



Celebrate
Winston-Salem, N.C.
City of Arts & Innovation



Whether Classic or Contemporary . . .

It all spells great theater at the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival.

BY IVY LAMB

While Shakespeare is required reading in most schools, there's only one way to truly appreciate the Bard's work — on stage, as he intended.

That's exactly what the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival (NCShakes) offers audiences in Winston-Salem, High Point, and across the state.

Founded in 1977 as a nonprofit, professional theater company, NCShakes was designated the state's official Shakespeare Festival by the General Assembly in 2000. Today, the

organization attracts high-caliber professionals from across the nation to produce its MainStage season, which features at least one Shakespeare production, in addition to other classic works.

"We have generous supporters because of the high level of theater we bring the area," says President and CEO Wil Elder. "We audition in both North Carolina and New York City, and oftentimes we'll find an actor working in New York City who's originally from North Carolina, so we're bringing the talent back here."

Headquartered in High Point's Spirit Center, the group's reach extends far beyond the stage. It also provides technical assistance to high-school and college productions, hosts seminars and workshops, and even offers a

Shakespeare Hotline for educators.

NCShakes's most ambitious education program, Shakespeare To Go, sends professional actors to schools across the state, reaching 20,000 students annually. Actors present shortened versions of the plays to help children go beyond the page and experience Shakespeare in new ways. Plans are in the works to expand the program to include some 200 schools, reaching nearly 50,000 students.

"Studies show that kids who study Shakespeare do better in calculus and physics, because reading Shakespeare teaches students critical thinking skills," Elder says. "We're going to be in trouble if we don't support arts education — the arts inspire the creative side of the mind, and that has a huge impact."

You don't have to go all the way to New York to see great theater when we're presenting it right in your backyard.

—Wil Elder, CEO, NCShakes

Festival Stage of Winston-Salem

An exciting addition to NCShakes, Festival Stage launched in 2010. Located at HanesBrands Theatre in downtown Winston-Salem, the affiliate theater company presents both classic and contemporary works with a fresh spin.

"Not only is HanesBrands Theatre a wonderful, intimate space that invites the audience right into the characters' lives, it's a space that can be tailored to the needs of each production," says resident director Steve Umberger. "We look forward to reinventing the theater for the audience in new and dynamic ways with every experience."

Past productions include *Lunch at the Piccadilly*, a new musical based on Clyde Edgerton's best-selling novel; Tennessee Williams's iconic drama *The Glass Menagerie*; and *Hatchetman*, a new farce written by David Wiltse, to name a few. This season, audiences can look forward to the Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Proof* and *33 Variations*, produced in partnership with the Wake Forest University Department of Theatre.

For each production, Festival Stage recruits playwrights, directors, actors, and other top-notch professionals from across the country. And audiences can engage with these artists at special events like pre- and post-show discussions and SchoolFest performances for area high-school students.

This innovative, professional theater company has become a vital part of the city's evolving cultural landscape and downtown revitalization. As NCShakes CEO Wil Elder notes, "You don't have to go to New York to see great theater when we're presenting it right in your backyard."

From left:
NCShakes 2010
production of *The Tempest*,
Festival Stage's 2012
production of *Hatchetman*

FestivalStage

To learn more about NCShakes, visit ncshakes.org. To learn more about Festival Stage, visit festivalstage.org.