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Horizon Theatre Announces the *New Georgia Woman Project: Black Women Speak - A Groundbreaking Project Amplifying the Stories and Voices of Black Women*

(Atlanta, GA) – Horizon Theatre Company announces the launch of the nationally recognized *New Georgia Woman Project: Black Women Speak (BWS)* program to develop plays that will amplify the voices of African-American women. BWS is a groundbreaking initiative to create works of and by Black women and for all, inspired by conversations with real Black women of Georgia. Horizon through *Black Women Speak* has commissioned a cohort of nine Black female playwrights to create new plays to bring to the stage the stories, lives, and concerns of Black women. *Black Women Speak* is the recipient of the National New Play Network (NNPN) inaugural Bridge Program funding awarded to only 18 theaters in the US and an innovation grant from the National Alliance for Musical Theatre.

One year after America's latest period of social reckoning, the BWS initiative seeks to explore the question: What are Black women thinking, feeling, and doing now?

Led by Horizon's **Associate Artistic Producer Marguerite Hannah**, Horizon's BWS team has gathered to date over 150 Black women in and from the Atlanta metro area and across the south to join Horizon for a series of small group conversations or Coffee Chats. Conducted via Zoom, Coffee Chats have brought together Black women to meet, share life stories, engage, and grow in community with one another. They include women from various backgrounds, including career professionals and business owners, physicians, educators, community activists, stay-at mothers, and retirees. In turn, these chats are inspiring nine playwrights to create new scripts featuring dynamic Black female characters to expand the canon of work by Black women writers. Through this project, Horizon aims to seed plays that will be produced on our stage over the next five years, beginning in 2023.

Though these plays will be based on the thoughts and feelings of Black women in Atlanta and across Georgia, the goal is to create works that resonate with Black women nationwide and with audiences of all genders and races. These powerful stories will be developed by and grounded in the cultures of Black women. This increased canon of work by female playwrights of color will positively impact audiences, the American theatre, and the world by expanding the narrative of Black voices. We will also provide

artistic opportunities for BIPOC actors and creative teams as these scripts continue to develop into full productions.

The BWS Playwright Artists Cohort of four playwrights developing plays for *Black Women Speak* includes: Candrice Jones, AriDy Nox, A'ndrea J. Wilson, and Shay Youngblood. The BWS Emerging Playwrights Collective of five playwrights includes Tramaine Brathwaite, Amina McIntyre, Chiwuzo Ife Okwumabua, Kelundra Smith, Dana Stringer (biographies for each playwright are listed below).

The power of the BWS project is best exemplified by the words of Associate Artistic Producer Marguerite Hannah: *The past, present, and future of Black America cannot be told without referencing Atlanta and its people. We have political power, culture, wealth, higher education, and a proud history as the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement. The cultural upheaval of 2020 has stirred many powerful images of Black women and their impact on the landscape of America. We must not miss the opportunity to use our art to give voice to these times.*

Horizon Co-Artistic/Producing Director, Lisa Adler shares: *Our goal through this project is to develop new relationships with artists and audiences who will have an ongoing, long-term connection with Horizon and the BWS project. We hope and believe that these relationships will also generate new connections for Horizon Theatre, helping to create a more diverse and equitable organization on all levels.*

Horizon has invited Black women from across Georgia to participate in our Coffee Chats, beginning with our audiences and branching out from there. We are honored to partner with the **City of Alpharetta and Alpharetta Arts Center** to reach audiences in the North Fulton area for Coffee Chats and with upcoming readings.

Readings of excerpts from the works in development for *Black Women Speak* will be held virtually and in person at the Alpharetta Arts Center October 29-30, 2021 and at Horizon November 5-7, 2021. More details and reservation/watch information will be announced in October. Development and public readings of the BWS full-length plays will begin in 2022, and production of selected BWS plays will begin as part of Horizon's 39th season in 2023.

Anyone nationwide interested in the project is encouraged to sign up to receive updates by filling out the first page of our BWS survey. Black women of Georgia can fill out as much of the survey as they like and request to join us for a Coffee Chat: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/bwsparticipants>

Or visit the Black Women Speak page on the Horizon Theatre website for more information and regular updates: <https://www.horizontheatre.com/black-women-speak/>

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BLACK WOMEN SPEAK PLAYWRIGHT ARTISTS COHORT

Candrice Jones is a Steinberg awarded playwright from Dermott, Arkansas. Candrice's artistic mission is to write love letters for and to women of the American South. A VONA Playwriting alum and CalArts Critical Studies MFA recipient, she has been a resident fellow at Ground Floor housed by the Berkeley Rep, the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival, and MacDowell's Colony of the Arts. She is scheduled to be a resident playwright at Djerassi's Colony of the Arts in the fall of 2022. Candrice has received the Many Voices (2020) and Jerome Fellowship (2021) from The Playwrights' Center. Her play, *FLEX*, was developed at VONA, Ground Floor, the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival, and was scheduled to premiere at Actors Theater of Louisville's Humana Festival of New American Plays, but was cancelled due to COVID. In the 2020-21 season, Candrice received virtual commissions from People's Light Theater (*Leaving Teaching*) and Actors Theater of Louisville (*Beyond the Crossroads*), as well as reading opportunities from Theatrical Outfit, National New Play Network, and San Francisco Playhouse. Recently, Candrice's full length play, *A Medusa Thread*, received a reading in UC Santa Barbara's BIPOC Reading Series where it will go on to receive a preview production scheduled in spring of 2022. Currently, Candrice is excited about opportunities she has received from Virginia's Signature Theater to collaborate with composer Nolan Williams as well as upcoming opportunities with Horizon Theatre's *Black Women Speak* playwriting lab, and Orchard Project's 2021 Episodic Lab. In May 2021, she took on the role of Director of New Programs at The Arkansas Repertory Theater in Little Rock, AR where she is in the midst of creating opportunities for playwrights who focus on the American South.

AriDy Nox is a multi-disciplinary Black femme storyteller and social activist with a variety of forward-thinking creative works under her/their belt including the historical reimagining of the life of Sally Hemmings *Black Girl in Paris* (2020), the ancestral reckoning play *A Walless Church* (2019), the Afrofuturist ecopocalypse musical *Metropolis* (2019), and many others. AriDy writes with a fervent belief that creating a future in which marginalized peoples are free requires a radical imagination.

Their tales are offerings intended to function as small parts of an ancient, expansive, awe-inspiring tradition of world-shaping, created by and for Black femmes. As a graduate of the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program at Tisch School of the Performing Arts at NYU and a beneficiary of the Emerging Writer's Group at the Public Theatre, she has been inordinately privileged to share the workings of her imagination among a vast array of inspiring and supportive artists of various radical backgrounds throughout the city.

A'ndrea J. Wilson, Ph.D. is a multi-medium creative writer, educator, and speaker. She integrates her clinical background, interest in interpersonal/intrapersonal development, and love for the African-American community with storytelling. A'ndrea holds a B.S. in Psychology, a M.S. in Counseling Psychology; an MFA in Dramatic Writing, and a Ph.D. in Global Leadership.

A'ndrea's work has been nominated for the Kennedy Center's Graduate Playwrights Workshop, and selected for readings at the National Black Theatre Festival. An alumnus of the Savannah College of Art and Design, A'ndrea was the recipient of a 2017-2018 Alumni Atelier Award/Ambassadorship, a quarter-long writing residency. A'ndrea is also the Braida Endowed Chair of Creative Writing, and the Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives at Grand View University. She teaches English, Creative Writing, and Theatre courses.

Shay Youngblood is a writer, visual artist, and educator. She is the author of several novels including *Black Girl in Paris*, collections of short stories and numerous essays. Her published plays including *Shaking the Mess Out of Misery*, *Talking Bones* and *Amazing Grace*, a stage adaptation of a children's book (all produced by Horizon), have been widely produced and her short stories have been performed

at Symphony Space and recorded for NPR's Selected Shorts. In 2021 she was appointed Commissioner to the Japan U.S. Friendship Commission and serves as a board member of Yaddo artists' community. Her current projects include an illustrated children's books, a super hero graphic novel collaboration, a radio play and *The Architecture of Soul Sound* a multi-media performance work about architecture, memory and the environment inspired by research in Japan, China and the U.S.

BLACK WOMEN SPEAK EMERGING PLAYWRIGHTS COLLECTIVE

Tramaine Brathwaite is a Guyanese-American playwright and writes about topics that are honest, uncomfortable, and sometimes taboo. She believes that life is a play waiting to happen...just write. Some of her written plays include: *Unnerving Stains*, *Enigma*, *Last Train to Glen Echo*, *Point...Blank...Period!*, and *Count It All Joy*. She also wrote and produced a short film entitled *Unheard*. Tramaine was a 2015-2016 Horizon Theatre Company Apprentice, 2016-2017 Working Title Playwrights Rhame Scholarship recipient, a 2017-2018 Atlanta Women in Theatre Mentorship recipient, and is a member of The Dramatist Guild. In 2017, Tramaine was published in *The Louisville Review* No. 81. She holds a B.S. in Business from the University of Maryland College Park and a Masters in Arts Management from Carnegie Mellon University. She uses her experiences and writes pieces that speak to the realities around her. Tramaine is a Maryland native residing in Hampton, GA.

Amina McIntyre is a playwright from Atlanta, GA, who has had productions and readings of her plays with Working Title Playwrights at OnStage Atlanta, TipMyCup Productions at the Roy Arias Theater in New York, Wabash College, Colby College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Spalding University, Indiana Theater Association ITWorks 2008, West Side Community CME Church, Sabrina McKenzie Ministries' EPIC Women's Conference, Lenoir-Rhyne University and the Hickory Museum of Art. Amina received a BA in Anthropology at Colby College, a MA in African American and African Diaspora Studies from Indiana University, Bloomington, a MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and a MTS from Emory University. She is a member of Working Title Playwrights, an Atlanta-based play development company, and Managing Director of Karibu Performing Arts, LLC/Songs of Karibu. Recently she presented her play *All's Fair in Jewels and Dresses* at the Fort Wayne Fringe Festival and she was an invited playwright for the Atlanta One Minute Play Festival.

Chiwuzo Ife Okwumabua (Chi Ife) has over ten years of experience in arts administration and the performing arts. She has worked as a show producer, production manager, lyricist, and actress for various productions nationally and internationally. As a producer, she is passionate about presenting innovative bodies of work that empower and create social change. As a lyricist and writer, her mission is to create original work that is thought-provoking, elevates audiences to a higher state of consciousness, and motivates people to live their best life. The original work that she creates is influenced by West African and Black American culture. Ife is the creator, songwriter, and co-writer of *A Song for Adaeze*, an original Afro-Futurism musical production. Presentations of *Adaeze* have been featured at The Atlanta Black Theater Festival, Art on the Beltline, Push Through Arts Festival, and will be a part of the 2022 Atlanta Musical Theater Festival.

Kelundra Smith is a theatre critic, arts journalist, and playwright whose mission is to connect people to cultural experiences and each other. Her work has been published in: The New York Times, Food & Wine, American Theatre Magazine, Bitter Southerner, TDF Stages, ArtsATL, Atlanta Magazine, and many other publications. She holds a bachelor's degrees in magazine journalism and theatre from the University of Georgia and her master's degree from the Goldring Arts Journalism program at Syracuse University.

Kelundra is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists and the American Theatre Critics Association, where she serves on the executive committee and the equity, diversity & inclusion committee. She has been a fellow at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center's National Critics Institute and guest critic at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Today, she primarily reviews plays by and about diverse people from marginalized communities and writes articles about artistic works created by women and people of color.

Dana L. Stringer is a playwright, poet, screenwriter, and writing instructor with an MA in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. She is an adjunct creative writing instructor in the *Inspiration2Publication* program at Antioch University Online. Dana has served as a guest playwright and judge for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival and serves currently as the Artist-in-Residence at Out of Hand Theater.

Her recent play, *We the Village*, was selected for Theatrical Outfit's Made in Atlanta new play development program and the Unexpected Play Festival (2020), as well as Working Title Playwright's First Light Series (2018). Dana's work have been presented by Alabama Shakespeare Festival, The Billie Holiday Theatre, Black Theatre Network, Vanguard Repertory Company, Ain't I a Woman Playfest, Blue Pearl Theatrics, National Black Theatre Festival, Fade to Black Play Festival, and MoJo Fest, amongst other companies. She is a member of the Dramatist Guild and Working Title Playwrights.

Horizon Associate Artistic Producer Marguerite Hannah will be the lead artist on the project. She is a Black female, Producer, director, and actor with over 30 years in the industry and 15 years at Horizon. She has been in a leadership role at Horizon for 15 years, serving as business manager first, director of the Horizon Apprentice Company, and now director and Producer. She began her 30-year professional acting career as an actor at Horizon. She is a graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C., another "Black Mecca." In addition to her work at Horizon, Marguerite Hannah is also working to further equity in the theatre industry through leadership positions with the National New Play Network (where she serves as the current Board Secretary) and the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (where she serves on the Board and Co-Chair of the NAMT Festival)

Horizon Theatre Company connects people, inspires hope, and promotes positive change through the stories of our times. We produce professional area and world premieres of smart, funny, and provocative contemporary plays. We also develop the next generation of diverse artists and audiences. We are currently producing online theatre and special events through our new "Horizon at Home" program, which can be found at horizontheatre.com/horizon-at-home. For more information about Horizon Theatre Company, call 404.584.7450, email boxoffice@horizontheatre.com, or visit horizontheatre.com.

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For more information and to set up interviews, please contact Elizabeth Hodges at elizabeth@horizontheatre.com.