



## SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Tom Ridgely Named Executive Producer of Shakespeare Festival St. Louis**

ST. LOUIS (April 12, 2018) -- After a nine-month national search, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has appointed Tom Ridgely, a Drama Desk-nominated director, producer and educator, as the Festival's new Executive Producer, a title that encompasses both artistic and executive leadership roles, it was announced today.

"The Festival Board members are excited that we have found in Tom Ridgely a leader who will provide the artistic vision, entrepreneurial talent, organizational management skills, and inspired drive towards innovation essential to Shakespeare Festival St. Louis' continued growth," said Penny Pennington, board chair of the Festival. "Tom's expertise will ensure the Festival continues to be a key contributor to the arts in our region, as well as a catalyst and stage for viewing topics important to our community -- all through the lens of performance. We are also personally thankful, and want to recognize the leadership and stewardship of Jennifer Wintzer during this interim period, who has led with great skill the programs we are about to unveil to the community."

Ridgely is currently the artistic director of Waterwell in New York, which he founded in 2002 with actor Arian Moayed. Under his leadership, Waterwell has developed and produced more than a dozen world-premieres and adaptations of classics, as well as been nominated for three IT awards, a Drama Desk, a *New York Magazine* Culture Award and a *Village Voice* "Best of NYC." Known for building innovative community partnerships, his recent work includes the resurrection of a collection of the lost WWII-era Frank Loesser musicals "Blueprint Specials," featuring Broadway and military veterans and presented on board the former *USS Intrepid* as part of the Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival. He also adapted and directed Waterwell's dual-language (English/Farsi) "Hamlet," which was designed and performed by a company of predominantly Middle Eastern and South Asian artists. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* described the production as "conceptually bracing...a magnetic reminder of where Hamlet came from and what he has lost."

As a director, Ridgely has been nominated for a Drama Desk Award and developed or presented work at the Public, The Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Society, Red Bull, and Ars Nova, to name a few. He's worked with Tony nominees Sting, Sherie Rene Scott, Laura Osnes, Will Swenson, Arian Moayed, Micah Stock, and others. His productions have won DFW Theater Critics Forum and ECNY Awards and been nominated for CT Critics Circle and BroadwayWorld Connecticut Awards.

As artistic director of Waterwell, he oversees the Waterwell Drama Program at the Professional Performing Arts School, one of the preeminent training grounds for young actors in the country. In partnership with the Department of Education it offers daily, year-round, conservatory-style classes to more than 200 New York City public school students absolutely free of charge.

"I simply couldn't be more honored or thrilled that the board has entrusted me with leading this next exciting phase in the life of the Festival," Ridgely said. "It is a dynamic and innovative organization that has woven its way into the fabric of this vibrant American city. The Festival's history of community engagement, and commitment to making Shakespeare accessible to all St. Louisans, is as radical as it is necessary. Building on and extending that legacy will be a tremendous privilege."

Ridgely will assume his duties beginning May 21. Jennifer Wintzer, who has been serving as interim producing director of the Festival following Rick Dildine's departure to Alabama Shakespeare Festival in August 2017, will continue to serve as the director of community engagement and education. In addition to Wintzer, Ridgely will be joining an ambitious and forward-thinking staff whose work reflects the Festival's mission of producing high quality, professional programming In the Schools, In the Streets, In the Parks and, this fall, a festival of new plays, In the Works. Since its founding 18 years ago, the Festival continues to use theater as a powerful tool for social change through inclusion and access.

In his new role, Ridgely will be responsible for planning and executing the Festival's current slate of programs and events while simultaneously developing viable strategies for new programming. The 2018 programmed season includes the Festival's main stage production of "Romeo & Juliet," June 1-24, at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park; Shakespeare in the Streets' production of "Blow, Winds," June 15-16, on the steps of the St. Louis Public Library, Central Branch in downtown St. Louis; and, In the Works, a festival of new plays inspired by Shakespeare's canon.

"Tom Ridgely is one of the most exciting talents working in today's American theater. A visionary stage director and a big thinker, he has a passionate commitment to the idea that theater really matters and that it brings joy and meaning to the life of a city and every community within it," said Barry Edelstein, artistic director of The Old Globe. "He's also a warm, approachable, and generous man with a great sense of humor and

openness. St. Louis is lucky to have him. I can't wait to see all the wonderful things he's going to do there."

Ridgely's appointment is the result of a national search process, conducted in partnership with Management Consultants for the Arts, with input from the Festival's Board, artists, staff, and community.

**About Shakespeare Festival St. Louis**

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 main stage productions at Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park. The organization has reached an additional 300,000 students In the Schools through its educational programming. 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' 2018 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. For more information, please visit [www.sfstl.com](http://www.sfstl.com), or call 314-531-9800.

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