profile
REBEKAH SCALLET &
MARY RUTH MAROTTE

Celebrating SHAKESPEARE

By Jillian McGehee | Photography by Sara Reeves
Hair & Makeup for Mary Ruth by McKenzie Cavin with Stilo Salon
Hair for Rebekah by Hannah Moon & Makeup by Mariah Fowler with Stilo Salon

Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre, the only professional theatre company in the state dedicated to producing Shakespeare's plays, celebrates a decade of bringing The Bard's world-renowned works to life. The 2016 season includes Shakespearean works *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. Hosted at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, each season also features a non-Shakespearean play; this year's selection is *West Side Story*.

Leading the theatre's mission – creating lively and accessible productions that enrich the community – are Executive Director Mary Ruth Marotte and Producing Artistic Director Rebekah Scallet.

After moving to Conway as an associate professor of English at UCA, Mary Ruth learned of plans to establish a professional Shakespeare company in conjunction with UCA's College of Fine Arts. She joined the AST Board of Directors and the rest is history.

Rebekah, who was avidly involved with Arkansas Arts Center Children's Theatre, was introduced to Shakespeare at a young age. Following performances, she would pull out her dictionary to look up any words she didn't understand. She first fell in love with *Romeo & Juliet* – and even staged and produced it in her own backyard at the age of 8. "As an adult, having spent five summers with the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, I was very excited to be able to expand my professional and artistic work with Shakespeare's plays. The opportunity to do it where I grew up and first fell in love with the work really made it perfect," she says.

Mary Ruth also attended productions at the Arkansas Arts Center Children's Theatre and was lucky to have parents who took her to New York City to see Broadway shows. "I still remember standing in the half-price ticket line with my mom in Times Square. The first Broadway show I saw was *Big River,* and I was blown away."

Honoring AST's 10th anniversary and the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the summer season will showcase some of The Bard's most beloved plays. "Each year when I am putting the season together, I try to unite the productions with a theme so that all four productions have a conversation with one another. This year's theme is love," Rebekah says.

A Midsummer Night's Dream will be performed on the lush lawn adjacent to the home of UCA's president. "It's a rare opportunity for Arkansans to see Shakespeare under the stars," Mary Ruth says. "Audiences can bring a blanket, a picnic, their kids and their dog and watch Shakespeare as he was originally enjoyed."

The organization's mission spans beyond the summer festival. "For the past several years," Mary Ruth notes, "We've been taking our family-friendly Shakespeare adaptation around the state. This year we'll travel to nine different locations, including several underserved communities. We've also performed for Arkansas Governor's School students, so we hope we are raising Shakespeare lovers and lifelong fans of his work."

Rebekah Scallet & Mary Ruth Marotte

Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre and UCA will host *First Folio! The Book that Gave Us Shakespeare*, a national traveling exhibition of the 1623 printing of Shakespeare's first published collection of plays. It will be on display at UCA's Baum Gallery from June 7 through July 12.

ARKANSAS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
June 10-July 7 | UCA Campus
www.arkshakes.com

GIRL talk // *Chit CHAT*

Earliest memory of Shakespeare?
Mary Ruth: Traveling to the Alabama Shakespeare Festival
Rebekah: An outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Favorite Shakespeare hero/heroine?
Mary Ruth: Emilia, Desdemona's handmaiden in *Othello*
Rebekah: Viola from *Twelfth Night*