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San Francisco Shakespeare Festival announces Carla Pantoja as next Artistic Director

San Francisco Shakespeare Festival is proud to announce **Carla Pantoja** as its next Artistic Director. Pantoja will provide artistic vision, strategic direction, and passion to build on SF Shakes' 40-year commitment to changing lives through accessible Shakespeare-based performances, education, and engagement.

"The mission of SF Shakes is one I am truly committed to," says Pantoja. "SF Shakes is an artistic home and I look forward to continuing to deepen its connection with Bay Area communities." Pantoja has a 20+-year history with the company, beginning with the Shakespeare on Tour production of *Julius Caesar* in 2003. Since then she has taught, acted, and directed in many programs of SF Shakes. Memorable roles at SF Shakes include Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Most recently, Pantoja served as the Director of Vision for the 2021 episodic production of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Pantoja directed the second episode (performed live online using Unified Virtual Space, pioneered in 2020 with *King Lear*) and fourth episode (performed live in person in local parks.) "Working alongside Episode 1 director Rebecca J. Ennals, Episode 3 director Elizabeth Carter, and Production Manager Pratiksha Shah realized my ideal of how I like to work - in collaboration with each other, supporting each other's artistic vision as well as supporting our needs as parent artists."

Pantoja is also known as a fight and intimacy director, and is Vice President of [Dueling Arts International](#), a non-profit organization devoted to providing comprehensive training for performers, teachers and directors in the art of theatrical combat. Pantoja will provide fight direction and intimacy direction in the coming months at [Oregon Shakespeare Festival](#); Pantoja is beginning her new role with SF Shakes on a part-time basis concurrent with her work at OSF.

Born and raised in Santa Clara in the SF Bay Area, Pantoja describes herself as a "chunky Chicana mom of two." Pantoja has studied Public Narrative and community organizing at the Harvard Kennedy School and is a member of [Making Good Trouble](#); an anti-racist training program launched in 2021 by Crowded Fire, Magic Theater and Playwrights Foundation.

Pantoja has been a longstanding Resident Artist with SF Shakes; Resident Artists have been sharing season planning and director selection with the Artistic Director for several seasons. "Carla's wealth of knowledge, breadth of experience, and depth of character are just the start of what she brings to the table, and her commitment both to the communities we serve and to making lasting change spark so much excitement," says Resident Artist David Moore, who served on the team that led the organization's search for Pantoja. "Carla is an excellent choice to lead SF Shakes into the future, and I'm so glad she's chosen to transition into this role." The search team also included Board Chair Cynthia Francis, Education Workgroup member Evan Held, Executive Director Toby Leavitt, and Production Manager Pratiksha Shah.

Pantoja succeeds Rebecca J. Ennals, whose plans for departure were [announced](#) in July, 2022. "I couldn't be more excited to pass the torch to Carla, whose insights and talent have already enriched SF Shakes for so many years," says Ennals. "She's the ideal person to take the company forward with its commitment to presenting inclusive and accessible Shakespeare that genuinely engages the communities we serve." The search demonstrated the wealth of talent in and national esteem for the Bay Area and the high regard for SFSF. The company is grateful to those who engaged in the search process, including applicants as well as those who provided references and offered advice and perspective along the way.

This is San Francisco Shakespeare Festival's 41st season. Since its beginning, the Festival has been bringing the words and themes of William Shakespeare to audiences throughout the Bay Area and beyond, regardless of their age, ethnicity, financial status, or level of education. The San Francisco Shakespeare Festival believes that Shakespeare experienced in a communal setting - whether outdoors, in a classroom, in a theater, or live online - elates the soul, inspires the mind, and unifies those who sit beside each other. Its 2023 season can be found [here](#).



Carla Pantoja*, Artistic Director
San Francisco Shakespeare Festival

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*Member Actors' Equity Association
Photo: courtesy of director



Carla Pantoja* as Kate in Free Shakespeare in the Park's 2014 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Photo: John Western