

Portland Center Stage at
THE ARMORY

**ARTISTS
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THEATRE

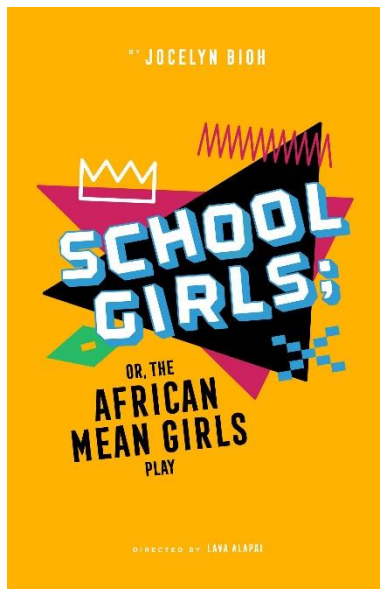
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M E D I A R E L E A S E

**JOCELYN BIOH'S BREAKOUT HIT
SCHOOL GIRLS; OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY
COMES TO PORTLAND IN HISTORIC CO-PRODUCTION**
"Ferociously entertaining and as heartwarming as it is hilarious."
– *The Hollywood Reporter*

Previews Begin Jan. 18 | Opening Night is Jan. 24 | Closes Feb. 16



Dec. 26, 2020 — PORTLAND, OR. Jocelyn Bioh's hit comedy *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*, comes to Portland this January in a historic co-production between Artists Repertory Theatre and Portland Center Stage at The Armory. Inspired in part by Bioh's mother's time in a boarding school in Ghana, and Bioh's own experience in at a boarding school in Pennsylvania, *School Girls* tells the story of Paulina, the reigning Queen Bee at Ghana's most exclusive boarding school. Her dreams of winning the Miss Universe pageant are threatened by the arrival of Ericka, a new student with undeniable talent, beauty ... and lighter skin. *The New York Times* called Bioh's biting play about the challenges facing teenage girls

across the globe "a gleeful African makeover of an American genre."

"Oftentimes, the stories about Africa that are being served up are usually tales of extreme poverty, struggle, strife, disease, and war," said Bioh. "This narrative is a dangerous and calculated one, and

it has always been my goal to present the Africa I know and love so dearly. *School Girls* was my first produced play, and I'm so thrilled at the reception." Lava Alapai, who will direct *School Girls*, spoke to the importance of a comedic story centering Black teenage girls: "We seldom get to see Black women on stages that allow space for joy and community."

This production marks the first time that Artists Repertory Theatre and Portland Center Stage at The Armory have co-produced a show. "This synergy between our two companies is a Portland theater milestone," said Dámaso Rodríguez, artistic director at Artists Rep. Marissa Wolf, artistic director at The Armory, said, "This partnership between our two theaters, helmed by our fantastic director, Lava Alapai, lifts us and our community together."

Various community events will be held surrounding the show, including a pre-show reception with the Ghana Association of Oregon, a dramaturgy class on *School Girls* taught by cast member Kisha Jarrett, and discussions with cast, crew, and community guests. More details will be posted at www.pcs.org/schoolgirls and www.artistsrep.org/education closer to the show.

JOCELYN BIOH

Jocelyn Bioh is an award-winning Ghanaian-American writer and performer from New York City. Her plays include *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (The Kilroys' List, 2016; Center Theatre Group; MCC Theater; Lucille Lortel Award; OCC John Gardner Award; Hull-Warriner Award; Drama Desk nomination; Drama League nomination; Off-Broadway Alliance nomination), *Nollywood Dreams* (Cherry Lane Theatre Mentor Project, 2017; The Kilroys' List, 2015), and *African Americans* (produced at Howard University, 2015; Southern Rep Theatre Ruby Prize Award finalist, 2011; O'Neill Theater Center semifinalist, 2012). Jocelyn conceived and wrote the libretto for *The Ladykiller's Love Story* (music and lyrics by CeeLo Green) and *Goddess* (book writer). She has also been a staff writer for the Netflix TV shows *Russian Doll* and Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*. Jocelyn received her M.F.A. in theater/playwriting from Columbia University. She is under commission with Manhattan Theatre Club, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Second Stage Theater, and Atlantic Theater Company, and is a resident playwright at LCT3. As an actress, Jocelyn's credits include: *In the Blood* (Signature Theatre; Best Featured Actress), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Broadway), *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep; originated the role of Minnie), and *Neighbors*

(The Public Theater; originated the role of Topsy). Film/TV acting credits include: *Ben is Back* (Black Bear Pictures), *Russian Doll* (Netflix), *Blue Bloods* (CBS), *The Detour* (TBS), *The Characters* (Netflix), *Louie* (FX), and *One Life to Live* (ABC).

THE CAST

Andrea Vernae (*Redwood* at Portland Center Stage at The Armory, *Everybody* at Artists Repertory Theatre) stars as the queen bee and mean girl, Paulina Sarpong. Morgan Walker (*School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls* play at Kansas City Repertory Theatre) plays Ericka Boafu, the newcomer who threatens Paulina's reign. The cast is rounded out by **Kisha Jarrett** (*A Chorus Line* at Live Arts, *Debbie Does Dallas: The Musical* at Dad's Garage) as Headmistress Francis, **Kayla Kelly** (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* at Company of Fools and *Peter/Wendy* at Bag&Baggage) as Mercy, **Tonea Lolin** (*Made to Dance in Burning Buildings* at Shaking the Tree Theatre, *Éxodo* at Milagro Theatre) as Gifty, **Treasure Lunan** (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* at The Armory, *The Most Massive Woman Wins* at Deep End Theater), and **Sara Williams** (*Best of Enemies* at Artists' Ensemble Theater, *Hamlet* at The Shakespeare Project of Chicago) as Eloise Amponsah.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Director **Lava Alapai** (*Is God Is* for Washington Ensemble Theatre, *The Revolutionists* at Artists Repertory Theatre) leads the creative team, which includes Scenic Designer **Lex Marcos** (*Is God Is* at Washington Ensemble Theatre, *Shakespeare in Love* at Tacoma Arts Live), Costume Designer **Wanda Walden** (*It's a Wonderful Life* and *Skeleton Crew* at Artist Repertory Theatre), Lighting Designer **Marika Kent** (*Reconstruction* at The TEAM, *Jazz Singer* at the Abrons Arts Center), Sound Designer **Phil Johnson** (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* at The Armory, *A Doll's House* at Artists Rep), Dialect Coach **Yetunde Felix-Ukwu** (*A Christmas Carol*, *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre), Stage Manager **Kristen Mun**, and Production Assistant **Macarena Subiabre**.

TICKET AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

When: Jan. 18 – Feb. 16, 2020*

*Opening Night/Press Night: Friday, Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m.

Preview Performances: Jan. 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23 at 7:30 p.m.

Where: On the U.S. Bank Main Stage at [The Armory](#)

128 NW Eleventh Ave., Portland, Ore., 97209

To Purchase: Regular tickets range from \$25 to \$87. Tickets may be purchased at www.pcs.org, 503.445.3700, or in-person from the box office (128 NW Eleventh Avenue, Portland, OR). Ticket specials are listed at www.pcs.org/deals. Rush tickets are \$25. Students and patrons who are 30 or younger get 50% off tickets in seating areas 1-3. Active duty or veteran military personnel and their families get \$15 off regular adult tickets. \$5 tickets are available for Oregon Trail Card holders through the Arts for All program. *All prices vary by date and time, and are subject to change.*

- **Online:** www.pcs.org/schoolgirls
- **By Phone:** 503.445.3700, 12–6 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday
- **In Person:** The box office is at 128 NW Eleventh Avenue
12 p.m. to 8 p.m. on performance days
12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday, on non-performance days
- **Groups:** Discounts available for groups of 10+ by calling 503.445.3794.

Artist Repertory Theatre Subscribers: Contact 503.241.1278 or www.artistsrep.org to purchase tickets.

More Info: www.pcs.org/schoolgirls

Showtimes: Tuesday through Sunday evenings at 7:30 p.m. (excluding Feb. 2, 4, and 16), Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. (excluding Jan. 18, 19 and 25); and Thursday matinees at 11 a.m. (excluding Jan. 23).

Please Note: Recommended for ages 12 and up. Contains mature language.

Accessibility: Learn about our accessibility options at www.pcs.org/access.

IDEA: Portland Center Stage at The Armory is committed to identifying and interrupting instances of racism and all forms of oppression, through the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). www.pcs.org/idea

PORTLAND CENTER STAGE AT THE ARMORY

[Portland Center Stage at The Armory](#) is the largest theater company in Portland and among the top 20 regional theaters in the country. Established in 1988 as a branch of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the company became independent in 1994, and is under the leadership of Artistic Director Marissa Wolf and Managing Director Cynthia Fuhrman. Around 160,000 visitors attend The Armory annually to enjoy a mix of classic, contemporary, and world premiere productions, along with a variety of high quality education and community programs. Ten productions are offered this season, in addition to hundreds of community events created to serve the diverse populations in the city. As part of its dedication to new play development, the company has produced 28 world premieres and presents an annual new works festival, JAW: A Playwrights Festival. Home to two theaters, The Armory (originally built in 1891) opened its doors in 2006 as the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first performing arts venue in the country, to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.

THE ARMORY'S 2019-2020 SPONSORS

The [2019-2020 season](#) is funded in part by Season Superstars Tim and Mary Boyle, Mary and Don Blair, and Lead Corporate Champion Umpqua Bank. Further support comes from Season Sponsors Advance Gender Equity in the Arts (AGE); the Regional Arts and Culture Council; and the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the state of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts. Support for *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* comes from Linda Illig and Glenn Dahl; the Shubert Foundation; and Joan Cirillo and Roger Cooke.

ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE

[Artists Repertory Theatre's](#) mission is to produce intimate, provocative theater and provide a home for a diverse community of artists and audiences to take creative risks. Artists Rep gratefully acknowledges that its home theater rests on the traditional lands of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other

tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River.

Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theater company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez and Managing Director J.S. May. Founded in 1982, Artists Rep is the longest-running professional theater company in Portland. Artists Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN). Artists Rep's 2019-2020 season can be found [here](#).

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American regional theater with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists and professionals of varied theater disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity.

[ARTSHUB](#) is Artists Rep's resource sharing and community-building initiative supporting Portland theater makers, arts and education nonprofits, and community groups. The mission of the ArtsHub is to create a cultural center by supporting Portland's rich artistic ecosystem. Programs and services include below market rates for rehearsal, performance, and meeting space; shared administrative work space for individuals and organizations; and production services such as set construction, scenic painting, and professional technical support from design through performance. Artists Rep prioritizes artists and organizations that support Artists Rep's values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and seek to provide a home for artists and audiences to take creative risks.

While the program's origin six years ago was in response to an opportunity to share underutilized performance space, Artists Rep has found that the most vital and lasting impact of the ArtsHub is the bustling community that has been formed, and the myriad ways it has led to the empowerment of local artists and the accelerated growth of participating organizations. In the 2018-2019 Season, over 1,500 events were held in Artists Rep's building by 42 local nonprofits, including 11 resident companies — 380 ArtsHub public events, 462 rehearsals, 422 classes and 306

ART events. Artists Rep's new facility is being designed so that the ARTSHUB can include even more organizations than it currently serves.

Artists Rep receives generous support from our community of patrons, including significant leadership gifts from: The Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Foundation; Ronni Lacroute; Regional Arts and Culture Council; The Shubert Foundation; David and Christine Vernier; Colliers International; and Wood Partners. Additional Corporate and Foundation support comes from: Dark Horse Wine; Lagunitas Brewing Company; Nossa Familia Coffee; the Kinsman Foundation; Rafati's Catering; Howard S. Wright/Balfour Beatty; and US Bank.

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