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



AASC's Artistic Director L. Peter Callender Comes Full Circle When He Directs *Black Eagles* at Marines' Memorial in March

As a member of the original 1991 cast at the Manhattan Theater (he played Roscoe), it has been a long time personal goal of both he and the African-American Shakespeare Company to mount a production of Leslie Lee's play in SF that tells the story of the Tuskegee Airmen, America's first squadron of black fighter pilots who took to the skies in World War II; if directing the play was not enough in terms of bringing things full circle and realizing personal ambitions, joining AASC company members Devin Cunningham and Gift Harris in the cast will be Callender's son Brandon Marcus Callender

Black Eagles will run March 16th – March 31 at the Marines' Memorial Theatre; Tickets are \$35.00 can be purchased at african-americanshakes.org

San Francisco, Feb 4, 2019– The African American Shakespeare Company will present Leslie Lee's *Black Eagles* under the direction of the company's Artistic Director, L. Peter Callender. This marks a return of the company to the Marine's Memorial where it will present the extraordinary drama about the Tuskegee airmen, America's first black fighter pilots. The play opens onstage during a reception honoring the airmen and Gen. Colin Powell. As the now-elderly WWII pilots reminisce, their younger selves join them, which serves as the basis for the story of this brave company to be retold.

Willie Rogers, the last member of the original Tuskegee Airmen died at age 101.

"I have always wanted to do this play ever since I became Artistic Director of AASC," says Callender. "With the recent passing of Willie Rogers, I felt in my bones it was time to bring their story to SF and keep the memory of these great American heroes alive and strong."

The relationship between the African-American community and the military has been a fraught one over the years, including how the draft was handled during Vietnam, but as Callender notes "There are several stories of African-American heroes (male and female) from past wars, space exploration, The Buffalo Soldiers; builders, and inventors where the contributions have been of immense importance. "I recently read about a group of 11 African-American soldiers brutally

mutilated and killed by German SS soldiers in Belgium. Their bodies were found frozen solid some time later. Pursued by the Germans, these men were taken in by a family who hid them in their farmhouse. They might have been safe there, but when they heard that the Germans were close to discovering them, they sacrificed themselves to save the lives of the Belgian family who protected them. The family would certainly have been killed for protecting these soldiers. This is true heroism! These are the forgotten stories. We wish to bring these stories up from the depths to remind a fractured nation of the sacrifices of brave men and women of color.”

Callender also notes that World War II was a time when national pride was at the forefront. “Our nation was at war, and although there were serious racial differences from sea to shining sea, when the shooting started, even though racism was rampant in many places, including the bases and in foxholes, for the most part, everyone was in hell when the shells dropped. This is just a reminder that, even though we have differences, when it comes to protecting our nation and its people,*all* its people, we are one: Americans!”

Cast includes AASC company members Devin Cunningham (*Zonita, Cinderella*), Gift Harris (*Jitney*) and joining them is Callender’s son Brandon Marcus Callender. “I have always wanted the opportunity to act with or direct my son, so I am thrilled to finally have this opportunity with Black Eagles,” says Callender before playfully pausing and lifting one brow. “We will see how he feels at the end of the process!”

What: African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Black Eagles*

When: March 16-31

Where: Marines’ Memorial Theatre

Time: Saturday evenings at 8pm, Sunday matinees at 3pm

Tickets: \$35.00 can be purchased at african-americanshakes.org

If you would like PRESS tickets to Black Eagles, please contact Liam Passmore at liam@shaveandahaircut.biz or at 415-218-1544 (cell); 415-865-0860 (landline)

High Res Photos To Come

The African-American Shakespeare Company will finish out the season July 13-28 with *Macbeth*, also directed by L. Peter Callender.

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 The Best Live Theatre in 2018 by San Francisco Magazine; and Winner of 6 Broadway World Regional Awards in 2019

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, Zellerbach Family Foundation, and the Wattis Foundation.

Production Sponsor Angela M. Archie

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, has been an Associate Artist at California Shakespeare Theater. He is an award-winning director, both in the Bay Area, where he has directed for AASC and the Aurora, and at American Stage Theater in St Petersburg, FL where he just opened *A*

Raisin in the Sun. 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.

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