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AFRICAN-AMERICAN
SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
“Envisioning the Classics With Color”



The African-American Shakespeare Company Looks to Explore What It Means To Be Family in 2018 Version of *Cinderella*



Paige Mayes in the 2017 African-American Shakespeare Company's *Cinderella*

Director Mark A. Davis looks to Sondheim and *Into The Woods* as inspirations to give context as he takes the reins for this year's production of the company's holiday classic as a story of a girl being raised by a mother “who doesn't like her,” and her search for authentic family, which in this version will feature a Fairy Godfather offering some needed assistance in her transformation and journey that includes a pair of particularly life-changing shoes

Cinderella runs for 4 performances, December 21-23 at the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco;

Tickets: \$25 - \$45 can be purchased at african-americanshakes.org

October 29, 2018, San Francisco— The African-American Shakespeare Company's annual holiday offering *Cinderella* returns this December in an update that recontextualizes our heroine's dilemma into a journey that finds her seeking what director Mark A. Davis describes as “authentic family.”

This, the company's 17th production spun from their original take first produced in 2000 is their take on the oft-told tale of a girl who while fully aware of the inequalities in her life—forced as she is to wait on her stepmother and two stepsisters hand and foot— doesn't allow them to define her.

After being a holiday staple for the company for close to two decades, with a number of revisions, additions and updates, Executive Director Sherri Young is always looking for ways to keep the story relevant to new audiences and reflect the changing times, all while “keeping the uniqueness that only the African-American Shakespeare Company can bring.”

As always, the musical production will find our heroine thanklessly toiling away before seizing the opportunity to pursue her dreams after coming into temporary possession of a particularly life-changing pair of shoes. In this case, the director, who is also a playwright and choreographer—and who as a dancer was a member of the original company of *The Lion King*—has modified the role of the traditional Fairy Godmother into a fast-talking, fashion conscious and very snappy dressing Fairy Godfather to be played by ShawnJ West.

Influenced by Sondheim and *Into The Woods*, Davis felt that there was more to Cinderella and her struggles still to be told, so specifically wanted to get audiences to think about her dilemma and how she got there from the outset by giving some context to her situation. “You have a girl being raised by a mother who doesn’t like her, which in this day and age leaves open all kinds of possibilities of where to take the play. And in this case it leapt out at me, that really, it’s about her search to find that place where she belongs and where she can be her most loving self and be loved in return.”

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

Full Cast TBA

High Res Photos Available [HERE](#)

What: African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Cinderella*

Dates: December 21 - 23

Times: Friday, December 22, 8:00pm; Saturday, December 23, 11am & 3:00pm, Sunday, December 24 at 1pm

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

Tickets: \$25-\$45 available at [City Box Office](#)

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 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.

About Mark A. Davis (Director)

Mark is an Assistant Professor of Theatre & Dance/Musical Theatre Specialist at San Francisco State University. He is an accomplished director/choreographer, playwright and actor. After 11 years in Europe, primarily in Germany, he performed for two seasons with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. He's an original cast member of the Broadway production of *The Lion King* and appeared at the Minskoff Theatre (NYC) for the 20th anniversary reunion with Sir Elton John in 2017. Recent productions as director: *Mahalia*, *Raisin*, *Aida*, *Chicago*, *H2\$*, *Dutchman*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *ART*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Ragtime*, *Threepenny Opera*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *On the Twentieth Century*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Upcoming productions: Choreography for Crowded Fire Theatre Company's production of Young Jean Lee's *Church* and adaptation, direction/choreography for the SF's African-American Shakespeare Company's, *Cinderella*. His musical (Book/Lyrics) *The Last Blues of the Empress* will have a staged reading in New York City in the Fall of 2018. His areas of pointed interest are Musical Theatre History, African-American Theatre History, Theatre of the African Diaspora, Dance History, The Black Body on Broadway, Theatre Devising and Intergenerational Intersections in Theatre Creation. His workshop *Mind the Gap: The Journey Towards Seeing the Complete Individual in Ourselves and Others* was held in the Spring of 2018 as a part of the Year in Conversation here at SFState. He received his BA in Dance & Performance from UMass Amherst and his MFA in Theatre/Dramatic Literature from Smith College. He holds a Gold Medal in Ice Dancing from the USFS. He's a member of the Society of Directors & Choreographers, The Writers Guild of America, Actors Equity Association and the Musical Theatre Educators Alliance. For more information please check out www.mallandavis.com.

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