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Symposium on Macbeth

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—January 7, 2008

**Rhodes College to Host Symposium on *Macbeth*
and African American Performances and Appropriations**

(Memphis, Tenn.)—National scholars, local artists, a film director and a Hollywood actor will participate in a conversation at Rhodes College about so-called ‘non-traditional’ casting of Shakespeare's plays and African American artists who have adapted *Macbeth* in their works.

“Shakespeare in Color: A Symposium on *Macbeth* and African American Performances and Appropriations” will be held Friday, Jan. 25, in Blount Auditorium from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. It is free and open to the public.

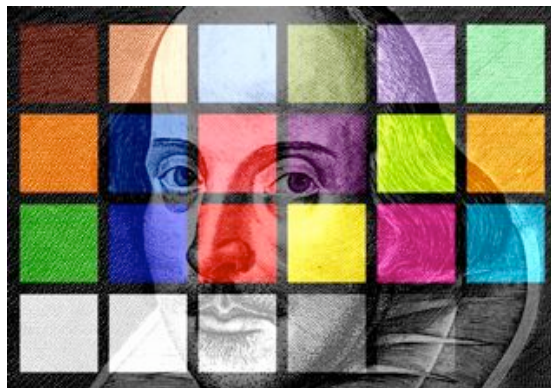
The symposium is presented in conjunction with local productions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by Hattiloo Theatre and Verdi's *Macbeth* by Opera Memphis.

Directors of the stage productions—Rhodes Theatre Professor Julia “Cookie” Ewing and Larry Marshall—will be panelists at the Rhodes symposium, along with actors and singers from both opera and play. The Rhodes Jazz Ensemble will perform selections from Duke Ellington’s Shakespearean suite, *Such Sweet Thunder*, at the closing reception.

Macbeth, Shakespeare’s shortest tragedy, has frequently been adapted. African Americans appearing in Shakespearean roles can be traced as early as 1821 when the African Grove Theater in New York presented *Richard III*; Ira Aldridge, one of the company’s leading performers, would go on to a successful expatriate career playing Shakespearean roles in England, including *Macbeth*. In 1936, Orson Welles directed an all-African American cast in *Macbeth* at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, New York; this production later toured the nation. In recent decades, many versions of the play have been produced by black repertory companies.

The symposium is sponsored by Rhodes’ Center for Outreach in the Development of the Arts (CODA); additional support comes from the Departments of Theatre, English, and African American Studies. The event has been coordinated by Scott L. Newstok, assistant professor of English at Rhodes. Those with specific inquiries can contact him at newstoks@rhodes.edu.

Further details about the symposium will be posted on the Rhodes website as they become available: http://cal.rhodes.edu/cal_event.php?id=125997



SCHEDULE

Friday, January 25
Blount Auditorium

- 8:30am **Coffee and registration**
- 9:00am ***Ayanna Thompson* (Arizona State University)**
 “What is a Black Shakespearean?”
- 10:00am ***Peter Erickson* (Williams College)**
 “Black Plays on Black Performers of Shakespeare”
- 11:00am ***Marguerite Rippy* (Marymount University)**
 “Primitivism in Welles’ ‘Voodoo’ *Macbeth*”
- Noon **Break**
- 1:00pm ***Amy Scott-Douglass* (Denison University)**
 “Interracial couples in *Macbeth* Spinoffs”
- 2:00pm ***Wallace Cheatham***
 “An African African Musician Reflects upon Verdi’s *Macbeth*”
- 2:30pm **Roundtable with *Opera Memphis***
- 3:15pm **Roundtable with *Hattiloo Theatre***
- 4:00pm ***Aleta Chappelle* and *Harry J. Lennix***
 “Adapting *Macbeth* for Today’s Film Audience”
- 5:00pm **Reception: *Rhodes Jazz Ensemble***
 Selections from Duke Ellington’s “Such Sweet Thunder”

(MORE)

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Aleta Chappelle is the director and writer of the forthcoming *Macbett*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's play set on a Caribbean island, starring Harry J. Lennix, Terence Howard, and Blair Underwood. She has over two decades of experience working in Hollywood, directing movies such as *Goosed* (starring Jennifer Tilly) and casting some thirty films, including *Drumline*, *The Nutty Professor*, and Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope productions such as *Godfather III*.

Wallace Cheatham is an award-winning composer, organist, scholar and educator based in Milwaukee. He is credited with introducing the works of major African American composers to Midwestern audiences, and has penned a number of scholarly works on race, classical music and opera. He interviewed many prominent singers for his book, *Dialogues on Opera and the African American Experience* (1997).

Peter Erickson is part of a group of scholars working to establish the study of race, including racial whiteness, in the field of Renaissance culture. His wider interests are both cross-disciplinary—with dual commitments to literature and visual art—and cross-historical—with strong investments in contemporary culture, as well as the Renaissance. He has published six books, including, most recently, *Citing Shakespeare: The Reinterpretation of Race in Contemporary Literature and Art* (2007).

Harry J. Lennix is a popular stage and screen actor; recent prominent roles include film: *The Matrix* series (Commander Lock); television: *Commander in Chief* (Jim Gardner), and *24* (Walid Al-Rezani); stage: the 2007 Broadway premiere of August Wilson's *Radio Golf* (Harmond Wilks). Among his many Shakespearean credits are Aaron in Julie Taymor's *Titus Andronicus* (stage and film) and the lead role in a recent African-American production of *Macbeth* in Los Angeles. He was part of the first American company to be invited to the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2001.

Marguerite Rippy has interests in multicultural literature, African American actors in classic Hollywood cinema, the Harlem Renaissance, and diversity programming, and has delivered lectures on these topics at dozens of national and international conferences. Rippy has published essays on the representation of women in performances from Shakespeare to Hollywood, and is author of the forthcoming book *Postmodern Welles: The Unfinished RKO Projects* (2008).

Amy Scott-Douglass' recent book, *Shakespeare Inside: The Bard Behind Bars* (2007), focuses on issues of discipline, ethics, race, gender, and sexuality in Shakespeare prison programs across the United States. She wrote more than two hundred entries in *Shakespeares after Shakespeare: An Encyclopedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture* (2006). Scott-Douglass is working on two book projects, one entitled *The Female Preface*; the other a study of Shakespeare performed in military contexts.

Ayanna Thompson specializes in depictions of race in the Renaissance. She is editor of a collection of essays, *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (2006), and author of *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (2007). She is working on a book project examining the way popular culture addresses issues of race through Shakespearean texts, appropriations, and adaptations.