



**PRESS RELEASE  
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**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS  
THE WORLD PREMIERE OF  
*THE INCREMENTALIST*  
BY CLEAVON SMITH**

**BERKELEY, CA (March 3, 2022)** Aurora Theatre Company continues its 30th season with the **World Premiere** of Cleavon Smith's **THE INCREMENTALIST**, an **Aurora Originate + Generate commission**. Bay Area-based director and Aurora Associate Artistic Director **Dawn Monique Williams** directs **Michael J. Asberry** (*The Bluest Eye, Exit Strategy, Satellites*), **Sam Jackson** (*Father/Daughter, The Bluest Eye, Exit Strategy, Splendour*), **Cathleen Riddley** (*The Bluest Eye*), and **Anna-Marie Sharpe** in this intellectually thrilling play about extrajudicial police violence, radical reform, and the fight for change.

**THE INCREMENTALIST** will be presented in-person on Aurora's mainstage from **April 15 - May 22 (Opens: April 21)**.

Aurora will also offer a week of streaming **THE INCREMENTALIST** performances for audiences to enjoy in their homes. Streaming performances will run concurrently with in-person performances, from **May 17-22**.

*Award-winning playwright Cleavon Smith (THE FLATS, an Aurora audio drama) was named Aurora's Originate+Generate 2021 commissioned artist. In Smith's world premiere play, Thomas, a highly regarded public intellectual and author, is brought to the University of California at Berkeley campus to help facilitate conversations concerning*

*extrajudicial police violence. A member of the UCB Black Student Union was violently beaten by an officer while peacefully protesting and the students find themselves rejecting Thomas' middle-ground, #NotAllCops rhetoric. Miriam and Raz, leaders of the BSU, want immediate action, radical reform, and are sick-and-tired of having to rely on a corrupt system for justice. Nina, the Vice Chancellor of the University, is caught between the demands of the students to shut Thomas down, and loyalty to Thomas, her dearest friend from graduate school.*

Cleavon Smith is a "Rock star local playwright." said the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Said Artistic Director Josh Costello: "As we prepare to once again reopen our doors -- hopefully for good this time -- I'm reflecting on the importance of community. The great joy of theatre is in a community coming together to share in the telling of a story, and the great power of theatre is in a story that speaks to the present moment. That's the idea behind Aurora's Originate+Generate program: to assist playwrights in telling the stories our community needs to experience together. After seeing some of Cleavon's work at other theaters, we brought him early in the pandemic to co-author our audio drama, *The Flats*. That experience confirmed my impression that Cleavon is an important voice in the Bay Area theatre community, and that he has powerful stories to tell. He was a natural choice for the first playwright I had the honor of commissioning as Artistic Director.

"With *The Incrementalist*, Cleavon sets a UC Berkeley administrator the task of responding to an incident of police violence against a student protestor. Through that window, Cleavon asks hard questions about the value of compromise and our culture's need for radical change. His play moves the conversation forward, offering deep insight into issues that continue to confront our community. This is exactly what Originate+Generate at Aurora is all about."

**Cleavon Smith's** (he/him) first Aurora commission was the Fall 2020 premiere of *The Flats*, which he co-wrote with Lauren Gunderson and Jonathan Spector. He was then named Aurora's 2021 Originate + Generate New Works Initiative commissioned artist. *The Incrementalist* is the play he began and developed through that commission. As Playwright in Residence at Berkeley's TheatreFIRST (T1) for three years, he wrote and produced six new works. T1's production of his critically acclaimed full-length work, *The Last Sermon of Sister Imani* was nominated for a 2018 Theatre Bay Area (TBA) Best Production award, and his short play *Just One Day* was included in T1's TBA "Best Anthology" award-winning production *Between Us*. Additionally, Cleavon has had a multitude of short plays performed by theaters in Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose. Cleavon lives in Oakland and teaches English at Berkeley City College. Upcoming work includes a podcast series about the relationship between spiritual leader Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as an immersive theater

project based on Bop City, a restaurant and jazz club located in San Francisco's Fillmore District and decimated by the city's failed redevelopment program of the 1950s.

**Dawn Monique Williams** (she/her), Associate Artistic Director, joined the Aurora team in August 2019. A native of Oakland, CA, Dawn was previously the Artistic Associate at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival where she directed *Merry Wives of Windsor* in 2017. Her recent directing credits include Aurora's *Bull in a China Shop*, *Earthrise* at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, *TiJean and His Brothers*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *The Secretaries* (Willamette Week's Top 10 Portland Theatre Productions of 2018), *Romeo & Juliet*, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, and Lynn Nottage's *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. She's directed a range of plays including the English language premiere of Gracia Morales' *NN12*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *In the Blood*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Children of Eden*, *The 25th Annual Spelling Bee*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Burial at Thebes*, *Medea*, *Antigone Project*, and *La Ronde*; international directing credits include Edinburgh Festival Fringe productions of *Scapin the Cheat*, *Anna Bella Eema*, and *The Tempest*. Dawn was a 2016 Princess Grace Theatre Fellowship recipient, was awarded a TCG Leadership U residency grant, funded by the Mellon Foundation, and was a former Killian Directing Fellow at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She is an alum of the Drama League Directors Project and holds an MA in Dramatic Literature and an MFA in Directing. Dawn is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

“Being in partnership and conversation with Cleavon from the inception has been such a treasure,” said Williams. “Watching him find his story has already offered such full satisfaction that transitioning into rehearsal with actors feels like striking gold.”

Williams has assembled an all-star cast for **THE INCREMENTALIST**.

**Michael J. Asberry** (he/him) returns to Aurora, where he previously appeared in *The Bluest Eye*, *Exit Strategy*, and *Satellites*. Asberry arrives on the heels of his most recent performance in *Fences* with the Sacramento Theatre Company. Regional Theatre credits include Orlando Shakes (Orlando, FL); San Francisco Shakespeare Festival; San Francisco Mime Troupe; American Conservatory Theatre; Center REpertory Company; Capital Stage; Artists Repertory Theatre (Portland, OR); Lorraine Hansberry Theatre; TheatreWorks; and the 6th Street Playhouse. Film appearances include *San Andreas*; *FreeByrd*; and *Mr. Incredible and Pals*. Television credits: *Chance*; *Trauma*; and *Nash Bridges*. Asberry has voiceover spots with Pixar Animation, Pine Sol, and Clorox, and appears as characters in the video games *Watchdogs 2* and *Battlefield Vietnam*.

**Sam Jackson** (she/her) returns to Aurora where she recently appeared in *Father/Daughter*. Other Aurora credits include Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Exit Strategy*, and *Splendour*). She is a San Francisco-based actor, vocalist, and teaching artist. Her recent acting credits include:

*Vinegar Tom* (Shotgun Players), *Kings* (Shotgun Players), and *Kill The Debbie Downers! Kill Them! Kill Them! Kill Them Off!!* (Shotgun Players). Jackson is also a company member of Nice Tan Comedy, a queer WOC-led sketch comedy group based in San Francisco.

**Cathleen Riddley** (she/her) returns to Aurora where was last seen in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (2021). Bay Area credits include A.C.T., Marin Shakespeare, Shotgun Players, SF Playhouse, TheatreWorks, Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, and Berkeley Playhouse. Film and television work include the feature film *La Mission*, the short film *Two Plus One*, and the television series *Trauma*. Riddley is an Associate Artist with Alter Theatre, and is an alumna of The Juilliard School Drama Division, a certified ASL Interpreter, and has an MA from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Anna Marie Sharpe** (she/her) is an actor and teaching artist in the Bay Area. In the past year, she has cultivated her craft in the filmed production of *[hieroglyph]* at SF Playhouse, and made her film debut in 2021 in the award winning short film, "The Best Time," as Sydney. She has appeared in several UC Berkeley main stage shows such as, *Unstable Connection: A Devised Performance*, and *House of the Spirits*, and served as an understudy for *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* at Berkeley Repertory Theater. She received her BA from UC Berkeley where she double majored in Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies and was the recipient of the 2021 Departmental Citation Award.

The creative team for **THE INCREMENTALIST** includes **Emma Buechner**--Assistant Stage Manager; **Richard Olmstead**--Scenic; **Stephanie Johnson**--Lighting; **Jasmine Milan Williams**--Costume; **Elton Bradman**--Sound; **Dawn Monique Williams**--Video

### **CALENDAR EDITORS**

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## **DATES**

**Previews:** Friday 4/15 and Saturday 4/16 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, 4/17 at 2 p.m.

Tuesday, 4/19 and Wednesday, 4/20 at 7 p.m.

**Open: Thursday, April 21**

**Close:** Sunday, May 22

**Shows: IN-PERSON PERFORMANCES (April 15 - May 22):**

Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.;  
Sunday at 2 p.m..

**STREAMING PERFORMANCES (May 17-22):**

Each performance is presented as a filmed production for audiences to enjoy in their homes.

Each performance is available for 36 hours, from 12 p.m. on the performance date to midnight the following day.

**TICKETS** For single tickets (\$20-\$78) or subscriptions (\$200-\$385), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit [www.auroratheatre.org](http://www.auroratheatre.org).

**PHOTOS** [bit.ly/INCREMENTALISTPress](http://bit.ly/INCREMENTALISTPress)

**PRESS** **Please do not reply to this media advisory for review tickets. Press review invites will be sent to selected media.**

## **ABOUT AURORA THEATRE COMPANY**

As the storyteller for our community, Aurora Theatre Company inspires new audiences and longtime theatre lovers alike with the visceral power of live theatre. Our venues, the most intimate professional stages in the Bay Area, highlight great acting, nuanced language, and an immediacy that makes for exhilarating theatre. By telling profoundly relevant stories, we're building a new culture of theatregoing in the Bay Area and contributing to a revitalization of theatre nationwide, challenging all of us to think deeper, laugh louder, and engage more purposefully and profoundly with our neighbors and our world. Aurora has an operating budget of \$2.2 million.

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges Executive Season Sponsors: Craig & Kathy Moody. Sponsors: Amy & Tom Worth. Associate Sponsors: Rosalind & Sung-Hou Kim, Ellen & Barry Levine.

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the following foundations and government agencies for their support: Alameda County Arts Commission ARTSFUND, City of Berkeley Civic Arts Program, Bernard Osher Foundation, California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant, Edgerton Foundation, Fleishhacker Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, the Shuttered Venues Operator Grant/American Rescue Plan, the Tournesol Project, and the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation.

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