our Nearest and Dearest Supporters

With 80% of our annual operating revenue coming from charitable contributions, CSC is more reliant on our incredible community of supporters than many other arts organizations. We launched the Prospero Society in 2021 to show our gratitude to the dedicated theater enthusiasts who donate \$1,000 or more to CSC each fiscal year, and this year was the most exciting yet for our Prospero Society donors. Throughout the year, we put on Salon Series events for Society members, featuring exclusive talks and performances and the opportunity to mingle with an outstanding group of artists and arts lovers. Our supporters attended



dinners, cocktail parties, and intimate gatherings featuring a wide variety of programming. The Newbury Hotel, CSC's longtime partner, offered an electric setting for Faran Tahir to preview his performance as Macbeth. Lady Macbeth herself joined us when Joanne Kelly performed at the Prospero Society's December holiday party.

We also hosted a reimagined Opening Night celebration this summer with a Soirée at the fabulous Boston Chops Downtown Crossing restaurant, just steps from the Boston Common.



Guests shared a delicious dinner before walking over to the Friends Fund seating section to take in the Opening Night performance of *Macbeth*, and returned to Boston Chops afterwards to celebrate the triumph with our cast, artistic team, production crew, and Apprentices over drinks and dessert. Thanks to the generosity of our partners at Boston Chops, all proceeds from the Opening Night Soirée tickets went directly towards supporting Shakespeare on the Common.

COOLIDGE CORNER FILM SERIES

Partners in Presenting Shakespearean Stories



Between theatrical productions, CSC continued our popular "Shakespeare Reimagined" film series in partnership with The Coolidge Corner Theatre, screening the films *Throne of Blood* from director Akira Kurosawa, *Shakespeare in Love*, and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. Our entertaining, educational

post-screening panel discussions included theater artists, historians, film critics, designers, and directors. "Shakespeare Reimagined" keeps CSC's mission alive year-round with fun Shakespearean content and expert artistic insight. We are so grateful for partners like The Coolidge who help CSC continually expand our community offerings!

"Our collaboration with Commonwealth Shakespeare Company on the Shakespeare Reimagined film series has been an immensely rewarding one. Together, we've been able to reach new audiences and explore new ways to engage people through the arts."

— Beth Gilligan, Deputy Director of The Coolidge Corner Theater



EDUCATION & TRAINING

Stage2 Onstage

Our 7th annual Stage2 production in May was an out of this world *Romeo & Juliet* directed by Associate Artistic Director, Bryn Boice, at Dorchester's Strand Theatre. A record 5,200+ middle and high school students, teachers, and community members experienced Shakespeare's text come to life, many for the first time. Student audiences engaged actively and raucously: laughing, gasping, screaming, and cheering, just as in Shakespeare's time.

Stage2 is performed by our CSC2 company, 12 talented and diverse early career professional actors who also teach school workshops, perform in Shakespeare on the Common, and coach Apprentices, spanning CSC's ecosystem of artistic and educational excellence.



"My biggest takeaway was that Shakespeare's plays are so much better once you see it performed live."

— Student attendee



"Hearing the student audiences cheer with delight during the show or write to us about their understanding afterward reminds me that we are giving a gift when we do this work."

— Bryn Boice, Associate Artistic Director and Director of Education & Training

(This page) Jack Greenberg, Nick Baum, Annika Burley. Photo: Gillian Gordon

(Facing page) Marleena Garris, Charlie Rose Hardy, Aidan Heaney, Avery Burnap, Seamus Doyle, Chloe Burton. Photo: Nile Scott Studios



"As a 2023 apprentice and a Spark Scholar, I was so happy to see myself lived and alive through this text...I loved the constant discovery. You can actually see the progress you make in real time."

— Marleena Garris, Spark Scholar* Apprentice

Apprentice Program

In its 14th year, our nationally renowned Apprentice program drew 35 early career actors from across the country for a summer of classical training and professional development. The eight week intensive culminated in two plays at Suffolk University's Modern Theatre: *Julius Caesar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We were thrilled to offer financial support to Apprentices through need-based aid, scholarships, and work study opportunities that provided experience with all aspects of producing theater.

Suffolk University served as the Official Partner for CSC's Apprentice Training Program for the second year. This invaluable partnership provides class and performance space and connects Suffolk students and alumni with opportunities in our programs and productions.

"We were proud to continue working with Suffolk University, building on last year's successful return to in person programming in the heart of Boston, steps away from the Common."

— Victoria Townsend, Artistic Programs Manager

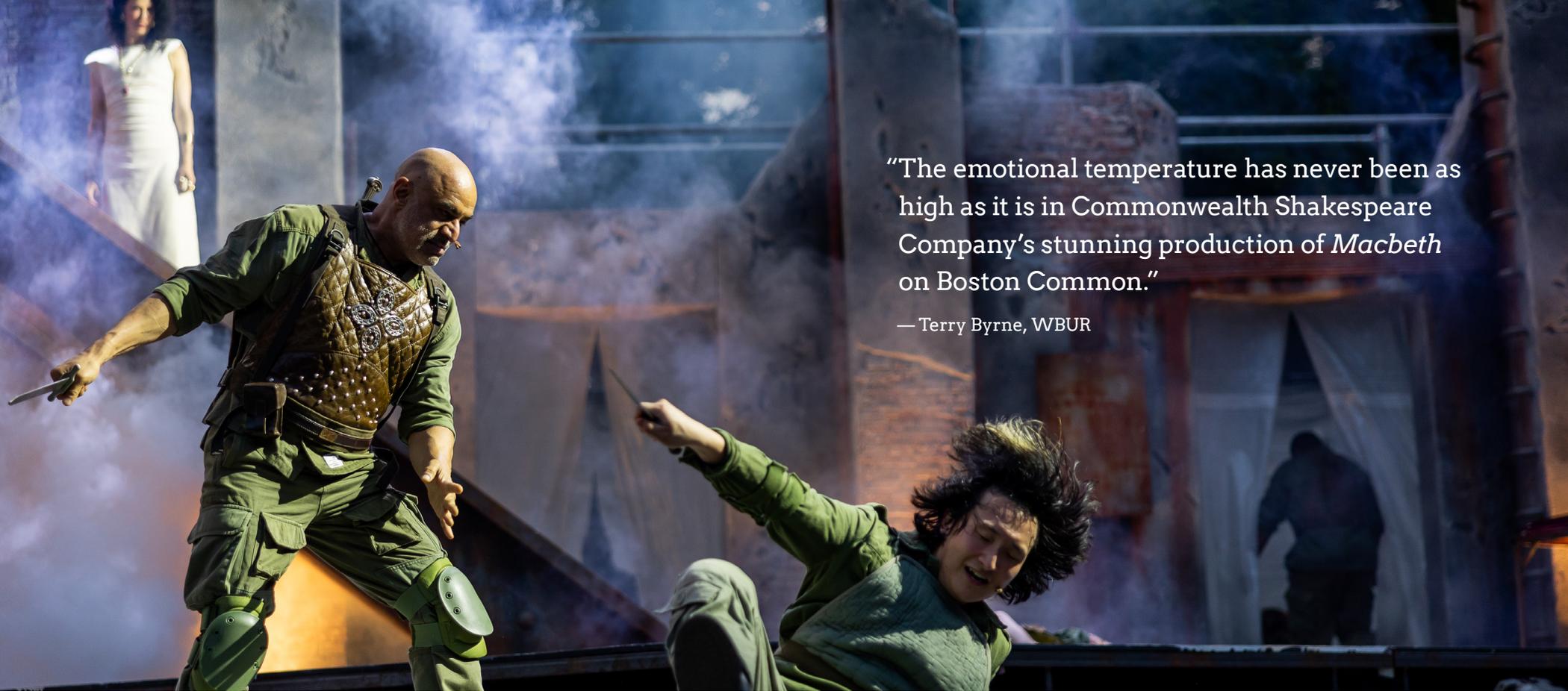


Educational Workshops

Our Education team offered in person workshops to seven schools across the state for middle school, high school, and college students on subjects like Unlocking Shakespeare's Text, Acting Shakespeare, and Public Speaking.

We were thrilled to welcome 23 students from Ireland and Boston with the arts nonprofit YouthINK. YouthINK's participants received training from CSC Teaching Artists and *Macbeth* stars, toured backstage, performed plays on our stage, and enjoyed *Macbeth* up close.

* 2023 Spark Scholarships were awarded to nominated BIPOC performers with an interest in Shakespeare and performance.



“The emotional temperature has never been as high as it is in Commonwealth Shakespeare Company’s stunning production of *Macbeth* on Boston Common.”

— Terry Byrne, WBUR

FREE SHAKESPEARE ON THE COMMON

Macbeth

This summer, Founding Artistic Director Steven Maler directed Shakespeare’s dark and action-packed classic, *Macbeth*. With a backdrop of civil strife, unraveling social fabric, and a bent toward authoritarianism, Steve’s modern interpretation struck a chord with audiences and critics alike. Faran Tahir, who also starred in CSC’s *Richard III* and in our very first production back in 1996, returned to our stage as Macbeth. Opposite him, dazzling film and TV actor Joanne Kelly played Lady Macbeth, and the two stars sizzled with natural chemistry.



In addition to the artistic success from incredible performances, direction, and design, *Macbeth*’s technical success was helped by longtime CSC collaborator and Production Manager Jenna Worden and her dedicated staff. The Shakespeare on the Common team grows each year with more artists and technicians, creating over 90 jobs for skilled theater workers.

“Director Steven Maler and his design team have conjured a gothic atmosphere that is both haunted and haunting, steeped in shadows literal and psychological...”

— Don Aucoin, Boston Globe

“Great staging and a wonderful evening! We were so impressed by all the ways that the show and experience was made welcoming and accessible to all! CSC is a treasure!”

— Audience Member

We were elated to see some of the largest audiences in CSC’s history, with 7,000 attendees at some shows, fanning out across the Boston Common. Every night was magical, from the joyfully crowded evenings to the one chilly night when hundreds of people huddled under ponchos to see *Macbeth* through the rain.

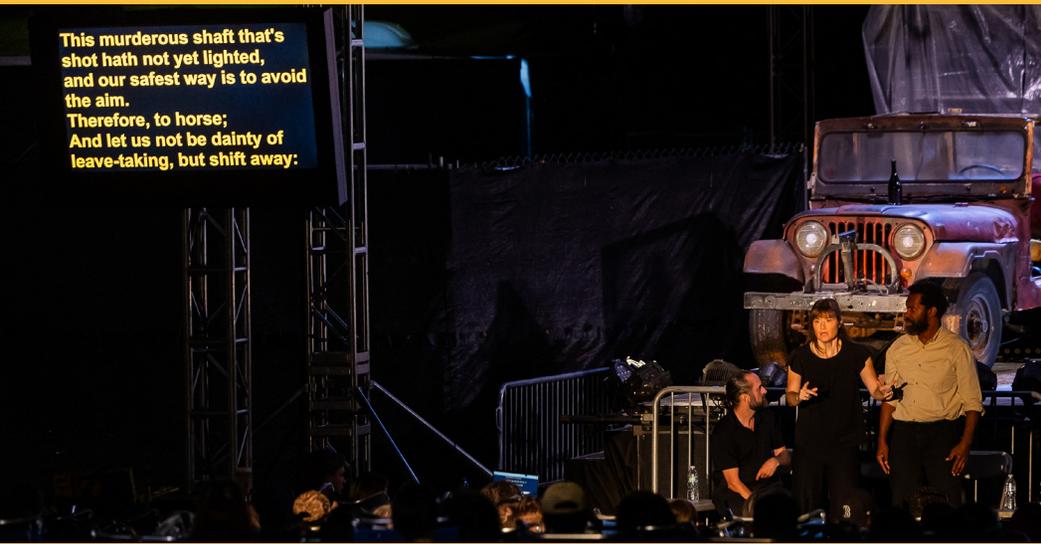
We were humbled by the impact of this show, illustrated by the tremendous attendance, feedback, and reviews. Free Shakespeare on the Common is the heart of CSC, offering the magic of theater to everyone. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, to everyone who joined and supported us for the 27th season of this powerful work.



(Top spread) Joanne Kelly, Faran Tahir, and Nick Baum. Photo: Nile Scott Studios

(Facing page) Faran Tahir and Joanne Kelly. Photo: Gillian Gordon

(This page) John Kuntz and Joanne Kelly. Photo: Nile Scott Studios



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access

Accessibility has always been central to CSC's mission, and we are proud that our work serves as a model of accessibility for the performing arts sector in Boston and across the country. This year more than ever, our peer organizations and partners have continued to turn to CSC and our access experts, led by CSC Access Advocate and co-founder of *Think Outside the Vox* Christopher Robinson, for insight and counsel.



CSC was privileged to recruit an incredible access team of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and consultants, including our wonderful *Macbeth* Director of Artistic Sign Language (DASL), Rachel Berman-Kobylarz, as well as a Blind Audio Description consultant, Amber Percy, to lead our audio description and tactile tours for the summer performance. Our employment of self-identified Deaf, Blind, and neurodivergent artists and consultants to lead the provision of access services for the groups they represent makes CSC one of just a few theater companies that follows these best practices.

Thanks to our fantastic team and ongoing commitment to access, CSC transformed the experience of Shakespeare on the Common, providing open captioning at every performance for the first time, designating seating areas that met specific access needs, offering access performances with ASL interpretation and audio description, and introducing a new backstage ramp that made our stage accessible to all actors and speakers, regardless of their mobility needs. We are incredibly grateful to the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation for providing the necessary funding to support the purchase of the captioning and ramp components that made possible the expansion of our access services.

RICHARD AND SUSAN

**Smith
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History of Boston Common

The land now known as Boston Common is on the traditional lands of the Pawtucket and Massachusetts tribes, as well as the historic lands of the Wampanoag nation. The Common has a violent history toward Indigenous peoples that is seldom acknowledged. We express our sorrow for this history and extend our gratitude for the use of this space. We ask you to learn more about this, the process and importance of land acknowledgement, and ways to support Indigenous communities who are still here by exploring the materials we have gathered on our website at commshakes.org/la.



With these materials as a starting place, CSC is in a process of constant learning with regard to our use on the Common, from our acknowledgements to our sustainability and access efforts. We welcome feedback from our community at info@commshakes.org.



"Although we are proud of our accessibility services and structures, Accessibility is not a new or revolutionary idea. We believe in access for everyone. Accessibility for all should be expected from us. Accessibility should be expected everywhere our artists and audiences occupy space." — Christopher Robinson



(Facing page) Top: Ian Sanborn, Janine Sirigano, and Christopher Robinson interpret during the performance. Bottom: Amber Percy, Audio Description Consultant. Photos: Nile Scott Studios

(This page) Image of statue, 'The Embrace' lit up on Boston Common. Photo: Liesl Clark

DEVELOPMENT

Incredible Support, Building Recovery

This fiscal year, the generosity of CSC's supporters helped us build towards a strong post-pandemic recovery. Without ticket income from our flagship program, CSC is always reliant on donors and partners who believe in our mission of keeping Shakespeare accessible, and this year you truly showed how much you share that belief. Thanks to our individual donors, Friends Fund donors, corporate sponsors, foundation and government supporters, and community donations at performances at *Macbeth*, CSC brought in 117% of this year's goal for contributed revenue.

We have so many supporters to thank for this success, starting with our passionate Boards of Trustees and Advisors whose advocacy and leadership guide everything we do. Loyal donors made transformational gifts that strengthened our programs in Education and on the Common. Continued support from foundation partners like the Liberty Mutual Foundation and the Klarman Family Foundation was essential for the caliber and accessibility of *Macbeth*. None of the fiscal year's accomplishments would have been possible without your support! We sincerely thank you.

Goal Exceeded With

117%



Transformational Public Funding

Much of CSC's programming and infrastructure growth this year was made possible by the tremendous support of our public institutions. We were honored to welcome Mayor Michelle Wu and Boston Chief of Arts and Culture Kara Elliott-Ortega to the *Macbeth* stage to present CSC with a \$300,000 grant award. Spread over three years, this funding from the City's Neighborhood and Downtown Activation Grant supports our work to make Boston Common a space for our community to experience the best of the city's performing arts.

We are also deeply grateful to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and our public officials including Senate President Karen Spilka, House and Means Chair Aaron Michlewitz, Senator Lydia Edwards and State Rep. Jay Livingstone, who included a landmark \$300,000 earmark for our free programming on Boston Common in their FY2024 state budget.

Additionally, CSC completed another phase of infrastructure investments supported by our transformational \$1.32 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) award from the state's pandemic relief funding. The capital investments made possible by this multi-year funding will be completed next spring, and are having an enormous impact on CSC's financial sustainability, as our procurement of infrastructure for Shakespeare on the Common eliminates many annual rental fees.

"This transformational investment in CSC has allowed us to better align our spending with our values. We have increased compensation for our artists and production teams by reducing our equipment rental costs for Free Shakespeare on the Common, and we are opening up new earned revenue opportunities as we begin renting out this gear when not on the Common." — Brittney Holland, General Manager



(Facing page) Joanne Kelly, and Archan Basu. Photo: Liesl Clark

(This page) Steve Maler, Dave Friedman, Mayor Michelle Wu, and Chief of Arts & Culture Kara Elliott-Ortega. Photo courtesy of City of Boston Mayor's Office



Partnerships and Sponsorships

We're eternally grateful to CSC's amazing partners, who connect us to the community and grow our opportunities for support and on-the-Common fun in so many ways.

We were delighted to collaborate once again with a diverse range of organizations as Community Ambassadors to Shakespeare on the Common, including many educational and community organizations from the Boston area and as far away as Vermont.

This summer, we welcomed back our longtime sponsors on the Common, including our friends at GBH, the Newbury Hotel, and many more. Our partners at Comcast and Ovation once again provided their generous support as well as our wi-fi on the Common. We were also delighted to

welcome new sponsors and partners, especially for the food and drink our audiences enjoyed on the Common. We loved seeing audience members around the Common enjoying the 'Double, Double, Cookies 'N Trouble' sundae that Ben & Jerry's created for *Macbeth* or the bespoke picnic baskets curated for the show by Kured and High Street Place.

Last but not least, through our amazing partnership with the glamorous Boston Chops Downtown Crossing restaurant, we offered a gourmet dinner-and-a-show pairing and a delightful Opening Night Soirée.

Thank you to all of our wonderful partners who help us create magic on the Common!



CSC Board

Our Boards of Directors and Advisors provide invaluable support, advocacy, and guidance for all of our efforts. We were honored to welcome several new members this year, including new Treasurer Terrance Regan, a longtime CSC supporter. Terrance succeeded Treasurer Cara Abdulrazak, who stepped down at the end of the fiscal year after several years of dedicated service. Thank you, Cara, for your tremendous leadership.

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**Denotes new members in Fiscal Year 2023*

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(Facing page) Top: Downtown Boston BID Courtesy Image. Bottom: This year's Apprentice Repertory Company's production of *Julius Caesar* gave a stage combat demonstration with Fight Director Jess Meyer for our partner, Downtown BID.

(This page): Paul Kastner, Natalie McKnight, Faran Tahir, and Mary Dockray-Miller. Photo: Liesl Clark



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This donor list represents individuals who made gifts in the 2023 fiscal year, which spanned from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. If we have omitted you or named you incorrectly, we deeply apologize and request that you reach out to us at development@commshakes.org so we can correct the error moving forward.

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