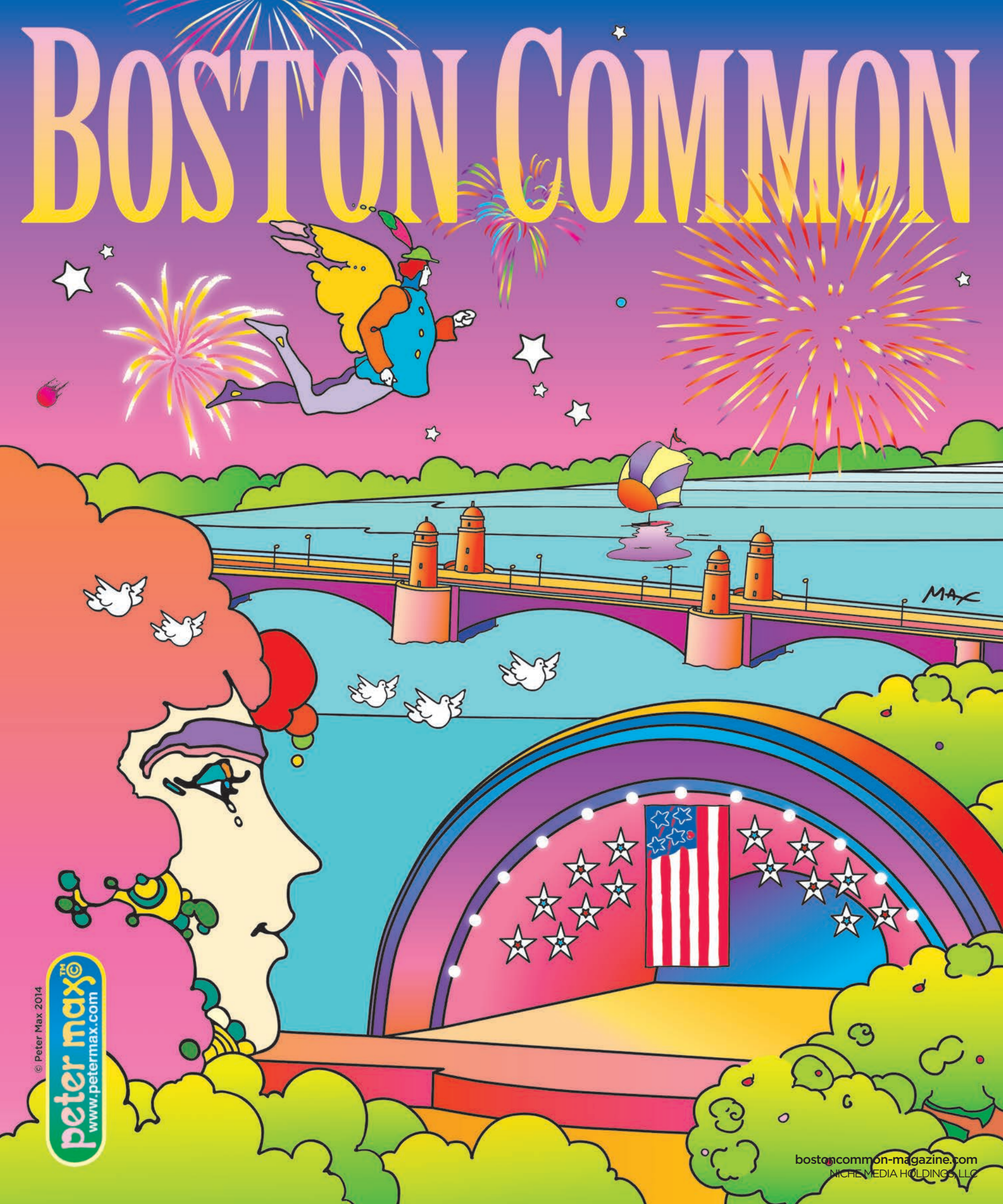


# BOSTON COMMON



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*Boston Common* magazine is published by Niche Media Holdings, LLC (Founder, Jason Binn), a company of The Greenspun Corporation.

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Clark Young and Karen O'Connell in Washington DC's Studio Theatre 2ndStage production of *Astro Boy and the God of Comics*, which Company One presents in Boston this summer.

# Off-Kilter and Out of Bounds? Thank You.

COMPANY ONE LAUNCHES ITS AUDIENCE INTO A NEW THEATRICAL STRATOSPHERE WITH *ASTRO BOY AND THE GOD OF COMICS*. BY JARED BOWEN

If there are boundaries in theater, Company One has crossed pretty much all of them. For its production of Tennessee Williams's steamy one-act drama *Green Eyes*, the Boston theater company seated audiences in a tiny room at the Ames Hotel while a half-dressed couple tussled across the sheets and patrons' laps. To present *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, it built a regulation-size wrestling ring as the platform for the provocative morality play about America's consumerist appetite and racial intolerance. And earlier this year, it staged Annie Baker's three-hour drama *The Flick* about three employees at a Worcester County movie theater—with their existential woes expressed in between long, naturalistic stretches absent of dialogue. Just weeks after Company One's acclaimed production closed, the play earned Baker a Pulitzer Prize for drama. "The last couple

of seasons we've adopted an internal motto about staging shows that feel impossible for a company of our size to do," says Company One's artistic director, Shawn LaCount. "Generally speaking, we find a lot of success in rising to the challenge."

In residence at the Boston Center for the Arts, the company is celebrating its 15th anniversary season. Its history is rich. Many of its shows are the darling of critics, and the small troupe has racked up an impressive array of awards, including more than 20 Elliot Norton and Independent Reviewers of New England awards, a first-of-its-kind grant by the American Theatre Wing, and spots on a number of year-end top-10 lists. Equally impressive is Company One's ability to survive on a precariously thin budget while staying at the

*continued on page 62*





FROM TOP: The Boston cast of *Astro Boy and the God of Comics* sits in front of drawings made live during a performance; the production's anime-style poster.

*continued from page 60*

leading edge of theater. It nurtured the early work of Lydia Diamond, Kirsten Greenidge, and Gina Gionfriddo—some of today's most notable playwrights, who all passed through Company One before seeing their work produced nationally. "For a long time, American theater was caught in a place of convention," LaCount says. "Company One looks to program plays that focus a spotlight on people who are generally considered 'other.'"

This summer the company again stretches its limits—this time with *Astro Boy and the God of Comics*. Written by Japanese playwright Natsu Onoda Power, the show chronicles famed illustrator Osamu Tezuka's creation of the beloved anime hero Astro Boy. A wide-eyed, lifelike robot with a perpetual smile, Astro Boy was conceived by Tezuka in a post-World War II Japan. Although born well after the comic's initial publication in 1952, Power tapped into her own nostalgia for the character to write the play. She had binge-read Tezuka's comic books as a child and even met him once during a school visit. "[The play] is a larger story about how artists use cre-

ativity to process historical trauma and violence, and to transform them," she explains. Astro Boy is the embodiment of that. "He's just so incredibly cute... and I think that has something to do with his positive energy," Power surmises. "He's a wise child, and he is altruistic."

The show, which *The Washington Post* named "one of the top three best theater experiences in 2012," is an interactive production incorporating projections, film, puppetry, and live drawing. For the past year the cast has taken master classes with Power to create drawings on giant, eight-foot-tall pieces of paper as part of their performance. Power, who is also directing the show, says she cast actors who were illustrators or were capable of learning how to draw. "The drawing doesn't exist on its own," she explains. "Our scene about World War II portrays people drawing with charcoal, and as they draw they get messy with it. As the drawing starts to form, people die. It becomes something about death and war... and trying to make do in the time of trauma and chaos." Once again, the stage is set for Company One to break new theatrical ground. *July 18–August 16, Boston Center for the Arts, Plaza Theater, 539 Tremont St., 617-292-7110; companyone.org* **BC**

"It's about how artists use creativity to process trauma."  
—NATSU ONODA POWER

## NIGHT MOVES

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* hits a modern vibe on the Boston Common's moonlit stage.

Steven Maler readily admits he was out of his element when he stumbled into the dreamscape that inspired his newest work as artistic director of the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company. Late at night last December, Maler was walking the streets of Miami's Wynwood district during the city's famed Art Basel fair. By day, Wynwood is home to a slew of galleries and museums. But by night, it's rife with dark corners, pulsating dance parties, and international creatures of the night. "It's a countercultural celebration unlike anything I've seen anywhere in the world," he says. "There was something about that expression, that slight sense of danger, that made me wonder, Am I going to be mugged or end up at the best party of my life?" It also occurred to him that the vibe was much like that of Illyria, the enchanted coastal setting for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which Maler will stage on Boston Common July 23 through August 10. "It's a surreal dream vision," he says.

One of Shakespeare's most popular comedies, *Twelfth Night* is about unrequited love and mistaken intentions, although it doesn't begin that way. "*Twelfth Night* has this blanket of loss and mourning and longing," Maler says while rattling off five deaths that occur near the beginning of the play. "It's about embracing the challenges that life throws your way and moving toward celebration." Maler often takes inspiration from current events, and he pointedly staged the Bard's tough, class-war drama *Coriolanus* during the last presidential election year. This year, he says, he's been influenced by the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings. "To think about how we journey through that loss—that's what this play is about."

So on the Common, look for the lighthearted, the sensual, and the peculiar that Maler found in Miami. The set design will even evoke some of the murals found in the Wynwood district—all for a play that Maler holds in epic esteem. *Twelfth Night*, he offers, "is Shakespeare's greatest comedy and perhaps his greatest play." *July 23–August 10, Boston Common; commshakes.org*



Shakespeare on the Common lights up Boston this summer.