

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse's New Works Initiative Presents "Culture Shock"

Westport Country Playhouse's New Works Initiative (NWI) will present the second play in its 2021 season with a virtual workshop of "Culture Shock," written by Gloria Majule, and directed by Taylor Reynolds, on Wednesday, July 14.

The second of four plays in NWI's 2021 season, "Culture Shock" is about two African students, Zahra from Tanzania and Hawi from Kenya, who start school in an Ivy League institution. They are placed in Salama House, an all-Black dorm and affinity space for Black students. Faced with cultural, academic, and economic challenges, Zahra and Hawi try to make it through freshman year, while facing the reality of what it means to be Black in America.

"What's most impressive about playwright Gloria Majule is her ability to use a uniquely dry sense of humor to uncover some of the deepest pain in her characters," said Liam Lonagan, Playhouse assistant artistic director. "And she accomplishes this so beautifully in 'Culture Shock'.

"Her extraordinary play speaks to the complicated reality of race in America, and how even spaces designated as safe can be the source of harmful divides and a violent clash of cultures," Lonagan added. "We're honored to be able to assist Gloria on her journey as a writer, and to give her the space to develop this piece with such a talented company of artists."

The Playhouse's NWI provides an artistic home to writers and theater makers, offering the resources and support necessary to further the growth of their works. NWI gives playwright and director two days to dive into the world of the play, making any changes and edits that might further the play's development. On the second day of the workshop, the company rehearses for half a day, and later reads through the play for an audience of invited guests. NWI is presented under strict COVID-19 protocols.

Playwright Gloria Majule is a playwright from Dodoma, Tanzania presently residing in Seattle, WA. She holds an MFA in playwriting from Yale School of Drama and graduated summa cum laude from Cornell University with a BA in performing and media arts, and Spanish. She has been a finalist for The Alliance/Keneda National Graduate Playwriting Competition, a two-time finalist for the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, a semifinalist for the Playwrights Realm Scratchpad Series, and long-listed for the Theatre503 International Playwriting Award. Her plays have been developed at Yale Cabaret, Aye Defy, Yale School of Drama, and the Schwartz Center for the Performing and Media Arts. Majule serves as co-editor in chief for the Tanzania Feminist Collective. She is fluent in English, Kiswahili, Spanish, and is currently learning French

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Director Taylor Reynolds is one of the producing artistic leaders of Obie-winning The Movement Theatre Company in Harlem. Her work focuses on dissecting and exploring issues related to race, gender, and the intersectionality of identity. She has worked as a director, assistant, and collaborator with companies including Baltimore Center Stage, Signature Theatre Company, Page 73, Clubbed Thumb, New Georges, The Public, EST, Ars Nova, Radical Evolution, and The 24 Hour Plays. She is a member of SDC, a New Georges affiliated artist, 2017-2018 Clubbed Thumb directing fellow, and Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab alum. BFA, Carnegie Mellon University.

The cast includes Alisha Espinosa (Mariela), Yonatan Gebeyehu (Einstein), Toney Goins (Osei), Omozé Idehenre (Mama), Mallori Johnson (Tiffany), Amandla Jahava (Charlene), Andy Lucien (Dr. Adams, Mr. Mturi, and Mr. Langat), Al-nisa Petty (Zahra), and Mirirai Sithole (Hawi).

Dramaturg is Anna Morton; Bernita Robinson is stage manager.

Throughout its 90 years, Westport Country Playhouse has been home to 60 world premiere productions of new plays and musicals, most recently, "Thousand Pines" by Matthew Greene, directed by Austin Pendleton, in 2018.

The 2021 New Works Initiative is supported by Athena and Daniel Adamson, and Judy and Scott Phares. The program was founded by the New Works Circle, a group of individual donors committed to the discovery and development of new theatrical work. Founding members are the late Howard J. Aibel, Stephen Corman, Czekaj Artistic Productions, Sandra and Neil DeFeo, Kate and Bob Devlin, Michele and Marc Flaster, Susan Jacobson and David Moskovitz, Judy and Scott Phares, Barbara and John Samuelson, Barbara and John Streicker, and Johnna G. Torsone and John McKeon.

The Playhouse's 2021 Season includes two new virtual productions, "Tiny House," a timely new comedy, written by Michael Gotch, and directed by Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director, playing June 29 through July 18; and "Doubt: A Parable," the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning drama written by John Patrick Shanley and directed by David Kennedy, Playhouse associate artistic director, playing November 2 through November 21. Two HD video productions from the Playhouse archives will stream on-demand, beginning with the musical, "Man of La Mancha" (2018), from August 23 through September 5, and "Of Mice and Men" (2008), from September 13 through September 26. Script in Hand playreadings will run October 4 - 10, and December 14 - 19, titles TBA. The complete schedule is available at westportplayhouse.org. All virtual content in the Playhouse's 2021 Season will be available on demand for patrons' convenience, with open captions in Spanish. Playhouse productions are rehearsed and filmed under Covid-19 safety protocols.

2021 Season Sponsor is the Eunice and David Bigelow Foundation. 2021 Season Media Sponsors are Moffly Media and WSHU Public Radio.

All play titles, artists, dates, and formats are subject to change.

For information and tickets, visit westportplayhouse.org, call (203) 227-4177, or email boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

Founded in 1931, Westport Country Playhouse is celebrating its 90th anniversary year. The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to enrich, enlighten, and engage the community through the power of professionally produced theater of the highest caliber and the welcoming experience of the Playhouse campus. The not-for-profit Playhouse provides this experience in multiple ways by offering live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos; educational and community engagement events to further explore the work on stage; the New Works Initiative, a program dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of new live theatrical works; special performances and programs for students and teachers with extensive curriculum support material; Script in Hand play readings to deepen relationships with audiences and artists; the renowned Woodward Internship Program during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; Family Festivities presentations to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater;

youth performance training through Broadway Method Academy, Westport Country Playhouse's resident conservatory program; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round. Charity Navigator has recently awarded its top 4-star charity rating to the Playhouse in recognition of its strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

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