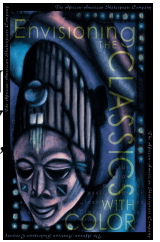


**AFRICAN-AMERICAN
SHAKESPEARE COMPANY**
"Envisioning the Classics With Color"



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**AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
CLOSES 18TH SEASON WITH AN URBAN INTERPRETATION OF
"THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR"
May 4-26, 2013**

SAN FRANCISCO (March 25, 2013) – Closing **African-American Shakespeare Company's** 2012-13 season is William Shakespeare's **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR**, directed by **Becky Kemper**. **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** reunites audiences with the ever-merry, ever-scheming character Sir John Falstaff from Shakespeare's history plays *King Henry IV, Part 1* and *King Henry IV, Part 2*, this time at the center of a comedy of his own. **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** plays **May 4 through May 26** (*press opening: May 4*) at the Buriel Clay Theater at the African American Art and Culture Complex in San Francisco. For tickets (\$10-35) and more information, the public may call **1-800-838-3006** or visit **African-AmericanShakes.org**.

Celebrating one of Shakespeare's most beloved characters and infamous skirt-chasers, **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** chronicles the exploits of Falstaff who, down on luck and money, tries to swindle two seemingly-simple housewives. But the joke is on him when the Mistresses Ford and Page catch on to Falstaff's seduction scheme and teach him a lesson with some mischief of their own. Re-set in the late 1950's in the shared back yards of a city neighborhood, and featuring live music, African-American Shakespeare Company's production marries the raucous and irreverent popular urban black theater movement known as the "Chitlin' Circuit" with the boisterous and bawdy practices of Elizabethan theater to create a theatrical experience that is joyous, ground breaking, outrageous, and original.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR is Shakespeare's only play to deal exclusively with contemporary Elizabethan-era English middle class life. Written sometime between 1597 and 1601, the play centers on the comic romantic misadventures of Falstaff. Although it contains elements of Plautus' comedies and Italian novelle, **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** does not have a known source. The play differs from Shakespeare's other comedies of this period in that it is not set in an imaginary country but in Windsor and the small-town rural life of Shakespeare's own day. Shakespeare's ploy in this engaging comedy is to introduce the character of Falstaff, already a household name in London in the

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENTS “MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR”

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late 1590s, into a non-historical plot where he occupies a very different role from that of the *Henry IV* plays.

“*The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a play about community, everyday people living everyday lives, with everyday problems and amusements,” said director Becky Kemper. “I am fascinated by how Shakespeare’s true theatrical tradition lives on in the tradition of urban black theater, in the guilty, raucous pleasure of Tyler Perry or Showtime at the Apollo. The urban black theater’s tradition of broad stories thematically match those of Shakespearean comedies, particularly *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and I think that our production is just as recognizable and enjoyable, a guilty pleasure full of outrageous archetypes we all know, and jokes that we think we shouldn’t.”

Continued Kemper, “The Elizabethan playhouse was not a well-behaved or stodgy event. More like a sporting event than what we think of as theater, the playhouse was a wildly interactive community center where the whole neighborhood went to hear music, see favorite stories retold, and revel in bawdy jokes; the influence of this joyous and passionate theater can certainly be found in the urban black theater movement. I want our audiences to abandon any notions of well-behaved, heady Shakespeare and join us in a simpler time, a time of good music and good friends, to come and play with us – laugh, cheer, talk, dance, and have a merry time at *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.”

Becky Kemper has been a director, actor, and teacher specializing in Shakespeare and Voice for 20 years. Having just returned from working directly with Kristin Linklater in NYC, she is currently Director of Training at San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, and teaches throughout the Bay Area at institutions including Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Waterfront Conservatory. Prior to San Francisco, she served as Producing Artistic Director for Maryland Shakespeare Festival, which she founded in 1999, as Artistic Director of the Metawhateverphor Theater in New York City, as Director of Education for Baltimore Shakespeare Festival, and Chair of the Artistic Council for Shakespeare Theater Association; she is a company member at Shakespeare & Co. in Massachusetts. Kemper holds a BFA from NYU, a Master of Letters in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature, and an MFA in Directing, and is currently working toward Linklater Voice certification. She has presented her research into Shakespeare’s dramatic use of rhetoric at numerous national conferences and theatrical workshops across the country.

African-American Shakespeare Company has assembled a talented ensemble for **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** including: **Belinda Sullivan** (Falstaff); **Armond Dorsey** (Mr. Ford); **Safiya Fredericks** (Mistress Page); **Leontyne Mbele-Mbong** (Mistress Ford); **Tavia Percia** (Anne Page); **Sherri Young** (Mistress Quickly); **Martin Grizzell** (Doctor Caius); **Shawn J. West** (Parson Sir Hugh); **Twon Marcel**

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENTS “MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR”

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(Justice Shallow); and **Frank Sparks** (Mr. Page). **Melvin Brown**, **Ali Khan**, and **Amy Lizardo** round out the ensemble.

African-American Shakespeare Company was introduced in 1994 to create an opportunity and a venue for actors of color to hone their skills and talent in mastering some of the world’s greatest classical roles. The company is dedicated to producing classic stage works from an African-American cultural perspective, providing opportunities and accessibility for minority artists and their communities to view these works in a manner that is inclusive of their cultural heritage. African-American Shakespeare Company has produced over 30 productions, toured to over 97 schools, and reached over 105,000 patrons through its main stage productions and arts education program.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

Closing **African-American Shakespeare Company**’s 2012-13 season is William Shakespeare’s **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR**. Celebrating one of Shakespeare’s most beloved characters and infamous skirt-chasers, **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** reunites audiences with the ever-merry, ever-scheming character Sir John Falstaff from Shakespeare’s history plays *King Henry IV, Part 1* and *King Henry IV, Part 2*, this time at the center of a comedy of his own. **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** chronicles the exploits of Falstaff who, down on luck and money, tries to swindle two seemingly-simple housewives. But the joke is on him when the Mistresses Ford and Page catch on to Falstaff’s seduction scheme and teach him a lesson with some mischief of their own.

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SHOWS: Opening: Saturday, May 4, 8pm (also press opening)

Sunday, May 5, 3pm
Saturday, May 11, 8pm
Sunday, May 12, 3 pm
Saturday, May 18, 8pm
Sunday, May 19, 3pm
Saturday, May 25, 8pm
Sunday, May 26, 3pm

Student Matinee Performances:

Thursday, May 2, 10am
Thursday, May 9, 10am
Thursday, May 16, 10am (*at capacity*)
Thursday, May 23, 10am

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENTS “MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR”

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WHERE: Buriel Clay Theater at the African American Art & Culture Complex
762 Fulton Street (at Webster), San Francisco, CA

TICKETS: For tickets (\$10-\$35) and information, the public can call **1-800-838-3006** or visit **www.African-AmericanShakes.org**

PHOTOS: High-resolution digital color photos for **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** may be accessed at **African-AmericanShakes.org/Media/Media_PressPage.htm** or are available upon request by contacting [brightbutterfly\[at\]hotmail.com](mailto:brightbutterfly[at]hotmail.com)

As part of their outreach to public schools in the Bay Area, **African-American Shakespeare Company** provides free student matinee performances for all their productions. **THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR** is brought to the community by Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.

African-American Shakespeare Company is funded in part by Fleishhacker Foundation; The James Irvine Foundation; Zellerbach Family Fund; The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; Grants for the Arts/SF Hotel Tax Fund; San Francisco Foundation; the California Arts Council, a state agency; the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; and Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.