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TAM Explores Race, Abolition, and the Power of Theater in *Red Velvet*

Monmouth, Maine – Theater at Monmouth’s 2017 *Power, Passion, and Privilege* Season continues with *Red Velvet* by Lolita Chakrabarti. The production runs Thursday, July 28 through August 17, 2017. This production marks the Maine premiere of award-winning British playwright, Lolita Chakrabarti’s true-life story of Ira Aldridge, an African-American actor and the first black man to appear as Othello on the London stage. This uncompromising tale of a pioneering artist from the 1800’s is fascinating, heartbreaking, and immensely relevant today.

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 1833. Edmund Kean, the greatest actor of his time, collapses on stage while playing Othello. A young black American actor is asked to take over the role. But as the public riot in the streets over the abolition of slavery, how will the cast, critics, and audience react to the revolution taking place on stage?

The play is a fictional account of the events that took place in 1833 when Covent Garden theater manager, Pierre Laporte, selected Ira Aldridge, to assay the title role in place of Edmund Kean. The opportunity to play Othello was to be his big break. Aldridge, driven from America by discrimination and by the 1830s an established actor in England’s provincial theaters, would go on to great success across Europe but would never again tread the boards at Covent Gardens. Producing Artistic Director, Dawn McAndrews, selected the play for the 2018 season, “because the 185 year old casting controversy continues to be an issue particularly in Hollywood today.”

Chakrabarti was first inspired to write about the life of Ira Aldridge in 1998. Drawn in by Aldridge’s remarkable story, Chakrabarti researched, wrote, and rewrote *Red Velvet* over the course of nearly fifteen years. The play premiered in 2012 at London’s Tricycle Theatre. Chakrabarti won Best New Playwright from both the Critic’s Circle and the London Evening Standard. The play had its American debut in New York City at St. Ann’s Warehouse in 2014, and appeared on the West End in 2016 as part of the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company’s inaugural season at the Garrick Theatre.

“Ms. Chakrabarti has imagined a debate within Laporte’s theater about what acting was, is and could be. In this version, Aldridge becomes the brave new incarnation of a forceful, natural style in a theater governed by artifice.” –Ben Brantley from the *NY Times* Review, 2014

Director Jennifer Nelson brings the play to life with a focus on our collective history, “The story of Ira Aldridge offers us a curiously enlightening perspective on one chapter of American history.” She goes on to say, “*Red Velvet* gives us an imagined look into how he worked, what challenges he might have faced, and why he is still revered among European theatricals.”

Red Velvet features Emery Lawrence as Casimir/ Henry Forester; Meghan Leathers as Halina/ Betty/ Margaret Aldridge; James Noel Hoban as Terrence/ Bernard Warde; Ryan Vincent Anderson as Ira Aldridge; Maggie Thompson as Connie; Travis Johnson as Charles Kean; Kelsey Burke as Ellen Tree; and Brad Wilson as Pierre Laporte. Set Design by Daniel Bilodeau, Costume Design by Michelle Handley, Lights by Matthew Adelson, Sound by Rew Tippin.

Performance Calendar: PREVIEW 7/27 at 7:30 p.m.; OPENING 7/28 at 7:30 p.m.; additional performance dates 8/1, 8/17 at 7:30 p.m., 7/29, 8/2, 8/6 at 1:00 p.m., and 8/13 at 7:00 p.m. with a Post-Show discussion.

In addition to a Post-Show Discussion, there will be a Classics in Context Discussion on the topic *Feminist Appropriations of Othello: Chakrabarti's Red Velvet and the history of Shakespeare's Othello in Performance* July 28th at 5:30pm, free with a ticket to the evening performance after the discussion. Panelists for the discussion include Professor Emerita at Bates College Cristina Malcolmson, as well as Jennifer Nelson, Director of *Red Velvet*.

Tickets, Subscriptions, and Ways to Save:

TAM Season Passes offer up to 25% off the single ticket price and exclusive benefits such as priority seating and free ticket exchanges. Gold, Flex, General, or Senior Passes are available for purchase, so whether you want a ticket for each show or five tickets to one show, there's an option for you. Single tickets for the Summer Repertory and Fall Show are \$32 for adults, \$28 for senior citizens, and \$20 for students (18 and under). Groups of 10 or more can enjoy TAM shows at up to a 22% discount. Groups may also schedule pre or post show discussions with tours of historic Cumston Hall. Contact the Box Office for more information and to book your group's event.

Opening Nights are Educator Nights: Educators receive 20% off the single ticket price with a photo ID at the Box Office.

Under 30 Rush Tickets: For patrons under 30, twenty \$10 Rush Tickets are available at each performance in the season. Sign up by contacting the Box Office, either by emailing boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org or calling 207.933.9999 the morning of the performance. Tickets will be released to the first 20 people on the list ten minutes before curtain.

For calendar and reservations, please contact the TAM Box Office at 207.933.9999 or visit www.theateratmonmouth.org.

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Theater at Monmouth, founded in 1970, was named the Shakespearean Theater of Maine by the State Legislature in 1975. The theatre's mission is to present innovative approaches to Shakespeare and other classic plays through professional productions that enrich the lives of people throughout Maine. Since its founding, TAM has produced expertly crafted, engaging productions in its three-month Summer Repertory Season entertaining audiences from 36 states and through Education Tours annually reaching more than 15,000 students statewide.

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