

# Lesley Malin

Chesapeake Shakespeare Company Producing  
Executive Director

BY CARYN R. SAGAL



Lesley Malin

**L**esley Malin was destined for theater. Her mother acted, directed and founded two children's theater companies; her father taught playwriting and theater history.

She saw her first Noël Coward play at age four and her first Shakespeare play at seven, and had her first acting role in second grade.

"I learned about theater history at

the dinner table and started helping my mother learn lines at age nine," Malin says. "Theater was my family's vocation, and I simply followed along."

After majoring in theater, she pursued acting before completing an arts management program at New York University. She then became managing director of The Lark, a renowned laboratory for new plays.



The cast of Chesapeake Shakespeare Company's "A Christmas Carol" (2024)

In 1999, Malin moved to Baltimore, but continued as The Lark's board vice president (for 20 years). In 2002, she was cast in a fledgling theater company's first show. Seeing the potential, she offered to help Founding Artistic Director Ian Gallanar establish the company for a few months before returning to New York.

Twenty-three years later, Malin remains in Baltimore and at the helm of the Chesapeake Shakespeare Company. "Life is what happens when you're planning other things," she proclaims.

Offering "performances of Shakespeare and other plays of classic stature that are unforgettable, challenging and innovative," CSC has become Maryland's leading classic theater company and the nation's 15th largest Shakespeare theater.

"In 2012, we were based in Howard County, staging four productions a year outdoors or in makeshift indoor spaces on an operating budget under \$600,000," Malin explains. "By the end of 2014, we had opened a \$5 million theater in downtown Baltimore, engaged in a successful capital campaign, expanded to eight shows a year and grown our budget to \$1.2 million."

CSC annually serves over 34,000 people through artistic projects and intentional community engagement.



As many as 13,000 students attend its spring “Romeo and Juliet” matinees. Its “Shakespeare Beyond” program brings free Shakespeare performances and other arts programming to parks and neighborhoods across Maryland, with an emphasis on underserved communities.

“We are creating community through art,” Malin says. “Audiences love that we come to them, and we love serving those who otherwise might be unable to join us.”

In fact, CSC’s “Shakespeare Wagon” is a custom mobile performance unit specifically designed for outdoor touring.

“Shakespeare is a joy to tackle; he has a ridiculously elevated, godlike reputation, along with the millstone of ‘boring’ chained around his neck,” Malin says. “It’s fun bringing his amazing plays, characters and language to life and changing people’s perceptions.”

Besides praising CSC’s shows that pay homage to the Bard, Malin regards its “Christmas Carol” production as “an annual gift to Baltimore, a cultural touchstone and a beautifully written story of redemption, hope and Christmas.”

“Set in Victorian Baltimore, our version combines Easter eggs like Edgar Allan Poe and the harbor, with fabulous period music and unbeatable costumes,”



Lesley Malin as Queen Elizabeth I in Chesapeake Shakespeare Company’s “Mary Stuart” (2025)

she says. “It’s our 11th year and more popular than ever!”

CSC’s 2026 lineup includes “Fences” (part of the Baltimore August Wilson Celebration produced by Malin), “The Tempest” (directed by Gallanar) and “The Tale of Cymbeline” as its “Summer Shakespeare Under the Stars” production (at Ellicott City’s Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park).

Along with her various management and production responsibilities, Malin

still loves being on stage. “At least once a year, I get to perform, and it’s wonderful returning to a creative wellspring that nourishes my inner artist.” □

*For information about the Chesapeake Shakespeare Company and its upcoming performances, visit [chesapeakeshakespeare.com](http://chesapeakeshakespeare.com).*

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