

# NATIONAL INITIATIVES

**N**ational Initiatives are NEA-supported projects that have a nationwide impact, bringing artistic activities and performances to areas of the country that usually do not have easy access to the arts. The first National Initiative undertaken by the NEA in FY 2003 was Shakespeare in American Communities.

Shakespeare in American Communities addresses the three fundamental goals of the NEA: supporting excellence in the arts, bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. The program began with a nationwide tour of six professional theater companies producing Shakespeare's plays. Thanks to an unprecedented appropriation of one million dollars from the Department of Defense, a seventh company was added to tour exclusively to military bases. By the end of 2005, the tour will include 29 theater companies, reach more than 200 small and mid-sized communities across all 50 states, play to more than 1,000 middle and high schools, and, we hope, reach one million students.

The tour, which was launched in September 2003 in New London, Connecticut, already had been recognized as the largest theatrical tour of William Shakespeare's plays in our nation's history. It is not only the size of the tour that is important, but also its reach. Places such as Beaver Creek, Colorado and Sheridan, Wyoming—not the usual stops for a national tour—are two of the American communities visited by high quality theater productions.

The plays touring the country are as follows:

## SEPTEMBER 2003 – NOVEMBER 2003

- *Othello* (The Aquila Theatre Company)
- *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater)

## JANUARY 2004 – APRIL 2004

- *Othello* (The Aquila Theatre Company and The Guthrie Theater)
- *Richard III* (The Acting Company)

Lloyd Notice as Othello and Kathryn Merry as Desdemona in the final scene of the Aquila Theatre Company's production of *Othello*.  
Photo by A. Vincent Scarano



APRIL 2004

- *Romeo and Juliet* (Arkansas Repertory Theatre)

OCTOBER 2004 – NOVEMBER 2004

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Artists Repertory Theatre)
- *Macbeth* will tour to designated military bases by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in 2004 as part of the partnership between the NEA and the Department of Defense.

The performances are enhanced by artistic and technical workshops, discussions about the productions, and the combination of arts presentation with arts education. More than 25,000 free educational resource packages developed by the Arts Endowment elicited the following comments from some of the thousands of teachers who have ordered them:

**“Very exciting way to teach my students the power of Shakespeare, enjoyed the video and then reciting certain verses.”**

**“Your materials greatly enhanced our learning about Shakespeare and his works. The students could relate more with the Bard’s work after seeing it in a context.”**

**“Outstanding visuals, good hands-on assignments, will definitely use it next year.”**

**“The children loved it and they are still quoting lines to each other. Thank you for this excellent program.”**

In 2004, the NEA announced the second phase of the Shakespeare program, Shakespeare for a New Generation, which will tour 22 additional companies specifically at middle and high schools. Again, the program will focus on smaller communities that do not have easy access to live theater.

Shakespeare in American Communities is made possible through cooperation with the Minneapolis-based regional arts organization Arts Midwest and educational support from The Sallie Mae Fund. In addition to its financial support for the initiative, The Sallie Mae Fund also has contributed by sponsoring “The Sallie Mae Fund Free Seats for Students” program. In each city of the Shakespeare in American Communities tour, 50 complementary tickets will be given to deserving high school students and a parent or chaperone to enjoy the performance.

Mrs. Laura Bush and former Motion Picture Association of America CEO Jack Valenti are serving as honorary co-chairs for the project. Also providing support to the initiative is the “Players’ Guild,” a group of arts experts and accomplished stage and screen actors. The

Players' Guild members are Jane Alexander, Harold Bloom, Hilary Duff, Rafe Esquith, James Earl Jones, Michael Kahn, Angela Lansbury, Julie Taymor, and Michael York.

Numerous members of government, including Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-NC), Rep. Mark Kirk (R-IL), Rep. Jim Leach (R-IA), Rep. Thomas Petri (R-WI), Rep. Jack Quinn (R-NY), Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Rep. Diane Watson (D-CA), Rep. Robert Simmons (R-CT), and Rep. Nick Smith (R-MI) have participated in local events celebrating the program as well as providing broad support for the tour.

For additional information regarding the tour, dates and performance venues, and participating companies, please visit: [www.ShakespeareInAmericanCommunities.org](http://www.ShakespeareInAmericanCommunities.org).



U.S. Representatives Cass Ballenger, Louise Slaughter, and Jim Leach at the Shakespeare in American Communities celebration on Capitol Hill.

*Photo by Steven Purcell*