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



African-American Shakespeare Company Debuts an Updated *Macbeth* at the Taube Atrium This July



(Photo by Lance Huntley)

Ambition, hubris, a complicated marital relationship—not to mention a more potent and alluring trio of witches than usually presented—take center stage in what AASC Artistic Director L. Peter Callender describes as the Bard’s “most poetic play” in a bold, modern-verse translation by Migdalia Cruz, commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, that makes its West Coast debut here in San Francisco; the cast features Adrian Roberts as Macbeth, and Leontyne Mbele-Mbong as Lady Macbeth

Six performances only, Saturday July 13 through Sunday, July 28 at the Taube Atrium;
Saturday evening performances at 8pm; Sunday Matinee’s at 3pm; Tickets
\$35.00 www.african-americanshakes.org

May 30, 2019, San Francisco, CA– The African-American Shakespeare Company will bring a bold, updated, modern-verse version of *Macbeth* to the Taube Atrium Theater in San Francisco for a series of six performances only. The adaptation—which will feature a more potent and alluring trio of witches than usually seen—is by playwright Migdalia Cruz, and was originally written for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s *Play On* series. This is its West Coast debut.

“*Macbeth* has always been my favorite Shakespeare play,” says Cruz. “I was attracted to the story of a good man becoming an ambitious man becoming a monster. I was intrigued by Lady Macbeth, whose ambition at first surpasses her husband’s, but then transforms into guilt and madness under the weight of her betrayal of King Duncan. Also, I wanted to explore the witches, which have never seemed like old crones to me but rather strong, psychic beings with overwhelming sexual attraction—and that’s why men are so afraid of them. As a woman of color, I wanted to make a place in the Shakespeare canon for my sisters, and the sisters that seemed most underexplored were the witches.”

This is the first time the company has presented *Macbeth* in over a decade, and it is also the first under Callender’s watch. “Although Shakespeare’s shortest play, it is notorious for being difficult to produce. With its witches, magic, severed heads, blood, fights, floating dagger, not to mention the dreaded “curse”, it has deserved its mentions over the years. But it’s also Shakespeare’s most poetic play, in my opinion, so we will tackle this head on with clarity, vision and the respect for all that comes with it. It is modern and will feature a cast of 10 versatile ensemble players bringing to vivid life the alluring witches, ambitious King and Queen, and an unsuspecting Duncan that Migdalia Cruz has given us with this adaptation.

Macbeth by William Shakespeare in a modern verse translation by Migdalia Cruz was commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director Bill Rauch and Executive Director Cynthia Rider as part of *Play on! 36 playwrights translate Shakespeare*, funded by a generous grant from the Hitz Foundation

Cast includes: Adrian Roberts as Macbeth and Leontyne Mbele-Mbong as Lady Macbeth

Director: L. Peter Callender

Writer: William Shakespeare, adapted by Migdalia Cruz, commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Publicity photos: Download high resolution photos [here](#).

What: African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Macbeth*

When: July 13-28

Time: Saturday evening performances at 8pm; Sunday matinees at 3pm

Where: Taube Auditorium, 401 Van Ness, 4th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94102

Tickets: \$35.00 <https://www.african-americanshakes.org/productions/macbeth/>

Macbeth by William Shakespeare in a modern verse translation by Migdalia Cruz was commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director Bill Rauch Executive Director Cynthia Rider as part of *Play on! 36 playwrights translate Shakespeare* Funded by a generous grant from the Hitz Foundation

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 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, 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.

About Migdalia Cruz

Migdalia Cruz is an award-winning playwright who has written more than sixty plays, operas, screenplays, and musicals. Her work has been produced across the U.S. and abroad at various venues including: Mabou Mines, Classic Stage Company, Playwrights Horizons, INTAR, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Monarch Theater, En-Garde Arts, HOME, Shaliko Company, New York Shakespeare Festival's Festival Latino, Theatre For The New City, and the W.O.W. Cafe (New York); Ateneo Puertorriqueño (PR); National Theater of Greece(Athens); Foro Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (Mexico City); Old Red Lion (London, England); Vancouver Players (Vancouver, B.C.); Latino Chicago Theater Company (Chicago); Houston Grand Opera (Houston); American Repertory Theatre (Cambridge); Cleveland Public Theatre (Cleveland);

Frank Theatre (Minneapolis); Théâtre d'aujourd'hui (Montreal); American Music Theatre Festival (Philadelphia); Intersection for the Arts/LATA (San Francisco); and Cornerstone Theater Company (Los Angeles), among others. She has been nurtured by Maria Irene Fornés' Playwrights' Laboratory at INTAR; Royal Court Theatre/New Dramatists Exchange '94 (London); Steppenwolf Theatre's New PlaysLab (Chicago); Bay Area Playwrights' Festival '94, Festival Latino '93 at Teatro Mision (San Francisco); the Sundance Institute; Midwest PlayLabs; Mark Taper Forum's New Play Festival; Omaha Magic Theatre; "Songs from Coconut Hill" Theater Festival '05; South Coast Rep's HPP '04, and was writer-in-residence at Latino Chicago Theater Company from 1991-98. Her plays include: *Salt, Fur, Miriam's Flowers, Lucy Loves Me, Dreams of Home, Telling Tales, ¡CHE-CHE-CHE!, Latins In La-La Land, Cigarettes and Moby-Dick, Lolita de Lares, Yellow Eyes*, and *Running For Blood: No. 3* (a radio play). She wrote book and lyrics for the musicals *Rushing Waters, Welcome Back To Salamanca* and *When Galaxy Six and The Bronx Collide*; the libretto for an opera, *Street Sense*; and lyrics and monologues for *Frida: The Story of Frida Kahlo*. Her plays and monologues are published by NoPassport Press, Theatre Communications Group, U. of Arizona Press, Routledge Press, Penguin Books, Arte Publico Press, Applause Books, Smith & Kraus Publishers, and Third Woman Press. She taught playwriting at U. of Iowa/Playwrights' Workshop, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Princeton University, and at Amherst College, and guest lectured at Yale University, Wesleyan University, Mount Holyoke College, and Columbia University. She received commissions from Mabou Mines, NYSF's Public Theater, Crossroads Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Latino Chicago Theater Company, Arena Stage, WNYC-radio, Ballet Hispanico, DUO and INTAR. Migdalia was awarded the 2013 Helen Merrill Distinguished Playwright Award (NYCommTrust), and is a 1996 recipient of the Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays award for *Another Part Of The House*. Her play, *The Have-little* was the runner-up for the 1991 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and *SALT* was a 1997 runner-up. She participated in Obsidian Theatre of Toronto's International Playwrights Festival in 2009, won a 2016 NYFA grant, 2005 Massachusetts Cultural Council grant, and a 1994 Connecticut Commission on The Arts grant for playwriting. At Classic Stage Company, she was a 1994 PEW/TCG National Artist in Residence. Migdalia was a 1997-98 Sackler Fellow at Connecticut Rep/UConn, a 1991 & 1995 NEA Playwriting Fellow, a 1988 McKnight Fellow, and received her MFA degree from Columbia University. She is an alumna of New Dramatists. She was born and raised in the Bronx.

About Adrian Roberts (Macbeth)

Adrian is thrilled to be working with African-American Shakespeare. Bay Area credits include most recently *Chaucer Mosely* in *Urban Retreat* at the *Lorraine Hansberry Theatre*, *Evan in Sweat* at *American Conservatory Theatre*, *Steve Daniels* in *A Lesson From Aloes* at *Z Space*. Other Bay Area credits include *Willy* in *Master Harold and The Boys* at the *Aurora*, *Gabriel* in *Breakfast With Mugabe* at the *Aurora*, *Gabriel* and *Troy Maxon* in *Fences* at *Marin*

Theatre Co, Claudius in Hamlet at California Shakespeare, King Basillio in Life is a Dream at California Shakespeare, Charles Boyd in Pen/Man/Ship at the Magic Theatre. Regional credits include Ken in Playboy of the West Indies at Lincoln Center, Booster in Jitney at American Stage, three seasons at The Oregon Shakespeare Festival among many others. Television credits include Scrubs, Criminal Minds, Brothers & Sisters, Chance, Sci-Fi television movie Vampires Out For Blood, and the film short Always Faithful. Mr. Roberts is a graduate of American Conservatory Theatre MFA program.

About Leontyne Mbele-Mbong (Lady Macbeth)

Leontyne Mbele-Mbong was last seen on African-American Shakespeare Company's stage in *Richard III*. Previous AASC roles: Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mistress Ford in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the title role in *Medea* (TBA Award: Female Actor in a Principal Role), and Cleopatra in *Antony & Cleopatra* (TBA Award Finalist). Other favorite Bay Area roles: Guthrie Theater/Berkeley Rep: *Watch on the Rhine* (Anise); Aurora Theatre Company: *Breakfast With Mugabe* (Grace Mugabe); Shotgun Players: *Top Girls* (Pope Joan/Nell); Aluminous Collective: *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Fabiana Cunningham); Altarena Playhouse: *Fences* (Rose); Central Works: *Andromache* (Andromache); Lamplighters Music Theatre: *Candide* (Paquette); Woman's Will: *Richard III* (Buckingham), *Twelfth Night* (Orsino), *Macbeth* (Lady M, and others); TheatreFIRST: *World Music*; Solano College: *Intimate Apparel* (Mayme; ARTY Award, best supporting actress). www.leontynembele-mbong.com