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**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS
TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*
ADAPTED BY LYDIA R. DIAMOND**

BERKELEY, CA (January 7, 2021) Aurora Theatre Company continues its 29th season with **Toni Morrison's THE BLUEST EYE**, adapted by **Lydia R. Diamond**. **Associate Artistic Director Dawn Monique Williams** (*Bull In A China Shop*) directs this poignant drama about Black girlhood, the poisonous effects of racism, and the heartbreak of shame.

THE BLUEST EYE will be presented as an audio drama, consistent with Aurora's reimagined digital 2020/2021 season due to the COVID-19 health crisis. **The audio drama opens April 9th**, and will be available through Aurora's new membership program, and also for individual release.

"When Dawn introduced me to Lydia Diamond's adaptation of **THE BLUEST EYE**, I was blown away," said Artistic Director Josh Costello. "Diamond has translated Toni Morrison's story with such a sharp ear for making a scene spring off the page. And Morrison's story, exposing the ways racism can be internalized, feels as important now as when the novel was first published. We can't present **THE BLUEST EYE** on our stage during the pandemic, but I am so pleased that Aurora has received special permission to present Lydia Diamond's adaptation as an audio drama. Dawn is assembling a remarkable cast of local actors—it's going to be a captivating production."

THE BLUEST EYE runs April 9 - May 21 (**Opens: April 9**).

Pulitzer Prize Winner Toni Morrison's debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (which turned fifty in 2020), comes to Aurora in a stunning adaptation by playwright Lydia R. Diamond (*Stick Fly*, *Smart People*). Pecola Breedlove is obsessed with Shirley Temple and a desire to have blue eyes. Claudia, another young girl and one of Pecola's only friends, guides us through this hauntingly lyrical memory play. Diamond expertly translates to the stage the emotional depths of Black girlhood, the poisonous effects of racism, and the heartbreak of shame in Morrison's work. Celebrated for a "profound and unrelenting vision," (*The New Yorker*) Morrison sets **THE BLUEST EYE** in her hometown of Lorain, Ohio, and places three young Black girls—Claudia, Pecola, and Frieda—center stage as they strive to make sense of love, sisterhood, abuse, and hate.

The Minneapolis Star-Tribune called **THE BLUEST EYE** a "poignant and poetic drama."

The cast features **Michael J. Asberry** (*Exit Strategy*, *Satellites*), **Sam Jackson** (*Exit Strategy*), **Cathleen Riddley**, **Jeune Simon**, and **Jasmine Milan Williams** (*Bull In A China Shop*).

Toni Morrison was a Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, essayist, book editor, and college professor. Morrison's writing focuses on the lives of African Americans, and are often set in what was once the racially segregated South. Among her best-known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *A Mercy*. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees, and was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012 by President Barack Obama.

Lydia R. Diamond is a nationally recognized award-winning playwright and assistant professor at Boston University. Her adaptation of Toni Morrison's **THE BLUEST EYE** won the Black Arts Alliance Image Award for Best New Play. Her other plays include *The Gift Horse*, *Stick Fly*, *The Inside*, and *Voyeurs de Venus*. Diamond holds a bachelor's degree in theater and performance studies from Northwestern University. She taught playwriting at Columbia College Chicago, DePaul University, Loyola University and currently at Boston University. Diamond is a board member of StageSource, Boston's resource for theatre artists.

Dawn Monique Williams joined the Aurora team as Associate Artistic Director in August 2019. A native of Oakland, California, Williams 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*, Lauren Gunderson's *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* (TheatreSquared), *Letters to Kamala* (American Stage Company), *Earthrise* (Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts), *Moon Man Walk*, *Tijeau and His Brothers*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (American Conservatory Theatre, MFA program), an audio version of Lynn Nottage's *Las*

Meninas, *The Secretaries* (Profile Theatre; Willamette Week's Top 10 Portland Theatre Productions of 2018), *Romeo and Juliet* (Chautauqua Theatre), August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (Le Petit and UNCO), Lynn Nottage's *By The Way, Meet Stark* (Douglas Morrisson and UNCO), and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Town Hall). 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 Putnam County 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*. Williams 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 SDC, the theatrical union of professional directors and choreographers.

Said Williams: "I was so excited, when we announced our 2020/21 season, to direct Lydia Diamond's adaptation of Toni Morrison's **THE BLUEST EYE**. It is my favorite adaptation of a novel for stage, and while heartbreaking it is also triumphant. With the shutdown due to COVID-19 and as the world rapidly changed before our eyes, I was no longer sure if **BLUEST** was the story my heart wanted to tell. But as the summer months dragged on and the violence against Black femmes continued to climb I knew that the complex story of Black girlhood was vital.

"The stories of Black women and girls in this country are regrettably often those of violence, but we also have stories of love, sisterhood, integrity and grace. And as 2020 marked the 50th anniversary of Morrison's debut novel I am honored to be an ambassador for the continued life of this story. As it began its life as a novel, **BLUEST** lends itself to the audio play format. Diamond has remained remarkably faithful to the language of the novel and penned a version that is a gift to actors to breathe life into."

Williams has assembled a talented cast for **THE BLUEST EYE**.

Michael J. Asberry (Daddy/Soaphead/Cholly) returns to Aurora where he was last seen in 2019's *Exit Strategy* and 2008's *Satellites*. He most recently appeared in *Las Meninas* with Profile Theater. He's also performed with the San Francisco Mime Troupe; Best of Playground Festival - Zoomfest; Sacramento Theatre Company; Capital Stage Company; San Francisco Shakespeare Festival; Pacific Conservatory Theatre; TheatreWorks; Shotgun Players; and the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. Film and television credits include *San Andreas* (Warner Brothers);

Chance (Hulu); *Trauma* (NBC); *Nash Bridges* (CBS) and voiceover for Pixar Animation, Clorox, Pine Sol, and the video game, *Watchdogs 2*.

Sam Jackson (Frieda/Darlene) is a San Francisco based actor, vocalist and teaching artist. She was last seen at Aurora in *Exit Strategy* (2019). Her most recent acting credits include: Shotgun Player's *Vinegar Tom, Kings*, and *Kill The Debbie Downers! Kill Them! Kill Them! Kill Them Off!!*. She is also a company member of Nice Tan Comedy, a queer WOC led sketch comedy group based in San Francisco.

Cathleen Riddley (Mama/Mrs. Breedlove) makes her Aurora debut. 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.

Jasmine Milan Williams (Pecola/Maureen) returns to Aurora after appearing in *Bull In A China Shop* (2019). Her recent work includes: *Utopia* (Cutting Ball Theater), *The New Normal* (By Ashley Smiley), *Inked Baby by Christina Anderson* (Crowded Fire Theater Company) and, *The Last Sermon of Sister Imani* (Theater First). Companies she has shared space with include: Campo Santo (Family/Company Member), Theater First, Those Woman Production Company, African American Shakespeare Company, and New Conservatory Theater Company.

Jeunée Simon (Claudia/White Girl) makes her Aurora debut. She was recently featured in Aurora's virtual reading of Kait Kerrigan's *Father/Daughter*. She is an actor and director in the Bay Area. Recent credits include: *La Ronde* (Cutting Ball Theater), *Men On Boats u/s* (American Conservatory Theater), *HeLa* (TheatreFIRST), and *When My Mama Was A Hittite* (Magic Theatre). Simon is a proud recipient of the 2017 RHE Artistic Fellowship and a 2019 Directing Apprentice with PlayGround.

The creative team for **THE BLUEST EYE** includes **Eliza Mascoll**--Stage Manager; **Everett Elton Bradman**--Music and Sound Design; **Angela Don**---Audio Engineer.

CALENDAR EDITORS

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- **Prorated Aurora single (\$75) and dual (\$125) memberships** are available for purchase at auroratheatre.org/memberships.

Memberships include but are not limited to virtual tickets to **THE BLUEST EYE**; on-demand access to **THE FLATS** and other select programming; access to monthly performances; a monthly book club exploring the works of playwright August Wilson; interactive virtual salons with leading Bay Area actors, directors, playwrights, and designers; and access to readings of new plays in development.

- **Single tickets to THE BLUEST EYE** are **\$25** and will be available for purchase starting Monday, January 11th at www.auroratheatre.org/thebluesteye.
- For more information, or for assistance with memberships, the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit www.auroratheatre.org for more information.

PHOTOS **XXXXXXXXXX**

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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. It

has an operating budget of \$2.2 million.

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges Season Sponsors: Ed & Liliane Schneider, Ellen & Barry Levine. Premiere Sponsors: Gertrude E. Allen, Elizabeth Burwell. Sponsors: Thomas W. Edwards & Rebecca Parlette-Edwards, Rosalind & Sung-Hou Kim, Gary & Trudy Moore, The Wood Foundation: David Wood & Kathleen Garrison, Amy & Tom Worth. Associate Sponsors: George & Candy Hisert, Muffy Thorne.

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