

For more information contact:

Allie Magee / allie@stlshakes.org / 314-775-7412

**ST. LOUIS SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
RETURNS TO LIVE PERFORMANCE IN FOREST PARK WITH
K I N G L E A R
STARRING TONY, EMMY & GRAMMY WINNER
ANDRÉ DE SHIELDS
JUNE 2 - 27, 2021**

PLUS FULL 2021 SEASON LINE UP

St. Louis, MO (March 5, 2021) -- The **St. Louis Shakespeare Festival** (Tom Ridgely, Producing Artistic Director) announced today that Tony, Emmy and Grammy award-winner **André De Shields** (Broadway: *Hadestown*, *The Wiz*, *Ain't Misbehavin*) will star in ***King Lear*** as part of its 21st summer of free Shakespeare in Forest Park. The production marks the theater's return to live outdoor performance, one of the first scheduled in the country. *King Lear* will be directed by **Carl Cofield** (Associate Artistic Director of the Classical Theatre of Harlem) and begin on Wednesday, June 2, with an opening night set for Friday, June 4 at 8:00 pm, and play through June 27 to strictly limited capacity crowds.

The Festival's 2021 Season will also include a new outdoor touring production of ***Othello*** that will visit 24 public parks across the metro area and three outdoor performances of "**Shakespeare in the Streets: The Ville**" in one of the most historically significant Black communities in America. Also announced, the second **Confluence New Play Festival** and members of the third Regional Writers Cohort, and a six-month **Directors Fellowship** now accepting applications.

"André is a national treasure and one of the most extraordinary theatrical artists alive," said producing artistic director **Tom Ridgely** in a statement. "And *Lear* is the Everest of Shakespeare's tragic roles. To see it played by an actor of his caliber in a setting as stunning as Forest Park after the year we've all been through, will be the thrill of a lifetime. And Carl Cofield's vision for how the play speaks to a 21st century America is both bracing and brilliant. We couldn't be more proud to welcome them and the incredible company they've assembled to St. Louis."

King Lear is considered by many to be Shakespeare's greatest - and most modern - masterpiece. A richly imaginative story of love, loyalty and unfathomable loss, it depicts a family and a nation torn apart and turned against itself by disastrous leadership. After the aging king's plan to divide his kingdom equally among his daughters goes horribly awry, he's cast out into the most famous storm in all of drama. By turns shocking and profound, *Lear* paints an unforgettable picture of human endurance pushed to the absolute limit by nature, violence and its own vanity.

André De Shields heads an all-BIPOC company featuring some of the finest actors out of New York, Chicago and St. Louis. He is joined by **Brian Anthony Wilson** (*The Wire*, *The Sopranos*) as Gloucester,

acclaimed Chicago and Shakespearean actor **Allen Gilmore** as the Fool and St. Louis legend **J. Samuel Davis** as Kent. The three daughters will be played by **Nicole King** (Cordelia) and Festival favorites **Rayme Cornell** (Goneril) and **Jacqueline Thompson** (Regan). **Daniel José Molina** (Oregon Shakespeare Festival) and **Leland Fowler** (TFANA) will play Gloucester's sons Edgar and Edmund, respectively. The company also includes **Jason J. Little** (Albany), **Carl Overly, Jr.** (Cornwall) and **Michael Tran** (Oswald), as well as an ensemble of actors from The Black Rep's Professional Internship Program: **Kentrell Jamison, Theorri London, Brian McKinley, Tyler White** and **Christina Yancy**.

"We are in a global reckoning with where we want to go and who we want to be," said director Carl Cofield in a statement. "'We See You White American Theater' is the current zeitgeist. For me, this chance to do *King Lear* with André in a bold, vibrant reimagining speaks directly to 13-year-old Carl and seeing Brown and Black people at the forefront. To bring this story in this way to St. Louis audiences is something I'm tremendously excited by."

The creative team for *King Lear* includes first-time Festival designers **Wilson Chin** (Scenic Design), **Mika Eubanks** (Costume Design) and **David R. Molina** (Music and Sound Design). **John Wylie** (Lighting Design) will return for his fourteenth season.

Performances in Shakespeare Glen are free and open to the public but for the first time will be limited in size to ensure the safety of staff, artists and audience. More details, including how to make a reservation, will be announced soon and will adhere strictly to City of St. Louis official health guidelines. **Visit www.stlshakes.org for up-to-date information.**

TOURCO - OTHELLO

This summer, the Festival is launching a brand new initiative called "TourCo" that will bring high-quality Shakespeare and the magic of Forest Park to parks all over the St. Louis metro area.

The inaugural production of *Othello* will play at 24 public parks and gathering spaces across the bi-state region from August 3 - August 29. The 90-minute adaptation will be directed by the Festival's Manager of Community Engagement & Education, Adam Flores, and feature **Courtney Bailey** (Desdemona), **Charlie Barron** (Iago), **Ricki Franklin** (Emilia), **Hannah Geisz** (Roderigo), **Jason J. Little** (Othello) and **Jesse Muñoz** (Cassio). The free events will begin at 7:00 p.m., and a full schedule of locations will be announced later this spring.

SHAKESPEARE IN THE STREETS: THE VILLE

In September, the Festival's internationally-recognized community engagement program, Shakespeare in the Streets, is partnering with The Ville neighborhood in North St. Louis on a new adaptation of *Hamlet* to elevate the incredible story of one of the most historically significant African American communities in the country. Home to Sumner High School, the first Black high school west of the Mississippi River, the Ville has nurtured cultural icons from Chuck Berry to Tina Turner to Arthur Ashe, Grace Bumbry, Dick Gregory, Robert Guillaume, Robert McFerrin, Sr., the Fifth Dimension and more. Sumner alumna **Mariah**

L. Richardson is writing the adaptation and Ville resident **Thomasina Clark** will direct. Presented in partnership with 4theVille, performances will be held September 9-11 at 8:00 p.m. outside the Annie Malone Home.

CONFLUENCE REGIONAL WRITERS PROJECT

Three new midwest playwrights join the Confluence Regional Writers Project as the 2021 cohort, the third group from Missouri and Illinois since the program's inception in 2018. **Courtney Bailey (St. Louis, MO), Melda Beaty (Chicago, IL) and Delaney Piggins (St. Louis, MO)** were chosen to help foster a regional culture of playwriting. They will spend the next year writing, collaborating, networking and receiving feedback on a new work commissioned by the Festival. The new plays by the 2021 and 2020 cohort will premiere with staged readings at the second Confluence New Play Festival in the fall.

DIRECTING FELLOWSHIP

The Directing Fellowship, which launched in 2020 with major support from Kathleen and Rich Waidmann, is a six-month hands-on director intensive created specifically to nurture diverse perspectives in theater-making. The 2021 Directing Fellow will work as Assistant Director across the three main Festival productions and lead a series of staged readings in the fall. Applications are now open for the singular Fellowship on the Festival website. **The deadline to apply is March 26.**

The St. Louis Shakespeare Festival's 2021 season is funded in part by the Missouri Foundation for Health, Bayer Fund, Regional Arts Commission, Arts Midwest, The Trio Foundation of St. Louis, the Missouri Arts Council and The Gertrude and William A. Bernoudy Foundation.

BIOS

The **St. Louis Shakespeare Festival** strives to foster community and joy across the St. Louis region through the Shakespearean tradition of art for all. Since 2001, the Festival has grown from producing a single production of Shakespeare in the Park to a year-round season of impactful programming in exciting and accessible venues throughout the bi-state area. Artistic and education programs reach over 50,000 patrons and students each season and have served over one million since 2001. In 2020, the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Bloomberg News* featured the Festival's stand-out virtual and in-person programs.

Andre Dé Shields (King Lear) is the triple-crown winner of the 2019 awards season, having won the Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and Tony awards for Best Featured Actor in a Musical for his critically acclaimed performance as Hermes, Messenger to the Gods, in *Hadestown*. The Actors' Equity Foundation followed suit with the Richard Seff Award, honoring veteran stage actors' best supporting performances of the year. In 2020, André received the 2020 Grammy Award for Musical Theater Album for *Hadestown*, an Honorary Doctor of Arts Degree from Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and the 2020 AUDELCO for Lifetime Achievement. In 2019, he received the 2019 Project1Voice Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2019 SAGE Joyce Warshaw Lifetime Achievement Award, The York Theatre Company's 2019

Oscar Hammerstein Award for Lifetime Achievement in Musical Theatre, and was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame. He received the key to the city of his hometown, Baltimore, Maryland, from Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young in August, 2019. Prior to his Tony Award win, De Shields was best known for his show-stopping performances in four legendary Broadway productions: *The Wiz*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Emmy Award), *Play On!* (Tony Nomination), and *The Full Monty* (Tony Nomination). In a career spanning 52 years, he has distinguished himself as an unparalleled actor, director, and educator, receiving in 2018 the eighth annual Off-Broadway Alliance Legend Award and the 33rd annual Bob Harrington Life Achievement Bistro Award. Among his other accolades are the 2009 National Black Theatre Festival's Living Legend Award and a 2007 Village Voice Obie Award for sustained excellence of performance, and eight AUDELCO Awards for Outstanding Performance, Direction and Choreography. His film and TV projects include Anton Ego in "Ratatouille: The TikTok Tok Musical", the Algebra Tutor in "John Mulaney & The Sack Lunch Bunch" on Netflix, Chubby in "Katy Keene" (CW) and as Wyndham on "Almost Family." He can next be seen as Gavin Plimsoll in Charles Busch's new film, *The Sixth Reel*. De Shields is a proud member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and SDC. UBUNTU! www.andredeshields.com

Carl Cofield (Director) was appointed Associate Artistic Director of the Off-Broadway award-winning Classical Theatre of Harlem in 2018. For CTH he has directed: *The Bacchae* (New York Times Critic's Pick), *Antigone*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* and *Dutchman*. He directed the award-winning world premiere of Kemp Power's *One Night in Miami* for Rogue Machine Theater in Los Angeles, Miami New Drama and Denver Center. Other regional credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* and Afro-futuristic *Twelfth Night* at Yale Rep, *Henry IV* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Disgraced* at Denver Center, *The Mountaintop* at Cleveland Play House, August Wilson's *Radio Golf* at Everyman Theatre and many others. For the McCarter Theatre, he collaborated with seven playwrights: Nathan Alan Davis, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Dipika Guha, Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Emily Mann, and Regina Taylor, and directed *The Princeton and Slavery Plays*. Honors include an N.A.A.C.P theater award, L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award and many AUDELCO nominations. As an actor, his work has been seen at The Manhattan Theater Club (*Ruined*), Berkeley Rep, Alliance, Arena Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, Intiman, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Milwaukee Rep, Alabama Shakespeare, The McCarter, The Acting Company, Studio Theatre and many others. He was in the founding class of The New World School of the Arts in Miami, Florida, and B.F.A. in theatre performance from the University of Miami. He holds an MFA in Directing from Columbia University and has also taught at Columbia, NYU and the New School and is on the faculty of the Yale School of Drama.