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



## **The African-American Shakespeare Company Conjures the Harlem Renaissance and Ex-Pat Paris of the 1920s in Noël Coward's *Private Lives***



The African-American Shakespeare Company brings its 2019/20 season to a close with Noël Coward's wit-filled comedy of manners that has had a number of notable revivals over the years starring a litany of high wattage names seeking to play members of the quartet of characters, including Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, Alan Rickman and Maggie Smith and many others; this particular production will be set against the cultivated backdrop of 1929 Paris, conjuring the nexus of Black art, jazz, philosophy and literary sophistication of the time; while this is the last official production of the company's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, they will be doing *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (abridged)* in September at the Taube Auditorium, and again in October at Salesforce Tower, as that month marks the exact month the company finalized their incorporation papers 25 years ago

Six performances only, April 11 – 26 at the Marines Memorial Theatre; Tickets are \$40.00 and can be purchased at [african-americanshakes.org](http://african-americanshakes.org)

**February 27, 2020, San Francisco**— The African-American Shakespeare Company is proud to present Noël Coward's classic *Private Lives*, directed by Clay David for six performances only this April. This draws their 2019/20 season to a close, a season that has seen the company mount a much-praised *Othello*, their annual holiday *Cinderella*, and the dramatic satire *The*

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

“I have always loved Noël Coward,” says AASC Artistic Director L. Peter Callender, and *Private Lives* is a definite favorite. It's not only brilliantly funny, stylish, with spectacular language, but I also see it as a way to remind our audiences of a time when the Kings and Queens of entertainment were of a certain hue, and regarded as the best of the best. And Paris of the 1920s was that place where style, beauty and elegance converged. A time when music fed the soul, clothing was the message and language transported us. I know this will be one of AASC's most memorable romps.”

For his part, the director, Clay David loves the challenge of breathing new life into classical masterpieces as way of reawakening and transforming them. “I chose not to direct this work with color-blind casting and instead wanted to take the opportunity to eliminate the original white aristocratic milieu and shift the spotlight to a contemporaneous cosmopolitan culture. In this case the Black aristocracy and sophistication of 1929 where the characters are completely immersed in the context of the Paris Black Célébré.”

As David points out in his Director’s Note: “Noël Coward entertained an exclusive set of English literati and nobility. However, that fashionable set ran parallel with French Black cultural awareness and the zenith of empowerment of the 1920s. Blaise Diagne, brilliant Black scholar and politician earned a seat in the French National Assembly in Paris, and founded a newspaper called *L'Ouest Africain Français*; Paulette Nardal, Afro-Martiniquais writer and driver of the Black literary consciousness, created the “Négritude genre” and translated the works of the Harlem Renaissance; Severiano de Heredia, Mayor of Paris and the first mayor of African descent of a Western world capital; Bessie Coleman, the first black woman to earn an aviation pilot's license in Paris; Josephine Baker, opened in *La Revue Nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

Clay David’s Director’s Note can be seen in its entirety [HERE](#)

The take on the play is in keeping with the original mission of the AASC which came about as a reaction to the “color blind casting” that came into vogue at the time of its founding in the mid 90s. Founder and Executive Director Sherri Young saw that as something that instead of opening opportunities for actors of color in the broad sense, discounted their own culture and experience, which should be the basis for interrogating work from a new and fresh perspective.

Over the past 25 years, the African-American Shakespeare Company has presented 71 productions, including 4 productions of *Macbeth*, 3 of *Othello* and 19 of their annual holiday staging of *Cinderella*. “At this point we have accomplished all of the major Shakespeare works,” says Young, “but I look forward to re-staging a number of them with enhanced

production values as a means of giving our actors even more to work with.”

Cast is comprised of Fummi Lola as **Sibyl**; Leontyne Mbele-Mbong as **Amanda**; Dane Troy as **Elyot**; Lijesh Krishna as **Victor**; Summi Narendra as **Louise**

**What:** The African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Private Lives*

**When:** April 11-26

**Time:** Saturday evenings at 8pm, Sunday afternoons at 3pm

**Where:** Marine’s Memorial Theatre

**Tickets:** \$40.00 that can be purchased via [african-americanshakes.org](http://african-americanshakes.org)

Link to High Res Images TK in March

### **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 the dynamic, cultural vibrancy that actors of color could bring to classical works. Moreover, since mainstream classical theaters often lack the ability to attract truly diverse audiences, The African-American Shakespeare Company aspires to highlight the dynamic cultural vibrancy that artists of color bring to classical productions.

The African-American Shakespeare Company's received a Certificate of Honor in 2004 from then San Francisco Mayor and now California Governor Gavin Newsom, was named “Best Live Theatre” by *San Francisco Magazine* in 2018, received a Jefferson Award for Public Service (Silver Recipient) in 2018, The Paine Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement for a Theater Company by the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, along with a Community Partner Award from University of San Francisco's Leo T. McCarthy Center for outstanding collaboration in providing a 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, Zellerbach Family Foundation, Theatre Communication Group, Black Arts Future Fund, and the RHE 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 under former Mayor and now California Governor 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 as well as increasing audience attendance by 30%, and increasing new funding support by foundations and individual donors within the past two.

### **About L Peter Callender, Artistic Director**

In addition to being Artistic Director of AASC, L. Peter Callender continues to enjoy a varied career in theater locally, nationally and abroad. He is a multi-award winning director and actor for American Stage Company in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he recently opened Dominique Morisseau's *Skeleton Crew*. Over the past 5 years, he has directed *Jitney*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Pipeline* and acted in *Between Riverside and Crazy* as Walter "Pops" Washington for American Stage.

As a member of CalShakes' Associate Artist program for over 20 years, Mr Callender performed in over 23 Shakespeare plays and taught Acting Shakespeare for the company. His other teaching credits include Acting Shakespeare and Fundamentals of Directing at Stanford University, Waterfront Conservatory, Stage Bridge, and a Shakespeare Master Class at Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Callender was voted "Mentor of the Year", and "Most Valuable Player in the Bay Area Theater Scene" by Robert Hurwitt (former) Theater Critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Along with the many plays Peter has directed for AASC (*Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Cinderella*, *Macbeth*, *Jitney*, *Winter's Tale* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), he has also had the privilege of directing locally at Aurora Theater (*Safe House*) and San Jose Stage (*We Are Proud To Present...*). He has directed and performed in Paris, France (*Gilded Six Bits*) and his theater credits span over 30 years as a professional actor from New York to San Francisco, performing in over 15 regional theaters and on Broadway (*Prelude to a Kiss*, Helen Hayes Theater). L. Peter Callender, a proud member of Actors Equity Association for over 30 years, received his formal training in theater at HS of Performing Arts and The Juilliard School in NYC; The Webber/Douglas Academy in London, England; and the Waseda Sho-Gekijo Theater Company in Toga, Japan under the tutelage of Tadashi Suzuki. His first play as a writer, *Strange Courtesies*, is currently in workshop on the east coast. Mr Callender's full resume and bio can be found at [www.lpetercallender.com](http://www.lpetercallender.com).