

SHEPSU AAKHU'S
CROSSING THE
Big Water

A WORLD PREMIERE
DIRECTED BY LAUREN "LL" LUNDY
SEASON 35

FIRST PERSON INTERVIEWS
PROVIDED IN PART BY
UNITED AFRICAN ORGANIZATION
FATE
MPAACT

DEVELOPED IN PART FROM THE SOURCE MATERIAL
AFRICANS IN CHICAGO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (UAO)
DIASPORA MONOLOGUES (FATE)
THE ABESHA CONSPIRACY (MPAACT)
SOST (MPAACT)

DEVELOPED BY
MPAACT'S PLAYWRIGHT'S LABORATORY



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Fehinty African
Theatre Ensemble



LEGACY ARTISTS



MPAACT
ICONS



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ENSEMBLE

Yahdina U-Deen
Obi Uwakwe
Edward Neequaye
Chloé Khaleeah Keira Johnson
Cat Evans

UNDERSTUDIES
Maame Addae

SETTING

The USA in the year of the 250th anniversary
of the founding of the nation.

OR

Any occasion upon which the many peoples of
Africa find comfort and joy in the many
reflections of ourselves.

CONTRIBUTORS

Hillina Tamrat * Patrick Sengbe
Woodtor * Yaasha Abraham * Maame
Addae * Tadesse Gebreyes * Jeanine
Ntihirageza * Jepcumba Cheluget *
Funmi Adeleke * Toyosi Oluwole *
Almaz Yigizaw * Anthony Imanlihen *

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Culture work is some of the most challenging and most rewarding work in theater. Culture work will humble you... It will remind you of how much you need to open yourself to the needs of others. It will remind you of how much you do not yet understand. It will remind you of how much our histories are intertwined and inter-dependent.

In this play, more than any other, I have had to accept my need to be supported by a multitude of people - each of whom are invested in this work for their own reasons. Transatlantic calls were made at all hours of the day and night, for translations and interpretations. Extended family and multi-generational networks were called upon to widen the lens of our already multi-national multi-ethnic production staff and cast. With every call to action, there was an overwhelming response to aid us in this work.

We knew it was impossible to learn everything we needed to know to represent everything covered in this play with absolute fidelity. But that knowledge never impeded our efforts.

Crossing the Big Water is a love letter to the many cultures of Africa as they exist throughout the world. We could never tell everyone's story in our time here.

Our hope is that you find yourself a little more open to these lives and these communities. There is so much to learn, and so much to be gained. This play is our contribution to the continuing dialogue between our peoples.

Culture work is a call to action. We are happy to have done some small part with this production, to answer that call.

- - Lauren Lundy



WRITER'S NOTE

I have spent a great deal of my artistic life looking to make space for ideas, points of view, experiences, and cultures from the incredible diversity of African cultures, as they are represented across the planet. With *Crossing the Big Water*, we have once again opened our hearts and applied our craft to that task. That said, this is perhaps our broadest, most sweeping endeavor in that regard.

From the very beginning we understood that we could not tell these stories without considerable help. FATE is the bedrock upon which we have built this show. We came to them, just as this idea was forming and invited them to step into the producing lane with MPAACT. They came with stories, and relationships all their own. Most importantly, they came with love, craft, and a profound sense of purpose.

Crossing the Big Water springs from a years long project at FATE -*The Diaspora Monologues*. It also springs from a decades long relationship between MPAACT and FATE. Ours is a shared journey—looking to validate OUR people and OUR lives as they are lived throughout the world.

We wanted to show respect to our people(s) in their myriad diversities, and also further a dialogue between us, that began at our forced parting and subsequent reintroduction. We are like twins separated at birth - we have spent lifetimes trying to find our way back to each other.

What a joy to be sharing this storytelling together.

- Shepsu Aakhu



A NOTE FROM FATE

From its inception on MPAACT's stage in 2015, FATE's *Diaspora Monologues* expressed the unfiltered essence of our purpose as a company founded by African immigrants: to tell the stories we didn't want to forget and the stories we were still discovering as we made homes in new places.

Diaspora Monologues centered the real-life stories of community members — stories of coming and becoming, often told in their own voices. Yet these stories murmured loudly of many histories of coming and becoming, of brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, aunties, uncles, and cousins once removed, of struggles and overcoming. In *Crossing the Big Water*, FATE and MPAACT come together to tell OUR story, as much to each other as to you.

It is a profound sense of homecoming for FATE to join MPAACT for this production. Our relationship indeed is one of kinship and shared purpose. While we have each committed lifetimes to telling stories of the African diaspora, *Crossing the Big Water* is a story we could only truly tell together—hand-gripping-hand.

And as we do, we hold fast to the promise: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.* (Is. 43:2).

- Dr. Olateju "Teju" Adesida



Fehinty African
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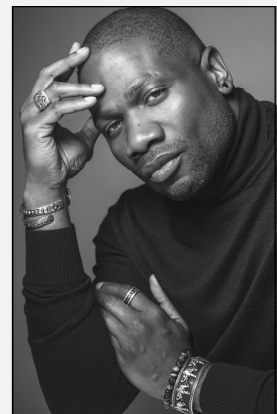
PROFILES



Yahdina U-Deen is a Jeff nominated singer/actor who is excited and grateful to part take in the ensemble of *Crossing The Big Water!* U-Deen values: Authenticity, Love and Family. You may recognize U-Deen from several hit plays around the Chicagoland and abroad such as Adventure Stage, Black Ensemble, Comer (Home of The Drill Team), ETA, Goodman, Hot House, MPAACT, Pulse Theater (Chicago), and The Victory Gardens just to name a few.

U-Deen's featured roles include, Dee - *Sun Tea*, Ms. Eddie - *City of Water*, Grandma Betty - *Beneath the Willow Tree*, Mammatu - *Somebody Say Amen*, Alberta Gaye - *The Marvin Gaye Story*, Nina Simone - *The High Priestess Speaks*, Etta #4 - *A Tribute to Etta James*, Sarah Vaughn#5 - *Club Sassy*, and Alma Carthan - *Til*. Other credits include, *This House of Power* (Moody Bible Radio), *Featured Vocalist* (Black Women's Expo), *The Chi* (Sho), Black Excellence, The Chicago Teacher's College. Outstanding Achievements - The Black Theatre Alliance Awards.

Many thanks to: My Creator, Shepsu Aakhu, Lauren "LL" Lundy as MPAACT masterfully gives birth to *Crossing The Big Water!* To a supportive cast of many talents I give thanks! Family, friends and supporters - "No you no me!" (Hugs) "Authenticity & Love is the answer to all that I am" says, U-Deen.



Obi Uwakwe is thrilled to be making his MPAACT debut. Chicago credits include *Voice in the Dark* (Steppenwolf), *A Ditch in Madagali*, *Wrecked*, and *Diaspora Monologues* (FATE). A touring musician, Obi also performs under the moniker "Obisoulstar."

Obi wrote, produced, and performed the featured track *Heal the World with a Smile* for the documentary *Project: Building Hope*. Film and television credits include *Saved by Grace*, *Ruthless*, *Bar Star City*, and *Last New Year*.



Edward Neequaye is a Ghanaian-American actor, comedian, and model from Chicago and a graduate of The Second City's improv program. His film and television credits include *Bermuda*, *Bride of the Killer Piñata*, *Darkroom*, *The Village*, and *The Maurice Show*.

Stage credits include, Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, (Invictus) part of the Jeff Award-winning Best Ensemble, and portraying Jesus in *The Followers* (Embassy of Christ Church). An award-winning

actor, Edward has received Best Lead Actor honors from the American Golden Picture International Film Festival and Indie Movies Spark.

As a commercial model, Edward has appeared in Aspen Dental billboard campaigns across the U.S. and currently models for ComEd campaigns featured throughout Chicagoland Walmart, Target, The Home Depot, Menards, Best Buy, and Lowe's locations. Edward is also a longtime educator who brings his love of storytelling, comedy, and performance to both the stage and screen.



Chloé Khaleeah Keira Johnson is a 2026 Jeff Award Nominee for *Men of Soul* (BET). This Chicago native is at home in plays, operas, and musicals. Her credits include, *Squat* (MPAACT), *That's What Friends Are For*, *PWAP The Girl Who Was Different*, *PWAP They Keep Talking About Me* (BET), *Ragtime* (Metropolis P.A.C.), *A Lot To Unpack*, *Ama and the Magic Toy Box*, *The Man Who Saved New Orleans*, and *Destination Freedom* (eta), *Long Way Home* (Uniting Voices

Chicago/Q Brothers Collective). Chloé is excited to return to MPAACT in *Crossing the Big Water*, performing alongside an eager and wonderful cast.

A graduate of DePauw Univ., her credits there include, *The Wolves*, *Sorry Wrong Number*, *Brainpeople*, *She Talks To Beethoven*, and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and *Cendrillon*.



Cat Evans is a Chicago based actor and intimacy director/choreographer. They are a BACA 2025 Award winner for Tad in 5th City MPAACT, and a 4 time Jeff Nominee. They received their BFA in Acting from Northern Illinois University. Notable works: *JANE: Abortion and the Underground* (Idle Muse), *Joan and the Fire* (Trap Door), *Medea Material* (Trap Door), *The Crucible* (Edge of the Wood). www.catrinaevans.com



Maame Addae (*u/s*) is thrilled to be joining MPAACT. Chicago theatre credits include *A Ditch in Madagali* (Amina), and *White N' Luscious* (Tiwa/Shay Shay) with (FATE). Film credits include *Me, We* (Executive Producers Rob McElhenney and Nzingha Stewart) and *Prosper* (Lady Villager). Commercial credits include campaigns for GrubHub, Kellogg's Special K, and Fresh Thyme Market.

Maame is also an accomplished writer and set designer whose work was featured in the Design Museum of Chicago's 2019 *Setting the Stage* Exhibition. She is a recipient of the Chicago BIPOC Performers' Scholarship.



J is for Jazz

by Carla Stillwell & Shawn Wallace
featuring Maggie & Afrika Brown

November 20, 2026 at 10AM/12PM/7PM

When Jae's brother Jason discovers her singing a jazz tune for an audition, she seizes the moment to teach her annoying little brother about the richness and beauty of jazz. As their playful exchange unfolds, audiences are drawn into a vibrant exploration of the music's history, rhythm, and cultural impact. This special production also celebrates the 100th birthday of Chicago jazz legend Oscar Brown Jr., featuring his daughters, Maggie and Afrika Brown, as special guest artists.



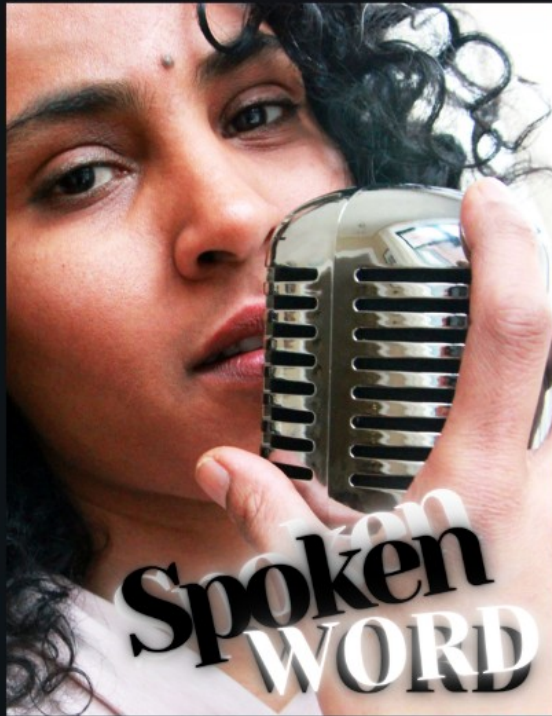
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PRODUCTION



Lauren “LL” Lundy (*Director*) is a graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul Univ. This season marks her 13th with MPAACT. LL began her MPAACT journey as an emergency fill-in for stage manager on our world premiere of Gloria Bond Clunie’s *Quark*. Over the years she has worked in every capacity of production from writer, designer, stage manager, to voice actor and director. Her MPAACT directing credits include *Squat*, *Warm on the Coolin’ Board* (2024 revival), *Ezekiel’s Wheel*, *Spoken Word*, *Swamp Baby*, *Starting Over*, and *Blood Mural*. She has also directed the MPAACT touring productions *Starting Over* and *In the Mirror Darkly*.

LL has also helmed *Half Life* (Broken Nose - Bechdel Fest), *One Direction* (Black Lives, Black Words), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show Live!* (Underscore), *The Seventh Night* (MPAACT Summer Jams) *Songs I Don't Know* (MPAACT Signature Series), *The Sacred Mother Tongue* (MPAACT Signature Series), a workshop of *The Promotion* (Steep), and a workshop of *Evolve-Transformations* (Red Door/Portland, OR). During the pandemic LL expanded her work into audio media, where she helped launch MPAACT into the digital marketplace with PODCAST PLAYS. She has had the joy of reimagining five of her signature shows for “the Audio Multiverse” - *Warm on the Coolin’ Board*, *In the Mirror Darkly*, *Spoken Word*, *Swamp Baby* and *Starting Over*. In addition to her credits as a director, LL continues her invaluable work as MPAACT’s Managing Producer. ...To Tina, the cast, and extended MPAACT family—thank you for making yet another world with me. Childhood dreams do come true.



Shepsu Aakhu (*Playwright*) A founding member, has penned over 30 critically acclaimed world-premiere works for MPAACT. Among them are: *Machine Made*; *Ride or Die*; *Red Summer*; *Spoken Word*; *Black & Blue*; *Never the Milk & Honey*; *By Association*; and *Starting Over*. Shepsu is a 2-time recipient of the Ted Ward Prize (*Ten Square & Kivi Black*), a 2-time Artistic Fellow in Scriptworks

(IAC - 2019 and 2004), a 7-time nominee for Best Original Work (BTAA) with awards for *The Abesha Conspiracy* and *Trouble The Water*. He is a 6-time nominee for the Joseph Jefferson Citation, with awards for Best New Work (*Speaking in Tongues/Babel*), and Original Music (*Kosi Dasa* and *Kivi Black*). *Cop Out!* and *Evolve* premiered for Red Door Theater (Portland, OR) in 2018 with writing credits shared by Shepsu and several Chicago writers. Currently, Shepsu has *Asylum* slated for premiere with MPAACT later this season. *The Companion*, the stage adaptation of his epic feature length-film on the Namibian holocaust is his current passion project.

In digital print media, Shepsu serves as editor-in-chief and as a regular contributor for *Listen* magazine - the companion magazine for podcast plays (the audio multiverse). Several of Shepsu’s plays are available in audio at MPAACTPLAYS.COM and in print media - *The BlaQ Market* (*Sakhu*) and *Seven Black Plays* (*Northwestern Univ. Press*). Independent film projects abound with longtime collaborator Mark Spencer (Masmedia) including the 2024 premiere of *One Thousand Negative Confessions*. Content for television and film continues in development with producing partners J. David Shanks and Phillip Edward Van Lear. Shepsu recently served as a writer for series television with AMC/Charter, and HBO.

To Dr. Teju, Mr. Dada and their entire network at FATE, thank you for trusting me with these stories. It has been an honor to chronicle the vast experiences in the “American experiment.” To the cast, and the production staff - thanks for making the impossible possible. For my wife Hiwoté, baby sister Nina, my sons, family, friends, and the other victims of my emotional fall-out. ...nothing without you. *San Bra Fie ...Remember the Remembering*.



Shawn Wallace (*Composer*) returns to MPAACT on the heels of the World premiere of *Machine Made*, the premiere staging of *Red Summer* and a successful revival of *Warm on the Coolin’ Board*. A multi-talented musical artist in styles ranging from Gospel to Jazz to Hip-Hop and beyond; as keyboardist, Shawn has worked with luminary artists such as Common, Ice Cube, Little Brother, Bobby Brown, Dwele, Johnny Gill, Jon B., Bilal, Estelle, Julie Dexter, Erykah Badu, Rene Neufville, Rakim, Eric Roberson, and Maggie Brown just to name a few.

Arrangement and composition for theatre include Ifa Bayeza's *Amistad Voices* (Chicago Shakespeare) *Kid Zero* (Chicago Center for Performing Arts) and *Charleston Olio* (National Black Theatre Festival) Shepsu Aakhu's *Warm on the Cooling Board* (MPAACT 2014/2025) and Carla Stillwell's *Land the CVS is Burning...a Gospel Musical Stage Play* (MPAACT 2015), *When Good Broccoli Goes Bad* (MPAACT), *Middle Passage* (Lifeline 2022) and *Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery* (Pegasus 2017). Independent film score credits include *Severed Ties* (Showcase Productions/Lions Gate Films), *Puzzle Love* (Storybox Productions) and *Son of America* (Tanskin Productions/N'Spire Entertainment INC). Sound Design credits include *N* (GLP Productions 2019), *Single Black Female* and *Lady Day at Emmerson's Bar and Grill* (Congo Square 2018-2019), *Love Child* (Live Bait /Chicago Theatre Co.), and *Love Talk* (Chicago Theatre Company). Commercial credits include work for Jet Magazine, Mississippi Rick's Restaurant, Huffy Bicycles, Arby's and Sprint.



Andrea Wukitsch (*Choreographer*) With more than 25 years of experience in theater and film, Andrea has built a dynamic career as an actor, dancer, and writer in the Chicagoland arts community. She began her professional journey with Black Ensemble Theater and went on to perform and collaborate with esteemed institutions including ETA, Steppenwolf, and Open Door Rep. among many others.

Driven by a passion for artistic excellence and mentorship, Andrea founded BIN Conservatory, an arts development center dedicated to training and elevating young performers. Under her leadership, emerging artists were given the rare opportunity to share the stage with seasoned professionals—an experience that helped gain entry into esteemed college theatre programs and launch several students into successful careers, in the entertainment industry and at Universal Studios.

Andrea has worked in collaboration with Actors' Equity Association, engaging with both Equity theaters and professional actors to help uphold standards of excellence within the performing arts community. Her work reflects a lifelong commitment not only to creating compelling

art, but also to cultivating pathways for the next generation of artists. At the heart of her philosophy is a simple yet powerful belief: everyone is born a star—you just have to find your galaxy.



Abboyé Lawrence (*Media Artist*) a Joseph Jefferson Award winning media artist, is happy to be back at home with MPAACT. His design credits with MPAACT include *Machine Made*, *Pulled Punches*, *Red Summer*, and *Ride or Die*. Recent Chicago credits include *Morning, Noon and Night* (Shattered Globe), *Smart People* (Lydia Diamond) and *Coronation* (Refracted Theatre) which earned

him a Jeff Award.

Abboyé continues to refine his skills in film and television production. He served on the film crew of *61st Street* (AMC) for two seasons, and continues as a freelance photographer for several independent artists. In addition, Abboyé is the principle photographer for *Listen Magazine*. His images are a regular feature in MPAACT's media campaigns for Podcast Plays. Check out his work at www.abboyelawrence.com.



Lauren Wells-Mann (*Costume Design*) is a proud company member with MPAACT. In addition to her work as an award winning director, actor, and teaching artist, Lauren finds the time to put on her “costume designer hat” and help her company bring another show to life. Mrs. Wells-Mann holds a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Theater/ Acting (Columbia College Chicago) and a Masters in Secondary Education (Univ. of Phoenix).

Sean Neron (*Visual Media Supervisor*) is a founding member of MPAACT. Sean's craft has been the cornerstone of MPAACT for more than three decades. He is happy to help launch another new work into the world. He is especially pleased to be producing *Big Water* with FATE and sharing this journey of kinship with our sister company.



Dr. Olateju “Teju” Adesida (*Assoc. Producer*) is a theatre artist, educator, producer, director, writer, designer, and performer whose work is rooted in the stories, memories, and lived experiences of Africa and its Diaspora. Since 2008, Teju has served as Artistic Director of Fehinty African Theatre Ensemble (FATE), helping establish the company as a Chicago-based home for African theatre.

Through FATE, she has directed, produced, written, adapted, designed, and performed in numerous productions, including *Calabash Blues: African Love Stories*, *Dipo’s Notes*, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, *Wrecked*, and *A Ditch in Madagali*. In 2015, Teju founded FATE’s *Diaspora Monologues*, a performance platform dedicated to preserving and celebrating the lived experiences and personal narratives of the African Diaspora in Chicago.



Matthew Dada (*Assoc. Producer*) Matthew Dada is a Chicago-based creative director, filmmaker, playwright, and visionary storyteller with a passion for creating unforgettable experiences. He is a founding member of F.A.T.E. (Fehinty African Theater Ensemble) and the creative force behind Frames and Stages, with numerous stage and film productions under his belt. Rooted in African culture and driven by human stories,

Matthew creates work that entertains, challenges, and inspires. A natural leader and relentless creative, he continues to use theater, film, music, and visual storytelling to give powerful stories a voice.



Aidan Lynn Smith (*Lighting Design*) is a designer, educator, and technician with over eleven years of professional experience. He currently serves Lake Forest H.S. as their Theater Technical Director where he proudly designs and teaches the future generation of artists. Aidan is grateful to be back working with his favorite people at MPAACT. Selected Light Design Credits include: *Machine Made*, *Warm on the Coolin’ Board*, *Blackademics*, *Book of Me*, *Ezekiel’s Wheel*, & *Ride or Die* (MPAACT), *[Title of show]* (PrideArts), *The Birds*, *Escanaba in da*

Moonlight, *Tea for Three* (The Playhouse at White Lake), *A Happy Life*, *Medea* (Underground Theatre), and *Flush* (Campfire Rep.). Aidan gives all his love to his partner, family, and friends. Check out more of his work at aidanlynnsmith.com

Omojolade Oladipupo (*Production Stage Manager*) is a passionate theatre artist with varied stage experience. With *Crossing the Big Water*, Omo is taking the helm as a stage manager for the first time. She has interned under some wonderful women in the theatre community, where she able built the skills and teamwork that goes into bringing a production to life. She is excited to continue growing and to help create a supportive environment for the cast and crew.



The Tamrat Sisters (*Consultants*) are excited to assist with the crafting of narratives exploring African immigrants and their evolving identities. Working with MPAACT for decades in various capacities, this trio has elevated new works like *The Book of Me*, , *Sost*, *The Abesha Conspiracy*, *Pod-cast Plays* and *By Association*. Contributions from their personal narratives also were contributed to *Crossing the Big Water* allowing our production to represent generational experiences from their family on our stage.

Shepsu Aakhu (*Set Design and Technical Director*) has been a designer and T.D. with MPAACT for more than three decades. His most recent work for MPAACT was *Sun Tea*, *Squat*, *The Book of Me*, *Tad in 5th City* (2024 revival) *Blackademics* (2023 revival), *Ride or Die*, *One 4 the Road* , and *Swamp Baby*. His favorite designs for MPAACT include *Sun Tea*, *Squat*, *Never the Milk and Honey*, *Swamp Baby*, *Tad in 5th City*, *Beneath A Dark Sky* (2008 revival), and *Kosi Dasa*.

Caro Arana (*Props*) is excited to be working with MPAACT following her previous work on *Squat*, *Machine Made*, *Ezekiel’s Wheel*, *Warm on the Coolin’ Board*, and *The Book of Me*. She is grateful to her partner and family for supporting her mad crafting projects and would like to thank MPAACT for continuously inviting her back to collaborate.

Big Water

PRODUCTION TEAM

DirectorLauren “LL” Lundy
Writer.....Shepsu Aakhu
Choreography.....Andrea Wukitsch
Media Art.....Abboyé Lawrence
Production Stage Manager.....Omojladé Oladipupo
Set Design.....Shepsu Aakhu
Lighting Design.....Aidan Lynn Smith
Sound Design.....Shawn Wallace
Costume Design.....Lauren Wells-Mann
Properties.....Caro Arana
Production Photographers.....Abboyé Lawrence
& Shepsu Aakhu
Production Manager.....Lauren “LL” Lundy
Assoc. Producer.....Dr. Olateju Adesida
Assoc. Producer.....Matthew Dada
Cultural Consultants.....Hiwoté, Hillina & Hilal Tamrat
Set Design/Tech Director.....Shepsu Aakhu
Visual Media Supervisor.....Sean Neron
Language Interpretations.....Kabelo Mofokeng, Obi Uwakwe
Hilal Tamrat, Siphesihle Ndlovu,
Yacob Adi, Ael Diehm

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Executive Director.....Reginald Lawrence
Managing Producer.....Lauren “LL” Lundy
Literary Manager.....Tina Fakhrid-Deen
Casting Director.....Nadia Pillay
Graphic Design.....Shepsu Aakhu
Information Tech.....Jelani Pitcher
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Marketing.....Tamarus Harvell
Group Sales.....Lauren “LL” Lundy

THE COMPANY

* Denotes Founding Member



MISSION

The Ma'at Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theater (MPAACT) is a professional, not-for-profit theater association founded in 1990. Our mission is to develop, nurture, and sustain original Afrikan Centered Theater (ACT) as a multi-disciplinary art form of American Theater. ACT is a genre of artistic expression grounded in the many cultures and traditions of the Afrikan continent and its Diaspora. With a vision focused upon new works and collaborative art, MPAACT shall produce and educate with the goal of bringing forth an understanding and appreciation of Afrikan Centered Theater and its inter-related disciplines.

MEMBERS

Shepsu Aakhu*	Melanie McCullough
Ashley Coney	Joshua X. Miller
Brittany Davis	Sean R. Neron*
Tina Fakhrid-Deen	Michaelyn Oby
Mark Franklin	Nadia Pillay
Joseph Giovannetti	Jelani Pitcher
Lauren Wells-Mann	Aum Mu Ra
Tamarus Harvell	Shariba Rivers
Shawn Wallace*	Carla Stillwell
Eddie Jordan III	André Teamer
Lauren "LL" Lundy	Jelani Julyus

EMERITUS

Carl Barnett*	William S. Carroll*	Nambi E. Kelley
Georges Blaise*	Daryl Charisse	Danjuma Gaskin

ARTISTIC ASSOCIATES

Chuck Smith	Razor Wintercastle	Abboyé Lawrence
Andrea J. Dymond	Jessica Wardell	Runako Jahi
Deidre Searcy	Lisa J. Willingham	Casey Diers
Evelyn Danner		

ANGELS

Lennal "Sati" Word	Sharlet Webb	Larry Nance
Leonard House Jr.	Ron White	Terry Cullers

ABOUT FATE

Inspired by the Truman College African student group

MOTHERLAND

Fehinty African Theatre Ensemble

made its company debut in 2007 with a production of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

FATE emerged from a longing for an artistic home centered on African voices and stories - one that explores the rich complexities of migration, belonging, memory, and identity.

From early dinner-theatre performances at *Iyanze* restaurant to premiering works by rising playwrights, establishing *African Folktales* in the Parks, and *Diaspora Monologues*, FATE fosters spaces for connection, recognition, dialogue, and exchange - enabling overlooked stories to be elevated, honored, and sustained.

At the heart of FATE's mission is the belief that our stories matter - not only to preserve our heritage, but to help us understand who we are and imagine who we can become.



**Fehinty African
Theatre Ensemble**



FATTY BUM BUM

Written by Nikkita Duke
Directed by Matthew Dada



ABOUT UAO

UNITED AFRICAN ORGANIZATION

UAO is a dynamic coalition of African community-based organizations that promotes social and economic justice, civic participation, and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. Their work includes public policy advocacy, leadership development workshops, community research, public education, organizing & building bridges program, citizenship & civic engagement application assistance, immigration legal services, health education, family support services, African language bank, and ESL/civic classes.



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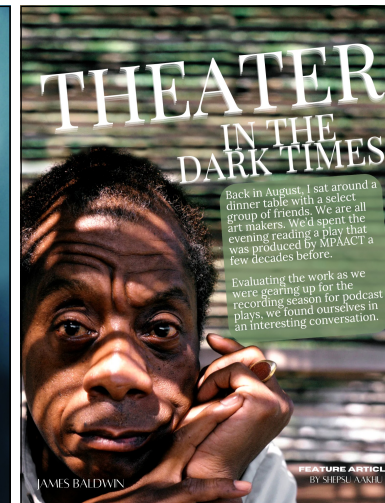
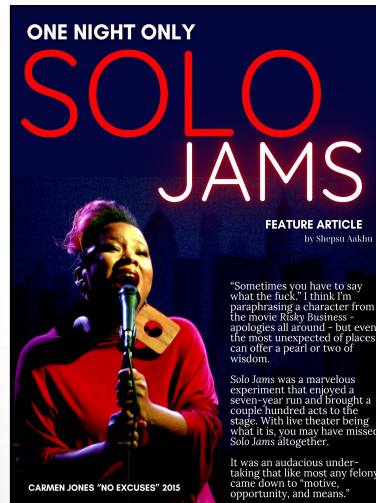
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Robert Hudson, James Coney, Stenovia Jordan, Tyannie Harris, Hiwoté Tamrat, Hilal Tamrat, Shirley Carney, Efé McWorter, Chuck Smith, Dennis & Piedad Lundy, Julia Van Vliet, Shariba Rivers, Reginald Lawrence, Yocab Abdi & Hillina Tamrat, Tina Fakhrid-Deen, Lauren Lundy, Marcus & Liona Ghebrai Lawrence, Yvonne and Jason Lee, Miriam Ex, Chad Eric Bergman, Charls S. Hall & Henry Bachofer, Phil Kohlmetz, Kedest Kassahun Lanum, Victoria Gordon, Sean Neron, Danelle Taylor, Monica Leach, Michelle Gains, Shawn Kennedy, Sheril Tyre, Janelle Kim, Rebecca Crummey, Blake Levinson, Anja Van Swinderen, Gloria Camacho, Renee Lockett, Mary Hopkins, Tiffany Trent, Lana Rogachevskaya, Nic Dimond, Antonio Lyons, Anthony Brown, Osiris Khepera, Razor Wintercastle Griffith, Timothy G. Elliot, Caro Arana, Peter Handler and Quicker Printers.



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FOUNDATION SUPPORT

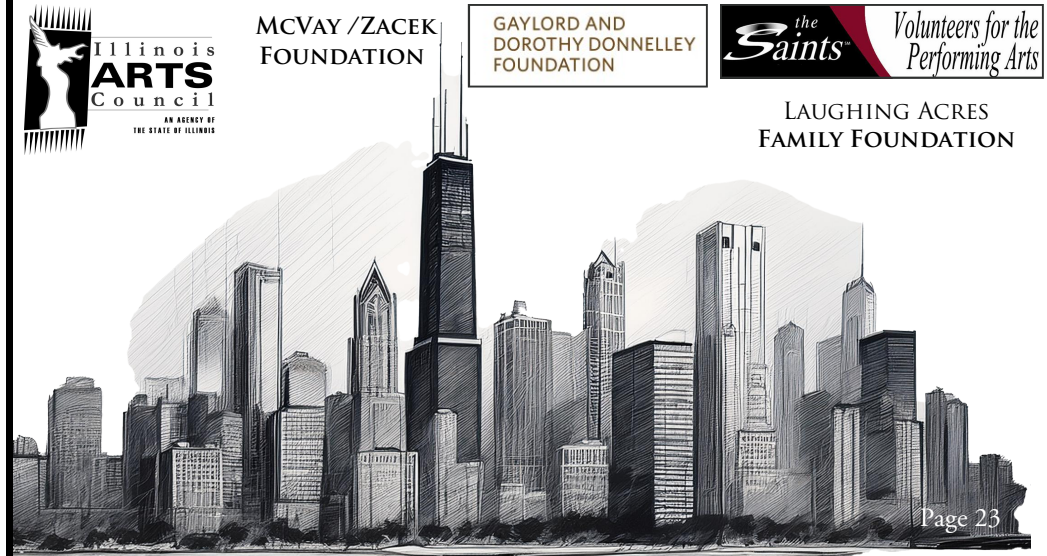


MCVAY /ZACEK
FOUNDATION

GAYLORD AND
DOROTHY DONNELLEY
FOUNDATION



LAUGHING ACRES
FAMILY FOUNDATION



35 SEASONS



2026

SUN TEA (WP)
SQUAT (WP)

2025

NEVER IDLE (EST)
MACHINE MADE (WP)
THE PROMOTION (WP)

2024

THE BOOK OF ME (WP)
WARM ON THE COOLIN' BOARD (REV)
TAD IN 5TH CITY (REV)

2023

BLACKADEMICS (REV)
DANDELIONS (WP)
EZEKIEL'S WHEEL (WP)

2022*

RIDE OR DIE (WP)
RED SUMMER - PREMIERE STAGING
PULLED PUNCHES (WP)

2021*

PODCAST PLAYS (EST)

2020*

SPOKEN WORD (WP)

2019

THE MASTER COMIC (WP)
ONE 4 THE ROAD (WP)
SWAMP BABY (WP)

2018

BLACK AND BLUE (WP)
BLOOD MURAL (WP)
MOTHER OF THE DARK WATER (WP)
100 ACTS OF RESISTANCE (EST)

2017

BURF OF A NATION (WP)
NEVER THE MILK & HONEY (WP)
BY ASSOCIATION (WP)

2016

STARTING OVER (WP)
FERAL (WP)
UPSTATE (WP)

2015

LAWD THE CVS IS BURNIN' (WP)
DIVINE ORDER OF BECOMING (REV)
SOFTLY BLUE (REV)

2014

THE INSIDE (REV)
WITHOUT TRACE (WP)
QUARK (WP)
SIGNATURE SHOWCASE SERIES (EST)
SUMMER JAMS (EST)

2013

WARM ON THE COOLIN' BOARD (WP)
WHEN GOOD BROCCOLI... (WP)
REALITY CHECK (WP)
LEAVES TREES FOREST (WP)

2012

BLACKADEMICS (WP)
EXTENDED JAMS (EST)
BODIES (WP)
SWEET HOME (WP)

2011

SPEAKING IN TONGUES/ BABEL (WP)
A BROWN TALE (DA-DA RE...) (WP)
THE LAST SAINT ON SUGAR HILL (WP)
GHOSTS OF ATWOOD (WP)
SOLO JAMS (EST)
DANCE JAM (EST)

2010

ZULU FITS (WP)
FILM JAM (EST)
SKETCH JAM (EST)
TAD IN 5TH CITY (WP)
FIRST WORDS (WP)

2009

TEN SQUARE (W/PEGASUS) (WP)
RADICAL HEARSAY... (WP)
STAGE BLACK (WP)

2008

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY (WP)
BLAQ MARKET MONOLOGUES (EST)
SHE CALLS UP THE SUN (REV)
BENEATH A DARK SKY (REV)

2007

MILK (REV)
TROUBLE THE WATER (WP)
BLAXPLOITATION 2... (WP)

2006

PANTHER BURN (WP)
SOFTLY BLUE (WP)

2005

BLAXPLOITATION: THE REMIX (WP)
BUS BOYZ (W/PROP THTR) (WP)
THE DIVINE ORDER OF BECOMING (WP)

2004

RELEVANT HEARSAY... (WP)
NOTES FROM THE BOTTLE TREE (WP)

2003

SOST (WP)
SCORCHED EARTH: FERTILE GROUND (WP)
KIWI BLACK (WP)
EKOMO AKYEDE (EST)

2002

SHE CALLS UP THE SUN (WP)
DEFENDING MYSELF (WP)
MAHALIA & ME (BCP)
KOSI DASA (WP)

2001

FASCIA (WP)
THE ALIBI TRANSCRIPTS (EST)
URBAN GRIOT PROJECT (WP)

2000

CHRIS T. (WP)
TERE-TOCHA-CHEW (WP)
EXOSKELETAL BLUES (WP)
THE GLOW OF REFLECTED LIGHT (WP)

1999

WITHIN THE DREAM (WP)
THE ABESHA CONSPIRACY (WP)

1998

BENEATH A DARK SKY (WP)
THE INSIDE (WP)
THE EMPIRE FESTIVAL (WP)
THE SCOTT JOPLIN STORY (BCP)

1997

PIECE-MEAL CLAN (WP)
TALES FROM AN URBAN EMPIRE (WP)
THE UNDERGROUND POETRY JAM (EST)
AFROSYNTHESIS (WP)
SCREAMS W/OUT CONSCIOUSNESS (WSP)

1996

A KWANZAA CAROL (WP)
SHORT ORDERS (EST)
GIRL TO BE NAMED LATER (WP)
OTHERWORLD LOVERS (WP)
FROM FUNK 2 FUSION (WP)

1995

MILK (WP)
SLICES (EST)
A NIGHT OF JAZZ FUSION (WP)

1994

TALES OF THE KITALOGO (WP)
VITAL SIGNS (WP)

1993

CONTINUUM (WP)

1992

RESTORE THE RHYTHM (WP)

1991

A HOUSE DIVIDED (WP)

WP - WORLD PREMIERE

REV - REVIVAL

EST - ESTABLISHED

BCP - BROADCAST PREMIERE

WSP - WORKSHOP PRODUCTION

*PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS -
LIMITED LIVE THEATER

*PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS -
NO LIVE THEATER



SUBMISSIONS

MPAACT IS COMMITTED TO THE
DEVELOPMENT OF ORIGINAL WORKS.
UNSOLICITED SCRIPTS ARE
ENCOURAGED.

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SEASON 35



OCT. 16 - NOV. 22, 2026



Seen through the lens of America's 250th anniversary, *Crossing the Big Water* takes a joyous and unflinchingly honest look at the myriad ways Africans have built a life for themselves inside the American experiment.

Three decades in the making, this production is an adaptation of more than 20 personal stories, collected by multiple cultural institutions, looking to document the remarkable vitality of our communities.

JAN. 15 - FEB. 28, 2027

Father Bowman is the young charismatic shepherd of his first congregation. When 17-year-old Idania "Eden" Cux-Castaneda steps into his confessional, she brings a world of troubles with her.

Seeking the protection of the church, Eden and Father Bowman maneuver the shadow life of America's "undocumented" to wrest control of her fate from the political machinery of an autocratic state.



In this solo tour de force, directed by South African artist Refiloe Leoere, Antonio utilizes music, movement, and spoken word to explore the many modes of his life.

Water Returns is also a lyrical anthropological investigation into the cultures of Cuba, framed both by Antonio's participation in the 29th Habana International Poetry Festival and the passing of his mother.

Most importantly, *Water Returns* speaks to the multi-modal essence of life. Asking one of the most foundational questions in modern life: How do you rehydrate a human soul?



APRIL 16 - MAY 30, 2027

WHOSE Mans IS THIS



A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES
BY JAVON J. SMITH

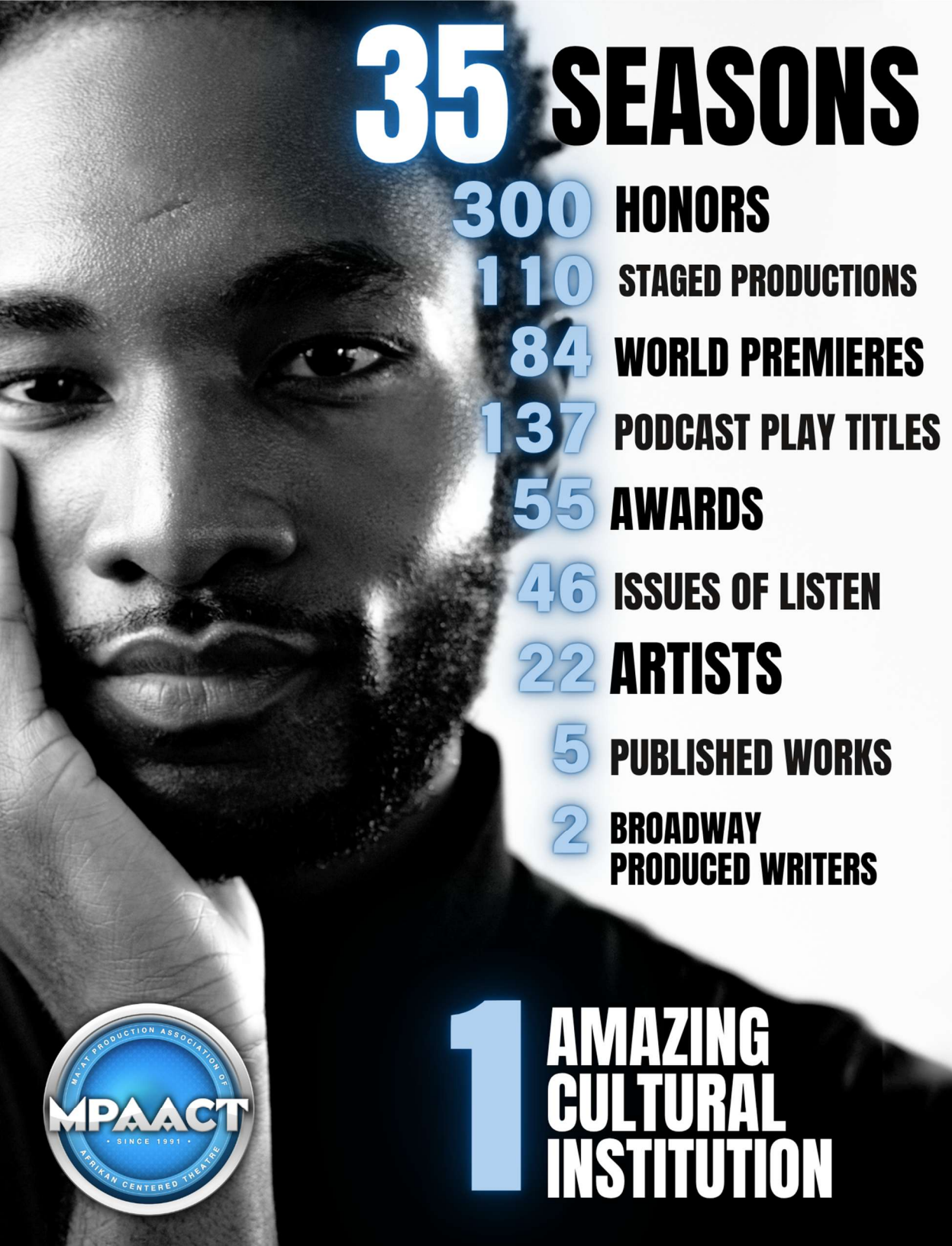


NEW IN PRINT

A collection of impactful perspectives reveling in identity, trauma, and transcendence. As a Black, gay, gender queer, Chicago native, socialized as a man, Javon J. Smith advances conversations by Sandra Cisneros, Morgan Jerkins, James Baldwin and Ta’Nehisi Coates.

[order Here](#)





35 SEASONS

300 HONORS

110 STAGED PRODUCTIONS

84 WORLD PREMIERES

137 PODCAST PLAY TITLES

55 AWARDS

46 ISSUES OF LISTEN

22 ARTISTS

5 PUBLISHED WORKS

**2 BROADWAY
PRODUCED WRITERS**

**1 AMAZING
CULTURAL
INSTITUTION**



MPAACT has been producing live theater for 35 seasons.

It has been a year of great challenges and great art making, but the business of bringing you this art has certainly gotten more difficult.

Your investment is vital to our sustainability. We are asking that you invest in the cultural art that we create - honest examinations of our shared history, our culture, our values, and our struggles to manifest the best of ourselves in times of crisis.

In the current political climate, our work has taken on added importance. We seek to expand the space for dialogue, we wish to continue presenting challenging and nuanced ideas that facilitate understanding, personal, and societal growth. We can't do this work without your investment.

Consider telling a friend, bringing them to a show, gifting them an audio subscription or donating to MPAACT below. In doing so, you'll help us continue to provide quality cultural art. Your contributions will help to ensure another spectacular season of world premiere work.



**INVEST
HERE**