



COMMONWEALTH
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

2024
YEAR IN
REVIEW

“A Notable Passion of Wonder”



Seasons of Growth

Throughout over 28 years of producing outstanding and accessible theater and creating education programs for Greater Boston, CSC has flourished. We've been through countless changes and navigated a pandemic, but this year truly marks a transformative season for the organization. As CSC's Associate Artistic Director, I'm honored to be sharing this report with you. We'll tell you the story of our 2024 fiscal year, beginning in October 2023 and blossoming forth with extraordinary programming and bold new plans through September 2024.



Associate Artistic Director Bryn Boice

This summer marked two firsts for Shakespeare on the Common: our first ever production of *The Winter's Tale*, one of Shakespeare's most magical and moving works, and my first time helming our flagship program as Director. Though I've directed shows at many theaters across Greater Boston, for CSC, and for CSC's Education programs, it was the honor of a lifetime to make my Shakespeare on the Common

debut with a play that means so much to me. The kind words from our critics, audiences, and each of you have meant the world!

I also serve as CSC's Director of Education & Training, and I was so proud to see our programs thrive this year with gorgeous productions from our CSC2 and Apprentice Repertory Companies. I was so delighted, in particular, to see the result of the many successful years of CSC training programs that was evident in the sheer number of former Apprentices and CSC2 actors who returned to work with us in a range of roles across Stage2 and Shakespeare on the Common.

Buoying another year of fantastic programming was a fiscal year of huge energy and momentum for CSC's organizational sustainability as we set many new plans and programs in motion!

First, we were thrilled this summer to share some of the biggest CSC news in decades: after nearly two years of exploration, ideation, and planning, CSC is launching a milestone new production in December 2024. We're starting off our fiscal year 2025 with a very festive bang as we produce the magical, musical *Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.'* Our Founding Artistic Director Steven Maler has led nearly two years of planning efforts to bring this show to life, and will direct the show with CSC stalwart Will Lyman starring as Scrooge. The show expands CSC's mission of sharing outstanding and accessible productions of classic works. Further, the potential ticket

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.



Christopher Robinson and Amber Pearcy on stage addressing the audience of Shakespeare on the Common.

CSC is Boston's home for accessible productions of classic works.

sales from a holiday favorite offers a vital revenue stream, contributing directly to the sustainability of our free public programming on the Boston Common.

This year, we also saw the return of our annual gala, growth in our fabulous community of donors and sponsors, and city and state investment that demonstrated incredible confidence in CSC. In the face of continuously rising expenses in the performing arts sector, our community and creativity have been the forces driving CSC ever forward.

If you're reading this letter, you play an important role in CSC's world, and we're so grateful to you.

I feel so lucky to serve as Associate Artistic Director in this season of growth for CSC's vital mission, and we feel so lucky to have you with us!

Bryn Boice

Associate Artistic Director & Director of Education and Training



2024 has been momentous for CSC. I am so proud to lead this passionate team through incredible growth, from introducing our own talented Bryn Boice to Shakespeare on the Common as a director to debuting a new holiday tradition for the city with *Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.'* I'm grateful for the entire CSC community, including Bryn, our staff, and all of you, for fueling and cheering this growth every step of the way.

Steven Maler

Founding Artistic Director

“Shakespeare on the
Common is quintessentially
'Boston'! Magnificent!”

— Audience Member



FREE SHAKESPEARE ON THE COMMON

The Winter's Tale

This summer, *The Winter's Tale* received a glowing critical and audience response for its imaginative direction, striking aesthetics, and strong performances.

Directed by our own Associate Artistic Director Bryn Boice, the production was praised by critics for the adept navigation of the play's tonal shift from the dark, intense first act set in Sicilia to the lighter, psychedelic second act set 16 years later in Bohemia.

“This was one of the best performances to date on the Common. Fantastic acting, pacing, sound, lighting, set and creative approach to costumes and choreography.”

— Audience Member





Some of Boston's best actors gave acclaimed performances, including Nael Nacer's portrayal of King Leontes, capturing the king's descent into madness and eventual path to redemption with depth and nuance. Marianna Bassham and Paula Plum were commended for the power and dignity of their performances as Hermione and Paulina, and countless reviews praised the talented ensemble.

Dynamic underscoring for the show was designed by Mackenzie Adamick and Dave Remedios, returning to Shakespeare on the Common after winning the Eliot Norton award for Outstanding Sound Design for their work on 2023's *Macbeth*.

Effectively balancing the play's themes of jealousy, repentance, and forgiveness with both gravitas and humor, Bryn Boice's *The Winter's Tale* offered Bostonians and beyond a splendid, free way to spend a summer evening.

"I love sitting on Boston Common under the summer sky with hundreds of my fellow Bostonians enjoying performances of Shakespeare's plays."

— Audience Member

Top: Cast of *The Winter's Tale* on stage for curtain call. Photo by Nile Scott Studios. Left: Audience members sit on Boston Common at dusk watching *The Winter's Tale*. Photo courtesy of City of Boston Mayor's Office. This Page: Nael Nacer and Marianna Bassham join hands in reunion. Photo by Nile Scott Studios.



Jaime José Hernández as Lysander dips Clara Hevia as Hermia in 2024's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Education is a pillar of CSC, and our ecosystem of education and training programs spans many ages and career stages. We believe engaging with Shakespeare and the artistic process can foster empathy, critical thinking skills, and confidence, preparing not only the artists of tomorrow but the arts lovers and engaged community members.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Stage2

In March, over 3,500 local middle and high school students attended CSC's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Associate Director of Education and Training Victoria Townsend. The production, themed around the darker side of fairy tales, asked students to examine familiar storytelling tropes to form their own opinions, and our student audiences engaged vocally! The talented cast consisted of our CSC2 cohort of 12 early-career professional actors, many of whom were former Apprentices or returning CSC2 performers.

Stage2 is made possible by the generous support of Paul Kastner and funded in part by Shakespeare in American Communities, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.

"I loved getting to talk to all the actors [in the talkback]... hearing about what inspired them to act because it really showed that they were all once aspiring theater kids just like us."

— 11th Grader from Kingston



Fairies Peaseblossom (Dyce Stephens), Cobweb (Rilyn Gardner), and Mustardseed (Ryan Richard Doyle) gather around Chloe Boyan, center, as Puck. Photo by Nile Scott Studios

CSC Apprentice Program

A diverse group of 33 students from across the country and as far as India joined CSC for this summer's six-week Apprentice training program. Our Education team led a full suite of classes, workshops, and full Shakespearean productions of *Richard II* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. Apprentices understudied ensemble roles in *The Winter's Tale* on the Common – one Apprentice even took the stage during an evening of actor illness – and many served as Audience Ambassadors, learning the ropes of a professional theatrical Shakespearean production alongside our staff.

“I keep saying this, but I had the best time. I'm so grateful I was able to work with this company and meet the friends and people I did. All of the Apprentices are still keeping in touch...and I feel so much more connected, even to the Boston theatre scene.”

—Summer Apprentice 2024



Bryce Mathieu and Ryan Scott Cooke embrace on stage. Photo by Nile Scott Studios



Our Think Outside the Vox ASL interpretation team performs with *The Winter's Tale*. Photo by Think Outside The Vox

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS

Access as a Core Value

Since our founding in 1996, accessibility has been one of the pillars of CSC's work. We're proud of our commitment to making outstanding performing arts available to everyone in Greater Boston regardless of ability to pay, and in recent years we've continued to expand our accessibility work to better serve all our patrons, regardless of mobility, ability, or other access needs.

"I have difficulty hearing. I use hearing aids. The sound system is fabulous. Better than most theatres. I am hugely thankful."

— Audience feedback on *The Winter's Tale*

In 2024, we once again offered open captioning at every performance of both our Shakespeare on the Common and Stage2 productions, as well as assisted listening devices and a range of playbill options including digital, large print, and Braille. Working with our longtime expert access partners at Think Outside the Vox, we presented ASL-interpreted performances, audio description, and a pre-show touch tour.

Renewing DEIA Commitments

In 2020, CSC published our first Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access. In it, we crystallized many of our long-held values and it has served as a guide for the evaluation and evolution of our organization's ideals and impacts relative to anti-racism, anti-ableism, and other critical dimensions of social justice in our work and our community. This year, we continued this work and added new goals. We've published updates to our commitments each year, and welcome you to explore and provide feedback on them at commshakes.org/deia.

Climate Resilience

In conjunction with our DEIA work, and generously funded by the Liberty Mutual Foundation, in fiscal year 2024 CSC completed an initial project of information-gathering and evaluation. We continue to evaluate our organization's climate impact and resilience as an outdoor summer producer of theater in a world of changing weather patterns. We're proud to have instituted CSC's first Climate Plan, and look forward to building further on this work.



Our performance site on land now known as Boston Common

The Land We Perform On

CSC's flagship Shakespeare on the Common program takes place on land now known as The Boston Common which is on the traditional lands of the Pawtucket and Massachuset tribes, as well as the historic lands of the Wampanoag nation. This land has seen a bloody history towards its Indigenous peoples. Our work relative to the land we occupy is ever-evolving, and as fiscal year 2024 comes to a close, CSC is currently reviewing our land acknowledgement practices with Groundwater Arts, a consulting firm focused on bringing a decolonized and climate-just future to the arts and culture sector. We look forward to sharing this ongoing work with you as it unfolds.

“The captioning is INVALUABLE for those of us who don't have a degree in Elizabethan poetry. Really enriches our experience, please keep!”

— Audience feedback on
The Winter's Tale



Co-Chairs Michael Kelley and Ricardo Rodriguez with Mayor Michelle Wu, Board Chair Dave Friedman, and Founding Artistic Director Steven Maler at The Newbury Boston for "Shakespeare Under the Stars." Photo by Mike Mejia

SHAKESPEARE UNDER THE STARS

The CSC Gala Returns

On April 5th, 2024, CSC's annual gala made its grand post-pandemic return. Illustrious power couple Ricardo Rodriguez and Michael Kelley, previous CSC gala chairs, brought the magic to the newly-branded "Shakespeare Under the Stars." Thanks to our generous sponsors at the Newbury Boston, the gala traveled through the hotel's magnificent second floor over wine from Barton & Guestier and an exquisite menu. Over dinner, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth from 2023's acclaimed production gave an intimate and electric performance, followed by a romantic showcase of *The Winter's Tale*.

Thanks to Ricardo, Michael, the Newbury, Winston Flowers, our other incredible partners, and our beautiful guests, Shakespeare Under the Stars was a gorgeous evening and CSC's highest-earning gala to date.



Thank you, and save the date for next year's event at the Newbury on **Saturday, April 5th, 2025!**



Opening Night Soiree

On July 24th, a group of CSC's greatest supporters gathered to celebrate the official Press Opening Night of *The Winter's Tale*. Thanks to our generous sponsors at Boston Chops, we enjoyed a fabulous dinner before taking in the opening night performance. Afterwards, artists and guests returned to Boston Chops to toast the show. Enormous thanks to our guests, donors, and Boston Chops!



Jennifer Hunnewell, Samia Kirmani and Jennifer Borggaard stand in front of the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company logo. Photo by Liesl Clark

DEVELOPMENT

Growing, Diversifying, and Sustaining

Despite ongoing challenges in the arts sector, donations to CSC have held strong, making all of our work possible. In fiscal year 2024, CSC employed multiple new strategies to diversify revenue, including the reintroduction of our gala, introducing our production of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, and an increased focus on sponsorships that resulted in raising 153% of our corporate funding goal. We were honored to welcome many wonderful new members to our Prospero Society of major donors, and to receive increased investment from many of our longtime supporters.



Patrons enjoy *The Winter's Tale* from the Friends Section, sponsored by The Newbury Boston. Photo by Dawn Kingston

We are so deeply grateful for the support of the individuals and organizations who bring all of CSC's programming to our community – thank you!

Steadfast Public Partners

Our second year of funding from the City of Boston's Neighborhood and Downtown Activation Fund contributed enormously to CSC's work on Boston Common, particularly our CommonStage initiative with partner organizations, and we're thankful for the continued partnership of Mayor Michelle Wu and Boston Chief of Arts & Culture, Kara Elliott-Ortega. Despite Massachusetts state budget challenges in fiscal year 2024 that resulted in large cuts to CSC's state funding, our advocates to the Massachusetts legislature helped secure a CSC-record earmark of \$375,000 for the coming fiscal year 2025.



Mayor Michelle Wu and Steve Maler greet the audience of *The Winter's Tale*. Photo courtesy of City of Boston Mayor's Office

PARTNERING FOR ACCESSIBLE ART

CSC Partners and Community Nights

Every year, CSC relies on our outstanding partners to help us make magic and share it with the Greater Boston community. During *The Winter's Tale*, we were honored to welcome many returning Community Ambassadors back to Shakespeare on the Common, including a wide range of educational and community partners and our friends at GBH. Our partners at Ben & Jerry's and many other food trucks supplied audiences on the Common with treats at every show.



Audience members at Shakespeare on the Common enjoy Ben & Jerry's signature *The Winter's Tale* ice cream sundae.



Victoria Townsend and Bryn Boice smile at a camera in front of a group of educators in a black box theater. Photo by Bryn Boice

This summer we were excited to introduce a new opportunity to connect with our partners, affinity groups, and communities in the Greater Boston area: Community Nights on the Common. At our inaugural events of Educator Night, Pride Night, and Access Night, we welcomed our Community Ambassador organizations at pre-show events and to watch *The Winter's Tale* from special community sections.

Over 60 Massachusetts educators joined our Education team for a workshop on teaching Shakespeare before sharing dinner and a show on Educator Night, and we were thrilled to offer our popular annual Access Night, featuring our full suite of access services facilitated by our amazing partners at Think Outside the Vox.



Community Ambassadors from the Pine Manor program attend *The Winter's Tale*.



An audience sits on CSC's Boston Common site at night watching *The Goonies* on blankets and lawn chairs. Photo courtesy of Alamo Drafthouse

CommonStage

Thanks to ongoing support from the Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture, CSC programmed the third year of our CommonStage initiative to share our stage on Boston Common with peer arts and culture organizations. After the run of *The Winter's Tale*, CSC welcomed partners to bring their programming to our site. First, we hosted Alamo Drafthouse for an evening of nostalgic fun around a free screening of *The Goonies*. Rain interrupted the planned "Better Together Follies" concert from our Pride Night Sponsor, The Crown & Anchor in Provincetown.

Finally, we were excited to debut the pilot program of our CommonStage Arts Festival, hosting booths and performances from half a dozen Boston-area arts organizations. Thank you to all of our CommonStage partners! We look forward to continuing to grow this initiative to bring more free arts and culture to Boston with our stage and team on the Common.



Front of house staffers and former Apprentices Bethany Cabral and Amelia Rodriguez pose in CSC's tent at the Commonstage Arts Festival.

Thank You to Our 2024 Sponsors





Prospero Society members enjoy a reading of *Love Letters* by Chris and Marianne Cooper. Photo by Liesl Clark

Prospero Society

The Prospero Society of CSC donors contributing \$1,000 or more annually powers and sustains all of CSC's operations and brings together our biggest fans and advocates! Since its founding in 2021, the Prospero Society has grown steadily, and fiscal year 2024 saw our highest membership yet. We were thrilled to welcome 29 new members, many of whom joined through your generous contributions to the Fund-A-Need at our gala, and were honored to receive renewed and increased commitments from so many longtime supporters.

Our members join CSC for exclusive events, behind-the-scenes visits, and insider news and sneak peeks. For our first Prospero Society event of the fiscal year, we welcomed dear friends of the company, and husband-and-wife acting duo, Marianne Leone Cooper and Oscar winner Chris Cooper for an exclusive, one-night staged reading of *Love Letters*, the Pulitzer Prize-nominated play by A.R. Gurney. We gathered at Seaport's District Hall to hear the performance and the first plans for the year ahead.



Michael McCormack, Janet Wu, Ali Zaidi, and David Jones at the March 2024 event, hosted by Michael McCormack. Photo by Liesl Clark

Board member Christy Cashman and her husband Jay carried on a tradition of graciously hosting CSC's holiday party, which featured the grand reveal of *The Winter's Tale* as our 2024 Shakespeare on the Common production and a performance by one of its talented young stars.

In March, we gathered at the home of CSC Advisor Michael McCormack to learn about CSC's education and training ecosystem and enjoy performances by some of the early-career actors who have blossomed in our Apprentice and CSC2 programs.



Top: Clara Hevia performs in front of smiling guests at CSC's holiday party. Bottom: Suzanne Bernard-Plimpton and Sam Plimpton raise a celebratory glass. Photos by Liesl Clark



Scharukh Jalisi with *The Winter's Tale* actors Tony Estrella and Joshua Olumide. Photo by Liesl Clark

For our final Prospero event of the fiscal year, CSC Advisor Moushmi Soleja and her husband Dr. Scharukh Jalisi generously opened their beautiful Newton home to the Prospero Society. Guests were invited to mingle with the extraordinary performers and creatives of *The Winter's Tale*, who joined us directly from rehearsal just two weeks before taking to the stage.



Steve Maler toasts hosts Moushmi Soleja and Scharukh Jalisi at the "Meet the Cast" party. Photo by Liesl Clark

Donors in Fiscal Year 2024

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We are deeply grateful for contributions of under \$1,000.

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We sincerely thank the hundreds of donors who contributed up to \$249.

This donor list represents individuals who made gifts in the 2024 fiscal year, which spanned from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024. 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.



CSC Board Executive Committee members with actors and supporters Chris and Marianne Cooper.

CSC Board

CSC's Trustees and Advisors serve as guideposts, advocates, and the stewards of CSC's mission. We were honored to be joined by several new board members this year, and honored as always by the invaluable service of our continuing members. Deepest thanks go to our board members who served on committees this year, recruited new friends, hosted events, contributed time and expertise, and more.

**“Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.”**

— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

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Nael Nacer center stage in *The Winter's Tale*. Photo by Nile Scott Studios



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