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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE U. S. PREMIERE OF
DESDEMONA WRITTEN BY TONI MORRISON, MUSIC BY
ROKIA TRAORÉ AND DIRECTED BY PETER SELLARS
OCTOBER 26-29 AT ZELLERBACH PLAYHOUSE**

A two part-symposium on the creation of *Desdemona* and the cultural forces in Shakespeare will be held October 27 & 28 featuring Toni Morrison (via Skype), Peter Sellars, Rokia Traoré and UC Berkeley scholars

Sightlines: Pre-performance talks with director Peter Sellars, October 28 & 29, 7:00-7:30 p.m. in Zellebach Playhouse

BERKELEY, September 22, 2011—The visionary director **Peter Sellars** brings the U.S. premiere of *Desdemona*, a collaboration with Nobel Prize-winning writer **Toni Morrison** and Malian singer/composer **Rokia Traoré** to Cal Performances' Zellerbach Playhouse on **Wednesday, October 26 – Saturday, October 29 at 8:00 p.m.** *Desdemona* explores issues of gender, race, love and destiny as the title character and her African maid Barbary reach beyond the grave to give voice to the mysterious forces behind *Othello*.

In addition to Traoré, who performs the role of Barbary, the production includes an ensemble of West African musicians: three vocalists **Fatim Kouyaté, Bintou Soumbounou** and **Kadiatou Sangaré** and two instrumentalists **Mamah Diabaté**, *n'goni* (a stringed instrument) and **Mamadyba Camara**, *kora* (double bridge harp lute). The role of Desdemona will be played by **Tina Benko**, a New York-based actress whose recent credits include Ivo Van Hove's production of *The Little Foxes*, and Wallace Shawn's *Marie and Bruce*. Sellars longtime design team is headed up by master lighting designer **James F. Ingalls**. *Desdemona* is co-commissioned and co-produced by Cal Performances, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Wiener Festwochen, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, spielzeit'europa of the Berliner Festspiele, Barbican, Arts Council London and London 2012 Festival.

In Act I of Shakespeare's play, Othello says that he and Desdemona fell in love as he told her stories. "Toni Morrison said, 'I want to write those stories,'" explains Sellars in a recent

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interview in Berkeley. “She’s written the back stories, the fairytales, the tall tales, the tales of adventure and battle.” Traoré, one of the most important voices of contemporary Africa, has composed songs and music that illuminate the imagined conversations between *Desdemona* and *Barbary*. The collaboration between Morrison and Traoré was 21st century with Traoré writing songs in Mali and sending them to Morrison who, after listening to the music, wrote scenes.

A two-part symposium presented in association with the **Doreen B. Townsend Center** will be held on Thursday, October 27 from 5-6:30 p.m. and on Friday, October 28 from 12-3:00 p.m. at Zellerbach Playhouse. On the first day, director **Peter Sellars** will discuss giving voice to the unheard characters in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. The second day will be divided into three conversations: the first between writer **Toni Morrison** (via Skype), composer **Rokia Traoré** and Sellars; the second between UC Berkeley scholars **Abdul JanMohamed** (English Department), **Tamara Roberts** (Music Department) and **Darieck Scott** (African American Studies); and the final talk is titled *Africa Speaks* and it will be between Traoré and Sellars. These events are free and open to the public. For a complete schedule go to www.calperformances.org.

A Sightlines pre-performance talks will be given by Peter Sellars, Friday, October 28 and Saturday, October 29 at 7:00 p.m. in Zellerbach Playhouse. These events are open to all *Desdemona* ticket holders.

PETER SELLARS

American theater, opera and festival director **Peter Sellars**, has gained renown worldwide for his transformative interpretations of artistic masterpieces and collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative artists across three decades. Sellars’ early work crossed genres and travelled in time with powerful contemporary versions of works by Shakespeare, Brecht, Gershwin, Mozart, Handel and Bach. Later, he collaborated with composer John Adams on operas including *Nixon in China*, *Doctor Atomic* and *The Death of Klinghoffer*. New operas by Kaija Saariaho and Amin Maalouf, Osvaldo Golijov and David Henry Hwang, and Tan Dun join new productions of works by Messiaen, Ligeti, Hindemith, Kurtág and Stravinsky.

Sellars, who has directed many path-breaking, international festivals, is a resident curator at the Telluride Film Festival and a professor of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA. He is the recipient of the 1998 Erasmus Prize for contributions to European culture and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Sellars is a longtime Cal Performances favorite has consistently created stunningly original productions for Bay Area audiences, including *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky* (1995), *Peony Pavilion* (1999) and *Kafka Fragments* (2008) and *Winds of Destiny* (2011).

TONI MORRISON

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford, in 1931 in Lorain (Ohio), **Toni Morrison** was the second of four children in a black working-class family. She displayed an early interest in literature and studied humanities at Howard and Cornell Universities, followed by an academic career at Texas Southern University, Howard University, Yale, and since 1989, she has held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University. She has also worked as an editor for Random House, a critic, and given numerous public lectures, specializing in African-American literature. She made her debut as a novelist in 1970, soon gaining the attention of both critics and a wider audience for her epic power, unerring ear for dialogue, and her poetically-charged and richly-expressive depictions of Black America. A member since 1981 of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she has been awarded a number of literary distinctions, among them the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Beloved* and in 1993 the Nobel Prize in literature.

ROKIA TRAORÉ

Rokia Traoré is an award-winning Malian singer, songwriter and guitarist. Traoré was born in Mali as a member of the Bambara ethnic group. As her father was a diplomat, she travelled widely in her youth including to Algeria, Saudi Arabia, France and Belgium. As a result of this travel, she was exposed to a wide variety of influences including music from many cultures. While the Bambara have a tradition of griot performing at weddings, members of the nobility such as Traoré are discouraged from performing as musicians. Traoré attended lycée in Mali while her father was stationed in Brussels and started performing publicly as a university student in Bamako. Traoré plays acoustic guitar as well as sings, which is rare for a female in Africa, and she uses vocal harmonies in her arrangements which are also unusual in Malian

music. In 1997, she linked with Mali musician Ali Farka Touré which raised her profile. She won a Radio France Internationale prize as "African Discovery" of 1997, an honor previously won by Mali's Habib Koité. She has produced numerous award-winning albums and has toured the world. This is her second production with Sellars. Their first partnership was the 2001 *Wati* which depicted a dying Mozart as a griot in ancient West Africa.

TINA BENKO

Tina Benko recently appeared in Ivo Van Hove's production of *The Little Foxes* and Wallace Shawn's *Marie and Bruce*. Other New York theater credits include the Broadway productions of *Irena's Vow*, *Joe Egg*, and *Top Girls*; Helen of Troy in *The Age of Iron* at CSC; and the New York premieres of *Restoration*, *Dark Yellow*, *Post-Mortem*, *Rough Sketch* and Charles Mee's *Wintertime*.

Films include *The Avengers*, *Puccini for Beginners*, *Photo Op*, *Lucky Days*, *The Hungry Ghost*, and *The Nanny Diaries*. She has appeared in workshops of new plays with Lincoln Center Directors Lab, NY Theatre Workshop, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Women's Project, The Flea, Clubbed Thumb, The Lark, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. Benko has co-written and starred in the plays *Gazebo* and *Crush the Infamous Thing*; and is currently directing the solo play *Lou* based on the memoirs of Lou Andreas Salome. For more information go to tinabenko.com.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for ***Desdemona* Wednesday–Saturday, October 26–29** at Zellerbach Playhouse are priced at **\$100.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens, other students and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$5.00 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperformances.org.

For select performances, Cal Performances offers UCB student, faculty and staff, senior and community rush tickets. Rush tickets are announced two hours prior to a performance and are available in person only at the Ticket Office beginning one hour before the performance; quantities may be limited. Rush ticket sales are limited to one ticket per person; all sales are cash only. Rush ticket prices are \$10.00 for UCB students; \$15.00 for UCB faculty and staff (UCB ID required) and seniors age 65 or older; and \$20.00 for all other community members. Information is available at 510-642-9988, press 2 for the rush hotline, two hours prior to a performance only.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Wednesday–Saturday, October 26–29 at 8:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Playhouse, UC Berkeley campus
Bancroft Way at Dana Court, Berkeley

Theater

Desdemona

Peter Sellars, director

Toni Morrison, writer

Rokia Traoré, singer/songwriter, Barbary

Tina Benko, *Desdemona*

Fatim Kouyaté, vocals

Bintou Soumbounou, vocals

Kadiatou Sangaré, vocals

Mamah Diabaté, *n'goni*

Mamadyba Camara, *kora*

Program: Cal Performances presents the U. S. premiere of *Desdemona*, a theatrical collaboration between Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison, singer/songwriter Rokia Traoré and director Peter Sellars. Co-commissioned and co-produced by Cal Performances, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Wiener Festwochen, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, spielzeit/europa of the Berliner Festspiele, Barbican, Arts Council London and London 2012 Festival.

Tickets: \$100.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door.

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Thursday, October 27 from 5-6:30 p.m.
Friday, October 28 from noon to 3:00 p.m.
Symposium

Zellerbach Playhouse, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Dana Court, Berkeley

Program: A two-part symposium presented in association with the **Doreen B. Townsend Center** will be held on Thursday, October 27 from 5-6:30 p.m. and on Friday, October 28 from 12-3:00 p.m. at Zellerbach Playhouse. On October 27, director **Peter Sellars** will discuss giving voice to the unheard characters in Shakespeare's *Othello*. On October 28, three conversations will be held: the first between writer **Toni Morrison** (via Skype), composer **Rokia Traoré** and Sellars; the second between UC Berkeley scholars **Abdul JanMohamed** (English Department), **Tamara Roberts** (Music Department) and **Darieck Scott** (African American Studies); and the final, titled *Africa Speaks*, between Traoré and Sellars. These events are free and open to the public. To learn more, go to calperformances.org.

Tickets: These events are free and open to the public.

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Fri. & Sat., Oct. 28 & 29 from 7-7:30 p.m.
Sightlines

Zellerbach Playhouse, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Dana Court, Berkeley

Sightlines pre-performance talks will be given by Peter Sellars on Friday, October 28 and Saturday, October 29 at 7:00 p.m. in Zellerbach Playhouse. Sightlines is a continuing program of pre- and post-performance discussions with Cal Performances' guest artists and scholars, designed to enrich the audience's experience. These talks are free to event ticket holders.

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