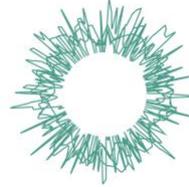




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TAPESTRY
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Obsidian Theatre and Tapestry Opera in partnership with TO Live present
The World Premiere of

OF THE SEA

Obsidian and Tapestry Make History with New Canadian Black Opera

With Libretto by Kanika Ambrose
Composed by Ian Cusson
Directed by Philip Akin
Musical Direction by Jennifer Tung

March 25 – April 1, 2023
Bluma Appel Theatre

Starring Jorrell Williams, Chantale Nurse, Suzanne Taffot, Justin Welsh, Paul Williamson,
and featuring the Orchestra of the Canadian Opera Company

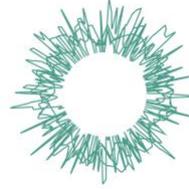
Toronto, ON – Following previous announcements that **Obsidian Theatre** and **Tapestry Opera** have come together to commission a **new Black Canadian opera** - and the first ever in Obsidian's history - to be presented by TO Live in March of 2023, the companies are thrilled to share complete details of their upcoming collaboration, **OF THE SEA**.

A powerful work of operatic storytelling flowing with hope and heartbreak, this ground-breaking World Premiere production is brought to life by an incredibly talented and diverse team of creatives. The work is written by Black playwright **Kanika Ambrose** (our place / Anansi and the Great Light, Curtis School of Music), composed by Métis and French-Canadian musician **Ian Cusson** (Fantasma, Canadian Opera Company), directed by the deeply respected and award-winning Black cultural leader, director, and actor **Philip Akin** (Pass Over / Gould's Wall), and music directed by Chinese Canadian conductor **Jennifer Tung** (Gould's Wall).

Additionally, in a medium in which Black performers remain vastly under-represented, OF THE SEA will feature - for the first time ever in a large-scale Canadian opera - an all-Black ensemble of performers led by **Jorell Williams, Chantale Nurse, Suzanne Taffot, Justin Welsh, and Paul Williamson** also featuring an **ensemble of international singers** and the **Orchestra of the Canadian Opera Company**. Additional cast



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and creative team members will be announced in the weeks to come.

“In all honesty, I don’t know how many Black folk traditionally go to the opera and I believe that is because we so rarely see ourselves or our stories represented in this medium,” comments **Obsidian Theatre Artistic Director Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu**. *“This groundbreaking opera written by Kanika Ambrose is therefore a game changer for our audiences. OF THE SEA takes the origin story of how many members of our communities came to be on this side of the Atlantic and mythologizes it. And it does so with profound heart and pathos. It is truly exciting for us to be able to partner with Tapestry Opera to bring this new thrilling work to life.”*

Tapestry Opera Artistic Director Michael Mori adds, *“Toronto is home to the most diverse public of any city in the world and this historic world premiere is a testament to its potential to foster great new collaborations to drive a dynamic present for opera, for the art form and for audiences who see themselves invested in it. Opera has for too long relied on traditional European works to represent the genre, and as a result many people don’t see themselves reflected in the stories, artists, and audiences. The creative team of Kanika Ambrose, Ian Cusson and Philip Akin have conceived of a visionary work, as the first large-scale Canadian all-Black cast opera, but also as a work that contributes to making our shared histories and mythologies better represent Toronto and Canada’s multicultural truth. When Ambrose and Cusson met in Tapestry’s 2018 creative intensive, sparks flew and the idea for OF THE SEA was born. The bold idea of expanding the source mythology for opera has resulted in a magical and incredibly human score and production.”*

OF THE SEA follows the story of Maduka (Jorell Williams), his daughter Binyelum, and fellow Africans thrown overboard during the Middle Passage who now populate mythical underwater kingdoms that span the ocean floor. Amidst the waves, fiery plans for revenge are made, a parent is blinded by love for their child, and a fight against fate begins. In the cold, murky waters, everyone dreams to see the sun again.

This exciting addition to the Canadian opera cannon arrives as slow progress is made in increasing Black representation and leadership on stage and behind the scenes in the opera sphere. New York’s Metropolitan Opera only just premiered an opera from a Black composer for the first time in September of 2021, 138 years after their founding, with Terence Blanchard’s FIRE UP IN MY BONES. In Canada, OF THE SEA follows in the footsteps of Nicole Brooks’ OBEAH OPERA and precedes the upcoming Canadian adaptation of Scott Joplin’s TREEMONISHA, in making critical strides in Black representation within the form.

The lead creative team is joined by set and costume designer Rachel Forbes.

OF THE SEA runs from March 25 to April 1 with performances Tuesdays to Saturdays at 8:00 p.m. at the Bluma Appel Theatre, 27 Front Street, East Toronto. Tickets start at \$39 and are available now online.



For more information, please visit <http://www.obsidiantheatre.com/season/of-the-sea/>

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For more information or to request an interview, please contact:

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Kanika Ambrose (Librettist) is a Toronto-based playwright, librettist, and screenwriter. She has been playwright-in-residence at Cahoots Theatre and Obsidian Theatre Company. Her play “our place” premieres at Theatre Passe Muraille in November 2022. As a playwright, her work has been presented at Toronto Fringe, Crow’s Theatre’s East End Performance CRAWL, Rhubarb Festival, Black Lives, Black Words, Rising Tides Showcase, SummerWorks Festival and Paprika Festival.

As a librettist, her work has been presented in Tapestry Opera’s “Tapestry Briefs,” Sparks and Wiry Cries’ “SongSLAM”, and Curtis Institute of Music (Philadelphia) where her piece, “Anansi and the Great Light,” created with composer Nick diBerardino and the students at Girard College, premiered.

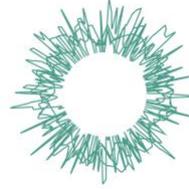
Kanika is a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University’s Theatre School and is Associate Artistic Director of Necessary Angel Theatre Company. She is currently in Canadian Film School’s Bell Media Primetime TV Program and was featured as one of Cahoots Theatre Company’s 30 for 30 theatre makers for their 30th anniversary season.

Ian Cusson (Composer) is a composer of Métis and French-Canadian descent. His work explores Canadian Indigenous experience including the history of the Métis people, the hybridity of mixed-racial identity, and the intersection of Western and Indigenous cultures. He has studied with Jake Heggie, Samuel Dolin, James Anagnoson and Johannes Debus. Ian is an inaugural Carrefour Composer in Residence with the National Arts Centre Orchestra for 2017-2019 and is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre and a member of the Canadian League of Composers. He lives in Oakville with his wife and four children.

Philip Akin (Director) is an award-winning cultural leader and has been acting and directing for 46 years. He is a founding member of Obsidian Theatre, Canada’s leading Black theatre company, and has served as its Artistic Director from 2006 to 2020.



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Selected Directing Credits: Shaw Festival: *Trouble in Mind* by Alice Childress, *Gatsby Jazz*, *Sonny's Blues* by Jay Turvey/Paul Sportelli; Young People's Theatre: *Million Billion Pieces* by David Brock/Gareth Williams; Obsidian Theatre: *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu; Harold Green Jewish Theatre: *Actually* by Anne Zeigler, *The Humans* by Stephen Karam.

Philip Akin has been the recipient of the Silver Ticket Award, the Mallory Gilbert Leadership Award, the Playwrights Guild of Canada Bra d'Or Award, the William Kilbourn Award, the Herbert Whittaker/CTCA Award for Distinguished Contribution to Canadian Theatre, the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts, as well as the Life Membership Award from Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

He is currently the vice-president of the board for Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre (2009 to present) and a director on the boards of the Koffler Centre of the Arts, Against the Grain Theatre and the Shaw Festival.

Jennifer Tung (Conductor) is the Artistic director of Toronto City Opera and assistant conductor of the Mississauga Symphony Orchestra. Chinese Canadian Tung leads a uniquely versatile career as music director and pianist. In 2020/21, she joined Tapestry Opera as a conducting fellow in the inaugural year of the Women in Musical Leadership program, in partnership with Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Pacific Opera Victoria. As part of her time within the program, Jennifer served as assistant conductor for the world premiere of Brian Current's *Gould's Wall* for Tapestry Opera, and a brand-new production of *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Vancouver Opera in collaboration with Ne Sans.

About Obsidian Theatre

Obsidian is the leading culturally-specific theatre company in Canada with a threefold mission to produce plays, to develop playwrights and to train emerging theatre professionals. Obsidian is passionately dedicated to the exploration, development, and production of the Black voice. For over 20 years, Obsidian has produced plays from a world-wide canon focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the works of highly acclaimed Black playwrights. Obsidian also provides artistic support, promoting the development of work by Black theatre makers and offering training opportunities through mentoring and apprenticeship programs for emerging Black artists.

About Tapestry Opera

Tapestry Opera is an award-winning Toronto-based company dedicated to creating, developing, and performing original Canadian opera. Tapestry is passionate about uniquely Canadian stories and innovative settings unforgettably interpreted by world-class singers and musicians. Tapestry supports emerging artists, develops new audiences and brings Canadian opera to the world stage. Founded in 1979, Tapestry is the voice of new Canadian opera.