

CYSE 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.

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) | CYSE PRODUCTIONS: *A Midsummer Night's Dream** (2015-'16 fall/winter program), *Hamlet** (2016-'17 fall/winter program), *Much Ado About Nothing** (2017 summer program), *The Tempest** (2017-'18 fall/winter program), and *Othello*⁺ (CYSE 2018-'19 Season)

*PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT | ⁺PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER



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



LAUREN MARUT in the CYSE's 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) | CYSE Productions: *Othello*⁺ (2018-'19 Season), *King Lear* (Alumni Reading, 2019), and *Richard III*⁺ (2019-'20 Season)

⁺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.

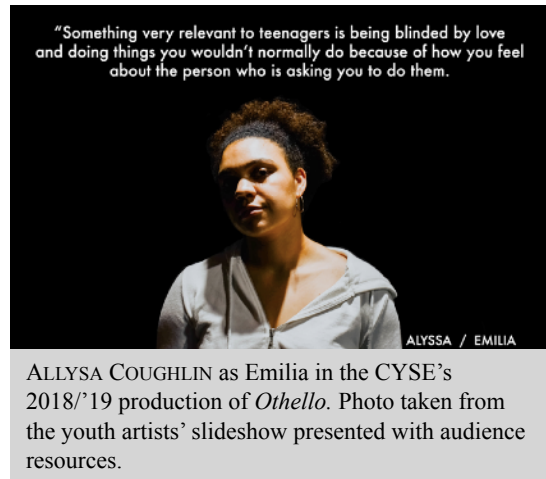
Thank you for the opportunities you provide, and thank you for all the mirth.

*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) | CYSE Productions: *Much Ado About Nothing** (2017
summer program), *The Tempest** (2017-’18 fall/winter program), and *Othello*+ (2018-’19
Season)

*PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT | +PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER





SIAH BERLASKY as Friar Laurence in the CYSE's 15-Minute *Romeo & Juliet*, performed at the City of Chicago's YAS Fest 2019 in Millennium Park

CYS is the absolute best training in theatre I have ever received, without fail. I go to an arts high school in Chicago and have spent many hours over many years with various young ensembles and theatre programs across the city. None of that training comes close to the professionalism, limit-breaking, and sheer artistic rigor that I experience whenever I walk into a CYS rehearsal.

CYS does not hold you to "youth standards". They do not hold you to "adult standards". CYS holds you to the highest standards you think yourself capable of meeting and then pushes you beyond those standards.

There is no director or teacher whose word is law and whose every command must be obeyed. Instead, CYS trains its students to develop sophisticated ideas and interpretations about the art they are adapting by creating a collaborative environment unlike anything you are likely to find anywhere else.

I have learned so much from CYS, not just about acting and Shakespeare, but about how to function as a responsible young adult. You can't be late, you have to put in the work, and you have to work amicably with a wide array different people, all skills that are vitally important to adult life.

The people that I have met, the art I have created, and the lessons I have learned about life and about myself at CYS are experiences I would not trade for the world. This place has become my home away from home in only two years.

— SIAH BERLASKY

Chicago High School for the Arts (Class of 2022) | CYS Productions: *Othello*⁺ (CYSE 2018/'19 Season), *Twelfth Night* (Summer Shakes program, 2019), *King Lear* (Alumni Reading 2019), and *Richard III*⁺ (CYSE 2019/'20 Season)

⁺PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER

CYS is the best theater experience I have ever had. I am used to directors who have a very specific idea of what they want the show to be. They change everything to fit their mold. CYS is not like that.

At CYS we learn to follow our impulses and make the words our own. How can we bring our character to life? How can words written hundreds of years ago take on new meaning? I learned how to step into a character, study how they change, figure out why they say the words they do, and find the impulses for everything that they say and do. It was so much more than just saying the lines, or saying the lines with direction. It was about the character, how all of their lines form a unified whole that is ultimately how the audience knows them. The skills I learned from CYS can be transferred to any show, not just Shakespeare or tragedies.



KIRA IMOWITZ as Prince Edward in *Richard III* at Raven Theatre, CYSE 2019-'20 Season

CYS also allowed me to be a part of the creative process in a way I had never been a part of before — the costumes, set, music, and lighting were all parts of the show that everyone had a say in. We all formed this show together, and that was amazing. This play provoked incredible political thought and discussion among both our ensemble and audience members, and we got to give it our own voice and artistic lens. I have never been able to have so much say and impact on a piece of theater.

I grew in so many ways, but the most positive part of the ensemble is the community. The directors, the guest teachers, and the students are all incredible, friendly, kind people that work well with others. We all trust each other and have each other's backs and I think each of us made a lasting impact on everyone else in the cast. We became a close-knit community during our rehearsals, even though we all go to different schools and have different interests. I will never forget the people that were a part of this show. CYS is just an incredibly unique experience that anyone who is a part of will never forget.

— **KIRA IMOWITZ**

The Ohio State University (Class of 2024) | CYSE Productions: *Richard III* + (2019-'20 Season)

+PROFESSIONAL COMPANY MEMBER