



SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS

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Shakespeare Festival St. Louis Engages Students with Newly Commissioned Play by Playwright Nancy Bell

Monsanto Fund awards \$50,000 grant for visits to rural schools

ST. LOUIS (Feb. 6, 2017) – A timely retelling of *Julius Caesar* and an original play for young audiences by playwright Nancy Bell will highlight Shakespeare Festival St. Louis' award-winning Education Tour, Feb. 6 through April 16, at up to 65 schools throughout the metro area and rural Missouri. Since 2013, the Monsanto Fund has sponsored the Education Tour's visits to rural communities, and that support will continue with a \$50,000 grant this season.

The new work, *Found at Sea*, uses a contemporary story about family love and loyalty to introduce young people to the themes and ideas of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear* and *Pericles*. As a storm brews outside their window, the play depicts the relationship between a father and his young daughter as their family faces a divorce. Bell, playwright-in-residence for the Festival, has masterfully created characters that use their love of Shakespeare's stories to weather both the physical and metaphorical storm. A version of the play, originally titled *Tales of Shakespeare: Found at Sea*, was featured as part of the 2016 St. Louis Symphony's Family concert Series. The new touring production has been adapted and expanded to fit a five-member ensemble and will be directed by Rick Dildine, artistic and executive director of the Festival.

"It seems only natural to be commissioning and showcasing a new play and encouraging the work of living playwrights," Dildine said. "Shakespeare was writing new plays all the time, and for students to be able to experience not only his work but new work resulting from it, is an incredible opportunity."

The Festival's 2016 tour will spend 10 weeks performing 50-minute versions of both Bell's production and *Julius Caesar*. Pairing performances with student workshops, the tour showcases the words and deeds of William Shakespeare's timeless characters

and themes written more than 400 years ago that still resonate today. The tour is also partnering with Kids In The Middle to offer resources about divorce for schools, children and families. The cast will meet with a representative from Kids In The Middle to discuss topics from the play and the challenges young people and families may face during divorce. A talkback is scheduled in partnership with Kids In The Middle and the St. Louis Public Library at 2 p.m., on March 18, at the library's Central Branch location (1301 Olive St.).

The Festival will also be expanding an artist's residency program to a St. Louis metro school and two schools in rural Missouri. Introduced as a pilot program in rural Scott County in 2016, professional teaching actors spent a week in the school community performing and teaching a residency on the literary arts. This year, the opportunity for students to receive the rich impact of repeat visits with guest artists will be showcased in Scott County, Callao C-8 and McCluer High School.

Since its inception in 2002, the Festival's educational programming and tour has reached 300,000 students throughout the state. In 2013, the Monsanto Fund began sponsoring the Education Tour's visits to rural communities throughout Missouri, providing many students from elementary through high school their first experience with live theater and Shakespeare. In addition to support from the Monsanto Fund, the Festival's 2017 Education Tour is funded by the Saigh Foundation and the Dana Brown Charitable Trust, and First Bank. The tour is also part of *Shakespeare in American Communities*, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with Arts Midwest.

"The Education Tour helps ensure that students in the region's rural communities also have access to the arts, which can have a positive impact on overall academic achievement," said Michelle Insko, Monsanto Fund program officer. "In addition to reaching new audiences, the program also provides excellent educational resources for teachers and tackles some tough issues confronting many young people."

In addition to the plays, the tour's educational student workshops provide students with the tools to write their own plays, explore language to unlock the stories and characters packed into Shakespeare's plays, and use key principles of character education to guide students through hands-on, experiential activities that build on the moral dilemmas presented by some of the Bard's most infamous characters. Supplemental curriculum guides are also available online at www.sfstl.com.

Since its inception in 2001, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has surpassed the one million mark in attendance through its work In the Schools, In the Streets and In the Park, with more than 710,000 people attending the free mainstage productions at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park. In 2010, the Festival launched SHAKE 38, a marathon participatory presentation of Shakespeare's entire 38-play canon community wide. In 2012, the Festival shut down its first street, Cherokee, to present a community-based play In the Streets. Leadership support for Shakespeare Festival St. Louis' 2017 season is provided by the Whitaker Foundation. The Festival is also funded in part by the National

Endowment for the Arts, the Missouri Arts Council, the Regional Arts Commission, and the Arts & Education Council of Greater St. Louis. In 2016, the Festival was named Arts Organization of the Year by the Missouri Arts Council. For more information, please visit www.sfstl.com or call 314-531-9800.

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