

CYS Youth Artist Statements

I currently attend The Juilliard School for Drama, and I can honestly say that I would never be here without CYS.

The first thing I was told after my Juilliard audition was that I had an unusually high proficiency in Shakespeare for my age. All I could do was smile and think of all the hours spent rehearsing with Manon and with my fellow CYS-ers over the past four years; how inspired I had been to come to rehearsal because it was the highlight of every day.

The training CYS provided us was top notch, conservatory level, and we were never patronized because of our age. When we entered that space we were treated like professional actors, not high school students with a hobby, which is a privilege that most teenage actors just don't get anywhere else.

What's really special about CYS is that it's driven by the philosophy that all you need to perform Shakespeare is yourself and your own experiences. This meant no phony British accents or over dramatic blocking, just us, the text, and wherever our impulses lead us on that given day. This was incredibly helpful to my growth as an artist. It taught me to trust in myself and to never hide behind some idea of how I was "meant" to perform. It encouraged me to remain vulnerable and open to change, and instilled in me the belief that no matter what: I am enough.

Consequently these lessons helped me to grow as a person as well when I began applying them to life outside of rehearsal. More than anything though CYS has provided me with a family; a little community of like-minded students who care for one another greatly. My best friends to this day are people I met at CYS and I'm certain these friendships will never fade. I'm also certain that if I hadn't stumbled upon that flyer for CYS my freshman year of high school, I'd be half the actor that I am today, and half the person too.

— **FREEDOM MARTIN**

The Juilliard School (Class of 2023), National YoungArts Winner (2018), City of Chicago Rising Star Honor Roll in Theatre (2017) | CYS PRODUCTIONS: *A Midsummer Night's Dream** (CYSE 2015/'16), *Hamlet** (CYSE 2016/'17), *Much Ado About Nothing** (Summer Shakes 2017), *The Tempest** (CYSE 2017/'18), *Othello*⁺ (CYSE 2018/'19), and *The Romeo & Juliet Project* (Virtual reading with alumni & professionals, 2020/'21)

*PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT | ⁺PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER



FREEDOM MARTIN in *Othello* at Raven Theatre, CYSE 2018/'19 Season



LAUREN MARUT in the CYSE's alumni staged reading of *King Lear* at The Edge Theatre, December, 2019

Working with the Chicago Youth Shakespeare Ensemble has been one of the most formative, complex experiences I've ever had. As an educational program and learning process, it was incredibly impressive and useful. As a chance to connect with other young people who love what I love, and to feel heard, respected and appreciated in a professional creative space, it was invaluable.

Being in an environment conducive to experimentation, where my artistic perspective and instincts were listened to and encouraged, served as an incredible source of artistic validation and personal self-confidence.

So often I find myself isolated in my interests, either within my classes, my social circles, or my family. And when what you love to do is something your parents balk at or something your peers think is strange or a waste of a weekend, it's utterly revitalizing to find reassurance and support with those who are open AND like-minded. Until CYS, I had never met people who cared so deeply about what they loved and tackled it so assiduously. And in the presence of people who had done CYS before, I was never made to feel competitive, less-than, or insignificant as a new person.

Most of all, I loved being a part of the development process and having the agency and support to freely voice my ideas. Being an active agent in the creation of the show prompted me to think more deeply about my character and her relation to others in her world, and prompted the whole cast to connect more closely as actors, characters, creative collaborators, and friends.

— LAUREN MARUT

Rising freshman at Yale University (Class of 2024), City of Chicago Rising Star Honoree in Theatre (2019) | CYS Productions: *Othello*⁺ (CYSE, 2018/'19), *King Lear* (Staged reading with alumni & professionals, 2019), *Richard III*⁺ (CYSE, 2019/'20), and *The Romeo & Juliet Project* (Virtual reading with alumni & professionals, 2020/'21)

⁺PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER

Dear Chicago Youth Shakespeare:

“To you I am bound for life and education.”

Thank you for all you have taught me about my art and myself!

In addition to helping cultivate my love for language and theatre, you have given me another place to call home and another group of people to call family.

Thank you for teaching me the power of my voice, for valuing my thoughts, and for keeping me safe.

Thank you for guiding me through life’s pitfalls with unfaltering compassion.

Thank you for challenging me, praising my successes, and embracing my failures.

Thank you for catalyzing change and for keeping conversations open and honest.

Thank you for the opportunities you provide, and thank you for all the mirth.

Being a part of your ensemble is the best gift I’ve ever received. Thank you for all you’ve given me. It is more than I ever could have asked for and more than I ever could have imagined.

— **ALYSSA COUGHLIN**

Northwestern University (class of 2023) | CYS Productions: *Much Ado About Nothing** (Summer Shakes, 2017), *The Tempest** (CYSE, 2017/’18), and *Othello*+ (CYSE, 2018/’19)

*PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT | +PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER

