

**Press Contact**

Liam Passmore

Shave and a Haircut

Liam@shaveandahaircut.biz

415-865-0860 (p); 415-218-1544 (c)

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



## A Moorish Prince Goes to Washington



From left: Isabel Siragusa (Desdemona) and L. Peter Callender (Othello); Michael Ray Wisely (Iago) and L. Peter Callender; Isabel Siragusa and L. Peter Callender. Photos by Lance Huntley

San Francisco's African-American Shakespeare Company kicks off its 25th anniversary season with a new production of *Othello* this October with Artistic Director L. Peter Callender playing the lead role for the first time in a staging that sees the famous Moor residing in both contemporary Washington D.C. and Syria, dealing with the forces of racism, bigotry and otherness that percolate through the play; Desdemona will be played by Isabel Siragusa and Iago by Michael Ray Wisely; Carl Jordan directs

*Othello* runs October 12-27, Saturdays at 8pm, Sundays at 3pm at Marines' Memorial Theatre;

Tickets are \$40.00 General Admission

[www.african-americanshakes.org](http://www.african-americanshakes.org)

**September 10, 2019, San Francisco, CA**— For their 25th anniversary season the African-American Shakespeare Company presents their new production of *Othello* this October, with Artistic Director L. Peter Callender in the title role for the first time. Directed by Carl Jordan, he will be joined by Isabel Siragusa (Desdemona) and Michael Ray Wisely (Iago).

Set in contemporary Washington DC and Syria, the production will focus in on Othello's status as an outsider, one who grew up with a strong Muslim background, who as a child grew up as part of a military gang in Africa. Opposing cultures, roles, customs, families, traditions

and Othello's marriage to a young Christian white woman all play a part in how the tragedy unfolds.

Director Carl Jordan sees the play as a cautionary tale for our times. "In Shakespeare's production, circa 1603, the play was done mostly in contemporary dress and staging of the era. By setting the play in today's turbulent landscape, we become painfully aware that our current culture is still struggling with such issues such as race, misogyny and nationalism."

"The challenge is to make it fresh and relevant," says Callender. "Lots of actors, and I daresay, companies, shy away from the play because of the racism and bigotry it depicts. I think now is the time more than ever to do this play. It has become personal for me. I am very interested in the idea that this could have been one of Shakespeare's greatest love stories if it weren't for the poisonous interference of others surrounding Othello. Not unlike Romeo and Juliet, it is a tragedy beyond scope."

**What:** African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Othello*

**When:** October 12 – October 27

**Director:** Carl Jordan

**Venue:** Marines' Memorial Theatre, 609 Sutter Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, San Francisco, CA 94102

**Tickets:** \$40.00 General Admission at [www.african-americanshakes.org](http://www.african-americanshakes.org)

**Specific performance dates and times:**

Saturday, October 12th at 8pm

Sunday, October 13th at 3pm

Saturday, October 19th at 8pm

Sunday, October 20th at 3pm

Saturday, October 26th at 8pm

Sunday, October 27th at 3pm

**High Res Publicity Images can be found [HERE](#)**

**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](http://www.lpetercallender.com).