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

“VERY LOCAL,
VERY TIMELY,
VERY FUNNY!”

BAY AREA WOMEN’S
THEATER FESTIVAL

KUDZU
2012

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
info@AEofBerkeley.Org

Check out www.AEofBerkeley.Org and subscribe to our email list for

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

Board of Directors
* = alternate, ^ = officer.

Performance Schedule:
Fri/Sat 8pm, Sat/Sun at 3pm March 1st - 3rd 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
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 29th-July 14th plus July 4th

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

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

Join us!
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Join the board or just volunteer and help us move forward! info@aeofberkeley.org