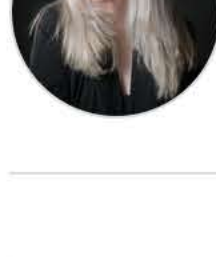


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Santa Cruz Shakespeare goes big: Eight shows take the stage in 2027



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Santa Cruz Shakespeare is going bigger than ever in 2027, with eight productions stretching from spring through winter, including a record four-show summer season. But at a warm gathering in the Audrey Stanley Grove on Monday night, the company also looked back, surprising former artistic director Mike Ryan by naming the Grove stage in his honor.

It was supposed to be a season announcement.

[Santa Cruz Shakespeare](#) invited its donors, board members, actors, crew and volunteers to the Audrey Stanley Grove at DeLaveaga Park on Monday night to celebrate the summer and get the first look at what Artistic Director Charles Pasternak has planned for 2027.

But before anyone learned what Shakespeare, Noël Coward and a Pulitzer Prize-winning rock musical would be doing under the trees next year, there were a few surprises.

The gathering felt less like a formal announcement and more like a family reunion. Pasternak was relaxed and playful onstage, drawing raffle winner Susan Myer-Silton, who went home with an autographed season poster, and presenting the summer’s Billy Award for outstanding volunteer service to board member Meg Lilienthal.

Board President Chris Frost briefly turned the attention toward the future. The [board](#), he said, is looking well beyond the next production or even the next season, asking where [Santa Cruz Shakespeare](#) should be five years from now and how it can support Pasternak’s growing vision while making sure the company remains sustainable for years to come.

Pasternak joined him onstage.

“The board is our strength,” he said, recognizing a group that is actively involved in nearly every part of keeping the company running.

Then he turned his attention to someone who helped make sure Santa Cruz Shakespeare still had a company to run.

Actor and former artistic director Mike Ryan led the company from 2014 through 2023, taking over after the collapse of Shakespeare Santa Cruz and helping guide the newly independent company through its formative years, including establishing its permanent home in DeLaveaga Park.

When Pasternak arrived in 2023, Ryan [stayed on as co-artistic director](#) for Pasternak’s first season.

“Mike gave me many gifts,” Pasternak told the crowd.

One was Ryan’s insistence on maintaining a full season. Another was agreeing to share the artistic director’s job that first year, giving Pasternak time to find his footing.

Then came the surprise.

Pasternak announced that the stage at the Audrey Stanley Grove would be officially named The Mike Ryan Stage.

A plaque bearing Ryan’s name was unveiled and installed as the crowd applauded.

It was an affectionate nod to the company’s past before Pasternak turned toward what may be its most ambitious future yet.

Santa Cruz Shakespeare will present eight productions in 2027, including, for the first time, four full productions during its summer repertory season.

And that’s only part of the expansion.



Charles Pasternak announces Santa Cruz Shakespeare’s 2027 season to an invitation-only donor event Monday at the Audrey Stanley Grove at DeLaveaga Park. Credit: Jana Marcus

The company will mount a full spring production, present two fall shows and once again bring back “A Christmas Carol” in December, giving SCS a theatrical season that now stretches through much of the year.

“We have never delivered so much theater to our community,” Pasternak said. “We have grown miraculously from three shows in 2023 to eight shows in 2027.”

Part of that growth, he said, is about opening the doors to audiences who might not necessarily arrive looking for Shakespeare. Musicals, comedies and contemporary plays offer other ways to discover the company.

But Pasternak promised that the two Shakespeare productions at the heart of the summer season aren’t going anywhere:

“We want to build more opportunities for people to fall in love with Santa Cruz Shakespeare.”

The 2027 season begins in April at the downtown Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building with Yasmina Reza’s “The Unexpected Man,” translated by Christopher Hampton and directed by Pasternak. Julie James and Rolf Saxon will star in the darkly funny two-hander about strangers sharing a train car, one a famous author and the other a woman who happens to be reading his latest book.

Then things get considerably busier.

The summer festival opens with Shakespeare’s “The Comedy of Errors,” directed by Pasternak. Two sets of identical twins, mistaken identities and escalating confusion make this Shakespearean chaos at its finest.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

The applause isn’t over yet: Your fall/winter theater guide



The second Shakespeare of the summer carries considerably higher stakes.

“Julius Caesar” returns to SCS for the first time in nearly 20 years, with Scott Wentworth returning to the festival for the first time in 15 years to direct Shakespeare’s political thriller about ambition, assassination and what happens when people decide killing a leader is the best way to save a republic. We know how well that works out.

The third summer production trades Roman bloodshed for champagne-fueled domestic warfare with Noël Coward’s “Hay Fever,” directed by Margaret Shigeko Starbuck in her SCS directorial debut. Four members of one spectacularly eccentric family each invite a romantic guest home for the same weekend without telling anyone else. What could possibly go wrong?

Rounding out the summer is the Pulitzer Prize-winning rock musical “Next to Normal,” with music by Tom Kitt and book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey. Rebecca Haley Clark will direct, with music direction by SCS resident composer Luke Shepherd. The musical follows a suburban family struggling with mental illness, grief, and the complicated ways we try to hold onto the people we love.

Those four productions lead into a two-show fall repertory, both directed by Paul Mullins.

John Logan’s “Red” takes audiences inside the world of abstract expressionist Mark Rothko as the artist battles with a young assistant, his own ambitions and a changing art world.

Stephen Massicotte’s “Mary’s Wedding” follows two young lovers separated by World War I, moving through letters, memory and fantasy as their story moves between love and loss.

There is a method to all this theatrical mayhem.

Pasternak has given the six summer and fall productions the theme “Cry Havoc! That Way Madness Lies...”

Taken together, that’s madness by mistaken identity, political ambition, family dysfunction, mental illness, artistic obsession and memory.

Apparently, madness comes in many forms.

The 2027 season closes in December with the return of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” at Vets Hall.

Summer and fall performances will run from mid-July through mid-October at the Audrey Stanley Grove in DeLaveaga Park. Festival tickets go on sale to members in April 2027 and to the general public on May 1.

Eight productions. Four summer shows – a growing spring season. Fall repertory – Christmas in December.

That’s a long way from a company that, not so many years ago, was fighting to survive.

And that made Monday night’s other big announcement especially fitting.

Next summer, when the first actors step onto the stage for SCS’s biggest season yet, they’ll be performing on the Mike Ryan Stage, named for one of the people who helped make sure there would still be a Santa Cruz Shakespeare to grow.

For a company spending so much time looking toward its future, it was a lovely way to remember who helped get it there.