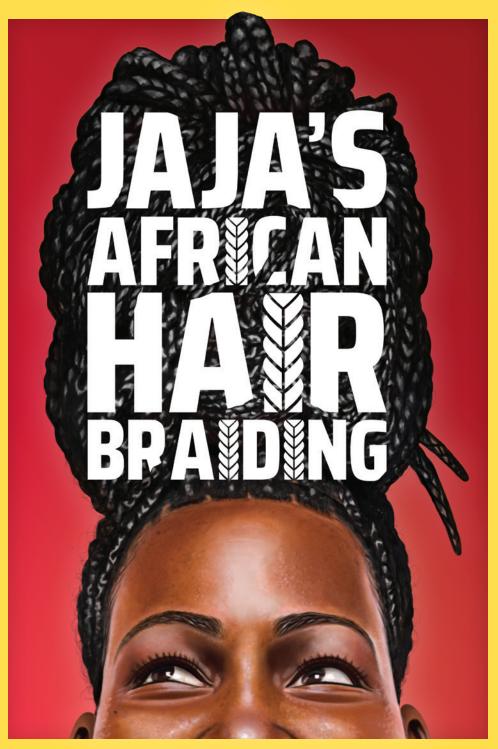
CHICAGOSHAKESPEARETHEATER



OFFSHORE LIRICA ROOFTOP RESTAURANT

Experience the best views of the city from the east end of Navy Pier with a 20% discount for all Chicago Shakespeare Theater guests

Pre-fixe menu also available

RESERVATIONS AVAILABLE ON OPEN TABLE





Welcome

Welcome to the joy and laughter that is Jocelyn Bioh's sparkling play Jaja's African Hair Braiding. Community and laughter are two such important things for us all to enjoy in the middle of winter and Whitney White's dazzling production gives us an excess of both. It's a particular pleasure to welcome Whitney back to CST where she took her first theater classes inspiring her early interest in theater and we were excited to bring this story to Chicago which highlights the rich diversity of our international city.

A recent World Health Organization collaborative study confirmed a long-held belief that engagement in performance art is linked to reductions in depression, improved quality of life, and even increased productivity—so it's official, a night with Jaja will improve your physical and mental wellbeing. So enjoy your experience in the salon with these entrepreneurial whip-smart women and thank you for being here and for giving yourself the gift of a restorative night out at Chicago Shakespeare.

See you again soon.

Edward Hall Artistic Director Carl and Marilynn Thoma Chair

Sumberly

Kimberly Motes Executive Director











TASTY KID'S MENU!

20% OFF* food and non alcoholic beverages when you show your show tickets!

> Chicago's own celebrity chef Art Smith is a familiar face on the national food scene. He has a wonderful collection of succussful restaurants in the US, and has enjoyed cooking for past presidents along with a myriad of celebrities. Now, Chef Art is bringing some of his most beloved recipes to the iconic Navy Pier, where his goal is to reunite friends and family, no matter the size or distance, and bring people back to the table.

*automatic 20% gratuity applied

NAVY PIER REUNIONRESTAURANTS.COM 312.224.1415 Reservations



CHICAGO**SHAKESPEARE**THEATER

MISSION

To create vivid, entertaining theatrical experiences that invigorate and engage people of all ages and identities by illuminating the complexity, ambiguity, and wonder of our world. Shared humanity and unforgettable stories—now THIS is Chicago Shakespeare.

VISION

We deliver excellent, powerful, life-changing theater that challenges our preconceptions of everything. We are an open and inspiring destination to meet, talk, and share experience through community and live performance that is available to everyone. We build a better future with those who watch, work, create, and participate.

ABOUT CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

A Regional Tony Award recipient, CST produces a bold and innovative year-round season that includes Shakespeare, original plays, musicals, family programming, and international theatrical events. CST is committed to serving as a cultural center across its three stages—the 700+ seat Yard, 500 seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, and the 200 seat Carl and Marilynn Thoma Theater Upstairs as well as in classrooms, neighborhoods, and venues around the world. CST has a deep commitment to education and lifelong learning with robust programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues 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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Donna Welch

In Memoriam Richard J. Franke

* Denotes Executive Committee Members

Chicago Shakespeare Theater is proud to recognize the sustaining partnership of our Season Sponsors, whose visionary support ensures that we live out our artistic mission for audiences today and for generations to come.



Denotes former Board Chairs

"In our digital world, it's critical for young people to explore their creativity and build their capacity for empathy."

-Nora Carroll Director of Lifelong Learning and Education Ray and Judy McCaskey Education Chair

"I got out of my comfort zone and worked well with my peers from a different school."

THEATER TRANSFORMS

We know theater has the power to change lives. Through education programs for students and teachers as well as lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, the artistry on our stages ignites imaginations and broadens perspectives—paving the way for a more empathetic, collaborative, and vibrant future.

20,000+

students and teachers will attend CST productions in the 2024/25 Season

43%个

more students reached since last year

50

student matinees this season, offered at a deeply subsidized rate

473

teachers engaged in our educational programs

72%

of students reported greater interest in Shakespeare after attending a student matinee

"Such an inspiring experience! The students have already asked when we'll be back."

-Student Matinee Teacher

SUBSCRIBE & SAVE in 2025

JAN 14-FEB 2



HYMN

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CELEBRATING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP & THE ART OF HAIR BRAIDING

We're grateful to the following organizations for their partnership as ambassadors for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*.



UNITED AFRICAN ORGANIZATION

UAO is a dynamic coalition of African community-based organizations that promotes social and economic justice, civic participation, and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. **uniteafricans.org**



SOLO HEADQUARTERS

Founded by hairstylist and salon owner Kristine Singer, Solo's highest mission is to shed light on the importance of mental health and to support the local Chicago community organizations that provide aid and guidance. **soloheadquarters.org**



ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF HAIR BRAIDERS

The premier organization for training, uplifting, and empowering natural hair stylists in protective hairstyles to demonstrate competitive leadership in the \$9 billion black haircare and cosmetic industry worldwide. **iaohb.org**



Check us out at Natural Hair Fest 2025!

See Jaja-inspired designs in the Fantasy Hair fashion show and hear from wig artisans in a panel conversation during the annual expo on Sunday, January 19. **naturalhairfest.com**





VISIT THE HAIR GALLERY IN THE LOBBY

Located near Door 1

Featuring the work of cultural coiffure artists Shani Crowe @crowezilla, Mo G @gotothemo and more!

CHICAGOSHAKESPEARETHEATER

EDWARD HALL Artistic Director Carl and Marilynn Thoma Chair KIMBERLY MOTES Executive Director

A co-production with **Arena Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre**, and **La Jolla Playhouse** in association with **Madison Wells Live** and **LaChanze**

presents

JAJA'S AFR®CAN HA®R BRA®D®NG

by JOCELYN BIOH

Set Design DAVID ZINN Costume Design DEDE AYITE Lighting Design

Original Music & Sound Design JUSTIN ELLINGTON

Video Design
STEFANIA BULBARELLA

Hair and Wig Design NIKIYA MATHIS Dialect and Vocal Coach **YETUNDE FELIX-UKWU**

Casting

ERICA A. HART, CSA KELLY GILLESPIE, CSA DAVID CAPARELLIOTIS, CSA

directed by WHITNEY WHITE

PREMIERE PRODUCTION SPONSORS

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Burton X. and Sheli Z. Rosenberg

LEAD PRODUCTION SPONSORS



TheJoyceFoundation

The performance runs 90 minutes with no intermission.

If we can help accommodate you during your visit, please speak with our House Manager. For your safety, we ask that you keep aisles and doorways clear. We request that you refrain from taking photography or capturing any other video or audio recordings of the production.

World premiere produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Chris Jennings, Executive Director) and Madison Wells Live 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

Jaja's African Hair Braiding is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service imprint. Dramatists.com

SETTING

Harlem, New York, 2019

CAST

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

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance: **Kevin Aoussou*** for James, Franklin, Olu, Eric; **Renea S. Brown*** for Jennifer, Vanessa, Radia, Sheila; **Debora Crabbe*** for Marie, Ndidi, Aminata; **Mia Ellis*** for Michelle, Chrissy, LaNiece; **Dorcas Sowunmi*** for Jaja, Bea, Miriam.

Nollywood Dreams Actors ONYE EME-AKWARI*, MORGAN SCOTT*

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Stage Manager Assistant Stage Manager MELANIE J. LISBY* BRILLIAN QI-BELL*

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

Associate Director Assistant Director Wig Supervisor Assistant Wig Supervisor Associate Scenic Designer Assistant Costume Designer Associate Lighting Designers

Assistant Lighting Designers

Associate Sound Designer Assistant Sound Designer Associate Hair and Wigs Designers

Intimacy consultant

MANNA-SYMONE MIDDLEBROOKS MANON MCCOLLUM Bret C. Harte Artistic Fellow TINIKA SADIKU APRIL TILLIES TERESA L. WILLIAMS CHRIS HYNDS CAROLINE ORTIZ HERRERA JACOB ZEDAK CATHERINE GIRARDI RENATA TAYLOR-SMITH Electrics Fellow DJ POTTS KAILEYKIELLE HOGA Harry Weininger Sound Fellow JANERA ROSE SHEREESE LYNN-CROMARTIE SIERRA YOUNG

Scenery, Costumes & Properties originally fabricated by Arena Stage



Student Matinee Ticket Access for *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is provided by Dove, a proud co-founder of the CROWN Coalition.



MELANIE BREZILL

(Michelle/Chrissy/LaNiece) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: The Comedy of Errors, As You Like It, Seussical, Willy Wonka. CHICAGO: Stokelv: The Unfinished

Revolution, for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf, Man in the Ring, Caroline, or Change (Court Theatre); Beautiful, Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story (Marriott Theatre); The Comedy of Errors at Shepperton, Nina Simone: Four Women (Northlight Theatre); Little Shop of Horrors (Drury Lane Oakbrook Theatre): Crowns (Goodman Theatre): The MLK Project (Writers Theatre). BROADWAY/ NATIONAL TOUR: The Book of Mormon, Harry Potter and the Cursed Child. Mamma Mia!. TELEVISION: Empire. FILM: Reporting for Christmas. Brezill is the creator of The Grandmother Project and Pearls & Pocketbooks series on YouTube. @shinegirlshine @thegrandmotherproject



LEOVINA CHARLES

(Vanessa, Sheila, Radia) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. BROADWAY: Young Nala in *The Lion King.* REGIONAL: *Lempicka* (La Jolla Playhouse);

I Am Antigone (Theatre for a New City); *The Waterfall* (Thrown Stone); *Twelfth Night*, *In the Red and Brown Water* (UC San Diego). **FILM**: *Soñadora* (Amazon Prime). **EDUCATION**: MFA in acting, UC San Diego; BFA in musical theatre, Howard University. Leovinacharles.com



VICTOIRE CHARLES (Jaja) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. BROADWAY: Jaja's African Hair Braiding. OFF BROADWAY: Golden Age, Ruined (Manhattan Theatre

Club). REGIONAL: Ruined (Intiman Theatre, 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). TELEVISION: New Amsterdam, recurring on Law & Order: Special Victims Unit as Judge Stella McRae (NBC); FBI (CBS); Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin, Pretty Little Liars: Summer School (HBO Max). EDUCATION: Fordham College at Lincoln Center, New York University Grad Acting Program.



YAO DOGBE (James/ Franklin/Olu/Eric) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Richard III, Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Macbeth. OFF BROADWAY: The Doctor (Park Avenue

Armory); Nollywood Dreams (MCC Theater). **REGIONAL:** Topdog/Underdog, Nollywood Dreams, Ohio State Murders (Round House Theatre); King Lear (Shakespeare Theatre Company); 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). **TELEVISION:** nationwide AutoZone commercial. **EDUCATION:** MFA in acting, University of Houston. @yaonation



MIA ELLIS (Jennifer) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. REGIONAL: The Amen Corner (Shakespeare Theatre Company); Fairview, The Mountaintop,

Intimate Apparel, Ragtime (Trinity Repertory Company); A Midsummer Night's Dream (Alabama Shakespeare Festival); A Raisin in the Sun (Seattle Rep); Hamlet (Santa Cruz Shakespeare). **TELEVISION**: The Good Fight, Elementary, Person of Interest, Welcome to the Blumhouse Live. FILM: Louder Than Words, Lavender Men. EDUCATION: Tougaloo College; MFA in acting, Brown University/ Trinity Rep. Ellis is also a teaching artist, writer, producer, and a member of the Acting Company at Trinity Rep. @ellismia09 miaellis.com



TIFFANY RENEE JOHNSON

(Aminata) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Red Velvet. CHICAGO: Blues for an Alabama Sky, Passage (Remy Bumppo Theatre, Core Ensemble Member);

Chlorine Sky (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play (Goodman Theatre); The Garbologists (Northlight Theatre); Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, A Doll's House (Writers Theatre); Flyin' West (American Blues Theatre); Vanya; Or, That's Life (Rasaka Theatre); A Nativity Story (Congo Square Theatre); Hairspray (Drury Lane Theatre). **TELEVISION:** Shameless, The Chi (Showtime); Chicago PD, Chicago Med (NBC); Soundtrack (Hulu). FILM: Range Runners, North of the 10 (Amazon Prime). EDUCATION: BFA in theater arts, Howard University. @tiffanyreneej_ tiffanyreneeiohnson.com



JORDAN RICE (Marie) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. TELEVISION: Jackie Carson in Swagger (Apple TV+); Esme in DC Universe's Doom Patrol. FILM: Dvlan

in One True Loves, Ava DuVernay's Selma. AWARDS: 2020 YoungArts Theatre Finalist and Winner, 2021 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts Semifinalist. @actressjordanrice #ThatGirlBeActing



AWA SAL SECKA (Bea) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. REGIONAL: Sassy in *After Midnight* (Paper Mill Playhouse); Zawadi in *Goddess* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre);

Sarah in Ragtime (Signature Theatre); Joanne in Rent (Kennedy Center); Mayme in Intimate Apparel (Theater J); Baker's Wife in Into the Woods (Ford's Theatre); Ama in School Girls, Dottie in Caroline, or Change (Round House Theatre). AWARDS: Helen Hayes Award-winning actor and a co-writer for the 2023 MacArthur Awardwinning show The Joy That Carries You. @_kujichagulia_



AISHA SOUGOU (Ndidi) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. CHICAGO: Beehive, Beautiful: The Carole King Musical, Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus (Marriott Theatre).

EDUCATION: School of Drama at The University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Class of 2023. @_aisha_marie_



BISSERAT TSEGGAI

(Miriam) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. REGIONAL: The Jungle (St. Ann's Warehouse, Curran Theatre); For All the Women Who

Thought They Were Mad (Soho Rep). **TELEVISION:** The Accidental Wolf, Seven Seconds, Succession, Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, Orange Is the New Black, Billions, Alternatino with Arturo Castro, Luke Cage, Rival Speak. @bisserat



KEVIN AOUSSOU

(Understudy) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Henry V. CHICAGO: Inanimate (Theater Wit); Moby Dick (Lookingglass Theatre Company);

Routes (Remmy Bumppo). REGIONAL: Berkley Repertory Theatre, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Theater at Monmouth, The Hedgerow Theatre, The Rogue Tucson, Cardinal Stage, Children's Theatre of Charlotte. EDUCATION: MFA in acting, Northwestern University; National Theater Institute MXAT; BFA in theatre performance, Winthrop University. @ayokev247



RENEA S. BROWN

(Understudy) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. REGIONAL: Sojourners, The Mountaintop, Nollywood Dreams (Round House Theatre);

Metamorphoses, Our Verse in Time to Come. A Midsummer Night's Dream (Folger Theatre); Tempestuous Elements, Change Agent (Arena Stage); The Tempest, Macbeth, As You Like It, (Shakespeare Theatre Co); The Wolves (McCarter Theatre); Covenant (Theatre Alliance); Othello, Sense and Sensibility, Twelfth Night (Island Shakespeare Festival); Much Ado About Nothing, A King and No King (American Shakespeare Center), TEVEVISION: Godfather of Harlem, Law and Order. AWARDS: 2024 Helen Hayes Outstanding Lead Performer for The Mountaintop. EDUCATION: MFA, Academy of Classical Acting. @Therealdarklady @TheLocallabco



DEBORA CRABBE

(Understudy) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. REGIONAL: Katie Smalls in The Victorian Ladies' Detective Collective (Washington Stage

Guild); 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); The Bus Driver in *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! The Musical!* (Kennedy Center TYA National Tour). **EDUCATION:** BFA in performance, Virginia Commonwealth University. @dcdebbiecakes



DORCAS SOWUNMI

(Understudy) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Lady Macduff, understudy Lady Macbeth in Short Shakespeare! Macbeth.

CHICAGO: Trust (Lookingglass Theatre Company); Teddy Ferrara reading (Goodman Theatre, New Stages Amplified). TOUR: To Kill a Mockingbird, REGIONAL: Old Globe Theatre, Syracuse Stage, Cherry Lane Theatre, Luna Stage, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Stratford Shakespeare Festival, The Alley Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Oscar Brockett Theatre, B. Iden Payne Theatre, The Laboratory Theatre, Austin State Theatre, SHSU Main Stage Theatre, TELEVISION: New Amsterdam, The Blacklist Collector (NBC); Holiday In Harlem (Hallmark Channel); The Last OG, Search Party (TBS); Happy! (Syfy Network); Modern Love (Amazon Studios); Chicago Code (20th Century Fox). EDUCATION: MFA in acting, University of Texas at Austin, The School at Steppenwolf, Stella Adler Actor Studio, Birmingham Conservatory at Stratford Shakespeare Festival.



ONYE EME-AKWARI

(Nollywood Dreams Actor) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. THEATER: Spirits to Enforce (Vernal & Sere); Jaia's African Hair

Braiding (Manhattan Theatre Club). **TELEVISION:** FBI: Most Wanted, Bob Hearts Abishola (CBS); The Good Doctor, Will Trent (ABC); Random Acts of Flyness (HBO); Outer Banks (Netflix). **EDUCATION:** MA in industrial/organizational psychology, University of Georgia. Eme-Akwari has performed in and taught numerous marching bands, indoor drum lines, and worldclass touring drum corps. He teaches at the Robert Mello Studio in Atlanta, GA and the Terry Knickerbocker Studio in Brooklyn, NY.



MORGAN SCOTT

(Nollywood Dreams Actor) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. THEATER: Jaja's African Hair Braiding (Manhattan Theatre Club); MUD; or

when things get messy and how we live with it (SheNYC Festival). EDUCATION: 2022 graduate of Juilliard; British American Dramatic Academy. @morganmscott_ JOCELYN BIOH (Playwright) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. THEATER: Jaia's African Hair Braiding (Manhattan Theater Club) 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); multi-award-winning School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play (MCC Theater) gone on to have over 65 regional productions and premiered in the UK in 2023. TELEVISION: Russian Doll. Spike Lee's She's Gotta Have It (Netflix): Tiny Beautiful Things (Hulu); new Star Wars series The Acolvte (Disnev+). AWARDS: 2017 Tow Playwriting Fellow, Dramatists Guild's HullWarriner Prize Award twice, Steinberg Playwright Award, Lortel Award, Drama Desk Award. Bioh is also writing the live screen film adaptation of the Broadway musical Once on This Island for Disney.

WHITNEY WHITE (Director) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. CHICAGO: The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington (Steppenwolf Theatre Company), BROADWAY: The Last Five Years (upcoming), Jaja's African Hair Braiding, Marvin's Room. OFF BROADWAY: Jordans. What to Send Up When It Goes Down (Public Theater): Soft (MCC Theater): On Sugarland, Othello (New York Theatre Workshop); If I Forget (Roundabout Theatre Company), Vineyard Theatre, The New Group, Page 73, The Playwrights Realm, Julliard, Trinity Rep, The Drama League, and others. INTERNATIONAL: The Secret Life of Bees (Almeida Theatre); Sundance, REGIONAL: The Amen Corner (Shakespeare Theatre Company); An Illiad (Long Wharf Theatre); Canyon (IAMA Theatre Company): World-premiere of Jump (PlayMakers Repertory Company); Trinity Repertory Company. ORIGINAL WORKS: Semblance. Definition. Macbeth in Stride, EDUCATION: MFA in acting. Brown University; BA, Northwestern University, AWARDS: Obie, Lilly, Tony Nomination for direction, writing, and music, two-times New York Times Critic's Pick. LA Times Critics Choice. Elliott Norton for Outstanding Musical Performance, Susan Stroman Directing, Herb Alpert, Jerome Fellowship, White is an Artistic Associate (Roundabout Theatre Company), an Associate Artistic Director (Shakespeare Theatre Company), and former staff writer on Boot's Riley's I'm a Virgo.

DAVID ZINN (Set Design) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: The Notebook. BROADWAY: set design for Stereophonic. Jaia's African Hair Braiding, The Notebook, Kimberly Akimbo, Funny Girl, The Minutes, Diana, Torch Song, The Humans; costume design for An Enemy of the People, A Doll's House Part 2. Other Desert Cities. The Vibrator Play, Xanadu; set and costume design for Sondheim's last musical Here We Are (The Shed): SpongeBob Musical, Fun Home, Choir Boy, Amélie, The Last Ship. NEW YORK: Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theatre Club, New York Theatre Workshop, Lincoln Center Theater, Second Stage, The Public. **REGIONAL:** American Conservatory Theater, American Repertory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Guthrie, The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, Seattle Rep. Santa Fe Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago. INTERNATIONAL: National Theatre, Young Vic, The Hampstead (UK), Berlin Staatsoper, Theater Basel, AWARDS: Tony, Drama Desk, Hewes, and Obie awards.

DEDE AYITE (Costume Design) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. SELECT BROADWAY: Othello, Our Town, Jaja's African Hair Braiding (Tony Award Winner); Hell's Kitchen, Appropriate, Topdog/ Underdog, Slave Play. OPERA: X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X (Metropolitan Opera), SELECT OFF BROADWAY: ; Merry Wives (The Public); Buena Vista Social Club, Days of Wine and Roses (Atlantic Theater Company), SELECT **REGIONAL:** Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Arena Stage. TELEVISION: Netflix, Comedy Central. AWARDS: TDF/Kitty Leech Young Master Award, Obie, multiple Drama Desk, Henry Hewes, Lucille Lortel, Helen Hayes, Theatre Bay Area, Audelco, and Joseph Jefferson Awards.

JIYOUN CHANG (Lighting Design) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. BROADWAY: Jaja's African Hair Braiding, Stereophonic, The Cottage, KPOP, for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf, Slave Play. NEW YORK: The Public, Roundabout, New York Theatre Workshop, MCC Theater, Signature Theatre Company, Guggenheim. REGIONAL: Alley Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, CalShakes, Guthrie, Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival. AWARDS: multiple nominations for Tony. Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Henry Hewes Awards; recipient of an Obie Award and Suzi Bass Award.

JUSTIN ELLINGTON (Original Music and Sound Design) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. BROADWAY: Home, Jaia's African Hair Braiding (Tony Award nomination), for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf (Tony Award nomination), Topdog/Underdog, Pass Over, Clvde's, OFF BROADWAY: New York Theatre Workshop, Lincoln Center, The Public Theater. AWARDS: multiple Obie, Audelco, and Henry Hewes Design Awards. recognized by ASCAP and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Ellington is currently a Lecturer in Sound Design at the David Geffen School of Design at Yale University.

STEFANIA BUBARELLA (Video Designer) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. BROADWAY: Jaja's African Hair Braiding (Manhattan Theatre Club). OFF BROADWAY: Space Dogs (MCC Theater); Travels (Ars Nova); A Bright New Boise, The Watering Hole (Signature Theatre); Semblance (New York Theatre Workshop); amongst others. AWARDS: 2024 Tony Award nominee for Jaja's African Hair Braiding; Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle nominee for Outstanding Video/ Projection Design for Space Dogs; HOLA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatrical Design for Vámonos!. stefaniabulbarella.com

NIKIYA MATHIS (Hair and Wig Design) 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 Morisseau'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: Raising Kanan on Starz. Nikiya is the first wig designer to ever receive a special Tony Award for her design of Jaia'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. Nikiva'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

ERICA A. HART, CSA (New York Casting) BROADWAY: Chicken & Biscuits, Pass Over, Death of a Salesman, Jaja's African Hair Braiding. TELEVISION: Black Mirror, A Black Lady Sketch Show (Artios winner), That Damn Michael Che, Bust Down, The Girls on the Bus, The Equalizer, Survival of the Thickest. FILM: The Surrogate (Artios winner), We Strangers (SXSW), Cupids (Tribeca). Music video: "Fight for You" by H.E.R. Thanks Jocelyn Bioh, Whitney White, Kelly Gillespie, David Caparelliotis, 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 Praver 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 CAPARELLIOTIS, CSA (New York Casting) SELECT BROADWAY/OFF BROADWAY: Good Night and Good Luck (upcoming); 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. TV/FILM: New Amsterdam (NBC, series casting), The Boys in the Band (Netflix, original casting). MELANIE J. LISBY (Stage Manager) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. CHICAGO: Red Dog Theatre, BROADWAY: Jaia's African Hair Braiding, Tina-The Tina Turner Musical, Grand Horizons, On the Twentieth Century. OFF BROADWAY: Dark Disabled Stories. american (tele)visions, Our Dear Dead Drug Lord. Hurricane Diane. Wild Goose Dreams. Jersey Boys, Pacific Overtures, Dead Poets Society, Mobile Unit's Hamlet, Once Upon A Mattress. REGIONAL: Berkelev Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Williamstown Theater Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, Two River, Pig Iron, Gulfshore Playhouse, The Barnstormers, Crossroads Rep. EDUCATION: Indiana State University. Lisby has also worked on numerous showcases, readings, galas, and events.

BRILLIAN QI-BELL (Assistant Stage Manager) CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE: Debut. NEW YORK: ASM for Bees & Honey (MCC Theater); PSM sub for El Otro Oz (Atlantic Theater Company); ASM sub for The Harder They Come, PA for Hell's Kitchen (The Public Theater); PA for Suffs development (101 Productions): ASM for 38th Marathon of One Act Plays (Ensemble Studio Theater). REGIONAL: ASM for A Thousand Maids (Two River Theater). NATIONAL TOUR: ASM sub for & Juliet, ASM sub for Funny Girl, PA for Jagged Little Pill. Qi-Bell has participated in advocacy programs including the Cody Renard Richard Scholarship, Beyond the Stage Door (Baseline Theatricals), and the Harriet Tubman Effect.

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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 Swept Away, 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). WEST END: Kathy & Stella Solve a Murder!, The Motive and the Cue (Laurence Olivier nomination), 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 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 next season. As Producer: The Outsiders. adapted from S.E. Hinton's classic novel (Tony Award), Jaja's African Hair Braiding by Jocelyn Bioh (Tony Award nomination). Here Lies Love by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim along with the 20th Anniversary of Suzan-Lori Parks' acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Topdog/Underdog (Tony Award) and Jeanine Tesori and David Lindsay-Abaire's new musical, Kimberly Akimbo (Tony Award), 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 Zava LaChanze. She resides in Westchester. New York with her three cats and gardening hats.



EDWARD HALL

(Artistic Director, Carl and Marilynn Thoma Chair) Acclaimed theater, television, and film director Edward Hall joined CST in October

2023. In February 2024, he directed his debut production as Artistic Director-*Richard III* starring Tony nominee and Paralympic champion Katy Sullivan and has more recently directed Henry V. He previously directed the Jeff Awardwinning Rose Rage trilogy at CST in 2003. Edward has built his love of Shakespeare around original interpretations of the Bard's plays, staging acclaimed productions in London's West End and on tour around the globe. He first directed at the RSC in 2000 and has had a long and happy association with the company. He led the UK's Hampstead Theatre for nearly a decade, transforming it into one of the nation's most successful theaters for new work development, with over 100 world premieres. He was the founder and Artistic Director of the multi award winning Propeller Shakespeare touring for over twenty years across the US, Europe, Asia, and beyond. He has served as an Associate Director at the National Theatre and Old Vic in London. His extensive film and television credits include The Heist Before Christmas starring Timothy Spall, Blithe Spirit starring Dame Judi Dench, multiple HBO and BBC series, and the season 4 finale for Downton Abbev. This season. Hall directs CST's productions of Henry V, Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Sunny Afternoon. He is a member of The Arts Club of Chicago and the Economic Club of Chicago.

KIMBERLY MOTES



(Executive Director) Esteemed arts leader Kimberly Motes joined CST in October 2023, bringing more than 25 years of senior leadership

experience within the performing arts and higher education in Minnesota and Washington DC. Motes served as the Managing Director of the Tony Awardwinning Children's Theatre Company (CTC). During her seven-year tenure, CTC produced 46 plays/musicals including 15 commissioned new works and six co-productions/transfers. Motes has held leadership roles including Senior Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the University of St. Thomas. Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the College of Saint Benedict, Managing Director at Theater Latté Da, and Executive Director at the Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts. She spent 13 years in Washington, D.C., where she was the Director of Development at Arena Stage and led adult arts education programming and a ballet training program with legendary ballerina Suzanne Farrell at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Her career began at The Washington Ballet. She has also served on grant panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Minnesota State Arts Board She is a member of the Economic Club of Chicago, The Chicago Network, and the Chicago Club.

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The Director of this production is a member of the **STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY**, a national theatrical labor union.



The set, costume, lighting, sound, and projections designers of this production is represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of IATSE.



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HAIR STORY/ HISTORY/ HERE STORY

By Otis Ramsey-Zöe

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.





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.

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. 💻

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Bard Circle members chat with Royal Shakespeare Company actor Zach Wyatt. Photo by Ty.Optix Photography

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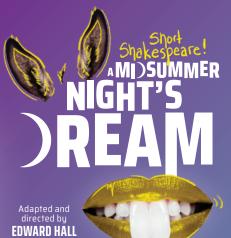
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