



# Hip TO Hip THEATRE COMPANY

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*Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Gantry Plaza State Park, 2014

## 2014 REPORT FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
Jason Marr

**MANAGING DIRECTOR**  
Guy Ventoliere

**ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
David Mold

When we sat down for our initial planning meeting in early 2014, we set the goal of growing into our new, much bigger clothes. Our prior two years were full of tremendous growth: to accommodate larger audiences, we added a state-of-the-art wireless microphone system; to increase our production values, we added a multi-level modular set (pictured above); to further our mission, we expanded our footprint to include 11 parks in New York City, Jersey City and Southampton, and we added an interactive children's workshop before each and every performance. We grew so much, so quickly, that we were stretching our human resources almost to the point of breaking. 2014 was our year to settle in.

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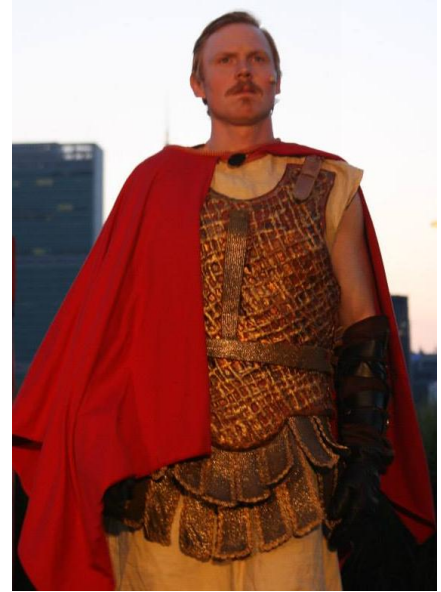


Our first order of business was an across-the-board evaluation of the components of our programming, with an eye toward maximizing efficiency. From vetting the creative team, to mastering our technical set-up; from devising smarter outreach strategies, to making more meaningful contact with already loyal patrons, we asked the question: "Is there a *better* way?"

I am proud to report that we found many better ways, and not only did we grow into our bigger clothes, but our focused planning freed up time and resources to accessorize our outfit. We provided free professional theatre to 7,106 people over the course of our 4-week, 11-park tour, and it was, without a doubt, our most relaxed, and most polished season to date.

## THE PRODUCTIONS & THE PEOPLE

The 2014 season included Shakespeare's early comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and his late romance *Cymbeline*. For the first time, we decided to highlight an overall theme to the season, and the theme was loyalty. Both *Two Gents* and *Cymbeline* explore themes of loyalty—loyalty to one's friends, loyalty to one's betrothed, loyalty to one's leaders and country, and loyalty to one's own principles. In addition, our choice to produce two of Shakespeare's less-frequently produced gems, instead of recycling titles that we've already produced, was an expression of our loyalty to working through the entire canon. The season also affirmed our loyalty to the legacy of Joseph Papp by keeping our programming FREE FOR ALL, and by reaching out to neighborhoods that have little to no access to live theatre. Another interesting factoid that I found to be delightful is that *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Cymbeline* were paired together in the inaugural season of Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival. Finally, the season displayed our loyalty to theatre artists.



I am proud to report that thanks in part to our early focus on recruitment and vetting, we assembled our largest and strongest production team to date. We 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 establishing structured apprenticeships and internships. All in all, 32 theatre artists collaborated to make the 2014 season possible.

Associate Artistic Director David Mold was at the helm of the action adventure fairy tale *Cymbeline*. The production featured sumptuous costumes by Resident Costume Designer Nancy Nichols, and flashy sword fights by stage combat choreographer Joel Leffert. The zany *Two Gentlemen of Verona* was directed by

S.C. Lucier (Artistic Director of Moira Dance Theatre) in the style of commedia dell'arte, with vibrant costumes and masks by Sarah Dixey, and commedia consultation by Yale School of Drama's Carter Gill.

On the technical front, I am happy to say we met our goal of becoming more energy independent. Our shows were literally brighter this year. Thanks to a capital grant, we were able to purchase a state-of-the-art "quiet" generator that supports over half of our electrical needs, including professional stage lighting. This acquisition both streamlined our set-up, and enhanced our beneficiaries' enjoyment of the productions.



## KIDS & THE CLASSICS

In 2014, we further developed our children's program "Kids & the Classics," which serves as a companion piece to our program of "Free Shakespeare in the Park". Offered before each and every performance, "Kids & the Classics" aims to give children of all ages a taste of the magic of live theatre by introducing them to classical text and performance, and by instructing them in various technical and artistic aspects of production. In its second year, we retooled the format of the program to make it less of a kid's "show," and more of a kid's "interactive workshop."



Our goal was to more fully engage, enrich and empower the children we reached.

I am thrilled to report that the program was a big hit with children and parents alike. 811 children participated in the program, which consisted of a series of fun theatre games and exercises lead by our recently-named Director of Children's Programming, Caitlin Cassidy. The workshop taught the tenets of ensemble playing, it provided an introduction to the elements of theatre (script, scenery, lighting, makeup, costumes, acting, and actors), it taught audience etiquette, and, most importantly, it got the kids up on their feet, playing with the language of Shakespeare.

"Kids & the Classics" has become a starting point for us in the development of a more comprehensive educational program. Toward that end, we applied for and were invited to present at the 30<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the New York State Theatre Education Association, and we are currently in discussions with New York City public schools regarding the design of an in-school program that would supplement the students' classroom introduction to Shakespeare and the classics.

I personally enjoyed watching the children explore the rhythm of iambic pentameter as they walked like pirates with wooden legs, chanting "I AM a PIRate WITH a WOODen LEG," allowing the wooden leg to stomp out the stressed beats of the line. On *Two Gents* days, it was a treat watching the children (wearing the complimentary masks we distributed to them) interact with the masked commedia characters; and on *Cymbeline* days, it was a blast watching the children act out their very own dramatic Shakespearean "death scene." These—and all of the other activities covered in



"Kids & the Classics"—achieved the desired effect of introducing children to the wonderful world of theatre, and helping them contextualize the performance they were about to see.



## DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH

I am proud to report that we grew the overall size of our audience by 8%. This increase was the result of a more robust “get-out-the-word” operation, positive press, and consistently pleasant weather (which is always the wild card).

Significantly, we launched a new community outreach campaign that focused on partnerships with over 100 civic organizations, and we distributed 2,000 flyers, 1,000 postcards and 500 posters. In addition, to attract more same-day traffic, we created an overall more festive atmosphere with pre-show music, colorful scenic elements, Shakespeare sandwich boards directing people towards the performances, and a new “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. (We nearly doubled the sales of t-shirts because we invested in higher quality “fitted tees—available in male and female sizes—and because we were for the first time able to accept credit cards.)

I am pleased to report that we also made progress toward our goal of developing a more vibrant connection to the broader New York City theatre scene: we joined the Alliance of Resident Theatres (A.R.T.), and our productions were adjudicated by the New York Innovative Theatre Awards (NYIT), the official off-off-Broadway theatre awards.

The amount of positive exposure we’ve received from the press has always been a good measuring stick for the season’s success. I am happy to report that our eighth season of “Free Shakespeare in the Park” received great coverage: we were again included in The New York Times’ round-up of noteworthy free summer events; we were featured in The Queens Tribune, The Times Ledger, The Queens Chronicle, and Queens Parent; we received free listings with NYC & Co. and many other internet-based periodicals and blogs; we grew our social media presence; and we were once again featured on NY1 (New York City’s 24-hour cable news channel).



## FUNDING

Thanks to a healthy mix of private and public funding, we exceeded our fundraising goal, raising \$58,122, including contributions from individuals (\$16,705), foundation support (\$10,500), government grants (\$17,597), contracted services (\$10,120), and t-shirt/playbill-ad sales (\$3,200). Crossing the \$50k threshold was important for us, because it qualifies us to apply to a wider array of private foundations that have a \$50k minimum annual budget.

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 from the professional actors union, and year-round producing—we must find new funding sources, including major donors and corporate sponsorships.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The 2015 season is already taking shape: regarding outreach, I am thrilled to announce that we will be expanding our footprint to include another of the City's underserved boroughs, the Bronx. Regarding raising our profile, we have submitted our upcoming productions for consideration by the New York City International Fringe Festival. Regarding our team, I am delighted to announce the appointment of Adriana Alter to the new staff position of Dramaturg. Production meetings have commenced for our ninth season of "Free Shakespeare in the Park"—the plays have been selected, the venues have been booked, the creative team is being assembled, the funding proposals are being sent out, and the audiences are being developed. 2015 promises to be another exciting year for Hip to Hip Theatre Company.

Jason Marr  
Artistic Director



**FREE SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK 2015**

**Hip TO Hip**  
THEATRE COMPANY

**THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**  
Directed by David Mold

**THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR**  
Directed by Murray McGibbon

July 22-Aug 16

*All that glitters is not gold*