

## **Eleanor Mitchell (English Studies PhD) – Cambridge American Stage Tour 2016**

The Cambridge American Stage Tour (CAST) aims to bring the work of Shakespeare to as wide an audience as possible in the eastern United States and has been performing to packed houses and critical acclaim since 2000. 2016's tour was *As You Like It*.

As Production Designer and Stage Manager, I was in Cambridge throughout August for the rehearsal period, working with the Director and the text to design a transportable set, costumes and props for the show. I was also responsible for devising risk assessments for the show and for ensuring everyone's health and safety throughout. At the beginning of September, we travelled to the Cayman Islands, before making our way up the east coast of America, stopping in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Connecticut. Over the course of the tour, we gave fourteen performances in a range of colleges, high schools and professional theatres, in addition to dates in Cambridge in October, and London in November. As well as the performances, a key part of the tour was its educational focus. At each venue, we also provided educational workshops to high school and college students, exploring ways of performing and reading Shakespeare with them.

CAST was an absolutely incredible experience for me and one I am so grateful to have had. From swimming with sting-rays in Cayman, to adapting the set for changing conditions in each venue (including an outdoors performance!), to encouraging occasionally shy or reluctant students to reinvent scenes from the play and get to grips with Shakespeare's language, I was constantly challenged and enjoying new experiences. The opportunity to approach a Shakespeare play as a designer rather than student over a prolonged period of time has also developed my appreciation of a play's performance contexts and the further implications for interpretation that these offer. Through the educational workshops, picnics and meals, I further had the chance to meet and talk to a diverse range of students and teachers in different states, from different backgrounds and stages of the American education system. This has broadened my outlook greatly, and given me a more internationally oriented understanding of current affairs, politics and, crucially, my subject and the ways in which it can be taught. I absolutely loved my time in the States, and am very thankful to the B M Rowe trust fund for supporting my participation in CAST.