



TheWallis

PRESS RELEASE

The Wallis and Black Rebirth Collective's Co-production of

Unmasked

A Theatrical Celebration of Black Women's Liberation

Witness

June 19 - July 2

FEATURING

Jezelle the Gazelle
By
Dominique Morisseau

G.O.A.T.
By
Ngozi Anyanwu

WHITE-N-LUSCIOUS
By
Jocelyn Bioh

Madness
By
Stacy Osei-Kuffour

DIRECTED BY
Kimberly Hébert & Camille Jenkins

Artwork by Jacqui Smith.

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--->PHOTOS FOR DOWNLOAD

<https://thewallis.org/photos.php?id=344>

**Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts
and Black Rebirth Collective
Announce a Co-Production of
UNMASKED
A Theatrical Celebration of Black Women's Liberation
Featuring One-Act Plays by Four of the Country's
Preeminent Voices in American Theater**

**Premieres on Juneteenth, Saturday, June 19, 2021,
and Available for On-Demand Streaming through Sunday, July 4
Tickets Now on Sale**

(BEVERLY HILLS, CA, May 19, 2021) — Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts and Black Rebirth Collective announce a co-production of ***UNMASKED: A Theatrical Celebration of Black Women's Liberation*** premiering on Juneteenth, Saturday, June 19, 2021, and available for on demand streaming through Sunday, July 4. Co-directed by Kimberly Hébert, Black Rebirth Collective's Artistic Director and Founder, and Camille Jenkins, The Wallis' Programming Manager, *Unmasked* features one-act plays by **Dominique Morisseau** (Tony Award-nominated book writer, *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations*), **Jocelyn Bioh** (*School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*), **Ngozi Anyanwu** (*Good Grief*), and **Stacy Osei-Kuffour** (*WATCHMEN*), four of the country's preeminent voices in American theater. The ensemble cast includes **Kelly M. Jenrette** (Emmy Award nominee, "The Handmaid's Tale"), **Makha Mthembu** ("Sip & Tell; The Highlights from Shakespeare"), **Candace Thomas** ("Chicago Fire"), and **Jonah Wharton** ("NCIS") and features violinist **Katherine Washington**.

Filmed in The Wallis' Lovelace Studio Theater, the plays include ***Jezelle the Gazelle*** by **Dominique Morisseau**, a clear-eyed coming-of-age story about a young girl who is ready to prove that she's the best runner on her block: young, fierce, and definitely faster than any boy. But is she fast enough to outrun what life has in store and claim her greatness? In ***White-N-Luscious*** by **Jocelyn Bioh**, a Nigerian pop star and an Afro-British scholar are confronted with the controversy of self-representation and unattainable beauty standards all while on a sensationalist talk show. ***G.O.A.T.*** by **Ngozi Anyanwu** spotlights friends Jay, Bonita, and Row, who have gathered to perform a sacred ritual to summon victory for the true Greatest Of All Time. In ***Madness*** by **Stacy Osei-Kuffour**, the protagonist, making a routine call to clean up a work issue, encounters a mysterious new colleague who offers her a unique brand of help.

According to Black Rebirth Collective's Artistic Director Kimberly Hébert, "It is our distinct pleasure to partner with The Wallis in this co-production, which is an invitation to bear witness to and hold space for the diverse voices of Black women in community, theater, and in the global narrative."

Adds The Wallis' Artistic Director Paul Crewes, "It has been a truly wonderful experience to collaborate with Black Rebirth Collective on this project. I am very proud that we are producing and sharing these four remarkable one-act plays with our online audiences."

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. On June 19, 1865, two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Union soldiers led by Major General Gordon Granger, rode into Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War had ended and slaves in Texas were free. According to directors Hébert and Jenkins, "With new interest and vigor, the country has been engaging in conversations and celebrations about this nationally forgotten moment in our collective history. The Wallis and Black Rebirth Collective have joined together to introduce to some and celebrate with many the triumphant spirit of this day through these plays by four extraordinary Black female playwrights. Dominique Morisseau, Jocelyn Bioh, Ngozi Anyanwu, and Stacy Osei-Kuffour reclaim the Black female perspective in American Theater, and we celebrate the liberation of their voices."

Tickets for the evening of four plays are \$19.00 per household, or \$5.00 each for individual plays, for viewing on the Stellar streaming platform. For further information and to purchase tickets, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/StellarUnmasked>. For more information about *Unmasked*, please visit BlackRebirthCollective.org/Unmasked or TheWallis.org/Unmasked.

310.746.4000 (Tue.-Fri. 9:30 am – 2:30 pm)
Tickets@TheWallis.org

BIOGRAPHIES

Kimberly Hébert (co-director) is a combination of undeniable humor, clarity, intelligence and strength, known best from her roles in HBO's "Vice Principals," ABC's "Kevin Probably Saves the World," "Better Call Saul," "Two and Half Men," and "Brooklyn Nine-Nine." She starred in two shows at The Geffen Playhouse, *Barbecue* and *By the Way Meet Vera Stark*, earning her an NAACP award for the former. Hébert has a host of New York theatre plays with Drama Desk and Lucille Lortell nominations to her credit. She holds two degrees, a BA in Psychology from Mount Holyoke College and a Masters in Clinical Social Work from The University of Chicago. She is an advocate for families and special needs children, and a voice for mental health services in underserved communities, as well as an actor, a thinker, an advocate, a mother, and a friend.

Camille Jenkins (co-director) is a producer, director, writer, and teaching artist whose work lives at the crossroads of multi-medium exploration, historical introspection, environmental connection, and personal reflection. Select credits include *Unmasked: A Theatrical Celebration of Black Women's Liberation* (The Wallis and Black Rebirth Collective) co-director and producer; *The Goddesses Guide: Adura for the Women of African Diaspora* (Hollywood Fringe Festival) writer, director, producer; *Spoken Perceptions: Interactive Poetry Showcase* (Non-Fiction Gallery) producer and director; and *Mama Metal* (IAMA Theatre Company) associate producer. Jenkins earned a BFA in Performing Arts and a MA in Arts Administration at Savannah College of Art and Design. Currently she is the Programming Manager at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills.

Jocelyn Bioh (playwright) is a Ghanaian-American writer and performer from New York City. Bioh's plays include the multi-award-winning *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* which debuted Off Broadway at MCC Theater in 2017 and has gone on to have over 20 productions throughout the country; *Nollywood Dreams* (postponed due to Covid-19) and the new musical *GODDESS* (Coming to Berkeley Rep Theater in 2022). Bioh's acting credits include TV (shows like "Russian Doll," "The Detour" and "Crashing") and film (*Ben Is Back*) as well as extensive career both Off and on Broadway including the Tony Award-winning play *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Her television writing credits include "She's Gotta Have It," "Russian Doll," "AMERICANAH," and the upcoming film adaptation of *Once on This Island* for Disney.

Dominique Morisseau (playwright) is the author of *The Detroit Project* (a three-play cycle) which includes the following plays: *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), *Paradise Blue* (Signature Theatre), and *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem and NBT). Additional plays include: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Sunset Baby* (LAByrnth Theatre); *Blood at the Root* (National Black Theatre) and *Follow Me To Nellie's* (Premiere Stages). She is also the Tony Award-nominated book writer on the new Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations* (Imperial Theatre). Morisseau is an alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop and has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Eugene O'Neil Playwrights Conference. She most recently served as co-producer on the Showtime series "Shameless" (three seasons). Additional awards include Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award (2), Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18, and a recent MacArthur Genius Grant Fellow.

Ngozi Anyanwu (playwright) is an overall Renaissance woman. She was trained at University of California San Diego's MFA acting program, Point Park University (B.A, Acting) The Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Barrington Stage, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, and The Mark Taper Forum. Among her TV credits are "Limitless," "Deadbeat," "The Affair," "Law and Order SVU," "Mysteries of Laura," and the HBO show "The Deuce." She served as a National Black Theatre Producing Fellow and Associate Artistic Producer of Now Africa's Playwrights Festival. She is also on the literary committee of the Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre. Among her director credits is *She Gon Learn* by Lisa Strum for the Emerging Arts Festival, United Solo Festival, and National Black Theater. Her playwrighting credits include *Nike and The Homecoming Queen* and *Good Grief*, which was presented as part of the Rising Circle Collective's 6th annual Ink Tank. Most recently *Good Grief* won the Inaugural CTG/Humanitas Award, had its world premiere at the CTG/Kirk Douglas Theatre in the 2016/17 season, was listed in the 2016 annual Kilroy's List, and was a semi-finalist for the Princess a Grace. Her work, *NIKE*, was recently presented as part of the National Black Theatre's Keep Soul Alive Monday Reading Series The NewBlack Fest in conjunction with The Lark Playwrighting Development Center. An excerpt of her work, *The Homecoming Queen*, was presented as part of The Fire This Time's Inaugural's Writers group. and most recently had a workshopped reading that was presented at Yale with Page 73 for its summer residency. *The Homecoming Queen* had its world premiere at The Atlantic Theatre in the 2017/18 season and was a Leah Ryan Finalist. Anyanwu is also a recipient of the Djerassi Artist Residency, The New York Stage and Film founders Award as well as Space on Ryder Farm and the LCT playwrights residency.

Stacy Osei-Kuffour (playwright), born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, is a BFA graduate from NYU, where she studied acting, and an MFA graduate from Hunter College, where she studied playwriting. She is a writer and actress. Previous writing work includes: "PEN15" (Hulu), "WATCHMEN" (HBO), "The Power" (Amazon), "SOLOS" (Amazon) and "The Morning Show" (Apple TV+). Stacy's newest play, *ANIMALS*, recorded through Williamstown Theater Festival (due to COVID) is currently available on Audible. Her goal as an artist is to bring untold stories to the stage and screen, stories that challenge our political, societal, and stereotypical views of the Black experience.

Kelly M. Jenrette [Bonita, Isha, and Girl] a native of Atlanta, now resides in Los Angeles with her husband, Melvin Jackson Jr., and is proud to be one of the founding members of and Playwright in Residence for Black Rebirth Collective. In 2018, she and her husband became the first African American married couple to be nominated for Emmys® in the same year. Jenrette's Emmy® nomination was for her portrayal of Annie in Season 2, Episode 4 of "The Handmaid's Tale." She recently wrapped production on a spinoff show for The CW's hit show "All American." Her two latest films can be found on Netflix: *Uncorked* and *All Day and A Night*. In the latter, she stars alongside Jeffrey Wright and Ashton Sanders. She is also in the second season of the hit anthology show "Manhunt: Deadly Games" (Lionsgate/Spectrum) currently available on Netflix. She can be seen as Winona on the Facebook Watch Original "LIMETOWN." Jenrette has also been a series regular on the Fox comedy, "Grandfathered," starring John Stamos, and she has had recurring guest star roles on "Mixed•ish" (ABC), "Here and Now" (HBO), "Pitch" (FOX) and "Graves" (EPIX). She may also be remembered from her twelve Kmart commercials as Kmart Kelly! She was a part of the 13 time Ovation Nominated Musical, *The Color Purple* at Celebration Theatre, where her portrayal of Nettie earned her an individual Ovation Nomination for best featured actress. Other TV credits include "Fuller House" (Netflix), "Weird Loners" (FOX), "The Haunted Hathaways" (Nickelodeon), "Happy Endings" (ABC), "Frisky Dingo," "VO" (Cartoon Network) WEB SERIES: "Mommy Uncensored Episode 2" (YouTube), "Much Ado About Mr. GQ" (YouTube/FunnyorDie) and "Study Buddy" (YouTube).

Makha Mthembu (Jay and Tiwa) is a South African born artist with an undergraduate degree in Theatre from Drake University, and a Master's degree in Classical Acting from the Old Globe/University of San Diego. A lover of both Contemporary and Classical works, her previous credits include Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (Globe for All), Paulina Sarpong in *School Girls: Or, the African Mean Girls Play* (TheatreSquared), and Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival). Mthembu's proudest work to date is her self-made and self-produced web series, "Sip & Tell; The Highlights from Shakespeare," where she playfully conflates some of Shakespeare's plays, "without all the boring bits of course," she says, adding, "and shows that not only are the Classics about all of us, they should include and be told by all of us." She currently lives and works out of Los Angeles, CA. www.makhamthembu.com

Candace Thomas (Row and Jezelle) was last seen under the lights at Milwaukee Repertory Theater's production of *Nunsense* at the beginning of 2020. Midwest credits include another important work by Dominique Morriseau, *Skeleton Crew* (Forward Theater), *The Wiz* (First Stage), *Man of La Mancha*, and *A Christmas Carol* (Milwaukee Rep). Additional theatre credits include *The Tempest*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Tongue of a Bird* (Theatre South Carolina); *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Plays and Players Theatre, Philadelphia), and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Bristol Riverside Theatre, Philadelphia - 2014 Barrymore Award Nominee for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical). TV credits include "Chicago Fire" and "Easy." Thomas has an MFA in Acting from the University of South Carolina. She says she is "beyond thrilled that her homecoming back to the stage is giving honor to the lives and brilliance of Black women."

Jonah Wharton (Mister and Richard), born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, has acted in numerous films and television shows including "NCIS", "NCIS: Los Angeles," "Southland," "Rizzoli & Isles," "Bones," "Castle," "Californication," and more.

Katherine Washington (Violinist) is a Los Angeles-based performer, diversity consultant, and facilitator. In 2019, she had the honor of playing Reza in the musical *ONCE* at 3-D Theatricals, becoming the first Black woman cast in the history of the show. An Ovation and NAACP Theatre award winner, she was most recently onstage in the critically acclaimed adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with Four Larks at the Wallis Annenberg Center for Performing Arts. As co-founder of The Hope Collective, she utilizes the power of narrative and intentional community building to connect activists to the tangible resources they need to create lasting change. IG: @daughterofassata & @letsmakehope. Twitter: @Kwashin3 & @letsmakehope20

About the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts:

The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is a dynamic cultural hub and community resource where local, national and international artists share their artistry with ever-expanding audiences. The

campus, located in the heart of Beverly Hills, CA, is committed to robust and distinctive presentations and education programs curated with both creativity and social impact in mind. Distinguished by its eclectic programming that mirrors the diverse landscape of Los Angeles and its location in the entertainment capital of the world, The Wallis has produced and presented more than 300 dance, theater, opera, classical music, cinema and family programs since its doors opened in October 2013. Hailed as “au courant” (*LaLa Magazine*), The Wallis was lauded by *Culture Vulture*, which proclaims, “If you love expecting the unexpected in the performing arts, you have to love The Wallis.” Its programming has been nominated for 79 Ovation Awards and nine L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Awards. The campus itself, a breathtaking 70,000-square-foot facility, celebrating the classic and the modern, has garnered six architectural awards. Designed by acclaimed architect Zoltan E. Pali (SPF:architects), the restored building features the original 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office (on the National Register of Historic Places), which serves as the theater's dramatic yet welcoming lobby, and includes the contemporary 500-seat, state-of-the-art Bram Goldsmith Theater; the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater; an inviting open-air plaza for family, community and other performances; and GRoW @ The Wallis: A Space for Arts Education, where learning opportunities for all ages and backgrounds abound. Together, these elements embrace the city's history and its future, creating a performing arts destination for L.A.-area visitors and residents alike. The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is led by Chairman of the Board Michael Nemeroff, Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer Rachel Fine and Artistic Director Paul Crewes.

About Black Rebirth Collective:

Black Rebirth Collective is a theatre collective that seeks to connect, nurture and support actors as they enter the creative process, whether through training, readings, or productions, while remaining rooted in the cultural expression that is found throughout the African diaspora and in the principle of Ujima - **Collective work and responsibility.**

For more information about The Wallis, please visit: TheWallis.org.

For more information about Black Rebirth Collections, please visit: blackrebirthcollective.org

For downloadable photos, please visit: TheWallis.org/Press.

Like The Wallis and Black Rebirth Collective on Facebook, and follow on Twitter and Instagram

EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

WHAT:

UNMASKED: A Theatrical Celebration of Black Women's Liberation

A Co-Production of Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts and Black Rebirth Collective

Featuring One-Act Plays by Dominique Morisseau, Jocelyn Bioh, Ngozi Anyanwu, and Stacy Osei-Kuffour

Directed by Kimberly Hébert and Camille Jenkins

G.O.A.T.

Kelly M. Jenrette - Bonita

Candace Thomas - Row

Makha Mthembu - Jay

Madness

Kelly M. Jenrette - Girl

Jonah Wharton - Mister

Jezelle the Gazelle

Candace Thomas - Jezelle

White-N-Luscious

Makha Mthembu - Tiwa

Kelly M. Jenrette - Isha
Jonah Wharton - Richard

WHEN:

Premieres on Juneteenth, Saturday, June 19, 2021, and available for on demand streaming through Sunday, July 4, 2021.

RUN TIME:

Approximately 55 minutes

TICKET PRICES AND INFORMATION:

Tickets for the evening of four plays are \$19.00 per household, or \$5.00 each for individual plays, for viewing on the Stellar streaming platform. Tickets cannot be transferred or shared. For further information and to purchase tickets, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/StellarUnmasked>

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