

# Playbill

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*Presents*

**Rhodessa Jones & Idris Ackamoor  
in**

## **THE LOVE PROJECT**

**Conceived by Rhodessa Jones & Idris Ackamoor**

**Directed by Harriet Schiffer-Scott**

**WRITTEN BY PEARL CLEAGE, ZARON BURNETT, IDRIS ACKAMOR &  
RHODESSA JONES**

## THE LOVE PROJECT

Conceived by Rhodessa Jones & Idris Ackamoor

Performance by Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor

Written by Pearl Cleage, Zaron Burnett, Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor

Directed by Harriet Schiffer Scott

Light Design by Stephanie Johnson

Video Editing and filming by Michael Guyton & Idris Ackamoor

Costume Design by Rene Walker & Laura Hazlett

Original Music by Idris Ackamoor

Lyrics by Idris Ackamoor, Rhodessa Jones and Cheryl Scales

Music Arrangements by Frederick Harris & Idris Ackamoor



### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

#### *THE LOVE PROJECT*

“True revolutions always begin with feelings of great love.”  
— Che Guevara

*The Love Project* is a multi-disciplinary performance piece written by Pearl Cleage and Zaron Burnett, Jr., with Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor. Using their long-time personal and professional partnerships as a starting point, the four artists examine the role of love in a world at war. Living and working on opposite sides of the country for the past thirty years (Jones and Ackamoor based in San Francisco and Cleage and Burnett based in Atlanta) they came together to look at how various kinds of love — romantic, familial, racial, platonic, spiritual and sexual — inform their current work and have shaped their past collaborations.

A shared belief that the personal is always political, and a deep respect for the power of love, allows these pieces to move between many topics as diverse as the challenge of world citizenship, forgiveness, and the constant perusal of love

in all its forms without missing a beat. This first time collaboration between the four, distinguished artists also will engage the audience directly in the performance, inviting them to add their stories to the “Chorus of Love” during a special segment that brings the performers up close and personal. In this way, the show is always a reflection not only of the people on the stage but of the people who have come to witness and inform each performance.

At the beginning of the process, Rhodessa Jones described her hopes for the experience of the piece as follows: “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.”

**That was the intention. This is the offering.**

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

**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 30<sup>th</sup> 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* (popularly known as “Sun City prison”). This was Rhodessa’s second visit to South Africa hosted by the *Urban Voices Festival*. Ms. Jones is currently collaborating with the *Women’s HIV Program at University of California, San Francisco Medical Center* conducting workshops and residency activities that will lead to a world premier performance in 2010.

During 2008 Rhodessa performed, ***The Love Project*** at the *Painted Bride Art Center* in Philadelphia, *Denison University* in Granville, Ohio, the *Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center* at the *University of Maryland*, and the *National Black Theater Festival* in North Carolina. In December of 2007 Rhodessa received a **United States Artist (USA) Fellowship** to support her work. In June 2008 Rhodessa gave the Keynote Address at Chicago’s DePaul University for the *Race, Sex, and Power Conference*, and in May she gave the Keynote Address at *New World Theater’s Intersections Conference* in Amherst, Massachusetts. During the month of September 2007 Rhodessa was an Adjunct Professor at the *University of Maryland* for the Women’s Studies Department. She was also the Artistic Director of the ***San Francisco International Theater Festival*** that took place in the spring of 2007. During July and April 2007 Rhodessa was Artist-in-Residence at the *University of West*

*Indies*, St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago. In June 2006 she directed a public reading for Eve Ensler's, *VDAY: Until the Violence Stops Festival* at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Ms. Jones was honored with an **Honorary Doctorate** from California College of the Arts in 2004. Rhodessa has received many awards for her work including a **GOLDIE Lifetime Achievement Award** presented by the San Francisco Bay Guardian in 2003, an **Otto Rene Castillo Award for Political Theater** in 2002, and a **San Francisco Foundation Community Leadership Award** commending her for developing the Medea Project as "an intersection of art, politics and social rehabilitation." In June 2001, her film collaboration *We Just Telling Stories*, a film profiling Ms. Jones and her work with the Medea Project in the San Francisco County jails, won Best Documentary at the San Francisco Black Film Festival. This award paralleled the 2001 release of a book on Ms. Jones' work entitled *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and the Theater for Incarcerated Women* by Rena Fraden, Ph.D. with a forward by Professor Angela Davis.

Ms. Jones published works include *Rhodessa Jones: Theater for a New Millennium*; *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance in the Twentieth Century*, Theater Communications Group, 1999; "Deep In The Night," *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Vol. 19, No. 2/3, Summer 1998 (performance script); and the plays *Big Butt Girls* and *Hard-Headed Women* for the 1996 *Colored Contradictions: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Plays*.

**IDRIS ACKAMOOR** is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, actor, tap dancer, director, producer, and videographer. He is the Founder and Co-Artistic Director of the San Francisco performance company **Cultural Odyssey**. Idris' primary instrument is the alto saxophone. An accomplished tap dancer, Idris' signature performance is his uncanny ability to combine tap dancing with playing his saxophone simultaneously. Beginning in January of 2009 Idris will embark on Cultural Odyssey's **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour** performing his 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, Idris Ackamoor was the assistant director (working with partner and director Rhodessa Jones) for a full-length theater production with female inmates inside the *Johannesburg Correctional Services* (popularly known as "Sun City prison"). This was Mr. Ackamoor's second visit to South Africa hosted by the *Urban Voices Festival*. In 2005 he performed at the world famous Market Theater of Johannesburg.

During 2008 Idris performed **The Love Project** at the *Painted Bride Art Center* in Philadelphia, *Denison University* in Granville, Ohio, the *Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center* at the *University of Maryland*, and the *National Black Theater Festival* in North Carolina. Mr. Ackamoor is the recipient of a 2007 **Center for Cultural Innovation** Award to support his work.

During July and April 2007 Idris conducted performances and residency activities in Trinidad & Tobago at the *University of the West Indies*. In February and 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 and at the *Penumbra Theater* in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1999. He also performed the role of legendary jazz musician **Lester Young** in the Lorraine Hansberry Production of "*The Resurrection of Lady Lester*" by Oyamo. In May 2007 Idris performed at the **San Francisco International Arts Festival** with the "*Underground Jazz Cabaret*" featuring a reunion of his legendary jazz group, "*The Pyramids*". As a tap dancer Idris has performed at the **4th Annual International Tap Dance Human Rhythm Festival** touring to 3 cities in Holland In September 2001. He took his solo simultaneous tap dance and sax act to Japan in the summer of 1996 where he performed six days a week in the Japanese cities of Shimenoseki, Osaka, and Tokyo. Some of the noted artists he has collaborated with include percussionist Don Moye of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, saxophonists Chico Freeman, dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones, writer/poet Ntozake Shange and many others.

Mr. Ackamoor has received many awards for his work including a **GOLDIE Lifetime Achievement Award** presented by the San Francisco Bay Guardian. Most recently he received a **Meet The Composer** and **American Composers Forum** grant for composing new music, and a San Francisco Arts Commission Individual Artists Commission. Idris achieved a musical milestone with the just-released two-CD retrospective of his recorded output entitled, **Music of Idris Ackamoor 1971-2004** 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*". During 2009 three albums by *The Pyramids* will be re-released as CDs on the Locust Music Label.

**PEARL CLEAGE** is an Atlanta-based writer who works in a variety of forms. 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 latest 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*. She is also the author of "We Speak Your Names: A Celebration," a poem commissioned by Oprah Winfrey for her 2005 Legends Weekend, written in collaboration with Zaron W. Burnett, Jr. She is also a performance artist and has performed throughout the country in collaboration with her husband, Zaron Burnett, in the *Live at Club Zebra!* series. Cleage and Burnett are currently collaborating with San Francisco-based performance artists

Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones on *Other Stories: The Love Project*. 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. He is currently at work on a screen adaptation of *The Carthaginian Honor Society* and is collaborating with his wife, Pearl Cleage, and San Francisco-based performance artists Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones on *Other Stories: The Love Project*. He serves as producing director of Just Us Theater Company and Georgia Theatre Network.

**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. For the past decade Ms. Scott has been an adjunct professor at Golden Gate University School of Law where she teaches a presentation skills course, "Courtroom as Theater," to law students.

**STEPHANIE JOHNSON** (lighting design) is a professional lighting designer working both nationally and internationally in theater and film. She has designed lights for Dimensions Dance Theater, Anne Bluethenthal & Dancers, Afro Solo and many others. She has a BFA from Emerson College in Boston, MA; an MA in interdisciplinary studies from San Francisco State University; and an MFA from The University of California, Berkeley. She has been the recipient of grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, New Langton Arts and Money for Women Fund, as well as commissions from the Richmond Art Center, City of Oakland:

Public Arts Division and Arts Festival of Atlanta. Ms. Johnson has exhibited at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, Berkeley Art Center, San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, Santa Cruz Art League, I.D.E.A. Artspace in Sacramento, CA and Bayview Opera House, among other galleries. She has collaborated with Cultural Odyssey for over twenty years.

**RENE WALKER** (costume design) has worked extensively as a costume designer with some of San Francisco's theater favorites: Magic Theater, Brava! and Word for Word. Her most recent credits include *The Best of Playground 10*, Traveling Jewish Theater's *Family Alchemy* and Chabot College's *Merchant of Venice*. As an original member of the Medea team, she is honored to work on a project that gives hope and inspiration to the women involved, along with everyone who comes in contact with the performance. It is a great pleasure for her to continue working with the talented artists on Cultural Odyssey's production, *My Life in the Concrete Jungle*.

**LAURA HAZLETT** (costume design) is pleased to again be working with Rhodessa Jones, having created THE Red Dress for "Hot Flashes". Ms. Hazlett has been designing costumes in the San Francisco Bay Area for over 25 years. She has had the pleasure of working with Bobby McFerrin, Anne Galjour, Marin Theatre Company, Berkeley REP, and innumerable other theatre companies, with over 120 productions to date. Her work has also graced the corporate stages of Microsoft, ATT&T, Levi Strauss & Co., Sun Systems, & Cisco. In her spare time she photo surrealism on black velvet.

## **ABOUT CULTURAL ODYSSEY**

Cultural Odyssey's mission is to support the artistic work and vision of Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor (Jones & Ackamoor), as well as an ancillary group of emerging, community, and established performing artists. To implement its mission, Cultural Odyssey locally premieres the original productions of Jones & Ackamoor, presents the Cultural Odyssey Performance Series, offers free and low cost technical assistance/consultancies to artists, students and small arts organizations, and conducts residencies, lectures and national and international tours. As well, it operates a community-based program entitled, The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women that serves female inmates, ex-inmates, and female community participants. In addition, the company conducts jazz programming spearheaded by the Idris Ackamoor Ensemble targeting youth and the general public.

## **CULTURAL ODYSSEY STAFF**

Founder/Executive Director: Idris Ackamoor

Co-Artistic Director and Medea Project Founder: Rhodessa Jones

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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We also wish to acknowledge the support of the MAP Fund of the Rockefeller Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Grants for the Arts, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, San Francisco Art Commission, California Arts Council, Grousbeck Family Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation, National Black Theatre Festival and National Performance Network, and the Lia Fund.