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Crystal Dickinson



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Chavez Ravine



Lauren F. Walker

FIRST LOOK: CULLUD WATTAH IN REHEARSAL

THE PUBLIC THEATER ANNOUNCES COMPLETE CASTING FOR WORLD PREMIERE PLAY *CULLUD WATTAH*

Written by Erika Dickerson-Despenza
Directed by Candis C. Jones

Complete Cast Includes Crystal Dickinson, Jennean Farmer,
Lizan Mitchell, Ta'Neesha Murphy, Andrea Patterson, Alicia Pilgrim,
Chavez Ravine, and Lauren F. Walker

Performances Begin Thursday, November 2 with a Joseph Papp Free Performance and
Run Through Sunday, December 5; Official Press Opening on Wednesday, November 17

October 18, 2021 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) announced complete casting today for the world premiere of **CULLUD WATTAH**, written by 2021 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize winner **Erika Dickerson-Despenza** and directed by **Candis C. Jones**. Developed by Dickerson-Despenza as the 2019-2020 Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater, **CULLUD WATTAH** was originally scheduled to premiere in July 2020 and will now begin performances in the Martinson Theater with a Joseph Papp Free Performance on Thursday, November 2. The new play will run through Sunday, December 5, with an official press opening on Wednesday, November 17.

The complete cast of **CULLUD WATTAH** features **Crystal Dickinson** (*Marion*), **Jennean Farmer** (*Marion/Ainee Understudy*), **Lizan Mitchell** (*Big Ma*), **Ta'Neesha Murphy** (*Plum/Reese Understudy*),

Andrea Patterson (*Ainee*), **Alicia Pilgrim** (*Plum*), **Chavez Ravine** (*Big Ma Understudy*), and **Lauren F. Walker** (*Reesee*).

2021 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize winner Erika Dickerson-Despenza's new Afro-surrealist play premieres at The Public about three generations of Black women living through the current water crisis in Flint, Michigan. It's been 936 days since Flint has had clean water. Marion, a third-generation General Motors employee, is consumed by layoffs at the engine plant. When her sister, Ainee, seeks justice and restitution for lead poisoning, her plan reveals the toxic entanglements between the city and its most powerful industry, forcing their family to confront the past-present-future cost of survival. As lead seeps into their home and their bodies, corrosive memories and secrets rise among them. Will this family ever be able to filter out the truth? Directed by Lilly Award winner Candis C. Jones, **CULLUD WATTAH** blends form and bends time, diving deep into the poisonous choices of the outside world, the contamination within, and how we make the best choices for our families' futures when there are no real, present options. **CULLUD WATTAH** comes to us from the same playwright and director duo behind the thrilling digital production of *shadow/land*.

CULLUD WATTAH will feature scenic design by Adam Rigg; costume design by Kara Harmon; lighting design by Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew; sound design by Sinan Refik Zafar; hair, wigs, and make-up design by Earon Chew Nealey; prop management by Corinne Golorgursky; original composition by Justin Hicks; and movement direction by Adesola Osakalumi. Janelle Caso will serve as the production stage manager.

The Public is excited to welcome our community back to its flagship home at Astor Place. The Public's audience policy requires complete COVID-19 vaccination by the date of attendance for access into the facility, theaters, and restaurant. Complete vaccination is 14 days following a final dose of the Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Moderna, or Astra-Zeneca vaccine. We are not able to accept any negative COVID test results for entry. Proof of vaccination includes Health Pass by CLEAR, Excelsior Pass, the NYC COVID Safe Pass, a copy or photo of a CDC vaccination card, and/or a copy or photo of an official immunization record from outside the United States. Approved face masks will be required at all times, including while watching a performance, except while actively eating and drinking in designated areas. The designated areas include Joe's Pub, The Library at The Public, and on the Levin Mezzanine. Public Theater staff and artists are subject to a mandatory vaccination policy. For complete health and safety protocols, visit [Safe At The Public](#). Any audience member seeking an accommodation should email info@publictheater.org for more details about our current policy. If you are feeling unwell or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, have been exposed to anyone with COVID-19 within 14 days of your visit, or been instructed to self-isolate within the last 10 days, we ask that you stay home and contact us, when possible, to discuss ticket refund or exchange options. We recognize that public health guidelines may change in the coming months and ask for your patience as we make any necessary safety adjustments. We also ask that you do your part to protect yourself and others by reviewing and agreeing to the attendance protocols before attending the facility.

BIOS:

ERIKA DICKERSON-DESPENZA (*Playwright*) is a Blk, queer feminist poet-playwright and cultural-memory worker from Chicago, Illinois. She has received the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (2021), the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award (2020), the Thom Thomas Award (2020), the Lilly Award (2020), the Barrie and Bernice Stavis Award (2020), the Grist 50 Fixer (2020), and the Princess Grace Playwriting Award (2019). Dickerson-Despenza is the former Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater (2019-2020), a U.S. Water Alliance National Arts & Culture Delegate (2019), a New York Stage and Film Fellow-in-Residence (2019), a New Harmony Project Writer-in Residence (2019), a Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow (2018-2019), and a The Lark Van Lier New Voices Fellow (2018). She is a part of the Ars Nova Play Group (2019-2021) and the Youngblood Collective (EST). Dickerson-Despenza's current commissions include Climate Change Theatre Action, The Public Theater, Studio Theatre, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. Her selected production credits are *cullud wattah* (Public Theater, 2021; Victory Gardens Theater, 2022), *[hieroglyph]* (San Francisco Playhouse/Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, 2021). Currently, Dickerson-Despenza is developing a 10-play Katrina Cycle, including *[hieroglyph]* and

shadow/land, focused on the effects of Hurricane Katrina and its state-sanctioned, man-made disaster rippling in and beyond New Orleans.

CANDIS C. JONES (*Director*)'s selected credits include *Detroit '67* (DC Signature Theater), *Black Solo Plays* (Willamstown Theater Festival), *shadow/land* (The Public Theater), *53% Of* (The Alliance Theater), *B*tch (Page 73)*, *Everybody* (NYU Tisch), *Trapt* (Joe's Pub), *House of the Negro Insane* (Bay Area Playwrights Festival), *Pipeline* (Detroit Public Theater), *Nike* (A.C.T. New Strands Festival), *The Wolves* (American Academy), *Brother Rabbit* (New Black Fest), *Name Calling* (Kennedy Center), *Morning in America* (Primary Stages), *TEMBO!* (Zanzibar International Film Fest). Upcoming: *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Cincinnati Playhouse). Jones received the 2016 Lilly Award, was a member of the WP Theater's 2018-2020 Lab, and is a Drama League Alumna. www.candiscjones.com

ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Forum, Under the Radar, Public Lab, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Girl From the North Country*. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 59 Tony Awards, 184 Obie Awards, 55 Drama Desk Awards, 58 Lortel Awards, 34 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 56 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. publictheater.org

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. The Public Theater honors and celebrates the people and legacy of Seneca Village, one of the earliest free Black communities in New York City, which was located in what is now Central Park from 1825–1857.

The LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust provides leadership support for The Public Theater's year-round activities.

CULLUD WATTAH was developed by Erika Dickerson-Despenza as the 2019-2020 Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater. This production is made possible by the **Laurents/Hatcher Foundation**. Additional support provided by an **Edgerton Foundation New Play Award**. This work was commissioned by the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**.

TICKET INFORMATION

CULLUD WATTAH begins performances in The Public's Martinson Theater on Thursday, November 2 and will run through Sunday, December 5, with an official press opening on Wednesday, November 17.

Public Theater Partner, Supporter, and full-price single tickets can be accessed by visiting publictheater.org, calling **212.967.7555**, or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street.

The Public's Joseph Papp Free Performance initiative will continue this fall with free tickets to the performance on Thursday, November 2 available via Goldstar lottery.

The performance schedule is Tuesday through Friday at 7:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. (*There is no 2:30 p.m. performance on Saturday, November 6 and Sunday, November 7. There is no 7:30 p.m. performance on Wednesday, November 24; Thursday, November 25; and Friday, November 26.*)

The **American Sign Language Interpreted** performance will be at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, November 20. The **Open Captioned** performance will be at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, December 4. The **Audio Described** performance will be at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, December 5.

The full performance calendar and complete ticket distribution details can be found at publictheater.org.

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