



Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice
A Staged Benefit Reading Starring Al Pacino and Geoffrey Rush



**Michael McKean and Harry Groener Join Cast which also includes
Lily Rabe, Keith David and Hamish Linklater
Directed by Dan Sullivan**

**Star-Studded Event to Benefit Shakespeare Center;
Honorary Co-Chairs are Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks**

**Noted Los Angeles Attorney and Author, Bert Fields, to lead 7:30pm pre-performance
discussion on Shakespeare and his character Shylock**

Monday, October 28 at 8pm at The Music Center's Walt Disney Concert Hall

(Los Angeles, CA) October 21, 2019—Legendary actor Al Pacino joins fellow Academy Award winner Geoffrey Rush for ***Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice***, a one-night only staged benefit reading to support The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles. Tony Award winner Dan Sullivan reunites Pacino (Shylock) with his *Merchant of Venice* Broadway stars Lily Rabe (Portia) and Hamish Linklater (Bassanio). All three actors originally appeared in Sullivan's 2010 production for the New York Shakespeare Festival's summer festival in Central Park which quickly transferred to Broadway for a limited sold-out run. Rush steps in to read the role of Antonio and Keith David will read the roles of the Duke of Venice and Solerio.

New to the cast are Michael McKean and Harry Groener. *Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* will take place Monday, October 28 at 8pm at The Music Center's Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Simply Shakespeare is a 28-year-old annual event to raise awareness and funds to benefit The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles. At this event, Oscar winners, Tony winners and Grammy winners unite for a night of impromptu Shakespeare. The honorary Co-Chairs of *Simply Shakespeare* are Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks. “For our 28th *Simply Shakespeare* benefit reading we wanted to explore a different dimension of Shakespeare’s writing than our earlier annual events,” said Ben Donenberg, Artistic Director for The Shakespeare Center. “So, to have Dan Sullivan reunite his cast of *The Merchant of Venice*—the great Al Pacino, Lily Rabe and Hamish Linklater—and then to have Geoffrey Rush onboard will make for an extraordinary experience for our audience. Much thanks goes to our extraordinary and dedicated supporters, and Rita and Tom for their ongoing support for our work. We’re also delighted to acknowledge that all funds raised will go directly to support our life-changing programs for at-risk youth and veterans in our community.”

Prior to the reading at 7:30pm, LA attorney and author Bert Fields, will lead a discussion on Shakespeare and specifically on the character of Shylock, an enigmatic character who varies with each actor's interpretation. Fields is the author of several books including the 2005 *Players: The Mysterious Identity of William Shakespeare*, which deals with the authorship of the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare, and the 2015 *Shylock: His Own Story* in which Fields gives Shylock's full story, his dangerous background, his life, loves and challenges as an educated Jew in 16th century Venice, the motivation for demanding his seemingly bizarre 'bond,' as well as what occurred after his fateful confrontation with Portia and the Doge.

There will be a dessert reception following the reading. Media Sponsor is Variety.

The *Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* staged reading takes place at The Music Center’s Walt Disney Concert Hall. Benefit tickets and sponsorships start at \$500 and can be purchased at 310.559.9334 x102 or Harvin@5Bevents.com

About *Simply Shakespeare*

Simply Shakespeare is a 28-year-old annual event to raise awareness and funds to benefit The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles. Past participants include: Rita Wilson, Tom Hanks, Jason Alexander, Christina Applegate, Kenneth Branagh, Steve Carell, Natalie Cole, Billy Crystal, Cedric The Entertainer, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Helen Hunt, Rob Lowe, Steve Martin, Sir Paul McCartney, Bette Midler, Keanu Reeves, Julia Roberts, Smokey Robinson, William Shatner, Paul Simon. All proceeds from ticket sales support the Shakespeare Center's performances and youth, veteran and educational programs.

About Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*

Written between 1596 and 1599, *The Merchant of Venice* was included in Shakespeare’s First Folio of work. The play remains one of Shakespeare’s most thrilling and controversial plays, rich with love and betrayal, mercy and revenge. The Jewish moneylender Shylock makes a loan to Antonio, a Christian merchant. Their loan contract, steeped in prejudice and centered on the play's infamous 'pound of flesh,' sweeps the two men and everyone in their worlds into chaos. Only the insightful Portia can imagine a way forward, but for her and those she loves, even 'the quality of mercy' has its limits.

When Dan Sullivan’s 2010 production of *The Merchant of Venice* was reviewed on Broadway, *The New York Times* wrote, “Giving what promise to be the performances of this season Lily Rabe, as Portia the heiress, and Al Pacino, as Shylock the usurer, invest the much-parsed trial scene of this fascinating, irksome work with a passion and an anger that purge it of preconceptions. You may find yourself trembling, as one often does when something scary and baffling starts to make sense. At the same time, you’re likely to have trouble figuring out exactly where your sympathies lie. For at this moment everybody hurts.”

About The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles

The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles has over 30 years of award-winning history in Los Angeles. This past June, The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles produced *Henry IV* with Harry Groener, Tom Hanks, Hamish Linklater, Joe Morton and Rondi Reed at The Japanese Garden on the West Los Angeles VA Campus. The theatre set and other production elements were built by a veteran workforce. SCLA offers outreach programs such as Will Power to Youth, an employment and enrichment program that combines hands-on artistic experience with paid job training, specifically created to provide an arts immersion for at-risk youth; Will Power to Schools, a program providing free tickets to students to see Shakespeare as well as professional teacher training; and Veterans In Art, which provides employment, training and educational opportunities for underemployed military veterans.

Calendar Listing for *Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*

Date: Monday, October 28, 2019 at 8pm; Pre performance lecture begins at 7:30pm.

Theatre: The Music Center's Walt Disney Concert Hall

Benefit Ticket Prices: Tickets and sponsorships start at \$500.

Tickets: Harvin@5Bevents.com
310.559.9334 ext 102

Parking: Complimentary self-parking is available at Jewish American University.

More Info: www.shakespearecenter.org
www.facebook.com/shakescenter
www.twitter.com/shakescenterLA
www.instagram.com/shakespearecenterla/
www.youtube.com/TheShakespeareCenter

Press Contacts:

Gary W. Murphy, GM/PR
213-700-9645 | gmurphypr@gmail.com
Tim Choy, Davidson & Choy Publicity
323-954-7510 | t.choy@dcpublicity.com

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