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In association with
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Gananoque, ON



SERVING ELIZABETH

By **MARCIA JOHNSON**

February 20 to 29, 2020 | SAGEBRUSH THEATRE

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Children: WCT productions, unless they are identified as family friendly, are not suitable for children or babes in arms. For more information, please visit the FAQs on wctlive.ca.

WELCOME!

We are never more proud than when we can contribute to the development and first production of a new Canadian play, such as *Serving Elizabeth*, by Marcia Johnson. As audience members and creators, we are all participants in this process, contributing to a piece of theatre that will have a life beyond our stages – and in the case of our recent productions of *Made in Italy* and *GLORY*, have a life from sea to sea, on many stages across the country. As Kamloopsians we can all be proud that we help make a difference in our national conversation about the arts, politics, and culture.



I studied history at university, and I've always been fascinated by the patterns of history and how the recollection of the past tells us something about our modern world: how we got here, how we've changed... and what we have yet to learn. Promoting tolerance, empathy, and compassion is one of the key issues of our time, and our last three productions have approached this issue in entirely different genres, yet the common thread is strong: we are better as a society when we reach out to one another and when we share a common understanding. I love Marcia's ability to thread these themes through a story that also raises important questions about popular media, politics, and cultural diversity.

You'll notice our "mystery subscription" offer in your program today. If you like what we are doing at WCT, we are asking you to take a leap of faith on renewing your 2020/21 season subscription prior to our announcement in late-March. This helps us get a jump on our very busy renewal season, and helps you get a chance to win your subscription!

With this play, we are happy to continue our collaboration with our partners at the Thousand Islands Playhouse in Gananoque, Ontario. I also extend my thanks and appreciation to the brilliant playwright Marcia Johnson, for her wonderful creation, and to all of you, for joining us on maiden journey of a terrific new play.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "James".

James MacDonald, Artistic Director of WCT

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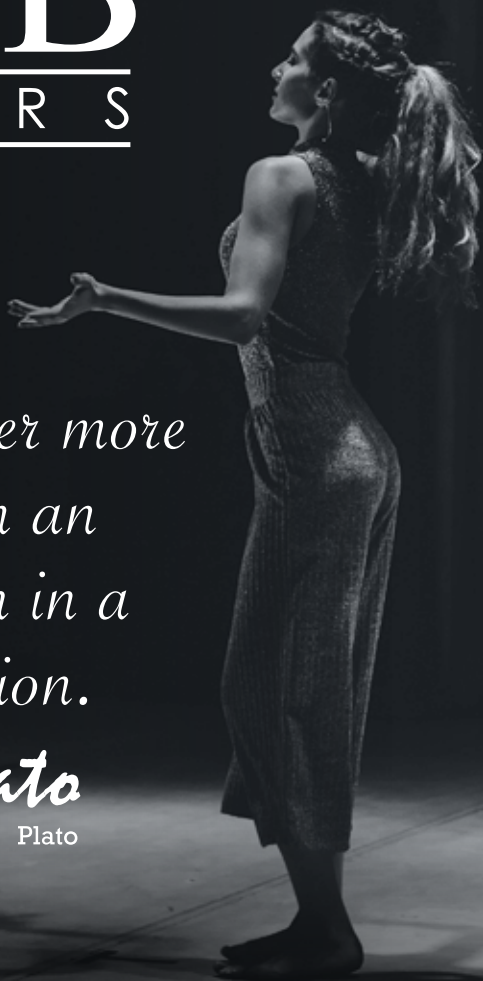
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hour of play than in a
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In association with
Thousand Islands Playhouse
Gananoque, ON

SERVING ELIZABETH

By **MARCIA JOHNSON**

FEATURING

ALLISON EDWARDS-CREWE Faith/Tia

MARCIA JOHNSON Mercy/Patricia

AMANDA LISMAN HRH Princess Elizabeth/Robin

TONY OFORI Montague/Steven

GEOFFREY POUNSETT Talbot/Maurice

CREATIVE TEAM

LEAH-SIMONE BOWEN Director

RACHEL FORBES Set and Costume Designer

JARETH LI Lighting Designer

ANDREW PENNER Sound Designer

CHRISTINE LEROUX Stage Manager

CASSIDY GALLANT Assistant Stage Manager

Approximately 2 hours 20 minutes, including one intermission

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES



MARCIA JOHNSON

When we were little girls, my sister and I dressed up as princesses; fashioning ball gowns from bed sheets and draping cardigans on our heads to represent their long flowing hair. I followed the exploits of the British royal family, especially Princess Anne. I loved watching her compete in horseback riding at the Olympics. Lady Diana came along and I became even more fascinated with princesses.

As I got older, my love of princesses provided a huge conflict with my newly found outrage towards imperialism. I tried to kick my habit but still woke up early for royal weddings.

In the fall of 2016, I tuned in to the Netflix series *The Crown*. I was drawn in by the excellent writing, acting, design; the whole production. And that was just the first episode! I curled up on my couch, excited for episode two. Elizabeth and Philip were going to Kenya! I was thrilled that the writer included that country in the telling of this very important part of Elizabeth's story. But, when it ended, my disappointment was palpable. (You will understand why after the play's intermission.)

The very next day, I was made aware of a call for submissions for the 2017 playwriting unit at Thousand Islands Playhouse (TIP) in Gananoque. For the 150th anniversary of Confederation, the theatre was asking writers to pitch ideas focusing on colonialism and its (after-) effects. I wrote my proposal for *Heavy is the Head* (*Serving Elizabeth's* original title) in less than thirty minutes and sent it off. I got selected for the group and proceeded to vent my spleen, writing the first draft in eight months; a record for me.

I wrote this play to give voice to the under-represented. It is dedicated to my mother, Cynthia Johnson. As a little girl in Jamaica she would watch Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret having tea in the backyard of their vacation home. As an adult, she looked forward to Queen Elizabeth's speech every Christmas. She knew that I was writing this play and I believe that, of all my plays, *Serving Elizabeth* would have been her favourite.

I'm deeply indebted to Alexis Diamond for encouraging me to apply for the Playwrights Unit (where the play was developed) and everyone at TIP who read and gave feedback, including Carolyn Bennet, Brett Christopher, Ian D. Clark, Ashlie Corcoran, Shannon Currie, Tess Degenstein, Erin Fleck, Virgilia Griffith, Rob Kempson, Cassel Miles, Anand Rajaram, Andrea Scott, Rashida Shaw, Marcel Stewart, and Alana Hibbert. I would also like to thank Leah-Simone Bowen for her gentle, passionate and wise direction, as well as James MacDonald and WCT for this world premiere in the tournament capital of Canada.



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LEAH-SIMONE BOWEN



ALLISON
EDWARDS-CREWE



RACHEL FORBES



CASSIDY GALLANT

BIOGRAPHIES

LEAH-SIMONE BOWEN

Director

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Leah is a writer, producer, and Dora Mavor Moore award nominated director. She is an alumnae of The Second City Tour Co. and once performed for Conan O'Brien, who is taller than you think he is. She is the creator and co-host of the hit CBC podcast "The Secret Life of Canada" about the untold and under-told history of the country. In the fall of 2020, her adaptation of Scott Joplin's 1911 Ragtime Opera *Treemonisha* will have its world premiere at the Washington Arts Centre before touring across the United States and Canada. **Other:** Originally from Spruce Grove, Alberta, Leah is a graduate of the University of Alberta's Theatre Program and is thrilled to be back home in the west.

ALLISON EDWARDS-CREWE

Faith/Tia

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: After graduating from Sheridan College's Music Theatre program, Allison's first professional show was a production of Marcia Johnson's play *Binti's Journey* (Theatre Direct). She's so grateful for the opportunity to finally work with Marcia, whose work she has admired for many years. Some of Allison's other credits include *The Color Purple* (Citadel Theatre); *School Girls* (Obsidian & Nightwood Theatre); *Girls Like That* (Tarragon Theatre); and *Da' Kink in My Hair* (Theatre Calgary, National Arts Centre). Film/TV: *Baby in A Manger*, *Witches' Ball*, *48 Christmas Wishes* and *Black Actress: A Web Series*. **Other:** Allison is thrilled to be performing at WCT for her first trip to British Columbia. She sends love to her family for their endless

support and many thanks to Leah-Simone, the cast and WCT team for making this such a great experience.

RACHEL FORBES

Set and Costume Designer

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Rachel is a Toronto based set and costume designer creating for theatre, dance and opera. Her work has been seen across the country with the Shaw Festival, Obsidian Theatre, Neptune Theatre, Centaur Theatre, Confederation Centre of the Arts, and Buddies in Bad Times. She is also a guest designer and mentor at Ryerson University. She has a passion for designing new theatrical works. Here are some selected productions she's had the pleasure to originate: *A Million Billion Pieces* (Young People's Theatre); *In The Abyss* (Citadel&Compagnie/Political Movement); *Portia's Julius Caesar* (RUFF/Hart House); *The Bridge* (Neptune Theatre/2b Theatre); *Risky Phil* (Young People's Theatre); *The Dream Catchers* (Charlottetown Festival); *Black Boys* (Saga Collectif/Buddies in Bad Times); and *How Black Mothers Say I Love You* (Trey Anthony Productions).

CASSIDY GALLANT

Assistant Stage Manager

At WCT: *Dracula: The Bloody Truth*

Elsewhere: Stage Management credits: *Ed's Garage* (Port Stanley Festival Theatre). Apprentice Stage Management credits: *Sunshine Express*, *Buying the Farm*, *Midnight Madness*, *Birds of a Feather*, *Hilda's Yard* (Port Stanley Festival Theatre); *Private Lives* (Stratford Festival); *The Monument* (Factory Theatre); *Gift of the Magi*, *Stag and Doe*, and *Mending Fences* (Theatre Orangeville). **Other:**



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MARCIA JOHNSON



CHRISTINE LEROUX



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AMANDA LISMAN

Cassidy is thrilled to be a part of such a beautiful production. Cassidy would like to thank her wonderful London family and as always, Alexander.

MARCIA JOHNSON

Playwright, Mercy/Patricia

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Marcia's plays include *Binti's Journey*, an adaptation of *The Heaven Shop*, by Deborah Ellis (Theatre Direct Canada/Manitoba Theatre for Young People/Black Theatre Workshop), and *Courting Johanna* (Blyth Festival) based on Alice Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. She has also written radio dramas (*Wifely Duty*, *Perfect on Paper*) and opera libretti (*My Mother's Ring*, *Lullaby at the Shore*, *Playing Ball*). As an actor: Marcia originated the role of Charmaine in *The New Canadian Curling Club* at Blyth Festival, where she also played several roles in *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*. Last year, she was in *The Miracle Worker*, directed by Marti Maraden (Drayton). TV appearances include Disney's *The Swap*, *American Gods* and *American Gothic*. **Other:** In addition to acting and writing, Marcia also works in audiobooks as a director and reader.

CHRISTINE LEROUX

Stage Manager

At WCT: As Stage Manager: *Meet My Sister*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Best Brothers*, *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth*, and *Made in Italy*.

Elsewhere: Stage Manager for *The New Canadian Kid* (Green Thumb Theatre); *The Best Brothers* (Theatre NorthWest); *TH'OWXIIA: The Hungry Feast Dish*, *Raven Meets the Monkey King* (Axis Theatre Company); and *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (TIP). Assistant Stage Manager for *Mamma Mia!* (Globe Theatre). **Other:** Christine is very excited to be starting 2020 at WCT. To James, Dawn, Leah, Marcia,

Cassidy, the incredible cast and creative team: thank you for making this production one to remember. All my love to Leon (and Charlie!). Enjoy the show!

JARETH LI

Lighting Designer

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Jareth is a stage designer based in Toronto. Select lighting design credits include *Hilot Means Healer* (Cahoots Theatre); *Copy That* (Tarragon); *Ring of Fire* (Citadel Theatre); *Casimir and Caroline*, *The Wolves Rock*, *Lemons...* (The Howland Company); *Iphigenia and The Furies* (Saga Collectif, Dora Award Nomination); *Yellow Rabbit* (Silk Bath Collective); *Chautauqua* (Pearle Harbour); *Black Boys* (Saga Collectif & Buddies In Bad Times); *Prairie Nurse* (Factory Theatre & Thousand Islands Playhouse); and *Risky Phil* (YPT). Jareth is a member of the Associated Designers of Canada. Upcoming projects this season include *The Three Women of Swatow* (Tarragon Theatre) and *Prince Caspian* (Shaw Festival). Online @Jareth.Li

AMANDA LISMAN

HRH Princess Elizabeth/Robin



At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Favourite theatre credits include three seasons at the Stratford Festival; *Venus in Fur* at Alberta Theatre Projects (Betty Mitchell Award); *23.5 Hours* at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg Theatre Award Nomination); *Noises Off* at the Segal Centre (Montreal English Theatre Nomination); *My Fair Lady* with Blue Bridge (Critic's Choice Spotlight Award and M Award); and many more with The Arts Club, The Belfry, The Citadel, Theatre Aquarius and Atomic Vaudeville. TV credits include *Suits*, *iZombie* and *A Veteran's Christmas*. **Other:** Amanda is a graduate of the University of Victoria (BA, Anthropology), the University



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TONY OFORI

Montague/Steven

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Selected Credits: *Copy That* (Tarragon Theatre); *Actually* (Obsidian Theatre); *Miss Julie, A Doll's House* (Quarter Century Theatre Company); *Gash* (Egro Pink Fest workshop); *Control Damaged* (Call Me Scotty Productions workshop); *Let's Go* (Theatre Passe Muraille); *Bonds Beyond* (Glass Reflections Theatre Collective); *The Model Apartment* (Toronto Centre for the Performing Arts/ Harold Green Jewish Theatre); *Lost* (Toronto Centre for the Performing Arts). Selected Film/TV: *Bad Kids* (Winner of the UTM Film Fest); *Love Thong* (Winner of the Boston International's Film Festival); *American Gods* (Amazon Prime/Star TV); *Supergirl* (CTV); *Dreams* (Film); *Game Time* (series).

Up Next: *Revolt* (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); *Serving Elizabeth* (Thousand Islands Playhouse). **Other:** Tony is a graduate of Humber's Theatre Performance conservatory and York University's BFA program. Tony is also a recording artist for hip hop group Iambic. Tony is extremely excited to take you all on this new adventure. www.tonyofori.com

ANDREW PENNER

Sound Designer

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Andrew is an award-winning artist who has worked in theatre at The Stratford Festival, Soulpepper, Canadian Stage, Crow's Theatre, Obsidian Theatre, Native Earth, Necessary Angel, and many others. Andrew is a founding member of the award winning, Kitchenband (*Boblo*—Dora Award for Best Composition & Sound Design—*Reesor, Pelee, Petrichor, Detroit Time Machine*). Andrew is also a Dora Nominated

Actor (*Spoon River, Boblo*). Andrew has created music for several films, including *Small Town Murder Songs, Cooking With Stella, One Week, This Beautiful City, Eadweard* and the television series *Lost Girl*. He has also appeared on over 50 albums and has performed extensively across North America and Europe. Most recently, Andrew was composer/sound designer for *Fool For Love* (Soulpepper) and performed/music directed for Crow's Theatre's *Ghost Quartet*. Andrew is also a member of the band Harrow Fair. They are set to release a new album entitled "Sins We Made" due out April 17 (Roaring Girl/Fontana North) and will be touring the U.K and North America throughout 2020. www.andrewpenner.ca

GEOFFREY POUNSETT

Talbot/Maurice

At WCT: Debut

Elsewhere: Geoffrey is a Toronto-based actor, director, educator, husband and dad who has been fortunate to work in theatres across Canada and Scotland. He's happy to return to BC, where he last performed in *Doubt* at Theatre NorthWest in Prince George. Favourite film & TV parts include *It, Suits, Murdoch Mysteries* and an ongoing role in the upcoming Netflix series *Grand Army*.

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PROGRAM NOTES

DISHING UP JUSTICE IN **SERVING ELIZABETH**

My second most memorable museum experience – first forever is the immersive tours at the Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park – was not at the British Museum or the Louvre, but at the humble People's Story Museum in Edinburgh. There I saw, for example, not mere elegant Victorian ball gowns, but detailed accounts of those who toiled in dreary conditions to create them; not more monuments to a few “great men”, but artefacts – in the form of placards and t-shirts – memorializing the many who opposed them. Who doesn't appreciate wrongs righted, especially when the “new” stories are evocative?

A similar impetus to give centre stage to the previously unheard is behind the world premiere we are witnessing in Kamloops today: Marcia Johnson was moved, after viewing *The Crown*, to write *Serving Elizabeth* “to give voice to the under-represented”, as she says in her program notes, in this case to British subjects in Africa who were relegated to the background in the Netflix series. Johnson has succeeded in creating an intellectually stimulating, emotionally engaging play that features characters in their rightful positions while not sacrificing credibility.

Serving Elizabeth intellectually engages by juxtaposing fascinating historical events – the 1952 visit to Kenya by Princess Elizabeth during the death of King George VI and the not unrelated Mau Mau Uprising (in which, importantly, Kenyan women played an instrumental role) – with contemporary issues. This is not to suggest the circumstances of the protagonists

Continued next page...



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PROGRAM NOTES continued

in 1952 rural Kenya and 2015 London, England are parallel. However, Mercy's position as a black colonial woman, subject to temporary imprisonment and ongoing financial punishment, who apparently compromises her ideals, inspires Tia, who, as a young black Canadian intern in a British television studio, faces certain barriers of her own. Tia's eventual defiance of the perpetuation of colonial attitudes is inspired by her creation of a spirited alternative – much as Johnson reacted to the Netflix series.

Johnson stimulates emotional engagement by transcending types and employing humour. While a lesser playwright might be forgiven for resorting to stereotypes, Johnson infuses her characters with complexity, empathy, and grounding. I most anticipate the scenes in which Mercy confronts the princess and Tia marches into her nemesis's fancy home: the outcomes in each case are unexpected, but credible and delightful.

Both Mercy and Tia pull off something ultimately more fulfilling than revenge – satisfaction, with their self respect intact. Every indication is that Marcia Johnson will have a similar experience as her play debuts. Chances are also excellent that experiencing *Serving Elizabeth* shining the spotlight on the worthy underdog will prove memorable for us audience members.

Ginny Ratsoy

Associate Professor of English
Thompson Rivers University

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