For Immediate Release:

UC BERKELEY DEPARTMENT OF THEATER, DANCE, AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES PRESENTS PHILIP KAN GOTANDA’S AFTER THE WAR BLUES, RUNNING MARCH 7-16 IN ZELLERBACH PLAYHOUSE

BAY AREA ARTIST STEVEN ANTHONY JONES DIRECTS

The Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies continues its 2014 Main Stage season with Philip Kan Gotanda’s After the War Blues, running March 7-16 in Zellerbach Playhouse.

War does many things to us – it can make us question our government, question what it means to be an American, and question where we belong. After the War Blues takes place in the aftermath of World War II, when several communities intersected in San Francisco’s Western Addition District: Japanese-Americans returning from internment camps, African-Americans who had come to San Francisco looking for work, White southern migrants looking for economic opportunity and Russian Jews arriving in this country in the wake of the war. During a time when resources were limited, the characters struggle to get along and find their place in this new cultural mix. Says Gotanda, “The play asks - how do you begin to bridge all these different communities, and ultimately, can you?”

After the War Blues, originally titled After the War, was first presented at American Conservatory Theater in 2007. Director Steven Anthony Jones, who developed the original version with Gotanda and also appeared in the play, was excited by the opportunity to continue working on it. “Philip and I always felt like there was more,” says Jones. “Continuing to develop the play seemed like a natural evolution.” “I was very happy with the first production,” says Gotanda. “And after seeing it, I had so many new ideas.”

Gotanda, who has taught in TDPS since 2009, was recently appointed as a Professor. The appointment gives him the opportunity to continue teaching, and also provides him a home base to create and introduce new works to the university and beyond.

With TDPS graduate student Takeo Rivera as dramaturg and Cal Shakes resident dramaturg Philippa Kelly acting as “playwright consultant,” Gotanda set to work reconceiving the text and revisiting themes, particularly the interracial relationship of characters. “Characters are not as nice and polite in this version,” says Gotanda. “I worked on deepening conversations to ensure that each character really speaks his or her point of view, and that it sets up truthful conflict,” says Gotanda. “It is edgier,” adds Jones, “and will be closer to a product of the times, and how people actually interacted in terms of race and gender.”

Given the diversity of UC Berkeley’s student body, Gotanda thought the play would be a great fit for the university. Producing it in an academic setting also comes with advantages for Jones.
“Directorially,” he says, “it is an opportunity to take a little more risk than one could take in a professional setting.”

Live music, specifically the blues, will take a more prominent place alongside the original jazz in this revised production. Gotanda has taken haiku poetry written by Japanese internment camp prisoners, setting those lyrics to blues melodies, sung both in English and Japanese. Music acts both as a metaphor for the internal voices of characters, in addition to symbolizing the intersection between the two main neighborhood groups.

Although at its core the play is a period piece, both Gotanda and Jones hope audiences will find clear parallels to contemporary life. “Especially now, we still see economic disparity surfacing through racial and class tensions,” says Gotanda. “Everyone in the play is searching for their place in life and looking for ways to be happy,” says Jones. “And that is what we all want.”

About the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies
The Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley teaches performance as a mode of critical inquiry, creative expression and public engagement. Through performance training and research, we create liberal arts graduates with expanded analytical, technical and imaginative capacities. As a public institution, we make diversity and inclusion a key part of our teaching, art making and public programming.

About Philip Kan Gotanda
Over the last three decades, playwright Philip Kan Gotanda has been a major influence in the broadening of our definition of theater in America. Through his plays and advocacy, he has been instrumental in bringing stories of Asians in the United States to mainstream American theater as well as to Europe and Asia. Mr. Gotanda holds a law degree from Hastings College of Law and studied pottery in Japan with the late Hiroshi Seto. Mr. Gotanda with musician Michael Sasaki and actress Joan Chen once had a chinglish version of My Boyfriend’s Back on the Hong Kong pop charts before it was banned. He resides in the Berkeley Hills with his writer-producer wife, Diane Takei and their famously ill-behaved dog, Toulouse.

About Steven Anthony Jones
Steven Anthony Jones is the artistic director of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, the premiere African American theatre company in the San Francisco Bay Area. Most recently, he directed eight of the ten titles in LHT’s 2012-2013 Bringing the Art to the Audience staged readings series, as well as the workshop production of Philip Kan Gotanda’s Jamaican Wash Project. He has worked professionally on stage, television and in film for 37 years, and performed, taught and directed at the American Conservatory Theater for 22 years as a member of the core acting company. Over the years he has performed both classical and contemporary works, and was in the original cast of The Negro Ensemble Company’s A Soldier’s Play, which one an Obie Award for ensemble acting and the Pulitzer Prize for best drama. His many film and television credits include two seasons of Midnight Caller and a recurring role on the NBC series Trauma. Mr. Jones received his early theatre training at Karamu House in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. He is a graduate of Yankton College in South Dakota.