Huntington Theatre Company and Dorchester's Codman Academy Charter Public School's nine-year collaboration, the Huntington-Codman Summer Theatre Institute, will culminate in two public performances of Julius Caesar on Thursday, July 24 and Friday, July 25 at 7pm at the Calderwood Pavilion at the BCA. The public is invited to the free performance - no tickets are required to attend.

Huntington Manager of Education Operations and Julius Caesar Director Meg O'Brien has set the play in the early 1970s. "Shakespeare's work can be incredibly powerful when teenagers and young adults are able to explore his poetry and storytelling, especially when the cast can relate the events of the story to their own lives," she says. "We're taking Caesar's story, and placing it in a time in America when there was massive political unrest around Vietnam. This is an incredible example of a time in our brief history when society came together to stand up for what they believed was right, and stand against the war, and the politicians who put us there. There are some very eerie similarities between the Vietnam protests and the time of unrest leading to Caesar's death."

"For the first time since our inaugural production of Romeo & Juliet in 2006, we turn our focus to something other than comedy," she continues. "It's been a real joy exploring this story with our cast, some of whom have never spoken Shakespeare's poetry before, and all of whom have only ever performed a Shakespearean Comedy. We are finding new strength and passion in the work, and there's been an inspiring commitment from the students to present a dynamic, exciting, and powerful performance."

A founding partner of Codman Academy Charter Public School, the Huntington collaborates with Codman year-round to create and teach its innovative, interdisciplinary Humanities curriculum. Through the four-week Summer Theatre Institute, Codman students explore the full theatrical process, extending lessons from the school year in literacy, teamwork, and priority-setting.

The Institute also provides a safe environment for the participants who come from some of Boston's most challenging urban neighborhoods, as urban youth violence tends to increase during the summer. Students participating in this summer program range from rising sophomores to recent graduates of Codman Academy.

"I love everything about the Summer Theatre Institute: the staff, the cast, the alumni help," says Lasha Snider, a recent Codman graduate participating in the program for her third time. "I love being on stage and the Huntington helped me make that discovery. Now that I've graduated, this is my last summer. I know I'm going to miss it!"

Niara Washington, who is also a recent graduate of the Codman Academy and participating in the Summer Institute for the first time says, "I know I'm going to miss working with the Huntington when I'm in college. Even though this is my first time in the summer program, I auditioned because I really wanted to be involved since this is the last opportunity I'll have to be in a Huntington play."

"I want to be open to new people and experiences when I go to college," says recent graduate Darius Wilson, "and this is a learning experience that will help me do that."

"I auditioned because it seemed like a strong play," says rising sophomore Jayrelle Fairweather. "This program also gives me opportunities to bond with people I ordinarily wouldn't interact with at school."

Now in its 14th year, the partnership with the Codman Academy showcases the Huntington's wide-reaching youth, education, and community initiatives. The program has been recognized locally and nationally as a model for improving urban students' reading, writing, speaking, and presentation skills. The partnership between the Huntington and Codman Academy was awarded the Commonwealth Award, the state's highest award in the arts and culture, by the Massachusetts Cultural Council; Codman Academy is the only public school to receive this recognition.

Through the program, students study poetry, plays, and the playwrights who wrote them, and attend Huntington productions. Additionally, 9th and 10th graders also work with Huntington staff and teaching artists two days every month, immersing themselves in the workings of a professional theatre. The partnership engages and inspires students from neighborhoods often excluded from Boston's dynamic cultural life and enables them to develop both an understanding of and appreciation for the theatre by studying and attending Huntington performances, observing behind-the-scenes activities of the theatre, and participating in hands-on work in the theatre arts.

Thanks in part to the programs designed and administered by the Huntington, 99% of Codman Academy's 10th graders pass the English Language Arts portion of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam, a requirement for graduation. Since the first graduating class, 100% of Codman Academy students have been accepted to four-year colleges and universities.

The Huntington Theatre Company's Department of Education and Community Programs is one of the most extensive, impact, and admired theatre education departments in the country. Over the past 32 years, its nationally recognized programs have served more than 300,000.

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