Berlin, January 13, 2014

SCHWARZ GEMACHT

by ALEXANDER THOMAS (USA)

World premiere: Wednesday, February 26, 2014 | 8pm

Set in 1938 Berlin and drawing heavily upon history, Schwarz gemacht by Alexander Thomas imagines a story that examines universal questions of self and citizenship primarily through the eyes of a patriotic Afrodeutscher (Afro-German) actor. Proud to serve his country, he appears in propaganda films calling for the return of Germany's former African colonies. Encounters with a young German-American woman and an African-American musician and activist at an underground jazz bar lead to hard questions about the treatment of people of color both in Germany and in the United States of America.

The production utilizes elements of expressionist silent film on a formal level as a reflection of the life of the protagonist. The surreal, often claustrophobic atmosphere of this era connects the various storylines and settings, focusing directly on the core issue of the play: "identity", the question of what makes us who we are and who has the right to define us.

Afrodeutsche and National Socialist Cinema

A surprising number of Afro-Germans were able to earn their living as extras in the film industry during the NS regime. They were used by Joseph Goebbels's propaganda machine to serve racist stereotypes while their precarious day-to-day existence was subject to constantly changing, arbitrary legislation. Extreme cases included being declared “stateless” and even deportation.

One of the primary inspirations for the main character in Schwarz gemacht is, among others, the well-known Afro-German actor Louis Brody. Brody's incredibly diverse career includes Robert Wiene’s Genuine (1920), Fritz Lang’s Der müde Tod (1921), the anti-Semitic Jud Süß (1940) as well as Münchausen (1942/1943). He is one of the few Afro-German actors to perform speaking roles.


Shows:
Thursday, February 27 – Saturday, March 1, Wednesday, March 5 – Saturday, March 8 and Wednesday, March 12 – Saturday, March 15, 2014 | 8pm | Tickets: 14 € | 8 € | In English and German. Post-performance discussions on February 27, March 6 and March 13, 2014.

Supported by the US Embassy, Berlin and the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation.

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BACHGROUND INFORMATION

*Schwarz gemacht* is the first project to move completely through English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center’s new work development series, THE LAB, to receive a full production. During the *Colorblind?* series of staged readings examining racial identity on stage in 2012, playwright Alexander Thomas, director Daniel Brunet and actor Ernest Allan Hausmann, known from various film and television productions such as *Berlin Calling* by Hannes Stöhr, *Soul Kitchen* by Fatih Akin, *Tatort* and the ARD telenovela *Red Roses* met and decided to complete the piece and bring it to the stage.

**ALEXANDER THOMAS**, was born and grew up in Albany, New York. He studied acting in New York City at the Stella Adler Studio (among others). His autobiographical solo show *Throw Pitchfork* ran off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop as well as the Kitchen Theatre Company in Ithaca, New York. *Throw Pitchfork* won a Special Honours Award and was the closing production at the 2004 *Thespis International Monodrama Festival* in Kiel, Germany.

He is one of the contributing writers to the American Slavery Project; *Unheard Voices*. A monologue play that gives voice to some of the 400 unmarked graves of slaves discovered at the African Burial Grounds unearthed in Manhattan, New York in 1991. This project has been performed in venues throughout New York including the Museum of Natural History.

Alexander Thomas has an international career as a stage actor. He was a cast member of the award-winning UK production of *On the Waterfront* by the esteemed director Steven Berkoff, which ran in London’s West End as well the Edinburgh Festival, the Nottingham Playhouse and the Hong Kong Arts Festival.