



BECOMING OTHELLO:

A BLACK GIRL'S JOURNEY

A SOLO SHOW

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY DEBRA ANN BYRD
DIRECTED BY TINA PACKER
PRESENTED BY SKIDMORE THEATER

ONE NIGHT ONLY

October 1, 2021 at 7pm

A personal, poignant and powerful story of perseverance, tragedy, triumph—and ultimately unconditional love.

Through rhyme, meter, lyrical language, and soulful songs, this one-woman theatrical drama chronicles the life of classical actress, Debra Ann Byrd; her tumultuous youth growing up in Spanish Harlem; her trials and triumphs with race and the classics; and her gender-flipped journey on the road to becoming Shakespeare's noble flawed general Othello.

Byrd's life as a single mother and as an artist provide her with the grounding and depth necessary to inhabit Othello, but it is the willing bravery to share her unseen truths that most resonates with her audiences.

Content: Drama, Storytelling, Movement, Music, A New American Classic, Adult Language, Sexual Violence, Guns shots fired during performance.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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 writing project. The international project comprises 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.

Tonight's performance of ***BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl's Journey*** is a 90 minute, 5-Act, living memoir about a young woman's trials and triumphs with race and the classics, her memorable experiences growing up in East Harlem and her gender flipped journey on the road to becoming Shakespeare's noble, flawed general. The solo show is complete with moving songs and lyrical language from Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and the King James Bible.

ABOUT THE ACTRESS | PLAYWRIGHT

DEBRA ANN BYRD 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 Harlem Shakespeare Festival's all-female multiracial mainstage production of Shakespeare's *OTHELLO: The Moor of Venice*, directed by Trezana Beverley. She recently reprised the role in a 90 minute adaptation for the Southwest Shakespeare Company in Arizona. 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. Debra Ann 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. Debra Ann was recently 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. She is extremely grateful to all these institutions for supporting her special *BECOMING OTHELLO* project.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

TINA PACKER is the founding artistic director of Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. She has directed most of Shakespeare's plays, acted in seven of them and taught the whole canon one way or another at over thirty colleges in the U.S., including

Harvard, M.I.T. and NYU. She began her career in England, having trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, where she won the Ronson Award for most Outstanding Actor. Following this, she became an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, performing at Stratford, the West End, and on tour. She has worked at The Royal Court in London; Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leicester, Coventry and Hornchurch repertory companies. She came to the U.S. in 1974 when the Ford Foundation funded an eleven-month project for her to research the visceral roots of Elizabethan theater. Tina Packer is the writer and creator of *Women of Will*.

BECOMING OTHELLO CREATIVE TEAM

Written by and Starring: Debra Ann Byrd. Director: Tina Packer. Director of Movement: Dyane Harvey-Salaam. Costume Design: Gail Cooper-Hecht. Sound Design: David D. Wright. Marketing & Community Outreach: Natalie Clarke. Associate Producer: Jacqueline Jeffries. Executive Producer: Voza Rivers.

BOOKING THE SOLO SHOW

Should you want to book the solo show for your theatre, university or festival be sure to reach out to Debra Ann's team at: BecomingOthello@gmail.com

What People Are Saying About Debra Ann Byrd and *BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl's Journey...*

-- "**Byrd has limitless charisma**" ... "**a prodigiously gifted author**" ... "**Like Hal Holbrook's *Mark Twain Tonight!* or John Gielgud's *Ages of Man*, it's the kind of solo show that an actor so inclined can spend the rest of his or her life playing in every corner of the English-speaking world.**" Terry Teachout, Drama Critic, The Wall Street Journal

-- "**... a truly singular dramatic talent.**" Sara Westh, Reporter, Stratford-upon-Avon HERALD.

"Debra Ann Byrd is a force of nature who exudes power and personality, both in her storytelling & her trailblazing." Hannah Yurke, THEATRIUS, San Francisco & Beyond.

-- "**Once in a great while a piece of theater resonates so profoundly it changes lives forever. This is one of those works.**" Mary Way, Executive Director, Southwest Shakespeare Company

-- **“Becoming Othello was astonishing, brilliant, funny, heartbreaking and ultimately inspiring.”** Mark Nixon Patron of the Arts, The Shakespeare Center, Stratford-upon-Avon UK

-- **“An incredible life story mixed with a love of Shakespeare. Absolutely stunning. Stratford was lucky to have it!”** 10/09/2019 Dr. Jami Rogers, Patron of the Arts

-- **“A powerful dynamo of a woman! BECOMING OTHELLO: A Black Girl’s Journey will stick to your consciousness long after Debra Ann Byrd’s one-act play has ended. Her production is a piece of theater to savor!”** Joanne Engelhardt, Mercury News