

For Immediate Release

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## ***Hamlet: Blood in the Brain*** **Journeys from Oakland to Edinburgh**

**California Shakespeare Theater and Oakland Technical High School host free community event on March 1 to celebrate students' award-winning production before it heads to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival**

Berkeley, CA – When California Shakespeare Theater embarked on its New Works/New Communities initiative back in 2004, no one dreamed that the project's first new play, *Hamlet: Blood in the Brain*—having culminated in Oakland following a sold-out run by Campo Santo at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco—would someday play on an international stage.

But five years later, the Advanced Drama Department at Oakland Technical High School chose Naomi Iizuka's gritty, poetic reimaging of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the drug-ravaged streets of 1980s Oakland as their entry in the American High School Theatre Festival, under the direction of Jessa Berkner. Not only did they win the Festival, but they also earned the right to perform their production at the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2010.

Now, to deepen the experience of Oakland Tech's student actors and their community as they prepare a series of performances around the Bay Area in advance of their overseas trip, Cal Shakes is working with Oakland Tech on a **free community event on Monday, March 1, 6:30–8pm at Oakland Tech Auditorium**. The event will include ***Blood in the Brain* excerpts performed by the students** and a **panel discussion and Q&A featuring** actors from both the original Cal Shakes/Intersection co-production of *Blood in the Brain* and the recent Oakland Tech performances, moderated by Cal Shakes Artistic Director **Jonathan Moscone**. An informal reception will follow.

"I am so happy that Jessa and her students at Oakland Tech are bringing Naomi's brilliant play to life for new audiences throughout Oakland, the Bay Area, and abroad," says Jonathan Moscone "This piece perfectly embodies the goal of our New Works/New Communities program as it connects Shakespeare to the lives of a Bay Area community in palpable, lasting ways, reflecting their stories in a classic and a classic in their stories."

"*Hamlet: Blood in the Brain* was the first play I took my students to see when I came to Oakland Tech to build the Performing Arts program three-and-a-half years ago," says Oakland Tech drama teacher and *Hamlet: Blood in the Brain* director **Jessa Berkner**. "It was the perfect introduction to theater for students who mostly had never

seen a play before ... academic and relevant, universal and personal, classic and modern, poetic and familiar. It is fitting that we have come full circle, having grown the theater program from 15 students to 150, taking the play we first experienced forward, as performers now, to the Edinburgh Fringe.”

The partnership between Cal Shakes and Oakland Tech will continue beyond *Hamlet: Blood in the Brain*, beginning with a first-ever classroom residency that will feature a *Twelfth Night* curriculum with Berkner’s advanced drama students. A second spring residency is in the works, too, wherein a ninth-grade English class will study *John Steinbeck’s The Pastures of Heaven*, by Octavio Solis—yet another New Works/New Communities project, and the first world premiere commission for the Cal Shakes’ Main Stage (opening June 2010).

“I am so grateful that an organization such as Cal Shakes had the foresight and funding to engage the community-based process of development with the gifted Naomi Iizuka and Campo Santo,” Berkner says. “This work proves the long-lasting impact of multilayered artistic collaborations.”

For more information about *Hamlet: Blood in the Brain* at Oakland Technical High School, contact Cal Shakes Artistic Learning Program Manager Emily Morrison at 510.548.3422 x127 or [emorrison@calshakes.org](mailto:emorrison@calshakes.org).

This event is underwritten through generous support from The James Irvine Foundation.

#### ABOUT CAL SHAKES

Founded in 1974, California Shakespeare Theater is a fully professional, critically acclaimed theater known for its innovative productions of the plays of William Shakespeare and other reimagined classics. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone and Managing Director Susie Falk, Cal Shakes is committed to being a leading community citizen by nourishing the imaginations of audiences, artists, and learners of all ages. Cal Shakes makes boldly imagined and deeply entertaining interpretations of Shakespeare and the classics; provides in-depth, far-reaching artistic learning programs for learners of all ages and circumstances; and brings disparate communities together around the creation of new American plays that reflect the cultural diversity of the Bay Area.

#### ABOUT NEW WORKS/NEW COMMUNITIES

Launched in 2003, California Shakespeare Theater’s New Works/New Communities projects bring disparate communities together to engage directly in the creation of new works of theater inspired by classic literature. In partnership with other arts and community-based organizations, Cal Shakes aims to make concrete connections between the work of classical writers and marginalized communities that do not see themselves reflected in those plays, or in theater itself. Through this inclusive and collaborative artistic process, Cal Shakes helps to nourish a cultural ecosystem that truly reflects the extraordinary diversity of the Bay Area.

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**Calendar Editors, please note:**

***Hamlet: Blood in the Brain* at Oakland Technical High School**

WHAT California Shakespeare Theater and Oakland Technical High School host an evening of select scenes from the Advanced Drama Department's award-winning production of *Hamlet: Blood in the Brain*, plus a Q&A with actors from both the original production and Oakland Tech's production, moderated by Cal Shakes Artistic Director Jonathan Moscone. Informal reception to follow.

WHO California Shakespeare Theater and Oakland Technical High School

WHEN Monday, March 1, 6:30–8pm

WHERE Oakland Technical High School Auditorium, 4351 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611-4612

COST Free

CONTACT Cal Shakes Artistic Learning Program Manager Emily Morrison at 510.548.3422 x127 or [emorrison@calshakes.org](mailto:emorrison@calshakes.org)

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