

**Press Contact**  
Liam Passmore  
Shave and a Haircut  
[Liam@shaveandahaircut.biz](mailto:Liam@shaveandahaircut.biz)  
415-865-0860 (p); 415-218-1544 (c)

AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
SHAKESPEARE COMPANY  
"Envisioning the Classics With Color"



## **African-American Shakespeare Company "Moves On Up" With Revamp of Cinderella at The Herbst**



Samantha Williams as Cinderella in the 2016 production of Cinderella from the African-American Shakespeare Company and SFBATCO

After bringing on The San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company (SFBATCO) as co-producers of the venerable Cinderella which has been a holiday season staple for the company since 2000, this year's version sees our heroine and her oh-so charming Prince navigate a fate dependent on a well-intentioned Fairy Godmother who doesn't always get things right, a scheming stepmother, and the return of a custom shoe to its owner (lost as they so often are, while fleeing a ballroom) all in order to engage in the business of pursuing a dream in order to "keep on rising;" this is not only the first production of The African-American Shakespeare Company's 2016/17 season, but its first ever at The Herbst

Directed by Rodney Earl Jackson Jr and Marcelo Pereira of SFBATCO, Cinderella runs five performances only, December 22 - 24 at The Herbst; Thursday, December 22, 8:00pm; Friday, December 23, 3:00pm & 8:00pm, Saturday, December 24, 11:00am & 3:00pm  
Tickets from \$20.00 - \$40.00 Tickets at [City Box Office](#)

**November 17, 2016, San Francisco** – The African-American Shakespeare Company begins a new chapter in 22 year history when it stages Cinderella at The Herbst Theatre in San Francisco, following its decision to leave its longtime home at the Buriel Clay Theater in the African-American Art & Cultural Complex. Cinderella will be followed by *Jitney* at the Marines Memorial and *The Winter's Tale* at the Taube Atrium.

Written and produced by the company starting in the year 2000, this year's version is being co-produced by SFBATCO, and directed by its founders, Jackson and Pereira. Jackson first worked

with the African-American Shakespeare Company when he was only 15, when he appeared as Walter Lee in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Audiences this year will not only experience the production in all its timelessness, but with what the company terms, "a soulful twist."

The producers and directors of this year's Cinderella agree that it is based on the resilience that comes from the discovery that one way we make our own dreams come true is by having the power to change what we know is wrong. Cinderella doesn't have her voice at the beginning of the production because she believes what other people say about her. She believes she is worthless, that she doesn't have value, and she isn't worthy of love. Yet, she also knows that this is FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real). So, with help from a Fairy Godmother who puts "the F in fabulous" to assist in finding her way, she defeats the negative voice that keeps her bound.

The musical elements of this production have been expanded by adding group production numbers, new harmonies and more dance.

"Cinderella is a universal story," says AASC Executive Director, Sherri Young. "There is something inherently visceral in cringing at the cruel treatment of our heroine and then cheering and championing her on to finally reach her destiny. Our company is a Cinderella story also, and The Herbst is our invitation to the palace, where we dream of wonderful things taking place. But in reality it has never been about the dress, the shoes, the palace, or the even the Prince, but how we handle ourselves in order to keep rising that matters."

"This production of Cinderella" says co-director Jackson, "focuses on the story through the lens of Cinderella and the Prince's grandchildren at the beginning of the play, all so the parents and grownups in the audience can view the world that they as adults create from a more child-like and imaginative perspective. We've updated the original AASC script in order to open it up to a wider audience, culturally and generationally, all while presenting a strong woman of color overcoming the monsters written into her existence."

As always, young audience members will have the chance to see and try on the shoe, just to see if it fits.

Cinderella stars Samantha Williams as Cinderella and Jeffrey Hyche as Prince Charming, the 2016 production is directed by Rodney Earl Jackson Jr., and Marcelo Pereira of SFBATCO. Choreography is by Raissa Simpson of PushDance.

**Cinderella:** Samantha Williams

**Prince Charming:** Jeffrey Hyche

**Evil Stepmother:** Amanda Ajisebutu

**Shaniqua (evil stepsister):** Branden Noel Thomas

**Zonia (evil stepsister):** Devary White

**The Duke:** Mason Smith

**Fairy Godmother:** Brittany Boutte

**Grandmother:** Paige Mayes

More information here: <http://www.african-americanshakes.org/productions/cinderella/>

**High Res Photos Available** [HERE](#)

**Dates:** December 22 - 24

**Times:** Thursday, December 22, 8:00pm; Friday, December 23, 3:00pm & 8:00pm, Saturday, December 24, 11:00am & 3:00pm

**Location:** The Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

**Tickets:** \$20-\$40.00 available at [City Box Office](#)

\*\*\*\*\*

The arrival of the New Year will see two more productions from African-American Shakes:

***Jitney* by August Wilson**

April 1 – 16 at Marines Memorial Theater, 609 Sutter Street

August Wilson's *Jitney* premiered at the Allegheny Repertory Theater in 1982. It went on to win the New York Drama Critics Award for Best New Play and the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Off Broadway Play. August Wilson is the recipient of the 1986 Whiting Award for Drama.

Set in 1970 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh that is served by a makeshift taxi company, *Jitney* is a beautiful addition to the author's decade-by-decade cycle of plays about the black American experience in the 20th century.

*Jitney* takes place during an end of an era, where urban renewal threatens to eliminate the makeshift small business Jitney service, which developed to serve the Black community when taxis would not come to their neighborhoods. *Jitney* is a play about father and sons and brotherhood and love; loss and hope; and ultimately, community, told with passion that transcends all races. Set in 1977 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, *Jitney* is part of the “Pittsburgh Cycle” of plays created by August Wilson about the African-American experience in Pittsburgh.

“What makes this play stand on its own are the characters and how they maneuver through life's battlefield,” says Callender. “The leaders and the followers, the dreamers and those whose dreams have faded away; and those clawing their way back from near destruction, in a world that is crumbling around them. All the while exhibiting pride, honor, dignity, humor, love and the unwavering desire to survive!”

- Saturday, April 1: Opening @ 8pm (Opening Night!)
- Sunday, April 2: Performance @ 3pm
- Friday, April 7: Performance @ 8pm
- Saturday, April 8: Performance @ 8pm
- Sunday, April 9: Performance @ 3pm
- Friday, April 14: Performance @ 8pm
- Saturday, April 15: Performance @ 8pm

- Sunday, April 16: Performance @ 3pm

**Note:** this is first time the company has produced the August Wilson classic *Jitney*; it follows in the footsteps of its hugely well-received staging of George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* during the 2015/16 season as a means of showcasing contemporary classics from the black theatrical canon.

***The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare**

June 10 – 18 at the Taube Atrium @ 401 Van Ness Avenue

*The Winter's Tale* explores the unsteady, unsettling, poisonous realm of jealousy and distrust as a childhood friendship is irrevocably torn apart by a grievous misunderstanding.

King Leontes of Sicilia accuses his pregnant wife, Hermione, of infidelity with best friend and fellow King of neighboring Bohemia, Polixenes. His rage and misguided tyranny results in the plot to have the King of Bohemia killed, banish the newborn baby girl, imprison his innocent wife, and turn his stunned staff and nation against him. Directed by Artistic Director of AASC, L. Peter Callender, this study of love, jealousy, tyranny and ultimate forgiveness will bring all the complicated plot twists, memorable characters and one of Shakespeare's most magical and romantic and unforgettable endings to life.

The pivotal role of Mamillius, Leontes son and storyteller in this production will be chosen from the a select group of the many talented young African-American children AASC has worked with in the past.

- Saturday, June 10: Performance at 3pm & 8pm (Opening Night)
- Sunday, June 11: Performance @ 3pm
- Saturday, June 17: Performance @ 3pm & 8pm
- Sunday, June 18: Performance at 8pm

**Note:** *The Winter's Tale* is one of the few Shakespeare plays the company has not until now been produced during its 22-year history

**About the African-American Shakespeare Company**

The award-winning African-American Shakespeare Company (AASC) was established in 1994 by professional theater artists from the American Conservatory Theatre as an alternative answer to the "Color Blind Casting" initiative that began in the early 90s. While this initiative temporarily changed the diversity on stage, African-American Shakespeare Company noticed color blind casting was ignoring these artists' rich cultural heritage and not making the most of their dynamic, cultural vibrancy that actors of color could bring to classical works. Moreover, "mainstream" classical theaters seem to lack the ability to truly attract diverse audiences. African-American Shakespeare Company inspired to highlight artist of color's dynamic cultural vibrancy within classical productions.

African-American Shakespeare Company's work has received honorary acknowledgement from San Francisco's City and County's former Mayor Gavin Newsome (now serving as Lieutenant

Governor); recently awarded The Paine Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement for a Theater Company by the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle; and a Community Partner Award from University of San Francisco's Leo T. McCarthy Center for outstanding collaboration in providing quality Service-Learning program.

The African-American Shakespeare Company is funded in part by Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest; San Francisco Arts Commission, Grants for the Arts, California Arts Council, The San Francisco Foundation, Columbia Foundation, Fleishhacker Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation, Macy's, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, The Hewlett Foundation, University of San Francisco Engage Program, and Silicon Valley Foundation.

**About Sherri Young, Founder & Executive Director**

An M.F.A. graduate from the American Conservatory Theatre; and former Commissioner for the San Francisco Art Commission proudly serving for Mayor Gavin Newsom, Young founded The African-American Shakespeare in 1993 and has been its Executive Director since. She has directed sixteen productions, produced and executed four programs for the organization and speaks at various colleges, universities, and conferences across the nation. Young manages the approximately 60 company members and volunteers for the organization's programs. Some career highlights includes the creation of the company's signature holiday performance Cinderella, effectively building and stabilizing the organization over the past five years, increase audience attendance by 30%, and increase new funding support by foundations and individual donors within the past two years.

**About L Peter Callender, Artistic Director**

In addition to being Artistic Director of AASC, L. Peter Callender is a Visiting Professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Stanford University, teaching Acting Shakespeare and Fundamentals of Directing. He is also a teaching artist at Waterfront Conservatory Theater in Berkeley, and, for over 20years, an Associate Artist at California Shakespeare Theater. He is an award-winning actor, performing in over 25 Shakespeare plays throughout his career, and voted "Mentor of the Year" and "Most Valuable Player in the Bay Area Theater Scene" by Robert Hurwitt (formerly) of the SF Chronicle! Mr Callender has performed On and Off-Broadway, and in over 15 regional theaters across the country, including NY Shakespeare Festival, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Syracuse Stage, Milwaukee Rep, Pennsylvania Stage Company, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Rep, Marin Theater Company and Aurora Theater Company. Some favorite roles: Simon in THE WHIPPING MAN, Richard in RICHARD III, Sam in 'MASTER HAROLD'...and the Boys, Leontes in THE WINTER'S TALE, Antony in ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, Mr M in MY CHILDREN! MY AFRICA!, Walter in SWIMMERS, Robert Mugabe in BREAKFAST WITH MUGABE, Sterling North in PERMANENT COLLECTION, Dr Treves in THE ELEPHANT MAN, Tom/Jamaican Waiter in PRELUDE TO A KISS (Broadway), Caliban in THE TEMPEST (directed by Julie Taymor) and several others. More information on his work and career can be seen on his website: [www.lpetercallender.com](http://www.lpetercallender.com).

####

