

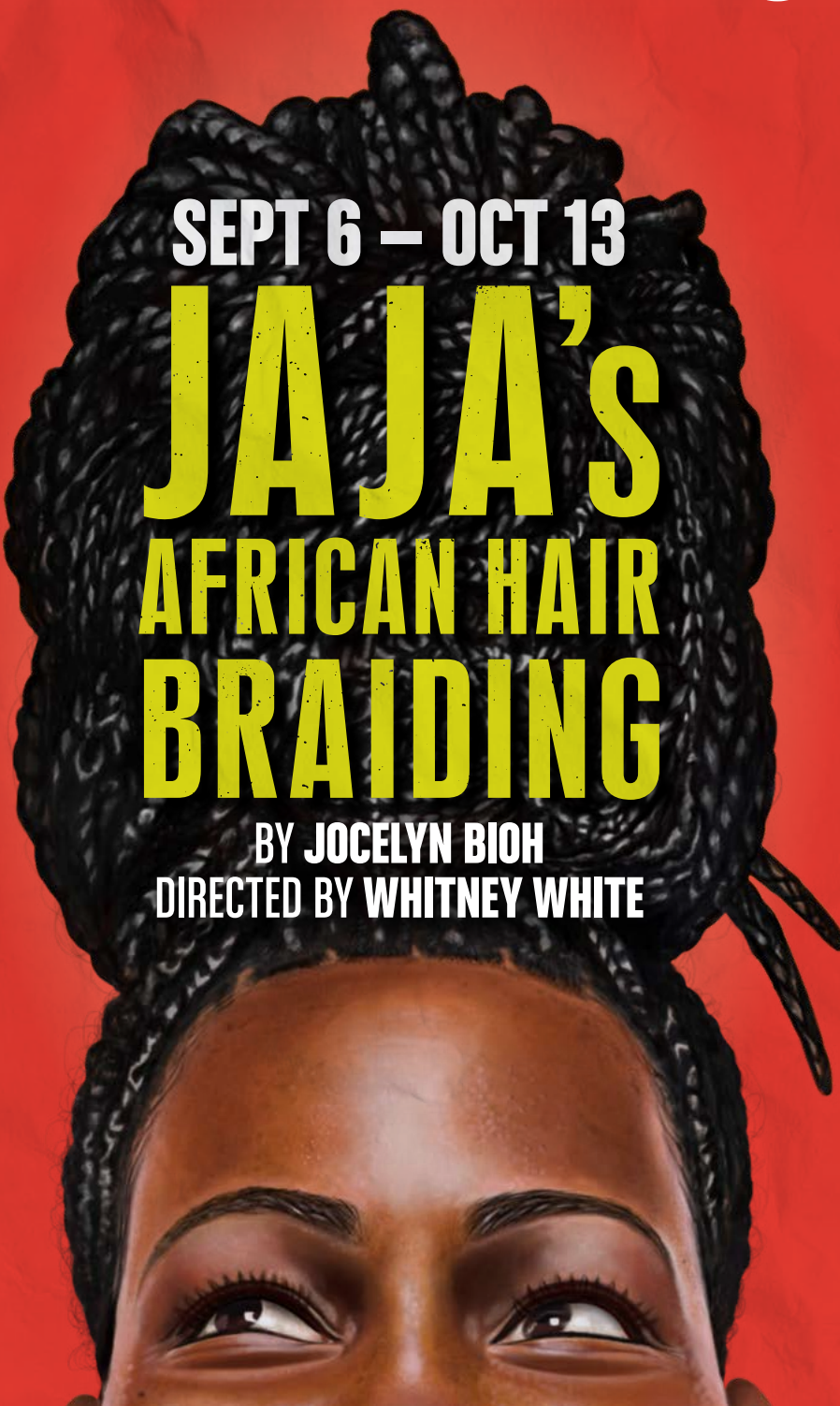
2024/25 SEASON



SEPT 6 – OCT 13

JAJA'S
AFRICAN HAIR
BRAIDING

BY JOCELYN BIOH
DIRECTED BY WHITNEY WHITE





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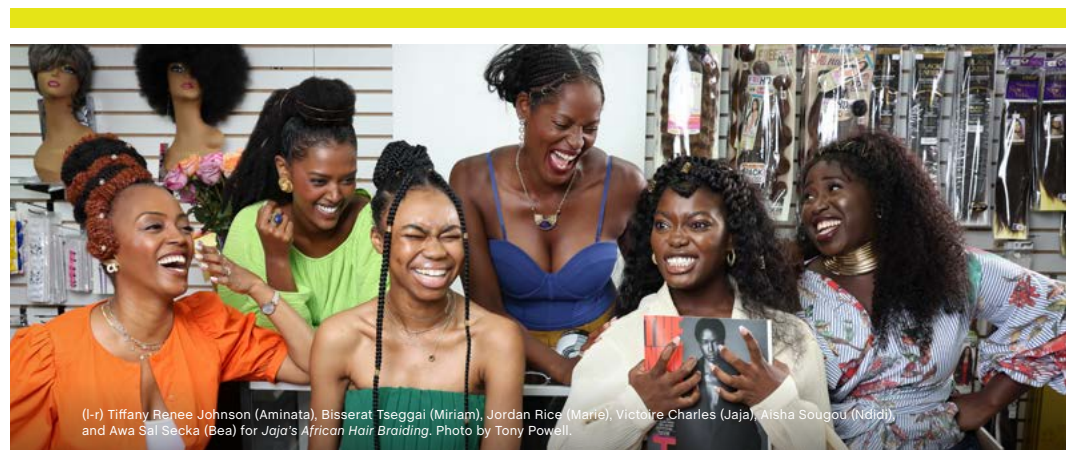
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Jaja's African Hair Braiding program book published Sept 6, 2024.

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(l-r) Tiffany Renee Johnson (Aminata), Bisserat Tseggai (Miriam), Jordan Rice (Marie), Victoire Charles (Jaja), Aisha Sougou (N'didi), and Awa Sal Secka (Bea) for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Photo by Tony Powell.



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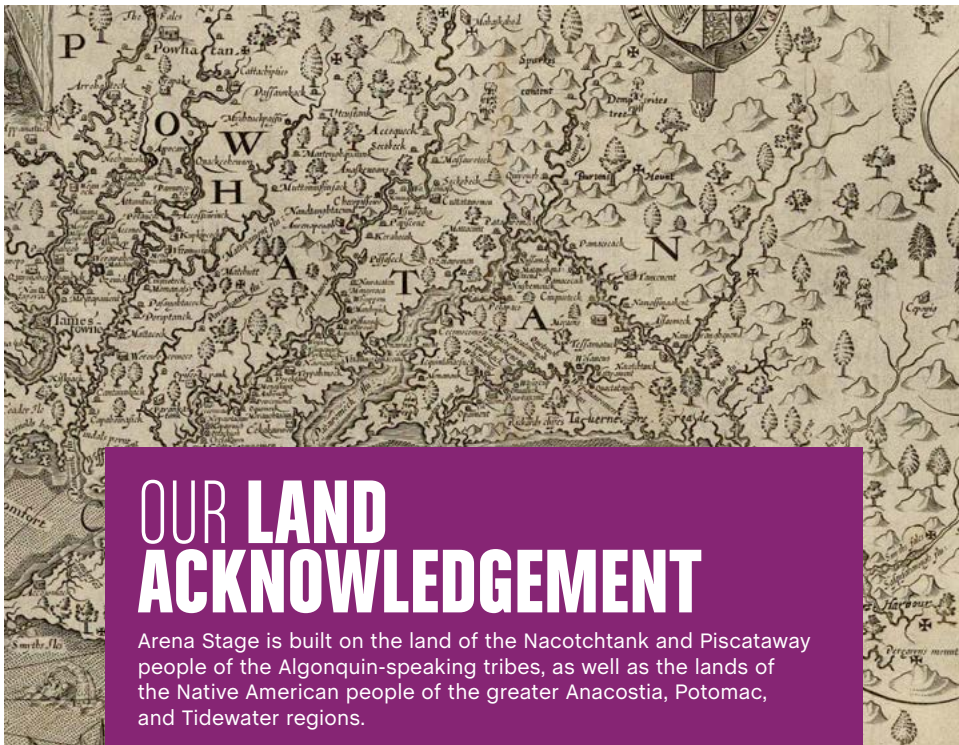
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ARENA STAGE'S MISSION

Arena Stage is the voice of American theater resident in our nation's capital. Focused on American artists, our productions are innovative and representative of stories from across the country. We nurture new plays and reimagine classics. We celebrate our democracy and diversity through a multitude of voices in our productions and community engagement programs to inspire people to action. We produce all that is passionate, exuberant, profound, entertaining, deep and dangerous in the American spirit.



OUR LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Arena Stage is built on the land of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway people of the Algonquin-speaking tribes, as well as the lands of the Native American people of the greater Anacostia, Potomac, and Tidewater regions.



ARTISTICALLY SPEAKING

“We Dreamers are made of something different. We are the culture and blood of our origins, but we are also the promise and future of this country.” —Gloria

One of the most sacred responsibilities of an Artistic Director is curating the selection of stories to share with their community. Which voices will entertain, challenge, and inspire? Which stories will leave an indelible mark and reflect all that is passionate, exuberant, profound, entertaining, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit?

Last fall, as the house lights rose in Broadway's Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, I knew I had found the very first story I would share with my new Arena Stage family. Jocelyn Bioh's *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is a revelation in its journey through the emotional acuity of the immigrant experience that's woven with joy, complexity, and resilience. Set in a Harlem braiding shop, *Jaja's* reflects the first intersection of a multifaceted African and African American experience onstage, bearing witness to both the rituals of hair and the rituals of care of these communities. Marie, Bea, Aminata, Ndidi, Miriam, Jaja, and others exemplify the notion that “women possess an indestructible strength that allows us to not only get down, but to get up, get through, and to get over.” *Jaja's* showcases the heart and laughter behind these women's lives and unveils vital questions about what it means to be a Dreamer and an American in its many forms. Whether or not the world of *Jaja's* shop is familiar to you, its vernacular—of family, fears, and aspirations—is shared across so many gathering places within our country.

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warned us of the danger of the single narrative, as it limits our ability to see, honor, and connect with the full humanity of those we view through a singular anthropological lens. One of Jocelyn's superpowers is her incredible ability to create worlds that may seem foreign to some upon introduction, then quickly transcend any preconceived notion to allow each to revel in the resonance of our own humanity. As I sat in the theater, moving from deep laughter to tears, I found myself reconciling the privileged pieces of my identity that I take for granted. With all of its complexity, this country still offers a haven for the prayers and ambitions of the multitudes of immigrants in pursuit of freedom, self-actualization, and hope.

The promise of the American dream is deeply rooted in our nation's history. George Washington's words, “The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions, whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges,” echo the core values of *Jaja's*. The play serves as a powerful reflection of this promise, depicting the struggles and triumphs of immigrants in America. In a serendipitous turn of events, the same week I attended the MTC production of *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* in New York, my 13-year-old daughter, unbeknownst to me, chose that very same show as the focus of her Current Events project for school. She was thrilled that I had just seen the show and immediately began to delve deeply into the issues surrounding Dreamers. This unexpected connection to the play sparked a meaningful conversation in our family about the rights, privileges, and opportunities around citizenship and the contemporary complications of being a nation of immigrants. My greatest hope is that each of you sees reflections of your own unique American story onstage and that we are reminded of the impossible journey our ancestors took to manifest the possibilities of our lives. Let us hold fast to the time-enduring words of our 41st President George H.W. Bush: “Nearly all Americans have ancestors who braved the oceans—liberty-loving risk takers in search of an ideal. ...Immigration is not just a link to America's past; it's also a bridge to America's future.”

Hana S. Sharif
Artistic Director, Arena Stage



FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

September 2024 marks the 100th anniversary of Zelda Fichandler's birth. Her legacy has been celebrated already this year with the publishing of two books—one a compilation of her written words (*The Long Revolution*, edited by Todd London) and the other an oral history told by those that knew her and were impacted by her (*To Repair the World* by Mary Robinson). Both books are on sale at our gift bar and are wonderful and fitting tributes.

An important part of the impetus for Zelda, Tom Fichandler, and Ed Mangum to create Arena Stage was a desire to be resident in the community. At a staff gathering in the early 2010s, Zelda impressed upon me the distinction between resident theater and regional theater. She said Arena was a resident theater: resident in its community, speaking to this community, and an active part of the community. Not just a region outside of New York.

We are gathered today to be part of the community of *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, an entirely different type of business from our own, yet with a similar goal of being resident in its community. The shop serves the needs of the community as well as building a community within the shop. The community they create supports, pushes, fights, and loves together.

In thinking about the significance of Zelda's birth, it's equally critical to highlight the steadfast support and acumen of Tom Fichandler in the founding of Arena Stage. For the first many years, Tom volunteered his time to support Arena while keeping his job running the Washington office of the Twentieth Century Fund. His volunteer work morphed into a full-time job as Arena's Executive Director, using his degree in actuarial mathematics for sure, which paved the way for the field to follow. A retired employee shared that Tom used to double-check the results of a calculator by doing the math in his head. He served as President of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) for six years. His leadership was instrumental in the construction of the Fichandler (née Arena) Stage and Kreeger Theater. While Zelda's legacy may be more prominently felt and heard, Tom's quieter yet stalwart support was also an essential part of this theater's success.

Zelda wrote in her introduction to Arena's 40th anniversary book, *The Arena Adventure*, "The community ringed around the theater circles the community within the theater. The people without, as well as the people within, constitute the theater in its fullest sense."

I extend my deep gratitude to Zelda and Tom for building this Arena Stage community, and I extend my deep gratitude to you as well, for being part of our community with us.

Warmly,

Edgar Dobie
Executive Producer
President of the Corporation

**Proudly Shaping
the Local Landscape**

HAIR STORY/ HISTORY/ HERE STORY

by Otis Ramsey-Zöe, Literary Manager

"Send these, the
homeless, tempest-tost
to me, I lift my lamp
beside the golden door!"

— Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"

"Everywhere, immigrants
have enriched and
strengthened the fabric
of American life"

— President John F. Kennedy,
A Nation of Immigrants

"Don't sit down and
wait for the opportunities
to come... get up and
make them!"

— "Madam C. J. Walker, according to A'Lelia Bundles,
*On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of
Madam C. J. Walker.*

In *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, within the arc of a single day, Jocelyn Bioh threads many lives from varying origin points on the globe into a stunning, unified tapestry.

For each braider, *it took a whole lot of trying just to get up that hill*. Each worker in Jaja's shop earned her spot through determination, skill, and the ability to navigate hostile systems. This "a day in the life of" story centers not on one individual but on an entire community invested in perpetual works of service, esteem-building, citizenship, self-making, and heritage preservation. According to Bioh, from an interview with legendary playwright Lynn Nottage, "There's something really powerful about when the story is the main character, or the place is the main character."

Jaja's is a particularly rewarding work because it is layered and dramatizes interior and exterior complexities. Walking in, the title signals that this is a hair story, but it is also a here story infused with deep culture and history.



"All black hairstyles
are political"

Hair story.

It's a quiet and hot Summer morning on 125th and St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem. The hair braiding shop owned by Jaja, like so many hair salons and barbershops in Black and immigrant communities, functions as a community center, as a hub for information, commerce, and image-making.

Physical appearance and presentation are not mere vanity. Despite progress on all fronts social, political, legislative, and the like, the way a person's appearance is read by another can determine how they are treated. In the lexicon of social codes, hair functions as a key ethnic signifier because, compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily.

Even mogul Oprah Winfrey has encountered numerous incidents of racial profiling while out shopping. Following

one occurrence, comedian Paul Mooney joked, "Oprah should've combed her hair," which recognizes that Black women face an inordinate amount of stigma, judgment, and assumptions based on how they wear their hair. Art historian Kobena Mercer asserts, "all black hairstyles are political in that they each articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both social and symbolic meaning and significance." Since hairdos function within systems of codes, values, and meanings, clients in Jaja's shop are selecting a story to embody; they are negotiating which aspects of themselves and culture to highlight, curb, fabricate, explore, honor, and project. Of course, a persistent aspect of history and historical forces is the reality of their ever presence.

History.

History is capacious. It is not simply written down or spoken. History may also be embodied. History shows up in our body movements, actions, and even apparel.

Bioh expertly and slyly signals an entire history lesson at the very top of the show by indicating that a character carries a particular accessory. Marie, Jaja's daughter, enters hauling supplies in large once-nameless, checkered, woven matted bags. Immediately recognizable and abundant even here in the United States, these bags acquired the name "Ghana must go" bags following the 1983 expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria. Today, the bags have many names including "Efiewura suame" (by Ghanaian, which means "help me carry this load"), "Anyi N'Aga" (Igbo for "we are going"), and refugee bags. The bags have become symbols of migration as carriers for possessions, as stand-ins for immaterial things like culture, heritage, and memories that are also being carried, and as reminders of dispossession and forfeiture.

Within the play, these bags are a tiny detail that reveals Bioh's investment in astutely infusing the characters and story with layers of meaning, history, backstory, tensions, anxieties, dreams, and every manner of the complications that arise from living and striving towards citizenship in a nation that holds opportunities and inhospitality in equal measure. *Jaja's* is infused with more meaningful and layered details than can be absorbed in a single viewing, and Bioh crafts a play that feels both timeless and rooted in a very specific time and place.



Source: Annenberg Learner

"History shows up in our body movements, actions, and even apparel."

Here story.

Set on a *very hot day in July of 2019* in Harlem, which was declared a Black mecca in 1925 during the Harlem Renaissance, *Jaja's* is an immigrant story, yes, but that is also the story of this nation. America has always been seen and represented itself as a "golden door" long before "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus was penned or inscribed onto the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, arguably the world's most recognizable symbol of welcome to immigrants. 2019 found the country embroiled in fierce debates about the status of and place for immigrants in this country. In 2018, one year before the play takes place, the then-sitting

US President expressed in vulgar terms his belief that not all immigrants should be welcomed in these United States. Such debates continue to this day, but questions around how we as a nation handle immigration mirror the dilemma of selecting a hair style. Both are operating within tensions between who we **say** we are by the image we project (our exterior) and who we **show** we are based on our actions (our interior). *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is not just about the immigrants represented by the women and men we see on stage in the shop; it is about each inhabitant of this country who either themselves or their ancestors came here from someplace else.



Dove is a proud co-founder of the CROWN Coalition



Join The CROWN Movement to help end race-based hair discrimination



The CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair) Act was created to ensure protection against race-based hair discrimination based on hairstyles and protective styles such as braids, locs, twists, and knots in the workplace and schools.

To date, at least 27 states have enacted the CROWN Act or laws inspired by the CROWN Act.

So much progress has been made, but there's still more to be done.

Help take action now by signing the petition at Dove.com/CROWN

| @TheCROWNAct

#CROWNLove

ARENA STAGE

HANA S. SHARIF, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | EDGAR DOBIE, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

IN A CO-PRODUCTION WITH BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE AND CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER
IN ASSOCIATION WITH MADISON WELLS LIVE AND LACHANZE

PRESENTS

JAJA'S AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING

BY JOCELYN BIOH

DIRECTED BY WHITNEY WHITE

SET DESIGNER
DAVID ZINN

COSTUME DESIGNER
DEDE AYITE

LIGHTING DESIGNER
JIYOUN CHANG

ORIGINAL MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGNER
JUSTIN ELLINGTON

VIDEO DESIGNER
STEFANIA BUBARELLA

HAIR AND WIG DESIGNER
NIKIYA MATHIS

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
**MANNA-SYMONÉ
MIDDLEBROOKS**

DIALECT AND VOCAL COACH
YETUNDE FELIX-UKWU

NEW YORK CASTING
**ERICA A. HART, CSA
KELLY GILLESPIE, CSA
DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS, CSA**

STAGE MANAGER
MANDISA REED*

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
JAMIE BERRY*

Special thanks to for their support of *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*.

In-kind support is provided by

World premiere produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Chris Jennings, Executive Director) and Madison Wells with LaChanze & Taraji P. Henson at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on September 12, 2023.

Commissioned by Williamstown Theatre Festival (Mandy Greenfield, Artistic Director), Williamstown, MA.

SETTING

Harlem, New York, 2019

CAST

Michelle/Chrissy/LaNiece **MELANIE BREZILL***
 Jaja **VICTOIRE CHARLES***
 James/Franklin/Olu/Eric **YAO DOGBE***
 Jennifer **MIA ELLIS***
 Aminata **TIFFANY RENEE JOHNSON***
 Vanessa/Sheila/Radia **COLBY N. MUHAMMAD***
 Marie **JORDAN RICE***
 Bea **AWA SAL SECKA***
 Ndidi **AISHA SOUGOU***
 Miriam **BISSERAT TSEGGAI***

UNDERSTUDIES

For Marie, Ndidi, Aminata – **DEBORA CRABBE***
 For Michelle/Chrissy/LaNiece – **MIA ELLIS***
 For Jaja, Bea, Miriam – **YETUNDE FELIX-UKWU***
 For Jennifer, Vanessa/Radia/Sheila – **JOI HENRY**
 For James/Franklin/Olu/Eric – **THEODORE SAPP***

NOLLYWOOD DREAMS ACTORS

ONYE EME-AKWARI*, MORGAN SCOTT*

**Members of Actors' Equity Association*

The videotaping or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited. Please turn off all electronic devices. Drinks with a lid are allowed in the theater. Eating is not permitted inside the theater.

FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Intimacy Consultant **SIERRA YOUNG**
 Hair Braiding Consultant **SHEREESE LYNN-CROMARTIE**
 Associate Set Designer **TERESA L. WILLIAMS**
 Associate Lighting Designers **CAROLINA ORTIZ, JACOB ZEDEK**
 Associate Sound Designer **DJ POTTS**
 Associate Hair and Wig Designer **JANERA ROSE**
 Assistant Costume Designer **CHRIS HYNDS**
 Assistant Lighting Designer **CATHERINE GIRARDI**
 Video Programmer **DEVIN KINCH**
 Wig Supervisor **TINIKA SADIKU**
 Assistant Wig Supervisor **LASANGRA AARONS**
 Production Assistant **SARA GEHL**
 Stage Supervisor **HANNAH MARTIN**
 Deck Carpenters **MAX MARSHALL, DAYNE SUNDMAN**
 Props Technician **ERICA FEIDELSEIT**
 Audio Technician **LIV FARLEY**
 Light Board Operator **KELSEY SWANSON**
 Wardrobe Supervisor **ALICE HAWFIELD**
 Wigs, Hair, and Makeup Supervisor **JAIME BAGLEY**
 Wardrobe **CAITLIN O'BRIEN, SABRINA SIMMONS,**
 Wig and Wardrobe Crew **JALISA WILLIAMS**
 Crew Swing **TREVOR COMEAU**
 Hair Braiding/Wig Construction **RAMON ALVELO, DORI BEAU SEIGNEUR,**
DANA DEPAUL, DAPHNE EPPS, ADIA GILL,
LASHAWN MELTON, AMBER NICOLE,
TATYANNA WILLIAMS

SPECIAL THANKS

Arena Stage would like to thank the following organizations for their support of this production:

Be Rooted, Beautie Essentials Beauty Supply, Beyond the Badge Foundation, College Park/Sandy Spring Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Dudley Beauty College, Howard University & PNC National Center for Entrepreneurship, IKNOW Skincare, Miche Beauty, and Oyin Handmade.



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CAST



MELANIE BREZILL (*Michelle/Chrissy/LaNiece*) is thrilled to be making her Arena Stage debut! Broadway and National Tour: *The Book of Mormon*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, *Mamma Mia!*. Select

Regional: *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution, for colored girls...*, *Man in the Ring*, *Caroline, or Change* (Court Theatre); *Beautiful, Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* (Marriott Theatre); *The Comedy of Errors at Shepperton*, *As You Like it* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Nina Simone: Four Women* (Northlight Theatre); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Drury Lane Oakbrook Theatre); *Crowns* (Goodman Theatre); *The MLK Project* (Writers Theatre). TV/Film: *Reporting for Christmas, Empire*. Melanie is the creator of The Grandmother Project and Pearls & Pocketbooks series on YouTube. She would like to thank her family, friends, and Stewart Talent for their support! Instagram: @shinegirlshine @thegrandmotherproject



VICTOIRE CHARLES (*Jaja*)

Theatre: *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Broadway); *Golden Age* (MTC); *Ruined* (MTC, Intiman, Geffen Playhouse); *Moby Dick Rehearsed*, *The Tempest* (The Acting Company, Group 35); *Intimate Apparel* (Portland Stage Company); *The Trojan Women* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival); *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare Theatre Company, DC). TV: *New Amsterdam* (NBC); *FBI* (CBS); *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* and *Pretty Little Liars: Summer School* (HBO Max); and an upcoming episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC). Training: Fordham College at Lincoln Center and the NYU Grad Acting Program.



YAO DOGBE (*James/Franklin/Olu/Eric*) is overjoyed to be making his debut at Arena Stage. Select DC credits include *Topdog/Underdog*, *Nollywood Dreams*, *Ohio State Murders* (Round House

Theatre) and *King Lear* (Shakespeare Theatre Company). Off-Broadway: *The Doctor* (Park Avenue Armory); *Nollywood Dreams* (MCC Theater). Regional: *Richard III*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Fences* (American Players Theatre); *Fly* (Capital Repertory Theatre); *Intimate Apparel* (Northlight Theatre); *Routes* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company); *Cymbeline* (Utah Shakespeare Festival). Tours: *Othello* (Montana Shakespeare in the Parks). Yao is a first-generation Ghanaian American actor and an activist for African cultural and dialectical authenticity on stage and film for the African diaspora. TV/Film: Yao currently has an AutoZone commercial nationwide. MFA Acting, University of Houston.

Instagram: @yaonation



MIA ELLIS (*Jennifer/*

u/s Michelle/Chrissy/LaNiece) was born and raised in Mississippi where she attended Tougaloo College. She received her MFA in Acting from Brown University/Trinity

Rep. Select Regional: *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare Theatre Company); *Fairview*, *The Mountaintop*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Ragtime* (Trinity Rep); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Seattle Rep); *Hamlet* (Santa Cruz Shakespeare). TV/Film: *The Good Fight*, *Elementary*, *Person of Interest*, *Welcome to the Blumhouse Live*, *Louder Than Words*, *Lavender Men*. Mia is also a teaching artist, writer, producer, and a member of the Acting Company at Trinity Rep. Mia is delighted to be making her Arena Stage debut, and she sends a special thanks to Linda, Semoune, and L.B. Instagram: @ellismia09 Website: miaellis.com



TIFFANY RENEE JOHNSON

(*Aminata*) is excited to make her Arena Stage debut! She's a proud Chicago native and Howard alum (Theatre Arts BFA) and is so glad to be back in DC. Some of Tiffany's

favorite regional credits include *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Remy Bumppo Theatre - Core Ensemble Member), *Chlorine Sky* (Steppenwolf Theatre), *School Girls*; *Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Goodman Theatre), *Red Velvet*

(Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), *The Garbologists* (Northlight Theatre), and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Writers Theatre). Her TV/film credits include: *Shameless* and *The Chi* (Showtime); *Chicago PD* and *Chicago Med* (NBC); *Soundtrack* (Hulu); and *Range Runners* (Amazon Prime). When Tiffany is not acting, she's writing for film and speaking to students. She gives God all the glory.

Instagram: @tiffanyreneej_ Website: tiffanyreneejohnson.com



COLBY N. MUHAMMAD

(Vanessa/Sheila/Radia) is more than thrilled to make her Arena Stage debut with *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Regional: *Love All* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Pride and Prejudice* (Chautauqua Theater Company). Educational Theatre: *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Promise*, *Everybody*, *In the Red and Brown Water*, *Anything Goes*, *Fabulation*, or *the Re-Education of Undine*. Education: Acting MFA from The University of California, San Diego; Musical Theatre BFA from Howard University.

Instagram: @colbynatasha Website: colbymuhammad.com



JORDAN RICE (Marie)

is an actress, filmmaker, and content creator from Atlanta, GA. At age 11, Jordan made audiences hold their breath in her film debut as the last little girl on the screen during the church bombing scene in *Ava DuVernay's Selma*. Her other notable TV/film work includes playing Jackie Carson in the Apple TV+ series *Swagger*, Dylan in *One True Loves*, and Esme in the DC Universe's *Doom Patrol*. Her creative work garnered her recognition as a 2020 YoungArts Theatre Finalist and Winner and a 2021 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts Semifinalist. Jordan is thrilled to continue developing her artistry and expanding the artistic space for more artists of color in the future. To follow her journey, follow her on Instagram: @actressjordanrice #ThatGirlBeActing



AWA SAL SECKA (Bea)

is elated to be making her Arena Stage debut! You may have seen her as Sassy (*After Midnight*) at Paper Mill Playhouse or Zawadi (GODDESS) at Berkeley Rep. Locally, you may have seen her as Sarah (*Ragtime*) at Signature Theatre, Joanne (*RENT*) at the Kennedy Center, as Mayme (*Intimate Apparel*) at Theater J, as the Baker's Wife (*Into the Woods*) at Ford's Theatre, or as Ama (*School Girls*) and Dottie (*Caroline, or Change*) at Round House Theatre. Awa is a Helen Hayes Award-winning actor and a co-writer for the 2023 MacArthur Award-winning show *The Joy That Carries You*. She is immeasurably grateful for her incredible agents at Nicolosi & Co., for her fiancé, and all her wonderful friends, family, and supporters, and especially for her mother, Fatou, who would be so proud to see her playing an African woman on stage.

Instagram: @_kujichagulia_



AISHA SOUGOU (Ndidi)

is excited to be making her Arena Stage debut. She was born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina, and is the daughter of immigrants from Senegal. She recently graduated from the School of Drama at The University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Class of 2023. Her recent credits include *Beehive*, *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, and *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (The Marriott Theatre). She radiates love and gratitude for her friends and family, especially her mother and sisters, who taught her everything she knows about respect and self-worth. So much love for Stewart Talent and the faculty at UNCSCA. Go Pickles!

Instagram: @_aisha_marie_



BISSERAT TSEGAI (Miriam)

is an Eritrean-American actor whose work in theater includes *The Jungle* at St. Ann's Warehouse and the Curran Theatre, and *For All the Women Who Thought They Were Mad* at Soho Rep. Her television credits include *The Accidental Wolf*, *Seven Seconds*, *Succession*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Orange Is the New*

Black, *Billions*, *Alternatino* with Arturo Castro, *Luke Cage*, and *Rival Speak*. You can follow her @bisserat on all social media platforms.



DEBORA CRABBE (u/s Marie, Ndidi, Aminata)

is excited to be making her Arena Stage debut! A Ghanaian-American teaching artist in the DC metro area, Debora graduated from VCU with a BFA in performance. She recently played Katie Smalls in the Washington Stage Guild's *The Victorian Ladies' Detective Collective*. Other roles include Iphigenia in *Iphigenia* (We Happy Few), Mercy in *School Girls* (Round House Theatre), Rosalind in *As You Like It* (Keegan Theatre, Helen Hayes Award - Outstanding Lead Performer), and The Bus Driver in *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! The Musical!* (Kennedy Center TYA National Tour). Thank you to God, her family, and her whole village for their neverending support.

Instagram: @dcdebbiecakes



YETUNDE FELIX-UKWU

(u/s Jaja, Bea, Miriam) last appeared at Arena Stage in the world premiere of *Tempestuous Elements*. Selected acting credits include *Nollywood Dreams* (Round House Theatre) *A Christmas Carol* (TheatreSquared); *Babel* (Unicorn Theatre); and *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre). As a dialect coach selected credits include an as yet untitled Ryan Coogler film (Warner Bros.), *Time Bandits* (Apple TV+), and *Metamorphoses* (Folger Shakespeare Library). More information can be found on all social media platforms @yetundelive and at www.yetundelive.com.



JOI HENRY (u/s Jennifer, Vanessa/Radia/Sheila)

After graduating from Howard University's College of Fine Arts and relocating to Atlanta, GA, Joi is grateful for and excited about her return to the DMV as well as her Arena Stage debut. As a Brooklyn, NY native, Joi is thrilled to be a part of a story that shares a piece of her childhood. Select Regional: *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare

Theatre Company). Select TV/Film: Tyler Perry's *Sistas*. Joi is also a professional background vocalist with credits that include Deborah Cox & the National Philharmonic, as well as recording artist Sonnie Badu.

Instagram: @joihenry_



THEODORE SAPP (u/s James/ Franklin/Olu/Eric)

is honored and excited to be making his Arena Stage debut. DC credits include *Miss Nelson Is Missing!* (Imagination Stage); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Ford's Theatre); *Ragtime* (Signature Theatre); *Ben Butler* (Washington Stage Guild); *Once on This Island* (Constellation Theatre Company); and *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare Theatre Company). Regional: *Bella: An American Tall Tale* (Portland Playhouse); *The Mountaintop* (Winnepesaukee Playhouse); *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Virginia Repertory Theatre). He has voiced characters on the podcast *Sugar Maple* and in series such as *Rogues Gallery* and *Sinister Infinite*. An accomplished singer, Theodore has also performed with the American Pops Orchestra as a background vocalist.

Instagram: @arynspapa



ONYE EME-AKWARI (Nollywood Dreams Actor)

is a Nigerian-born actor, producer, musician, and educator. He has performed in and taught numerous marching bands, indoor drum lines, and world-class touring drum corps. Recent theater credits include the regional premiere of *Spirits to Enforce* (Vernal & Sere) as well as the five-time Tony-nominated *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* on Broadway (Manhattan Theatre Club). Recent TV/film credits include guest star and recurring appearances in *FBI: Most Wanted* (CBS), *The Good Doctor* (ABC), *Bob Hearts Abishola* (CBS), *Will Trent* (ABC), *Random Acts of Flyness* (HBO), and *Outer Banks* (Netflix). Onye teaches at the Robert Mello Studio in Atlanta, GA, as well as the Terry Knickerbocker Studio in Brooklyn, NY. He also holds an MA in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Georgia.

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Image of Matthew Broderick for *Babbitt* courtesy of the artist, artwork by La Jolla Playhouse.



MORGAN SCOTT (*Nollywood Dreams Actor*) is a 2022 graduate of Juilliard, originally hailing from Greenville, South Carolina. Morgan also trained at the British American Dramatic Academy. Recent

New York theater credits include *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Broadway) and *MUD; or when things get messy and how we live with it* (SheNYC Festival). She would like to express her utmost gratitude for her Heavenly Father, her family, and her hair braider of six years, Mrs. Deborah, on 125th St. in Harlem. Instagram: @morganmscott_

CREATIVE

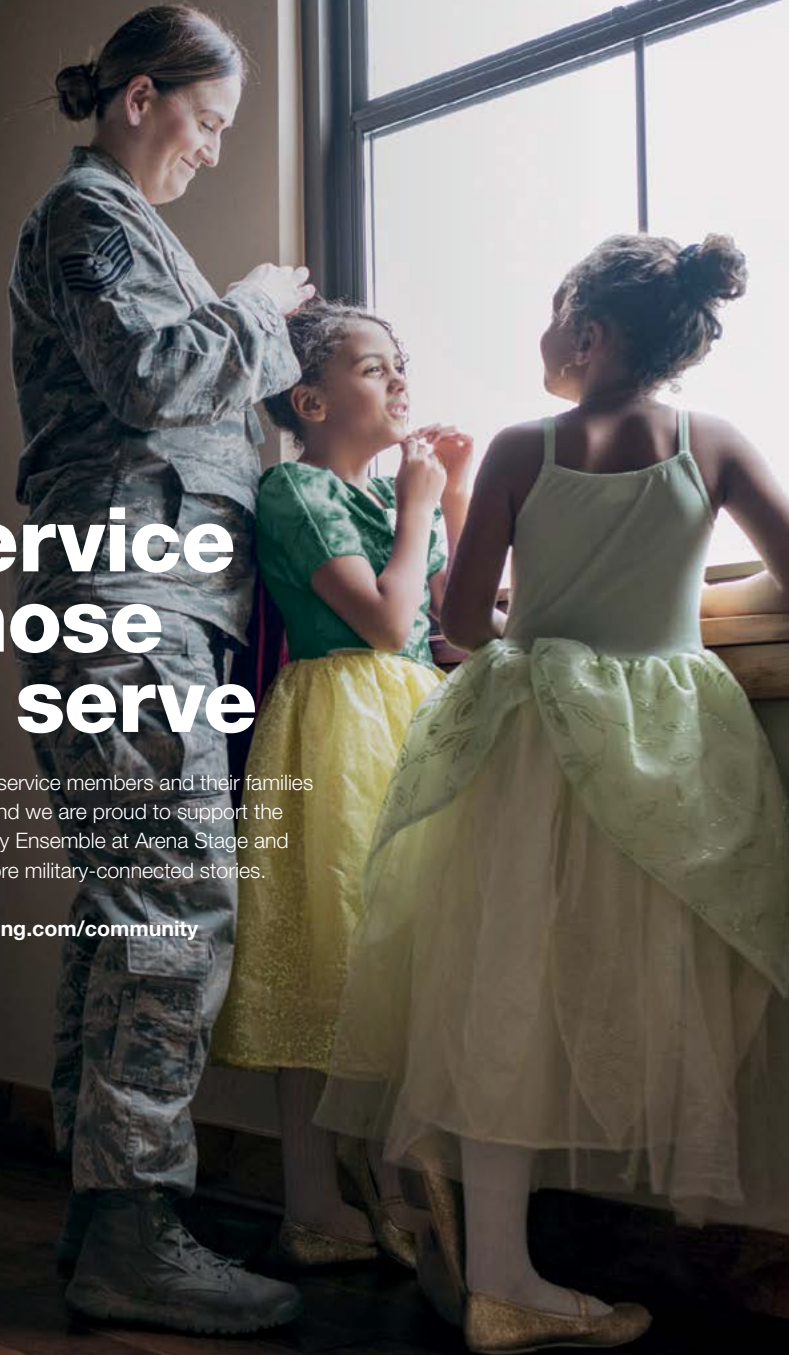
JOCELYN BIOH (*Playwright*) is an award-winning, Tony Award-nominated Ghanaian-American writer/performer from New York City. Her written works for theater include *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (MTC) which premiered on Broadway in 2023 and was nominated for five Tony Awards including Best Play; *Merry Wives* (Public Theater/Shakespeare in the Park, PBS *Great Performances*) which won the 2022 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Adaptation; *Nollywood Dreams* (MCC Theater); book writer for the Broadway-bound musical *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep); and the multi-award-winning *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* which was originally produced at MCC Theater in 2017/2018 and has gone on to have over 65 regional productions and premiered in the UK in 2023. Jocelyn was a 2017 Tow Playwriting Fellow and has won several playwriting awards, including being awarded the Dramatists Guild's Hull-Warriner Prize twice, Steinberg Playwright Award, Lortel Award, and Drama Desk Award. Jocelyn has also written for TV on *Russian Doll*, Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* (Netflix), *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Hulu), the new Star Wars series *The Acolyte* (Disney+), and she is also writing the live screen film adaptation of the hit Broadway musical *Once on This Island* for Disney.

WHITNEY WHITE (*Director*) is an Obie Award and Lilly Award-winning, as well as a Tony Award-nominated, director, writer, and musician. She was a staff writer on Boots Riley's *I'm a Virgo* and is a believer of multi-disciplinary work and collaborative processes. Recent directing includes *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Broadway), *Jordans* (The Public Theater), *The Secret Life of Bees* (The Almeida, UK), *Soft* (MCC, New York Times Critic's Pick), *On Sugarland* (New York Theatre Workshop), *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* (New York Times Critic's Pick), *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare Theatre DC), *An Iliad* (Long Wharf), *Canyon* (IAMA, LA Times Critic's Choice), *Jump* (PlayMakers Rep, National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere), and *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* (Steppenwolf Theatre). Original works include *Semblance* (NYTW), *Definition* (Bushwick Starr), and *Macbeth in Stride* (American Repertory Theater, Under the Radar Festival at The Public Theater) for which she won an Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Musical Performance. Her four-part cycle deconstructing Shakespeare's women is currently in development with American Repertory Theater (Boston, MA) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (UK). Whitney has developed work with Sundance, Roundabout, New York Theatre Workshop, The Vineyard, The New Group, Page 73, Playwrights Realm, Juilliard, Trinity Rep, NYU Tisch, Luna Stage, SUNY Purchase, Princeton University, Atlantic Theater Company Acting School, The Drama League, South Oxford, Jack, The Tank, New York Musical Theatre Festival, The Lark, and others. She also has been an Associate to Sam Gold (*Othello*, New York Theatre Workshop), Daniel Sullivan (*If I Forget*, Roundabout), and Anne Kauffman (*Marvin's Room*, Broadway). Whitney is a part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative and is a recent recipient of the Susan Stroman Directing Award, Herb Alpert Award, and Jerome Fellowship. She is an Artistic Associate at the Roundabout and an Associate Artistic Director at Shakespeare Theatre DC. Past residencies and fellowships include Colt Coeur, The Drama League, Roundabout, and the 2050 Fellowship at the New York Theatre Workshop. MFA Acting: Brown University/Trinity Rep, BA: Northwestern University. Whitney will direct the upcoming Broadway production of *The Last Five Years* featuring Nick Jonas and Adrienne Warren.

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DAVID ZINN (*Set Designer*)'s recent work on Broadway includes set design for *Stereophonic*, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, and *The Notebook*; costume design for *An Enemy of the People*; and set and costume design for Sondheim's last musical *Here We Are* (The Shed, NY). Other Broadway includes scenery for *Kimberly Akimbo*, *Funny Girl*, *The Minutes*, *Diana*, *Torch Song*, and *The Humans*; scenery and costumes for the *SpongeBob Musical*, *Fun Home*, *Choir Boy*, *Amélie*, and *The Last Ship*; and costumes for *A Doll's House Part 2*, *Other Desert Cities*, *The Vibrator Play*, and *Xanadu*. He's also designed at Playwrights Horizons, MTC, NYTW, Lincoln Center, Second Stage, The Public, A.C.T., A.R.T., Berkeley Rep, The Guthrie, The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, Seattle Rep, Santa Fe Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, National Theatre, Young Vic, The Hampstead (UK), Berlin Staatsoper, and Theater Basel. He's received Tony, Drama Desk, Hewes, and Obie awards for his work.

DEDE AYITE (*Costume Designer*) is a Tony Award-winning costume designer. Recent: *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* at the Metropolitan Opera. Select Broadway: *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Tony Award), *Hell's Kitchen*, *Appropriate*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Slave Play*. Select Off-Broadway: *Merry Wives* (Public), *Buena Vista*, *Days of Wine and Roses* (Atlantic). Select Regional: Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Arena Stage. Television: Netflix, Comedy Central. Awards: TDF/Kitty Leech Young Master Award, Obie, Drama Desk, Henry Hewes, Lucille Lortel, Helen Hayes, Theatre Bay Area, Audelco, Jeff awards.

JIYOUN CHANG (*Lighting Designer*) is honored to back for a second time at Arena Stage after *Ride the Cyclone*. She loves to work on new stories and adaptations that connect her to communities around her and share a deep understanding of them with the audience. Her credits on Broadway are *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, *Stereophonic*, *The Cottage*, *KPOP*, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, and *Slave Play*. Her other credits are at The Public, Roundabout, NYTW, MCC, Signature, ATC, Guggenheim, Alley Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Berkeley Rep, CalShakes, Guthrie, Old Globe, and OSF. She has been nominated numerous times for

Tony, Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, and Henry Hewes awards. She is a recipient of an Obie Award and Suzi Bass Award.

JUSTIN ELLINGTON (*Original Music and Sound Design*), born in Alexandria, Virginia, and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, is a versatile composer and sound designer who is thrilled to make his Arena Stage debut. His impressive portfolio spans theater, film, and radio, with Broadway credits including *Home*, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Tony nomination), *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (Tony nomination), *Topdog/Underdog*, *Pass Over*, and *Clyde's*. Off-Broadway, he's contributed to productions at New York Theatre Workshop, Lincoln Center, and The Public Theater. Justin has earned awards like the Obie, Audelco, and Henry Hewes Design, and has been recognized by ASCAP and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. He is currently a Lecturer in Sound Design at the David Geffen School of Design at Yale University.

STEFANIA BULBARELLA (*Video Designer*) is a projections designer from Argentina based in NY. Broadway: *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (MTC). Off-Broadway: *Space Dogs* (MCC); *Travels* (Ars Nova); *A Bright New Boise*, *The Watering Hole* (Signature Theatre); *Semblance* (New York Theatre Workshop); amongst others. Nominations: 2024 Tony nominee for her work in *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*; Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle nominee for Outstanding Video/Projection Design for *Space Dogs*. Awards: HOLA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatrical Design for *Vámonos!*. stefaniabulbarella.com

NIKIYA MATHIS (*Hair and Wig Designer*) is a multi-hyphenate actress and wig designer. She has originated roles in world-premiere plays including *Blood Quilt* at Arena Stage; Off-Broadway premieres including Tarell McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, Dominique Morrisseau's *Skeleton Crew*, Kirsten Greenidge's *Milk Like Sugar*; and Lynn Nottage's NY revival of *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*. She currently recurs as N'Kiyah Franklin in *Power Book III: Rising Kanan* on Starz. Nikiya is the first wig designer to ever receive a special Tony Award – for her design of *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. She is

an Obie Award winner, Drama Desk Award winner, Black Women on Broadway Award winner, and Henry Hewes Award winner. Nikiya's Broadway credits include *Home*, *The Heart of Rock and Roll*, *Once Upon a One More Time*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Topdog/Underdog*, and *Chicken & Biscuits*. Her Off-Broadway credits include the current re-envisioning of *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, among others. [Instagram: @our_black_tresses @nikiyamathis](#)

MANNA-SYMONNE MIDDLEBROOKS

(Associate Director)'s recent work on Broadway includes *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. She was the assistant director at Arena Stage for *Indecent* and *Turn Me Loose*. Recent directing credits include *The Tempest*, *sandblasted*, *Precious Little*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* at Northwestern University. Other regional associate and assistant director credits include *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* (Steppenwolf); *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare Theatre Company, DC); *All's Well That Ends Well* (Chicago Shakespeare); *Henry IV, Part I*, *Amadeus* (Folger Theatre); *The Wolves*, *Skeleton Crew*, *Translations* (Studio Theatre); and *BLKS* (Woolly Mammoth). [Instagram: @mannasymone](#)

YETUNDE FELIX-UKWU (*Dialect and Vocal Coach*) See bio on page 19.

ERICA A. HART, CSA (*New York Casting*) Broadway: *Chicken & Biscuits*, *Pass Over*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Television: *Black Mirror* (U.S. casting season six), *A Black Lady Sketch Show* (season four), *That Damn Michael Che*, *Bust Down*, *The Girls on the Bus*. Film: *The Surrogate* (Artios winner), *Lapsis* (SXSW), *Cupids* (Tribeca). Music video: "Fight for You" by H.E.R. Thanks Jocelyn Bioh, Whitney White, Kelly Gillespie, David Caparelliottis, and the *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* family!

KELLY GILLESPIE, CSA (*New York Casting*) has been on the casting staff at Manhattan Theatre Club for 17 seasons. Favorite MTC projects include *Prayer for French Republic* (Broadway and Off-Broadway), *Mary Jane*, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, *The Best We Could*, *Skeleton Crew*, *Ink*, *Choir Boy*, and *The Explorers Club*. Other credits include *Bite Me*, *Sancocho*, *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord*, *What*

We're Up Against, *Sundown Yellow Moon*, *Ironbound* (WP Theater); *Melancholy Play*, *A Map of Virtue*, *The Zero Hour*, *Monstrosity* (13P); *Good Person of Szechwan* (Foundry and Public Theater); *Photograph 51* (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *Exclusion*, *POTUS* (Arena Stage); *Age of Innocence*, *Trouble in Mind* (The Old Globe); *Two Sisters and a Piano* (Two River Theater); and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Angels in America*, *Residence*, *Seven Guitars*, *4000 Miles*, *Dot*, *The Roommate*, and *Eat Your Heart Out* (Actors Theatre of Louisville). Gillespie also was resident casting director for several seasons for the Off-Broadway companies TACT and Keen Company. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan.

DAVID CAPARELLIOTTIS, CSA (*New York Casting*) Select Broadway/Off-Broadway: *Mary Jane*; *Prayer for the French Republic*; *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*; *2:22 A Ghost Story*; *Grey House*; *Summer, 1976*; *The Comeuppance*; *Ohio State Murders*; *Cost of Living*; *Macbeth*; *The Minutes*; *Skeleton Crew*; *Ink*; *Letters From Max*; *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; *The Waverly Gallery*; *Boys in the Band*. Select theatres: Signature NYC, Atlantic, Ars Nova, The Old Globe, CTG. TV/Film: *New Amsterdam* (NBC, series casting), *The Boys in the Band* (Netflix, original casting).

MANDISA REED (*Stage Manager*) a Saginaw, Michigan native, is a proud graduate of Dillard University in New Orleans (BA) and the University of California San Diego (MFA). Broadway credits include *Lackawanna Blues* (MTC), *Skeleton Crew* (MTC), *Topdog/Underdog* (Golden Theatre), *Home* (Roundabout Theatre Company), *Kimberly Akimbo* (Booth Theatre), and *Sweeney Todd* (Lunt-Fontanne Theatre). Mandisa is honored to return to Arena Stage after kicking off the *Jitney* Broadway National Tour here in 2019! For mum and granny, the women who taught me how to braid.

JAMIE BERRY (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is overjoyed to join the Arena Stage staff as Assistant Stage Manager for *Jaja's!* She prides herself on ensuring spaces are safe, equitable, and joy-filled for casts and crew. Her most recent/select work includes the First National Tour of *Back to the Future* (Sub SM), *Dreamgirls* (PSM, McCarter

Theatre 2024 and Goodspeed Opera House 2023), and the five-time 2024 Helen Hayes Award recipient, *Fela!* (PSM, Olney Theatre Center/Round House Theatre). She has worked with artEquity, trained with Equity & Justice for Institutional Change (EJIC), and also worked with EJIC as a facilitator. [Instagram: @jamiedreamsbig](#)

BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE has grown from a storefront stage to an international leader in innovative theatre. Known for its ambition, relevance, and excellence, as well as its adventurous audience, the nonprofit has provided a welcoming home for emerging and established artists since 1968. Over 6 million people have enjoyed more than 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 85 world premieres. Berkeley Rep shows have gone on to win eight Tony Awards, nine Obie Awards, 11 Drama Desk Awards, a Grammy Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and many other honors. In recognition of its place on the national stage, Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. Through its annual seven-play season, together with up to four special event presentations, Berkeley Rep invites audiences to enjoy an eclectic range of theatrical experiences featuring diverse artistic voices, themes, and perspectives. Berkeley Rep's bustling facilities—which include the 600-seat Roda Theatre, 400-seat Peet's Theatre, Medak Center, and a spacious campus in West Berkeley—are helping revitalize a renowned city.

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around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted theater—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that illuminate the complexities, ambiguities, and wonders of our world. www.chicagoshakes.com

MADISON WELLS LIVE is the live entertainment arm of Madison Wells, Gigi Pritzker's award-winning, independent production company who believes in telling stories by, and about, badass women, as well as people who love pushing boundaries. Led by Executive Producer Jamie Forshaw, Madison Wells Live focuses on producing purpose-driven projects through collaboration with partners who are aligned in the belief that great storytelling can provoke, inspire, and move audiences around the world. Broadway credits include *Water for Elephants* (Tony nomination), *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Tony nomination), *Shucked* (Tony nomination), *Company* (Tony Award for Best Revival), *The Old Man and The Pool*, *Pass Over*, *Hadestown* (Tony Award for Best Musical), *The Inheritance* (Tony Award for Best Play), *Million Dollar Quartet* (Tony nomination), and the forthcoming *Swept Away*. West End: *Kathy & Stella Solve a Murder!*, *The Motive and the Cue*, and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (Laurence Olivier nomination). Off-Broadway: *We Live in Cairo*, *Seven Deadly Sins* (Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience). For more information about Madison Wells Live, visit www.madisonwellsmedia.com.

LACHANZE Broadway: *Celie* in *The Color Purple* (Tony Award), *Ti Moune* in *Once on This Island* (Tony Award nomination), *Trouble in Mind* (Tony Award nomination), *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical* (Tony Award nomination), *A Christmas Carol*, *If/Then*, *The Wiz*, *Company*, *Ragtime*, and *Dreamgirls*. Off-Broadway: *The Secret Life of Bees*, *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, *The Vagina Monologues*, and *Cabin in the Sky* at New York City Center Encores!. TV: *Handel's Messiah Rocks: A Joyful Noise* (Emmy Award), *East New York*, *The Blacklist*, HBO's *The Night Of*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Good Fight*, *Sex and the City*. Film: *The Help*, *Melinda*, and Disney's *Hercules* among other titles. As Director: *Alice Childress' Wine in the Wilderness* at Classic Stage Company in 2024. As Producer: *Here Lies Love* by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim; 20th

Anniversary of Suzan-Lori Parks' acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-Winning play, *Topdog/Underdog*; Jeanine Tesori and David Lindsay-Abair's new musical, *Kimberly Akimbo*, both co-produced with David Stone. President of Black Theatre United, a community dedicated to awareness, accountability, and advocacy. Proud mother to Celia Rose and Zaya LaChanze. She resides in Westchester, New York with her three cats and gardening hats.

ARENA STAGE LEADERSHIP

HANA S. SHARIF (*Artistic Director*) has enjoyed a multi-faceted theater career, including roles as an artistic leader, director, playwright, and producer with a specialty in strategic and cross-functional leadership. Hana began her professional career as an undergraduate student at Spelman College. From 1997 to 2003, Hana served as the co-founder and Artistic Director of Nasir Productions, a theater dedicated to underrepresented voices challenging traditional structure. Hana joined the Tony® Award-winning regional theater, Hartford Stage, in 2003. During her decade-long tenure at Hartford Stage, Hana served as the Associate Artistic Director, Director of New Play Development, and Artistic Producer. Hana launched the new play development program, expanded the community engagement and civic discourse initiatives, and developed and produced Tony®, Grammy, Pulitzer, and Obie Award-winning shows. Starting in 2012, she served as Program Manager at ArtsEmerson, a leading world theater company based at Boston's Emerson College. During her tenure at ArtsEmerson, Hana launched an Artists in Residency program, led a research program assessing barriers to inclusion across the region, and leveraged her regional theater experience to freelance produce for smaller theater companies looking to expand and restructure their administrative teams. Hana was Baltimore Center Stage's Associate Artistic Director from 2014 to 2019 and was the architect of the innovative CS Digital program: a platform that pushes

the boundaries of traditional theater and looks at the nexus point between art and technology. Her other achievements at Baltimore Center Stage included prototyping the Mobile Unit focused on historically underserved audiences, strengthening community engagement, producing multiple world and regional premieres, and helping to guide the theater through a multi-million dollar building renovation and rebranding effort. Hana became the first Black woman to lead a major regional theater in 2018 when she was named the Augustin Family Artistic Director of The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. During her tenure at The Rep, Hana guided the organization through a strategic alignment, revolutionized the New Works program, expanding access to underserved communities, and centering equity and anti-racism as the organization's foundational values. Hana holds a BA from Spelman College and an MFA from the University of Houston. Hana is the recipient of USITT's 2023 Distinguished Achievement Award, Spelman's 2022 National Community Service Award, the 2009-10 Aetna New Voices Fellowship, EMC Arts Working Open Fellowship, and Theatre Communications Group (TCG) New Generations Fellowship. Hana is a founding member of The Black Theatre Commons (BTC). She serves on the board of directors for the TCG, BTC, and the Sprott Family Foundation.

EDGAR DOBIE (*Executive Producer*) Born in Vernon, British Columbia, a village next to the Rocky Mountains (three years after Arena had its first performance in 1950), I am one of five brothers raised by my Dad Edgar, a mechanic and small businessman, and Mom Connie, a telephone operator and union organizer. I am the only Dobie to make a career in theater. Luckily for me, drama was an arts elective I was offered at the tender age of 12 so I hung up my hockey skates and joined the drama class, led by teacher Paddy Malcolm and her fledgling Powerhouse Community Theater after school. By the time I graduated from high school, we volunteers had built ourselves a 200-seat, fully equipped theater on its own piece of land in the center of town and found a sold-out audience for the full season of plays we had on offer. That experience taught me so many lessons about the power of theater to foster collaboration and share meaningful

stories, as well as the public values that attach themselves to building a safe place where everyone is welcome. All those lessons served me well as a managing leader and producer both sides of the border and both sides of the commercial and non-profit theater divide. Arriving here in Southwest with my good wife Tracy and our daughter Greta Lee in 2009 makes me feel like I am well-equipped to do a good job for you all. I am honored to have been recognized for my service to, and leadership of, the Washington, D.C.-area theater community as a recipient of Theatre Washington's inaugural Victor Shargai Leadership Award in 2022.

This theater operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association.



The actors and stage managers are members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

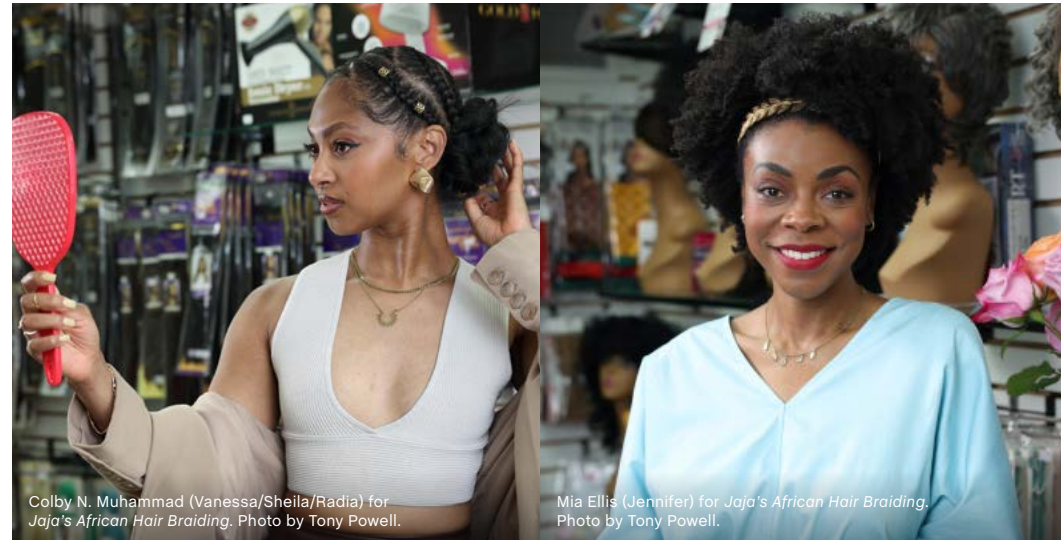


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Colby N. Muhammad (Vanessa/Sheila/Radia) for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Photo by Tony Powell.

Mia Ellis (Jennifer) for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Photo by Tony Powell.



Yao Dogbe (James/Franklin/Olu/Eric) for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Photo by Tony Powell.

Victoire Charles (Jaja) for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*. Photo by Tony Powell.

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The Molly Smith Fund for New Work was created to honor the tremendous legacy of Molly Smith, Arena Stage's Artistic Director Emeritus, who retired at the end of the 2022/23 Season after 25 years of visionary leadership. The fund will support the artistic development of new work at Arena Stage, a pillar of Molly's vision.

Thank you to the following donors who supported this initiative through their philanthropic leadership.

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(l-r) Brooke Ishibashi, Jane Lui, and Tim Lui in *Cambodian Rock Band* (2023/24 Season). Photo by Margot Schulman.

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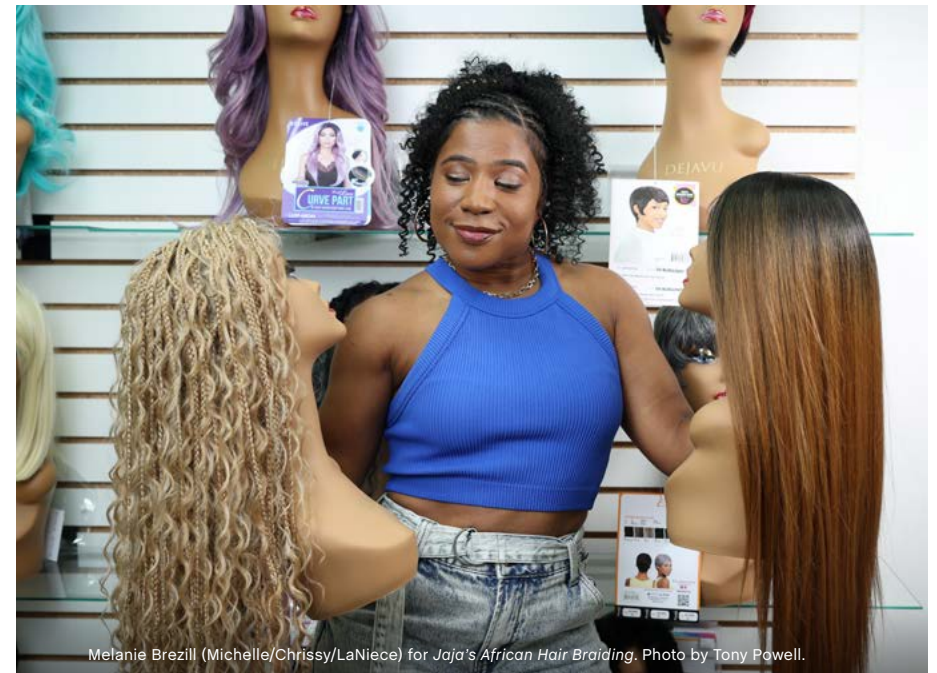
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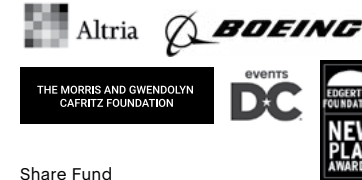
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ARENA STAGE THEATER STAFF

Artistic DirectorHana S. Sharif
Executive ProducerEdgar Dobie
Founding DirectorZelda Fichandler
(1924-2016)

Founding Executive
Director..... Thomas C. Fichandler
(1915-1997)

Artistic Director
Emeritus.....Molly Smith

ARTISTIC

Associate Artistic DirectorTeresa Sapien
Senior Artistic ProducerReggie D. White
Literary Manager.....Otis C. Ramsey-Zöe
Casting Director/Line Producer..... Raiyon Hunter
Artistic Coordinator Misy Singson
Artistic Fellow..... Abigail Thomas*
Current Commissioned Writers.....The Bengsons,
Lee Cataluna, Kia Corthron,
Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi,
Emily Feldman, Idris Goodwin,
Caleen Sinnette Jennings, Deepak Kumar,
Octavio Solis, Vera Starbard, Cheryl West,
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Controller.....John Monnett
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Staff AccountantMark Runion
Accounting Associate.....Matthew Paige
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and Operations.....Keun Windear
Maintenance Assistant.....Tevin Smith
Porter Lawrence Wise
Building Technician.....Harvey Ceasar
Stage Door Attendant.....Kay Rogers
Environmental and Security Services.....SWBID

*2024/25 Class of the Allen Lee Hughes
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Development Operations
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Development Operations
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Assistant Company Manager.....Bowen Fox
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Management CoordinatorJenna Murphy
General and Company
Management Fellow.....Rachel Halili*

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IS Help DeskEddie Wieland

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Production ManagerTrevor A. Riley
Assistant Production
Manager.....Rachel Crawford

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Resident Production
Stage ManagerChristi B. Spann

SCENIC

Technical DirectorTravis Smith
Associate Technical DirectorClare Cawley
Scene Shop Supervisor.....Frank Miller
Stage SupervisorHannah Martin
Scenic Charge Artist.....Colleen Dotty
Scenic Artist.....Misha Rodriguez
Carpenters.....Erick Boscana,
Matthew Grisdela, Julia Junghans,
Max Marshall, Logan McDowell

PROPERTIES

Properties DirectorJennifer Sheetz
Associate Properties DirectorJonathan Borgia
Head Props ArtisanNiell DuVal
Props ArtisanKyle Handziak
Props Assistants....Erica Feidelseit, Kayla Prough

LIGHTS

Lighting SupervisorPaul Villalovoz
Assistant Lighting Supervisor.....Olivia Rudd
Electricians.....Scott Folsom, Kelsey Swanson
Nicole Trantum
Lighting Fellow.....Christian Henriquez*

SOUND

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Assistant Sound and
Video SupervisorLex Allenbaugh
Master Sound and
Video Technician.....Timothy M. Thompson

Sound Technicians.....Alexander Cloud,
Liv Farley, Kirubell Seyoum

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Costume DirectorJoseph P. Salasovich
Associate Costume DirectorCierra Coan
Drapers.....Seth Gilbert, Erika Krause
First HandsMichele Macadaeay,
Elizabeth Spilsbury
Craftsperson.....Deborah Nash
Wardrobe Supervisor.....Alice Hawfield
Wigs, Hair, and
Makeup Supervisor.....Jaime Bagley
Dressers.....Caitlin O'Brien, Sabrina Simmons

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Executive Assistant.....Sabrina Zillinger
Associate Director of
Sales Services & Operations.....Caroline Hunt
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Marion Levy Qualls
Lead Manager of Group Sales Donald Jolly
Group Sales CoordinatorsBrandon Ferguson,
Meaghan Karch

Junior Ticketing Systems &
Tessitura Specialist.....Aaron Hutchens
Lead Sales & Audience
Services AssociatesKeshawn Conner,
Olivia Martin

Sales & Audience Services
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Jamie Lazarus, Colin O'Bryan,
Gary Shackelford,
Lara Rogers Benchoam

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Grant Collins, Tristin Evans,
Emily Gjovik, Dalton Lamberth,
Hayley McGuirl, Brian Jon Moran,
Frances Pepper

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Bruce Perry, Ellie Pline

Manager of
Events & RentalsChrystal Vaughan
Lead Events &
Rentals Specialist.....Trevor Haren
Associate Director of Merchandising &
Guest Experience.....Jody Barasch
Lead Bartender, HospitalityErika Wallace
Lead Bartender, Operations.....Edwin Cortez
Bartenders.....Greg Gonzales, Kaitlyn Sakry

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DATA

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December 15

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DEATH
on the NILE

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December 29

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December 22

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March 16

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