

# News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## *San Francisco Shakespeare Festival celebrates 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Hamlet, Pop-up Shakespeare speeches planned to mark landmark season*

**San Francisco, CA** – In 2017, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival celebrates 35 years as the Bay Area’s acclaimed producer of Free Shakespeare in the Park and powerful education programs for children and communities. SF Shakes’ first season as a non-profit organization was 1983. 35 years later, the company is still renowned for its signature summer productions as well as high-quality educational programming such as Bay Area Shakespeare Camps, Shakespeare On Tour, and Midnight Shakespeare (a residency program for low-income schools and communities). “The Festival has been true to its mission of providing access to Shakespeare for 35 years,” says Executive Director Toby Leavitt, “and we’re excited to celebrate this milestone with the community in 2017.”

For this historic year, SF Shakes will present *Hamlet* for the first time for Free Shakespeare in the Park. The play, about the questionable succession of King Claudius to the throne of Denmark over his nephew Prince Hamlet, speaks strongly about disenfranchisement, frustration, and the need for action during troubled times. Hamlet is torn between revenging his father’s murder and going along quietly with the new regime, including his mother Queen Gertrude. Finding an ally in the audience, he shares his inner turmoil in a series of soliloquies which have become familiar all over the world – from “Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I” to “To be or not to be” to “How all occasions do inform against me.” “When we chose the play over a year ago, we had no idea exactly how relevant it was going to feel,” says Artistic Director Rebecca J. Ennals. “*Hamlet* is one of those plays that never stops having something new to teach me. It has lasted 400 years because Hamlet’s dilemma is so compelling, his struggle so familiar, and his words so evocative that it just keeps making sense. Even when we wish it didn’t.”

Associate Artistic Director Stephen Muterspaugh will direct this production, after co-directing *The Taming of the Shrew* with Ennals in 2014 and directing four seasons of Shakespeare On Tour. “*Hamlet*, with themes of appearance vs. reality, action vs. inaction, and corruption, is such a rich play to explore,” says Muterspaugh. “I couldn’t be more excited to be telling this specific story and to be exploring our world through the prism of *Hamlet*.” Bay Area actor and playwright Davern Wright takes on the title role after appearing as Florizel in *The Winter’s Tale* in 2016. Wright is a member of the PlayGround writers’ group and wrote an adaptation of *Measure for Measure* for SF Shakes’ Midnight Shakespeare program in 2016. Also returning to the Festival’s mainstage production is Scenic Designer Jay Lasnik, who designed *The Winter’s Tale* in 2016. Visit <http://www.sfsakes.org/programs/free-shakespeare-in-the-park/hamlet> for regular updates on *Hamlet*.

In addition to Free Shakespeare in the Park, SF Shakes will present a series of free, short, site-specific performances called “35 Famous Speeches in 35 Famous Places” celebrating the Festival’s history in San Francisco. From February to August 2017, culminating in the opening performances of *Hamlet* in San Francisco, SF Shakes artists will perform familiar and beloved speeches from Shakespeare’s plays in venues throughout the city. There will be a kick-off event on February 16 at 6 pm at the Presidio Officers’ Club, sharing the first five speeches and a look back at 35 years of performing Shakespeare free in the parks. Visit <http://www.sfsakes.org/programs/35-famous-speeches-in-35-famous-places> for updates on the latest performances.

The Festival’s annual Gala at the Marines Memorial Theatre on April 22, 2017 will also celebrate the past 35 years and look forward to the future, with opportunities to support the “35 Famous Speeches” project, the development of a new musical of *As You Like It* for 2018, a modular repertory set for future seasons, and Resident Artists and interns. For

more information on the gala or to request an invitation, please visit <http://www.sfshakes.org/donations/fifth-annual-gala>.

SF Shakes will continue to present quality education programs throughout the year, including Midnight Shakespeare (celebrating 20 years), Bay Area Shakespeare Camps (celebrating 25 years), and Shakespeare On Tour (celebrating 30 years), as well as newer programs like Prologue classes for adults. – see [www.sfshakes.org](http://www.sfshakes.org) for a full list of education programs.

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*Note to Editor: Artists and staff are available for interviews at (415) 558-0888.*

### About San Francisco Shakespeare Festival

The mission of the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival is to make the words and themes of Shakespeare available to everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, financial status, or level of education. We accomplish this through the presentation of **Free Shakespeare in the Park** and a wide array of education programs: **Shakespeare On Tour**, **Tailor-Made Residencies**, **Bay Area Shakespeare Camps**, **Midnight Shakespeare**, and **Shakespeare for All**. *Shakespeare On Tour* performs an abridged Shakespeare play at schools, libraries, and community centers all over the state. *Tailor-Made Residencies* connects teaching artists with classroom teachers for in-class theatre enrichment, specifically tailored to their learning objectives and their students. *Bay Area Shakespeare Camps* for ages 4-6, 7-13 and 12-18 are two-week theatre camps held throughout the Bay Area. *Midnight Shakespeare*, the Festival's after-school program for under-served and low-income youth, serves participants in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Antioch. *Shakespeare For All* in three Central Valley communities, Salida, Madera, and Chowchilla, gives residents a chance to stage community productions of Shakespeare's plays with the assistance and guidance of theater professionals.

### About Rebecca J. Ennals

Ms. Ennals, who took the position of Artistic Director in 2012, has been a staff member of the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival since 2002. She has extensive acting, directing and teaching experience and holds a BA in Theatre and English from Scripps College (summa cum laude) and an MFA in performance from U.C. Davis. For the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, she has directed *The Winter's Tale*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Romeo and Juliet* for Free Shakespeare in the Park, eight Shakespeare on Tour productions, and various projects including *Romeo and Juliet* for Napa's Festival del Sole and the 2013 Green Show, *Witchipedia*. She also devised and directed the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program "30 Days of Free Shakespeare in the Parklet" in 2012.

### About Stephen Muterspaugh

Mr. Muterspaugh, who took the position of Associate Artistic Director in 2014, has been teaching, acting and directing for the Festival since 2010. As a Resident Artist, he has taught Bay Area Shakespeare Camps, Upstart Crows, Advanced Shakespeare Workshop, and Midnight Shakespeare programs, as well as creating the Shakespeare for All Central Valley Residency Program. He has helmed four seasons of Shakespeare on Tour productions, as well as co-directing the 2014 Free Shakespeare in the Park production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Acting credits for SF Shakes include Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* and Banquo in *Macbeth*. He is a graduate of PCPA - Pacific Conservatory Theatre and a proud member of Actors' Equity.

### About Toby Leavitt

Ms. Leavitt, who joined the Festival in 1998, oversees all aspects of the organization. A leader in audience development and the relationship between theater and community, she did her undergraduate work at the University of Chicago, and received her Masters from the University of Chicago Business School in 1997. Prior to joining the Festival in 1998, she served as General Manager for Chicago's Court Theatre.