

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANNOUNCING THE ARTISTS IN THE AWAKENINGS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Toronto, ON – April 15, 2021: Soulpepper Theatre Company and Toronto History Museums are delighted to announce the five selected members of the **Awakenings Mentorship – Augusto Bitter, Samuel Davilmar, Aria Evans, Jay Northcott, and Racquel Rowe**. The five artists will be working alongside the five Soulpepper Academy Artists — **Samantha Brown, Liz Der, Daniel Krmptic, Ahmed Moneka, and Natasha Adiyana Morris** — and will be mentored by **Weyni Mengesha, Esie Mensah, and d’bi young anitafrika**. The program will include a new focus on civic engagement, furthering participants’ understanding of the relationship between the arts and the City of Toronto.

“Awakenings is shining a light on the stories and history that belong in our city’s collective narrative. Soulpepper is proud to be collaborating to support artists in sharing these stories, and with the mentorship program, ensuring the next generation of artists play a key role in building our collective culture,” said **Weyni Mengesha**, Artistic Director.

Throughout the process of the mentorship, participants’ work and exploration will be documented by the City of Toronto, and the footage will be used for a mini documentary series chronicling the program. The first phase of the program will involve workshops along with the Soulpepper Academy, focusing on site-specific and immersive works. Workshop leaders include mentors **Weyni Mengesha, Esie Mensah, d’bi young anitafrika, Lucius Dechausay** and **Rachel Forbes** from the team who came together to create the inaugural Awakenings performance piece – [“A Revolution of Love”](#). Participants will also be receiving private workshop sessions with internationally renowned immersive theatre company **Punchdrunk** (*Sleep No More*).

The artists will all be creating site-specific performance art related works that speak to the anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-oppressive messaging behind the Awakenings philosophy. The program will include site-visits to Toronto History Museum locations: **Spadina House, Colborne Lodge, Mackenzie House, Montgomery’s Inn, Scarborough Museum, Gibson House, Fort York Visitor Centre, Market Gallery, Todmorden Mills, and Zion Schoolhouse**. This period of workshops and creation will culminate in a sharing hosted at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts to present the work thus far.

“Toronto History Museums is excited to be expanding its reach by creating programming that shares space and authority with community partners, such as Soulpepper Theatre Company. The Awakenings Artist Mentorship program gives new energy and vitality to the City’s historic sites and provides opportunities for BIPOC artists to be supported by established BIPOC artists,” said **Cheryl Blackman**, Acting General Manager, Economic Development & Culture, City of Toronto.

Toronto History Museums are a group of 10 museums owned and operated by the City of Toronto that bring Toronto’s history to life for residents and visitors. More information is available at www.toronto.ca/museums.

MEET THE ARTISTS

AUGUSTO BITTER

"I am honoured to be a part of the Awakenings Artist Mentorship. 'A Revolution of Love' allows me to dive deep into long-time curiosities about my processes and work in a non-traditional performance environment. I can't wait to connect with new artists and new spaces in a city that inspires me every day," said **Augusto Bitter**.

Augusto Bitter is a Venezuelan-born, Dora Award-winning performer, writer, facilitator and artistic producer based in Toronto. They have been a Resident Artist at Canadian Stage, Aluna Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, and hub14. They've trained with Teatro delle Radici, Manifesto Poetico, Canada's National Voice Intensive, Aluna Theatre's Interpretation Lab, and the University of Toronto. Augusto's first play, CHICHO (Pencil Kit Productions/TPM/Aluna) is being produced into a short film, and they're developing a second dance-theatre piece, Reina, with musician Y Josephine. Augusto has made three short video-poems, Reina (in isolation), cannibal and golden girl, with the support of TO Live, Toronto Queer Film Festival, and Glad Day Lit's Naked Heart Festival. They've been an artist educator with Soulpepper and the Paprika Festival, and facilitate creative-writing workshops across the GTA with Story Planet.

SAMUEL DAVILMAR

"To be awakened is to meet the unforgettable. We know pain to be unforgettable but we often forget, love and healing can do the same. I'm ecstatic to bring this narrative to Toronto History Museums and share my visions of Black triumph," said **Samuel Davilmar**.

Samuel Davilmar is Canadian born Dancer, Choreographer, and Actor. His versatility as a dancer/creator has granted him many opportunities within the performance industry. Samuel's choreography is a fusion of dynamic movement and storytelling. With strong experience in the commercial industry, he has had the pleasure of working with Juno nominated artist KAPRI. Acting film credits include Workin' Mom's on Netflix, Coroner on the CBC Network, and Lock & Key on Netflix. Selected credits include: Toronto Pride, Netflix, Fashion Art Toronto, Disney +, Universal Music Group Canada, The CBC Network, USA Network, and Inside Out Film Festival.

ARIA EVANS

"Awakenings proposes such a beautiful way to imagine the future; through the lens of love. I am excited to activate one of the History Museums with the life and energy of dancing bodies. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the team of mentors and really uncover the stories that are buried and waiting to come alive and be reimagined to be relevant and urgent today," said **Aria Evans**.

Aria Evans is a queer, Toronto-based, award winning interdisciplinary artist who's practice spans dance; creation, performance and film. Aria draws on their experiences with Afro-Indigenous and settler heritage to capture meaningful social and cultural themes through their interactive art. With a large-scale vision, collaboration is the departure point to the work that Aria creates under their company POLITICAL MOVEMENT. Advocating for inclusion and the representation of diversity, Aria uses their artistic practice to question the ways we can coexist together. www.politicalmovement.ca.

JAY NORTHCOTT

"I can't stop thinking about all of the possibilities the Awakening program has to offer. My imagination keeps going in so many directions, we have an opportunity to devise and present something unique to each person and each space. It's kind of a once in a lifetime chance and I can't wait to see what we create together!" said **Jay Northcott**.

Jay Northcott (they/them) is a multidisciplinary artist; director, playwright, burlesque dancer, and producer. Jay works to decolonize their art and practice with storytelling, movement, and gesture to create a foundation for their work. They continue to grow and make it their mission to uplift projects that put BIPOC Queer artists in the spotlight. They create and develop communities that are run by and for racialized and queer artist. With their Post-Britney2007/Hyperpop Aesthetic, Jay develops techniques and experiences that questions: Why theatre is still relevant?

RACQUEL ROWE

“As a performance artist when I saw the call for Soulpepper x Awakenings ‘A Revolution of Love’ I instantly knew this was a project I wanted to participate in. Not often does an opportunity to create site specific work at a Historic Toronto site present itself. As an artist interested in exploring the history of marginalized people and untold stories I cannot wait to embark on this unique opportunity,” said **Racquel Rowe**.

Racquel Rowe is a performance artist who explores the way history has shaped modern day depictions of Black women, culture and thus how these things affect her lived experience. Rowe is based in Waterloo, Ontario but hails from the island of Barbados where she draws most of the inspiration for her artwork.

SAMANTHA BROWN

“I am excited to explore new approaches. I am looking forward to expanding my own definition of acting and theatre. My hope is to develop an outlook that is expansive asking questions like: ‘If there were no limitations or fear based thoughts what could this become?’. I am excited for the unknown and the possibility,” said **Samantha Brown**.

Samantha Brown is a mixed race Anishinaabe and European settler storyteller, from Onaping in Northern Ontario. She came to Toronto to study in the Acting Conservatory at York University. Her past theatre credits include: Amy in the Arc theatre production of *Oil*, A Storyteller in the Soundstreams and Signal Theatre production of *Two Odesseys: Gállábártnit/Pimooteewin*, Joanna in the Soulpepper production of *August: Osage County*, Kilawna in the WCT, The Cultch, Persephone and Gordon Tootoosis Nīkānīwin Theatre production of *Kamloopa*, among more.

LIZ DER

“I am most excited to broaden my storytelling approaches and skillset in learning from an incredible and diverse cast of teachers and fellow attendees. I hope to come away with an increased confidence in my artistic voice and process and a robust practice to back it up,” said **Liz Der**.

Liz is a mixed-race performer and theater maker. She was born in Women’s College Hospital with her twin brother in 1994 and has called Toronto home ever since. She graduated from the University of Toronto with Honors, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Drama and History in June 2017. Liz is particularly interested in how theatre can be used to unpack personal and cultural complexities of identity and belonging. She is grateful to her Ying Ying, Granny, Mum, and Sister for their wisdom, tenacity, and stories. She thinks her Ya Ya, Granddad, Dad, and Brother are pretty great, too. Liz is beyond thrilled to be a part of Soulpepper’s 2021 Academy and can’t wait to get to work.

Past performance credits include: *Mi Casa de Incienso* (Soulpepper Queer Youth Cabaret), *meintrás tanto // 缺口* (Rhubarb Festival), *All’s Well That Ends Well* (Dauntless City Theatre), *Shadow Girls* (Pencil Kit Productions), and *Crave* (Pure Carbon Theatre).

DANIEL KRMPOTIC

"I am beyond thrilled to learn from and be challenged by the wonderful team at the Soulpepper Academy and to create new friendships with my fellow classmates. I hope to gain a newfound understanding of my role within the theatrical landscape and its future," said **Daniel Krmpotic**.

Born in Hamilton, ON, Daniel spent the majority of his childhood in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Zadar, Croatia. After returning to Canada to complete his secondary education, Daniel graduated with a B.F.A Performance Acting degree from Ryerson University.

Following this, he was accepted into the Stratford Festival's Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre, a two-year professional training program aimed at preparing actors for the demands of classical text & Shakespearean drama. During his training, Daniel had the opportunity to train with many wonderful Canadian instructors; as well as Kristin Linklater at the Linklater Voice Centre in Orkney, Scotland.

Upon completion, Daniel starred in The Festival's 2019 productions of *Othello*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Front Page*. He was set to star in The Festival's 2020 season as the *Marquis of Dorset* in *Richard III*, as well as appear in *Hamlet 9-1-1* and understudy in *Three Tall Women*.

Most recently, Daniel is excited to premiere in his first feature length film - *Albatross*.

AHMED MONEKA

"I'm excited to be a student again, to collaborate and learn from my favorite theatre-makers in Canada. I hope to improve my writing and directing skills and expand my connections to produce shows for Canadian audiences, and be acknowledged as a local artist," said **Ahmed Moneka**.

Ahmed Moneka was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq and arrived in Toronto five years ago and has since collaborated with many artistic institutions including the Canadian Opera Company, Tarragon Theatre, Aga Khan Museum, Tafelmusik, Driftwood Theatre Group, Toronto Jazz Festival, Koerner Hall, Modern Times Stage, Jabari Dance Theatre, Toronto Laboratory Theatre, Theatre Centre, Aluna Theatre, and TRIA Theatre. He is one of the founders of the band Moskitto Bar and is the creator and leader of Moneka Arabic Jazz – a 2019 Stingray Rising Stars Finalist at the Toronto Jazz Festival.

In Baghdad, Ahmed studied theatre at the Institute of Fine Art and then at the prestigious Academy of Fine Art. During his formative years, he also learned Afro-Sufi singing and drumming in the tradition of his family, who came to Iraq from Kenya in the 8th century. He was the first Black Iraqi to host a television program, the youngest member of the Iraqi National Theatre, and he played Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in England. Other performances with The Forum Theatre, Iraqi Theatre Company, Street Art Company, and Baghdad Theatre Company took him to Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, and many other festivals. He co-wrote and starred in the film *The Society* which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and resulted in his exile from Iraq because of its subject matter of homosexuality. His family was later exiled to Turkey and after waiting for four years the family has finally been reunited in Toronto, Canada.

NATASHA ADIYANA MORRIS

"Soulpepper is an artist-led company that continues to set the bar for quality production, developing original work, and training the next generation of theatre artists. I am excited about the commitment to inclusivity and future readiness. Not only was the performing arts directly affected by the global pandemic, theatre may have been one of the least prepared. We have been resisting change with more lip service than action and the figurative barriers are collapsing with great speed. From an ensemble framework, it is an honour to be a part of reimagining how we pave new paths for the longevity of this industry," said **Natasha Adiyana Morris**.

Natasha Adiyana Morris is a soft spoken, dramatic storyteller, who is drawn to wordplay and a healthy dose of satire. Born in Winnipeg and raised in Toronto's West End—in the most encouraging and full up Jamaican household—Natasha was able to explore her craft and hone her voice from a young age. Recognized for founding PIECE OF MINE Arts, a platform for presenting works-in-progress by Black play creators, she owes a great deal to the esteemed tutelage of b current, anitafrika! dub theatre, Obsidian Theatre, and Volcano Theatre. Natasha was most recently Dora nominated for the Outstanding New Play award for her debut theatre production, THE NEGROES ARE CONGREGATING (PIECE OF MINE Arts, Theatre Passe Muraille). The timely play touches on internalized racism and has been produced internationally including Canada, the United States, and Europe.

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For more information please contact:

Milusha Copas, Media & Communications Coordinator, Soulpepper: media@soulpepper.ca

Michele Simpson, City of Toronto: 416-392-4467, michele.simpson@toronto.ca

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