



**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY
CONTINUES 25TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON WITH
“SAFE HOUSE”
West Coast Premiere
November 4 - December 4, 2016**

BERKELEY, Calif. (October 4, 2016) – **Aurora Theatre Company** presents the West Coast Premiere of **Keith Josef Adkins’ SAFE HOUSE**. African-American Shakespeare Company Artistic Director **L. Peter Callender**, who appeared in the Aurora Theatre Company productions of “*Master Harold...and the boys*,” *Breakfast With Mugabe*, *The Soldier’s Tale*, and *Permanent Collection*, makes his Aurora directing debut with **SAFE HOUSE**, featuring **Lance Gardner, David Everett Moore, Dawn L. Troupe, Cassidy Brown, Jamella Lagara Cross, and Dezi Solèy**. **SAFE HOUSE** plays **November 4 through December 4** at the Aurora Theatre in Berkeley. For tickets and information the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **auroratheatre.org**.

What is family? Who deserves our loyalty and protection? What does it really mean to be free? Set in Northern Kentucky in 1843, nearly two decades before the start of the Civil War, **SAFE HOUSE** explores the lives of one free family of color and the tensions that arise when two brothers have conflicting dreams about how to secure their futures. The Pedigrews are free people of color, a unique position in their antebellum community. While one brother strives to open a shoe business and create a successful life for his family, the other risks everything to help slaves escape. When a fugitive comes knocking, the brothers’ freedom, loyalty, and dreams are put to the test. Inspired by Adkins’ ancestors, this riveting, heart-wrenching story of love and survival rejects the notion of a world painted black and white.

Keith Josef Adkins is a playwright and screenwriter. His works for the stage include *The People Before The Park*, about the 19th century black community Seneca Village that was destroyed to create Central Park; *Pitbulls*, which received its World Premiere Off-Broadway at Rattlestick Theater; **SAFE HOUSE**, which received its World Premiere in 2014 at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park with a subsequent production at Repertory Theatre of St. Louis; *The Last Saint on Sugar Hill* which received its New York City premiere in 2013 at National Black Theater. Other plays include *The Dangerous*, *Sugar and Needles*, and *The Final Daze*, among others. Adkins is the recipient of the 2015 Helen Merrill Mid-Career Playwright Award, and Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park recently commissioned him to write a new play

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for their 2016-17 Season. As a screenwriter, Adkins worked as a writer on the CW hit comedy *Girlfriends* and is currently developing a TV pilot for Kingsize Productions/CBS. Additionally, Adkins has blogged on culture and the arts for TheRoot.com and has made radio appearances on NPR, and BBC Worldservice Radio, among others.

"Theater is one of the few public forums in which people can engage and have conversation and feel comfortable and feel protected," said Adkins. "I am a storyteller committed to authenticity, truth and complexity. I am also incredibly interested and invested in the stories, voices and complexities of people whose experiences have been historically marginalized, silenced, subjugated yet courageously sustained. As cliché as it may sound, I believe every voice deserves bearing witness to life and my mission is to bear witness to the voices that speak to me personally, politically and, without question, passionately."

In regards to **SAFE HOUSE** Adkins notes, "It wasn't about writing a play, it was discovering my genealogy. As a writer, you fill in the blanks around the facts. There were so many records available because free people of color were always asked to document and testify and prove themselves in one way or another. I thought this was a rare world I didn't even know I was a part of, and I wanted to write about these people and explore my own legacy. I see a lot of similarities between characters in my play and my own family, so it was just meant to be."

L. Peter Callender helms **SAFE HOUSE**. Callender has worked professionally as an actor, writer, and director for over 30 years. He received his formal training in theater at the Juilliard School in New York City, and has appeared on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in regional theaters across the United States and abroad. Directing credits include productions at African-American Shakespeare Company, where he is Artistic Director, Word for Word, Solano College, and the San Francisco School for the Arts. As an actor, Callender is an Associate Artist at California Shakespeare Theater, and has regional credits including productions at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, American Conservatory Theater, Lorraine Hansberry Theater, Magic Theater, Marin Theatre Company, Thick Description, Cincinnati Playhouse, Arena Stage, and New York Shakespeare Festival, among others. For Aurora Theatre Company, Callender appeared in "*Master Harold...and the boys*," *Breakfast with Mugabe*, *The Soldier's Tale*, *Permanent Collection*, and *Saint Joan*.

Aurora Theatre Company has assembled a talented ensemble for **SAFE HOUSE**. **Lance Gardner** makes his Aurora stage debut as Frank. Credits include productions at California Shakespeare Theater (*Othello*, *Fences*), TheatreWorks (*Superior Donuts*), Berkeley Repertory Theatre (*Yellowjackets*), Marin Theatre

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Company, Encore Theatre, and Just Theatre, among others. Also making his Aurora stage debut is **David Everett Moore** as Addison. Credits include productions at California Shakespeare Theater, African-American Shakespeare Company, Marin Theatre Company, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, Word for Word, Just Theater, and AlterTheater, among others.

Dawn L. Troupe makes her Aurora debut as Dorcas in **SAFE HOUSE**. Credits include productions at TheatreWorks, California Shakespeare Theater, Marin Theatre Company, Shotgun Players, Broadway by the Bay, and Willows Theatre Company, among others. **Cassidy Brown** returns to Aurora as Bracken; he previously appeared in the company’s hit production of *Bosoms and Neglect*. Additional credits include roles at Marin Shakespeare Company, CenterRepertory Company, San Francisco Playhouse, TheatreWorks, and Shotgun Players, among others.

Rounding out the cast are **Jamella Lagara Cross**, and **Dezi Solèy**. Cross makes her Aurora debut as Roxie in **SAFE HOUSE**. Credits include productions at Magic Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, Pianofight, and Bay Area Children’s Theatre, among others. Solèy makes her Aurora debut as Clarissa; previous credits include productions at Left Coast Theater and Brick-a-Brack Theater.

Following **SAFE HOUSE**, Aurora Theatre Company continues its 25th anniversary season with Tom Stoppard’s **THE REAL THING** in January, directed by Timothy Near. Jon Tracy helms the Bay Area Premiere of Sarah Greenman’s **LENI** in March. Steve Waters’ **TEMPLE** makes its U.S. Premiere at Aurora in April, directed by Artistic Director Tom Ross. Abi Morgan’s **SPLENDOR**, directed by Barbara Damashek, closes the season in June.

Voted Best Theater Company in 2012 by *SF Weekly*, Aurora Theatre Company continues to offer challenging, literate, intelligent stage works to the Bay Area, each year increasing its reputation for top-notch theater. Located in the heart of the Downtown Berkeley Arts District, Aurora Theatre Company, declared “one of the best regional theaters around” by *7x7* magazine, has been called “one of the most important regional theaters in the area” and “a must-see midsize company” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, while *The Wall Street Journal* has “nothing but praise for the Aurora.” The *Contra Costa Times* stated “perfection is probably an unattainable ideal in a medium as fluid as live performance, but the Aurora Theatre comes luminously close,” while the *San Jose Mercury News* affirmed Aurora Theatre Company is “arguably the finest small theater in the Bay Area,” and the *Oakland Tribune* stated “it’s all about choices, and if you value good theater, choose the Aurora.”

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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DATES: Previews: November 4, 5, 9 at 8pm; November 6 at 2pm; November 8 at 7pm
Opens: November 10, 2016
Closes: December 4

SHOWS: Tuesday at 7pm; Wednesday through Saturday at 8pm; Sunday at 2pm and 7pm

WHERE: Aurora Theatre, 2081 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA

TICKETS: For subscriptions and single tickets, the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **auroratheatre.org**. Half-off tickets for Under 35, student, and group discounts available.

PHOTOS: High resolution photos for **SAFE HOUSE** can be found at **auroratheatre.org/index.php?option=com_theatre&view=press_show&id=130**

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges Season Restaurant Sponsor Gecko Gecko and Season Floral Sponsor Darling Flowers for their support.

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