



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**The Shakespeare Theatre Launches Its 2017 Season With  
*The Merchant of Venice***

MADISON, NJ — **The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey** kicks off its 55<sup>th</sup> season with *The Merchant of Venice*, not seen at The Shakespeare Theatre since 2000. Acclaimed company member **Robert Cuccioli** returns to direct. **Performances begin on May 17** at the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre located at 36 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ. Patrons can **purchase tickets by calling the Box Office at 973-408-5600 or online at [www.ShakespeareNJ.org](http://www.ShakespeareNJ.org)**.

*The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare's dark comedy and one of his most controversial tales, is a timely masterpiece that is eerily resonant of our world today. A money-obsessed, patriarchal, dysfunctional society where wealth bestows power; one in which women cannot determine their own fate, and one marked by religious and racial prejudice. A play that offers no true villains or heroes, Shakespeare's Venice represents a culture as complex and troubling as today's, where the situations and questions posed ask to examine the "quality of mercy" in myriad ways.

**Bonnie J. Monte**, the Theatre's Artistic Director said, "There are so many reasons we are thrilled about this coming year. We're very excited to be welcoming Bob Cuccioli back for his tenth season with us, this time in the role of director, bringing our audience a show that has not been done here for 17 years. Never was there a more apt moment in time to revive *The Merchant of Venice*, and having worked with Bob many times on challenging Shakespeare productions, I know he will guide our stellar cast with a sure directorial hand."

**The Cast:**

Taking on the famous role of Shylock is **Andrew Weems** in his seventh season at The Shakespeare Theatre. His company credits include *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Noises Off*, *King John*, and *Rhinoceros*, among many others. He has appeared on Broadway in *Born Yesterday*, *Inherit the Wind*, *The Green Bird*, and *London Assurance*.

**Brent Harris** returns for his sixth season with The Shakespeare Theatre as Antonio, the merchant referred to by the play's title. Mr. Harris most recently played King Berenger the First in last season's *Exit the King*, a performance that received unanimous acclaim including rave

reviews from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He has also appeared in national tours of *The Lion King* (Scar) and *The Screwtape Letters* (Screwtape).

**Melissa Miller** returns for her third season in the role of Portia, one of Shakespeare's most notable female characters. Her company credits include *Fallen Angels* and *Macbeth*. She has performed regionally with McCarter Theatre Center, Pittsburgh Public, Premiere Stages, and 59E59. Ms. Miller's television credits include *Elementary*, *The Path*, and *All My Children*.

As Bassanio, **John Keabler** returns to The Shakespeare Theatre for his second season. His company credits include *Richard III* and the staged reading of *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. He has performed regionally with The Shakespeare Theatre Company, Kentucky Repertory, Virginia Repertory Company, among many others.

After directing last summer's wildly successful *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) (revised)*, **Jeffrey M. Bender** returns for his eighteenth season as Lancelot Gobbo/Prince of Arragon. His company credits include *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Alchemist*, *The Tempest*, and *Fallen Angels*, to name just a few. Mr. Bender has appeared on Broadway in *A Time to Kill* (Golden Theatre) and *Cymbeline* (Lincoln Center).

**Jay Leibowitz** returns for his eleventh season with The Shakespeare Theatre in the role of Solanio. His company credits include *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Life of Galileo*, *Pericles*, and *Carnival!*, among many others. He has performed regionally with The Acting Company and Gulfshore Playhouse. He is also the primary author of *Who Doth Inhabit the Primary Position*, a Shakespearean parody of Abbot and Costello's *Who's on First*.

For his STNJ debut, **Ian Gould** will play the role of Gratiano. Mr. Gould has performed with The Acting Company in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Hamlet*, and *A Connecticut Yankee*. His regional credits include *Les Misérables*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Seagull* (Great Lakes Theatre); *Copenhagen* (Luna Stage); and *Amadeus* (New Harmony Theatre).

**Robert S. Gregory** makes his STNJ debut in the role of Duke of Venice/Old Gobbo. His recent stage credits include *The Dressmaker's Secret* (59E59), *Bard at the Lake* (Blue Horse Repertory), and *Mr. Paradise* (Arthur Seelen Theater). He has performed regionally with Fort Worth Shakespeare, NY Theatre Ensemble, Folger Theatre, and Aspen Playwrights.

As Lorenzo, **Anthony Michael Martinez** returns for his second season with The Shakespeare Theatre, having previously toured with Shakespeare LIVE!. He has appeared Off-Broadway in *I'll Be Damned* and *Restoration Comedy* (Drama Desk nominee). He has performed regionally in *Floyd Collins* (Kentucky Repertory Theatre) and internationally in *As You Like It* (Hyde Park).

**Tug Rice** will play Salario as he begins his second season with The Shakespeare Theatre. He previously appeared in *The Royal Family*. He has performed regionally with Sierra Repertory Theatre, Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre, and the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival. His film and television credits include *Life at Twenty* and *As the World Turns*.

Rounding out the cast are **Amaia Arana** as Jessica, **Rachel Towne** as Nerissa, **Ademide Akintilo** as Prince of Morocco, **Byron Clohessy**, and **Joe Penczak**.

**The Director:**

**Robert Cuccioli** is in his tenth season with The Shakespeare Theatre. He previously directed *The Glass Menagerie* at the Shakespeare Theatre, and his company acting credits include Iago in *Othello*, Claudius in *Hamlet*, Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Paul in *Carnival!*, among many others. Mr. Cuccioli is best known for his performance in the original Broadway production of Frank Wildhorn's *Jekyll and Hyde*, where he received a Tony Award nomination and won the Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama Desk Award for his performance in the lead role. Other Broadway credits include: *Spider-Man Turn Off the Dark* and *Les Misérables*. He most recently appeared Off-Broadway in 59E59's production of *White Guy on the Bus*, a *New York Times* Critics' Pick.

**The Artistic Staff:**

The visual landscape for this production of *The Merchant of Venice* has been conceived by scenic designer **Brian Ruggaber**, lighting designer **Michael Giannitti**, and costume designer **Candida Nichols**. The production stage manager is **Alison Cote**.

**Tickets:**

Single tickets for *The Merchant of Venice* are begin at \$29 for preview performances and \$49 for regular performances. Prices range from \$29 - \$69. The Theatre is proud to bring back its successful **30 UNDER 30** program for the 2017 season. Patrons aged 30 and under can purchase tickets for only \$30 with valid ID, subject to availability. For tickets, patrons can **call the Box Office at 973-408-5600 or visit [www.ShakespeareNJ.org](http://www.ShakespeareNJ.org)**

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey offers various cost-saving opportunities, including \$15 **student rush tickets**, which are available 30 minutes prior to each performance, with a valid student ID, and a limited number of **Pay What You Can** tickets for every performance on a first come, first serve basis.

**Student matinees** are offered at the very affordable price of \$17 per ticket and are offered throughout the run. Schools are encouraged to book soon as availability is limited. To book, please call 973-845-6742.

**Special Performances:**

For the same price as a regular ticket, the **Symposium Series performances** offer a post-show discussion with the cast and artistic staff. For *The Merchant of Venice*, the symposia will be held following the Tuesday, May 23 at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, May 27 at 2:00 p.m., and Saturday, June 4 at 2:00 p.m. performances.

The **Know the Show** pre-show talks are offered free-of-cost. Prior to the show, an artist from the Shakespeare Theatre presents a pre-performance talk providing background information and an inside perspective on the production. This program is free with the purchase of a performance ticket, and for *The Merchant of Venice* will be held on Thursday, May 25 at 7:00 p.m., with the show beginning at 8:00 p.m.

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is an independent, professional theatre company located on the Drew University campus. One of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation, serving approximately 100,000 children and adults annually, it is New Jersey's largest professional theatre company dedicated solely to Shakespeare's canon and other world classics. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's programs are made possible, in part, by funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional major support is received from Bank of America, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The F.M. Kirby Foundation, The Edward T. Cone Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, CTW Foundation, and The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, as well as contributions from numerous corporations, foundations, government agencies and individuals.

***The Merchant of Venice* Snapshot:**

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR:** Bonnie J. Monte

**MANAGING DIRECTOR:** Todd Rosen

**MAIN STAGE:**

36 Madison Avenue (at Lancaster Road)

Madison, NJ

(located on Drew University's campus)

***The Merchant of Venice***

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Robert Cuccioli

**Performances begin May 17**

**Previews:** Wednesday, May 17 at 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, May 18 at 8:00 p.m.; Friday, May 19 at 8:00 p.m.; and Saturday, May 20 at 2:00 p.m.

**Opening Night:** Saturday, May 20 at 7:30 p.m.

**Post-Show Symposium Performances:** Tuesday, May 23 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, May 27 at 2:00 p.m.; Saturday, June 3 at 2:00 p.m.

**Know the Show:** Thursday, May 25 at 7:00 p.m.; curtain at 8:00 p.m.

**Performances:**

Tuesdays (7:30 p.m.): May 23 and 30

Wednesdays (7:30 p.m.): May 17, 24, and 31

Thursdays (8:00 p.m.): May 18, 25, and June 1

Fridays (8:00 p.m.): May 19, 26, and June 2

Saturdays (2:00 p.m.): May 20, 27, and June 3

Saturday (7:30 p.m.): May 20

Saturdays (8:00 p.m.): May 27 and June 3

Sundays (2:00 p.m.): May 21, 28, and June 4

Sundays (7:30 p.m.): May 21 and 28

For tickets and information: Call 973-408-5600 or visit [www.ShakespeareNJ.org](http://www.ShakespeareNJ.org)