



Jordan Brown and Laura Rook in *Shakespeare in Love*. Photo by John Revisky.

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Password: Viola

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Casting Announced for Asolo Rep's *SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE*

Directed by Rachel Rockwell; Production runs Jan. 10 - March 28

(SARASOTA, December 11, 2017) — Asolo Rep proudly kicks off its repertory season with ***SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE***, the stunning new stage adaptation of **Marc Norman** and **Tom Stoppard**'s triumphant Academy Award®-winning film. The film starred Gwyneth Paltrow as Viola, who garnered an Oscar® for the role, Joseph Fiennes as Will, and Dame Judi Dench as Queen Elizabeth. This lush, sweeping and timeless romantic comedy will be helmed by director and choreographer **Rachel Rockwell**. Originally produced by Disney Theatrical Productions and Sonia Friedman Productions and adapted for the stage by **Lee Hall**, ***SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE*** previews January 10 and 11, opens January 12 and runs in rotating repertory through March 28 in the Mertz Theatre, located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts.

SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE imagines the world of young Will Shakespeare, his greatest muse, and the extraordinary romance that inspired one of the most enduring love stories of all time. Promising playwright Will Shakespeare is tormented by writer's block while two competing theater managers are demanding new comedies complete with romance, adventure, and maybe a funny bit with a dog. To his rescue comes the lovely and vibrant Viola, Will's greatest admirer and the inspiration he's been longing for. But Viola has a secret and Will finds himself star cross'd in this not-to-miss theatrical adventure teeming with wit, charm and, above all, love.

"How perfect to kick off the first rep season of our **Staging Our World** initiative by peering into the love life of William Shakespeare, a globally celebrated voice of the stage for more than four centuries," said Asolo Rep Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. "But it wasn't just the romance that drew me to the piece. It was the wildly fresh and contemporary comedy that permeates the entire production. With the brilliant Rachel Rockwell at the helm, **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** promises to be a vastly joyful, must-see masterpiece."

Rachel Rockwell is an acclaimed Drama League and Lortel Award nominated and Jefferson and Joe A. Calloway Award-winning director and choreographer based in Chicago, where she was named Chicagoan of the Year in Theatre in 2012 by the *Chicago Tribune*. Her recent credits include *Ride The Cyclone* (Jeff Award for Best Director, MCC Theater), *October Sky* (Craig Noel Award for Best Musical, Old Globe), the world premiere of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Delaware Theatre Company) and the world premiere of *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* for the Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis. Her other directing/choreography credits include *Shakespeare In Love* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); *Brigadoon* (Jeff Award - Best Musical and Best Choreography, Goodman Theatre); *Billy Elliot* (Jeff Award for Best Choreography, Drury Lane Theatre), *Ragtime* (Jeff Award - Best Musical and Best Director, Drury Lane Theatre); and *Enron* (Jeff Award nomination - Best Play, TimeLine Theatre Company).

"When I started my work on **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**, I was setting out to do a romantic comedy," said Rockwell. "I so loved the film and have watched it countless times through that lens. But now what I also see is a play that is making an imperative, compelling statement about the importance of art, the *power* of art, in a society. Of course this is historical fiction, but the story it tells is true: art has the power to transform people — and communities, and cultures. Art inspires people to rise up against oppression, against prejudices, and bigotry. That's what art does."

Chicago-based actor **Jordan Brown** leads the cast as Will Shakespeare. His Chicago credits include *Vanya and Sonia and Mash and Spike*, *Brigadoon* (Goodman Theatre), and *White Guy on the Bus* (Northlight Theatre). Fellow Chicago-based actor **Laura Rook** plays his love Viola de Lesseps. Her Chicago credits include *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Othello*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), *The Liar* (Writers Theater) and *Skylight* (Court Theater).

Jack Wetherall plays Henslowe, the owner of the Rose theater. On Broadway, Wetherall played the title role in *The Elephant Man*. He also played Vic in *Queer as Folk* on Showtime. **Matt Mueller** (Asolo Rep: *HERO: The Musical* [2014]) takes on the role of playwright Kit Marlowe. In Chicago, Mueller has appeared at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Marriott Lincolnshire, and Northlight.

The cast features Asolo Rep Favorites **David Breitbarth**, **Matt DeCaro**, **Matt McGee**, and **Peggy Roeder**. In **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**, Roeder plays Queen Elizabeth (Asolo Rep: *Ah, Wilderness!*; *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* [2016], *The Matchmaker*; *Good People* [2015]; *The Grapes of Wrath*; *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* [2014] and more).

Breitbarth, who has appeared in more than 75 productions at Asolo Rep, plays Burbage, a theater owner. DeCaro, who played President LBJ in *The Great Society* at Asolo Rep last season, plays Tilney, the Queen's Master of Revels, and Sir Robert de Lesseps, Viola's father. McGee (Asolo Rep: *All the Way*, *Living on Love*, *Josephine* [2016]) plays Lambert, a henchman, and Wabash, a stammering actor. **Henley**, an adorable terrier mix rescue dog, will make her stage debut in the role of Spot.

The cast also features **Dustin Babin, Andrew Bosworth, Nate Burger, Christopher Carlson, Brandon Dahlquist, Mary Ellen Everett, Anthony J. Hamilton, Amy Helms, Nolan Fitzgerald Hennelly, Aleksandr Krapivkin, Colleen Lafeber, Amber Lageman, David Lively, Addison Ruscoe, Catherine Smitko, Kedren Spencer, Wes Tolman, and Rex Willis.**

CAST

(In order of appearance)

JORDAN BROWN*	Will Shakespeare
MATT MUELLER*	Kit Marlowe
JACK WETHERALL*	Henslowe
DAVID LIVELY*	Fennyman
MATT MCGEE*	Lambert/Wabash
ANDREW BOSWORTH	Frees/Ensemble
DAVID BREITBARTH*	Burbage
COLLEEN LAFEBER	Mistress Quickly/Ensemble
MATT DECARO*	Tilney/Sir Robert de Lesseps
HENLEY THE DOG	Spot
PEGGY ROEDER*	Queen Elizabeth
ALEKSANDR KRAPIVKIN	Valentine/Ensemble
LAURA ROOK*	Viola de Lesseps
CATHERINE SMITKO*	Nurse
REX WILLIS	Musician
ANTHONY J. HAMILTON	Ralph/Ensemble
NOLAN FITZGERALD HENNELLY	Nol/Ensemble
DUSTIN BABIN	Robin/Ensemble
WES TOLMAN	Adam/Ensemble
ADDISON RUSCOE	John Webster
BRANDON DAHLQUIST*	Wessex
NATE BURGER*	Ned Alleyn
CHRISTOPHER CARLSON	Sam/Ensemble
KEDREN SPENCER	Molly/Ensemble
MARY ELLEN EVERETT	Kate/Ensemble
AMY HELMS	Ensemble
AMBER LAGEMAN	Ensemble

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM

Director.....	Rachel Rockwell
Scenic Designer.....	Scott Davis
Costume Designer.....	Susan Mickey
Lighting Designer.....	Robert Wierzel
Composer/Music Director.....	Neil Bartram
Fight Director.....	Matt Hawkins
Hair/Wig & Make-up Designer.....	Michelle Hart

SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

JORDAN BROWN* (Will Shakespeare, *Shakespeare in Love*) is thrilled to be making his Asolo Rep debut. His Chicago theatre credits include *By The Water*, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *Iphigenia In Aulis*, *White Guy On The Bus*, *Brigadoon*, *Wonderful Town*, *In The Company Of Men*, and *The Pitmen Painters*, among others. Other regional credits include *A Skull In Connemara* at Centerstage Theatre in Baltimore, MD and *The Light in The Piazza* at River Valley Rep in Poughkeepsie, NY. TV credits include *Sirens* (USA Network) and *Crisis* (NBC). Mr. Brown is a graduate of the University of the North Carolina School of the Arts.

MATT MUELLER* (Kit Marlowe, *Shakespeare in Love*) last appeared at Asolo Rep as Kirk in *HERO: The Musical*. Chicago credits include productions at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Marriott Lincolnshire, and Northlight. Regionally he has appeared at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Theatre at the Center, Capital Repertory Theatre, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Marin Theatre Company, Palm Beach Dramaworks, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Arvada Center, and Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company. His film and TV credits include *Chicago Justice* and the upcoming feature *Popper Baxton's Sickly Stew*.

RACHEL ROCKWELL (Director, *Shakespeare In Love*) is a Chicago-based director/choreographer. Some of her recent credits include: *Ride The Cyclone* at MCC (Joe A. Calloway Award for Choreography, Lortel and Drama League nominated); *October Sky* at the Old Globe (Craig Noel Award for Best Musical); the world premiere of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* at Delaware Theatre Company; and the world premiere of *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* for the Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis. Other directing/choreography credits include: *Ride the Cyclone* (Jeff Award for Best Director), *Shakespeare In Love* at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre; *Brigadoon* (Jeff Award - Best Musical and Best Choreography, Goodman Theatre); *Billy Elliot* (Jeff Award for Best Choreography), *Ragtime* (Jeff Award - Best Musical and Best Director) at Drury Lane Theatre; and *Enron* (Jeff Award nomination - Best Play) at TimeLine Theatre Company.

PEGGY ROEDER* (Queen Elizabeth, *Shakespeare in Love*) has appeared at Asolo Rep in *The Grapes of Wrath*; *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*; *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*;

Ah, Wilderness!; *Matchmaker*; and *Good People*. Other favorites include *The Dresser* (Steppenwolf), *Romeo and Juliet* (Goodman), *Clean House* (Milwaukee Rep), *Kabuki Macbeth* (Chicago Shakespeare), *The Cider House Rules* (Atlantic Theatre Company), *My Fair Lady* (Lyric Opera), *Big Meal* (ATC), *Outside Mullingar* (Peninsula Players), *Float* (About Face), *Barefoot in the Park* (Drury Lane Oakbrook). Her work has garnered four Jeff Awards, three Artisan Awards, two After Dark Awards. Film and TV credits include *Groundhog Day*, *Road to Perdition*, *Were the World Mine*, *Stranger Than Fiction*, *Star Trek: DS9*, *Law & Order*.

LAURA ROOK* (Viola de Lesseps, *Shakespeare in Love*) is thrilled to be making her Asolo Rep debut with such an exciting season. Ms. Rook is based in Chicago where favorite credits include: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Othello*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *The Liar* (Writers Theater); *Skylight* (Court Theater). Regionally, she has worked for the past six seasons at American Players Theatre where highlights include *Three Sisters*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Mary's Wedding*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Seagull*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. She has also worked regionally at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, and with Montana Shakespeare in the parks and schools. LauraRook.com

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Inside Asolo Rep: SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE and MORNING AFTER GRACE

Wednesday, January 31 at 11am

Cook Theatre

Panel discussions are \$5; and free for all donors and Asolo Rep Guild Members

Get rare insights into the artistic process, hear directly from the people responsible for producing **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** and **MORNING AFTER GRACE**, and engage in stimulating discussion inspired by the musical's themes and issues.

Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by Designing Women Boutique, Observer Media Group and Hotel Indigo.

Meet the Actors

Sunday, March 25 at 2pm

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre

Immediately following the 2pm matinee, ask questions and learn more from members of the cast in a facilitated discussion.

OUT@AsoloRep: SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

Thursday, January 25 at 6:30pm; show starts at 7:30pm

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Contact Asolo Rep's Box Office for subscription and ticket information

Now in its eighth season, OUT@AsoloRep is Sarasota's premier cultural event connecting local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities with fantastic theatre. Enjoy a pre-show reception and learn about participating LGBT organizations, and gain personal insight into **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** from the creative team and cast members.

OUT@AsoloRep is sponsored by CAN Community Health and Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering.

The Scoop

One hour prior to every performance of **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**. (Opening Night, January 12, is excluded.)

Tuesday Talkbacks

January 30, March 6, 20
Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors or guests following every Tuesday performance of **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**.

TICKETS

SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE contains brief partial nudity.

Tickets for **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** and the entire 2017-18 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** start at \$27.

To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388, visit www.asolorep.org, or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre Box Office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts.

The Box Office is open Monday 10am – 5pm, Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 7:30pm, Friday – Saturday 10am – 8pm, and Sunday 10am – 2pm. The box office closes at 5pm when there are no evening performances and phone lines close one hour prior to the start of any performance. Season subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** because of the generosity of its sponsors. Corporate sponsors for **SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE** are Energy Today, Williams Parker, Harrison, Dietz and Gietzen, ABC 7, SRQ Media, WUSF Public Media, and The Resort at Longboat Key Club.. Asolo Rep 2017-18 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, William H. Donner Foundation, Woman's Exchange, Inc., the Huisking Foundation, and Sunset Cadillac of Bradenton. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues. Asolo Rep is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

About Asolo Repertory Theatre

Now in its 59th season, Asolo Repertory Theatre is recognized as one of the premier professional theatres in America and one of the largest in the Southeastern United States. One of the few select theatres in the nation that performs in true rotating repertory, Asolo Rep's highly skilled acting company and extensive craftsmanship bring to life this unique performance method that gives audiences the opportunity to see multiple productions in the span of a few days. Asolo Rep presents up to 10 productions each season including contemporary and classic works and provocative musical theatre experiences. A theatre district in and of itself, Asolo Rep is committed to expanding its reach into the community, furthering its collaboration with the best theatre artists working in the industry today and cultivating new artists through its affiliation with the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards and Managing Director Linda DiGabriele, Asolo Rep's ambitious theatrical offerings and ground-breaking education and community programming engage audiences and ensure its lasting legacy for future generations.

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