

# Press Release

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Southwest Shakespeare Company

## AWARD WINNING HARLEM-BASED CLASSICAL ACTRESS DEBRA ANN BYRD RETURNS TO PHOENIX WITH A NEW ONE-WOMAN SHOW



(February 2020 – Harlem, New York) Classical actress and producer **Debra Ann Byrd** undertook a remarkable journey to take on the role of Shakespeare’s noble general Othello — which she recently performed for **Southwest Shakespeare Company** at Taliesin West, winning her the **2019 Broadway World Arizona Lead Actress Award**. This past fall the actress recorded her experiences on becoming ‘The Moor of Venice’ as writer-in-residence at the **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in the UK**, where she first performed her new solo show.

Now **Southwest Shakespeare Company** in partnership with **Phoenix Art Museum** are working together to celebrate **Black History Month** and **Women’s History Month** in Phoenix featuring visiting artist **Debra Ann Byrd**, as she performs her one-woman show **BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl’s Journey** for a limited run at the **Phoenix Art Museum**, February 22 – March 29, 2020.

**BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl’s Journey** is a 90 minute, 5-Act, living memoir which explores a young woman’s acting journey on the road to becoming Othello, her trials and triumphs with race and the classics, some memorable experiences on her gender flipped journey and her fun-loving and tumultuous youth; complete with moving multimedia images, lyrical language from Black women playwrights, William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and the King James Bible, along with soulful songs and the music that shaped her life in her beloved Harlem.

**BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl’s Journey**, written and performed by **Debra Ann Byrd** was workshopped and developed at Shakespeare & Company by founding artistic director **Tina Packer**; with sound design by **David D. Wright**, multimedia projections by **dabgrafix designs**; and is produced by **Voza Rivers/New Heritage Theatre Group** and **Harlem Shakespeare**.



**DEBRA ANN BYRD** (Actress & Playwright) is an award winning classically trained actress and producer who recently received an Outstanding Achievement Award from AUDELCO for her portrayal of the title character in the all-female multiracial mainstage production of Shakespeare's OTHELLO: The Moor of Venice. She recently reprised the role for the Southwest Shakespeare Company in Arizona where she won the 2019 Broadway World Phoenix Award for Best Lead Actress. In the span of one year she was named Writer-in-Residence at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Artist-in-Residence Fellow at the Folger Institute, Artist-in-Residence at Southwest Shakespeare Company and Community Scholar in Cohort VI at Columbia University. As the Founder and Producing Artistic

Director of Take Wing And Soar Productions and the Harlem Shakespeare Festival, she guided the company's growth from its birth as the passionate dream of one determined woman, into a viable support organization serving classical artists of color and theater arts groups throughout New York. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Acting from Marymount Manhattan College and completed advanced studies at The Public Theater's Shakespeare Lab, Shakespeare & Company and The Broadway League's Commercial Theatre Institute. Her classical roles for the stage include Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, The Chorus in *Antigone*, Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*, Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, Winter in *Love's Labors Lost*, Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cleopatra in *Antony & Cleopatra*, Othello in *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*, Marc Antony in the all-female production of *Julius Caesar* and Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*; the latter, for which she received Best Lead Actress and Outstanding Actress in a Lead Role nominations from AUDELCO and the NY Innovative Theatre Awards.

## BECOMING OTHELLO PROJECT PARTNERS AT-A-GLANCE

**HARLEM SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL** (Producer) established in 2013 by **Debra Ann Byrd** and **Voza Rivers/New Heritage Theatre Group**, is an award winning, Harlem-based project with an international reach, dedicated to helping classically trained actors of color reach their highest potential. ([www.BecomingOthello.global](http://www.BecomingOthello.global)) ([www.newheritagetheatregroup](http://www.newheritagetheatregroup))

**SOUTHWEST SHAKESPEARE COMPANY** (Presenter) is a modern day people's theatre created to foster a sense of community through education, inspiration, and elevation of its artists, the general public and the educational communities of Arizona. ([www.swshakespeare.org](http://www.swshakespeare.org))

**PHOENIX ART MUSEUM** (Presenter) is a vibrant destination connecting people to great art from around the world to enrich their lives and communities. In the last 60 years it has grown to an institution with an international reputation for excellence.

**DATES:** Saturday, February 22th thru Sunday March 29th, 2020

**TIMES:** **Black History Month Performances**  
Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> @ 2:00pm & Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm

**Women's History Month Performances**  
Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm & Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm

**THEATRE:** **Phoenix Art Museum**  
1625 N Central Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85004

**TICKETS:** **NOW ON SALE at the Phoenix Art Museum Box Office**  
\$35 for Public / \$25 for Museum Members / \$13 for Students and Educators

**RESERVATIONS:** Book Seats Online >> <http://www.phxart.org> or call 480-435-6868  
Box Office opens 1 hour before curtain

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Phoenix Art Museum