

Bard on the Beach Rules Out In-Person 2021 Shakespeare Festival Due to Impact of COVID-19

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA, May 4, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Bard on the Beach](#), Western Canada's largest and longest-running Shakespeare festival, has confirmed it will not be staging a theatre season at its outdoor Festival site this summer. The decision was made necessary by the impact of the pandemic on Bard's production model and the risks to its financial health and

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stakeholder safety. Instead, the Festival's 32nd Season will be digital, offering a slate of new online content and events with programming and distribution details to be released in the coming weeks.

Timing of the decision: A key barrier to staging a Festival in 2021 for in-person audiences is Bard's unique production model. It takes considerable time to erect (and later completely remove) its theatre tents and site facilities in Vanier Park/Señákw. Bard makes a major financial investment in installing that infrastructure each summer as

well as the associated operational expenses. The Festival explored a range of scenarios aimed at downsizing and modifying its in-Park model to reduce costs and complexity, while not compromising artistic quality and the safety of its teams and patrons. All those scenarios required that site construction start no later than May 1, to be ready for a mid-July opening – the latest the Festival can delay the start of public performances given that weather conditions in the fall require the Season to end by early October. The May 1 deadline passed without the required start-up conditions in place, and without assurances that in-theatre audiences will be able to gather in the tents by a Festival start date of mid-July. A further issue was the challenge of ensuring critical health and safety protocols were maintained for Bard's large artistic and production teams.

Artistic Director Christopher Gaze: “It is a deeply difficult call to make. We see the faces of those who depend on us, and the impact Bard has on the Vancouver economy, sector employment, and the community's love for our iconic summer event. But the conditions we need to present a safe and satisfying in-person Festival are simply not there at this time.”

Season Update Video – Executive Director Claire Sakaki and Artistic Director Christopher Gaze

What's next: The Festival is preparing a digital 32nd Season which will offer programming and related events in online spaces and beyond. The centrepiece will be a new full-length play, *Done/Undone* by Kate Besworth, commissioned by Bard for the 2021 Season. *Done/Undone* is deeply rooted in Shakespearean themes and it poses provocative and engaging questions about Shakespeare in today's world. The play will be available for online viewing and there will be further updates later this spring about its artistic team, related programming, and more. The Festival's popular educational offerings, including annual summer camps and workshops, will transition to online formats.

Bard on the Beach - Background: Founded in 1990 by Artistic Director Christopher Gaze, the Festival presents Shakespeare and related plays in Vancouver, BC against a spectacular backdrop of mountains, sea and sky. In a typical year Bard's annual budget is over \$8.5 million and it offers 200+ play and related performances, employs over 250 people, and draws an average attendance of 100,000. 20,000 young people participate in its on- and off-site Education programs, and Bard distributes over \$20,000 in bursaries for youth education programs to children and families in need. It is supported by 300 dedicated volunteers who collectively give 25,000 hours of service each year.

Bard on the Beach - Supporters: Bard is proud of its long-standing partnerships with British Columbia's business community and their continued support for its 2021 Season. The Peter and Joanne Brown Foundation is a 2021 Season Co-Sponsor, along with BMO Financial Group, the sponsor of Bard's BMO Mainstage since 2011. The Howard Family, who support the Howard Family Stage in the Douglas Campbell Theatre Tent, have continued their support this year. Sponsors RBC and the RBC Foundation, multi-year investors in Bard Education programs, are returning, along with individual contributions from Jefferson Mooney and Suzanne Bolton and the Pamela and David Richardson Family Foundation. Grosvenor America, Lawson Lundell LLP, BlueShore Financial and Odlum Brown have continued their support for the digital Season. Bard is grateful for these corporate partners, foundations, community philanthropists, local businesses along with ongoing and generous contributions from all three levels of government.

For further background on the Festival and its developing 32nd Season plans, visit bardonthebeach.org

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