DREAMING ZENZILE

SOMI KAKOMA / USA

FEB 23—27

EMERSON PARAMOUNT CENTER
Dearest ArtsEmerson Friends,

Welcome back! We are grateful to have you join us for ArtsEmerson's first in-person show of 2022, Dreaming Zenzile. Written and performed by the Grammy-nominated force that is Somi Kakoma, Dreaming Zenzile is based on the life of legendary South African artist Zenzile Miriam Makeba, taking us through her final performance and the final moments of her life.

Miriam Makeba, also known as Mama Africa, was first introduced on to the world stage in 1959, igniting audiences with her voice and challenging people across the globe to recognize and consider what African music could be. Throughout her life, Makeba used the power of her voice to inspire others through song and to speak out against the atrocities of apartheid in her home country. Somi Kakoma's work and performance invites all of us to honor Miriam Makeba’s legacy and celebrate over half a century of African music.

ArtsEmerson’s relationship with Somi goes back many years, and we are ecstatic to bring you this piece tonight. Behind this rolling world premiere production are seven passionate producers coming together to support Somi’s vision: Octopus Theatricals, National Black Theatre, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, McCarter Theatre Center, the Apollo Theater, New York Theatre Workshop and, of course, ArtsEmerson. What makes this work so special is Somi’s undeniable passion to use the gift of her own voice to tell Makeba’s story—one that has inspired her own. In 2021, Somi became the first African woman ever nominated in any of the Grammy jazz categories, and her own activism has brought her to the United Nations General Assembly and other global stages. Somi is a bright light, and we are honored to welcome her, and her first theatrical work, to Boston.

Of course tonight’s performance would not be possible without the unwavering support of ArtsEmerson’s audiences, patrons, community and incredibly dedicated staff. Dreaming Zenzile is also supported by our Gaining Ground Fund, which supports work that reflects the African Diaspora experience in America. Here at ArtsEmerson, we are committed to bringing you art from all around the world that awakens the mind, prompts conversation and fuels a deeper connection among us all.

The world is very uncertain right now, but we feel fortunate to be able to gather together at this moment. Tonight, let us come together to cherish the life and music of Zenzile Miriam Makeba. May we all come away from this evening with a better understanding of the power of her voice, as well as our own.

Sincerely,

David C. Howse, Executive Director
Ronee Penoi, Director of Artistic Programming
Welcome to ArtsEmerson!

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to tonight’s virtual performance of Out of Order!

These past few months have tested us all, and there were days when we wondered if we were on the right track. It all seemed to happen at once, simultaneously even: navigating the pandemic, reckoning with local and national activism demanding social, racial and climate justice, and grappling with the continued polarization of our society. And yet, we are still here working toward our mission of connecting people more closely to themselves and to each other.

For millennia and across many cultures, the theater has been the forum where people could discover and process what they, collectively, were living through. This is fundamentally our purpose, to foster our communal capacity to weather and process calamities on this scale. And in these moments, we can look to the art and the artists to help us make meaning of these incredible times.

When we reached out to artists about our virtual programming, The 7 Fingers were the first to answer the call. Their exuberant, filmed performance of Sequence 8 was the first piece of theater our audiences brought into their homes. Now a year and a half later, as we launch into our new hybrid-model of live and virtual theater, we are happy to have the troupe back with their first piece created specifically to be seen on a screen: Out of Order.

Our 21-22 Season is made possible in no small part to the resilience of the artists, our team, you – our patrons, and our community. Your support and words of gratitude over these several months have touched the ArtsEmerson team very deeply. And we take seriously the responsibility to represent what it means to believe in the power and possibility of connection through the arts. Thank you for connecting with us!

May this be the first of many performances you will see at ArtsEmerson this season.

We welcome you home!

David C. Howse
Executive Director

ArtsEmerson.org / 617.824.8400

Our Story

ArtsEmerson is Boston’s leading presenter of contemporary world theatre. We are dedicated to engaging all communities through stories that reveal and deepen our connection to each other. By cultivating diversity in the art and in the audience, we ignite public conversation around our most vexing societal challenges as a catalyst for overcoming them.

Founded in 2010 by Robert J. Orchard, the year the US Census confirmed there was no single cultural majority in Boston, we committed to building a cultural institution that reflects the diversity of our city. We program a full season of performances, film and dialogue that invites each of us to engage in a more contemporary narrative of Boston as a truly global city.

We believe in the power of art to ignite our vision of a thriving world.

A thriving world is one where all of its residents are seen and heard and life is better, richer and fuller for everyone. The foundation for this vision is empathy. Empathy is the fuel that will power a thriving world—a world connected across difference, where each of us sees and celebrates both that which is common to us and that which distinguishes us.

Landmark Venues

Emerson Cutler Majestic Theatre

Built in 1903 as the second performance venue in Boston’s historic Theatre District, the Cutler Majestic Theatre is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The venue was purchased by Emerson College in 1983 and magnificently restored through the support of Ted and Joan Benard-Cutler in 2003. It combines state-of-the-art theatre facilities with Old World charm, serving the Boston community by showcasing first-class performing arts in its exquisite 1,200-seat auditorium.

Emerson Paramount Center

The Emerson Paramount Center is a comprehensive performing arts hub, including three venues serving the public: the 565-seat Robert J. Orchard Stage, the 125-seat Jackie Liebergott Black Box and the 170-seat Bright Family Screening Room. Originally a 1930s cinema palace, The Paramount was one of the first movie houses in the city to screen film with synchronized sound. Recognized as a Boston Historic Landmark, it remained closed for three decades before being entrusted to Emerson College to restore in lively Art Deco style, reopening to the public in 2010.

On the Blog

ArtsEmersonBlog.org

Follow our blog for additional insight and artist content about our shows, to connect with others in the community and to learn more about our commitment to advancing racial equity in Boston.
Dreaming Zenzile was developed with the generous support of Octopus Theatricals, National Black Theatre, ArtsEmerson, The Clarice Smith Center’s Artist Partner Program, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Rauschenberg Residency/Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and UCLA Center for the Art of Performance. It was developed at the Sundance Institute Theatre Lab in 2019. Dreaming Zenzile was originally commissioned and developed with the support of Joe’s Pub at The Public. It was also developed in part during a residency at Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York, NY. This work was developed in part during a residency in the SEI Innovation Studio at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. The original music and arrangements of Dreaming Zenzile were made possible through the French American Jazz Exchange, a joint program of FACE Foundation and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with generous funding from Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, SACEM, Institut Français and the Ministere de la Culture et de la Communication.

Special thanks to The Miriam Makeba Estate, Mama Africa Cultural & Social Trust and The Miriam Makeba Foundation for their support and permission to create this work.
CAST
Miriam “Zenzi” Makeba.................................................................................. SOMI KAKOMA
Sangoma Chorus ........................................................................................... AARON MARCELLUS
Sangoma Chorus .............................................................................................. NALEDI MASIMO
Sangoma Chorus ................................................................................................ PHUMZILE SOJOLA
Guest Understudy............................................................................................ HELEN MARLA WHITE*

BAND
Guitar/Musical Director—Hervé Samb
Bass—Pathé Jassi
Percussion—Sheldon Thwaites
Pianist—Toru Dodo

SETTING
A benefit concert in Castel Volturno, Italy.
November 9, 2008, the night of
Miriam Makeba’s final performance

INTERMISSION
The play will be presented with one intermission

*M Helen Marla White has stepped in for an injured cast member at the last minute

MUSIC

ACT I
Mabhongo
Ngicela Indlela
Why Are You Resisting
Umqombothi
Umhome
Tulips Tulips Tulips
Where Does It Lead?
Swish Slap Swish
Do Not Be Scared
Khawuleza
Sweet Sound of American Jazz/
 ’Til There Was You/
 A-Tisket A-Tasket/
 Moonlight in Vermont/
 My Favorite Things/
 It Don’t Mean a Thing
The Echo of You
Run Zenzi Run
Ihoyiya
Dreaming Zenzile/
 Ema Juba/
 Lakutshon’Ilanga

ACT II
House of the Rising Sun
Mbombele
Nonqonqo
Black Against White
Love Tastes Like Strawberries
Heavy Blue
Milele
Malaika
Hapo Zamani
Mabhongo
Pata Pata
MUSIC CREDITS

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by Ella Fitzgerald and Van Alexander
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“Black Against White”
Written by Somi Kakoma and Toru Dodo
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“Do Not Be Scared”
Written by Somi Kakoma, Toru Dodo and Hervé Samb
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“Dreaming Zenzile”
by Somi Kakoma
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“Ema Juba”
Written by Abigail Kubeka
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“Hapo Zamani”
by Dorothy Manyando Masuka
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“Heavy Blue”
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“House of the Rising Sun”
by Miriam Makebe Zenzile
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by Traditional and Miriam Makeba Gallo Music Publishers (SAMRO) All rights on behalf of Gallo Music Publishers administered by Warner Chappell Music Holland B.V. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Warner Chappell Music.

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“Khawuleza (Hurry Mama Hurry!”
by Dorothy Manyando Masuka
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“Lakutshn Ilanga”
by Davashe Mackay
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“Mabhongo”
by Traditional and Miriam Makeba Gallo Music Publishers (SAMRO) All rights administered by Warner Chappell Music Holland B.V. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Warner Chappell Music.

“Malaika”
Written by William Fadhili
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“Mbombela”
Written by Miriam Makeba
Published by Warner Chappell Music. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Warner Chappell Music.

“Moonlight In Vermont”
Written by Karl Suessdorf and John M. Blackburn
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“My Favorite Things”
Written by Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II
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“Ngicela Indlela”
Written by Abigail Kubeka
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“Nongqongqo”  
by Miriam Makeba  
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“Pata Pata”  
Written by Miriam Makeba and Jerry Ragovoy  
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“Run Zenzi Run”  
by Somi Kakoma  
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“Sweet Sound of American Jazz”  
Written by Somi Kakoma and Toru Dodo  
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“Swish Slap Swish”  
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“The Echo of You”  
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“Til There Was You”  
Written by Meredith Willson  
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“Tulips Tulips Tulips”  
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“Umhome”  
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“Umqombothi”  
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“Where Does It Lead?”  
by Gloria Davis  
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ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENT CREDITS
“Dreaming Zenzile”  
Arrangement: Somi Kakoma and Hervé Samb

“Hapo Zamani”  
Arrangement: Hugh Masekela

“House of the Rising Sun”  
Arrangement: Miriam Makeba

“Ihoyiya”  
Arrangement: Miriam Makeba

“Khawuleza”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Love Tastes Like Strawberries”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Malaika”  
Arrangement: Toru Dodo

“Mabhongo”  
Arrangement: Miriam Makeba

“Mbombela”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Milele”  
Arrangement: Miriam Makeba

“Ngicela Indlela”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Pata Pata”  
Arrangement: Somi Kakoma, Toru Dodo, Hervé Samb

“The City of Gold”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Umhome”  
Arrangement: Hervé Samb

“Where Does It Lead?”  
Arrangement: Somi Kakoma and Hervé Samb
This deep dive into the memory and voice of the great Miriam Makeba has been a wonderful gift. Twelve years ago, she visited me in my dreams when I did not think I could make it through the fog of losing my father. Five years later, I found the courage to reflect on those dreams. Those reflections lead me to this play. Two years ago, we tried to put this play on its feet and the world changed only a few days before opening night. Today, we are still here.

What a blessing it is to return to the stage after so many moons of uncertainty, and find myself safely surrounded by the genius of collaborating artists, cultural workers, and art lovers despite the ongoing global challenges. We are still here. Writing Dreaming Zenzile has been a deeply personal journey that perpetually demands that I also reflect on my life as a Black woman, an African voice, and an artist. I can honestly say that this work has made me more honest with my own heart and more clear about how freedom articulates itself in life and death. My hope in sharing Miriam Makeba’s story is that we remember her extraordinary legacy and, in doing so, we remember to live as the freest version of ourselves. Now more than ever because, yes, we are still here.

Gratitude and infinite love to Mama Miriam, to my wonderful parents, to God, and to the Ancestors.

Somi Kakoma
Playwright
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

TORU DODO (Pianist). A Tokyo-born, Berklee College of Music alumnus pianist, composer, arranger, producer, author and Grammy-nominated, Toru Dodo has lived in NYC since 1998. He has released five leader albums. Also, as one of New York’s most in-demand sideman, Dodo has worked with jazz luminaries such as Kenny Garrett, Benny Golson and Curtis Fuller. Currently, he has been frequently performing and traveling worldwide with notable singers such as Somi, Nicole Henry, Alicia Olatuja and Laurin Talese. He also has been one of the regular pianists for the Off-Broadway hit show Sleep No More since 2011. Somi’s Holy Room: Live at Alte Oper with Frankfurt Radio Big Band, which he performed on, is nominated for a 2021 Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album. He’s been one of the music collaborators for the creation of Dreaming Zenzile since its inception.

PATHÉ JASSI (Bass) has collaborated with a diverse group of accomplished musicians in a career that has spanned over three decades. Originally from Dakar, Senegal, Jassi has traveled the globe performing and recording alongside legendary West African vocalists Youssou N’Dour, Cheikh Lo, Monsour Seck, Baba Maal and guitarist Hervé Samb. In addition, he has lent his artistry to Detroit artists such as Luis Resto, Marcus Belgrave, Wendell Harrison, John Arnold and Mike E. He also worked closely with Sam Sanders, one of Detroit’s jazz legends. Pathé’s rare ability to combine bebop with a polyrhythmic African sound has made him one of Detroit’s most revered jazz musicians.

SOMI KAKOMA (Miriam Makeba, Playwright). Vocalist, composer, and writer Somi Kakoma was born in Illinois to immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda. Known simply as “Somi” in the music world, she often combines her artistry and her activism. Somi has been widely honored as a Soros Equality Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a USA Doris Duke Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, a 2021 Grammy nominee, and a recipient of two NAACP Image Awards. Mentored by legendary South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, The New York Times hailed Somi for her “supple jazz singing and compassionate social consciousness.” Her fifth studio album, which also honors Miriam Makeba, will be released on March 4th, 2022 just before her Off-Broadway debut. Dreaming Zenzile is her first play. Somi is the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique record label and cultural agency for contemporary African musicians and writers. She holds undergraduate degrees in Anthropology and African Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Master’s degree in Performance Studies from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. Presently, Somi is pursuing a PhD in Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry at Harvard University’s Department of Music.

AARON MARCELLUS (Sangoma Chorus) is a singer, vocal coach, writer, musician, dancer and actor from Atlanta. He got his start in gospel music and has performed around the world. He has recorded albums and was voted top 24 on “American Idol” in 2011. After a world tour, Marcellus was featured in a ChapStick commercial, NBC’s “Next Caller” and Stomp. Marcellus also hosts a burlesque show at Duane Park. He founded Surrender to Love, LLC, a foundation that supports arts programs and seeks to feed the hungry, and Adventure Voice, a training program offering vocal classes for groups and individuals.

NALEDI MASILIO (Sangoma Chorus) is a zesty vocalist, composer and teaching artist from Johannesburg, South Africa. She cultivated her love for the arts through backyard jam sessions and endless artistic curiosity. While cultivating her passions at the intersections of music, women and development, Naledi received a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the University of Cape Town and a Bachelors of Music from The New England Conservatory. Masilo has been a resident at the Kennedy Center (D.C) through Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead Program, where she was mentored by the likes of Dee Dee Bridgewater and Jason Moran. She has also been selected as part of the prestigious South African Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Band and has been invited to participate in the Banff International Jazz and Creative Music workshop in Calgary, Canada. Masilo is the founding director of the South African based non-profit Dreaming Girls Arts Foundation. Due to make prolific strides in the arts industry—Masilo is a young artist with a voice and story to remember!

HERVÉ SAMB (Music Director/Guitar) is a virtuoso guitarist, original composer, arranger and respected producer. He has established himself as an outstanding musician worldwide, with many famous artists such as Marcus Miller, Oumou Sangaré, Salif Keïta and so many others. He is occasionally an artistic director for renowned artists such as Kellylee Evans, Somi and Lisa Simone, to name a few. His four previous albums as a leader have all been acclaimed by the public and international critics, through which he confirms a
ABOUT THE ARTISTS (CONT.)

unique style, the “Jazz Sabar,” born from the rhythms of the sabar—traditional Senegalese percussion, crossing original melodies inspired by both traditional Senegalese tunes and contemporary jazz. In 2021, he released his first solo opus, Benn, where he excels at unifying a rhythmic approach based on riffs and ostinatos, the art of accompaniment where each chord is in its place and a melodic gift where jazz phrasing rubs shoulders with the accents of his native Africa. Herve Samb is also about to release his new named Jolof, cussion, crossing original melodies inspired by rhythms of the sabar—traditional Senegalese per-

He has worked with such artists as Chris Daughtry, Blackwell and Dave Dicenso. Sheldon is a graduate of Boston Arts Academy and Berklee College of Music. He currently resides in Washington, D.C. @ SheldonThwaites. th8aites.com.

HELEN MARLA WHITE (Guest Understudy) is excited to make her debut at Cleveland Play House in Light It Up. She recently appeared at Minton’s Playhouse with a solo show, Carmen Hall in the Take Me to the World Concert with Tituss Burgess, Christmas Tour with Idina Menzel. Other New York credits include Off-Broadway: Sistas the Musical at St. Luke’s Theatre, The First Noel at the Apollo Theater. She has worked regionally at Theatre by the Sea and Surflight Theatre in Ain’t Misbehavin’. She traveled all across the world performing with several artists as well on Royal Caribbean as the main female vocalist. She continues to pursue her career as an actor/performer. Proverbs 3:5–6, Matthew 6:33–34.

LILEANA BLAIN-CRUZ (Director) is a director from New York City and Miami. Recent projects include Marys Seacole (LCT3, Obie Award); Iphigenia (MASS MoCA, ArtsEmerson, The Kennedy Center); Hansel and Gretel (a film for Houston Grand Opera); Afrofemononomy (PSNY); Anatomy of a Suicide (Atlantic Theater Company); Fefu and Her Friends (TFANA); Girls (Yale Rep.); Faust (Opera Omaha); Fabulation, Or the Reeducation of Undine (Signature Theatre); Thunderbodies and Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again. (Soho Rep.); The House That Will Not Stand and Red Speedo (New York Theatre Workshop); Water by the Spoonful (Mark Taper Forum/CTG); Pipeline (Lincoln Center); The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World (Signature Theatre, Obie Award); Henry IV, Part One and Much Ado About Nothing (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); The Bluest Eye (The Guthrie); War (LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater and Yale Rep.); Salome (JACK); Hollow Roots (the Under the Radar Festival at The Public Theater). Upcoming: The Listeners (Opera Norway). She was named a 2021 Doris Duke Award winner, a 2018 United States Artists Fellow and a 2020 Lincoln Center Emerging Artist, and is currently the resident director of Lincoln Center Theater. She is a graduate of Princeton and received her MFA in directing from the Yale School of Drama.

MARIANI FORTÉ-SAUNDERS (Choreographer) is a mother, choreographer, performer, community organizer and a three-time Bessie Award winner.

PHUMZILE SOJOLA (Sangoma Chorus). From Gqeberha, South Africa, Phumzile made his Broadway debut in the Tony Award-winning The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess (Peter).

His following Broadway show was the Tony Award-winning production of Cinderella (Lord Pinkleton). He appeared in the North American tour of Phantom of the Opera (Ubaldo Piangi). Phumzile also enjoyed performing in the hit Off-Broadway show, Three Mo’ Tenors. He recently performed Master Harold and the Boys (Willie) at Syracuse Stage. No stranger to the operatic stage, Phumzile sang in the recent Metropolitan Opera production of Porgy and Bess. Other opera credits include L’etoile (Herrissson), Troubled Island (Popp) with New York City Opera, La Bohème (Rodolfo) with Missouri Symphony Orchestra, Lost in the Stars (Leader) at Skylark Opera, The Magic Flute (Monostatos), Carmen (Remendado) at Dayton Opera, Porgy and Bess (Robbins/Crabman) with National de Lyon and The Edinburgh International Festival. Phumzile was featured in concerts with Jacksonville Symphony, Knoxville Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Dayton Philharmonic, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and Krasnoyarsk Ballet Orchestra. He performed at Venice Biennale in Italy with jazz pianist Jason Moran. Recordings include Cinderella (OBC), The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess (OBC), Treemonisha (Cephus) with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and The American Spiritual Ensemble CD, The Spirituals.

SHELDON THWAITES (Percussion) is an award-winning international Caribbean-American percussionist, specializing in drum set and steel pan. Drums were his first love, but after pursuing music at the high school level, he transitioned into composition, arranging and production. He has worked with such artists as Chris Daughtry, Lauryn Hill, Amel Larrieux, Cobi and Marina Satti. Sheldon has played drums internationally for world-renowned steel bands Witco Desperadoes, Phase II Pan Groove and Skiffle Bunch. He has studied drum set with Terri Lynn Carrington, John Blackwell and Dave Dicenso. Sheldon is a graduate of Boston Arts Academy and Berklee College of Music. He currently resides in Washington, D.C. @ SheldonThwaites. th8aites.com.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS (CONT.)

PHUMZILE SOJOLA (Sangoma Chorus). From Gqeberha, South Africa, Phumzile made his Broadway debut in the Tony Award-winning The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess (Peter).
ABOUT THE ARTISTS (CONT.)

She is a recent awardee of the prestigious Dance Magazine Harkness Award (2020) and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Fellowship. She is an inaugural recipient of three distinguishing fellowships, including Urban Bush Women’s Choreographic Center Initiative Fellowship (2017), the Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship (2018) and the DanceUSA Artist Fellowship (2019). Saunders is a two-time Princess Grace Foundation awardee. Saunders is a founding member of the collective 7NMS, alongside composer and husband Everett Saunders. They are recent recipients of New Music USA and the National Dance Project Production & Touring Award for their new portrait of the lyricist Prophet, a multi-tiered project and performance work. Commercially, Saunders has worked with Sundance Award-winning director Kahlil Joseph, Kevin Willmott, Kevin Everson and Tracee Ellis Ross’ product launch video campaign for Patterns. Marjani is honored to be a part of the creative team of Dreaming Zenzile, in utter admiration of our beloved Miriam Makeba. Humbly, she defines her work by its lineage stemming from culturally rich, vibrant, historic, loving, irreverent conjurers.

RICCARDO HERNÁNDEZ (Scenic Designer) designed the Broadway productions of Jagged Little Pill (Tony nomination); Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune; Indecent; The Gin Game; The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess; The People in the Picture; Caroline, or Change (also National Theatre London); Elaine Stritch at Liberty (also The Old Vic, London); Topdog/Underdog (also Royal Court, London); Bells Are Ringing; Parade (Hal Prince, director, Tony nomination); Bring in ’Da Noise, Bring in ’Da Funk and The Tempest. Recent credits include Mes Frères (La Colline, Paris); Admissions (LCT); Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train; La Dame aux Camélias (Théâtre National de Bretagne and TV France 3); Milma’s Tale (Public Theater); Red Speedo and The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World (both directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz); Don Giovanni (Santa Fe Opera); The Invisible Hand (NYTW—Henry Hewes Outstanding Set Design Award) and Splendid’s (La Colline-Theatre National Paris). He has designed over 250 productions in the U.S. and internationally at Abbey Theatre, Cour D’Honneur, Palais des Papes—Aix-en-Provence, Moscow Art Theatre, Oslo National, Théâtre du Chatelet Paris, Teatro Real Madrid, Theater an der Wien, English National Opera, San Francisco Opera, NYCO, HGO and others. He is a recipient of the Obie Award for Sustained Excellence. He is an Associate Professor Adjunct of Design at the Yale School of Drama.

MIMI PLANGE (Costume Designer). Award-winning Ghanaian-born American fashion designer, Mimi is excited to explore the world of costume design for the very first time with Dreaming Zenzile. Mimi launched her lifestyle brand in 2010 with her partner Ibrahim Ndoye, after a decade working in the New York fashion industry. She is a graduate of the San Francisco Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising and has her bachelor’s in architecture from the University of California at Berkeley with a minor in dramatic art. Plange has shown her collections in New York, Sweden, South Africa, Cote d’Ivoire, Paris and Nigeria, and creates modern contemporary pieces inspired by African body adornment and modifications such as scarification, painting and piercings. Her designs explore identities, culture and what it means to be unfashion. Plange has collaborated with Manolo Blahnik, Roche Bobois and most recently LeBron James and Nike. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, T Magazine, Vogue.com, Ebony Magazine, Vogue UK, Vogue India, WWD, Harpers Bazar, Marie Claire, Essence, Glamour Magazine, Cosmopolitan and Nylon Magazine, and she is proud to embark on this new journey and share her vision of Miriam Makeba and the beautiful Sangoma healers at New York Theatre Workshop.

YI ZHAO (Lighting Designer). Theater, New York: Greater Clements, Pipeline (Lincoln Center Theater); Actually (Manhattan Theatre Club); Fabulation, In the Blood, The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World (Signature Theatre); Thunderbodies, Revolt She Said. Revolt Again., Futurity (SoHo Rep.); The House That Will Not Stand, Red Speedo (New York Theatre Workshop). Regional: Dreaming Zenzile (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, McCarter Theatre Center); Yale Repertory Theatre; Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Mark Taper Forum; Dallas Theater Center; Wilma Theater; American Conservatory Theater; Berkeley Repertory Theatre; Huntington Theatre Company. International: Theatnatur Festival (Germany). Opera: Opera Omaha; ArtsEmerson—Curtis Institute of Music; Prototype Festival; Hong Kong Arts Festival. Dance: Sasha Waltz & Guests (Germany), Ballet de Lorraine (France), Nichole Canuso Dance Company. Upcoming: Dreaming Zenzile (ArtsEmerson, New York Theatre Workshop), The Skin of Our Teeth (Broadway), Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, Chicago Lyric Opera; Opera Philadelphia. Awards: 2019 Henry Hewes Design Award, 2016 Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Theatre, yi-zhao.com.

JUSTIN ELLINGTON (Sound Designer) is an award-winning sound designer whose work has been featured in film, commercial radio and on
ABOUT THE ARTISTS (CONT.)

stages nationally and internationally on Broadway and off. Ellington has received Obie Awards, an Audelco Award and is the proud recipient of a Henry Hewes Design Award for his work in the theater. McCarter credits include Fetch Clay Make Man. Broadway credits include Pass Over, Clyde’s and Other Desert Cities. Off-Broadway credits include Heroes of the Fourth Turning (Playwrights Horizons); The Rolling Stone, Pass Over, Pipeline (Lincoln Center); Mrs. Murray’s Manegenire (ArsNova); The House That Will Not Stand, Fetch Clay Make Man (New York Theatre Workshop); He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box, The Winter’s Tale (Theatre for a New Audience). Additional theaters include Steppenwolf, Goodman Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Alliance Theatre, Guthrie, The Stratford Festival (Canada), The Royal Shakespeare Company (UK) and The Old Vic (UK). Mr. Ellington has also been awarded by The American Society of Composers and Publishers along with The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for his composition work in the recording industry.

HANNAH WASILESKI (Projection Designer) is a visual artist and projection designer whose work spans theater, opera, music and installation. Recent designs include Dreaming Zenzile (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, McCarter Theatre Center), Hansel and Gretel (visual design for filmed production at Houston Grand Opera), Anatomy of a Suicide (Atlantic Theater Company), Fires in the Mirror (Signature Theatre; Henry Hewes and Outer Critics Circle awards), 18 Stanzas Sung to a Tatar Reed Whistle (FiveMyles), The Magic Flute (Staatsoper Berlin), Lohengrin (Wagner’s Bayreuth Festival), Pipeline (Lincoln Center; Lortel Award), Water by the Spoonful (Mark T per), Sleep (BAM), La Voix Humaine (National Sawdust), The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World (Signature Theatre), A Proust Sonata (Wortham Center), Angel’s Bone (Prototype Festival), The Wreckers (Bard SummerScape Opera), The World Is Round (BAM; Obie Award). Her video installations have been exhibited in New York City, London, Brighton, Glasgow and Prague. MFA Yale School of Drama.

ABIGAIL JEAN-BAPTISTE (Associate Director) is a theater maker, director and writer born and based in New York City. Her work intersects with critical race theory, disrupts conditioned rules of behavior and reimagines understandings of the past. Abigail is currently a Soho Rep Project Number One Artist. In 2020, she was named one of the “Powerhouse Women Directors Theatre Fans and Industry Pros Alike Need to Know” by Playbill. Most recently, she directed The Story of a Circle by David Ryan Smith (Soho Rep.), A Case for Black Girls Setting Central Park on Fire by Kori Alston (Clubbed Thumb, Reading Series), the salt women by Audley Puglisi (Playwrights Realm, Reading Series). Recent AD credits include Merry Wives (dir. Saheem Ali), Anatomy of a Suicide (dir. Lileana Blain-Cruz), Jagged Little Pill (dir. Diane Paulus), King Lear (dir. Sam Gold). Abigail is part of the Roundabout Director’s Group, Bushwick Starr Reading Series, Classic Stage Company Associate Board and The New Georges Jam. A proud Lilly Award winner and New Georges Affiliated Artist. Upcoming: The House That Will Not Stand (Le Petit Theatre, New Orleans). B.A. from Princeton University.

TALVIN WILKS (Dramaturg) is a playwright, director and dramaturg. His plays include Tod, the boy, Tod, The Trial of Uncle S&M, Bread of Heaven, An American Triptych, Jimmy and Lorraine: A Musing and As I Remember It with Carmen de Lavallade. Directorial projects include the world premiere productions of Udu by Sekou Sundiata, The Love Space Demands by Ntozake Shange, the Obie Award/AUDELCO award-winning The Shanequa Chronicles by Stephanie Berry, The Peculiar Patriot by Liza Jessie Peterson, Cannabis! A Viper Vaudeville by Baba Israel and Grace Galu, and co-writer/co-director for Ping Chong’s ongoing series of Undesirable Elements and Collidoscope: Adventures in Pre- and Post-Racial America. Since 2014, some of his most acclaimed directorial works have been centered at Penumbra Theatre Company: The Ballad of Emmett Till and Benevolence by Ifa Bayeza; This Bitter Earth by Harrison David Rivers; The Owl Answers by Adrienne Kennedy; and The White Card by Claudia Rankine. As a dramaturg he has collaborated on numerous award-winning projects with nationally renowned companies such as Bebe Miller Company, Urban Bush Women, Camille A. Brown and Dancers, MAI (Jon Boogz and Lil Buck) and the stage adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ Between the World and Me at the Apollo Theater.

STEWART/WHITLEY (Casting). Duncan Stewart CSA and Benton Whitley CSA. Broadway/NY credits include Hadestown (Artios Award), Chicago the Musical, Rock of Ages, The Lightning Thief, The Great Comet of 1812, Elf, On the Town, Pippin, La Cage aux Folles and Radio City Christmas Spectacular. Television and film credits include Netflix, 20th Century Fox, NBC, Lionsgate and Disney Channel. In London’s West End and the UK, credits include Hadestown, Thriller Live and Menier Chocolate Factory. Tours and regional credits include Hadestown, Hairspray, Waitress, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Finding Neverland,
ABOUT THE ARTISTS (CONT.)

Into the Woods, We Will Rock You, A.R.T., Berkeley Rep, Alley, Bay Street, For The Record, TUTS, Hollywood Bowl, McCarter, Signature Theatre and RCCL. @stewartwhitley and stewartwhitley.com.

BONGI DUMA (Dialect Coach & Casting Consultant). South African born-Durban (Umlazi), Bongi has spent the last 16 years entertaining thousands of fans every night in the production of The Lion King on Broadway in New York City. As a vocalist he possesses a unique breathy sound which is a true representation of his native Zulu culture and style of singing. Bongi is also known for his dynamic compositions and rhythmic arrangements, which in 2014 landed him a Drama Desk Award nomination for Best Music in a Play (Generations) and collaboration with numerous artists and institutions such as Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall’s Musical Explorers, Princeton’s Glee Club Choir and many more. In an effort to better himself in production, Bongi attended Institute of Audio Research, where he studied the art of audio recording and mixing. In his early years Bongi spent over five years in the UK, Ireland, Italy and Germany performing and teaching Zulu/Xhosa language and South African singing to students and professional artists.

EGYPT DIXON (Production Stage Manager). Her credits are as follows: OOTB: (Production Stage Manager) Into the Woods, Nocturne, Charlie Brown, The Last Five Years. The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis (Production Stage Manager): Dreaming Zenzile. Atlantic Theater Company (Production Stage Manager): Anatomy OAS. Theatre for a New Audience (Assistant Stage Manager): Fefu and Her Friends, Julius Caesar, Winter’s Tale. Weston Playhouse (Assistant Stage Manager): Indecent. Weathervane Theatre (Assistant Stage Manager): Bright Star, Curious Incident..., Chicago, Sister Act. Weathervane Theatre (Production Stage Manager): Hello, Dolly!; Buyer & Cellar; Little Shop; Miracle of South Division Street; And the World Goes ‘Round; Always, Patsy Cline.

ALISON COTE (Stage Manager) is an AEA stage manager and was part of McCarter Theatre’s stage management department for 24 seasons. Working on over 20 world premieres, highlights include Danai Gurira’s The Convert, Sorrows and Rejoicings written and directed by Athol Fugard, Stephen Wadsworth’s adaptations of The Figaro Plays and Tarell Alvin McCraney’s trilogy of The Brother/Sister Plays. Alison has also worked regionally at The Old Globe, Berkeley Rep, Arena Stage, Shakespeare Theatre Company DC, Goodman Theatre, Long Wharf, Paper Mill Playhouse, Center Theatre Group, Santa Cruz Shakespeare, Pittsburgh Public and 22 productions at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. New York credits include Second Stage, Playwrights Horizons and The Public Theater. Abroad, she was stage manager for An Iliad at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival in Romania. Alison is a founding partner of princetonVIRTUAL as a virtual stage manager and event producer and is an adjunct instructor at Rider University.

The actors and stage managers employed in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

United Scenic Artists Local USA 829 of the I.A.T.S.E. represents the Designers & Scenic Artists for the American Theatre.

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DAVID C. HOWSE
Executive Director
David C. Howse joined ArtsEmerson as executive director in 2015 and is fiscally and administratively responsible for multiple cultural venues in Downtown Boston. Prior, he served as executive director of Boston Children's Chorus (BCC), where he was instrumental in helping grow BCC from a pilot project serving 20 kids in 2003 to a vibrant organization educating more than 500 singers in 12 choirs in 5 locations. David was named as one of the GK100: Boston’s Most Influential People of Color, earned the Social Innovation Forum Achievement Award (Root Cause) and was included in the “40 Under 40” (Boston Business Journal). He serves in many capacities in the community, including service on the boards of Exponential Creativity Ventures, Social Innovation Forum, Philanthropy Massachusetts, and as a Trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts. He also serves on the Board of Corporators for Eastern Bank and the Advisory Council of the New England Foundation for the Arts. David earned degrees from Bradley University (Peoria, IL) and New England Conservatory of Music (Boston, MA) and is a graduate of The Partnership’s Next Generation Executive Leadership Program at Harvard University. He teaches at the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. Originally from Murfreesboro, TN, he resides in Milton, MA. Twitter: @dchowse

RONEE PENOI
Director of Artistic Programming
Ronee Penoi (Laguna Pueblo/Cherokee) was most recently a Producer with Octopus Theatricals, where she advanced the work of Cherokee artist DeLanna Studi (And So We Walked), Phantom Limb Company (Falling Out), Ripe Time (Sleep), Homer’s Coat (An Iliad by Denis O’Hare and Lisa Peterson), Theatre for One, and more. She is a two-time ISPA (International Society of Performing Arts) Global Fellow, and has been an APAP (Association of Performing Arts Professionals) Leadership Fellow and TCG (Theatre Communications Group) Rising Leader of Color. Ronee is a Founding Member of The Industry Standard Group (TISG), a commercial investment and producing organization with an intentional focus on increasing the presence of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) investors and producers in the commercial producing field. She is also part of the consortium leadership of First Nations Performing Arts, a proud NEFA (New England Foundation for the Arts) National Theater Project Advisor, serves on Western Arts Alliance Committees, and leads the Creative and Independent Producer Alliance (CIPA) Programs Committee. Ronee is a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Individual Artist Fellowship as well as additional awards for her musical composing work with collaborator Annalisa Dias on #Resist and The Carlisle Project. She is also Co-Founder and collaborator with Groundwater Arts Collective dedicated to climate justice in the arts. Previously, Ronee was NNPN Producer-in-Residence at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Senior Producing Fellow and Directing Fellow at Arena Stage, and toured nationally with Anna Deavere Smith’s Let Me Down Easy. She spent three years with the Consensus Building Institute, a non-profit specializing in facilitation and mediation services. Her current anti-racism practice builds upon a decolonization framework and embraces systems change as a key component of that work. She graduated with honors from Princeton University with a degree in Music with certificates in Vocal Performance and Theatre & Dance. She has been invited to guest lecture on producing at Princeton University, CalArts, Howard University, and for American University’s graduate Arts Administration program.
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At Emerson College’s Office of the Arts, we hold ourselves accountable to the work of undoing oppression and advancing equity to overcome our city’s bitter history of segregation and racial inequality. As part of this work, we must start by acknowledging that we are residing on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Massachusetts people, whose name was appropriated by this Commonwealth.

We pay respect to the Massachusetts elders past, present and future, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we make and present our art. We acknowledge the truth of violence perpetrated in the name of this country and make a commitment to uncovering that truth through dialogue, partnerships and learning.

ABOUT EMERSON COLLEGE

Located in Boston, Massachusetts, opposite the historic Boston Common and in the heart of the city’s Theatre District, Emerson College educates individuals who will solve problems and change the world through engaged leadership in the liberal arts, communications and the arts. The College has approximately 3,500 undergraduates and 670 graduate students from across the United States and 50 countries. Supported by state-of-the-art facilities and a renowned faculty, students participate in more than 90 student organizations and performance groups. Emerson is known for its study and internship programs at Emerson Los Angeles, located in Hollywood, and at its beautifully restored 14th-century castle in the Netherlands. Additionally, there are opportunities to study in Washington, D.C.; London; China; the Czech Republic; Spain; Austria; Greece; France; Ireland; Mexico; Cuba; England; and South Africa. The College has an active network of 37,000 alumni who hold leadership positions in communication and the arts. For more information, visit emerson.edu.
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