

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”



African-American Shakespeare Company Closes Out Season with *Richard III*



L. Peter Callender in *Richard III*; photo by Lance Huntley; design by Vicky Chen

Produced for the first time by African-American Shakespeare Company, the production will star the company’s Artistic Director, L. Peter Callender as the King “you love to hate,” in a role he has played once before in 2003; Director Kirsten Brandt makes her debut with AASC in the same play that marked her professional directorial debut in 2001; in a flip with tradition two male roles—Hastings and Buckingham—will be played by women in a play that freights one of Shakespeare’s most memorable and oft-quoted opening lines: *Now is the winter of our discontent*

July 14-29, 2018 at the Taube Atrium Theater, 401 Van Ness, 4th Floor; Tickets \$30.00

at www.african-americanshakes.org;

evening performances at 8pm; matinees at 3pm

San Francisco, CA, May 30, 2018 – The African-American Shakespeare Company will present for the first time in its history *Richard III*, a play that explores the Machiavellian rise to power of one of Shakespeare’s most fascinating and complex anti-heroes. Kirsten Brandt, in what is her first production with the company, will direct AASC Artistic Director L. Peter Callender as the unapologetic King you love to hate in a play that seems strikingly contemporary and omniscient given its commentary on and fascination with manipulation, power, family, and the right to rule.

Some notes about the production and approach:

- This is the second time L. Peter Callender has played, *Richard III*, the first being in 2003 with Thick Description, directed by Tony Kelly
- This is the second time director Kirsten Brandt has directed *Richard III*; it was her professional directing debut back in 2001, and is her first time directing a play for the African-American Shakespeare Company.
- The play begins with one of Shakespeare's most famous openings: *Now is the winter of our discontent*, which has even more resonance today, given our current political climate.
- When asked about playing *Richard III* given said political climate, L. Peter Callender replied: "It is a contemporary reality show. Richard plays with his 'followers', bringing them into his thinking and manipulating their thinking to his. So his successes become theirs. They are charmed by him. So his lies (FAKE NEWS?) become their truths; he uses his physical failings and false faith as a way of getting sympathy and in so doing, gives us permission to hate his detractors. So I think it's not so much we 'love to hate him', but perhaps actually hate to love him. But we do. We hate his behavior and his villainy, but somehow inwardly cheer him on."
- When asked what is meant by Richard being a character 'you love to hate', Kirsten Brandt replied: "The allure of Richard is that he makes the audience his co-conspirator the moment he walks on stage. We understand why he is doing what he is doing. He is charming and a master of rhetoric. We love to marvel at his manipulation skills and watch him carry out his intentions. He unabashedly confides in us every vile and morally corrupt action he is about to undertake."

The production will be set in the modern day and keep the British references, while also reflecting current global politics. "The play is about right now," says Brandt. "The issues we are facing as a nation. And although the show has four amazing women roles (Margaret, Anne, Duchess, and Elizabeth) I have also cast Hasting and Buckingham as women. With our 12-person ensemble, this gives us gender equity in the production."

Adds Callender, "The contemporary parallels are astounding. 'He capers nimbly in a ladies chamber' during 'the winter of our discontent.' It's almost prophetic! In addition, he only has people around him who flatter him (sound familiar?) until late in the play when he loses confidence and his flatterers. When dreams become nightmares and his conscience gets the best of him he literally crumbles to the ground. It is a journey I am looking forward to playing."

What: African-American Shakespeare Company Presents *Richard III*

When: July 14–29, 2018; evening performances at 8pm; matinees at 3pm

Where: Taube Atrium Theater, 401 Van Ness Avenue, 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA, 94102

Tickets: \$30.00 at <https://www.african-americanshakes.org/productions/richard-iii/> or
<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3066574>

Nearest BART Station: Civic Center

Written by: William Shakespeare

Directed by: Kirsten Brandt

Starring: L. Peter Callender (Artistic Director of African-American Shakespeare Company)

High resolution images: [HERE](#)

Cast:

Richard III: L. Peter Callender

Lord Buckingham: Leontyne Mbele-Mbong

Elizabeth: Regina Morones

Young York: Cameron Payne

Hastings/Blunt: Radhika Rao

Duchess/Murderer 1/Sheriff: Brittany Sims

Richmond/Rivers: Terrance Smith

Margaret/Brakenbury: Beli Sullivan

Catesby: Jourdan Olivier-Verde

Anne/Prince Edward/Princess Elizabeth: Brandi Huzzie

Grey/Tyrell/Murderer 2/Oxford: Devin Cunningham

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; 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 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.

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 Kirsten Brandt

Kirsten Brandt is an interdisciplinary artist and educator whose practice embraces inquiries into gender, science and politics. A theatrical director, playwright and advocate, her passion lies in igniting the imagination of audiences through visceral storytelling and visual poetry to encourage dialogue and ethical engagement.

For seven years, Brandt served as the Artistic Director of Sledgehammer Theatre, San Diego's leading alternative theatre company. Under her leadership, the company experimented with theatrical form and non-linear storytelling through devised ensemble performances and re-interpretations of classics. The productions served as catalysis to bring social and political issues into the realm of public discourse and through this immediacy reflect on the human condition. At Sledgehammer, she forged a distinct directing style that continually investigates the balance between spoken text and theatrical movement.

As free-lance director, Brandt's approach to her explorations encourages curiosity with her collaborators. She views each production – be it classical works such as Greek drama, Shakespeare and Ibsen or new plays and musicals – as an opportunity to understand the universality of our experiences, our commonalities and to widen our perspectives. Since 1999, with her feminist and biotechnology-fueled adaptation of *Frankenstein* called *The Frankenstein Project*, Brandt has explored the intersection of projected media and live performance which garnered her a grant from the NEA to continue those investigations with *The Frankenstein Project 2.0*. Her explorations into telematics with *The Thinning Veil* and installation, interactive performance art with *Thirsting for Salt* have lead her to examine the phenomenology of digital media and performance technologies and our relationship to it.

Brandt makes her home in the Santa Cruz Mountains, on the outskirts of Silicon Valley, with her daughter, husband, two dogs and cat. She is adjunct faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz and San Jose State University.

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