



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: December 9, 2024

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Application No.: LBR-2024-25-019
Business Name: African-American Shakespeare Company
Business Address: 762 Fulton St., Suite 305, and 460 Gough St.
District: District 5
Applicant: Sherri Young, Executive Director
Nomination Date: October 24, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Dean Preston
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

The African-American Shakespeare Company (AASC) is the oldest established Black theater company in the United States that specializes in classical works. It was founded in 1994 by current executive director Sherri Young, a graduate of the American Conservatory Theater where she earned a Masters of Fine Arts. Young is also a former SF Arts Commissioner.

AASC's mission is to open the realm of classic theater to a diverse audience and provide an opportunity for actors of color to hone their skills and talent. They do this by producing work canon to classical theater – including notable American and global playwrights, like Shakespeare – with an African American cultural perspective that is lively, entertaining, and relevant. Their commitment to arts education has touched the lives of over 3,825 students annually, offering programs that foster artistic skills, critical thinking, social emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness. The organization plays a significant role in accessible arts education, particularly for students of color, providing them with the chance to explore and develop their creative expressions in a nurturing and diverse environment.

AASC's original mailing address was 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd., #923 in 1994. AASC secured their first physical office space at 209 Mississippi St. in 2000, which was merely a desk to rent among other working professionals. Since 2004, AASC has called 762 Fulton St., Suite 305, in the African-American Art & Culture Complex home. This location has provided space where they have been able to thrive and expand the reach of their office. In 2021, AASC found a rehearsal space at 460 Gough Street, where the partnership forged between the company and the building owners still holds strong. Since their inception, AASC has hosted performances in theaters across the city, and their resilience through the years has shown dedication to maintaining their presence and connection to the neighborhoods they serve.

Currently, AASC is facing displacement of their currently subsidized office space in the African-American Art & Culture Complex because the building will be going through a major renovation, which is expected to take several years. AASC's objective and dedication to their students and community remains unchanged, though their focus must pivot to finding a new location to continue their operations and program.

Since 1994, AASC has provided a unique and irreplaceable theatrical program and touched the lives of more than 240,000 performers, writers, students and patrons. They currently run a School Partnership Program that partners with over 36 schools in the Bay Area to offer free student matinees and residency workshops, as well as offer professional development programs that provide employment training for emerging and experienced artists. They have also participated in neighborhood events and collaboratives and currently provide a platform for 98 Black artists who are vitally contributing to the rich tapestry of San Francisco art.

Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business
City Hall Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554-6680
legacybusiness@sfgov.org
www.legacybusiness.org





CRITERION 1

Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes, African-American Shakespeare Company has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd. from 1994 to 2000 (6 years)

209 Mississippi St. from 200 to 2004 (4 years)

762 Fulton St. Ste. 305 from 2004 to Present (20 years)

CRITERION 2

Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, African-American Shakespeare Company has contributed to the history and identity of the Western Addition and Fillmore neighborhoods in San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is associated with classical theater production from an African-American cultural perspective.
- The theater company's dynamic origins and current office location on Fulton Street trace back to the esteemed African-American Art & Culture Complex (AAACC), initially recognized as the Western Addition Cultural Center. The AAACC is identified in the African American Historic Context Statement for its association with African American history. The complex is the only city-owned cultural center for the preservation of African American art and culture located in the geographic heart of one of two historically Black communities remaining in San Francisco. Further, The National Coalition of Black Gays and Lesbians met here for social and educational activities.

The Gough Street rehearsal property, Neustadter Brothers Standard Shirt Factory, was established in 1871 and is eligible for the California Registry.

- Many of the artists that have worked with the African-American Shakespeare Company have varying degrees of success in the industry. Some of them have become directors, educators, and work as actors in the film, television, and Broadway stages. The most notable person to cross the organization's threshold has been Colman Domingo, a Tony award winner, Oscar award nominee, and continuous rising star.
- There have been several features and articles on the African-American Shakespeare Company and founder Sherri Young, both within and outside the theater industry. The theater was recognized in an NPR article in 2021 that highlighted how the company's work is "helping Shakespeare speak to more diverse audiences." Further, the theater company was featured in a ShakespeareAMERICA sponsored live streamed virtual event to discuss the past, present, and future of African-American Shakespeare. Young has been the focus of a few articles published by the National Endowment for the Arts and 7x7. The theater company has also received a variety of awards through the years including "Best Live Theatre" by San Francisco Magazine in 2018, Certificates of Honor from both Mayor London Breed and Governor Gavin Newsom, and the Pain Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement. Lastly, Young received the Jefferson Award for Public Service in 2018 acknowledging her outstanding contributions to community service.

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- With regard to racial and social equity, African-American Shakespeare Company is the oldest established Black theater company in the United States that specializes in classical works. It was founded in 1994 as a non-profit by the current executive director, Sherri Young, who believes in the importance of creating a pivotal space for artists of color to practice, perform, and perfect their art. Central to their mission has been the employment of Black artists and staff, thereby directly supporting a demographic that historically faces barriers within the arts sector. Without the organization, San Francisco's theater scene would be a less varied monolith, stifling the emergence and development of distinct voices and narratives that challenge, inspire, and entertain. The city greatly benefits from the rich dialogue and cultural exchange that their diverse programming fosters. The theater company's impact will be felt for generations to come, as opportunities for mentorship, innovation, and leadership in the arts are offered through their school partnership programs and professional development programs.

CRITERION 3

Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, African-American Shakespeare Company is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that African-American Shakespeare Company qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Cultural exchange within classical theater.
- Theater company and administration.
- School Partnership Program.
- Youth programs.
- Professional development workshops.
- Rehearsal space.
- Accessible arts education, particularly to the African American community and communities of color.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Theater.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include African-American Shakespeare Company currently located at 762 Fulton St., Suite 305, and 460 Gough St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

December 9, 2024

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

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Business Address: 762 Fulton St., Suite 305, and 460 Gough St.
District: District 5
Applicant: Sherri Young, Executive Director
Nomination Date: October 24, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Dean Preston
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for African-American Shakespeare Company, currently located at 762 Fulton St., Suite 305, and 460 Gough St.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 9, 2024, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes African-American Shakespeare Company in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at African-American Shakespeare Company.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Cultural exchange within classical theater.
- Theater company and administration.
- School Partnership Program.
- Youth programs.
- Professional development workshops.
- Rehearsal space.
- Accessible arts education, particularly to the African American community and communities of color.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain African-American Shakespeare Company on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Theater.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on December 9, 2024.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2024-25-019
Business Name: African-American Shakespeare Company
Business Address: 762 Fulton Street, Suite 305
District: District 5
Applicant: Sherri Young, Executive Director
Nomination Date: October 24, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Dean Preston

CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?
 Yes No

5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd. from 1994 to 2000 (6 years)
209 Mississippi St. from 200 to 2004 (4 years)
762 Fulton St. Ste. 305 from 2004 to Present (20 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?
 Yes No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?
 Yes No

NOTES: NA

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: November 6, 2024

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
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DEAN PRESTON

October 24, 2024

Office of Small Business
Attn: Legacy Business Registration Application
City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: *Letter of Nomination for the African-American Shakespeare Company
to the Legacy Business Registry*

Dear Mr. Kurylo:

I am writing to nominate the African-American Shakespeare Company, located in District 5 in the African-American Art & Culture Complex, to the Legacy Business Registry Program.

The African-American Shakespeare Company was founded in 1994 by Sherri Young, with the vision to change the landscape of classical theater to make it more accessible to diverse audiences and provide actors of color the opportunity to master some of the world's greatest classical roles. The company's first performance was in February 1994 at the New Conservatory Theatre Center at 25 Van Ness Avenue. Sherri Young is a graduate of the American Conservatory Theatre and former commissioner for the San Francisco Arts Commission, and has served as the Executive Director of the AASC since its inception. Under her leadership, the organization has produced over 20 major theatrical productions.

In 2004, the African-American Shakespeare Company found a home at the African-American Art & Culture Complex at 762 Fulton Street. In 2021, the organization added a rehearsal space at 460 Gough Street, blocks away from the AAACC, also in District 5. The organization's resilience, particularly during the pandemic, reflects its deep connection to San Francisco's neighborhoods and cultural fabric.

The African-American Shakespeare Company is the oldest established Black theater company in the country that specializes in classical works. In the thirty years since its founding, more than 240,000 students, patrons, and community members have interacted with the organization.

The company also actively participates in neighborhood events and collaboratives, including offering free student matinees to Bay Area youth. Their commitment to arts education has touched the lives of over 3,825 students annually, offering programs that foster not just artistic skills but also critical thinking, social emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness. AASC plays a significant role in accessible arts education, particularly for students of color, and the broader city landscape by providing a supportive space for artists of color to nurture their craft.

Letter of Nomination for African-American Shakespeare Company

October 24, 2024

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Given its importance as a cultural institution that provides a supportive platform for San Francisco's Black artists and their contributions to the arts, I strongly believe the African American Shakespeare Company should be added to San Francisco's Legacy Business Registry.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dean Preston
District 5 Supervisor



Legacy Business Registry Application



Business Information

Business name: African-American Shakespeare Company

Business owner name(s): N/A (Nonprofit Organization)

Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business

Current business address: 762 Fulton Street, Suite 305, San Francisco, CA 94102

Telephone: (415) 680 - 3830 **Email:**

Mailing address (if different than above):

Website: www.African-AmericanShakes.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AfricanAmericanShakespeare **Twitter:** @AASC_SF

7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN): 0 3 9 7 7 3 6

Do any of these describe your business? (select all that apply)
Requires at least 51% of the business be owned, operated, and controlled by the business designation below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Immigrant-Owned Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Owned by Person with a Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ+-Owned Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Veteran-Owned Business |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minority-Owned Business* | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman-Owned Business |

**Minority is defined as one or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander*

Contact Person Information

Contact person name: Sherri Young

Contact person title: Executive Director

Contact telephone: () - **Contact email:**

Business Location(s)

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business.

If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address.

Original San Francisco address: 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd. **Zip Code:** 94131

Is this location the founding location of the business? (Y/N): Y

Dates at this location: **From:** 09/01/1994 **To:** 05/30/2000

Other address (if applicable): 209 Mississippi St. **Zip Code:** 94107

Dates at this location: **From:** 6/1/2000 **To:** 07/30/2004

Other address (if applicable): 762 Fulton St., Suite 305 **Zip Code:** 94102

Dates at this location: **From:** 08/01/2004 **To:** Present

Other address (if applicable): 460 Gough St. **Zip Code:** 94102

Dates at this location: **From:** 11/1/2021 **To:** Present

Other Address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Applicant Disclosures

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

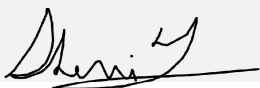
In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Name: Sherri Young

Signature:



Date: 4/30/2024

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Written Historical Narrative

INTRODUCTION

a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?

The African-American Shakespeare Company was introduced in 1994 to open the realm of classic theater to a diverse audience and provide an opportunity and place for actors of color to hone their skills and talent in mastering some of the world's greatest classical roles. They do this by producing work from the canon of classical theater – including Shakespeare and great American and world playwrights – that is lively, entertaining, and relevant.

b. Describe whom the business serves.

Constituents include the greater Bay Area and beyond, as the African-American Shakespeare Company is the longest running Black theater company that specializes in Shakespeare, and the classics nationally and globally.

c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.

Envisioning the classics with color.

CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years

a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.

The African-American Shakespeare Company is a non-profit organization that was established with the California Secretary of State on September 28, 1995. The organization was founded a year earlier in 1994, with the company's first performance occurring in February 1994 at the New Conservatory Theatre Center at 25 Van Ness Avenue.

Sherri Young is a Master of Fine Arts graduate from the American Conservatory Theatre and former commissioner for the San Francisco Arts Commission. Sherri founded the African-American Shakespeare Company in 1994, established it with the Secretary of State in 1995, and has been its Executive Director since. She has directed 20 productions, produced and executed four programs for the organization, and speaks at various colleges, universities, and conferences across the nation. Sherri manages the approximately 80 company members and volunteers for the organization's programs. Some career highlights includes the creation of the company's signature holiday performance Cinderella, effectively building and stabilizing the

organization, as well as increasing audience attendance and new funding support by foundations and individual donors.

The inaugural address of the organization was a mailbox service located at 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd., #923.

When the need for physical office space arose in 2000, the organization secured a shared rental at 209 Mississippi Street in San Francisco. Among a group of graphic designers, African-American Shakespeare Co. had a desk and a location to call home for several years, but the location was not able to have rehearsals or performances.

The necessity for a more effective solution in 2004 led the organization to the African-American Art & Culture Complex at 762 Fulton Street, Suite 305, which not only offered affordability but also became the fertile ground where the organization truly began to thrive and expand. The organization found its footing and developed a community of relationships with the neighborhood and those beyond for 13 years.

Despite not having performed at the African-American Art & Culture Complex from 2015 through 2023, African-American Shakespeare Co. retained office space in the complex and managed to maintain their presence and connection to the neighborhood, staying true to their roots.

In 2021, the organization was fortunate to find a rehearsal space available during the pandemic at 460 Gough Street. The space was formerly a men's clothing store in the community that was less than a half-block away from their office space at 762 Fulton Street. But their former location remained closed to any activity or programming during the pandemic. African-American Shakespeare Company was fortunate enough to find a partnership with the owners at 460 Gough to have the space activated.

Sherri's next legacy is to acquire a performance space for the organization.

b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.

African-American Shakespeare Company is a non-profit organization. Sherri Young has been the Founder and Executive Director since the organization was founded.

c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.

The COVID pandemic in 2020 temporarily shut African-American Shakespeare Company's ability to have live performances, but the business survived and still remained in San Francisco.

CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community

a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.

The African-American Shakespeare Company is the longest established Black theater company in the country that specializes in classical works. In terms of the community, over 240,000 people, students, and patrons have interacted with the organization since 1994. They have provided free student matinees that benefited the community locally and throughout the Bay Area.

Their commitment to arts education has touched the lives of over 3,825 students annually, offering programs that foster not just artistic skills but also critical thinking, social emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness. The organization plays a significant role in accessible arts education, particularly for students of color, providing them with the chance to explore and develop their creative expressions in a nurturing and diverse environment.

The broader artistic landscape of San Francisco also benefits from the African-American Shakespeare Company. They have been a pivotal space for artists of color to practice, perform, and perfect their art. Without the organization, San Francisco's theater scene would be less varied and more monolithic, stifling the emergence and development of distinct voices and narratives that challenge, inspire, and entertain. The city greatly benefits from the rich dialogue and cultural exchange that their diverse programming fosters.

Lastly, the next generation of artists — undiscovered talents — find their voice and vision within the supportive confines of the African-American Shakespeare Company and get the chance to come into play and develop. The chain reaction of this gain is felt not just in the immediate future but for generations to come, as opportunities for mentorship, innovation, and leadership in the arts are enhanced.

b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?

Many of the artists that have worked with the African-American Shakespeare Company have varying degrees of success in the industry. Some of them have become directors, educators, and work as actors in the film, television, and Broadway stages. The most notable person to cross the organization's threshold has been Colman Domingo, a Tony award winner, Oscar award nominee, and continuous rising star.

c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

The African-American Shakespeare Company has participated in neighborhood events and collaboratives. The organization also has free student matinee performances for all their

productions in the season. They have also created events and platforms to serve artists and provide them with training and employment opportunities.

d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?

The African-American Shakespeare Company has been referenced extensively in the media over the years, regarding its performances and the organization itself. There have been countless news articles about its performances. Key media references about the organization itself include the following:

- **Black Theater Artists Are Helping Shakespeare Speak To More Diverse Audiences**
NPR
July 29, 2021
<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/29/1019258187/shakespeare-black-theater-race-diverse-audiences>.
- **Black actors discuss future of African-American Shakespeare in virtual event**
Herald and News
January 27, 2021
https://www.heraldandnews.com/black-actors-discuss-future-of-african-american-shakespeare-in-virtual-event/article_7b249b61-dfee-5193-8740-6b7a6b9e2af5.html
- **Black is the new Bard: Meet Sherri Young, founder of SF's African-American Shakespeare Company**
7x7
Jun 30, 2020
<https://www.7x7.com/sherri-young-founder-african-american-shakespeare-company-san-francisco-2646264845.html>
- **Art Talk with Sherri Young of the African-American Shakespeare Company**
National Endowment for the Arts
February 25, 2015
<https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/art-talk-sherri-young-african-american-shakespeare-company>

e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?

The African-American Shakespeare Company has received favorable representation across various media outlets in recognition of their stellar performances. Notably, they were honored with the following:

- “Best Live Theatre” by San Francisco Magazine in 2018, an accolade determined through rigorous adjudication rather than mere popularity.

- Jefferson Award for Public Service (Silver Recipient) in 2018 awarded to founder Sherri Young acknowledging her outstanding contributions to community service.
- Commendation from former Supervisor Malia Cohen, date unknown.
- Certificate of Honor from Mayor London N. Breed, date unknown.
- Certificate from Governor Gavin Newsom, date unknown.
- The Paine Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement for a Theater Company.

f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

If the African-American Shakespeare Company were to be sold, relocated, or shut down, the impact on the community would be profound and multifaceted. Central to their mission has been the employment of Black artists and staff, thereby directly supporting a demographic that historically faces barriers within the arts sector. This not only enriches their organization with diverse perspectives, but also provides vital employment opportunities. The cessation of their operations would mean the disappearance of a crucial platform for 98 Black artists and creatives, diminishing the rich tapestry of art that their community enjoys.

The disappearance of the African-American Shakespeare Company would not only mean the loss of a vibrant cultural institution but also a critical blow to the community's diversity, vibrancy, and creative spirit. The absence of their supportive platform for Black artists and their contributions to broadening the horizons of youth through arts education would create an irreplaceable void in San Francisco's cultural landscape.

CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business

a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?

The theater company's dynamic origins trace back to the esteemed African-American Art & Culture Complex, initially recognized as the Western Addition Cultural Center. Amidst a vibrant collection of arts organizations housed within the complex, they were privileged to establish and nurture their community. This foundational period enabled the African-American Shakespeare Company to foster a unique and enriching environment, laying the groundwork for their future endeavors and influence in the arts sphere.

b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.

Performing great theatrical works that have withstood the test of time; and using a culturally diverse viewpoint or group of artists in telling these stories that connects us to each other.

c. What is the plan to keep the business open in the long term beyond the current ownership?

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, the African-American Shakespeare Company has proactively engaged in fortifying their core team and broadening the delegation of responsibilities. This strategic approach not only ensures the stability and resilience of their operations but also paves the way for the emergence of new leadership at the opportune moment. Their commitment to this development ensures that they are well-prepared to thrive in a post-pandemic world, embodying the principles of innovation and adaptability that are quintessential to their organizational ethos.

d. What challenges is the business facing today?

The organization is currently facing a pressing challenge that requires immediate attention and action. Until now, their administration office has been housed within the African-American Art & Culture Complex, benefiting from subsidized rates that have allowed them to efficiently manage their operational expenses. However, they recently received the unexpected news that they will need to vacate their current premises for a major renovation project for "several years."

This development places the organization at a crucial juncture. Their initial plan was to launch a capital campaign aimed at securing ownership of their own building, a strategic move designed to establish a permanent and stable foundation for their operations. Given the current situation, while the objective remains unchanged, their immediate focus must pivot to identifying and securing an alternative location that can serve as a conducive work environment for our team.

The urgency to find a new space coincides with their ongoing commitment to ensure the seamless operation and continuity of their organization's important work. They recognize the criticality of this moment, not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to galvanize support and strengthen their resolve towards achieving long-term sustainability.

With this in mind, they are exploring all viable options and calling upon their community, stakeholders, and sympathizers for support, suggestions, and potential leads on suitable spaces that align with their needs. Together, they believe they can overcome this hurdle and continue to advance their mission with resilience and determination.

Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:

a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.

Theater company.

b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 460 Gough Street, Neustadter Brothers Standard Shirt Factory, is "A - Historic Resource Present." It appears to be eligible for the California Registry as an individual property through survey evaluation.

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the African-American Art & Culture Complex at 762 Fulton Street is "B - Unknown / Age Eligible." The property had been identified for its association with modern architecture and landscape design (1935-1970). The National Coalition of Black Gays and Lesbians met here for social and educational activities. The property is also identified in the African American Historic Context Statement for its association with African American history.







EDUCATION

Our education program, **Shake the Stage**, provides life-long learning and creativity while simultaneously building and strengthening reading and comprehension skills.

The Shake the Stage program teaches literacy skills to students using theater games and drama techniques. This program addresses the educational needs of students in fun and creative ways, helping students develop a positive relationship with complex reading materials. Partner schools receives first choice dates and seating at performance events.

Shake the Stage

We offer workshops, study guides, free student matinees, and special events for teachers.

[More Info](#)[Sign-up](#)

WORKSHOPS

Our teaching artists provide workshops about theater arts. Our artists can go to your school and/or you can come to us at our theater.

[More Info](#)

STUDENT MATINEE

Free student matinees for public schools during the production run. We're accepting applications for 2024-2025 productions.

[More Info](#)

TEACHER'S NIGHT OUT

Special complimentary event for educators to preview our productions. Mark your calendars and invite your colleagues to join!

[More Info](#)



Sherri Young, founder and executive director of San Francisco's African-American Shakespeare Company. (Amir Abdul-Shakur)

Black is the new Bard: Meet Sherri Young, founder of SF's African-American Shakespeare Company

By [Shoshi Parks](#) Jun 30, 2020

At the African-American Shakespeare Company (AASC), Julius Caesar isn't a Roman dictator, he's a West African warlord. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* doesn't take place in the forested fairylands outside Athens but amid a raucous Carnival celebration in the West Indies. And Cinderella? She's not a down-on-her-luck white woman but an extraordinary Black one, who finds not just her prince at the end of the fairytale, but her voice, too.

Twenty-five years ago, these types of productions—classic plays reframed in ways that spoke to the Black community and their experiences—simply didn't exist. Although the theater industry was slowly beginning to grapple with issues of diversity on stage, the classics were too opaque, too elitist, too emotionally and experientially distant to draw many Black people to their productions. "I would call myself the only chocolate chip in the audience," laughs Sherri Young.



In African-American Shakespeare Company's production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' Hermia and Lysander are portrayed by Black actors Antonette Bracks and Ryan Marchand.

(Jay Yamada)

Young, who founded the African-American Shakespeare Company in 1994 and has served as its executive director ever since, understood the disconnect. She felt the same way once, too. "I had a hate-love experience with Shakespeare," she explains. "Hate came first."

Like many people, Young first encountered the Bard during her freshman year of high school, through the tale of *Romeo and Juliet*. And like many teens, she found reading the play painful, an experience guided by an unskilled teacher who focused on the play's objective facts, not its powerful emotions.

Even years later, after she had become a professional actor—Young trained at San Francisco's [American Conservatory Theater](#) (A.C.T.)—she still had her doubts about the classics.

"Everyone would say 'oh Shakespeare's wonderful and Shakespeare's this and Shakespeare's that' and 'only the well-trained actors could ever do it, you can't do it because you're not really well trained,'" she remembers. "I hated that because it kind of negated in my mind that, well, does that mean if you [don't do Shakespeare] that you're not a well-trained actor?"

After she graduated from A.C.T., Young's perspective began to shift. As an actress, she had been made to feel that she didn't have the chops to perform Shakespeare, but instead of internalizing the critique, she turned the narrative on its head. She would break Shakespeare and the Greek classics out of a prison of fuddy-duddy elite expectations and re-frame them through the cultural competency of the Black community. The productions put on by her company wouldn't just pay lip service to diversity, they would move the needle to build greater equity in the theater.

Young mounted her first Shakespeare production with just a credit card, a 60-seat theater, and a little help from fellow A.C.T. actors in 1994. The sold-out two-night showcase was well received but it didn't generate the kind of funding that AASC needed to really get off the ground. It would be another decade before Young could quit her job in finance to run the company full time. In 2009, she was able to hire the acclaimed actor L. Peter Callender as artistic director and AASC came into full bloom, drawing new, diverse audiences to classic theater and providing opportunities for actors of color to hone their skills with the works of cherished classical and American playwrights.

"If you really want diversity, you've got to change the cultural perception of who's telling the story, and who's in it, and where the locations are, and what kind of music are you listening to, and what kind of costumes are you wearing, and whose icons are you looking at, and what character parallels images from my community," says Young.

It's how *Julius Cesar* ended up being set in West Africa and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the West Indies. "We find ways to parallel the different communities of the African Diaspora," she explains.

After 25 years of productions, the space AASC has carved out within the theater world has been embraced by diverse members of the Black community. "Our audience, they feel very powerful for just being part of our theater company," says Young. "They're really just in awe

that we've dared to do something and be in a space that we weren't really supposed to be in originally. We're showing up in plays that we normally haven't been invited to, and we're showing up in a way where we're unapologetic."



Actors Devin Cunningham as Prince Charming and Funmi Lola in the title role of AASC's 'Cinderella'.

(Lance Huntley)

While the AASC continues to put on Shakespearean and Greek classics annually, in recent years they have expanded their focus to also include American classics like Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Fairy tales also show up on the AASC stage. Every holiday season since 2015, Young has directed the company's popular production of *Cinderella*.

"A lot of Black girls are ignored, not elevated, and watching Disney movies you just didn't see us. So I wanted to do a show that spoke to the positivity of young Black

girls. *Cinderella* is a favorite because there aren't a lot of family shows for Black youth to see," says Young.

The AASC is empowering off stage, too, with drama workshops oriented towards Black youth. Showing up consistently with programs that are embedded in the community is one way the company is working to build equity both on the stage and behind the scenes. While workshops are on hiatus due to COVID-19, Young continues to look for ways to keep youth engaged at home while simultaneously supporting artists who are temporarily on out of work, offering those they work with the opportunity to develop activities for youth to do at home or in a classroom setting.

As for the company's performances, those are on hiatus too, at least for now. In the meantime, Young and her team are moving to an online platform, putting together a documentary to celebrate their 25th anniversary, and planning for the 2021-2022 season, which will include *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*. In commemoration of Juneteenth, AASC released a [video](#) of artistic director Peter Callender interviewing *Selma* actor Colman Domingo and, soon, they'll also be offering a new play-reading program featuring contemporary playwrights and works on-demand.

"With every thorn there are roses and I think that there are going to be more opportunities for artists to have space to create," says Young. "So I'm looking forward to seeing where we're going down the road as a community, a society and an industry."



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: December 4, 2024

Filing Date: November 6, 2024
Case No.: 2024-010352LBR
Business Name: African-American Shakespeare Company
Business Address: 762 Fulton St, Suite 305
Zoning: RM-2 (RESIDENTIAL- MIXED, MODERATE DENSITY) Zoning District
 50-X Height and Bulk District
Cultural District: Not Applicable
Block/Lot: 0781/010
Applicant: Sherri Young, Executive Director
 762 Fulton Street Suite 305, San Francisco, CA 94102
Nominated By: Supervisor Dean Preston
Located In: District 5
Staff Contact: Kat Cuiffo, kathryn.cuiffo@sfgov.org, 628-652-7367

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

The African-American Shakespeare Company (AASC) is the oldest established Black theater company in the United States that specialize in classical works founded in 1994 by current Executive Director Sherri Young. Young is a graduate of the American Conservatory Theater where she earned a Masters of Fine Arts and was a former San Francisco Arts Commissioner. The mission of the AASC is to open the realm of classic theater to a diverse audience and provide an opportunity for actors of color to hone their skills and talent. They do this by producing work canon to classical theater – including notable American and global playwrights, like Shakespeare – with an African American cultural perspective that is lively, entertaining, and relevant. Their commitment to arts education has touched the lives of over 3,825 students annually, offering programs that foster not just artistic skills but also critical thinking, social emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness. The organization plays a significant role in accessible arts education, particularly for students of color, providing them with the chance to explore and develop their creative expressions in a nurturing and diverse environment.

The AASC originally established their inaugural mailing address at 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd., #923 in 1994. As the need for more physical space grew, AASC secured their first physical office space at 209 Mississippi St. in 2000, which was merely a desk to rent amongst other working professionals. Since 2004, AASC has called 762 Fulton St., Suite 305 in the African-American Art & Culture Complex home. This location has provided them space where they have been able to thrive and expand the reach of their office. Since their inception, the company has hosted performances in theaters across the city with their first in February 1994 at the New Conservatory Theater Center at 25 Van Ness Avenue and more recently at Herbst Theatre, Marines' Memorial Theatre, and Taube Atrium Theater at 401 Van Ness Ave. Despite having to pause productions in 2020 during the pandemic, AASC was fortunate enough to find a rehearsal space at 460 Gough Street in 2021, where the partnership forged between the company and the building owners still holds strong. AASC's resilience through the years has shown dedication to maintaining their presence and connection to the neighborhoods they serve.

Currently, the business is facing displacement of their currently subsidized office space in the African American Art & Culture Complex because the building will be going through a major renovation which is expected to take several years. AASC's objective and dedication to their students and community remains unchanged, though their focus must pivot to finding a new location to continue their operations and program.

Since 1994, AASC has provided a unique and irreplaceable theatrical program and touched the lives of more than 240,000 performers, writers, students and patrons. They currently run a School Partnership Program that partners with over 36 schools in the greater Bay Area to offer free student matinees and residency workshops, as well as offer professional development programs that provide employment training for emerging and experienced artists. They have also participated in neighborhood events and collaboratives and currently provide a platform for 98 Black artists who are vitally contributing to the rich tapestry of San Francisco art.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1994.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. African-American Shakespeare Company qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. African-American Shakespeare Company has operated continuously in San Francisco for 30 years.
- b. African-American Shakespeare Company has contributed to the history and identity of the Western Addition and Fillmore neighborhoods in San Francisco.
- c. African-American Shakespeare Company is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art / craft / cuisine / tradition?*

Yes. The business is associated with classical theater production from an African-American cultural perspective.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and / or architecture?*

Yes. The theater company's dynamic origins and current office location on Fulton Street trace back to the esteemed African-American Art & Culture Complex, initially recognized as the Western Addition Cultural Center (AAACC). The AAACC is the only city-owned cultural center for the preservation of African American art and culture located in the geographic heart of one of two historically black communities remaining in San Francisco. Further, The National Coalition of Black Gays and Lesbians met here for social and educational activities.

The Gough Street rehearsal property, Neustadter Brothers Standard Shirt Factory established in 1871, is eligible for the California Registry with a San Francisco Planning department Historic Resource Status of A.

Many of the artists that have worked with the African-American Shakespeare Company have varying degrees of success in the industry. Some of them have become directors, educators, and work as actors in the film, television, and Broadway stages. The most notable person to cross the organization's threshold has been Colman Domingo, a Tony award winner, Oscar award nominee, and continuous rising star.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

No, their office space located at 762 Fulton Street is not on a historic resource registry, though their performance space at 460 Gough St. property is a Category A (Historic Resource Present) building.

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

No, the African-American Shakespeare Theater is not as of the date of this Executive Summary. However, the African-American Art & Culture Complex and 762 Fulton St. property is identified in the African American Historic Context Statement for its association with African American history.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. There have been several features and articles on Young and the theater company, both within and outside the theater industry. The theater was recognized in an NPR article in 2021 that highlighted how the company's work is "helping Shakespeare speak to more diverse audiences." Further, the theater company was featured in a ShakespeareAMERICA sponsored live streamed virtual event to discuss the past, present, and future of African-American Shakespeare. Young has been the focus of a few articles published by the National Endowment for the Arts and 7x7. The theater company has also received a variety of awards through the years including "Best Live Theatre" by San Francisco Magazine in 2018, Certificates of Honor from both Mayor London Breed and Governor Gavin Newsom, and the Pain Knickerbocker Award in 2014 for Outstanding Achievement. Lastly, Young received the Jefferson Award for Public Service in 2018 acknowledging her outstanding contributions to community service.

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

On July 15, 2020 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted [Resolution No. 1127](#) centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department's Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor's Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The Legacy Business Program is deeply intertwined with these goals. One of the primary purposes of the Legacy Business Program is to maintain San Francisco's cultural fabric and to foster civic engagement and pride by assisting long-operating businesses remain in the city. The Legacy Business Registry was established to recognize longstanding, community-serving businesses that are valuable cultural assets of the city. These businesses, ranging from restaurants to art galleries to tire shops to community shelters, are key to sustaining the racial and social diversity in San Francisco and adding to the identity and character of our city and the many communities within it.

African-American Shakespeare Theater is the oldest established Black theater company in the United States that specializes in classical works. It was founded in 1994 as a non-profit by the current Executive Director, Sherri Young, who believes in the importance of creating a pivotal space for artists of color to practice, perform, and perfect their art. Central to their mission has been the employment of Black artists and staff, thereby directly supporting a demographic that historically faces barriers within the arts sector. Without the organization, San Francisco's theater scene would be a less varied monolith, stifling the emergence and development of distinct voices and narratives that challenge, inspire, and entertain. The city greatly benefits from the rich dialogue and cultural exchange that their diverse programming fosters. The theater company's impact will be felt for generations to come, as opportunities for mentorship, innovation, and leadership in the arts are offered through their school partnership programs and professional development programs.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 762 Fulton St., Suite 305 (2004 – Present)
- 460 Gough St. (2021 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 209 Mississippi St. (2000-2004)
- 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd. (1994–2000)

Recommended by Applicant

- Cultural exchange within classical theater
- Theater company and administration
- School Partnership Program
- Youth Programs
- Professional Development Workshops

- Rehearsal space

Additional Recommended by Staff

- Accessible arts education, particularly to the African American community and communities of color

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
 - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
 - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
 - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DRAFT RESOLUTION NO.

HEARING DATE: December 4, 2024

Case No.: 2024-010352LBR
Business Name: African-American Shakespeare Theater
Business Address: 762 FULTON ST
Zoning: RM-2 (RESIDENTIAL- MIXED, MODERATE DENSITY) Zoning District
50-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0781/010
Applicant: Sherri Young
762 Fulton Street San Francisco, CA 94102
Nominated By: Supervisor Dean Preston
Located In: District 5
Staff Contact: Kat Cuiffo, kathryn.cuiffo@sfgov.org, 628-652-7367

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE THEATER CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 762 FULTON ST BLOCK/LOT 0781/010.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 4, 2024, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that African-American Shakespeare Theater qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for African-American Shakespeare Theater.

Location(s):

Current Locations:

- 762 Fulton St., Suite 305 (2004 – Present)
- 460 Gough St. (2021 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 209 Mississippi St. (2000-2004)
- 5214-F Diamond Heights Blvd. (1994–2000)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Cultural exchange within classical theater
- Theater company and administration
- School Partnership Program
- Youth Programs
- Professional Development Workshops
- Rehearsal space
- Accessible arts education, particularly to the African American community and communities of color

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business on December 4, 2024.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

RECUSE:

ADOPTED: December 4, 2024