

**BAM HOUSE &  
ACTORS ENSEMBLE OF BERKELEY  
PRESENT**

**A STAGED READING OF A PLAY BY TRACY BAXTER  
DIRECTED BY CAT BROOKS**

**\$15 ADVANCE  
\$20 DOOR**

**MARCH 1-3, 2024**

**FRI & SAT 8PM  
SAT & SUN 3 PM**



**KUDZU  
2012**

“  
“VERY LOCAL,  
VERY TIMELY,  
VERY FUNNY!”

”  
BAY AREA WOMEN'S  
THEATER FESTIVAL

**a  
gentrification  
tale**

**BAM HOUSE, 1540 BROADWAY, OAKLAND  
(STEPS FROM 12TH ST. BART)**



## **About Actors Ensemble of Berkeley**

Actors Ensemble (AE) has been around the block (and just around the corner from you) since 1957, making us the longest-running stage company in Berkeley. Since 1965 we have performed often at Live Oak Theatre in North Berkeley. Recently we have also taken the opportunity to bring the magic of theatre to the John Hinkel Park Amphitheatre, a wonderful outdoor space with a vast legacy of performance.

As Berkeley's only true community theatre company, we depend on our volunteers to bring their energy and creative vision to each play we produce. If you would like to volunteer in our theatre, give us a call or send us an email! We'd love for you to play a part in our next show!

Actors Ensemble of Berkeley  
P.O. Box 663  
Berkeley, California 94701  
[www.aeofberkeley.org](http://www.aeofberkeley.org)  
info@AEofBerkeley.Org



Check out [www.AEofBerkeley.Org](http://www.AEofBerkeley.Org) and subscribe to our email list for

- Staged Readings
- Audition Notices
- Two-for-One Nights and Other Discounts

### **Board of Directors**

Michael R. Cohen<sup>^</sup>, Victoria F. Siegel<sup>^</sup>, Jeff Trescott<sup>^</sup>, Jerome Solberg<sup>^</sup>, Tracy Baxter, Hannah Rachel Gerry, Jane Goodwin, Paulette Herring, Jay Manley, Gabriel Ross, Ian Wilcox\*, Crystal Brown\*, Susannah Wood\*, Robert Estes\*, Martha Luehrmann\*, Norah Foster\*, Meryn MacDougall\*

\*=alternate, ^=officer.

### **Performance Schedule:**

***Fri/Sat 8pm, Sat/Sun at 3pm March 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024***

***BAMHouse***

***The home of Black Creatives***

***1540 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94601***

The Performance is approx. 1 ½ hours with no intermission

Actors Ensemble is supported in part  
by a grant from The City of Berkeley  
Civic Arts Commission



A PROUD MEMBER OF



**KUDZU 2012: a gentrification tale**

**By Tracy Baxter**

**Directed by Cat Brooks**

*Cast and Crew*

*Melbert/June..... Ali-David Abdullah*  
*Melbert Sr.....Luchan Baker*  
*Zach Connor/Caleb/Changemaker..... Paul Bisesi*  
*Tamika Warfield.....Natalie Ford*  
*Angela Warfield/Miss Mabry..... Jacinta Kaumbulu*  
*Kayleigh/Mayor/Changemaker.....Missa Perron*  
*Charlton “Jolly Cholly” Oliver/Clark Davd.....Leon DNas Sykes*  
*Sally.....Jeff Trescott*  
*Assistant to Cat Brooks.....Nikki Coombs*  
*Sound Technician.....Stanley Hunt*  
*Light Technician/Stage Management..... Kenitra Love*  
*Assistance with Sound Design.....Hannah Rachel Gerry*  
*Producer/Graphic Designer.....Tracy Baxter*  
*Co-Producer.....Jerome Solberg*

***A co-production with BAMHouse, the home of Black Creatives in Oakland.***

***Actors Ensemble and BAMHouse thank Bay Area Women’s Theater Festival for its support.***

Thanks to Cat Brooks for providing some rehearsal space for this production.

Thanks to Ruth Giron Wong, Kevin Karplus, Lisa Wang, Jeff Trescott, Martha Luehrmann, Jay Manley, Jerome Solberg, Matthew Campbell, Jennifer Halsing, Kathleen A Shiring, Eugene S. Bardach, Christine Sheppard, Charlotte von der Hude, Tom and Jan Vargo, and all those who have supported Actors Ensemble over the past year.

## **A Note from the Author**

**It all starts with a cute, little cafe...**

To my utter amazement, I found out recently that the word “gentrification” has two meanings. Depending on where you sit, it’s either a positive process of revitalizing economically depressed urban areas so that they’re filled with happy, young families, bike lanes, and beer gardens; or it’s the experience of being ejected from home, family, friends, and even your own memories by slow but sure degrees. After a while, when the process is complete, you’re gone—and it’s like you were never there to begin with.

Any guesses as to who thinks what?

The story you’re about to see is about gentrification from the second perspective--specifically, about what happens in the lives of an everyday, working-class Black family when a tech exec with a people curation app comes to town. Hipster obsessions from the 2010s like kombucha and kale, food substitutes and cat cafes get dragged (as they should). But *KUDZU 2012: a gentrification tale* is also a stinging critique of how profits are being wrung from the deliberate displacement of Black communities yet again.

## **A Note from the Director**

Tracy Baxter’s KUDZU takes place in 2012, but for many of us 2024 Oakland will be immediately apparent. For those of us who were here in 2012, we will recognize the warning signs of hillbilly beards and drones that we joked about when we still had our Black family festivals at the Lake and Mosswood Park. And many of us will lament, as I have over the three years that I have been working on this project, that there is not much to laugh at anymore as the forces of gentrification continue marching in and over our Black bodies. Laugh or scream I often say. Laughter has kept Black folks from going mad for hundreds of years. Tonight, I invite you to laugh. Then I urge you to hit the streets and scream, reach out to your electeds and scream, gather your neighbors and collectively scream. Scream, breathe, build, organize. Remind them that this is still your City and you ain’t going nowhere!

## Cast and Crew and Playwright Biographies

*In Alphabetical Order*



**Ali-David Abdullah** (*Melbert/June*) Born in Oakland, raised in various areas in California and Georgia. I come from a family with 9 siblings, so lonely is never in my vocabulary. I currently train in dance professionally at Oakland School for the Arts, which ignited my passion for performance and entertainment. I create original songs in my spare time, strengthening my vocal capabilities as an artist. My career as an actor began last year as I performed in school plays, as well as

voice acting for various animated series. I found that telling a story through the facade of acting as a character is impactful, and it allows me to contribute to stories that otherwise would not have gotten told.



**Tracy Baxter** (*Playwright, Producer*) is an **Actors Ensemble** board member and directed a gripping online production of Lynn Nottage's *SWEAT* as well as two editions of the one-act festival *THREE FOR THOUGHT* for the company. Her play, *KUDZU 2012*, was a semifinalist selection in the Playwrights

Foundation's 2017 Bay Area Playwrights Festival and a finalist selection in the Screencraft 2020 Stage Play Writing Competition. Staged readings of *KUDZU 2012* were presented in 2022 by the San Francisco Women's Theater Festival and San Francisco's 3Girls Theatre, where she was a Brady Fellow, an incubator program for writers over 40.



**Cat Brooks** (**Cat Brooks** (Director) is an actress, director, playwright, dramaturg and community organizer. She is also the host of KPFA's Law & Disorder, as well as a resident artist with Tha Lower Bottom Playaz in Oakland and 3 Girls Theater in San

Francisco. She trained at the Royal National Theater Studio in London. Notable roles include Lady Macbeth at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland and starring in her one-woman show

'*Tasha*, about the in-custody murder of Natasha McKenna. Brooks has been nominated Best Featured Actress by the Bay Area Theater Circle Critics and 'Tasha won Best of The SF Fringe in 2017. She's the co-founder and executive director of the Anti Police-Terror Project whose mission is to eradicate police terror in communities of color. As an organizer, she played a central role in the struggle for justice for Oscar Grant and has spent the last 14 years working with impacted communities and families to rapidly respond to police violence and radically transform the ways we define and implement public safety strategies. Cat was the runner-up in Oakland's 2018 mayoral election, facing incumbent Libby Schaaf.



**Luchan Baker** (*Melbert Sr.*) is an Oakland native and has been in theatre since he was 9 years old. His love for theatre began at Berkeley's Black Repertory Theatre. He's been in many productions written by Ellis Berry and has been in many August Wilson pieces with his core theatre group Tha Lower Bottom

Playaz.



**Paul Bisesi** (he/him) (*Zac Connor, Changemaker*) is excited to continue in the role of Zac. Other recent credits include Rutherford Selig in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Attorney Greenburg in the *Words that Made the Difference* tour, and roles in a variety of short films. Outside of acting, he enjoys writing, board games, and trying to do science.



**Natalie Ford** (She/Her) (*Tamika Warfield*) is a twenty-year-old actress from Oakland, California. She's ecstatic for her first appearance with **Actors Ensemble**. Natalie has previously appeared as the lead Caitlyn in Jeffery Lo's *Spending the End of the World on Ok Cupid* and played Eurydice in *Deirdre the Queer Queen* by Ai Adia. She's currently studying theatre arts at Laney College. Her passion for theater will continue to blossom on

stage.



**Jacinta Kaumbulu** (*Angela Warfield/Miss Mabry*) is a Bay Area actor. She has worked in theater for several years, at several theater companies in the Bay Area. She has also worked as an actor, children's theatre playwright, and director at Children's Fairyland. Jacinta is proud to be a part of the production of *KUDZU 2012: a gentrification tale* by Tracy Baxter directed by Cat Brooks. Jacinta is honored to represent the "black" people of the

City of Oakland, playing the role of Angela Warfield. You can see Jacinta in her next play which will be in May 2024 at 3 Girls Theater in *Soulmates* by Kimberly Ridgeway.



**Missa Perron** (*Changemaker, Mayor Jane and Kayleigh*) is grateful for her first opportunity with **Actors Ensemble**. She is a member of the sketch comedy group Geek Show which earned its wings at Bindlestiff Studio and performed at San Francisco Sketch Fest. Most recently, Missa performed a sketch comedy student showcase with Killing My Lobster in which she played a chatty knight riddled with

self-doubt and a flair for the dramatic.



**Leon DNas Sykes** (*Charlton "Jolly Cholly" Oliver/Clark Davd*) is a dynamic media professional, educator, and community builder with a passion for igniting media excellence. With over a decade of experience in the world of media, Leon has demonstrated his

talent in various roles, from being a podcasting maestro and radio pioneer to an enthusiastic media educator and community engagement leader.



**Jeff Trescott** (*Sally*) has been in many plays and worked behind the scenes in many others. Most recently, he was Charles in *The White Card*.

**Make sure to check our Summer 2024 productions in Berkeley's beautiful *John Hinkel Park Amphitheatre*:**

***Much Ado About Nothing***, by William Shakespeare, directed by Glen Havlan – weekends June 29<sup>th</sup>-July 14<sup>th</sup> plus July 4<sup>th</sup>

***The Imaginary Invalid***, by Moliere, directed by Jay Manley - weekends August 24<sup>th</sup> – September 8<sup>th</sup> including Labor Day.

Open Auditions for both productions are  
March 24/25<sup>th</sup> – check our website!

Join us!

Join our mailing list (email or snail mail)

Make a proposal to the board:

[proposals@aeofberkeley.org](mailto:proposals@aeofberkeley.org)

Join the board or just volunteer and help us move forward!

[info@aeofberkeley.org](mailto:info@aeofberkeley.org)