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press@publictheater.org | 212.539.8624

PHOTOS: DELACORTE THEATER

PHOTOS: CAST AND CREATIVE HEADSHOTS

**THE PUBLIC THEATER  
ANNOUNCES  
61<sup>ST</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON OF  
FREE SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK  
AT THE DELACORTE THEATER**

***HAMLET***

**Directed by Kenny Leon**

**Featuring Ato Blankson-Wood in the Title Role**

**June 8–August 6**

**Jerome L. Greene Foundation Returns as Lead Sponsor of  
Free Shakespeare in the Park**

January 12, 2023 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) announced today that the 61st season of Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park will feature the classic drama **HAMLET**, directed by Tony Award winner **Kenny Leon** and featuring Tony Award nominee **Ato Blankson-Wood** (*Slave Play*, *Public Works' As You Like It*) in the title role. **HAMLET** will have an extended run of nine weeks, beginning at The Delacorte Theater on Thursday, June 8 and running through Sunday, August 6 with an official press opening on Wednesday, June 28. Since 1962, over six million people have enjoyed more than 150 free productions of Shakespeare and other classical works and musicals in The Public's beloved home in Central Park.

In 2019, director Kenny Leon's entrancing production of *Much Ado About Nothing* was widely adored and heralded as "delicious & powerful" by *The New York Times*. Returning once again to Free Shakespeare in the Park, Leon commands The Delacorte stage with a nine-week, tour-de-force production of the Bard's masterpiece, **HAMLET**, a riveting, contemporary take on Shakespeare's classic tale of family and betrayal, as enduring as the stars above Central Park.

"*Hamlet* is arguably the greatest play in the Western canon, and I am thrilled that Kenny Leon will be helming this summer's production. As he demonstrated with his brilliant production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Kenny has an expert way of making Shakespeare come alive in a contemporary American context, illuminating these great works while also reimagining them for our times and our country," said Public Theater Artistic Director **Oskar Eustis**. "*Hamlet* will be a beautiful salute to the city as we head into a season where we will be renewing and renovating our beautiful home, The Delacorte Theater."

"I'm so happy to be at The Delacorte once again and to share something that binds us to one another," said director **Kenny Leon**. "A 500-year-old play exploring the need for a strong foundation of family, with music and words, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has much to say about humanity and the importance of our

connectedness to each other. We set this production in 2021, filled with all of the challenges we face as Americans as we explore our need to love more profoundly both nature and its people.”

“Summer in New York is simply not summer, nor New York, without The Public Theater’s Free Shakespeare in the Park,” said **Luis A. Miranda, Jr.**, Board Chair of The Public Theater. “The Delacorte Theater is an undeniable pillar of New York’s cultural landscape, and this upcoming renovation will expand its accessibility and will enhance the artistic experience of both audiences and creatives alike. We cannot wait to welcome people from all corners of the five boroughs, the country and beyond back into community with Kenny Leon’s *Hamlet* featuring Ato Blankson-Wood.”

**HAMLET** features scenic design by **Beowulf Boritt**; costume design by **Jessica Jahn**; lighting design by **Allen Lee Hughes**; sound design by **Justin Ellington**; video design by **Jeff Sugg**; music composition by **Jason Michael Webb**; and hair, wig, and makeup design by **Earon Chew Nealey**. **Karyn Meek** serves as production stage manager. Complete casting, creative team, and a detailed performance schedule will be announced at a later date.

**HAMLET** has been previously staged at The Delacorte four times. It was last seen 15 years ago in a 2008 production featuring Michael Stuhlbarg in the title role and Lauren Ambrose as Ophelia, Andre Braugher as Claudius, and David Harbour as Laertes, directed by Artistic Director Oskar Eustis. Thirty-three years before, Michael Rudman directed Sam Waterston as Hamlet in 1975, also featuring Ruby Dee as Gertrude and John Lithgow as Laertes. In 1972, the production was directed by Gerald Freedman, featuring Stacy Keach as Hamlet, James Earl Jones as Claudius, Sam Waterson as Laertes, Raul Julia as Osric, and Colleen Dewhurst as Gertrude. Two years after The Delacorte opened, Public Theater founder Joseph Papp directed a 1964 production featuring Alfred Ryder in the title role, with Howard Da Silva as Claudius and Julie Harris as Ophelia.

## TICKETING INFO & HEALTH AND SAFETY

Free tickets will be distributed in a variety of ways across all five boroughs with distribution details and locations announced by May 2023. **TodayTix** returns as a partner for the free virtual ticket lottery distribution. Public Theater Supporter and Partner tickets will be available beginning on **Tuesday, February 7**. COVID-19 health and safety protocols will be made available by April 2023.

“We are so pleased to be partnering with The Public Theater once again to exclusively run Free Shakespeare in the Park’s digital Lottery. This iconic New York tradition continues to rivet theatergoers year after year. As innovators who create frictionless ways to democratize access to the arts, TodayTix is very proud to be involved and power audience attendance,” said **Merritt Baer**, President and Co-founder of TodayTix Group.

This season, The Public proudly welcomes the return of **Jerome L. Greene Foundation** as season sponsor. The generous support of the Jerome L. Greene Foundation helps to sustain The Public’s mission of inclusion, creating great theater, boldly conceived, and free for all.

“We are thrilled to be the lead sponsor of this summer’s Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater,” said **Chris McInerney**, President and CEO of the Jerome L. Greene Foundation. “This iconic summer theater experience is always a joyous celebration in the cultural life of New York City, and it will be a thrill to share Kenny Leon’s *Hamlet* under the stars at The Delacorte Theater, for free, with thousands of New Yorkers.”

The Public Theater’s Annual Gala, a star-studded evening of dinner and performance, will be celebrated on **Monday, June 12** on the lawn at The Delacorte Theater. This year, The Public will honor **Darren Walker**, President, and **Ford Foundation** for their immense philanthropic impact in the arts. In addition, The Public celebrates **Marilla-Altagracia Torres** as this year’s community honoree. Torres serves as the Family & School Partnership Coordinator for LION Charter school, a close partner of Hunts Point Alliance for Children and the Hunts Point Children’s Shakespeare Ensemble, and uses her position as both a parent

and a community partner to recruit other families and advocate for Hunts Point programming. For more information on The Public Theater's Gala, visit [publictheater.org/gala23](https://publictheater.org/gala23) or email [gala@publictheater.org](mailto:gala@publictheater.org).

**Eustis** added, "Darren Walker is one of the most visionary and important leaders of our time; he has led The Ford Foundation to new heights of influence, democracy, and justice. He is also one of the wisest men I know, whose advice I lean on and whose counsel is indispensable. In honoring The Ford Foundation and Darren, we are honoring all that is best in our philanthropic culture."

## **ABOUT THE DELACORTE THEATER REVITALIZATION**

In 2018, The Public Theater, in partnership with Central Park Conservancy and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, began embarking on a much-needed revitalization of the 61-year-old Delacorte Theater in Central Park. The plan—a major investment in outdoor cultural space as part of New York's economic recovery—will dramatically improve the home of Free Shakespeare in the Park, addressing critical infrastructure, accessibility, and theatrical needs. The key approved design includes accessible and comfortable space for audiences and artists with disabilities, streamlined backstage operations and improved comfort for cast and crew, a revitalized exterior for a more dynamic aesthetic experience, a focus on resilience and sustainability, and lighting improvements, among other benefits. Initial construction began this past fall and will continue following **HAMLET**. Additional details, including production plans for the upcoming 2024 Free Shakespeare in the Park season, will be announced at a later date. For more information on The Delacorte's revitalization, visit [publictheater.org](https://publictheater.org).

To support The Public Theater, become a Supporter or Partner by visiting [publictheater.org/supporttoday](https://publictheater.org/supporttoday).

## **BIOS**

**KENNY LEON** (*Director*) is a Tony Award-winning director who has been honored with The Actors Fund Medal of Honor, an Obie Award, and an NAACP Image Award. Leon is also a proud honoree of the George Abbott Lifetime Achievement for American Theatre. Leon is on the producing team of *Some Like It Hot*, the musical directed by Casey Nicholaw. This season, Leon directed *Topdog/Underdog* and *Ohio State Murders* on Broadway. Other Broadway credits include *A Soldier's Play*; *American Son*; *Children of a Lesser God*; *Holler If Ya Hear Me*; *A Raisin in the Sun*; *The Mountaintop*; *Stick Fly*; and August Wilson's *Fences*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and *Radio Golf*. Off-Broadway work includes *The Underlying Chris*, *Everybody's Ruby*, *Emergence-SEE!* (The Public); and *Smart People* (Second Stage). Television and film credits include *Robin Roberts Presents: Mahalia*, "Colin in Black & White," "4400," "Amend: The Fight for America," *American Son* (adapted for Netflix), "Hairspray Live!," "The Wiz Live!," *Steel Magnolias*, "Dynasty," and *In My Dreams*. Leon is the author of *Take You Wherever You Go*. He is the artistic director emeritus of Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre Company, as well as senior resident director at Roundabout Theatre Company.

**ATO BLANKSON-WOOD** (*Hamlet*) starred on Broadway in Jeremy O. Harris' critically acclaimed *Slave Play*, for which he was nominated for a 2021 Tony Award. He also earned nominations for the Drama League Awards and the inaugural Antonyo Awards for playing "Gary," a role he originated for the New York Theatre Workshop production, where his performance earned him a Lortel nomination. Blankson-Wood followed this by starring opposite Bill Camp and Elizabeth Marvel in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* for Audible, which reunited him with *Slave Play* director Robert O'Hara, and led the Free Shakespeare in the Park production of Public Works' *As You Like It* for The Public Theater. Blankson-Wood had his breakout performance in The Public Theater musical *The Total Bent* (Drama League and Lucille Lortel Award nomination), which explored the life of a Black musical prodigy in a nation on the verge of social upheaval. Blankson-Wood has also been seen on Broadway in *Hair* and *Lysistrata Jones*, as well as in *The Rolling Stone* for Lincoln Center (Drama League Award for Distinguished Performance nomination). Films include Kathryn Bigelow's *Detroit*, Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman*, *Worth* opposite Michael Keaton, and in Peter Hedges' *The Same Same Storm*. TV includes "The Good Fight," "She's Gotta Have It," Ava DuVernay's "When They See Us," and Ryan Murphy's "Dahmer."

## **ABOUT JEROME L. GREENE FOUNDATION**

The Jerome L. Greene Foundation supports select programs that make a significant impact on the lives of all New Yorkers in the areas of the arts, education, medicine, and social justice. Its 40-year history is grounded in the vision of its founder, Jerry Greene, to give back to the city he loved. Today, the Foundation honors this commitment by continuing to fund quality programs and by identifying new ways to increase access to the arts and to education, create opportunities for ground-breaking medical research, and help ensure social justice for all. [www.jlgreen.org](http://www.jlgreen.org)

## **ABOUT TODAYTIX**

TodayTix is the digital gateway to cultural experiences. TodayTix works with thousands of venues in cities across the globe to provide millions of theatergoers access to theatre and culture's best. Via its highly-rated app, TodayTix not only offers tickets at exceptional prices, but also has signature access programs, Lottery and Rush, to provide access to the hardest-to-find tickets to the hottest shows. Through industry-leading technology, innovative product design, unparalleled inventory, and frictionless experiences, TodayTix is offering theatergoers a ticketing experience unlike any other. TodayTix was designed to ensure people across the globe have frictionless access to the best theatre and culture have to offer. In other words, to find a seat for everyone. To learn more, visit [www.todaytix.com](http://www.todaytix.com) or download TodayTix for iOS or Android. TodayTix, alongside Goldstar, Secret Cinema, and Show-Score, is part of TodayTix Group, the global e-commerce leader for cultural experiences.

## **ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER**

**THE PUBLIC** continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Under the Radar, Public Lab, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 60 Tony Awards, 184 Obie Awards, 56 Drama Desk Awards, 59 Lortel Awards, 34 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 62 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org)

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

The Public also gives our respect to the people of Seneca Village, a community of Black property owners who were removed from their land and whose village was destroyed in the creation of Central Park. We recognize the sacrifice that these ancestors made and honor Seneca Village's legacy.

**Jerome L. Greene Foundation** is the proud season sponsor of Free Shakespeare in the Park.

**The LuEsther T. Mertz Legacy Trust** provides leadership support for The Public Theater's year-round activities.

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