

Soulpepper



THREE SISTERS

BY INUA ELLAMS

AFTER CHEKHOV

A SOULPEPPER & OBSIDIAN THEATRE CO-PRODUCTION



Photo: Roya DelSol, 2023, Photoshoot Creative Director: Chinedu Ukabam.



On behalf of Soulpepper and Obsidian Theatre, we want to welcome you to the North American premiere of this powerful and moving play. *Three Sisters* has been the culmination of years of dreaming between our two companies. For both companies, this felt like the right play at the right time for us to collaborate on – a classic play by Anton Chekhov, adapted by Nigerian-born British playwright Inua Ellams.

For playwright Inua Ellams, his attraction to the story started with his own family – specifically his three sisters. He and his family immigrated to England from Nigeria in 1996 and there, he says, “attitudes towards people of colour became so toxic, Britain voted to leave the European Union believing they would gain control over their borders and keep us out. Such rhetoric exists because Britain colonized the world and conveniently forgot the conflicts this created - which displaced, and continues to displace, millions.” His adaptation of *Three Sisters* looks at one such conflict – the Nigerian Civil War – which as Ellams points out, “is part of British History, and by extension, part of Canadian history.”



Ellams’ adaptation was one that both Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu (Artistic Director of Obsidian and Director of the production) and Weyni Mengesha (Soulpepper’s Artistic Director) were incredibly energized and

moved by. As members of the Soulpepper Academy, both Mumbi and Weyni studied Chekhov’s original play. “For both of us, reading Ellams’ script brought together two worlds – our love of Chekhov and our African heritage – in a stunning adaptation, a story which sheds light on a part of the world that we rarely see on Canadian stages.” Showcasing stories like these has always been at the heart of Obsidian Theatre’s mandate.

As the incredible, all-star cast and creative team came together, all of us at Soulpepper and Obsidian knew we had the final ingredients for a truly extraordinary offering – we can’t wait for you to experience it.

GIDEON ARTHURS
Executive Director,
Soulpepper Theatre
Company

WEYNI MENGESHA
Artistic Director,
Soulpepper Theatre
Company

MICHAEL SINCLAIR
General Manager,
Obsidian Theatre
Company

MUMBI TINDYEBWA OTU
Artistic Director,
Obsidian Theatre
Company



Story Story? Sto-ry!

Once Upon A Time? Time-Time!

In the cobblestone forest of the Distillery District, a bunch of ragamuffins gathered in one corner to play a play about Igboland. It was Fantastic, Cokastic, and Maltastic. They were laughing, studying, sharing snacks, singing and dancing together, and trying not to give each other malaria. Then, one day, the organizers of the play asked one of the ragamuffins -- who happens to be an Igbo person in real life -- to write something called an Artist Note for the pamphlet that

attendees of the play may either read or not read, or wipe or not wipe their nyash with.

That patikula Igbo person doesn't want peace. They want problems, always! So, they said "ehen now". After plenty wahala, they decided to share the following

lessons: I don't know enough African history, and I feel h'embarrassed, but I can learn. That is a gift.
Magic loves a void.
We are enough. We have room to grow.
Freedom is expensive. It asks the most of those who have the least.
Body no be firewood.

gratitude for:

- this opportunity to share this story of my lineage, a time travel ticket to a strange and familiar home away from home (my family hasn't been back in 21 years)
- your attention, dear reader-listener-viewer
- the full-bodied flavour of the vulnerability that comes with honouring pain
- the generous guidance and world-altering wisdom of my fellow passionate, insightful, gifted, and hard-working Biafrans
- the warriors, victims, and survivors of this Igbo genocide, and freedom fighters worldwide

questions: Are there justifiable reasons for warfare? What will it take for governing leaders to divest from this destructive method of nation-building? Would the Igbos or another Nigerian ethnic group attempt secession again? Is Nigeria beyond repair now? Who would my elders now be, had they experienced childhood without massacre? What residue has taken up residence in my generation and beyond?

jara ("extra, bonus")

rather than the typical straight line,
often diagonally inclined and likely to feature jagged edges of varying sizes,
the shape of progress looks, to me,
like a downward spiral into a cycle of violence doing nonstop somersaults
on the curve of the back bent in prayer to a creator one may only belong to, and not be part of.
it turns in on itself, not at all unlike the way we do one another.

AMAKA UMEH

Actor, *Three Sisters*



Old Igbo proverb: Gidi gidi bu ugwu Eze
 Meaning: Unity is strength!

Growing up in Nigeria in the 80's and 90's the music of King Sunny Adé, Fela Aníkúlápó Kuti and Prince Shina Peters were the sounds Sunday afternoons were made of. After a lunch of “rice and stew very plenty” us children would sit on the floor around our father as he told us stories of the Biafran war and how he and my mother met and fell in love in the midst of the chaos of the war. During the war, the great actor Sunny Oti hired my father to be a part of a traveling troupe of

actors who performed for the Biafran army. The dream of Biafra for those who believed, symbolized, freedom of choice, freedom of governance, and total autonomy from colonial rule. These dreams burned bright in the heart of Ndi Igbo who believed in the cause, emblemizing their innate spirit of freedom, entrepreneurship, and community. My father Dr. Chijioke Waboso held these ideals in his heart until he went to be with God and our ancestors. It is a moment of deep pathos, cyclical, and honor for me to be a part of this journey with the incredible cast and team at Obsidian Theatre and Soulpepper Theatre. I believe in the importance of this story and the ideals of freedom and community and know that they are integral to the work of decolonization as we redefine what it means to be a citizen of the global south; in and out of diaspora, and specifically, what it means to be Onyi Igbo!

Igbo Kwezwenụ, Yah!

SODIENYE WABOSO AMAJOR

Dialect Coach & Cultural Consultant, *Three Sisters*

DATES

Three Sisters takes place in Owerri, Nigeria.

Act 1: May 30, 1967

Act 2: September 13, 1968

Act 3: April 20, 1969

Act 4: January 25, 1970

MUSIC

“**War No Dey**” (Traditional) and “**Atula Egwu**” (Traditional)
 arranged by Adekunle Olorundare (Kunle).

“**Together We Stand**” written and composed by Adekunle Olorundare (Kunle).

“**Baby Love**” by Eddie Holland used by permission of Sony Music Canada.

“**Downtown**” by Tony Hatch used by permission of Universal Music Canada.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Notes by Ugochukwu Okoye

Introduction

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, unfolded from 1967 to 1970, profoundly shaping Nigeria's history and exerting a lasting impact on its political and social fabric. Arguably one of the bloodiest conflicts in Africa's history, with a death toll estimated between 500,000 and three million, the war stemmed from profound ethnic, political, and economic tensions between the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region and the rest of Nigeria. Its roots are entwined in a complex interplay of historical, ethnic, and political factors dating back to the colonial foundations of the Nigerian state. However, the attempt by the then Eastern region to establish the breakaway independent state of Biafra in the summer of 1967 triggered a devastating 30-month-long war between the Nigerian government and the secessionist state of Biafra.

Background

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960. However, before European colonialism, the territory that is now Nigeria comprised several indigenous civilizations, leaving a lasting impact on the nation today. In the predominantly Muslim north were two nineteenth-century empires, the Sokoto Caliphate and the Bornu Empire. To the southwest lay numerous Yoruba city-states of the Oyo Empire, and the Benin Empire. In the southeast was the Igbo kingdom, Nri, along with a collection of semi-autonomous towns and villages in the Niger River delta. These regions, linguistically, religiously, and politically distinct, were separately administered as the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

However, on January 1, 1914, both protectorates were arbitrarily amalgamated into what is today Nigeria through a decree promulgated by the then Governor-General Lord Frederick Lugard, citing

“administrative convenience.” The territory was subsequently divided into three political regions — the north, west, and east — aligning with the three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, respectively constituting the dominant group in each region. This arrangement persisted until independence in 1960.

Despite the differences between the various ethnic groups, the birth of the new independent nation was greeted with much enthusiasm. In the 1960s, Nigeria, by virtue of its large population, economy, and human resources, stood as a shining example of black excellence. However, the political landscape was marred by ethnic and regional disparities, leading to the eruption of political unrest.



Map of Nigeria (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2001)

Prelude to the War: Nigerian Independence and the First Military Revolution

In January 1966, a group of young army officers, primarily Igbo, carried out a coup that resulted in the assassination of several political leaders, including the Prime Minister, who was from the north. This event heightened ethnic tensions, leading to a countercoup primarily led by officers of northern Nigerian extraction in July 1966 and the assassination of the then-military Head of State, Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo army general. The coup was followed by widespread massacres of mostly easterners residing in the northern part of the country. Observers estimated that between 3,000 and 30,000 Igbos were killed, and another 150,000 – 300,000 fled to southern and eastern regions.



Photo of Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Source: AFP)

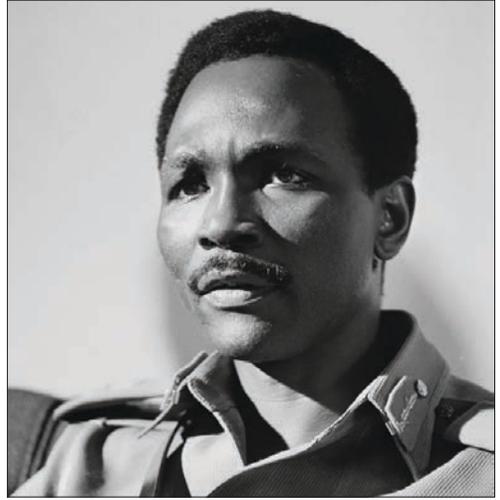


Photo of Col. Yakubu Gowon (Source: Terry Fincher / Hulton Archive - Getty Images)

Biafra Declaration of Independence

The slow response from the Federal government in curbing the anti-Igbo pogrom and its indifference toward addressing the unfolding humanitarian crisis due to the violence was perceived by the easterners as a calculated act of persecution. In response to this and in a last attempt at the self-preservation of the Igbo people, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the 34-year-old military governor of the Eastern Region predominantly inhabited by the Igbo, ordered all Igbos to return to the Eastern Region. Months later, after successive failed diplomatic attempts at resolving the crises, Col Ojukwu declared the independent Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. The declaration, interpreted by the Nigerian Federal government as an act of rebellion, set off a chain of events that would forever change the course of the country's history.

See timeline of key events on the following page.

Conclusion

In the aftermath, the war was declared “no victor, no vanquished,” with no formal prosecution of Biafran leaders instituted by the Nigerian government. However, justifications for the war

vary on both sides of the divide. For the Nigerian government, the preservation of the unity of Nigeria was seen as a task that must be accomplished regardless of the cost, thus considering the secession an act of rebellion. Whereas for the Igbos, Biafra meant freedom, and the war was an inevitably heavy but noble price paid to secure that freedom—a sentiment very well embodied in General Ojukwu's declaration of Biafra speech and the central theme of battle songs chanted by soldiers. Though the war ended, efforts to address the issues that led to the war, including ethnic and regional disparities, continue to shape Nigeria's political discourse and Biafra activism.

Narratives of the Nigeria-Biafra war have been documented in several books and documentaries and adapted into critically acclaimed movies. “The Three Sisters,” an adaptation of Chekhov's, set in the eastern heartland city of Owerri in the period preceding the Civil War, chronicles the survival of three Igbo sisters through the war. It tells the story of lives transformed, dreams displaced and hopes harangued by the travesty of war.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

- **January 1967:** Nigerian military leaders famously meet in Aburi, Ghana, to resolve the complications and disaffections created by the two coups. Among the agreements reached at Aburi are demands for greater fiscal autonomy for the regions.
- **May 27, 1967:** General Gowon, the Military Head of State, reneging on the conditions set out in the Aburi Accord, declares the division of Nigeria into 12 states, including splitting the Eastern Region into three parts.
- **May 30, 1967:** Ojukwu declares the independence of the Republic of Biafra after an official vote of secession by the Consultative Assembly in the eastern region.
- **June 1967:** Following the declaration of Biafra, Nigeria's military government places an economic embargo on goods and services to and from Biafra, excluding oil tankers. The eventual blockade, which extended throughout the duration of the war, led to a severe famine, with estimates of millions of people, especially children, dying due to starvation.
- **July 6, 1967:** Five weeks after Ojukwu declared the Republic of Biafra as an independent state, Nigerian forces launched "Operation UNICORD," an offensive from the northern Biafra border, capturing Nsukka and Garkem within days, in an attempt to overrun and capture Enugu, the capital of the former Eastern Region and subsequently the capital of Biafra. This marked the start of the civil war.
- **January 1968:** After nearly six months of war, the Nigerian military had surrounded Biafra and cut off the majority of their supply lines, but the Biafrans continued to resist surrender and kept on fighting.
- **April 13, 1968:** The Government of Tanzania under President Julius Nyerere formally recognized Biafra as an independent state. This was followed by Ivory Coast on May 14, 1968. Other countries that formally recognized Biafra include Gabon, Zambia, and Haiti (on March 22, 1969) while receiving de facto recognition and covert military support from France, Portugal, Israel, South Africa, and Rhodesia.
- **September 1968:** Nigerian forces launched "Operation O.A.U" to capture the three key cities in Biafra's heartland: Owerri, Aba, and Umuahia.
- **May 1969:** Biafrans commenced a land offensive reinforced by foreign mercenary pilots, attacking military airfields in Enugu, Port Harcourt, Ughelli, and Benin City.
- **June 5, 1969:** A Red Cross plane was downed while delivering relief supplies to Biafra. As a result, the Red Cross ceased air deliveries of aid.
- **June 30, 1969:** Nigeria banned International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) aid to Biafra.
- **January 7, 1970:** Nigerian forces launched its offensive "Operation Tail-Wind," successfully retaking Owerri and Uli within 5 days.
- **January 12, 1970:** Efforts to seek a diplomatic end to the conflict failed. Amid worsening humanitarian conditions, General Philip Effiong, deputy to Col Ojukwu, who had fled to the Ivory Coast a few days earlier, formally surrendered Biafra to Nigeria. The war officially ended on January 15, 1970, with the unconditional surrender of Biafran forces. Thus ended the quest for Biafra.

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Cast

Akosua Amo-Adem
Lolo

Tawiah M'Carthy
Onyinyechukwu

Ordena Stephens-Thompson
Nma

Virgilia Griffith
Nne Chukwu

Ngabo Nabea
Nmeri Ora

Amaka Umeh
Igwe

Daren A. Herbert
Ikemba

Tony Ofori
Dimgba

Matthew G. Brown
Standby: Onyinyechukwu

Sterling Jarvis
Eze

Oyin Oladejo
Abosede

JD Leslie
Oyiridiya

Makambe K. Simamba
Udo

Creative Team

Inua Ellams
Playwright

John Gzowski*
Sound Design & Composition

Paul de Jong
Dialect Coach

Mumbi Tindiebwa Otu
Director

Adekunle Olorundare (Kunle)
Vocal Music Coach & Arrangement
Additional Composition

Ugochukwu Okoye
Historical Consultant

Natasha Mumba
Assistant Director

Esie Mensah
Movement Director

Robert Harding
Stage Manager

Joanna Yu*
Set Design

Anita Nittoly
Fight & Intimacy Director

Emilie Aubin
Assistant Stage Manager

Ming Wong*
Costume Design

Sodienye Waboso Amajor
Dialect Coach & Cultural Consultant

Keleshaye Christmas-Simpson
Apprentice Stage Manager

Andre du Toit*
Lighting Design

*Indicated designers on this production are represented by the Associated Designers of Canada, IATSE Local ADC659.

Production

Christopher Blanchenot
Scenic Artist

Erin Halls
Stitcher

Jordan Silva
Assistant Wigs

Paul Boddum
Head Scenic Artist

Ellie Koffman
Head of Wardrobe

Jackie Smulan
Dresser

Everett Dalingwater
Audio Operator

Brooke Logie
Dresser

Bill Stahl
1st Carpenter

Stephen Catatina
Scenic Artist

Lisa Nighswander
Head of Props

Dalton Villeneuve-Marini
Deck Hand

Greg Chambers
1st Props Builder

Kalina Popova
Assistant Head of Wardrobe

Alex Edwards
Production Assistant

Sylvia Defend
Cutter

Jacqueline Robertson-Cull
Head of Wigs

Celina Westlake
Stitcher

Andy DeVries
Head Carpenter

Ethan Robinson
Lighting Operator

Thank you: Evan Reid.

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Originally commissioned by Metta Theatre. *Three Sisters* was first presented by the National Theatre of Great Britain on 10 Dec 2019.

**Running time: 3 hours, 20 mins,
including one intermission**



AKOSUA AMO-ADEM was born in Ghana, West Africa and raised in Toronto, ON. **OBSIDIAN:** School Girls; (Obsidian/Nightwood), Venus' Daughter, 21 Black Futures (Obsidian/CBC Arts). **SOULPEPPER:** Billie, Ella, and Sarah: Revolutionary Women in Jazz, Pipeline, Streetcar Named Desire, Innocence Lost, Idomeneus, For Colored Girls..., Father Comes Home I, II, III, The Crucible. **OTHER THEATRE:** Much Ado About Nothing, Les Belles Soeurs, Death and the King's Horseman (Stratford Festival), The Middle Place, Domesticated, Tartuffe (Canadian Stage); The Assembly (The NAC); The Home Project (The Howland Company). **FILM & TELEVISION:** Frankie Drake Mysteries; 21 Black Futures; In The Dark, Most Dangerous Game; American Gods; Kim's Convenience. **OTHER:** Akosua is a published author with an article called "See Me" in Intermission online magazine and is currently in the process of developing her first full length play!



EMILIE AUBIN is a stage manager for theatre and live performance based in Tkaròn:to. **OBSIDIAN:** Is God Is (Obsidian/Necessary Angel/Canadian Stage), 21 Black Futures, Pass Over, School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play, hang, Cast Iron (Obsidian/Factory Theatre). **SOULPEPPER:** Art. **OTHER THEATRE:** 2 Pianos 4 Hands (Marquis Entertainment/Mirvish); Cockroach 甲由, Paint Me This House of Love (Tarragon Theatre); Century Song, Infinity (Volcano Theatre); Lady Baby, Portrait (The Dietrich Group); Tributaries (LuminaTO 2017); Freedom Singer (Project:Humanity).



MATTHEW G. BROWN was born and raised in Toronto. **OBSIDIAN:** Is God Is. **SOULPEPPER:** Debut. **OTHER THEATRE:** The Real McCoy (Blyth), Appropriate (Associate Director, Coal Mine), Intimate Apparel (Belfry), Billy Elliot, Little Shop of Horrors, To Kill A Mockingbird, Twelfth Night, (Stratford Festival), Calpurnia (Nightwood), Wizard of Oz, Cinderella: A RATical retelling, I Think I Can (YPT), Hair (The Grand), Jersey Boys (Dancap, Dodgers). **SELECTED FILM & TV:** Fellow Travelers (Showtime), Pretty Hard Cases (CBC), Pinkalicious & Peterrific (PBS Kids), The Kennedys (History Television), Hailstorm (CFC) Instant Star (CTV). **UPCOMING:** Look for Matthew in the upcoming feature film Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, Frank. **TRAINING:** Randolph College, The CFC Actors Conservatory. Follow on IG & Tiktok: @ItsMrMGB



KELESHAYE CHRISTMAS-SIMPSON was born and raised in Toronto, ON. **OBSIDIAN & SOULPEPPER:** Debut. **OTHER THEATRE:** Jesus Christ Superstar (Talk Is Free Theatre); Guildwood (Garner Theatre Productions); Intimate Apparel, The Music Man (Thousand Islands Playhouse); Artist Mentorship Program 2023 (Black Theatre Workshop); Scott Joplin's Treemonisha (Volcano/Luminato); Prodigal (The Howland Company/Crow's Theatre); RENT (BurlOak Theatre Group) **OTHER:** Keleshaye would like to thank her family, both chosen and blood, your support means the world. Much gratitude and love to each and every one of you.



PAUL DE JONG is the Co-Head of Coaching at the Stratford Festival where he has served as a Voice, Text, and Dialect coach for thirteen seasons. Paul also teaches for the School of Performance at Toronto Metropolitan University. He has taught at the National Theatre School of Canada, the Centre for Indigenous Theatre, and for the Theatre Performance program at Humber College where he served three years as director of the program and six years as its Head of Voice. Paul has coached at theatres across the country: Teatro Proscenium, the Grand Theatre, Artistic Fraud, the Globe Theatre, and Soulpepper to name a few. Paul received his post-graduate degree in Voice Studies from the Central School of Speech and Drama and is a graduate of the Birmingham Conservatory.



ANDRE DU TOIT was born and raised in Toronto, ON. SOULPEPPER 2023: Three Sisters. FOR SOULPEPPER: Oratorio (2018); Animal Farm (2018); A Delicate Balance (2018); Vimy (2017); The 39 Steps (2016). OTHER THEATRE: Here Lies Henry (Factory Theatre); speaking of sneaking (Groundwork Redux/Obsidan/Buddies); The Queen in Me (Canadian Opera Co./Amplified Opera/Nightwood/Gargantua); Maanomaa, My Brother (Canadian Stage/Bluebird Collective); Prince Hamlet (Why Not Theatre).



VIRGILIA GRIFFITH is an actor based in Toronto. OBSIDIAN: 21 Black Futures (Obsidian/CBC Gem); Other Side of the Game (Obsidian/Cahoots), Up The Garden Path. SOULPEPPER: Queen Goneril, King Lear, Betrayal, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. Winner of the Dora Mavor Moore award for Outstanding Performance for Harlem Duet by Djanet Sears. Winner of the Meta Emerging Artist Award for Gas Girls by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard. She was also a Dora Mavor Moore nominee for Outstanding Female in an Independent Division for her performance of Honesty directed by Jordan Tannahill. She was also a recipient of the Jon Kaplan Legacy Award for Canadian Theatre Performer in 2021. Selected credits include: Our Place (Cahoots/Theatre Passe Muraille), Iphigenia and the Furies (On Taurian Land) (Saga Collectif/ Theatre Passe Muraille), Serving Elizabeth (Stratford Festival), Contractions (Studio 180), Guarded Girls (Tarragon Theatre/ Greenlight Arts), The Wedding Party (Crow's Theatre), Da Kink In My Hair (Theatre Calgary/ NAC).



JOHN GZOWSKI SOULPEPPER 2024: Three Sisters. Composer, sound designer, musician and instrument maker John Gzowski worked on over 250 theatre, dance and film productions for which he has done composition, sound design, live foley, live music and as musical director. He has played banjo for opera in Banff, studied Carnatic classical music in India and played oud and guitar in jazz and folk festivals across Canada and Europe. His theatre work has won him 6 Dora's, from 18 nominations for companies like Ex Machina, Stratford, Shaw Festival, Luminato, National Arts Centre, the Mirvishes, MTC, the Arts Club, Canstage, Soulpepper, Dancemakers, Red Sky, Tarragon, Factory Theatre and YPT. Gzowski has played on numerous CD's, with releases with Patricia O'Callghan, Tasa, and Autorickshaw as well as a Juno nomination with Maza Meze. He has run Canada's first microtonal group, touring Canada playing the works of Harry Partch, composed and performed with several new music groups and worked as co-artistic director of the Music Gallery.



ROBERT HARDING Born and raised in Lewisporte, NL. SOULPEPPER credits include: The Guide to Being Fabulous, The Seagull, Queen Goneril, King Lear, Pipeline, Draw Me Close, Almighty Voice and his Wife, Rose: A New Musical, Waiting for Godot, Spoon River, Of Human Bondage, The 39 Steps, Accidental Death of an Anarchist. Production Stage Manager 2015-2019. OBSIDIAN: Once on this Island (Musical Stage Co./Obsidian). OTHER THEATRE: Treemonisha (Volcano Theatre/Soulpepper/Luminato), Things I Know To Be True (Company Theatre/Mirvish Productions), Clybourne Park, Stuff Happens (Studio 180/Mirvish Productions), The Best Brothers, Communion, A Beautiful View (Tarragon Theatre).



DAREN A. HERBERT is a stage and screen artist whose love for acting continues to grow. OBSIDIAN: The Wild Party (Obsidian/Musical Stage Co.) SOULPEPPER: Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts I, II, III), Dora and Toronto Theatre Critics Award winning roles in The Brothers Size and Jesus Hopped the A Train. Recent television appearances include recurring roles on CBC series Kim's Convenience and Pretty Hard Cases. Daren has practiced at LS&Co. Studios + Gracemoon Arts Company for over a decade under the mentorship of Michele Lonsdale Smith. He serves as a member of the Sheridan College Music Theatre Performance PAC and is a Musical Stage Co. board member. Daren has also earned an MFA in Drama at The University of California, Irvine and a BFA in Theatre Arts from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia. #allblacklivesmatter



STERLING JARVIS is an award winning actor and singer from Toronto. OBSIDIAN: Ruined, Caroline or Change (Obsidian/Musical Stage Co.) SOULPEPPER: Debut. OTHER THEATRE: Book of Mormon (US Tour/Broadway), The Lion King (Mirvish), We Will Rock You (Mirvish), Driving Miss Daisy (Harold Green Jewish Theatre). FILM & TV: The West Wing (NBC), The Bridge (CBS), Covert Affairs (CW), Suits (Netflix), Deglassi (CTV), The Boys (Amazon), Law and Order Toronto (CityTV). OTHER: Sterling earned a Dora Award for his work in Caroline of Change and has sung anthems for the Blue Jays, the Raptors and the Toronto Maple Leafs. He can also be heard singing the themes for the popular kid's shows Donkey Kong Country, Wild Kratts and Zoboombafoo.



JD LESLIE was born and raised in Scarborough, ON. OBSIDIAN: Is God Is (Obsidian/Canadian Stage/NAC). SOULPEPPER: Her Words Festival - Queen Goneril (Workshop, 2021). OTHER THEATRE: On The Air (Lighthouse Festival); Vierge (Factory); Snow White (Young People's Theatre); Portia's Julius Caesar (Hart House); Elbow Room (Toronto Fringe). FILM & TELEVISION: Paging Mr. Darcy (Hallmark), A New Diva's Christmas Carol (Green Door Pro.); Good Witch (Hallmark); The Anniversary (Dir Shaun Boyd). OTHER: JD is honored to make her official Soulpepper debut. "Big Love to my family and dearest friends; Cadence, Camille, Missem, and #BBFA. You are my world."



TAWIAH M'CARTHY is a Ghanaian born, Toronto based theatre practitioner, notable as a director, performer and playwright. **OBSIDIAN:** Fairview (Director - Obsidian/ Canadian Stage), Yen Ara Asaase Ni (21 Black Futures - Playwright). **SOULPEPPER:** Sizwe Banzi Is Dead (Performer). **OTHER THEATRE:** As Director - Here Lies Henry (Factory Theatre), Topdog Underdog (Canadian Stage), Death and the King's Horseman (Stratford Festival) and Rihannaboi95 (Young People's Theatre); as Playwright-Creator/ performer: Maanomaa, My Brother (Blue Bird Theatre Collective), Black Boys (Saga Collectif) and Obaaberima (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre). Tawiah is a co-artistic director of Blue Bird Theatre Collective.



ESIE MENSAH is an award winning choreographer, director, dancer, movement director, educator, and TEDx speaker. A member of the Canadian Guild of Stage Directors and Choreographers as well as a two-time Dora nominated artist who has worked with megastars like Rihanna, Drake, Janelle Monae, Nelly Furtado and Arcade Fire to historic brands like Holt Renfrew, Coca-Cola, TIFF, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto Raptors, and more. In theatre Mensah has worked on Russian Play, Victory, Farmers' Revolt (Shaw Festival), Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (Soulpepper), Dixon Road (Musical Stage/Obsidian), New Monuments (Canadian Stage), and Serving Elizabeth (Theatre Aquarius). Original creations include ZAYO, Dora-nominated Shades, and films A Revolution of Love, and TESSEL. Esie was the choreographer for Scott Joplin's Treemonisha: A Musical Reimagining presented by TOLive, the Luminato Festival and Volcano Theatre.



NGABO NABEA was born in Toronto, ON but spent much of his childhood travelling abroad. **OBSIDIAN & SOULPEPPER:** Debut. **OTHER THEATRE:** Twisted (Factory Theatre); The Postman (Appledore Productions); The Number's Game (Storefront Theatre); You (Globe Theatre); Fences (Grand Theatre); Death and the King's Horseman (Stratford Festival); King Lear (Shakespeare Bash'd) **FILM & TELEVISION:** The Expanse; the Strain; and Anne with an E. **OTHER:** This will be Ngabo's first project with Soulpepper and Obsidian, and he looks forward to bringing this classic to life with this talented cast.



NATASHA MUMBA is a Zambian born, Toronto based multi-disciplined artist. **OBSIDIAN:** School Girls, or the African Mean Girls Play (Obsidian/Nightwood). **SOULPEPPER:** Debut. **OTHER THEATRE:** Henry V, The Adventures of the Black Girl, Dracula, Hound of the Baskervilles (Shaw Festival); Silver Arrow (Citadel); Trout Stanley (Factory); Measure for Measure, Much Ado About Nothing (Canadian Stage); Middletown (Crows) The Millennial Malcontent (Tarragon). **FILM & TELEVISION:** Handmaid's Tale(MGM); The Last of Us (HBO); Y: The Last Man (FX); Beacon 23 (AMC); Matlock (CBS); Five Days At Memorial (APPLE +). **OTHER:** Natasha previously served as the Apprentice Artistic Director and participated in the Directing program at Factory Theatre with the generous support of the Metcalf Foundation. Her directing credits include; Balance (Driftwood Trafalgar); Lady Sunrise (Assistant Director- Factory); The Water Gun Song (YPT); Vierge (Factory). She graduated from the National Theatre School of Canada. IG: @Tashamum



ANITA NITTOLY Selected Fight Director and Sexual Choreographer credits: Bad Roads (Crow's); Wildwoman (Soulpepper), Hamlet (The Rose); Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes (TIP), Fall on Your Knees (CanStage/Neptune/NAC); Counter Offence (Segal Centre); Fairview (Canstage); Prodigal (Crow's); Trojan Girls and The Outhouse of Atreus (Factory); Our Place (Cahoots/TPM); The Last Wife, The 39 Steps, Successions (Centaur); Whole World (Carousel Players). Stage Combat Instructor, Fight Director, and Sexual Choreographer at the National Theatre School. Selected Stunt Performer/Stunt Actor Credits: Law & Order: Toronto, SEE, Star Trek: Discovery, Pretty Hard Cases, Titans, The Boys, Rabbit Hole, What We Do in the Shadows, various Ubisoft motion capture productions.



TONY OFORI was born in Toronto, ON. **OBSIDIAN:** Actually (Obsidian/Harold Green). **SOULPEPPER:** Wildwoman, Pipeline (2022 Dora Nomination – Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role). **OTHER THEATRE:** Fall On Your Knees (NAC/Vita Brevis/Canadian Stage/Neptune/Grand), Bunny, Copy That (Tarragon Theatre), Serving Elizabeth (Western Canada Theatre). **FILM & TELEVISION:** Supergirl, A Royal Queens Christmas, Amazing Grace, The Boys, Coroner, Murdoch Mysteries, Star Trek. Currently, Tony can be seen on Apple TV's season 3 of Daytime Emmy winning show Ghostwriter as Malcolm Turner. **OTHER:** Tony is a Humber College and York University Alumni. Want to know what's next for Tony? Check him out at www.tonyofori.com.



UGOCHUKWU OKOYE was born and raised in Jos, Northcentral Nigeria. Ugochukwu is currently a Teaching Assistant and Doctoral candidate in Anthropology at Carleton University, Ottawa. He is an alumnus of both the University of Nigeria and the University of Edinburgh, and the co-author of the book "A Tale of Two Neighbours: A Sociopolitical History of Ukwa and Ngwa Nations", which was published in 2022.



OYIN OLADEJO Ms. Oladejo graduated from the prestigious Humber School of Creative & Performing Arts in Toronto, having immigrated to Canada from Nigeria in her teens. **OBSIDIAN:** Is God Is (Obsidian/Canadian Stage). **SOULPEPPER:** Crucible; Tartuffe; Eurydice; A Doll's House, Noises Off. **OTHER THEATRE:** In This World (Roseneath Theatre); Tomorrow Love (Outside the March). **FILM & TELEVISION:** Star Trek: Discovery; Endlings; Orah. **OTHER:** Won The Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Performance in the theatre production, In This World, as well as the Reelworld Award for Outstanding Actress in a Feature Film for her role in, Orah. Graduate of the Soulpepper Academy.



Born in Nigeria, **INUA ELLAMS** is a poet, playwright & performer, graphic artist & designer and founder of: The Midnight Run (an arts-filled, night-time, urban walking experience.), The Rhythm and Poetry Party (The R.A.P Party) which celebrates poetry & hip hop, and Poetry + Film / Hack (P+F/H) which celebrates Poetry and Film. Identity, Displacement & Destiny are reoccurring themes in his work, where he tries to mix the old with the new: traditional African oral storytelling with contemporary poetics, paint with pixel, texture with vector. His books are published by Flipped Eye, Akashic, Nine Arches, Penned In The Margins, Oberon & Methuen.



ADEKUNLE OLORUNDARE (KUNLE) A multi-instrumentalist, singer, and songwriter, Kunle’s folk and soul music bridges contemporary styles with roots in West African rhythms and stories. Nigerian-born and currently based in Toronto, Kunle brings together his vocals, guitar, harmonica, and talking drum to take audiences into what he terms “music with no boundaries.” CREDITS - 2022: Music director and composer of and percussion (onstage) in *Death and The King’s Horseman*. Stratford debut. *Saga* Tiata Isabel Bader Theatre 2018: *Abusolon* in *Wahala Dey Oh* (adaptation of Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*), acting debut. Music Performance: *Mariposa Folk Festival*; *Summer Folk Festival*; *Muskoka Festival*; *Africa Day Festival*, Hamburg, Germany. Production Credit: *Emotional Intelligence EP*- Vincent Jamal. Training: OCAD Hons Music Industry Arts and Performance, Post Grad Diploma Arts Management Centennial College, Toronto. Awards: Best Instrumental 2015 Folk Music Ontario, Peter Dickinson Award 2016, Ontario Premier Award Nominee 2022, Alumnus of Distinction 2023 Centennial College.



MAKAMBE K. SIMAMBA is a multiple award-winning published playwright and actor of Zambian birth. **OBSIDIAN & SOULPEPPER:** Debut. Select stage acting credits include *The First Stone* (New Harlem Productions), *Serving Elizabeth* (Thousand Islands Playhouse), *Giant* (Ghost River Theatre), *Winners And Losers* (Chromatic Theatre), *Bea* (Sage Theatre), *inVISIBLE* (Handsome Alice Theatre) and *SIA* (Pyretic Productions). On screen, she can be seen in projects such as *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* for Paramount+, *Titans* for HBOMax, *True Dating Stories* for CBC Gem, *Grand Army* for Netflix and more. As a playwright, her solo work includes the multiple Dora Award-Winning *Our Fathers, Sons, Lovers, And Little Brothers* and *A Chitenge Story*, both published by Playwright’s Canada Press. Makambe was the 2020/21 Urjo Kareda Artist in Residence at the Tarragon Theatre. Her intention is to be of service through her ability to tell stories.



ORDENA STEPHENS-THOMPSON was born in Jamaica, West Indies. **OBSIDIAN:** *Fairview* (Canadian Stage/Obsidian). **SOULPEPPER:** *A Streetcar Named Desire* (upcoming), *‘da Kink in My Hair*, *For Coloured Girls*. **OTHER THEATRE:** *Sweat* (Canadian Stage/Studio 180); *Fences* (The Grand Theatre); *Harlem Duet* (Tarragon Theatre). **FILM & TELEVISION:** *Skymed*; *Christmas at the Drive Inn*; *Ruby and the Well*. **OTHER:** Two Dora Award nominations.



MUMBI TINDYEBWA OTU is the Artistic Director of Obsidian Theatre Company and the Founder and Artistic Director of IFT Theatre. **OBSIDIAN:** *Is God Is*, (Obsidian/Canadian Stage/Necessary Angel), *Cast Iron* (Obsidian/Factory), *21 Black Futures* (Obsidian/CBC). **SOULPEPPER:** Director: *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, *The Brothers Size*, *Oratorio: A Theatrical Mixtape* (Obsidian/Soulpepper), *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, *The 27 Club*, *Porgy and Bess*. Assistant Director: *For Colored Girls*, *It’s A Wonderful Life*. **OTHER DIRECTING:** *Post Democracy* (Tarragon), *Trout Stanley* (Factory), *We are Proud to Present* (UTSC). **AWARDS:** Recipient of a Dora Award, Toronto Theatre Critics Award, Canadian Screen Award, Pauline McGibbon Award amongst others.



AMAKA UMEH (@yesamaka) was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria and Calgary, AB. **OBSIDIAN:** Debut. **SOULPEPPER:** Sizwe Banzi Is Dead, 1851: Spirit and Voice, 2021 Her Words Festival, Around The World in 80 Plays, 'da Kink in My Hair (Dialect Coach). **OTHER THEATRE:** Fall On Your Knees (Eastern Canadian tour); Love's Labour's Lost, Death and the King's Horseman, Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream (Stratford Festival); The Wolves (Howland Company/Crow's Theatre), Asst. Director, Sweeter (Cahoots/Roseneath). **FILM:** The Stranger's Case (CBC Gem). **OTHER:** UmeH has received two Dora Mavor Moore Awards, a Peter Donaldson Award, and a BBPA Harry Jerome Award. Igbo Kwenu!



SODIENYE WABOSO AMAJOR (@sodiandtheboys) is a Dora Nominated Nigerian Actor, Writer, Performer and Mother who lives and works in Ontario. Sodiénye has played roles such as Puck in Shakespeare in Action's adaptation of "A Midsummer Nights Dream", Memory in Theatre Directs "Binti's Journey" *, Gigi in New Harlem productions, "Gas girls" *, Beka in Volcano Theatre's Africa Trilogy "Shine your Eye" * Luminato, June 2010 reprising her role as Beka in a Canstage/ Volcano Theatre's production of "Another Africa" Canstage 2011 and Harriet Tubman in "The Power of Harriet T" YPT 2013. Sodiénye holds an MA in Theatre and Performance studies from York University with a keen interest in Pre-Colonial African Theory and Development. Sodiénye is the Arts Mentorship Program Director at Suitcase in Point Multi Arts Production Company and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Theatre Dance and Performance studies at York University. Igbo Kwenu!



MING WONG is an award winning Toronto costume designer and stylist. She has worked in theatre, dance, opera, and film & television for over 15 years. **OBSIDIAN:** Is God Is (Canadian Stage/Obsidian/Necessary Angel); hang; The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble (Obsidian/Factory). **SOULPEPPER:** Alice in Wonderland (Soulpepper/Bad Hats), The Guide to Being Fabulous, Sizwe Banzi is Dead, Pipeline. **OTHER THEATRE:** Rent, Hamlet 911 (Stratford Festival); Natasha, Pierre, & the Great Comet of 1812, The Master Plan, Red Velvet (Crow's Theatre); Just to Get Married, Trouble in Mind (Shaw Festival); Hansel und Gretel (Canadian Opera Company); **DIGITAL:** Alice in Winterland (Ross Petty Productions); New Monuments (Luminato/Canadian Stage); Savitri (Against the Grain). **OTHER:** Two time Dora Award Winner, 2021 Laureate of the Virginia & Myrtle Cooper Award in Costume Design.



JOANNA YU 余頌恩 was born in Hong Kong raised in Thornhill, Ontario. **OBSIDIAN:** costumes for Passing Strange, Other Side of the Game & School Girls; or, the African Mean Girls Play. **SOULPEPPER:** 'da Kink in My Hair. **OTHER THEATRE:** (selected) 1939, Les Belles Soeurs (set, Stratford Festival); Prison Dancer (set, Citadel Theatre, NAC); Forgiveness (costume, Arts Club/Theatre Calgary); The Queen in Me (COC/Nightwood/Theatre Gargantua/Amplified Opera); Rope (Shaw Festival); among men, acts of faith (Factory); How to Fail as a Popstar (Canadian Stage). **OTHER:** Joanna is an award-winning set and costume designer, designing across Canada and Internationally. She sits on the board of the Associated Designers of Canada (ADC659). www.joannayudesign.com



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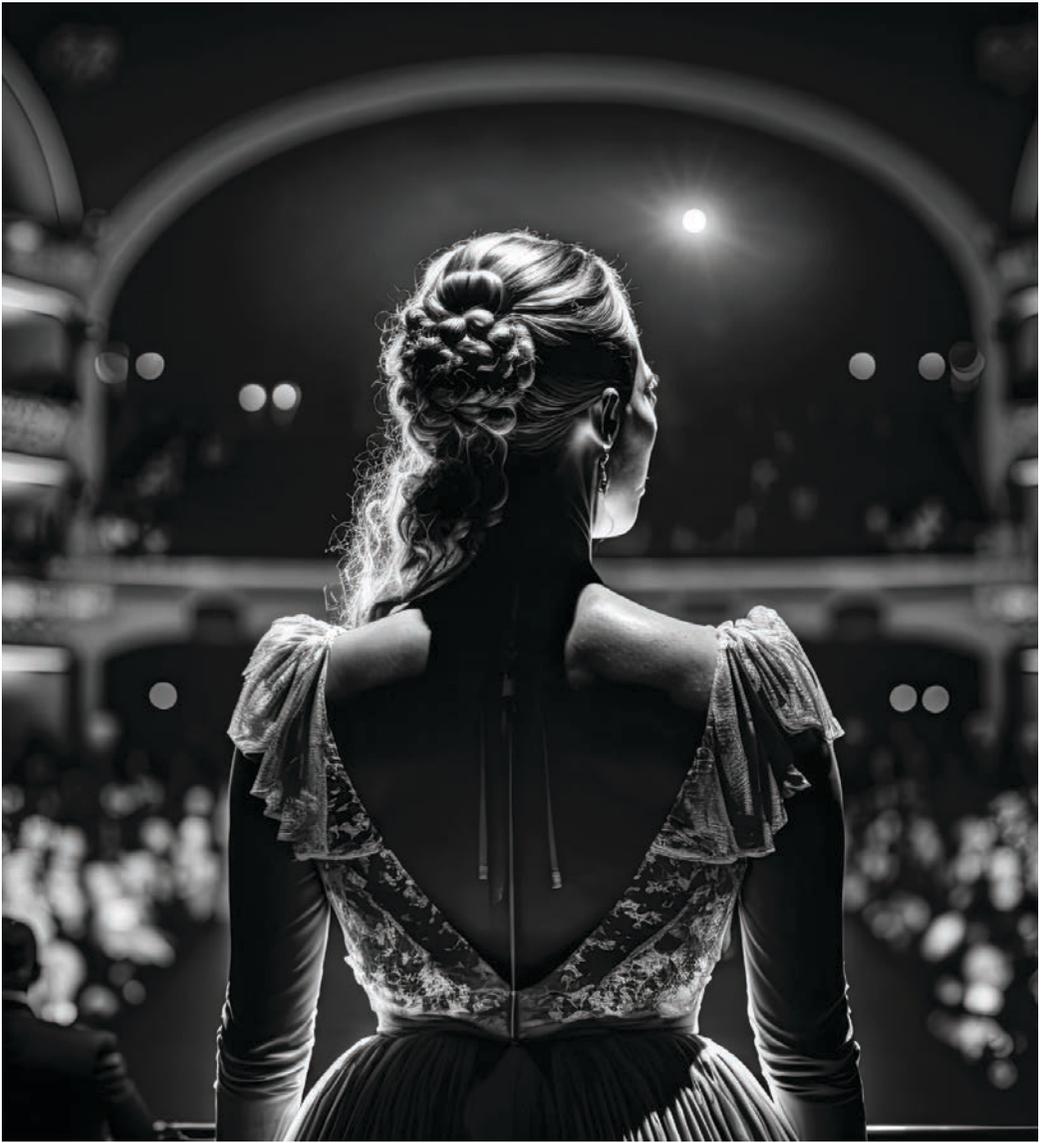
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We started the 23/24 season with *speaking of sneaking* presented in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and Groundwork Redux written and starring our own daniel jelani ellis, following *Three Sisters* we will be in association with Crow’s Theatre and paul watson productions with their presentation of *shaniqua in abstraction* and closing our season with *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* at Crow’s Theatre.

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Thank You!

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Young Centre Facilities Funding:



All front of house staff – floor captains, patron service representatives, baristas and ushers - working for the Young Centre for the Performing Arts are represented by Local B-173 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

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The artists and staff of Soulpepper, Obsidian Theatre, and the Young Centre for the Performing Arts acknowledge the original caretakers and storytellers of this land —the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Wendat First Nations. We commit to honouring and celebrating their past, present and future.

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