



ILLUSION THEATER

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**Illusion Theater announces
The Afro-Atlantic Playwright Festival
October 13, 14, 15, 2023
in Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Three new plays coming from the Cultural Diaspora Program will be presented this October in Minneapolis, Minnesota co-curated by Carlyle Brown and Chuck Mike. Hosted by Camargo Foundation, Playwrights' Center, and Illusion Theater, the Festival begins October 13 with the Opening Night of Illusion Theater's full production of **We Take Care of Our Own** by **Zainabu Jallo**, directed by **Carlyle Brown**. On Saturday October 14 there will be staged readings of **MY SOUL IS NOT RESTED** by **Cassandra Medley** directed by **Aaron Todd Douglas** and **Red Dragon** by **Tonderai Munyevu** directed by **Ansa Akyea**. On Sunday October 15 following the 2pm matinee of **We Take Care of Our Own**, there will be a roundtable discussion **What is the African Diaspora? A Conversation about Afro-Atlantic Culture** with playwright Zainabu Jallo and Africana Scholar Maboula Soumahoro, moderated by director and festival curator Carlyle Brown.

The idea for The Cultural Diaspora Program and this Festival comes from Carlyle Brown, a celebrated playwright, an astute cultural observer, and a sailor. While a sailor

he reflected how the people of the African Diaspora carried their culture with them as they created new lives away from their ancestral homeland. This led to Carlyle and his colleague, Chuck Mike, to co-curate two residencies for playwrights of African heritage which were held at The Camargo Foundation in France in 2018 and 2022. The Camargo Foundation was founded by philanthropist Jerome Hill, its mission is to foster creativity, research, and experimentation through its international residency program for artists, scholars, and thinkers. Camargo, with the Playwrights' Center, hosted the first Afro-Atlantic Playwright Festival where three plays from the Diaspora Program were read. In 2020 Carlyle was awarded the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship to become Playwright-in-Residence at Illusion Theater. As part of his Fellowship, Carlyle, with Illusion Producing Directors Bonnie Morris and Michael Robins, began to plan to bring more of the plays of The Cultural Diaspora Program to production.

Carlyle says, "These storytellers, the New Griots, make their narratives out of an Afro-Atlantic point of view. New, intricate expansive narratives that do not simply explain who we are but celebrate our return to ourselves. That explore and discover our African-ess. Narratives that are for ourselves as well as for others. Narratives where Black Lives don't simply matter but are essential."

Generous support for this Festival comes from Camargo Foundation, Playwrights' Center, National Endowment for the Arts, Jerome Foundation, Ford Foundation, FACE France American Cultural Exchange, Venturous Theater Fund, and Illusion Theater.

The Playwrights and Plays:

Zainabu Jallo is a scholar, playwright, and portrait photographer. Her academic and creative works have been developed through Fellowships at the Sundance Theater Institute, The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, Residenz Theater Munich, Chateau Lavigny, and House of Writers in Switzerland. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts England, and UNESCO Coalition of Artists for the General History of Africa. She is the author of award-winning plays - Onions Make Us Cry, Holy Night, and My Sultan Is A Rockstar. Jallo is Doctoral Researcher at the Graduate School of Humanities at the University of Bern Switzerland. Her scholarly interests include diaspora studies, iconic criticism, and material culture. <https://zainabujallo.com/>

We Take Care of Our Own by Zainabu Jallo

Carlyle Brown describes, **We Take Care of Our Own**, as "a tale of migration and aging in the diaspora. Three elderly gentlemen in the twilight of their lives find themselves in a lavish nursing home somewhere in Europe poring over their existential anxieties. Away from family and homeland in their twilight years they are all wondering, how the hell did we get here?"

Cassandra Medley is a playwright and a teacher. Originally from Detroit, Michigan she is based in New York City. Her plays have been produced all over the U.S. Most recently she is a recipient of the 2023 Helen Merrill Playwriting Award. Recent works

include the libretto for Fannie Lou Hamer Opera at the Trilogy Opera Company of New Jersey, MARCH 13, 2020 at Martha's Vineyard Theater, Celebrating our Community at Gatekeeper's Collective, Mrs. Palmer's Honey at Bread and Roses Theater Her play, Relativity (Magic Theatre), a commission from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, won the Audelco August Wilson Playwriting Award, was featured on Science Friday on National Public Radio and is published by Broadway Play Publishing. Off-Broadway works include Ma Rose (Apple Corps Theatre) and her sketch, "Ms. Mae", one of several individual pieces which comprise the Off-Broadway musical, A... My Name is Alice, which received the Outer Critics Drama Award (American Place Theatre). Regional works include Cell (Ensemble Studio), Dearborn Heights (Vital Theatre), and Waking Women (People's Light and Theatre). The recipient of many awards, Cassandra is a retired Professor of Playwriting at Sarah Lawrence College, she has taught at New York University, and has also served as guest artist at Columbia University, the University of Iowa Playwrights Workshop and Seattle University. She is a playwright member of the Ensemble Studio Theatre, New River Dramatists, and the Dramatists Guild.

<https://www.cassandramedleyplaywright.com/>

MY SOUL IS NOT RESTED by Cassandra Medley

Newly arrived New York City undocumented refugees clash with the New York City homeless. Two desperate women struggle for turf in a New York City hotel room.

Tonderai Munyevu is an award-winning writer born in Zimbabwe and raised in London. His play MUGABE, MY DAD AND ME opened at York Theatre Royal in collaboration with English Touring Theatre, and later became the debut production of the newly opened Brixton House Theatre. The play won the UK Theatre Awards Best New Play 2022 and was shortlisted for The Alfred Fagon Award. He has most recently co-adapted and directed Jane Austen's MANSFIELD PARK at the Watermill Theatre. His debut play THE MOORS premiered at London's Tara Arts Theatre. He is a salaried writer at Stockroom for whom he has co-written ALICE IN WONDERLAND at Liverpool Playhouse and the audio drama BLACCINE: FIRST DOSE which he also co-directed with Debbie Hannan. He is on commission to Hampstead Theatre, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, The Royal Shakespeare Company and BBC Radio 4.

Red Dragon by Tonderai Munyevu

1607, a ship, The Red Dragon, is transporting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* bound for Africa. 2024 a celebration of that journey in Sierra Leone; and a gathering in London that ponders questions: What is cultural? Who gets to define it? Are art and subjugation ultimately interlinked?

The Afro-Atlantic Playwright Festival

October 13, 14, and 15, 2023

At Illusion Theater

Located In the Center for the Performing Arts

3754 Pleasant Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55409

Box Office: 612-339-4944 www.illusiontheater.org

Hosts: Camargo Foundation, Playwrights' Center, Illusion Theater

Funders: National Endowment for the Arts, Jerome Foundation, Ford Foundation, FACE France American Cultural Exchange, and Venturous Theater Fund

Tickets: Tickets are available at the Illusion Theater website (www.illusiontheater.org) or by phone (612-339-4944). **Note:** Tickets for the Staged Readings on October 14 and the Discussion on October 15 are free, however, reservations are required.

Please [click here](#) for more information on the Afro-Atlantic Playwright Festival.

[Click here](#) for information on the Camargo's Cultural Diaspora Program.

Hosted by:



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PLAYWRIGHTS'
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