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**OKLAHOMA CITY
REPERTORY THEATER**

KELLY KERWIN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

EMILY COMISAR
MANAGING DIRECTOR

IN ASSOCIATION WITH OKLAHOMA CONTEMPORARY
PRESENTS

QUEENS OF SHEBA

A CO-PRODUCTION WITH SOHO THEATRE AND NOUVEAU RICHE

Written by

JESSICA L. HAGAN & RYAN CALAIS CAMERON

Directed by

JESSICA KALIISA

January 25-27, 2024

Te Ata Theater

QUEENS OF SHEBA runs approximately one hour with no intermission

CAST

PAISLEY BILLINGS | DÉJA J BOWENS | JADESOLA ODUNJO | MUKI ZUBIS

CREATIVE

Producer for Nouveau Riche

SARAH VERGHESE

Stage Manager

MARIE-ANGELIQUE ST HILL

Communications & Marketing

YASMIN MEHBOOB-KHAN

Vocal Coach

THEO LLEWELLYN

Original Movement Director

YASSMIN V FOSTER

Producers for Soho Theatre

DAVID LUFF & MADDIE WILSON

Associate Director

ABIGAIL 'TÓPIA' ADEBAYO

Movement Director

YAMI LÖFVENBERG

Voice and Movement Coach

GRETA MENDEZ

Production Dramatherapist

WABRIYA KING

Presented in partnership with Under the Radar

Mark Russell, Festival Director

ArKtype, Festival Producer

This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



We are thrilled to bring *Queens of Sheba* from London to Oklahoma City as part of the company's first U.S. Tour. Thank you for making space for four brilliant actresses to perform this moving play by Jessica L. Hagan and Ryan Calais Cameron—two electrifying writers who are doing major things in the arts world including expansions into film, television, and London's West End.

Queens of Sheba is inspired by the seminal work of theater by Ntozake Shange: *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, written in 1976. Shange used new theatrical vocabularies to convey stories of love, pain, injustice, and beauty with a cast of seven Black women. Shange ultimately coined the term choreopoem to describe the piece. Not long after *for colored girls...* was written it was catapulted to Broadway, and in 2022 it was revived on Broadway where it was nominated for seven Tony Awards. This work gave voice to many Black and Brown women whose stories need to be told and told loudly.

Queens of Sheba uses *for colored girls...* as a launchpad into something new and very NOW. The various vignettes are generated from true events and real stories. One incident involves four black women being turned away from a popular nightclub in London for being "too black." Jumping from here, the four women in *Queens of Sheba* weave together various stories through poetry and song to illuminate many facets of the Black female experience. *Queens of Sheba* is a meditation, a celebration, and a contemporary choreopoem about sisterhood, resilience, resistance, and transformation. They sing, they dance, they laugh, they cry, they support one another, they speak truth.

OKC Rep piloted Under the Radar's On the Road initiative in 2021 with Inua Ellams' *An Evening With an Immigrant*. This partnership is an effort to decentralize theater and connect the work of international artists with audiences across the country. We are now in our third year of partnership with no signs of stopping! None of it would be possible without the support of OKC Rep's Board of Directors, the generosity of donors, and the support of the community. Thank you for being here. Your presence makes it all possible.

Sincerely,

Kelly Kerwin, Artistic Director



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Soho Theatre is one of the UK's busiest theatre and comedy venues, with a year-round festival programme, audiences of 180,000 a year and a buzzing bar. Soho Theatre's work is wide-ranging, drawing from this fringe heritage, and adding a queer, punk, counter-culture flavour. Soho Theatre champions voices that challenge from outside of the mainstream, and sometimes from within it too.

NOUVEAU RICHE

Nouveau Riche is a multi award-winning creative movement, headed by a team of professional performing artists and producers.

Our objective is to discover, nurture and produce unique stories with a keen scope on work that is both educational and entertaining. Nouveau Riche have set out to create and nurture new writing that is thought provoking, challenging and culturally inclusive. The most common theme in our work is that we tend to depart from traditional Western storytelling, experimenting with fresh, contemporary, and unconventional methods.



UNDER THE RADAR (RADAR) is a festival celebrating new theater and performance works from both around the world and down the street. Taking place in New York City from January 5 – 21, 2024. Produced and programmed by thirteen different venues in collaboration with RADAR. Under the Radar 2024 addresses a city, a country, and the world with the voices of innovative multidisciplinary artists speaking to their time. The festival stands for transparency, equity, and equal collaboration in the development of new live works. It represents global citizenship, innovation, and a platform for those whose voices have yet to be heard. Under the Radar: On the Road increases the impact and scope of RADAR programming by collaborating with performing arts centers across America. Oklahoma City Repertory Theater was a pilot theater for this initiative, and now the partnership is in its third year. We greatly appreciate OKC Rep's support in spreading the creative force of Under the Radar beyond the immediate NYC area.



Arktype is recognized as among the world's leading supporters of new, experimental work. Established in 2005 by producer Thomas O.

Kriegsmann to support the finest in emerging and established artists based in NYC and worldwide, we support risk in live performance – creating an ever-shifting mechanism for the fulfillment of artists' visions for new work, international collaboration, production and touring.



YOU ARE A BEAUTIFUL HUMAN.

BRAVE, BEAUTIFUL YOU! YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH, AND YET YOU HONORED YOUR DESIRE FOR SURPRISE, TRANSFORMATION, AND CONNECTION, AND SHOWED UP TO SUPPORT REAL LIVE ARTISTS IN OKC! THAT RIGHT THERE IS A GEN-U-INE TRIUMPH FOR HUMANITY. THINK ABOUT IT... EVERY ACT OF CREATION - EVERY TIME YOU ALLOW YOUR HEART TO SOAR IN AWE, COMPASSION AND DELIGHT - HELPS TO BALANCE OUT THE ACTS OF DESTRUCTION IN THIS WORLD. YOU ARE SO COOL!

YOU KNOW WHAT? GO ON AND SLAP THIS PAGE, BECAUSE THIS IS OUR HIGH FIVE TO YOU! WE ARE PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR RESILIENCE AND PRESENCE.

ALSO, HOW ABOUT THESE *SUBLIME* PERFORMERS AND OUR INSPIRED PALS AT **OKC REP & OKLAHOMA CONTEMPORARY**?! THEY'VE WORKED SO HARD TO BRING YOU SOMETHING SPECIAL - PLEASE GIVE THEM A HIGH FIVE TOO.

FINALLY, PLEASE REMEMBER TO ENGAGE YOUR SENSE OF WONDER AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE. WHEN YOU NEED A BOOST, TURN TO AN ARTIST. THAT'S WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO!

THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE, AND FOR SUPPORTING THE ARTS. WITH SO MUCH LOVE,
YOUR FRIENDS AT SPARK! CREATIVE LAB



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jessica L Hagan is a Ghanaian-British writer who heavily explores themes of identity, displacement and misogynoir in her work. Her debut play, *Queens of Sheba*, co-written with Ryan Calais Cameron, won the Untapped Award 2018. The play went to Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2018 and had a successful sold-out 4 week run with 4 and 5 star reviews across the board and won The Stage Award 2018. Jessica is a spoken word artist and spends her time in both London and Ghana. In Ghana, she works with emerging playwrights through workshoping and is a grant maker for creative organizations across the continent.

Ryan Calais Cameron is an award-winning Writer, Actor and Theatre Maker. For *Nouveau Riche*, Ryan has written *Queens of Sheba* (co-written with Jessica Hagan) and *Typical* (starring Richard Blackwood), sell-out hits at Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2018 and 2019 respectively, winning The Stage Edinburgh Fringe Award. Ryan was the winner of Best Director (*For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Hue Gets Too Heavy*) at the Black British Awards 2022. Ryan has been chosen as one of "The Stage 25" 2022 list of future stars of the UK theater industry.

COLLABORATING ARTISTS & STAFF

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager.....David Pilchman
Lighting Head.....Tait Truong
Technicians.....Shae Chakraborty,
Blair Edwards, Dalen Enevoldsen,
Isis Husanadeen, Noah Voth

OKC REP STAFF

Artistic Director.....Kelly Kerwin
Managing Director.....Emily Comisar
Production Manager.....David Pilchman
Associate Producer.....Jenny Brand
Company Administrator.....Karis Martin
Spring 2024 Intern..... Sarah Filek

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ART IN A NEW LIGHT



Installation view of *Descendants of the Black 1000: Flight from Oklahoma Black Towns to Canada*. Photo: Cassandra Watson

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ABOUT OKC REP

Oklahoma City Repertory Theater (OKC Rep) is dedicated to championing new ways of making theater, supporting innovative artists, and growing the cultural ecology of Oklahoma City.

OKC Rep's mission and values are intrinsic to our programming, staffing, and the culture we establish with our audiences, staff, and artists. It is our commitment that OKC Rep is not only responsible for producing and presenting impactful theater in Oklahoma City, but will perpetuate crucial values of equity, inclusion, diversity, sustainability, authenticity, and acceptance in our city.

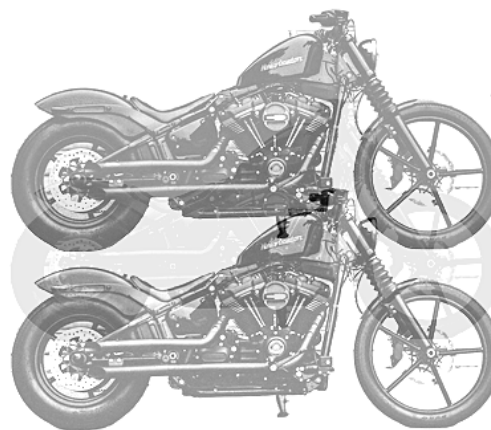
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MEET THE OKC REP STAFF

Kelly Kerwin (Artistic Director, She/Her)

recently directed OKC Rep's *Superstitions* by Emily Zemba, and co-created *Of a Mind: Oklahoma City*. She began her tenure as OKC Rep's Artistic Director in July 2021, after over four years at The Public Theater in New York, where she was the Producer for the Under the Radar Festival and The Public's Devised Theater Working Group, as well as a producer for new plays and musicals including the world premieres of *Girl from The North Country*; *Soft Power*; *The Line*; *M'lima's Tale*; and Tony Kushner's revised *A Bright Room Called Day* directed by Oskar Eustis. Kelly served on the artistic staff at Yale Repertory Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Atlantic Theater Company, The House Theatre of Chicago, Chicago's Collaboraction, and she was the Co-Artistic Director for the Yale Cabaret's 46th Season. She co-founded Chicago's Salonathon, a weekly series specializing in underground performance. She's currently a Lecturer in Dramaturgy/Dramatic Criticism at Yale School of Drama. Training: MFA, Yale Drama; BFA, The Theatre School at DePaul University. She and her husband, set designer Edward T. Morris, live on Main Street with their rescue dog, George.

Emily Comisar (Managing Director, She/Her)

has been a theater person her entire life, but on staff at OKC Rep since September 2022. She has worked in fundraising and management positions at Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, MCC Theater, and Pipeline Theatre Company. She was the General & Company Manager for the commercial off-Broadway world premiere of *The View Upstairs*, and has produced in festivals including FringeNYC, SheNYC, and the Game Play Festival (The Brick). Emily has also spent many years as a playwright and independent producer. She is currently an instructor in the OU Online M.A. in Arts Management program. Emily holds an MFA in Theatre Management & Producing from Columbia University, a BA from Northwestern University in Performance Studies, and MA in Italian from Middlebury College (which still comes in handy from time to time).

David Pilchman (Production Manager, Any/All)

is a Stage Manager and Production Manager based in OKC. For the last three years, he has worked with local organizations such as Oklahoma Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra, OKC Ballet, Painted Sky Opera, RACE Dance, SPARK! Creative Lab, and OKC Rep. Prior to moving back to OKC in 2020, David worked on new productions in NYC such as *The View Upstairs*, *Small Mouth Sounds*, Mike Birbiglia's *Thank God For Jokes*, and *Clinton the Musical*. Thanks to everyone creating theater in his hometown.

Jenny Brand (Associate Producer, She/Her)

has been organizing theater since the age of 16 when she lived in the Netherlands. Since graduating from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Jenny has worked extensively in both the UK and US, including National Youth Music Theatre (UK), European Union Youth Orchestra (UK), Children's Theatre Company (MN), Twin Cities Horror Festival (MN), Revolutions International Theatre Festival (NM), and California International Theatre Festival as their executive producer. Locally, she currently works with OKC Rep, Jewish Theatre of Oklahoma, and Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, and is the Executive Director of Theatre Crude, Oklahoma's own fringe festival - theatrecrude.org.

Karis Martin (Company Administrator, She/Her)

fell in love with the performing arts at a young age. She joined the OKC Rep staff this past December. She graduated from John Brown University with a degree in Film and Creative Writing in the spring of 2020, spending a stint in Austin, TX as a photographer before settling in Oklahoma City in the fall of 2022, working for Encore Productions as a Technician and AV savant. She's looking forward to spending her time continuing to cultivate the arts here in Oklahoma City through OKC Rep.

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