



Hip TO Hip THEATRE COMPANY

5240 39TH DRIVE, 9U
WOODSIDE, NY 11377

Phone: 718-729-8567
Email: contact@hiptohip.org
www.hiptohip.org



The Merry Wives of Windsor at Gantry Plaza State Park, 2015

2015 REPORT FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Jason Marr

MANAGING DIRECTOR
Guy Ventoliere

ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
David Mold

Our 9th season of “Free Shakespeare in the Park” was a resounding success! Our goals were to increase the quality and the quantity of our programming, and to raise the profile of Hip to Hip by creating a stronger connection to the broader New York City theatre scene. I am happy to report that we more than met these goals. We provided more free performances in more places for more people, and we achieved our highest level of artistry to date.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nina Szarkowski Jones
Daren Kelly
Jason Marr
Joy Marr
Katie O’Sullivan
Gabourey Sidibe

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
Dawn Clarke

RESIDENT COSTUME DESIGNER
Nancy Nichols

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S
PROGRAMMING**
Caitlin Cassidy

DRAMATURG
Adriana Alter



In selecting the titles for the season, we wanted to choose plays that would entertain our audiences and provoke thought about current social issues. *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* did just that. *Merchant*, through biting drama, and *Merry Wives*, through hilarious satire, examine societies where individuals are not treated equally under the law, and both question the values of forgiveness versus revenge. Ripped right from today’s headlines, they gave our audiences (and artists) plenty to chew on.

We assembled a robust creative team, consisting of 36 theatre artists, including Broadway actors, a razor-sharp dramaturg, and an international guest director.

We further developed our children’s program “Kids & the Classics” by making it highly interactive, and I am thrilled to report that 672 enthusiastic children ages 4 – 16 participated in it.

In addition to drawing larger audiences to our venues in Queens, Southampton and Jersey City, we expanded our footprint to include 2 new venues: the Bronx (the most underserved of NYC's five boroughs) and Manhattan (where our production of *Merchant* was featured in the New York International Fringe Festival, the largest multi-arts festival in North America). In total, our 6-week tour traveled to 11 diverse parks, and reached 7,931 people.

THE PRODUCTIONS & THE TEAM

Spanning small-town Windsor and sophisticated Venice, our 2015 season incorporated romance, wit, suspense and even finance. *Merchant* and *Merry Wives* explore both the outrageously funny and the sadistically dark sides of revenge and justice, commerce, courtship, and the social order. *Merchant* was set in the last decade of the Victorian era, and *Merry Wives* was set in the early 1400's, during the reign of Henry V.

We assembled our largest, most impressive, and most diverse creative team to date—36 theatre artists in all, including administrators, directors, technicians, actors, production assistants, photographers, a publicist and a graphic designer. I am thrilled that in addition to serving a large and multi-cultural audience, we are also providing opportunities to a large and multi-cultural team of artists, to work on their craft. We again had a healthy mix of fresh faces and returning company members, and we struck an important balance between working professionals and up-and-comers by further developing our program of structured apprenticeships and internships.



Associate Artistic Director David Mold, who in past seasons directed *Hamlet*, *Love's Labor's Lost* and *Cymbeline*, returned to direct *The Merchant of Venice*, and at the helm of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was multi-award-winning director Murray McGibbon, whose international accomplishments include six years as Artistic Director of Drama for the Playhouse Company in Durban, South Africa, a Fulbright Scholarship and a long career of excellence in teaching at Indiana University's Department of Theatre & Drama. This was the first year we were in a position to hire an out-of-town guest director, and the exchange of artistic ideas paved the way for an especially invigorating process.

We took another big step forward with our production values by rolling out our most ambitious touring sets to date, and by lifting our lighting and sound system to a whole new level of professionalism. We again maximized our multi-level modular set by creating two distinct looks for the productions. As always, our ambitions had to be balanced with the logistical challenges we still face: setting up and breaking down the set on a daily basis with a small crew. We were fortunate to hire a fantastic



up-and-coming set designer who totally understood this balance. With a minimal number of pieces, Miguel Urbino came up with designs that captured both the rustic Tudor world of Windsor, and the elegant architecture of Venice. We did have to move to a larger touring truck (a 20-footer instead of a 14-footer) to accommodate our larger technical load, but our crew managed it with focus and grace.



Our Resident Costume Designer Nancy Nichols again wowed our audiences with a parade of sumptuous costumes. With a limited budget, and an amazing team of assistants, she designed and assembled 38 vibrant costumes that illuminated both the characters and the plays. It should be noted that we owe many thanks to two amazing NYC resources: Materials for the Arts and TDF Costume Collection.

Materials for the Arts (MFTA) is New York City's premiere reuse center, providing a way for companies and individuals to donate unneeded supplies to thousands of nonprofit organizations with arts programming.



We could not do what we do without MFTA—in 2015 alone, we built or refurbished over 20 garments using fabrics, trims, linings, boning, buttons, feathers, paint, paper and glue-on jewels donated by MFTA—specifically, 60 yards of fabric, 25 yards of trim, 12 zippers, 10 yards of elastic, 15 yards of Velcro, 3 dozen hangers, 2 dozen buttons, 8 dozen snaps, and sundry belt buckles, beads, chains, pins, bracelets, earrings, rings, snaps, hooks & eyes.

Theatre Development Fund (TDF) is a not-for-profit organization created in 1968 to provide support to theatrical works of artistic merit. TDF Costume Collection was designed to help dress up the stages of not-for-profit and

small-scale theatrical performances by offering affordable costume rentals. Our costume team spent countless hours pulling and fitting costumes in its warehouse, which houses over 80,000 costumes and accessories donated from Broadway, Off Broadway, Opera, Film, and regional productions.



Photographer Julian Voloj again captured hundreds of images that document the totality of our programming, from production meetings and rehearsals to set construction and performance. In addition, Julian spearheaded an extra project that is now in development: he selected our production of *The Merchant of Venice* as the subject for a "fumetti" (also known as a graphic novel). The story will include a behind-the-scenes look at the making of our *Merchant*-from play selection to design to casting to performance! German born, Julian's work explores identity and heritage. He has been featured in a variety of newspapers and magazines such as the New York Times, Washington Post, and the Jerusalem Post. His award winning work has been exhibited in museums and galleries around the globe. For the posterity of Hip to Hip, we are extremely lucky that Julian has photographed the bulk of our work over the past many years.



In the spring, our Board made the decision to find the money to hire a publicist for the first time, and the investment paid off. Our productions garnered very positive press: in addition to being featured on NY1 News, we were covered by New York Magazine, the New York Observer, BroadwayWorld.com, The Queens Ledger, The Southampton Press, Dan's Papers, Sag Harbor News, and wonderful interviews on two podcasts (*Broadway Bullet* and *Go See a Show*) and a radio show—WLIW's "Bonnie in the Morning." In addition

to these features, both productions were critical hits, and both productions were nominated for a slew of Queens Kudos Awards by the Times Ledger, including Best Director, Best Production, Best Actor and Actress and Best Supporting Actor and Actress; and Guy Ventoliere won Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of the flamboyant Dr. Caius and the loose cannon Pistol in *Merry Wives*!

Here are some of the highlights from the critics:

“Hip to Hip is simply the best.”

-Queens Tribune

“Shylock is played with dignity and touching humanity by Doug Hendel. Portia, one of Shakespeare’s strongest female characters, is expertly portrayed by Joy Marr. Bassanio is portrayed with searingly heartfelt emotion by William Oliver Watkins.”

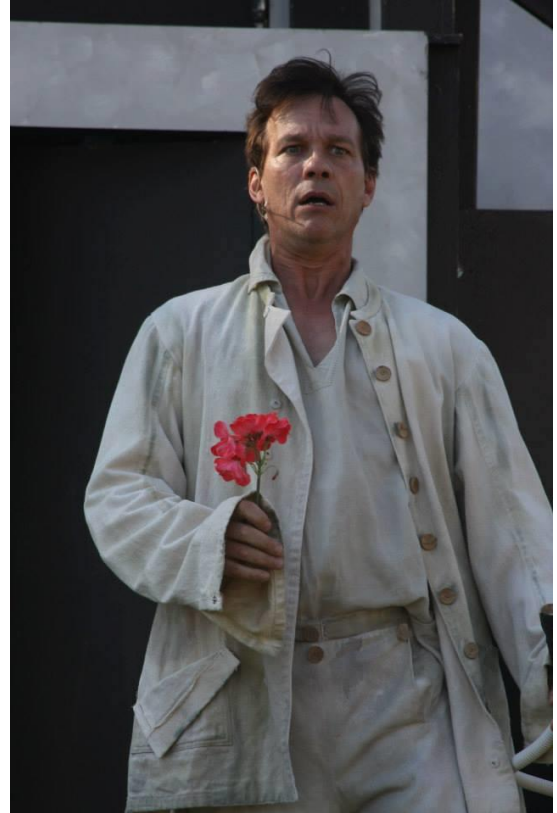
-Queens Tribune

“Absolutely stellar. The stage, the costumes, and the sound effects add fantastic atmosphere to the show while the actors and actresses expertly bring the characters to life—if you get a chance to see this rendition of this classic comedy do not hesitate!

-AXS.com

“Children, teens, adults and seniors alike came to the production and seemed to have a great time.”

- Queens Chronicle



KIDS & THE CLASSICS

In 2015, we further developed our free educational program “Kids & the Classics,” which serves as a companion piece to our program of “Free Shakespeare in the Park”. As in prior years, it was offered before each and every performance, and in its third year, the format for the program was retooled to make it even more interactive.

“Kids & the Classics” constitutes an integral component of our outreach to low-income communities; it introduces at-risk children to classic literature in such a way as to encourage self-expression and strengthen a wide variety of skills. Our unique curriculum is based on the teachings of improvisation pioneer Viola Spolin, and is implemented under the tutelage of our Director of Children’s Programming, English and theatre teacher Caitlin Cassidy. We customize our workshop to a wide range of ages, and differentiate instruction so as to best serve students with differing abilities. In 2015, “Kids & the Classics” provided 672 children with an introduction to the tenets of ensemble playing, the elements of theatre, and audience





etiquette. It enabled the children to fully engage with Shakespeare's language, and to identify connections between the text and their own lives. As a result, we not only helped children contextualize and understand the performances they were about to see, but also inducted them into the magical world of theatre.

"Kids & the Classics" aims not only to entertain, but also to enrich and empower, the children whom it reaches. As numerous articles and studies have argued recently, in addition to augmenting students' literacy, articulation, observation, and listening abilities, arts education plays a significant role in fostering leadership potential; it encourages and inculcates creativity, confidence, collaboration, and attention to detail, and helps to impart a positive sense of self. Moreover, the collaborative nature of putting on a play has social and emotional, as well as academic and personal, rewards. By forming an ensemble, and by watching a professional company of actors collaborate in putting on a play, children instinctively learn about teamwork and deportment. Finally, through the medium of Shakespeare's work, children acquire a wider perspective as they explore larger ideas about society and their own futures. Overall, therefore, exploring Shakespeare through theatre not only introduces children to classic literature, but also lends them insight into the world around them, and helps to instill a sense of mutual respect and trust.

DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH

In the spring of 2015, I met with Tom Finkelpearl, the Commissioner of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and he congratulated us on our commitment to diversity, and he praised our mission of providing access to the arts. It is a good time to be doing what we are doing because equity, and diversity in arts organizations, are goals of the current administration.

In addition, we won the endorsements of New York City Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer and Queens Borough President Melinda Katz.



Our community outreach campaign again focused on partnerships with over 100 civic organizations. We distributed 2,500 flyers, 2,500 postcards and 150 posters. In addition, to attract more same-day traffic, we continued our efforts to create a festive atmosphere with pre-show music, colorful scenic elements, Shakespeare sandwich boards directing people towards the performances, and a “welcome tent,” where patrons could stop by to learn more about Hip to Hip, sign up to be on our mailing list, and buy a souvenir t-shirt.

Our Managing Director, Guy Ventolieri, lead the way for our expansion to the Bronx. We saw this as a natural progression of our mission of providing access to the professional arts in underserved communities. As a native of the Bronx, Guy did a fabulous job connecting us to the Bronx politicians, the media outlets, the supportive staff of Van Cortlandt Park, and the wonderfully appreciative audience. This expansion was so successful, that we have decided to build upon it in 2016.



In early 2015, Joy Marr and I, as the founders of Hip to Hip, were honored with a Queens Impact Award. Winners were chosen based on nominations from a six-member committee and the Times Ledger staff, to represent the entire borough. Honorees were recognized for the work they have done as volunteers and professionals to make life better for people in Queens. The award provided us with a nice publicity boost right as we were announcing the 2015 season.

I am pleased to report that we achieved our goal of developing a more vibrant connection to the broader New York City theatre scene: we continued our membership in the Alliance of Resident Theatres (A.R.T.); we hired a publicist who introduced us to more off-off Broadway publications and podcasts; and our production of *Merchant* was featured in the New York International Fringe Festival.



The Fringe performances took place in the historical Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan’s East Village. The Fringe opportunity allowed us to showcase our work to a whole new audience, and our team truly enjoyed the Manhattan vibe, not to mention an easier commute for company members who live in Manhattan or Brooklyn.

Finally, I am thrilled to report that our gala performances in Southampton were again a highlight of our tour. Thanks to a full-court press by a strong volunteer marketing committee, we won excellent media attention, and we played to our

largest audiences there to date. These gala performances, both in terms of fundraising and artistic standards, are integral to our outreach efforts in under-served neighborhoods in NYC.

FUNDING & LOOKING AHEAD

I am happy to report that in 2015 we continued to pull together a healthy mix of private and public funding. Thanks to the focus and drive of our dramaturg (and grant-writer) Adriana Alter, we approached more funders, with more competitive applications, than ever before. This, in connection with increased public funding, positions us to achieve an operating budget of \$100,000 in 2016. (For a bit of context, our inaugural annual budget in 2007 was \$2,500.) How far we've come!

If we are to take the *next* important step in our development—namely, a higher level of technical self-sufficiency, a higher tier of contract with the professional actors' union, and year-round producing capabilities—we must find new funding sources, including individuals, and corporate sponsorships. The great news is that we have an amazing 6-member Board and 7-member staff focused on making progress on all of these fronts in 2016.

We are especially excited to welcome 2016 because it marks our 10th anniversary! I hope you will join us for two of Shakespeare's best-loved and most action-packed plays, complete with political intrigue, hilarious romantic misadventures, civil war, a wrestling match, and a vengeful ghost! Through the dazzling comedy *As You Like It* and the pointed tragedy *Julius Caesar*, our tenth season explores the themes of love and liberty. Both plays examine the aftermath of regime change in a world without clear-cut heroes and villains, where loyalties shift, power corrupts, and individuals must strive for their personal freedom. These plays seem especially apt for an election year—and an anniversary season!

Jason Marr
Artistic Director

Free Shakespeare In The Park 2016

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

10th
Anniversary Season

AS YOU LIKE IT & JULIUS CAESAR
Directed by David Mold Directed by Joel Leffert

Hip TO Hip
THEATRE COMPANY

July 27 - Aug 28