

## SOULPEPPER ACADEMY RELAUNCHES IN JANUARY 2021

### SOULPEPPER ANNOUNCES CALL FOR APPLICATIONS IN FALL 2020 FOR THE RE-IMAGINED SIXTH ACADEMY INTAKE

**Toronto, ON – September 16, 2020:** Soulpepper Theatre Company is pleased to announce the relaunch of the **Soulpepper Academy**. Following a program review, and as a response to current health guidelines, the Soulpepper Academy will be a two term, five-month paid professional training program with a focus on **future readiness** and **ensemble theatre making** with an inclusive lens. A national search process will begin **this fall** for the sixth Academy intake, which begins in January 2021. Details about the Soulpepper Academy and the application process can be found at [soulpepper.ca/academy](http://soulpepper.ca/academy).

As part of the Breaking Ground season announcement, Artistic Director **Weyni Mengesha**, a graduate of the inaugural Academy class, reiterated the importance and the vitality of the paid training program and has championed its return. Soulpepper's ambition to be a radically inclusive civic leader and provide a supportive home for artists of all background and experiences, is essential to the company and to the success of the Soulpepper Academy.

*"Relaunching the Academy is one of the things I have been most passionate about since taking up my position at Soulpepper. As a graduate myself, I know the time I was given to experiment and take risks, while knowing I could be financially secure, allowed me to really grow and find my voice as a leader. In this time of uncertainty we have to invest in artists and the next generation to lead us into the future. We need spaces that allow these artists to feel empowered to reach for the impossible, to speak their truths, and help us find bold new ways to tell our stories. Ensemble building is a skill set that I feel we can uniquely teach at Soulpepper. We have an incredible faculty and I am so inspired by some of our new instructors that are coming onboard. I can't wait to meet the five new artists in the new year, teaching and learning from them will be crucial to our growth as a company,"* said **Weyni Mengesha**, Artistic Director.

The Soulpepper Academy will nurture and support a core group of voices that promise to shape the future of theatre in Canada. The training will provide dynamic young artists with a wholistic approach to cross-disciplinary theatrical training. They will be working and learning alongside some of Canada's leading artists including **d'bi.young anitafrika** (*The Sankofa Trilogy*), **Camellia Koo** (*August: Osage County*), Soulpepper Artistic Director **Weyni Mengesha**, Slight Family Director of Music **Mike Ross** (*The Secret Chord: A Leonard Cohen Experience, Rose, Spoon River*), **Lorenzo Savoini** (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), and **Djanet Sears** (*The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*).

The goal for the Academy is to equip the five selected members to **innovate** and **make theatre for our future**. The Academy is not simply a place of study but is a space for research, to pose artistic questions relevant to life and its multitude of experiences, and to make a meaningful contribution to the vitality of Soulpepper and to the national theatre ecology. While past Academies have involved separated training streams, this reimaged Academy will have a strong focus on ensemble creation through devised and collective work.

*"When I first arrived in Canada, it was immediately clear to me how essential The Academy is to Soulpepper. Not only was Weyni a proud graduate, but so many of the company's leading artists had either benefitted from the training, or been members of the teaching faculty. It was clearly something that sat right at the heart of the company, and we knew from the start that we needed to bring it back. Over this past year, we have worked hard to bring together the financial support needed to take the program to its next iteration, and we are deeply thankful to the Canadian Arts Training Fund, RBC Emerging Artists Project, and Sylvia Soyka for their support. With a renewed focus on ensemble theatre making, and a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, we look forward to welcoming five theatre makers of the future to our company,"* said **Emma Stenning**, Executive Director.

As with past Academies, the five participants will be paid a living stipend throughout the 20 week program, and will receive an Artistic Residency with the company following graduation.

Soulpepper is grateful to the RBC Emerging Artists Project, the Government of Canada through the Arts Training Fund, and the support of longtime donor Sylvia Soyka for their generosity and commitment to supporting the development of future generations of Canadian artists.

*"I am so pleased to support the revival of the Soulpepper Academy. The Academy has been such an integral part of the Soulpepper fabric and truly a gift to the entire theatre community across Canada. Theatre goes and makers everywhere and, of course, especially at Soulpepper, have been benefitting from its successes for years. It is particularly fitting, and perhaps telling, that it is under the artistic leadership of Weyni Mengesha, herself a graduate of the programme, that the Academy will return. It is also, in these singular times, a vote for and an investment in the future of live performance and a beacon of hope for all of us. Best wishes to everyone involved,"* said Sylvia Soyka.

Soulpepper is proud to have an educational and artist-training role in the theatre community, and the Academy has been a significant part in the development of generations of artists since 2008. Since the first class, the Academy has adapted to the artistic training needs of the moment.

Given the context in which the theatre community finds itself in heading into 2021 with the sector-wide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Soulpepper has adjusted the multi-year model into a condensed multi-term, five month program from January 2021 to May 2021. Classes, studios, and workshops are planned to be held in person in full adherence to public health guidelines, but will incorporate virtual learning where required.

Applications for the sixth Soulpepper Academy are now being accepted. The application deadline is October 11, 2020. Information about the Academy requirements, the program structure, and details on how to apply can be found at [soulpepper.ca/academy](http://soulpepper.ca/academy).

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Located in its multi-venue home, the Young Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto's Distillery Historic District, Soulpepper is Toronto's largest not-for-profit theatre company. Founded and guided by artists, Soulpepper has an integrated mission which includes: industry-leading youth and community outreach initiatives; artist training and mentorship programs; and a year-round diverse repertory season which is grounded in the classics and committed to the creation of new works, new forms, and innovative practices.

The artists and staff of Soulpepper and the Young Centre for the Performing Arts acknowledge the original caretakers and storytellers of this land - the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Wendat First Nations. We commit to honouring and celebrating their past, present and future. Soulpepper believes all people have a right to express their individuality, to experience creative freedom, to feel safe at all times, and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Tickets for Soulpepper Productions and Concerts start at \$25. Tickets are available by calling the Young Centre Box Office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting [soulpepper.ca](http://soulpepper.ca). All ticket prices include a Young Centre facility fee, service charge and HST. Pricing is subject to change.

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For more information please contact:

Milusha Copas, Communications & Media Coordinator, Soulpepper: [media@soulpepper.ca](mailto:media@soulpepper.ca)

Media Gallery:

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