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**CALIFORNIA SHAKESPEARE THEATER CONTINUES
ITS 2017 SEASON WITH WEST COAST PREMIERE OF
BLACK ODYSSEY, AUGUST 9-SEPTEMBER 3**

Acclaimed playwright Marcus Gardley brings his take on Homer's epic home to Oakland in this music-filled journey through the African-American experience.

Berkeley, CA, July 10 – **California Shakespeare Theater** continues its 43rd Season with the West Coast premiere of *black odyssey*, a thrilling and music-infused new play that mashes up Greek mythology and African-American folklore. *black odyssey* marks the Cal Shakes debut of Oakland native **Marcus Gardley** (*The House That Will Not Stand* at Berkeley Rep), and is only the second production ever of the play, which is being re-set in Oakland for Cal Shakes. Directed by Cal Shakes Artistic Director **Eric Ting**, fresh from directing Berkeley Rep's smash hit *An Octoroon*, the production will also feature vocal compositions by **Linda Tillery** and **Molly Holm**.

After he is lost at sea and presumed dead, American soldier Ulysses Lincoln struggles to find his way home to his wife and son. But manipulating his journey are a host of gods: the dignified Deus and the scheming Paw Sidin, playing with Ulysses' fate like a game of chess, and the radiant Aunt Tina, who has her own reasons for setting her sights on the wandering warrior. A fable about confronting the burdens of one's past before you can truly find "home," this lyrical epic from a shining voice of American theater promises to be one of the theatrical events of the season.

Low-priced previews take place August 9-11; Opening Night is August 12, and performances continue through September 3 at the Bruns Amphitheater. Press night will be held Saturday, August 12, at 8pm. Tickets (**ranging from \$20-\$92**) are available through the Cal Shakes Box Office at 510.548.9666 or by visiting www.calshakes.org. *Ticket prices are subject to change without notice.*

"I'm thrilled to be directing the West Coast premiere of *black odyssey*," says Artistic Director **Eric Ting**. "I know our audiences are going to find this adaptation of one of Western civilization's earliest epics vividly theatrical; and with Marcus resetting the core of the story's journey in Oakland, I'm excited to stage its homecoming production at the Bruns." Adds Ting, "Linda and Molly, whose work in the Bay Area music scene is legendary, have crafted an incredible a Capella landscape for this production that digs deep into

200 years of African American culture. In harmony with Marcus' poetic language, these artists are bringing a truly unique vocal resonance to this rich, multi-faceted meditation on the restoration of home."

Says Oakland-native **Marcus Gardley**, "I am extremely honored to share this epic odyssey about African American history, told through music, folklore, humor, myth and my own personal history with my hometown, the Bay Area. The topping on the sundae is that I get to do it with an amazing cast and two of my favorite collaborators: Linda Tillery and Molly Holm."

A Grammy-nominated vocalist, percussionist, producer and workshop leader, Linda Tillery has performed and recorded with leading musicians across several musical genres, and in 1992 formed the Cultural Heritage Choir in order to pursue the research and performance of Sacred and Secular music of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Molly Holm has been a visionary presence on the Bay Area music scene for more than four decades. She's been a featured singer with Terry Riley and Zakir Hussain among other jazz luminaries. Bobby McFerrin tapped her to run the yearlong audition process for his Voicestra a cappella vocal ensemble after seeing her Jazzmouth ensemble.

Marcus Gardley is a Bay Area-born playwright who the *New Yorker* calls "the heir to Garcia Lorca, Pirandello and Tennessee Williams." His most recent play, *X or the Nation v Betty Shabazz* was a *New York Times* Critic Pick and will be remounted off-Broadway in the Spring of 2018. He is the recipient of the 2015 Glickman Award for *The House That Will Not Stand*. The play was commissioned and produced by Berkeley Rep and had subsequent productions at Yale Rep and the Tricycle Theater in London and was a finalist for the 2015 Kennedy Prize. Gardley was the 2013 USA James Baldwin Fellow and the 2011 PEN Laura Pels award winner for Mid-Career Playwright. His play *The Gospel of Loving Kindness* was produced in March 2015 and won the BTAA award for best play/playwright. His play *Every Tongue Confess*, starring Phylicia Rashad and directed by Kenny Leon, was nominated for the Steinberg New Play Award, the Charles MacArthur Award for Best Play and was the recipient of the Edgerton New Play Award. His musical, *On The Levee*, premiered at Lincoln Center and was nominated for 11 Audeco Awards including outstanding playwright. His critically acclaimed epic *And Jesus Moonwalks the Mississippi* was produced at the Cutting Ball Theater and received the SF Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award nomination for outstanding new play and had two sold-out extensions. His epic *black odyssey* premiered at the Denver Center Theatre and opened to rave reviews. In 2014, his saga *The Road Weeps, the Well Runs Dry* had a national tour and was a finalist for the 2014 Kennedy Prize. His plays *This World in a Woman's Hands* (October 2009) and *Love is a Dream House in Lorin* (March 2007) have been hailed as some of the best in Bay Area Theater. The latter was nominated for the National Critics Steinberg New Play Award. He has had six other plays produced including and adaptation of *Tartuffe* called *A Wolf in Snake Skin Shoes*, which was produced in London, *dance of the holy ghosts* at Center Stage in Baltimore and the Yale Repertory Theatre, *(L)imitations of Life* at the Empty Space in Seattle, WA and *like sun fallin' in the mouth* at the National Black Theatre Festival. He is the recipient of the 2013 Mellon Playwright

Residency, 2011 Aetna New Voice Fellowship at Hartford Stage, the Hellen Merrill Award, a Kesselring Honor, a Gerbode Emerging Playwright Award, a National Alliance for Musical Theatre Award, a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Grant, a NEA/TCG Playwriting Participant Residency, the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Scholarship and the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize. Gardley holds an MFA in Playwriting from the Yale Drama School and is an alumnus of New Dramatists, The Dramatists Guild, and the Lark Play Development Center. Currently, he is working on a TV show for Showtime.

Returning to the Bruns for this production are many Cal Shakes favorites, including **Aldo Billingslea** (last season's *Othello* and Troy in *Fences*); **Margo Hall** (acclaimed in her role of Rose in last season's *Fences*), **J. Alphonse Nicholson** (*Fences*; *The Piano Lesson* at Actor's Theatre of Louisville), **Omozé Idehenre** (*Spunk*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*), **Dawn L. Troupe** (*Spunk*, *Safehouse* at Aurora Theatre Company, *In the Red and Brown Water* at Marin Theatre Company), and **Safiya Fredericks** (*Much Ado About Nothing* at Cal Shakes, *The Hard Problem* at A.C.T., *Aubergine* at Berkeley Rep). Rounding out the cast and making their Cal Shakes debuts are **Lamont Thompson** (*Penumbra*, Milwaukee Rep, Indiana Rep, Mixed Blood, *Evan Almighty*, *3 Days to Kill*, among others), **Michael Gene Sullivan** (San Francisco Mime Troupe, Berkeley Rep, Marin Theater Company, among many others), and **Michael Curry** (2016 Fellow, Berkeley Repertory Theater, Morehouse College).

Black odyssey's creative team includes Scenic Designer **Michael Locher** (whose previous designs for Cal Shakes include *Fences*, *Spunk*, and *The Winter's Tale*, Costume Designer **Dede M. Ayite** (who designed the set for Cal Shakes' production of *A Raisin in the Sun* and has also designed for Playwright's Horizons, the Public, and Lincoln Theater Center, among others), Lighting Designer **Xavier Pierce** (whose work has been seen in Cal Shakes' productions of *The Glass Menagerie* and *Fences*), and the Cal Shakes debut of Sound Designer **T. Carlis Roberts**, who has designed for Steppenwolf, Arena Stage, San Jose Rep, and Lookingglass Theatre, among others. Also making their Cal Shakes debuts are Movement Choreographers **Latanya D. Tigner** (who choreographed *A Winter's Tale* at SF Shakes and *Dance of the Holy Ghost* at Ubuntu Theatre, among others) and **Kendra Kimbrough Barnes** (founder and director of K-STAR-PRODUCTIONS and co-presenter of the Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now).

Eric Ting is an Obie Award-winning director and was appointed Artistic Director of California Shakespeare Theater in November of 2015. Recent directing credits include last season's *Othello* (Cal Shakes); as well as Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* (Berkeley Rep) and *Appropriate* (Center Theatre Group); Sam Hunter's *Lewiston* (world premiere, Long Wharf Theatre) and *A Great Wilderness* (Williamstown); *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Cincinnati Playhouse); Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's *The World of Extreme Happiness* (world premier, Manhattan Theatre Club/Goodman), Kimber Lee's *Brownsville Song* (Long Wharf/Philadelphia Theatre Co), Nora Chipaumire's *Miriam* (BAM Next Wave), Jackie Sibbles Drury's *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...* (world premiere, Soho Rep/Victory Gardens) and *Rising Son* (world premiere, Singapore Rep). Upcoming: Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* with Toshi Reagon and Lauren Yee's *The Great Leap* (world premiere, Denver Center/Seattle Rep).

Single tickets for *black odyssey* range from **\$20 to \$92**, with discounts available for seniors, youth, students, military families, persons age 30 and under, and groups. Prices, dates, titles, and artists are subject to change. For information or to charge tickets by phone with VISA, MasterCard, or American Express, call the Cal Shakes Box Office at 510.548.9666. Additional information and online ticketing are available at www.calshakes.org.

California Shakespeare Theater's 2017 season is supported in part by the generosity of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, and The Shubert Foundation. Corporate partners include BART, Chevron, City National Bank, John Muir Health, McRoskey Mattress Company, Meyer Sound, Peet's Coffee, and *San Francisco* magazine. Production partners for *black odyssey* are KBLX, and McRoskey Mattress Company.

ABOUT CAL SHAKES

California Shakespeare Theater (Cal Shakes), under the leadership of Artistic Director Eric Ting and Managing Director Susie Falk, is now in its 43rd season as a nationally-recognized leader in drawing on the power of authentic, inclusive storytelling to create more vibrant communities. Serving more than 43,000 people annually, Cal Shakes invites people from all walks of life to make deeply-felt connections with our shared humanity through its work onstage, in schools, and with people in non-traditional settings throughout the Bay Area who have little or no access to theater. For more information, visit www.calshakes.org.

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Fast Facts about *black odyssey*

WHAT	California Shakespeare Theater's production of <i>black odyssey</i> by Marcus Gardley directed by Eric Ting vocal composition by Linda Tillery and Molly Holm designed by Michael Locher (scenic designer), Dede M. Ayite (costume designer), Xavier Pierce (lighting designer), and T. Carlis Roberts (sound designer). Featuring: Aldo Billingslea (Paw Sidin), Michael Curry (Malachai, Poly'famous), Margo Hall (Great Aunt Tina), Lamont Thompson (Great Grand Daddy Deus), J. Alphonse Nicholson (Ulysses Lincoln), Omozé Idehnre (Nella Pell), Michael Gene Sullivan (Artez Sabine), Dawn L. Troupe (Alsendra Sabine), Safiya Fredricks (Benevolence Nausicca Sabine)
WHEN	August 9-September 3, 2017 Previews August 9, 10, 11 at 8pm Press Opening August 12 at 8pm Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30pm Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm Saturday Matinee June 18 at 2pm Sunday Matinees at 4pm

Grounds open two hours prior to show time for picnicking. Café and full bar are available on site.

WHERE Bruns Amphitheater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way, Orinda, CA 94563 (just off Highway 24 at the California Shakespeare Theater Way/Wilder Rd. exit, one mile east of the Caldecott Tunnel.)

Complimentary shuttle from Orinda BART beginning 2 hours before curtain.
Complimentary parking onsite.

TICKETS Single tickets start at \$20, with discounts available for seniors, students, persons age 30 and under, and groups. Cal Shakes makes twenty tickets available for \$20 on a first-come, first-served basis for every performance throughout the season. Call Cal Shakes' Box Office at 510.548.9666 between noon and 2pm to purchase. Prices subject to change.
All tickets are available through the California Shakespeare Theater Box Office, 701 Heinz Avenue, Berkeley CA, 510.548.9666, online at www.calshakes.org, or at the Bruns box office on the day of the performance (pending availability).

GROUPS Groups of 10 or more save \$10 off the adult single ticket price; complimentary ticket available for groups of 15+. For more information, call 510.809.3290.

INFO www.calshakes.org

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***black odyssey* Special Events**

First Look, Saturday, August 5, 7-9pm, Bruns Amphitheater

Get a First Look at the production and hear from members of the artistic team days before performances begin. Artistic Director Eric Ting will moderate a Q&A with the director, followed by an opportunity to watch technical rehearsal. Free and open to the public.

Pay-What-You-Can Preview, Wednesday, August 9, 8pm

The first preview of each show is a special Pay-What-You-Can performance. Tickets are first-come, first-served, and available beginning at 6pm day of show only; to purchase, call the Cal Shakes Box Office at 510.548.9666 or visit the Bruns Amphitheater Box Office.

Opening Night Post-Show Party, August 12, following the performance

Experience the excitement of the opening night performance and then mingle with the cast and creative team at a complimentary post-show party.

Post-Show Talkbacks, Tuesday, August 15, Thursday, August 17, and Wednesday, August 23

Stay after the show for a discussion with a member of the artistic staff in the Plaza.

Open-captioned performance, Wednesday, August 16, 7:30pm

Special seating and opening-captioning for Deaf or Hard of Hearing patrons, who can read the text and dialogue on a digital screen. Purchase tickets for section A online www.calshakes.org or call the Box Office at 510.548.9666. For groups of 10 or more, email groups@calshakes.org or call 510.809.3290.

Meet the Artists, Sundays, August 13 and 27, following the 4pm performance

Audience members enjoy an opportunity to engage in a lively discussion about the production with cast. Free and open to all.

InSight Matinee, Sunday, August 20, following the 4pm matinee

Explore the world of the play through an informal dialogue with the production's dramaturg. Free and open to all.

Grove Talks, 45 minutes before each performance

Free, informal 20-minute talks are held on site 45 minutes before each and every performance in the ADA-accessible Grove Talk grove, offering invaluable insight into the play and the production.

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