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

San Francisco's African-American Shakespeare Company Announces its 25th Anniversary 2019/20 Season

The company's 25th Anniversary Season begins October 12 with Artistic Director L. Peter Callender making his debut in *Othello*, followed by the company's beloved annual holiday production/spin on *Cinderella* in December; 2020 sees two never before produced by AASC productions: *The Trial of One-Short Sighted Black Woman vs. Mammy Louise and Safreeta Mae* in February, and then Noël Coward's *Private Lives* in April

www.african-americanshakes.org

July 10, 2019, San Francisco, CA— The African-American Shakespeare Company begins its 25th season with an ambitious and varied slate of programming. Established in 1994 by professional theater artists from the American Conservatory Theatre as an alternative to the "Color Blind Casting" initiative that began in the early 90s, the company flourished by bringing its artists rich cultural heritage to the fore. Since then it has produced 60 plays including 23 by Shakespeare—with some plays produced 2 & 3 times—along with a number of other classics such as *Jitney* by August Wilson, Tennessee Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire* and George C Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*.

Othello

By William Shakespeare

Directed by: Carl Jordan**Dates:** October 12 - October 27**Location:** Marines' Memorial Theatre – 609 Sutter Street, 2nd Fl, San Francisco, CA 94102

AASC Artistic director L. Peter Callender makes his debut in *Othello*. Directed by Carl Jordan, this production will be set in a contemporary milieu that places an emphasis on Othello as "the other"—an outsider who grew up in Africa attempting to balance his Muslim background against the Christian society he is marrying into.

Cinderella**Directed by:** Sherri Young**Dates:** December 20 – 22

Location: Herbst Theatre – 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102

This beloved annual holiday treat—which has sold out each of the past 4 years—is a timeless tale, brought to whimsical, magical life in an uplifting re-telling of the classic fairytale, featuring all of the pageantry, hilarity, and charm of the original, but with a decidedly soulful twist. Not to mention a very hands on Fairy Godmother.

The Trial of One-Short Sighted Black Woman vs. Mammy Louise and Safreeta Mae

By Karani Marcia Leslie Johnson

Directed by: Sherri Young

Dates: February 15 – March 1

Location: Taube Atrium Theater – 401 Van Ness Avenue, 4th Fl, San Francisco, CA 94102

This satirical play by Karani Marcia Leslie Johnson is set up as a mock trial of black female identity—specifically the jovial, asexual and servile “mammy,” along with the hyper-sexualized Jezebel-like “Safreeta Mae” stereotypes, which the main character charges, are actually based on television, advertising and the movies, not reality. And it is these stereotypes that have impeded her success in making it up the entertainment industry’s corporate ladder. Interestingly, the playwright herself was an editor and staff writer for CBS, NBC and Fox, with credits that also include *The Cosby Show* and *Parenthood*.

Private Lives

By Noël Coward

Directed by: Clay David

Location: Marines’ Memorial Theatre – 609 Sutter Street, 2nd Fl, San Francisco, CA 94102

Dates: April 11 – April 26

The bright and shining wit and comedy of Coward’s 1930 comedy of manners tells the story of a divorced couple who come to realize that though they both just remarried younger spouses, they’ve somehow booked into the same hotel for their respective honeymoons! And in fact, are sharing a terrace. A who’s who of theater and film stars have played the roles over the years—including Lawrence Olivier, Maggie Smith, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor—and the African-American Shakespeare Company is thrilled to be giving it a go!

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 discounted these artists’ rich cultural heritage, and not making the most of the dynamic cultural vibrancy that actors of color could bring to classical works—a vibrancy that African-American Shakespeare Company aspired to highlight. Moreover, “traditional” classical theaters seem to lack the ability to truly attract diverse audiences.

African-American Shakespeare Company's work has received honorary acknowledgement from San Francisco City and County's former Mayor Gavin Newsom; was awarded The Paine Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement for a Theater Company by the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle; a Community Partner Award from University of San Francisco's Leo T. McCarthy Center for outstanding collaboration in providing quality Service-Learning program; Winner of 6 Broadway World Regional Awards in 2019; and winner of The Best Live Theatre in 2018 by San Francisco Magazine

The African-American Shakespeare Company is funded in part by the Hitz Foundation, Wattis Foundation, 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, Theater Communications Group, Black Arts Future Fund, and Zellerbach Family 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 Company in 1993 and has been its Executive Director since. She has directed over 20 productions, produced and executed five 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 include the creation of the company's signature holiday performance *Cinderella*, effectively building and stabilizing the organization over the past five years; increasing audience attendance by 30%; and increasing new funding support by foundations and individual donors within the past two years. Young is a recent Silver Award Recipient of the Jefferson Award, honored in 2018.

About L. Peter Callender, Artistic Director

In addition to being Artistic Director of AASC, L. Peter Callender has been a Visiting Professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Stanford University, teaching Acting Shakespeare and Fundamentals of Directing. He was also a teaching artist at Waterfront Conservatory Theater in Berkeley, and, for over 20 years, an Associate Artist at California Shakespeare Theater. He is an award-winning director, both in the Bay Area, where he directed for AASC and the Aurora, and at American Stage Theater in St Petersburg, FL where he directed 4 plays--most recently *Pipeline* by Dominique Morriseau, and performed as Walter "Pops" Washington in *Between Riverside and Crazy*. He is also 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! 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 *Anthony 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.