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VIRGINIA SHAKESPEARE TO SUSPEND MAIN PERFORMANCE SEASON

WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA, October 12, 2016 – The Department of Theatre, Speech & Dance at William & Mary has decided to suspend operations of the main performance season of the Virginia Shakespeare Festival for the coming three years.

Their very popular education program, the Young Shakespeare Camps, will be offered during the summer and even likely expanded to meet the demand.

The festival experienced a 23 percent drop in attendance this past summer, and that, when combined with a consistent decline since 2009 that has seen the loss of 56 percent of previous audience numbers and the scheduled closure of Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall for renovations in May of 2018, has caused the department to take this time to re-evaluate what summer theatre it might offer. This decline is part of a nationwide shift in audience preferences that has seen the closing of the main Shakespeare Festivals of both Georgia and North Carolina in the last five years.

“The Department of Theatre, Speech & Dance – the governing body of the festival – took a hard look at the future and the options available to us given the realities of mounting major productions in Williamsburg at this time,” said Producing Artistic Director Christopher Owens. “I concur with their overwhelming vote to suspend main stage production of a Shakespeare-based company and will work with all of the rest of the faculty to re-evaluate what we might offer to our community in the future. I am pleased that our education program will likely remain, at least for the upcoming summer, as its popularity and impact upon the many hundreds of young people it has introduced to Shakespeare is a source of great pride.”

Members of the department, following the closure of the outdoor drama “The Common Glory” in 1975, founded the Virginia Shakespeare Festival in 1978. It produced 38 seasons of live professional theatre in Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall and launched the theatrical careers of many William & Mary students. During that time, it presented all but five of Shakespeare’s canon of plays as well as two original musical versions of “Pericles” and “Twelfth Night.”

The department will look toward the re-opening of a renovated PBK Memorial Hall as the stimulus for launching of a new summer theatre program, Owens said.

The festival will continue to seek support in the form of contributions and grants for its education program. The registration window opens Feb. 15, 2017, for camps occurring in June and July of 2017 – much upon the same model as in past years, with an additional week being scheduled to meet projected demand.

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