

## News Release

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### ***San Francisco Shakespeare Festival presents a bold new video series exploring iconic scenes from Shakespeare: Takes on Shakes***

*First episode explores gender roles in the balcony scene  
from 'Romeo and Juliet'*

**San Francisco, CA** – *Takes on Shakes* is a new on-demand video series, designed to help educators with distance learning and challenge assumptions about classic Shakespeare plays. Inclusive casting will enable students to see current and personal relevancy in his work while examining interpretations of iconic scenes. Each on-demand episode provides fresh and often unexpected “takes” – multiple iterations of the same scene using different actors – on famous scenes that interrogate complex, thorny, and sometimes controversial topics in Shakespeare’s canon. In between takes, actors and directors explain how creative decisions can have profound effects on how audiences perceive and interpret the play.

In the first episode, nonbinary actor, director, and drag artist Chris Steele explores the role of gender in *Romeo and Juliet* by looking at the casting practices and gender assumptions of the 1590s until present day. By questioning the heteronormativity of 20th-century film versions of the play,” the three ‘takes’ on the classic balcony scene examines how casting has changed over the centuries and highlights the role of gender-queerness in understanding the play and its language. Between takes, Director Steele explains how creative decisions can have profound effects on how audiences perceive and interpret the play. Additionally, actors offer their own points of view on playing the roles based on gender norms from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The second episode, directed by genderqueer theater artist Akaina Ghosh, explores issues of consent and personal agency in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and addresses how directing and acting choices can affect how we experience the comedy in the play. Director Ghosh’s passion for reconstructing historically significant narratives through a feminist lens and generating new works that center underrepresented voices and perspectives informs their direction of this piece.

Driven by radical inclusion, the *Takes on Shakes* series challenges assumptions about Shakespeare performance and interpretation. The young and diverse team of actors, directors, and teaching artists bring their personal perspectives to each episode, and deliver the empowering message that there's no "right way" to perform or appreciate Shakespeare.

The performers and directors featured in *Takes on Shakes* include Akaina Ghosh (Director/Performer), Chris Steele (Director/Performer), Rebecca J. Ennals (Artistic Director), Bidalia Albanese (Performer) Ron Chapman (Performer), Danielle Ferrer (Performer), Charlie Lavaroni (Performer), Carolina Morones (Performer), and Joshua Waterstone (Performer).

The first two episodes (*Takes on Romeo and Juliet* and *Takes on A Midsummer Night's Dream*) are currently available on the SF Shakespeare Festival's website, [www.sfshakes.org](http://www.sfshakes.org); \$99 for one title or \$149 for both.

Additional episodes in the series are in development and release dates are to be announced. For more information, call the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival at (415) 558-0888.

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*Note to Editor: To arrange interviews with Artistic Director Rebecca J. Ennals, Directors Chris Steele or Akaina Ghosh please call 415-558-0888 or email [jwestern@sfshakes.org](mailto:jwestern@sfshakes.org)*

#### About San Francisco Shakespeare Festival

The mission of San Francisco Shakespeare Festival is to make the words and themes of Shakespeare available to everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, financial status, or level of education. We accomplish this through the presentation of **Free Shakespeare in the Park** and a wide array of education programs: **Shakespeare On Tour, Tailor-Made Residencies, Bay Area Shakespeare Camps, Virtual Playshops, Making Virtual Theater webinar, and Midnight Shakespeare.** *Shakespeare on Tour* performs an abridged Shakespeare play at schools, libraries, and community centers all over the state. *Tailor-Made Residencies* connects teaching artists with classroom teachers for in-class theatre enrichment, specifically tailored to their learning objectives and their students. *Bay Area Shakespeare Camps* for ages 7-13 and 12-18 are two-week theatre camps held throughout the Bay Area. *Midnight Shakespeare*, the Festival's after-school program for under-served and low-income youth, serves participants in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Antioch. Note that due to current pandemic restrictions all in-person programs have temporarily been redesigned to accommodate virtual formats.