



Hip TO Hip THEATRE COMPANY

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As You Like It - Gantry Plaza State Park, 2016

2016 REPORT FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Jason Marr

MANAGING DIRECTOR
Guy Ventoliere

ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
David Mold

2016 was a special year for Hip to Hip, as it marked our 10th anniversary of “Free Shakespeare in the Parks.” Over the past decade, we’ve had the good fortune of bringing together 237 theatre artists to produce eighteen major shows, and we’ve toured the shows to over two dozen neighborhoods in Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem, Jersey City and Southampton, playing to 46,211 individuals, young and old, and from some of the most diverse communities in the world.

Our tenth season gave us a chance to both celebrate and build upon this foundation. The play selections were especially apt—*Julius Caesar* was perfect for an election year and *As You Like It* provided us with a nice touchstone as it was the centerpiece of our inaugural season ten years ago.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

Our goals for 2016 were (1) to increase the quality and the quantity of our programming, (2) to develop a higher level of technical capability and self-sufficiency, and (3) to continue 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 made good strides on all fronts: (1) we provided more free performances in more places and achieved our highest level of artistry with our productions, (2) we made a significant technical capital investment, and (3) we received a Citation from The Council of the City of New York for our “exemplary service, which is the lifeblood of the community and the city.”

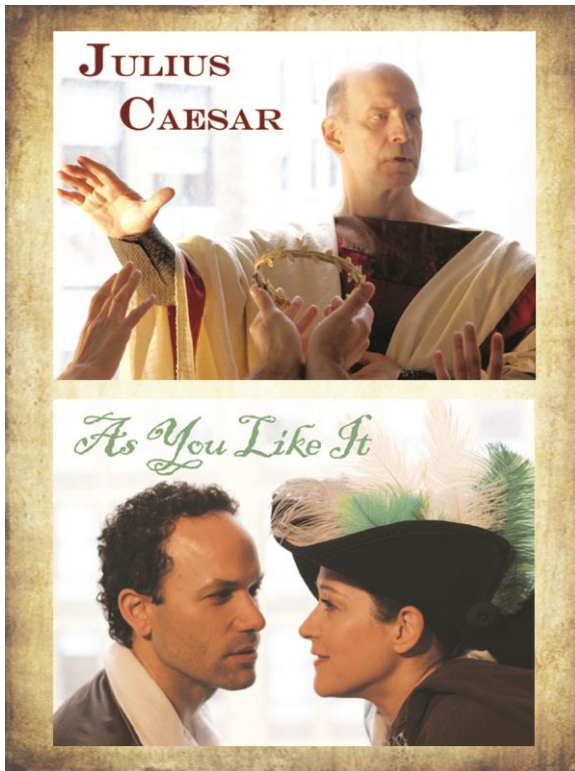
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
Dawn Clarke

RESIDENT COSTUME DESIGNER
Nancy Nichols

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S PROGRAMMING
Caitlin Cassidy

DRAMATURG
Adriana Alter





THE PLAYS, THE PRODUCTIONS & THE PEOPLE

Julius Caesar and *As You Like It* are 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 of *As You Like It* and the pointed tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, our tenth season explored the themes of love and liberty. Our productions examined 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. There was truly something for everyone.

We assembled our largest, most impressive, and most diverse creative team to date—38 theatre artists in all, including administrators, directors, technicians, actors, production assistants, photographers, a publicist and a graphic designer. In addition to serving a large and multi-

cultural audience, we provided opportunities for 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.

I discovered the meaning behind the old saying that the difference between success and failure is a great team. Despite a rather hot, humid, and rainy summer, on 24 occasions our intrepid team traveled to a park, unloaded a 20-foot box truck, set up sets, lights, costumes and audio equipment, put on a stellar show, and then disassembled and reloaded said items back into said box truck and drove away. Great doesn't even begin to describe our 2016 team.

Associate Artistic Director David Mold, who in past seasons directed *Hamlet*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Merchant of Venice* returned to direct *As You Like It*. At the helm of *Julius Caesar* was Broadway actor and Hip to Hip veteran Joel Leffert. The productions were designed to be family-friendly and highly accessible—for lovers of Shakespeare and for those experiencing Shakespeare for the first time.





Our costume designers wowed our audiences with a parade of sumptuous costumes. Resident Costume Designer Nancy Nichols transported us to the dawn of the Roman Empire in *Julius Caesar* and guest designer Courtney Leigh Newman whisked us away to late-sixteenth century France in *As You Like It*. With a limited budget, and an amazing team of assistants, they designed and assembled over 45 vibrant costumes. It should be noted that we again owe many thanks to two amazing NYC resources: Materials for the Arts and TDF Costume Collection.

We took a huge step forward with our production values by rolling out a new elevated stage. Thanks to capital funding from The Hyde & Watson Foundation, we purchased 22 4'x4' modular stage decks. Not only did the raised decks improve the sight lines for our grass-sitting patrons, they also provided a fresh dynamic to the staging of the productions, and they afforded our apprentices and interns another opportunity for hands-on learning and experience.

We were fortunate to have Miguel Urbino return to design the sets for the productions (Miguel designed the knock-out sets for our 2015 season productions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*). As in prior years, our goal was to create two distinct looks for the productions with a minimal number of pieces. As always, our ambitions had to be balanced with the logistical challenges of setting up and breaking down the sets on a daily basis with a relatively small crew. I am thrilled to report that Miguel struck that balance—he created the pastoral world of the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* and he created the open vistas and columned architecture of Rome in *Julius Caesar*.



KIDS & THE CLASSICS

In 2016, 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”. The workshop, which is offered before each and every performance, was expanded to forty-five minutes,



and it was retooled to make it even more engaging. Children between the ages of 4 and 12 were given 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. The workshop was led by teaching artist Erin Gilbreth, 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, 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 to best serve students with differing abilities. In 2016, "Kids & the Classics" provided 583 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

I am proud to report that in 2016 our tour was truly City-wide. In addition to our flagship venues in Queens, Southampton and Jersey City, we continued to expand our footprint. We returned to the Bronx for a second year, and we added brand new venues in Harlem and Brooklyn. Securing the Harlem Meer venue was a real coup as it is located in Central Park. All in all, we toured *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It*, together with our interactive children's workshop "Kids & the Classics," to thirteen parks all over New York City and its surrounding areas. We drew a total audience of 7,629 people over the course of our five-week tour.



Audience demographics:

Age: 33% seniors; 51% adult;
16% children

Ethnicity: 18% African-American;
8% Asian; 36% Caucasian;
23% Hispanic/Latino; 8% Middle Eastern;
7% Multi-ethnic



Partnerships:

We have always relied on solid community partners to help get out the word about our performances, and it was even more crucial in 2016 because of our expanded map. Our 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.

Press:

Our productions garnered positive press: in addition to being featured in BroadwayWorld.com, Theatre Mania, The Times Ledger, The Queens Tribune, and The Southampton Press, our performances were covered by New York Magazine, Dan’s Papers, the Sag Harbor News, and countless online blogs and events calendars.

In addition, we were featured on the podcast *Go See a Show*, and at the end of 2016, Hip to Hip was again named “The Best Theatre Group in Queens” by The Queens Tribune.



Funding:

I am happy to report that thanks to additional individual and foundation support, and thanks to increased funding from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (NYCDCA), we reached our \$100,000 fundraising goal in 2016. As would be expected for a company whose mission is to provide free theatre in public spaces, we have maintained a 50/50 ratio of private and public funding. The key to growing our budget in future years will depend on our ability to grow both sides of this equation.



NYC Parks

On the public side, in addition to support from the NYCDCA, we won the support of NYC Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer and the Queens Borough President Melinda Katz.

On the private side, we enjoyed a surge in new individual and foundation support thanks in part to a wonderful cocktail party hosted in the spring by Board Member Nina Jones. This event gave us a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness of Hip to Hip's mission.



Programmatic 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).

If we are to take the *next* important step in our development—namely, an even higher level of technical self-sufficiency, a higher tier of contract with the professional actors' union, and year-round producing capabilities—we must continue to bring new funding sources into the fold. The great news is that we have an amazing six-member Board and seven-member staff focused on making progress on these fronts.

2017 invites us to embark on our next ten years, and thanks to a very successful 2016 season, we are moving forward with energy and enthusiasm.

Jason Marr
Artistic Director

