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For immediate release
June 5, 2026

A Look Back at San Francisco Shakespeare Festival's 2026 Annual Gala, *The Republic Strikes Back* - *A Celebration of Art and Community*

The San Francisco Shakespeare Festival welcomed supporters, artists, educators, civic leaders, and community members to its annual gala fundraiser on Saturday, April 25, at the historic San Francisco Italian Athletic Club in North Beach. The evening celebrated the Festival's longstanding commitment to making Shakespeare and the performing arts accessible to audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and income levels through its acclaimed education and community programs. The event also served as a vital fundraiser supporting initiatives such as Free Shakespeare in the Park, Shakespeare on Tour, and other arts education programs that reach thousands of Bay Area residents each year. In a time of uncertainty and growing challenges for the arts, more than 120 supporters came together—through ticket sales, table purchases, auction bids, and donations—to raise over \$150,000 for our arts and education programs.

Among the evening's distinguished speakers were Assemblymember Matt Haney and Supervisor Danny Sauter, both of whom underscored the essential role that arts organizations play in fostering vibrant, connected communities. Their remarks highlighted the importance of ensuring that cultural experiences remain accessible to everyone and recognized the Festival as a model for how the arts can enrich civic life, encourage dialogue, and bring people together across diverse backgrounds.

Assemblymember Haney spoke passionately about the transformative power of the arts and the need to invest in arts education and cultural programming as foundational elements of a thriving city. He emphasized that organizations such as the Festival do more than produce performances—they create opportunities for learning, creativity, and community engagement that strengthen the social fabric of San Francisco and the Bay Area. A longtime advocate for public investment in the arts, Haney praised the Festival's work in removing barriers to participation and inspiring audiences through meaningful artistic experiences.

Supervisor Sauter echoed those sentiments, stressing the importance of sustaining programs that make the arts welcoming and accessible to all residents. He spoke about the value of cultural institutions in shaping neighborhood identity, fostering civic pride, and creating

opportunities for people of different generations and backgrounds to gather around shared experiences. His remarks reflected a vision of San Francisco in which the arts remain a central and inclusive part of public life.

Guests were also treated to a special performance of the Festival's Shakespeare on Tour production of *Julius Caesar*, offering a first-hand opportunity to see the educational touring program that brings Shakespeare directly to schools, libraries, and community centers throughout California. The performance showcased the energy, accessibility, and relevance that have become hallmarks of the Festival's work, and demonstrated how Shakespeare's exploration of leadership, power, and civic responsibility continues to resonate with contemporary audiences.

The gala was both a celebration of artistic achievement and a reaffirmation of the Festival's mission: to ensure that the words and themes of Shakespeare remain accessible to everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, financial status, or educational background. Through the generosity of donors, sponsors, and community supporters, the evening helped secure resources that will allow the Festival to continue inspiring audiences and expanding access to the arts across the Bay Area for years to come

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Note to Editor: To schedule an interview with SF Shakes Artistic Director Carla Pantoja, email sfshakes@sfshakes.org or call 415-558-0888.

The mission of the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival is to make the words and themes of Shakespeare accessible to everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, financial status, or level of education.



L to R: A young Shakespeare Fan, District 3 Supervisor Danny Sauter, Assemblymember Matt Haney, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival Board Member Dan Rabinowitz

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L to R: Abigail Rivamonte Mesa, Chief of Staff for Assemblymember Matt Haney and Evan Held, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival Education Program Manager

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L to R: San Francisco Shakespeare Festival staff members: Pratiksha Shah, Production Manager and Neil Ormond, Technical Director with Brandon DiPaola, Shakespeare on Tour cast member

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