



CREATED & PERFORMED BY

# Samson <u>Bonkeaban</u>tu Brown

A Theatre Passe Muraille digital production



# PRAIRIE THEATRE EXCHANGE

**DIGITAL PRESENTATION** 

October 13-17 / 2021

PTE.mb.ca



# MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

All of us at PTE are full of joy and excitement as we begin the 2021-2022 season! Over the last 19 months, we've seen a change in how theatre is experienced and how it is shared. This season, while we'll be making our return to live performances, we have also enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to continue sharing productions online as well.

What does this mean? It means that we can share productions like Theatre Passe Muraille's 11:11 with you. I remember when an earlier incarnation of the show was happening in Toronto and thinking, "If only it wasn't so far away!" And then Passe Muraille announced their production of Samson's play and again I thought, "Again! If only I could get to Toronto." When their digital production premiered, I was finally able to experience this beautiful and profound piece, this time from my living room.

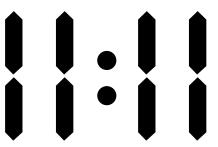
It is not only this production, but that experience, the opportunity to have a new story for the stage in your home, that inspired me to program this show to begin our season. And now I turn it over to Samson and the artistic team of 11:11 to powerfully and vulnerably share their story.

Thank you for your continued support of the live performing arts and PTE as a theatre company. We are so very, very grateful for you.

With love,

THOM

THOMAS MORGAN JONES, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



A Theatre Passe Muraille digital production

Written & Performed by Samson Bonkeabantu Brown Directed by Tsholo Khalema Original Producer Brett Haynes Set & Costume Design by Nalo Soyini Bruce Assistant to Set & Costume Design Lucy Wong Choreographed by Mafa Makhubalo Lighting Design by Sharmylae Taffe-Fletcher Music by Waleed Abdulhamid Sound Design by River Oliveira Stage Manager Laura Baxter Dramaturgy by d'bi.young anitafrika Digital Producer Ulla Laidlaw TPM Production Manager Eric Read Streaming Co-ordinator David Fisher Technicians Joey Morin, John Cabanela Camera Operators Rinchen Dolma, Shavo Dorjee \*

\*MADE IN EXILE Film Intensive participant

RUNTIME: 60 MINUTES, NO INTERMISSION

Prairie Theatre Exchange is a not-for-profit theatre and an active member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT), and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.



# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

Thokozani,

I'd like to begin these notes by introducing myself in the same style that we introduce ourselves in my culture, by stating my lineage, and I do this by sharing my clan name and the clan names of my maternal ancestors.

We introduce ourselves in this way to honor izinyanya zethu:

"My name is Samson Bonkeabantu Thulani Keyi Brown. My clan name is Ngxongo and the rest of my lineage includes Ntsundu; Yem-yem; Sophitsho, vele' bembhentsele; Zondwa, zintshaba zingazubenza nto; Madiba; Ngqolomsila; Dlomo; Mthikrakra; Mthembu. Ndizalwa ngu MamNgxongo oka MaNdlovo, oka MaMholi, oka MaKhumalo, oka MaDlamini..."

I'm not going to write all of my clan names because it would take forever, but what I will say is that all of my clan names are important because these are the ancestors who collectively decide and gift me the stories I must tell. They guide and protect me.

"What does 11:11 mean?" Initially, I understood 11:11 to be how my ancestors got my attention in dreams. Later I understood it to be an Awakening Code... a Growth Code, if you will, that signified that my spiritual gifts were growing and getting stronger.

Currently, I understand it to represent both the 22 bones of the skull which protect our thoughts, and the 22 autosomes in DNA which govern the ancestral characteristics that we inherit.

None of these understandings are incorrect or untrue, in fact, these understandings are connected. Like my ancestors and I, these understandings fold and open into themselves and each other. As such, the meaning is constantly evolving.

I never wanted to write 11:11 and I approached it much like I approached being out about my transition, begrudgingly. Because I was operating from a place of ego and convinced that I was the one guiding my journey, I decided that 11:11 was supposed to be a story about my coming out in my own words.

Writing it was going to heal my relationship to my transition and help me understand why I was trans. None of that happened.

The healing I assured myself I was going to experience never came. Instead, the first iteration of 11:11 hurt to write and perform because my ancestors meant for it to be a catalyst for my healing. It was shadow work. The journey of 11:11 has been less about my transition and more so one of healing myself and consequently healing my ancestors. By humbling myself and submitting to them, I am able to understand that now.

Spiritually, this iteration of 11:11 finds me still healing myself and my ancestors and discovering more of our story. It isn't mine alone because I am not alone. Artistically, it is a ritual of celebrating all that I have healed and discovered thus far.

11:11 is a prayer and a theatrical altar through which I venerate my ancestors and give thanks for their love, guidance and protection.

"What does 11:11 mean?"

11:11 means healing and discovering. It means ritual and celebration. It means humbling myself and submitting. It means ancestral inheritance.

This is what 11:11 means to me. What does it mean to you?

Samson Bonkeabantu Brown would like to extend full gratitude to Obsidian Theatre Company and Buddies In Bad Times Theatre for their generous recommendation of 11:11 and to the Ontario Arts Council for their support with the Recommender Grant. Thanks also, to Phumelele Khumalo for her song, On & On.

Special thanks to Jay Havens, Manidoons Collective, Tom Arthur Davis, and Why Not Theatre. This production was made possible with the assistance of Charles Street Video.

This production of 11:11 is sponsored by Jeff and Rita Rayman

# **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

I'm a theatre veteran and also a continuous student. I've been studying the art of acting for the past 20+ years, and now I am a first-time emerging director who is learning new ways in which art is made possible. Every day, I am swept away by the power of community.

We are in chaotic times where our industry continues to face challenges. Challenges of closures and lockdowns that change how we make theatre. Incorporating the digital into this production of 11:11 was not a compromise. The digital experience is an extension of how we can still share stories with one another. As I have a deep love for both filmmaking and theatre, this opportunity allowed me to pour all my knowledge and skill set as a filmmaker, theatre artist and visual artist.

Stories of Blackness and stories of queer empowerment need to be told, now more than ever in this time of revolutions and revelations. Trans people continue to be harmed and murdered in insidious ways. We are taught to not love "Blackness" and "queerness", and we do not see enough Black queer stories, especially not on mainstream theatre stages. Being a South African man of trans experience, living in Canada has been truly a unique experience.

South Africans have a particular way of existing in the world which surpasses the apartheid. We have stories of love and joy, comedies, tragedies, stories of tribes and betrayals that exist above the colonizer's lens.

I'm ecstatic to contribute as director of 11:11, a Theatre Passe Muraille digital production written and performed by Samson Bonkeabantu Brown. A beautiful and touching story of self-discovery and ancestral connecting, my vision for the production was a re-imagination of the world each character is living in, connecting especially the protagonist's world to South Africa visually.

There's a unique lens in this show that we don't often witness in theatre: A lens that celebrates and honours African culture, specifically South African healing practices and connection to ancestors' lands. In directing 11:11, I was able to experiment with visual ideas I've had for years. I'm honoured to be part of this team as director, working together to bring this unique story and theatrical experience to life.

Appreciation for my Mentor Audrey Dwyer for her guidance and for the expertise you have offered. Theatre Passe Muraille & 11:11 team, all designers and Samson for trusting Tsholvisions as I weave together the new concepts with the atmosphere that support this already touching story of self-discovery and honouring the ancestors. Glory be to my Mom and Dad for loving their trans son unconditionally. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

11:11 is about transformation, growth and evolution. It is a new way of offering our audience "art medicine". I hope you will feel inspired to tell your stories and find new ways to share them too.

I hope that you strive to continuously transform and that this performance inspires you to dream bigger than ever, know your worth and recognize the gifts you possess.

### Trans Is Beautiful.

- Tsholo Visions Khalema Director, 11:11



We invite you to join us in recognizing that we are on Treaty 1 land, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Dakota and Métis nations. We are a committed partner of Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord, and, as a part of our journey to reconciliation, PTE promises to bring Indigenous stories and voices to the PTE stage every season.

# "Because sharing stories changes the way we see the world, ourselves and each other."

Thomas Morgan Jones, Prairie Theatre Exchange



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# MEET THE ARTISTS



# Samson Bonkeabantu Brown

PLAYWRIGHT & PERFORMER

Samson Bonkeabantu Brown is a Sangoma, ngaka, inyanga, hoodoo, traditional healer, multidisciplinary artist and playwright. His primary focus is on spiritual healing, ancestral veneration, trans advocacy and the arts. He uses the arts (primarily as an actor and playwright) to create and educate the general public on trans issues. He has been tasked by his ancestors to shed light on how ancestral veneration can assist with healing the self and living in our purpose.

Spirit-felt gratitude to my ancestors, my parents, family (chosen and blood), d'bi.young anitafrika, the entire TPM and creative team, and my family edlozini at Impande Ka Mkhwanazi. Camagu.



## Tsholo Visions Khalema DIRECTOR

Tsholo Visions Khalema is a proud AmaHlubi warrior, a storyteller braving the elements. Guided by elders and ancestors as he continues to embark on a journey of creating stories that enhance the Black and Transgender voice(s) showing the many diverse intersectionalities of blackness. An Indigenous Black South African man of trans experience, the Sun, Tsholovisions is inspired by his culture, his life story and his people. He is a visionary, actor, director and visual artist who wears many hats well. Visit tsholovisions.com



# Sharmylae Taffe-Fletcher LIGHTING DESIGN

Sharmylae Taffe-Fletcher is an emerging Black theatre artist with a passion for lighting and performance that spans her entire life. She is looking forward to bringing the Magic to more projects in the future. An alum of Obsidian's Mentor/Apprentice program, she is thankful for Obsidian Theatre's continuing support. Recent credits include: Jingle Belles (Smile Theatre); Welcome to My Underworld (Rare Theatre), Addicted (Watah Theatre), Alex the Artist (Fringe 2017), Bleeders (Watah Theatre), She, Mami Wata & the Pussy WitchHunt (Watah Theatre). She extends an abundance of gratitude to her supportive family and friends.

# MEET THE ARTISTS



## River Oliveira SOUND DESIGNER

River Oliveira is a queer, trans, and disabled theatre artist and musician based in Toronto. He has been working and training with a variety of companies as a creator, performer, sound designer, and emerging producer. Highlights include the Paprika Festival, Nightwood Theatre, and VIBE Arts. River's work focuses on themes surrounding transness, resilience, and community. They're especially interested in the role art can serve in healing and celebrations of personal identity. River is thrilled to be working on 11:11, and would like to thank the team for welcoming him into this space. Additional thanks to Max Fearon, Miquelon Rodriguez, and Steph Raposo, for encouraging and guiding him. For more information, visit riveroliveira.com



## Waleed Abdulhamid MUSIC

Waleed Abdulhamid is a Canadian Multi-instrumentalist, Composer, Vocalist, Music and Film Producer, and is known for his striking vocals, innovative bass technique, and his speed and precision on percussion. He has been an active member of the Toronto music scene since his arrival from Sudan in 1992 and is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards. He demonstrates his versatility playing 20 instruments and is most proud of his role as a mentor to acclaimed artists such as d'bi.young, Ngozi Paul and Zaki Ibrahim to name a few. Waleed is also a professor and faculty member of the Music Degree Program at Humber College.



## Mafa Makhubalo CHOREOGRAPHER

Mafa Makhubalo is a movement poet trained in folk forms from the Regions of African tradition, African contemporary, and Western-Contemporary. "I have been influenced by my understanding of dance as an accumulation of memory and the history of my culture." He has been actively involved in community engagement camps and arts education programs. During 2020-21, Mafa has been a mentor for the Vibes Arts Cohort 2, a resident choreographer with Ballet Jorgen Canada, Theatre Passe Muraille's 11:11 and TDT Pilot Episode 2021. Mafa was a participant of the Ontario-Quebec cohort program 2019-2021 presented by (La DSR) La danse sur les routes du Québec and Ontario Presents.



## Nalo Soyini Bruce SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Nalo Soyini Bruce is a Montreal-based artist, set, costume and prop designer of Caribbean origin. Her designs evoke rich associations through vibrant colour relationships, textured surfaces and varied materials. She uses this vocabulary to express underlying historical, cultural and psychological dimensions of stories enacted on screen and stage. As set elements are introduced or reoriented, or as outer and inner layers of costumes are revealed, the audience discovers the deeper layers of people, places and things. Visit Nalo's website: www.nalosoyini.com



# Lucy Wong ASSISTANT TO SET & COSTUME DESIGN

Lucy is an emerging costume designer for theatre and film. She is a recent graduate from the University of Guelph, majoring in Theatre Studies, where she was taught by Judith Thompson, and Sky Gilbert. As a Student Member of Associated Designers of Canada, Lucy has assisted in designing shows for various plays across Toronto and is currently a member of Nightwood Theatre's Young Innovators Program. Selected credits include: La Kid du COVID (directed by Katia Café-Fébrissy), Suburban Motel (University of Guelph Ensemble), A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare in Action), After the Blackout (RARE Theatre/ Soulpepper Theatre), Portia's Julius Caesar (Shakespeare in the Ruff). To see her work visit www.lucy-wong.com



## Laura Baxter STAGE MANAGER

Selected theatre credits: Elle (Theatre Passe Muraille); Sweat, Love and Information, Venus in Fur, seven seasons of Shakespeare in High Park (Canadian Stage); Black Boys, The 20th of November, Arigato Tokyo, Obaaberima, The Maids, The Silicone Diaries, Breakfast (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); Oslo, My Name is Asher Lev, My Night With Reg, You Will Remember Me, NSFW, God of Carnage, Clybourne Park (Studio 180); Actually (Obsidian/ Harold Green); The Story, Tails From the City, Happy Days (Common Boots Theatre); Trout Stanley, Little Pretty and the Exceptional, Age of Arousal (Factory Theatre); I Call myself Princess (Cahoots/ Paper Canoe/Native Earth); Soliciting Temptation, More Fine Girls (Tarragon Theatre); The Berlin Blues, Ipperwash (Blyth Festival); A Christmas Carol, The Story, Macbeth (Caravan Farm Theatre). Laura is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, 2005. Thank you to my amazing wife Shawn for all your love and support.

# MEET THE ARTISTS



## Ulla Laidlaw DIGITAL PRODUCER

Ulla Laidlaw is a theatre director, dramaturg, writer and filmmaker. Formally trained in Drama at the University of Guelph, she carries this training and sensibility into her film work; often partnering with theatre companies and working to bridge the forms. Previous credits in this vein include Confluence for Raven Spirit Dance that showed at Dawson City International Short Film Festival, Stray for Theatre Conspiracy (in progress), Waterfront (editor) for Radix Theatre, and multiple pieces for CBC's Exhibitionists. She is currently further exploring the boundaries of the film form with Canada Council funded project EXTINCTION with scenographer Margaret Krawecka.

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