

Press Release

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229 West 135th Street • Front 1 • NYC, NY 10030
(212) 926-0104 • E-mail: press@harlemshakespearefest.org
Contact: Lainie Cooke at New Heritage Theatre Group
Contact: Alisan Cole via email at alisan.cole@shakespeare.org.uk



HARLEM ARTIST SET TO TAKE THE STAGE AT SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's first Writer-in-Residence, Debra Ann Byrd, is set to return to Stratford-upon-Avon in October 2019 with her new solo show *BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl's Journey*



(September 2019 – Harlem, New York) The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and The University of Warwick together with Voza Rivers and the Harlem Shakespeare Festival are working together to celebrate Black History Month in the UK featuring visiting artist **Debra Ann Byrd** as she performs a concert staged reading of her new solo-show *BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl's Journey* for two performances on **9 October 2019** at The Shakespeare Center in Stratford-upon-Avon; and **16 October 2019** at Warwick Arts Center's Helen Martin Studio in Coventry.

Classical actress and producer **Debra Ann Byrd** undertook a remarkable journey to take on the role of Othello — which she first performed in her native Harlem. The actress recently recorded her experiences on becoming 'The Moor of Venice' as writer-in-residence at the **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**.

Inspired in 2000, by actor Charles Dutton when he performed at the Playing Shakespeare workshop with John Barton, Debra Ann dreamed that she too would one day play the role of Othello. --- Roll on 15 years and she finally got her wish.

Now the **Birthplace Trust** and **The University of Warwick** together with **Misfit, Inc.**, the **Folger Institute**, **Southwest Shakespeare Company**, **Columbia University** and the **Harlem Shakespeare Festival** are working together to sponsor Debra Ann's planned three-year international writing project comprising of a documentary feature film, a solo show and a small volume memoir which includes research from the Birthplace Trust, the Folger Shakespeare Library and Columbia University Archives.

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** is Produced by **Voza Rivers/New**

Heritage Theatre Group, Paul Prescott, Paul Edmonson and Katie Brokaw, with Costumes by **Gail Cooper-Hecht**, Sound Design by **David D. Wright**, Story Coaching by **Tanya Taylor Rubinstein** and Workshopped by **Tina Packer**, founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company.



DEBRA ANN BYRD (Actress & Playwright) is an award winning classically trained actress and producer who recently won 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. 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

The Harlem Shakespeare Festival, 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. The **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** is the independent charity that cares for the world's greatest Shakespeare heritage sites in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK. **The University of Warwick** is a plate glass research university in Coventry, England, which was founded in 1965 as part of a government initiative to expand access to higher education. **Misfit, Inc.** is an artisan technology incubator, where they partner with social entrepreneurs to launch simple solutions that make the world a more delightful place. The **Folger Institute** is a center for research in early modern humanities at the Folger Shakespeare Library. The Community Scholars Program at **Columbia University** is designed to offer independent, community-based scholars from Northern Manhattan access to a suite of Columbia University services and resources that allow them to work toward the completion of a particular project or to attain skill in a particular area. **Southwest Shakespeare Company** 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.

PERFORMANCE 1

9 October 2019 | 5:00pm
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
The Shakespeare Centre
Stratford-upon-Avon
Warwickshire, UK
Tel: 01789 201806

PERFORMANCE 2

16 October 2019 | 6:00pm
Warwick Arts Centre
Helen Martin Studio
University of Warwick
Coventry, UK
Tel: 024 7652 4524

TICKET RSVP: Both performances are presented Free and Open to the Public.

Limited Seating.

RSVP Strongly Suggested.

Book your Seats online at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)

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BECOMING OTHELLO:
A BLACK GIRL'S JOURNEY

A SOLO SHOW

