DEATH AND THE KING’S HORSEMAN

by WOLE SOYINKA
DURING THE PERFORMANCE

Masks stay on

Silence your phone

No photography or video
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FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIEND,

Welcome to the inaugural staged reading presentation of The Shift, an exciting collaboration between Shakespeare Theatre Company and Howard University’s Department of Theatre Arts. It is our combined goal to expose students to the classics while exploring together how such classics are defined. Based on true incidents and dealing with concepts of culture, community, and conviction, Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* is a perfect example of this expansion of the canon. Thank you for supporting these young theatre artists as they present what I am sure will
be a thoughtful and provocative culmination of the exceptional work they have performed over the last two semesters.

Cheers,

Simon Godwin
Artistic Director
Shakespeare Theatre Company
DEATH AND THE KING’S HORSEMAN

By Wole Soyinka
Directed by LeeAnét Noble

February 26, 2022
The Michael R. Klein Theatre at the Lansburgh

Choreographer
Lauren Smith

Attending Professor
Ricky Ramón

Assistant Director
Amiah McGinity

*NThis performance is being filmed and livestreamed by The National Museum of African American History and Culture.*
The Shift seeks to broaden and enrich our community by connecting with diverse organizations to create initiatives and opportunities that aid in shifting the future of theatre. Over the past two years, Shakespeare Theatre Company has partnered with Howard University’s Department of
Theatre Arts for a series of events, showcases, and experiences. As a way of deepening the connections between Howard University’s Department of Theatre Arts and to engage with new talent that will shape the future of theatre, we have collaborated to create a new course that will take place annually.

Within this year’s two-semester course with STC, students explored a classic play and found ways to expand the term “classic” while learning how a major classical theatre operates. Sessions included master classes with Simon Godwin, Keith David, Dr. Soyica Colbert, Dr. Drew Lichtenberg, Dr. Bayo Omolola, and more. In addition, the course engaged various departments within the University to support the program. Students also received course credit. This reading represents their final project for the program.
CAST

Girl........................................................ Ezinelia Baba
Jane Pilkings...........................................Tymetrias Bolden
Elesin Oba..............................................Rashad Davis
The Aide-de-Camp.................................Khyrin DeBose
Iyaloja....................................................Chloé Gill
Simon Pilkings......................................Patrick Hamilton
The Bride/The Young Woman/
Stage Directions....................................Kennedi Hendrix
Olunde....................................................Jacques Jean-Mary
The Praise-Singer.................................Elizabeth Mpanu-Mpanu
Sergeant Amusa/The Resident..............Jared Alexander
Woman/Guard.......................................Lauren Smith
The Prince/Stage Directions...............Shawn Smith
Joseph.................................................John Woods III
Woman/Ensemble.................................Amiah McGinty

Stage Managers: Jordyn T. Stroman, Gabrielle Rice

SPECIAL THANKS

Dr. Ofosuwa M. Abiola, Dr. Soyica Colbert, Deirdre Cross, Keith David, Dominique Douglas, Simon Godwin, Janice Jensen, Dr. Drew Lichtenberg, Gordon Nimmo-Smith, Heather Ogden, Dr. Bayo Omolola, Dean Phylicia Rashad, Associate Dean Denise Saunders Thompson, The Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts at Howard University, The National Museum of African American History and Culture, Eric Ruffin, Chair Nikkole Salter.
This is a pivotal time at Shakespeare Theatre Company and within the landscape of the American theatre. Our partnership with Howard University represents and celebrates the needed progression of classical theatre. As an alum of The Department of Theatre Arts at Howard University, I am truly excited about this venture.

Every step of the process for this production included the input of the participating students. Addressing the complex topics within the play as well as all design elements and the vision through open discussions and brainstorming was a vital part of
this process. Throughout this journey renowned directors, dramaturgs, actors, and our stellar production team have worked with the students to give insight into the process of producing a play.

Directing this phenomenal team of young artists and working with Professor Ricky Ramón on this program has truly been a highlight of the season. I look forward to seeing their journey in the professional theatre and continuing our partnership with Howard University’s Department of Theatre Arts.

LeeAnét Noble
Director/STC Director of Equity and Enrichment
The Singularity of Wole Soyinka

By Dr. Drew Lichtenberg
STC Resident Dramaturg

PHOTO OF WOLE SOYINKA IN 2015 BY GERALDO MAGELA/AGÊNCIA SENADO.
Wole Soyinka (1934–) is not quite like his countryman Chinua Achebe, though like Achebe, Soyinka is both a literary giant and a foundational figure in Nigerian independence, one who remains critical of Nigerian political corruption to this day. He is not quite like his Kenyan contemporary Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o; though both were foundational theatrical practitioners in post-independence 20th-century Africa, Soyinka is an Anglophone writer who did not reject English as a medium. He is not quite like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, though like these statesmen he has spent time in prison for his political activities. He is not quite like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, though in the wake of the Presidential election of 2016, Soyinka burned his green
card to the United States, an action befitting those civil rights leaders, whose critiques of American society remain radical.

There is something fundamentally distinct about Soyinka’s achievement, something setting him apart. One of the best ways of understanding it involves an experience of the play widely acknowledged as his masterpiece, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975), which he wrote while he was a fellow at Cambridge University in England. Soyinka would later say he was inspired to write the play by walking past a bust of Winston Churchill every day, and feeling an irresistible urge to shatter it on the floor.

The play is based on real events that occurred in 1946 in Oyo, once the capital of a powerful Yoruban empire.
The Yoruban religion is still practiced there, and Yoruban is one of its official languages. In an author’s note that is almost as famous as the play, Soyinka cautions “producers” to avoid what he calls the “facile tag of ‘clash of cultures’,” emphasizing the “far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the play’s threnodic essence.”

“The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical,” he continues. In a phrase recalling Nietzsche’s “birth of tragedy from the death of music,” he states that the play “can be fully realized only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition.”

“Threnodic” means funerary. The music Soyinka means is that of lamentation, funerary odes, the “abyss of transition” that lies between “the world of the living, the dead
and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all.”

Many contemporary critics noted the play’s resemblance to Greek tragedy, by which they most likely mean Soyinka’s elegant synthesis of ritual with a dramatic plot. Soyinka had adapted *The Bacchae* by Euripides six years earlier, and the temptation to compare is inviting. The action begins at sunset and ends shortly after the clock strikes midnight, obeying almost to the letter Aristotle’s dictum that well-structured plays confine themselves to one revolution of the sun, “more or less.” And like an ancient Greek play, the action feels like the final, climactic moment in a history stretching far back into the past. It even opens in a seemingly Greek manner, with the entrance of singers and dancers recalling the parodos, or entrance of the Chorus.
However, this is a misconception. For the play’s first four scenes, Soyinka alternates between scenes set in the ancient city market, a world of vibrant urban life, of music, drums, and dance, most importantly of a previously uncorrupted Yoruban way of life. He contrasts these with the private bungalow and ballroom of the Colonial Residency, where the British colonialists are shown wearing indigenous African masks and dresses, like children playing a ridiculous game of dress-up. Soyinka features a song and dance in each of the play’s five scenes, from the opening “Song of the Not-I Bird,” to the final “Song of the King’s Horseman.” The tangos and waltzes of the British colonials, by comparison, seem frivolous. Instead of a contrast between Nigerian and British cultures, the play depicts the ignorance of the British toward indigenous Yoruban rituals,
which they regard as uncivilized, irrational things they can play with, and the catastrophic results of their decision to intervene in matters they do not understand.

The genius of the play, however, lies in the way Soyinka filters a key piece of dramatic information through these two unequal prisms. In Yoruban tradition, after the sovereign’s death, his Horseman—the titular Elesin Oba, shown as a respected and proud man—is obliged to commit ritual suicide. In the play’s opening scene, it is the morning of Elesin Oba’s death, and he confronts it with a ceremony and celebration that underline the spiritual seriousness and cultural centrality of this act. It is not something to be taken lightly. In scenes 2 and 4, the British hear reports of Elesin’s activities, things we have already seen with our own eyes. Failing to properly
understand what they are hearing, they act accordingly. The play moves forward with an inexorable forward momentum and centripetal motion, slowly and then all at once, constricting around the characters like a vise tightening shut.

There are many ways Soyinka could have dramatized this material. Instead of using the expository means of the Aristotelian play, and thus condescending to his audience, he chooses first to confront them with indigenous forms of ritualistic song and dance, challenging his audience (and his actors) to interpret them properly. Our emotional sympathies lie with the African characters; our intellectual interest is in their way of life. Both have been excluded from prior historical narratives as being beneath notice. And the harm the British do is not only to these ancient traditions, but
to the contemporary potential for intercultural exchange.

As the plot unfolds, we perceive the events of the play with a double consciousness, remembering the celebratory rituals of Elesin Oba while simultaneously perceiving them through the British colonials’ veil of misunderstanding. This brilliantly ironic dramatic conceit is sustained throughout the whole play. Soyinka does not just thematize the inequalities and power imbalances of British colonialism; he turns them into a dramaturgy. He is less a postcolonial writer (after all, what is postcolonialism?) than he is intercultural, using his mastery of English and European forms to tell a fundamentally Yoruban story about African society. It is an achievement as singular as it is powerful in its effect.
CAST BIOGRAPHIES

JARED ALEXANDER
Sergeant Amusa/The Resident

Jared is a graduating senior Acting BFA candidate at Howard University. He is thrilled to grace the stage once again since the beginning of the pandemic. His most recent credits include the roles of Innocent in the Howard Player’s 2020 mainstage production Children of Killers by Katori Hall, and Lou in Howard University Theatre Department’s 2019 mainstage production Spell #7 by Ntozake Shange. In 2021, he had the pleasure of directing a virtual staging of Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun in the RCR Festival, produced by Howard alumna Maya Shed. He is currently working on the #ReclaimTheChild project, which involves a coalition of artists commissioned to give a voice and soul to an underrepresented enslaved child shown in a portrait of Elihu Yale at the Yale Center for British Art.

EZINELIA BABA
Girl

Ezinelia is a sophomore Theatre Arts major with a concentration in acting and a minor in psychology.
at Howard University. She is very passionate about traveling, hanging out with her friends and family, and learning new languages. Ezinelia is very grateful and excited to be a part of this amazing production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* at Shakespeare Theatre Company and thankful for everyone who has supported her.

**TYMETRIAS BOLDEN**

*Jane Pilkings*

Tymetrias is excited to be performing in this wonderful production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* at Shakespeare Theatre Company in collaboration with Howard University. She is a sophomore at Howard University, majoring in Theatre Arts with an Acting concentration and minoring in TV and Film. When she’s not in school, Tymetrias loves spending time with her loved ones, discovering new music, and making endless memories. She wants to thank her family for all their love and support.

**RASHAD DAVIS**

*Elesin Oba*

Rashad makes his regional theatre debut in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Currently studying in Howard’s BFA
acting program, his university credits include work with the Howard Players in *Children of Killers* and *21 Strings*, as well as writing and directing his own shows *The Scar* and *Tha Block is Hot*. Outside of theatre, Rashad works as a recording artist, record producer, and songwriter. Rashad would like to thank his family and his friends for their undying and unconditional support.

**KHYRIN DEBOSE**  
*The Aide-de-Camp*

Khyrin is extremely excited to perform on the world class Shakespeare Theatre Company stage and is even more ecstatic to make his professional debut. Khyrin is a junior Musical Theatre Major at Howard University and when he isn’t studying the books of endless acting theory you can find him streaming on Twitch @KLDDeBoss7. He hopes you truly enjoy the show!

**CHLOÉ GILL**  
*Iyaloja*

Chloé is a sophomore Theatre Arts Major with a Concentration in acting from the Flint area in Michigan. Chloé is also a playwright, poet, and activist. Chloé is very excited to be a part of this production of *Death*
and the King’s Horseman and is very thankful to all of the cast and guests who were along for the journey for their insight and collaboration. Chloé would also like to give thanks to her family and friends for encouraging her along the way.

PATRICK HAMILTON
*Simon Pilkings*

Patrick (he/they) is from Fresno, California where his love for music and storytelling blossomed. He is a graduating BFA Musical Theatre major at Howard University and is so excited and grateful to Shakespeare Theatre Company as well as the creative team for this opportunity!

KENNEDI HENDRIX
*The Bride/The Young Woman/Stage Directions*

Kennedi is currently a second year Theatre Arts-Acting major with a minor in Theatre Administration from Waller, Texas. Her favorite part about being in Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of *Death and The King’s Horseman* is having the opportunity to collaborate with her peers and getting to dive into the beautiful Yoruba culture. She would like
to thank LeeAnét Noble, Professor Ricky Ramón, Shakespeare Theatre Company, the cast, her family, and everyone in the audience for attending!

JACQUES JEAN-MARY
Olunde
Jacques is a junior BFA Acting Major at Howard University from Brooklyn, New York. His most recent work was a student-produced short film he worked on over the summer, *The World We Created* by Camille Petinaud. In his spare time, he enjoys watching movies starring his favorite actors and dancing. Jacques is super excited to deepen his craft and enhance his storytelling through the role of Olunde.

AMIAH MCGINTY
Assistant Director/
Women/Ensemble
Amiah is a junior BFA Acting major at the illustrious Howard University. She is a passionate storyteller and theatre-maker who loves both acting and directing; therefore, she is honored to have the opportunity to serve both as the production’s Assistant Director and portray one of the Women. You may have also seen her work when she starred as Mali in the world premiere of
21 Strings by Nsangou Njikam or when she directed her original short film Resurface for the Howard Player’s Annual 8x10 play festival. Amiah has learned so much from this creative process and is overjoyed to have worked on such an amazing play.

ELIZABETH MPANU-MPANU

The Praise-Singer

Elizabeth (she/her) is a senior Musical Theatre major at Howard University from Fairfax, Virginia, by way of Florida. She is so very happy to have the opportunity to experience this show. She is thankful for all the things she has been able to do and learn while helping to put the show on its feet. She would like to give special thanks to her family, especially to her big brother Tony, to her friends and cast mates, and special thanks to Ricky Ramón and LeeAnét Noble. Thank you for coming and enjoy the show!

LAUREN SMITH

Choreographer/Woman/Guard

Lauren is a graduating senior BFA Musical Theatre student at Howard University. Her past credits include Urinetown (Tiny Tom), Pippin, and the musical review Coming
Home (Ruth, “Raisin”) all on the historic Ira Aldridge Stage at HU. Lauren is grateful for this opportunity to work with Shakespeare Theatre Company once again after dazzling in previous gala performances and previews. For more of her performances, visit her Instagram page at: @_lilo4u.

SHAWN SMITH
The Prince/Stage Directions

Shawn is thrilled to be involved in this production of Death and The King’s Horseman at Shakespeare Theatre Company. He is currently a sophomore Theatre Arts Major with an Acting concentration at Howard University and continues to train, audition, and emerge as a young actor, artist, vocalist, writer, and musician. Outside of school, he enjoys reading, spending time with family, and bingeing R&B. Shawn couldn’t be more thankful for his family’s support.

JOHN WOODS III
Joseph

John is a senior Acting major at Howard University from Columbia, Maryland. He has an extensive background in theatre; some of his theatre credits include playing John in Aftermath (Lucille Lortel Theatre);
Mercer Ellington in Daydream (Kennedy Center); and Jay in the regional premiere of Beat Bugs: A Musical Adventure, in which he was a part of the original cast (Red Branch Theatre Company/Touring Cast). Along with theatre, John has been in a number of television productions; his last television appearance was on Reelz’ Copycat Killers. He also has starred in a number of feature films, commercials, and short films, including Coyote in Inglewood, Comcast’s BTheOne, and Dakota.

CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

WOLE SOYINKA
Playwright

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright, poet, author, teacher, and political activist. In 1986, he became the first African to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. He served as a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theatre in London and he has taught at a number of universities across the globe, including Cambridge, Sheffield, and Yale. Soyinka founded the theatre group The 1960 Masks in 1960 and the Orisun Theatre Company in 1964. Soyinka has published around 20 works combined of drama, novels, and poetry.
LEEANÉT NOBLE
Director/Director of Equity and Enrichment at STC
LeeAnét Noble is Shakespeare Theatre Company’s Director of Equity and Enrichment. She graduated magna cum laude from Howard University with a degree in theatre. As an actor, director, and choreographer, she has worked with STOMP, Drumstruck, Disney’s The Lion King Experience, Bono, Alicia Keys, Rihanna, Sheryl Crow, and more. Her original one-woman shows have premiered Off-Broadway at The Zipper Theatre and at 54 Below in New York City. She is the director of the upcoming touring production and digital film 10 Seconds, a play based on police relations with youth in Washington, D.C., produced by Imagination Stage. Alongside her mother Lauretta Noble, she is the co-director of the internationally, critically acclaimed dance troupe, Team Vicious. Her original productions have been produced at Madison Square Garden, The Stade de Bercy, and The Kennedy Center. Her work diversifying fashion has been inducted into museums around the world including The Museum of Modern Art. As an educator she has worked at Montgomery College and Howard University and has conducted workshops, master classes, and lectures at Spelman College, Morgan State University, Hunter College, Coppin State University, Clark Atlanta University, Bowie State University, Morehouse College, and The Fashion Institute of Technology. She is passionate
about creating change through the arts. For more information, please visit LeeAnet.com.

**RICKY RAMÓN**
*Attending Professor*

Ricky has been an educator, administrator, and artist for more than 20 years at secondary schools, universities, nonprofits, and professional theatre companies. Since joining Howard University as a faculty member in the Department of Theatre Arts, Ricky has directed the musicals *Urinetown* (2019) and *Pippin* (2020) and has professionally directed and stage managed over 60 plays and musicals at Atlantic Theater Company (NYC), Adventure Theatre MTC, Rep Stage, Theater Alliance, Imagination Stage, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and Teatro Vivo (Austin). He is a Helen Hayes Awards judge for professional theatre in Washington, D.C. Ricky earned a Master of Education in Arts in Education from Harvard University, a Master of Fine Arts in Acting and Directing from Texas Tech University, and a Master of Arts in Performance Studies from New York University-Tisch School of the Arts. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre and English from the University of Notre Dame. He is originally from Pearsall, Texas.
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