

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

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



San Francisco's African-American Shakespeare Company Tackles an Authentic American Classic in August Wilson's *Jitney*

Artistic Director L. Peter Callender's long-simmering and personal vision of what *Jitney* is and what it is saying comes to San Francisco for the first time since he initially staged an award-winning version in Florida in 2016; the production comes at a time when work from the two-time Pulitzer winning playwright is experiencing a resurgence of sorts with Denzel Washington nominated for an Oscar in the film version of *Fences*

Jitney opens April 1 and runs for 8 performances through April 16 at the Marine's Memorial Theater, 609 Sutter Street, San Francisco; Tickets are \$32.50

www.african-americanshakes.org

San Francisco, February 9, 2017- The African American Shakespeare Company will present August Wilson's *Jitney* for the first time ever. Directed by AASC Artistic Director L Peter Callender, it reflects his long-simmering and personal vision of the play.

As to why a company dedicated to Shakespeare would perform a play by a two-time Pulitzer winning contemporary playwright, African-American Shakespeare Company

Artistic Director L. Peter Callender—who directed an award-winning version in 2016 at The American Stage Theater in Florida says—"I think of August Wilson as the Shakespeare of our time. I love Wilson's honesty, the 'anthropological aspect' of listening to real people and capturing the rhythms of their speech."

August Wilson is a titan of American Theater. And *Jitney* is one of 10 plays that make up his legendary Pittsburgh Cycle, in which each play takes place in a different decade as a means of illuminating the breadth of the black American experience in the 20th century. It is a story of fathers, sons, brotherhood, love, loss and hope.

This new production comes at a time when Wilson's work is experiencing a resurgence of sorts. In addition to Denzel Washington recently starring in the film version of another Wilson play, *Fences* (for which he was nominated for an Oscar), there was the first ever Broadway production of *Jitney*. A recent review in *The Wall Street Journal* made the shrewd observation that the characters in both plays wrestle with "ruthlessness and rebellion," and who despite the scars the outside world has left them with, make decisions that determine their own fates.

If all that sounds a bit Shakespearean, you would not be wrong.

"Shakespeare wrote 10 history plays and August Wilson wrote 10 history plays," says Callender. "His plays belong in the canon of the greatest plays ever written and should be played in the same seasons as Shakespeare, Miller, Williams, Shaw, O'Neil, Albee, Chekov and the all-time greats! Like these American and European writers, Wilson's plays are rich in humor, painful struggle, expressive characters and brilliant storytelling. AASC is committed to the classics. Wilson's plays are that and more."

What: The African American Shakespeare Company Presents *Jitney*

When: April 1-16, 2017

Where: Marine's Memorial Theater, 609 Sutter Street

Admission: \$32.50

Tickets: african-americanshakes.org or www.brownpapertickets.com/event/2628244

High Res Photos: contact liam@shaveandahaircut.biz

Director's Note

No director worth his/her salt would turn down an opportunity to direct one of August Wilson's plays, nor an actor turn down an opportunity to play one of his richly

nuanced characters. I have had the pleasure of doing both! I have acted in 23 Shakespeare plays, directed several and, as in Shakespeare (who wrote 10 history plays as did Wilson), Wilson's words are textured, the thoughts are rich and complicated, the characters bigger than life and the stories are breathtaking! *JITNEY*, Wilson's first play, is such an example. It is a play about fathers and sons, and brotherhood and love; loss and hope, and ultimately, community, told with passion and poetry that transcend all races. This is not an epic play. It doesn't follow in the footsteps of Wilson's other masterpieces like *PIANO LESSON*, *FENCES*, *GEM OF THE OCEAN*, *MA RAINY'S BLACK BOTTOM* and *JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE*. What makes this play stand on its own are the characters you'll be introduced to and how they maneuver through their lives on life's battlefield. 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! I will be forever grateful to have the opportunity to helm this brilliant work! I dedicate this production to Brandon Callender, Elsa Callender, and to you, reading these notes, for your support of these great plays.

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.

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