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**La MaMa E.T.C. presents**  
**RHODESSA JONES & IDRIS ACKAMOR**  
**In**  
**THE LOVE PROJECT**  
**Written by Pearl Cleage & Zaron Burnett**

**Performance Artists Make Interactive Love on La Mama Stage**

With the election of America's first African American President, Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor, two prominent artistic voices in American race and gender politics for the past thirty years, make a timely return to the La Mama stage. While pundits crank out sanitized narratives of multi-culturalism and gender equality in sweeping gestures, Jones and Ackamoor track a decidedly personal political history of this country through the romantic, professional, political, and sexual relationships that have guided them through decades of conflict and struggle. Part house party, part TV talk show, and part cabaret, *The Love Project* is an interactive experience that testifies to the network of human relations that define our times. ***The Love Project* comes to La Mama's First Floor Theater, Thursdays – Sundays, Jan. 29 – Feb. 8, 2009.** Performance times are **Thurs. – Sat. 8:00 PM - Sun. 2:30 PM**. Tickets are \$18. Discount Ticketing: Students & Seniors: \$5 off ticket price. Children under 10: \$10 for all shows. 10% discount for Groups of 10 or more. Please call 212-254-6468 for group sales. **Online ticketing available at [www.lamama.org](http://www.lamama.org). La Mama E.T.C. 74A E 4 ST. Box Office (212) 475-7710.**

The Love Project represents the collaboration of four distinguished artists. Long-time creative partners and one-time romantic cohorts, Ackamoor and Jones have collaborated for most of their lives in performance, music, dance, and education. For the *Love Project*, they have partnered with Pearl Cleage, acclaimed author of *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*, and her husband Zaron Burnett Jr., writer and director of the *Just Us Theater Company* in Atlanta. These four artists, working together and separately across the country since the late 70s, converged upon this single project to reflect on how various kinds of love—romantic, familial, racial, platonic, spiritual, and sexual—have shaped their careers and political context.

The project first appeared as a work in progress at the National Black Theater Festival to the delight of a sold-out audience. It has continued to evolve since then, shifting in response to the context of its presentation. As Ackamoor and Jones preside, they depend on audience members to enrich the experience with their own songs and narratives, creating what Ackamoor describes as a “Chorus of Love”. Jones underlines these ambitions, remarking: “My deepest fantasy is that *The Love Project* is a cabaret piece that encourages a public forum—an evening of words, music, and movement that can expand to include live performance in the moment.” Harriet Schiffer-Scott directs *The Love Project*. Jones and Ackamoor are particularly enthusiastic about returning to New York and La Mama E.T.C. after years of absence.

While *The Love Project* is their first truly interactive work, Ackamoor and Jones have sparked animated conversations and awards at La Mama for many years. At the *Women’s Theater Festival* in 1997, they presented *The Legend of Lily Overstreet*, Jones’ comedic lamentation on her days as a peep show dancer. The work captured La Mama audiences with its hilarious audacity, while posing serious questions about race and sexuality. Their take on Ike and Tina Turner, *I Think It’s Gonna Work Out Fine* had the Village Voice saying “*American Gothic...Excellent performances!*” Their performance at Aaron Davis Hall in Harlem had the New York Times saying, “*The material shimmered with intelligence, wit and humanity*”. Jones’ Piece de Resistance, “*Big But Girls, Hard-Headed Women*” garnered the duo a **BESSIE AWARD** for the 1992-93 theater season. Ackamoor’s show “*Shoehorn!*” garnered the La Mama Production “Best Musical”, “Best Actor in a Musical”, and “Best Director for a Musical” at the **23<sup>rd</sup> Annual AULDELCO Awards** in 1995. Ackamoor and Jones are masters of transporting audiences out of their daily lives in order to provide greater critical perspective upon them. Jones has gained international notoriety for developing original theater within prisons as part of her *Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women*, allowing inmates to reflect upon their incarceration. Jones and Ackamoor have been collaborating since the late 1970’s. Ackamoor had just founded the San Francisco based performance ensemble Cultural Odyssey and Jones had recently finished the early versions of *Lily Overstreet*. The two artists merged their endeavors, developing a repertoire of highly acclaimed works under the auspices of Cultural Odyssey over the next thirty years. “*Cultural Odyssey Dazzles! Jones and Ackamoor make sense of life by making beautiful music of the human experience,*” proclaims the *San Diego Tribune*.

### **Artists Bios**

**RHODESSA JONES** is Co-Artistic Director of the San Francisco acclaimed performance company Cultural Odyssey. She is an actress, teacher, singer, and writer. Ms. Jones is also the Founder and Director of the award winning *Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women*, which is a performance workshop that is designed to achieve personal and social transformation with incarcerated women. Beginning in January of 2009 Rhodessa will embark on Cultural Odyssey’s 30th Anniversary tour performing her newest performance piece, *The Love Project*, written in collaboration with noted writer Pearl Cleage and Zaron Burnett, at La Mama Theater in New York City, Tampa Bay

Performing Arts Center in Tampa, Florida, 7 Stages in Atlanta and many other locations. In November 2008, for the first time in South African history, Rhodessa Jones directed a full-length theater production with female inmates inside the Johannesburg Correctional Services. In December of 2007 Rhodessa received a United States Artist (USA) Fellowship to support her work.

**IDRIS ACKAMOR** is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, actor, tap dancer, and director. He is the Founder and Co-Artistic Director of the San Francisco performance company Cultural Odyssey. Idris' primary instrument is the alto saxophone. During 2008 Idris performed *The Love Project* at the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia, and the National Black Theater Festival. Mr. Ackamoor is the recipient of a 2007 Center for Cultural Innovation Award to support his work. In March 2007 he performed the role of musician "Moses Britten" in *Indigo Blues*, a play by Judi Ann Mason that ran at the M Ensemble Theater in Miami, Florida. A two-CD retrospective entitled, *Music of Idris Ackamoor 1971-2004* was just released on EM Records of Japan. In 2004 Idris released his third CD entitled, "Homage to Cuba". In 1999 Idris released his second jazz CD entitled, "Centurian" and in 1998 he recorded and released his first CD entitled "Portrait".

**PEARL CLEAGE** is an Atlanta-based writer. She is an award-winning playwright whose stage works include *Flyin' West*, 1994's most-produced new play in the country; *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, which was included in the 1996 Olympic Arts Festival; and *A Song For Coretta*, her newest work that premiered in 2006 and is scheduled for a national tour in 2008. She is also a best-selling author whose first novel, *What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*, was on the New York Times bestseller list for nine weeks in 1998 and was a selection of the Oprah Book Club. Her novel, *Baby Brother's Blues*, is an *ESSENCE* Magazine bestseller and book club favorite. Her other novels include *I Wish I Had a Red Dress*, *Babylon Sisters* and *Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do*. Her newest novel, *Seen It All and Done the Rest*, will be published by Ballantine/One World in April 2008.

**ZARON W. BURNETT, JR.** is a novelist and performance artist whose work has been recognized by the Rockefeller Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities Expansion Arts Program, Georgia Council on the Arts and Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs. His novel, *The Carthaginian Honor Society*, was published by Just Us Theater Press in 1994. He is the creator of the *Live at Club Zebra!* series, a performance installation that has toured the country, including appearances at the National Black Arts Festival and National Black Theatre Festival. He collaborated with Pearl Cleage on "We Speak Your Names: A Celebration," a poem commissioned by Oprah Winfrey for her 2005 Legends Weekend honoring outstanding African American women. He has contributed to a number of anthologies, including *Proverbs for the People* and was a regular contributor to *CATALYST* Magazine for nine years.

**HARRIET SCHIFFER SCOTT** (director) is known to many in the San Francisco Bay Area for her work as a director, writer and theater artist. She has toured her one-woman shows across the United States and Europe throughout her performance career of over

thirty years. Ms. Scott has been touring her most recent performance work, *A Year of Paperwork*; *Confessions of a Shul Hopper*, which opened two years ago at Center Stage in Marin County, CA. Her work with Cultural Odyssey began in 1985 when she directed Rhodessa Jones in *The Legend of Lily Overstreet*. She has directed Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones in several projects since that time. In 1996, she founded the company Stage Presence®, where she applies her skills and talents as a monologist and director, coaching executives and professionals to become dynamic, spontaneous public speakers and communicators.