



History

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival traces its roots back to the Chautauqua movement, which brought culture and entertainment to rural areas of the country in the late 19th century. Ashland's first Chautauqua building—erected in 1893, mostly by townspeople—saw its first performance on July 5. In 1905, the building was enlarged to accommodate an audience of 1,500. Families traveled from all over Southern Oregon and Northern California to see such performers as John Phillip Sousa and William Jennings Bryan during the Ashland Chautauqua's 10-day seasons.

In 1917 a round, dome-covered structure was erected in the place of the original Chautauqua building. The structure fell into disuse, however, when the Chautauqua movement died out in the early 1920s. The dome was torn down in 1933, but the cement walls remain standing today; covered with ivy, they surround the Elizabethan Theatre.

Angus L. Bowmer, an enthusiastic young teacher from Southern Oregon Normal School (now Southern Oregon University), was struck by the resemblance between the Chautauqua walls and some sketches he had seen of Elizabethan theatres. He proposed producing a “festival” of two plays within the walls, in conjunction with the City of Ashland's Fourth of July celebration. The City cautiously advanced Bowmer a sum “not to exceed \$400” for the project. SERA (State Economic Recovery Act) funds provided a construction crew to build the stage and improve the grounds.

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival was officially born on July 2, 1935 with a production of *Twelfth Night*. The Festival presented *The Merchant of Venice* on the 3rd and *Twelfth Night* again on the 4th. Reserved seats cost \$1, with general admission of \$.50 for adults and \$.25 for children. Even at these prices, the Festival covered its own expenses. The Festival also absorbed the losses of the daytime boxing matches that the City—which feared that the plays would lose money—held onstage.

Here's a brief look at some of the major events that followed the Festival's inception in 1935:

- 1935 Oregon Shakespearean Festival opens July 2 with a production of *Twelfth Night*, and presents *The Merchant of Venice* on the 3rd and *Twelfth Night* again on the 4th.
- 1937 Oregon Shakespearean Festival Association is incorporated.
- 1939 The Festival takes a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* to the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. Angus L. Bowmer later credits the nationwide radio broadcast and resultant publicity for enabling the Festival to resume production after World War II.
- 1941-46 OSF closes during World War II.

- 1947 OSF resumes production as a new, larger Elizabethan Stage is built to replace the stage damaged by a 1940 fire. As the reputation for the productions grows, so does the Festival; more performances are scheduled, and the company becomes larger. The Institute of Renaissance Studies (the forerunner of the current education department, the OSF Institute) becomes a part of OSF.
- 1952 The Tudor Guild, the Festival's first volunteer organization, is incorporated.
- 1953 OSF hires its first full-time paid employee: General Manager William Patton, who later becomes Executive Director. Richard L. Hay is appointed Designer and Technical Director.
- 1958 With its production of *Troilus and Cressida*, OSF completes the Shakespearean canon for the first time. Following the season, the 1947 stage house—which had, for several years, barely met fire codes—is torn down.
- 1959 New Elizabethan Stage opens. Designed by Richard L. Hay (architect: Jack A. Edson; contractor: Frank Fairweather), the stage house is patterned on London's 1599 Fortune Theatre.
- 1960 OSF produces its first non-Shakespearean play, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.
- 1963 Attendance tops 50,000.
- 1966 OSF's Endowment Fund is established.
- 1970 The 600-seat indoor Angus Bowmer Theatre, designed by Richard L. Hay (architects: Kirk, Wallace, McKinley, AIA & Associates, Seattle WA; contractor: Robert D. Morrow, Inc., Salem, OR), opens March 21 with Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Completion of the theatre enables OSF to expand its season into the spring and fall; helps generate much-needed income; and accommodates more playgoers.
- 1971 Angus Bowmer retires. Jerry Turner is appointed Producing Director. Attendance tops 150,000.
- 1977 A third theatre—the 140-seat Black Swan, designed by Richard L. Hay—opens February 11 with Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. This intimate theatre allows experimentation with plays which cannot be sustained in the larger theatres, but are still worthy of serious production. Angus Bowmer and OSF receive the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- 1978 With *Timon of Athens*, the Festival completes the Shakespearean canon for the second time.
- 1979 OSF founder Angus Bowmer dies on May 26 (1904-1979).
- 1983 Festival wins Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award for outstanding achievement in regional theatre and National Governors' Association Award for distinguished service to the arts, the first ever awarded to a performing arts organization. Attendance tops 300,000.

- 1984 OSF negotiates a special contract with Actors' Equity Association, thereby increasing the number of Equity actors in the company while continuing to give new actors the opportunity to accrue experience and professional credits.
- 1985 OSF celebrates its 50th anniversary.
- 1986 Festival volunteers receive the President's Volunteer Action Award at the White House.
- 1987 Board of Directors accepts invitation from the City of Portland to establish a resident theatre company in the new Portland Center for the Performing Arts.
- 1988 OSF Portland opens November 12 with a production of George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. The expansion makes OSF the largest not-for-profit theatre in the country. The Oregon Shakespearean Festival changes its name to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.
- 1989 Richard L. Hay, OSF's Principal Scenic and Theatre Designer, receives the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- 1990 OSF launches \$5.2 million fund-raising campaign to build Elizabethan Theatre Seating Pavilion. Board of Directors refuses \$49,500 grant from National Endowment for the Arts due to restrictive language. OSF subsequently receives 1990 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Commendation and 1990 Open Book Award for First Amendment Courage from American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA).
- 1991 Jerry Turner—who receives the Oregon Arts Commission/Governor's Award for the Arts—retires and Henry Woronicz is appointed Artistic Director.
- 1992 The \$7.6 million Allen Pavilion of the Elizabethan Theatre is completed in June. The Pavilion encircles the seating area and provides improved acoustics, sight-lines and technical capabilities. Vomitoria (entryways for the actors from under the seating area to the stage) are added, increasing staging possibilities. Seating capacity does not change, but several hundred seats are raised onto a roofed balcony. The theatre remains open to the sky.
- 1993 William Patton receives the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- 1994 The Festival's operation in Portland becomes an independent theatre company—Portland Center Stage—on July 1.
- 1995 William Patton retires after 47 years with OSF. Patton later receives the Mark R. Sumner Award for distinguished achievement from the Institute of Outdoor Drama. Henry Woronicz announces his resignation in June: Libby Appel is named Artistic Director; and OSF General Manager Paul E. Nicholson is named Executive Director.
- 1996 Artistic Director Emeritus Jerry Turner is presented the St. Olav's Medal by the Norwegian Consul General on behalf of King Harald of Norway.

- 1997 Festival's third rotation through the Shakespeare canon is completed with *Timon of Athens*.
- 1998 The season's production of Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* is videotaped for the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center's Theatre on Film and Tape Archives (TOFT). OSF's production of Lillian Groag's *The Magic Fire* tours to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. from November 10 through December 6. It is selected by *Time* Magazine as one of the year's Ten Best Plays.
- 1999 The season's productions of William Shakespeare's *Pericles* and Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* are videotaped for TOFT.
- 2000 The Festival's 2000 production of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* is videotaped for TOFT. Groundbreaking for the New Theatre to replace the Black Swan occurs November 17.
- 2001 Black Swan closes its doors as a performance venue on October 28. New Theatre constructed, the product of a successful \$21 million Capital Campaign.
- 2002 New Theatre opens in March. Theatre space design: Richard L. Hay; architect: Thomas Hacker and Associates, Portland, OR; contractor: Emerick Construction, Portland, OR; acoustical engineer, Dohn and Associates, Morro Bay, CA. OSF Scenic Designer William Bloodgood receives Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- 2003 OSF named one of America's top five regional theatres by *Time* magazine (6/2/03), and the OSF/Berkeley Repertory Theatre co-production of David Edgar's world premiere two-play cycle *Continental Divide* named by *Time* as the #1 American theatre experience for 2003 (12/22/03).
- 2004 OSF/Berkeley Repertory Theatre co-production of David Edgar's *Continental Divide* tours to England and to La Jolla Playhouse. Artistic Director Emeritus Jerry Turner dies on September 2 (1927-2004).
- 2006 Bill Rauch is named Artistic Director Designate to succeed Libby Appel in 2008.
- 2007 Libby Appel retires and is named Artistic Director Emeritus. Attendance tops 400,000 for the first time in OSF's history.
- 2009 OSF receives the Governor's Tourism Award.
- 2010 OSF celebrates 75th year and sets new record for attendance at 414,783. Bill Rauch receives TCG's Visionary Leadership Award.
- 2011 Emeritus Executive Director William Patton dies January, 13, 2011 (b. 1927). Main supporting beam in Angus Bowmer Theatre cracks on June 18 necessitating closure of the venue for 62 performances over six weeks. Only one performance is cancelled. Thirty-one restaged versions of productions are held in alternate venues and 31 are held in a tent erected in Lithia Park, named Bowmer in the Park. The Bowmer reopens on August 2.
- 2012 Paul Nicholson retires. Cynthia Rider appointed new Executive Director. Bill Rauch awarded Zelda Fichandler Award for imaginative, brave work in the theatre.

- 2013 The New Theatre is renamed the Thomas Theatre as a result of a generous \$4.5 million from a group of donors. The name is in recognition of longtime Development Director Peter D. Thomas, who died in March 2010.
- 2014 The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation grants OSF \$3 million, and the Elizabethan Stage/Allen Pavilion is renamed the Allen Elizabethan Theatre. Robert Schenkkan's *All the Way*, an American Revolutions commission that premiered at OSF in 2012, wins a Tony Award for Best Play and numerous other awards. Directed by Bill Rauch, the Broadway production featured Bryan Cranston as President Lyndon Baines Johnson. OSF costume designer Deborah M. Dryden (34 seasons at OSF) is the recipient of the TDF/Irene Sharaff Lifetime Achievement Award.
- 2015 OSF productions of *Pericles*, *Guys and Dolls* and Lynn Nottage's world premiere *Sweat* enjoy post-season transfers to regional theatres across the country.