



# Hip TO Hip

THEATRE COMPANY

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*Measure for Measure, Flushing Meadows, 2017*

## 2017 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
Jason Marr

**MANAGING DIRECTOR**  
Guy Ventoliere

**ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
David Mold

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Adriana Alter

Hip to Hip's 2017 season of "Free Shakespeare in the Parks" was especially bright thanks to its funders, its fans, and its first-rate creative team. I am thrilled to report that Hip to Hip expanded access to theatre by removing cultural, physical, and financial barriers.

Cultural barriers were removed by assembling a diverse team and by producing vibrant and highly accessible productions with universal themes: between the dark comedy *Measure for Measure*, the epic *Henry IV, Part 1*, and the interactive children's workshop "Kids & the Classics," Hip to Hip truly had something for everyone.

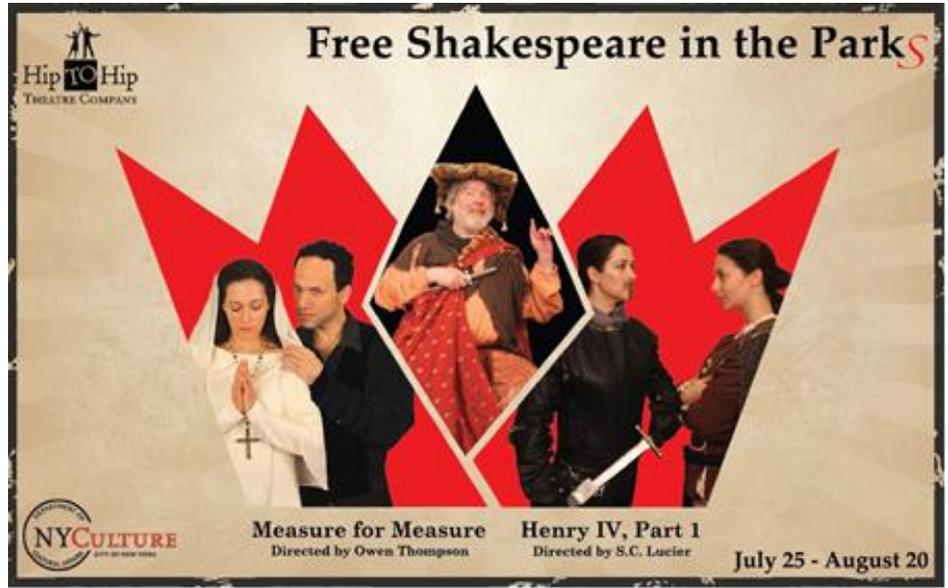
Physical barriers were removed by taking the shows directly to the people. In all, Hip to Hip performed in thirteen neighborhoods; for the first time in its history, Hip to Hip covered all five boroughs of New York City, as well as Southampton and Jersey City! In each of those neighborhoods, the performances were held in highly accessible public spaces.

Financial barriers were removed by providing all programming for free, and Hip to Hip's "no-tickets-no-lines" policy guaranteed the programming was *truly* free, because patrons did not have to pay with their *time* standing on line for tickets—all they had to do was show up!

CreateNYC, New York City's first-ever cultural plan, identified areas of the city that were defined by the Social Impact of the Arts (SIAP) study as neighborhoods with low measures of economic well-being, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs has decided to pour more resources into those neighborhoods. When the list was published, I was thrilled to see that of Hip to Hip's eleven NYC venues, eight of them were on that list. It confirmed for me that Hip to Hip has really been doing what its mission mandates—taking quality professional theatre to underserved communities.

## THE PLAYS, THE PRODUCTIONS & THE PEOPLE

From taverns to palaces, Hip to Hip's productions of *Measure for Measure* and *Henry IV, Part 1* invited audiences into the personal trials and triumphs of the common people and their all-too-human leaders. The shows featured madcap capers and epic battles, mistaken identities and unexpected marriages, courtly diplomacy and political sex scandals, and a vibrant cast of unforgettable characters, including the iconic Falstaff.



Once again, Hip to Hip put together an impressive roster of talent, 40 theatre artists in all. The acting company included Broadway veteran Daren Kelly, and the directing team included S.C. Lucier and award-winning director Owen Thompson. Ms. Lucier, who directed *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and co-directed *The Tempest* for Hip to Hip in prior years, returned to direct *Henry IV, Part 1*. Mr. Thompson, who in past seasons appeared in *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, returned to direct *Measure for Measure*. I am especially proud to report that Hip to Hip continued its commitment to diversity and gender equity throughout the entire creative team. Of particular note: two of *Henry IV, Part 1*'s traditionally male protagonists, Prince Hal and Harry Percy, were portrayed by women.



Under the leadership of Managing Director Guy Ventoliere and Associate Artistic Director David Mold, Hip to Hip assembled a dedicated and hardworking group of apprentices, production assistants, and interns, with Hunter College and Marymount Manhattan College serving as a fertile source of aspiring young talent. In 2017, Hip to Hip had its most robust and specialized production team to date, including a Production Stage Manager, two Assistant Stage Managers, two Assistant Directors, three Production Assistants on costumes, two production assistants on sound and lights, and two production assistants on the welcome tent. For perspective, Hip to Hip's inaugural season in 2007 had a production crew of one.

Here's a quick look at what happens with Hip to Hip on a performance day: four hours before showtime, I arrive on site with a 20-foot box truck and I am joined by the crew, which is made up of the aforementioned production personnel, plus a sound technician and four apprentice actors; the seventeen of us unload the truck and set up the sets, lights, costumes and audio equipment; thirty minutes before the main show, "Kids & the Classics" starts; the main show lasts 100 minutes; immediately following the performance, the crew and the acting company work together to disassemble and reload everything into the 20-foot box truck; and I drive the truck to its parking spot in Long Island City. It would be far too tedious to recount the many small tasks that have to be accomplished before the show begins, like the daily pick-up of ice and water for the cast and crew, so let it suffice to say that it is an intricate puzzle that takes a lot of people to successfully put together. I am proud to report that the 2017 team was one of Hip to Hip's best!



Hip to Hip's Resident Costume Designer, Nancy Nichols, wowed audiences yet again with a parade of sumptuous costumes. *Henry IV Part 1* used medieval century line and color, with leather, metallic articles, and distressed garments, to show the rough and tumble life of two armies facing off (Prince Hal's and Harry Percy's), and to contrast the world of King Henry and that of the commoners. *Measure for Measure* employed early Jacobean design and expression, in bold colors and rich textures, to show a court at cross-purposes with itself and its rulers.



In prior years, Hip to Hip relied on borrowed lighting equipment. In 2017, thanks to a capital grant from The Hyde & Watson Foundation, Hip to Hip was able to purchase "Source 4" lighting instruments, dimmer packs, lighting trees and all the needed clamps, electric cabling and support. Many thanks are owed to the audiovisual rental house PSAV for generously lending equipment for the past five years, and many thanks are owed to The Hyde & Watson Foundation for helping Hip to Hip take this crucial step. Stage lighting is not only necessary for visibility, but it enhances *all* the elements of a

production—the actors, costumes, sets and story become more vibrant and captivating, which is helpful when performing in wide open spaces with tons of distractions. I am especially grateful for The Hyde & Watson Foundation’s commitment to capital giving, because not only did Hip to Hip increase its technical production capability, it also increased its net worth!

Also on the technical front, Hip to Hip was fortunate to have Robert Dutiel return as a set consultant. Mr. Dutiel has a long history advising, designing and building for Hip to Hip. In early production meetings regarding the 2017 season, discussions centered on finding a way to marry Hip to Hip’s multi-level set which was used from 2012-2015 and the raised decking which was used for last year’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. Unfortunately, in the technical rehearsals, it was concluded that Hip to Hip did not yet have the crew-size to support such a massive set-up. As always, the logistical challenges of setting up and breaking down the sets daily with a relatively small crew had to be considered in the final designs. It was a treat to tour with the multi-level set again. It was utilized in two configurations to create distinct looks for *Measure for Measure*’s Vienna and *Henry IV, Part 1*’s England.



## KIDS & THE CLASSICS

In 2017, Hip to Hip further developed its free educational program “Kids & the Classics,” which serves as a companion piece to its program of “Free Shakespeare in the Parks.” The workshop, which was offered before each performance, gave children between the ages of 4 and 12 the chance to interact with the text by previewing the characters and situations, creating links between the text and their own lives through theatre games and Shakespearean word associations and phrases. Managing Director Guy Ventoliere, who designed the program in 2013, returned to develop the 2017 iteration. In performance, the workshop was led by teaching artist/juggler, Jacob Gordon, with assistance from two apprentice actors from within the acting company.





“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. We customize our workshop to a wide range of ages and differentiate instruction to best serve students with differing abilities. In 2017, “Kids & the

Classics” provided 886 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.

## DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH

In 2017, for the first time, Hip to Hip performed on Staten Island. In partnership with Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Gardens Hip to Hip performed *Henry IV, Part 1* on the South Meadow stage, and it was a magical night in a gorgeous setting. Adding this venue allowed Hip to Hip to achieve one of its longest goals: to serve all five boroughs of New York City. Including the gala performances in Jersey City and Southampton, Hip to Hip provided 21 free performances and children’s workshops in 13 public spaces, drawing a total audience of 8051 over the course of a four-week tour. Here’s a demographic overview of the audience: Age: 29% seniors, 60% adult, 11% children; Ethnicity: 18% African-American; 8% Asian; 36% Caucasian; 23% Hispanic/Latino; 8% Middle Eastern; 7% Multi-ethnic.

Hip to Hip has always relied on solid community partners to help get out the word about its performances, and it was even more crucial in 2017 because of its expanded map. The outreach campaign consisted of partnering with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, Community Boards, City Council Members and over 100 civic organizations. Hip to Hip distributed 2,500



flyers, 2,500 postcards and 150 posters. To attract more “same-day traffic,” Hip to Hip did the following: (1) created a festive atmosphere with pre-show music and colorful scenic elements, (2) placed its “Welcome Tent” in a prominent place to encourage patrons to learn more about Hip to Hip, and (3) started the children’s workshop with a flashy juggling exhibition.



Hip to Hip’s productions garnered positive press: the *New York Times* included Hip to Hip in its round-up of noteworthy summer festivals; Hip to Hip was on *Theatre Mania’s* list of “10 Must-See Free Summer Shows in New York City”; Hip to Hip was featured in *BroadwayWorld.com* and *The Queens Chronicle*; and Hip to Hip’s productions were covered by *Time Out New York*, *New York Magazine*, *Newsday*, and more than twenty online blogs and events calendars.



I am happy to report that Hip to Hip reached its \$100,000 fundraising goal in 2017. Like in prior years, there was a healthy mix of public and private funding and earned income. On the public side, in addition to increased support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (NYCDCA), Hip to Hip was granted “one-time” funding as a part of CreateNYC, the City’s first-ever cultural plan. Hip to Hip also won discretionary funding from NYC Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer, and expense funding from the Queens Borough President, Melinda Katz. Rounding out the public funding was a modest regrant from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) administered by A.R.T. New York. On the private side, in addition to the continued support of The Davee Foundation, The Hyde & Watson Foundation and the City Parks Foundation, Hip to Hip continued to enjoy the support of a loyal group of individual donors. Finally, Hip to Hip continued to earn income from t-shirt sales and performance fees from partner organizations.

On the expense side of the equation, funding was used for artist stipends, production costs (including costumes, sets, lights, and sound equipment), touring costs (including truck rental, fuel and artist transportation), and marketing and promotion (including design and printing of posters, postcards and playbills).



In 2018, my focus will be on Hip to Hip's long-term goal of entering a higher tier of contract with the

professional actors' union, Actors Equity Association. This goal would require Hip to Hip to increase its annual budget to \$120,000. The key to achieving this depends on increasing private sector funding, because Hip to Hip's largest source of funding is the NYCDCA, and the NYCDCA is already giving its maximum grant based on its requirement that its funding cannot make up more than 50% of an organization's total budget. Therefore, to get more funding from the NYCDCA, Hip to Hip must increase its funding from non-NYCDCA sources. The great news is

that Hip to Hip has a terrific six-member Board and seven-member staff focused on keeping Hip to Hip moving in that direction.



Finally, I am excited to provide a sneak preview of the 2018 season:

For the first time in Hip to Hip's history, it will be adding non-summer indoor programming. The inaugural project for this new programming will be a springtime staged reading of *Henry IV, Part 2*, the sequel to last season's *Henry IV, Part 1*. Like all of Hip to Hip's programming, this staged reading will be free and open to the public.

Hip to Hip's flagship programs of "Free Shakespeare in the Parks" and "Kids & the Classics" will tour to thirteen parks from July 31<sup>st</sup> to August 26<sup>th</sup>, and the titles will be *King Lear* and *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason Marr  
Artistic Director