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FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE CELEBRATED A MODERN RENAISSANCE IN THE ARTS AT *SHAKESPEARE'S SHINDIG* ON FEBRUARY 26

(Sarasota, FL) —On Monday, February 26, artists and supporters of Florida Studio Theatre flocked to the theater for its annual fundraiser, *Shakespeare's Shindig: A Modern Day Renaissance*. With a nod to history's greatest playwright, this year's Shakespearean-themed event celebrated the resurgence of theatre in today's society, with more people attending theatre today than at any point in modern day history. Long-time FST supporter Marie G. Kropp chaired the event, and Gulf Coast Community Foundation supported the Shindig as its lead sponsor. With live, exclusive entertainment, the presentation of the distinguished Spelman Award, a plated dinner, and merriment abounding, *Shakespeare's Shindig* was a not-to-be-missed event for many of the greatest patrons of the arts and contemporary theatre in Sarasota.

Donning Renaissance and steampunk-inspired attire, attendees added to the festive and lively atmosphere. A Renaissance maiden distributed flower crowns, Puck (from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) frolicked among the crowd, Romeo and Juliet pushed the boundaries of forbidden love, and there was even an appearance by "Will" Shakespeare, himself. Students from Venice High School's Madrigal Troupe entertained guests with hymns, and FST Improv performed short sets in FST's Court Cabaret as special drinks and appetizers circulated during the cocktail hour.

Following the cocktail hour, guests gathered in FST's Gompertz Theatre for special performances from the casts of *Shakespeare's Greatest Hits* and *Blue Suede Shoes*, and the presentation of the annual Spelman Award. Named in honor of FST Founding Artistic Director, John Spelman, the Spelman Award is presented to an individual or corporate sponsor who has demonstrated extraordinary leadership by providing FST with spiritual, financial, and/or in-kind support.

This year's award went to Mr. Arnold Simonsen for his generous \$1 million gift for the purchase of 1234 1st Street, located adjacent to FST's administrative parking lot. Dedicated in October 2017, the new building will provide much needed room for additional workspaces and rehearsal studios, as well as accommodations for the company's growing production needs. Mr. Simonsen also supported the capping of the Kretzmer Artist Residence, FST's newest artist housing project.

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Between musical sets, Managing Director Rebecca Hopkins and Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins spoke about the arts' importance and cultural resurgence, as well as FST's mission and 44 years of impressive transformation. Richard Hopkins remarked, "When I came to Florida Studio Theatre in 1980, the subscriber base was 103 people, and the budget was \$140,000. Today, FST has over 36,000 subscribers [and plays to] over 200,000 people. Today, FST is a living, breathing part of that 'American theatre renaissance.'" The theatre's breadth of programming demonstrates this sense of rebirth. As Hopkins explains, FST endeavors to "Reflect the values of Americans...regardless of race, age, income, religion, or sexual orientation."

"It is our aim to continue the Renaissance," said Hopkins. "To continue to continue to reinvent ourselves and to reinvent this theatre every day, little by little, to continue to suit the theatre to the model of the day and spirit of our age...To meet the challenges and the needs of our audience."

The visiting artists who share their talent with Sarasota for anywhere from three weeks to six months are an integral part of making this happen. To ensure that these talented individuals feel "at home" at FST, an "Adopt an Actor" fundraiser was held to put the finishing touches on the Kretzmer Artist Residence. Queen Elizabeth (aka the event's Chairwoman Marie G. Kropp) opened up the bidding floor for guests to help raise funds for items as blenders, blankets, and towels for FST resident artists.

Once the ceremony concluded, guests enjoyed good conversation over a delicious dinner catered by Michael's on East. By the end of the evening, everyone was in good spirits and left the doors of Florida Studio Theatre, following Hopkins' invitation to "Enjoy the Renaissance."

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by Artist Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company then acquired the former Woman's Club building, becoming the first permanent venue. Shortly after Richard Hopkins arrived, the building was purchased and renamed The Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Gompertz Theatre, the Parisian style Goldstein Cabaret and John C. Court Cabaret, and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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