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Lantern Theater Company Announces One-Week Extension of the Philadelphia Premiere of *Red Velvet* by Lolita Chakrabarti

Critically Lauded and Barrymore Recommended Production Will Close Sunday, Oct. 15, 2017

PHILADELPHIA (September 26, 2017) – **Lantern Theater Company** announced today that its 2017/18 season opener *Red Velvet* will extend its run to meet audience demand and will now close on **Sunday, Oct. 15, 2017**. The following performances have been added:

Wednesday, Oct. 11 at 7 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 12 at 7 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 13 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 14 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 15 at 2 p.m.

Lolita Chakrabarti's provocative and moving drama about race and theater has played to sold out houses since its first Lantern performance on September 7. Based on the true story of 19th century Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge – who in 1833 became the first African American actor to portray Othello on the London stage – Chakrabarti's debut play skillfully weaves themes from William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the play-within-a-play, into *Red Velvet*. In both stories, white men feel threatened by the professional skills of a black man and by his physical interactions with a white woman. Chakrabarti shows how outsiders – Othello and Aldridge – are first valued and then rejected for their innovations and accomplishments, and how individuals who push their societies toward greater justice are often punished for their audacity.

“Ira Aldridge was an extraordinarily influential person whose story has largely been ignored by history,” said Lantern Theater Company Artistic Director **Charles McMahan**. “Embodied by **Forrest McClendon's**

mesmerizing performance, Aldridge's story is both inspiring and infuriating. Inspiring for Aldridge's courage, character, and achievements; infuriating because almost 200 years after the events of the play, the plague of bigotry that infected the world in Aldridge's time remains so today. 'Theater is a political act,' says theater manager Pierre LaPorte in *Red Velvet*. That is most certainly so when simply telling the truth is a political act."

The production has resonated deeply with Philadelphia audiences and theater critics alike. *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* **Toby Zinman** called *Red Velvet* a "provocative and entertaining drama about race and theater," lauding McClendon's performance as "a virtuosic demonstration of acting styles and accents." Writing for *Philadelphia* magazine, **David Fox** agreed: "[McClendon] is not just a good, even great actor – he's a fascinating and continually surprising one. He manages to simultaneously suggest a historical character and a modern one, which underscores *Red Velvet's* ultimate, crushing point – more than 150 years after Aldridge, our theater is still grappling – often unsuccessfully – with racial politics and casting." **Megan Diehl** of *DC Metro Theater Arts* said, "Director Peter DeLaurier wrestles with [the play's] issues athletically, staging the powerful standoffs and quiet venomous implications with equal passion. Tony nominee Forrest McClendon leads a distinctly strong cast..." And in *Broad Street Review*, **Mark Cofta** called the production a "historical play, right for today."

The Lantern further explores the world of *Red Velvet* with **Lantern Searchlight**, available online at www.lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Penned by Lantern Dramaturg **Meghan Winch**, published articles for *Red Velvet* include the evolution of acting styles during the 19th century from highly stylized to the more naturalistic, the abolitionist protests swirling outside the Theatre Royal, and the tradition of African American artists leaving the United States for success in Europe; new content is added throughout the production's run.

Tickets for all added performances of *Red Velvet* go on sale today and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Tickets are \$34 – \$39 for all performances now through Sunday, October 1; prices increase to \$38 – \$43 for performances beginning Wednesday, October 4. Student tickets are \$15 in advance; \$10 student rush tickets are available ten minutes before curtain with valid ID. Discounts are also available for theater industry professionals (\$10 in advance or at the door), seniors 65 and up, groups of 10 or more, and U.S. military personnel. Lantern Theater Company is located at St. Stephen's Theater, 10th & Ludlow Sts. in Center City Philadelphia.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994, Lantern Theater Company launched its twenty-fourth season with a record number of subscribers, its largest-ever operating budget at \$1.5 million, and a growing community of theater artists engaged in its productions and audience enrichment events. The Lantern's innovative **Theater Artist Fair Pay Initiative** was recently featured in *American Theatre* magazine as a leading national success story for

increasing artist compensation through a combination of fundraising and higher ticket sales. The Lantern seeks to be a vibrant, contributing member of its community, exposing audiences to great theater, inviting participation in dialogue and discussion, engaging audience members on artistic and social issues, and employing theatrical language and techniques to enrich learning in the classroom. Since the inception of the Barrymore Awards for Excellence in Theatre in 1995, the Lantern has received 96 nominations and 19 awards, including the 2009 Excellence in Theatre Education and Community Service Award for its education program, *Illumination*. Following *Red Velvet*, the Lantern's 2017/18 season continues with the world premiere of *The Craftsman* by Philadelphia playwright Bruce Graham, *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, and the Philadelphia premiere of *Don't Dress for Dinner* by Marc Camoletti and adapted by Robin Hawdon. More information is online at www.lanterntheater.org.

FACT SHEET

Red Velvet

WRITTEN BY:

Lolita Chakrabarti

DIRECTED BY:

Peter DeLaurier

CAST:

David Bardeen as Terence/Bernard Warde
Damon Bonetti as Pierre LaPorte
Liz Filios as Halina Wozniak/Betty Lovell/Margaret Aldridge
Adam Hammet as Charles Kean
Forrest McClendon as Ira Aldridge
David Pica as Casimir/Henry Forester
Ebony Pullum as Connie
Lauren Sowa as Ellen Tree

PRODUCTION TEAM:

Meghan Jones – Scenic Designer
Janus Stefanowicz – Costume Designer
Lily Fossner – Lighting Designer
Christopher Colucci – Sound Designer
Shannon O’Brien – Props Master
Janice Orlandi – Movement Consultant
Leonard Kelly – Dialect Coach
Christie Kelly – Wig Designer
Rebecca Smith – Stage Manager

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TICKET INFORMATION:

Online: www.lanterntheater.org

By Phone: (215) 829-0395

In Person: Lantern Box Office, 10th & Ludlow Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19107

TICKET PRICING:

Tickets are \$33 – \$43

Students: \$15 in advance

Student Rush: available 10 minutes before curtain for \$10 with current student ID

Industry: \$10 in advance or at the door

Discounts also available for seniors, military, and groups of 10 or more

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES:

Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. on September 26
Wednesday at 2 p.m. on September 27 [AIC] and October 4
Wednesday at 7 p.m. on September 27, October 4, and October 11
Thursday at 7 p.m. on September 28, October 5, and October 12
Friday at 8 p.m. on September 29, October 6, and October 13
Saturday at 2 p.m. on October 14
Saturday at 8 p.m. on September 30, October 7, and October 14
Sunday at 2 p.m. on October 1 [ICS], October 8, and October 15
Sunday at 7 p.m. on October 1

CLOSING:

Sunday, October 15 at 2 p.m.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

▪ **[ICS] In Conversation: The Mirror to Nature**

Presented by the Lantern in conjunction with *Red Velvet*, this fascinating conversation with drama scholar **Michael W. Brooks** and Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon** will focus on how theater-making evolved during the 19th century, with particular focus on the shift from stylized to more naturalistic acting and how casting has come to better reflect audiences. A retired professor of English literature at West Chester University, Mr. Brooks' In Conversation program about George Bernard Shaw and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was a highlight of the Lantern's 2016/17 season. Brooks' works include *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* and *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York*, which traces the development of the subway from its inception, including how it has been represented in art and film, recounting women's experiences of the subway, and examining its connection to the city's racial tensions. The discussion immediately follows the 2:00 p.m. performance of *Red Velvet* on Sunday, October 1 and is free with ticket purchase.

PLAY SYNOPSIS:

London, 1833. There are riots on the streets protesting the Slavery Abolition Act. Inside the Theatre Royal, tragic actor Ira Aldridge is making history. Fresh from dazzling success in the capitals of Europe, he is about to become the first African American actor to play Othello in London, where the play was created. The conflict inside the theater mirrors that on stage and outside: what price will artists pay for their audacity?

PERFORMANCE VENUE:

St. Stephen's Theater, 10th & Ludlow Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19107

PARKING/TRANSPORTATION:

Ample parking is available at nearby lots and garages, including The Autopark at Jefferson (10th & Ludlow Sts.) and LAZ Parking (10th & Chestnut Sts.). Metered street parking is available during posted hours. Venue is also accessible by taxi, SEPTA buses and trains, and the PATCO Speedline.