

Mosaic Theater Company Media Release

Ari Roth, *Founding Artistic Director* • Serge Seiden, *Managing Director & Producer*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MOSAIC ANNOUNCES KEY CASTING UPDATE FOR *CHARM*: LEAD ROLE OF 'MAMA DARLEENA ANDREWS,' INSPIRED BY CHICAGO TRANSGENDER ICON GLORIA ALLEN, TO BE PLAYED BY B'ELLANA DUQUESNE

*KenYatta Rogers to become Associate Director and understudy for 'Mama'
in an ensemble diverse in sexual orientation, as well as cultural, racial, and gender identity*

*New partners announced for discussion series: "**Compelling Dilemmas: Transforming Identity**"*

January 5-29, 2017

(Washington, DC) Mosaic Theater Company of DC announces **key casting update for the regional premiere of Philip Dawkins' groundbreaking, Joseph Jefferson Award-winning *CHARM* (January 5-29, 2017)**. After conversations with lead artists and important feedback from members of the local and national transgender community, the principal role of 'Mama Darleena Andrews,' the inimitable transgender African American woman at the helm of an etiquette class for transgender and gender nonconforming youth, will be played by **B'Ellana Duquesne (*The T Party*)**. KenYatta Rogers, originally slated for the role, will understudy Duquesne, and will support the production as Associate Director alongside director Natsu Onoda Power.

The casting change follows conversations initiated by Rogers, whose months of character research led to talks with Onoda Power and Mosaic Theater Company leadership about additional ways the production might support transgender artists. At the same time, Mosaic has been listening to feedback from members of the transgender community about this and other productions of *Charm*, and to conversations happening across the country on similar matters. Rogers and Onoda Power, together with Mosaic leadership, arrived at the decision to enlist Duquesne—a collaborator on *The T Party*, which Onoda Power wrote and directed—to assume the lead role of 'Mama.'

"Plays often come with political imperatives," shares Founding Artistic Director **Ari Roth**, "and we've come to understand that, at this moment, the politics of representation and empowerment of trans actors on our stages is of supreme importance. Our *Charm* ensemble already includes transgender actors and other contributing trans artists, but we've come to feel that the lead role of Mama Darleena

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Trans actor B'Ellana Duquesne to play lead in *Charm*; KenYatta Rogers new Associate Director—Page 2

really will be best served by a transgender actor, no matter how amazing we know KenYatta Rogers, a cisgender actor, can be in the part. Empowering a trans actor to drive the show is a way of undergirding the message of empowerment in this play. We can't wait to work with B'Ellana and we're grateful to both KenYatta and Natsu for their insight and heart—and for helping us become an ensemble that truly celebrates the empowering diversity of this play.”

Crucial questions about representation are at the heart of Mosaic's mission to tell stories from “the front lines of conflict zones.” Now, as often, Mosaic is at the center of one of the country's most important conversations about equity and access. The company will continue to play a role of *active listening*, and will promote a wide variety of community voices in *Charm's* expanding discussion series, appropriately entitled “Compelling Dilemmas: Transforming Identity.” Through this unforgettable script and kaleidoscopic cast, Mosaic will do its part to tell an honest story about an inspirational woman—and CELEBRATE the transgender, gender nonconforming, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Mosaic Theater Company takes seriously issues of representation at all levels of the organization. ***Charm's* cast and creative team is the result of a local and national search, and includes transgender, cisgender, and gender nonconforming actors, managers, consultants, and public programmers**, as part of an ongoing effort to authentically produce experiences that are welcoming and inclusive to our full community.

B'Ellana Marie Duquesne (*Mama*) Her life as Jack Eng included stints as a radio broadcaster, WFL football player, businessman, and high school drama teacher. In 2012 she revealed a long hidden personality of B'Ellana Duquesne when serving as hostess at MoMos, a DC restaurant. The visibility at “Homos at MoMos” led to additional performing opportunities including a role in *The T Party*, written and directed by Natsu Onoda Power. B'Ellana is very excited to be working with Natsu again on *Charm*. While now living almost entirely in female mode, she believes that freedom of gender expression is essential to a happy life and defines herself as gender-fluid.

Additional partners announced for discussion series: “Compelling Dilemmas: Transforming Identity”

In preparation for *Charm*, Mosaic has enlisted an expanded team of public programmers in the development of a discussion series that builds on recurring season themes of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA). “**Compelling Dilemmas: Transforming Identity**” will include a strong lineup of leaders from the LGBTQ community, health care providers, educators, and faith leaders. The series is supported by community partner **Whitman-Walker Health**, and will include open discussions on the politics of transgender representation in entertainment; voice and identity; healthcare and support services available to the transgender community in DC; LGBTQIA+ identity on local college campuses; and LGBTQIA+ representation in communities of faith. In addition to Whitman-Walker Health, Mosaic is working with **Dana Beyer** (*Executive Director, Gender Rights Maryland*), **Casa Ruby**, **Crystal Mann** (*Organizer, The Sanctuaries*), **Sarah McBride** (*Human Rights Campaign*), **Rev. Aaron McEmrys** (*Senior Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington*), **Rayceen Pendarvis** (*The Ask Rayceen Show*), **Trayce Redd** (*Black Youth Project 100*), **Rev. Erik W. Martinez Resly** (*Lead Organizer, The Sanctuaries*), and **Amanda Simpson** (*Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Operational Energy*), and others. Musician **AJ Head** will perform at the Opening Night celebration. The discussion series will

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conclude with a new installment of the acclaimed **Peace Café** series, featuring **Debbie Shore** (*Founder and Executive Director, Sasha Bruce Youthwork*) focusing on the state of housing services available to the transgender youth community.

Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company is committed to making transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones, building a fusion community to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. Dedicated to making our theater a model of diversity and inclusion at every strata, on stage and off, Mosaic invests in the new as we keep abreast of our changing and challenging times to ensure that our theater is a responsive gathering space, all the while nurturing and producing art of the highest order.

We complement our productions with comprehensive engagement through free pre- and post-show programming, an annual intercultural festival, like our “Voices From a Changing Middle East” series, and educational initiatives, including our touring “Mosaic on the Move.” We strive to foster a culture of listening and welcoming, embracing complexity and a multi-focal perspective. Our plays speak truth to power and to the private parts of our soul. In short, we make art with a purpose and strive for impact.

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Opening Nights for Mosaic Theater Company of DC’s second season:

Satchmo at the Waldorf: Monday, August 29 at 7:30 PM

Milk Like Sugar: Sunday, November 6 at 7:30 PM

Charm: Sunday, January 8 at 7:30 PM

Hooded, Or Being Black for Dummies: Monday, January 30 at 7:30 PM

Blood Knot: Sunday, April 2 at 7:30 PM

A Human Being Died That Night: Sunday, April 9 at 7:30 PM

Ulysses on Bottles: Monday, May 22 at 7:30 PM

The Return: Monday, June 12 at 7:30 PM

Meet Mosaic

Website: MosaicTheater.org

Facebook: facebook.com/MosaicTheater

Twitter: twitter.com/Mosaic_Theater

Instagram: instagram.com/MosaicTheaterDC

Blog: mosaictheater.org/blog