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Philip Akin to step down as Artistic Director of Obsidian Theatre

Philip Akin has announced that he will be stepping down after 14 seasons as the Artistic Director of Obsidian Theatre, Canada's leading culturally specific theatre company. Though he will remain in his position until 2020, the search for new artistic leadership begins now.

In 2000, Philip along with 12 other prominent Black artists came together with the vision for an organization by and for Black theatre creators; one that would never need to reach for whiteness. Obsidian Theatre was formed, named for a black volcanic glass that alluded to creation and breaking new ground. Philip served on the board of directors, and as the company's administrative producer before becoming Artistic Director in 2006. After the company celebrates their 20th season, he will leave the Obsidian in the hands of someone new.

"This transition marks an important time for both the company and the theatre community. Under Philip's leadership since 2006, Obsidian Theatre has grown to become a hub for Black theatre makers across the country. We are now known as a company that creates space for risk-taking; values and pays for the work of artists; and which works for change by creating a culture of radical generosity. As Artistic Director, Philip has worked tirelessly to provide opportunities, guidance, and ongoing support for young-in-craft artists. He will be deeply missed."

- Harmony Cohen, Chair of Obsidian Theatre's Board of Directors

As an artistic leader Philip is known for speaking his mind, always in support of Black artists, even if it isn't the popular opinion. "It was part of my DNA that walls should come down, and if it took smashing, then smashing it should be," says Philip, "My role I feel is to be that point, that spear, that person who will be unapologetically Black, and will be as honest and straightforward about it, no matter the consequences."

"One of the things I value most about Philip is his honesty. When I go to him for help or advice he always speaks the truth. It isn't always easy to hear but it's what I keep coming back for."

- Lisa Codrington, Playwright and Actor

He is a champion for new work and young-in-craft artists, growing both Obsidian's Mentor Apprentices Program and Playwrights Unit, while ensuring that everyone involved gets paid along the way. "We pay our playwrights more than anybody says we should. We do all of that stuff because we believe the best way to show respect is financially."



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"I arrived at Obsidian as a young writer. When I applied into the playwrights program I was worried I wouldn't get in because the play I had written was a comedic fantasy about Black people set far into the future. I thought it didn't fit into the definition of a Black play. But, I got into that program and on the first day Philip said to me 'Any play you write is a Black play. If you want to write about Black people in the future - that is a Black play, if you want to write about four white guys in a fraternity - that is a Black play, because they will be speaking your words, because you wrote it. Write whatever you want.' It was the best and most freeing piece of advice I've ever received."

– Leah-Simone Bowen, Playwright, Producer and Director

He will be leaving the company in a strong position, currently having what has been described as a banner year for the organization in its most ambitious season yet. The plans for his last year are even bigger. Obsidian continues to grow and take creative risks, while at the same time remaining financially stable – a rare find in Canadian theatres. Leaving on a high was always the plan for Philip, dreading on becoming one of those Artistic Directors "that is dragged out kicking and screaming". On Wednesday it was announced that Philip is the 2018 Artist Award laureate for the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts, it's hard to find a better note to end on.

"He's the reason I knew there was a home for me in the Canadian theatre landscape, and the reason I knew theatre administrators even existed. He came to speak to students at York when I was in my first year. I think there were maybe 10 Black students out of 140, and he was there for us. Sitting in the office with him over the last 3 1/2 years has been a degree on its own. This company will miss him, but he will still remain as mentor in the community first and foremost"

– Luke Reece, Producer, Obsidian Theatre

Philip will remain in his position through the end of the 2019-2020 season and his successor will take the reins for the following season. When asked about the search for Obsidian's 3rd Artistic Director Philip said, "I'm not looking for somebody to be a mini me. I'm looking for somebody who will say 'Thanks Philip, and now we're doing something totally different'. What I would hope for is when the next artistic director is coming on, for every award I got, they got three." The search for this individual begins now.

Read the NOW Magazine article by Jordy Kieto [here](#).

Media Contact:

Luke Reece, op@obsidiantheatre.com



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Looking for Obsidian's next artistic leader

We are seeking a dynamic leader who can embody the role of mentor and artistic visionary with elegance; a person who will sustain and grow Obsidian responsibly;-who will continue to build Obsidian's power and share it with members of our community in the spirit of radical generosity. Our new AD will maintain the company value that at Obsidian everyone, no matter the job, has a place and voice at the table.

We are accepting submissions now until May 31st, 2019

For full details on the Artistic Director job posting please [click here](#).

Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts

The **Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts program** is administered by the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) on behalf of the Government of Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS). Winners are selected by a jury of artists and arts professionals.

For more information on the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts please read the full press release [here](#).