

THE LOVE PROJECT 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. In October 2009 Rhodessa continued her ongoing residency at *Naturena Women's Prison* in Johannesburg conducting workshops and directing full-length theater productions with female inmates hosted by the *Urban Voices Festival* and the *Johannesburg Correctional Services*. In September 2009 Ms. Jones traveled to Moscow, Russia as a part of the *U.S. Department of State Speaker's Program* where she conducted residency activities, lectured, and performed her award winning show, *Big Butt Girls, Hard - Headed Women* at Praktika Theater in Downtown Moscow. During January & February 2009 she performed her latest performance piece, *The Love Project*, at La Mama Theater in New York City, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center in Tampa, Florida, 7 Stages Theater in Atlanta and many other locations including residency activities and performances in the Caribbean countries of Trinidad & Tobago and St. Lucia. Ms. Jones is currently collaborating with the *Women's HIV Program* at San Francisco Medical Center conducting workshops and residency activities that will lead to a world premier performance in 2010. In December of 2007 Rhodessa received a *United States Artist (USA) Fellowship* to support her work. Ms. Jones was honored with an *Honorary Doctorate* from California College of the Arts in 2004. Her 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*, in *Journal of Medical Humanities*; Volume 19, Numbers 2/3, Summer 1998; *Big Butt Girls, Hard-Headed Women*, in *Colored Contradictions* 1996.

IDRIS ACKAMoor is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, actor, tap dancer, and director. He is the Founder 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. Idris returned from his third trip to South Africa in October 2009 continuing an ongoing residency at *Naturena Women's Prison* in Johannesburg conducting workshops and co-directing full-length theater productions with female inmates hosted by the *Urban Voices Festival* and the *Johannesburg Correctional Services*. In September 2009 Mr. Ackamoor traveled to Moscow, Russia as a part of the *U.S. Department of State Speaker's Program* where he conducted residency activities, lectures, and performances. During January & February 2009 he performed his latest performance piece, *The Love Project*, at La Mama Theater in New York City, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center in Tampa, Florida, 7 Stages Theater in Atlanta and many other locations including residency activities and performances in the Caribbean countries of Trinidad & Tobago and St. Lucia. Idris has received many awards for his work with Cultural Odyssey. Several of the many that he is particularly proud of include a *GOLDIE Lifetime Achievement Award* presented by the San Francisco Bay Guardian and a *Meet The Composer and American Composers Forum* grant. A musical milestone was achieved for Idris in 2007 when a 2 CD retrospective entitled, *Music of Idris Ackamoor 1971-2004* was released on EM Records of Japan. In 2004 Idris released his

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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* were re-released on vinyl by Ikef Records that will be followed by a CD box set in 2010.

PEARL CLEAGE (Writer) 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. Her newest novel, *Seen It All and Done the Rest*, was published by Ballantine/One World in April 2008.

ZARON W. BURNETT, JR. (Writer) 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*. 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

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Golden Gate University School of Law where she teaches a presentation skills course, Courtroom as Theater, to law students.

GINA DAWSON (Guest Dancer)

STEPHANIE JOHNSON (Lighting Designer / Scenographer) is a California based lighting designer who has worked in New York, Europe and India. In the Bay Area, she has designed for Dimensions Dance Theater, Anne Bluethenthal & Dancers, and Afro Solo among many other groups. She has happily collaborated with Cultural Odyssey for over twenty years. As a visual artist, she has been the recipient of grants and commissions from The National Endowment for the Arts, New Langton Arts and Money for Women Fund, the Richmond Art Center, City of Oakland: Public Arts Division, and The Arts Festival of Atlanta. Locally, her work has been exhibited at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, The DeYoung Museum, Berkeley Art Center, The Museum of The African Diaspora, and The Sargent Johnson Gallery. Ms. Johnson is the chair of the Visual and Public Art Department at California State University, Monterey Bay, and a Civic Arts Commissioner for the City of Berkeley. She is currently a doctoral candidate in public policy at The Union Institute & University.

PAM PENISTON (Set Design) –

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. She has collaborated with Cultural Odyssey for over twenty years. It is a great pleasure for her to continue working with the talented artists on Cultural Odyssey's production, The Love Project.

LAURA HAZLETT (Costume Design) is pleased to again be working with Rhodessa Jones. 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, AT&T, Levi Strauss & Co., Sun Systems, & Cisco. In her spare time she photo surrealism on black velvet.