

# Mosaic Theater Company Press Release

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Night: Monday, January 8 at 7:30 PM

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## Mosaic's World Premiere Production of **QUEENS GIRL IN AFRICA** launches “Locally Grown Mosaic Initiative”

*Follow-Up Production to acclaimed **QUEENS GIRL IN THE WORLD** will be Mosaic Theater Company's contribution to the Second Women's Voices Theater Festival with performances running from January 4 to February 4, 2018*

WASHINGTON, DC—the fifth production of Mosaic Theater Company's third season will be *Queens Girl in Africa*, written by DC playwright **Caleen Sinnette Jennings**, staged by up-and-coming director **Paige Hernandez**, and starring Helen Hayes Award winner **Erika Rose**. This funny, moving, one-woman show tells the story of spunky New York-born heroine Jaqueline Marie Butler's teenage years in civil-war torn Nigeria as she navigates her new home, her budding activist beliefs, and her first love.

“*Queens Girl in Africa* exemplifies so many of our Mosaic values,” says founding Artistic Director Ari Roth. “It's a world premiere commission that honors a longstanding relationship with a writer of distinction—in this case, an esteemed African-American playwright who has been a beloved creator, educator, and voice of integrity in the DC theater community for decades, Caleen Sinnette Jennings. Caleen has an urgent story to tell about the forces pulling at a young woman's identity as she comes of age on the continent of her ancestors' origins. Yet she and her activist parents find themselves at odds with a Nigerian society increasingly divided by post-colonial chaos and long-standing tribal enmity. There is a very personal search in this play (Jaqueline's quest to find friends and to fit in), alongside a larger sociological quest—a family's aspirations to find a feeling of home amongst their native countrymen at a time when the country is falling apart. This epic quest is being brought to life by one of DC's finest actors, Erika Rose, in a stunning solo performance that encompasses dozens of characters (and dialects)! In addition, we are very proud that our contribution to the DC Women's Voices Theater Festival is a follow-up to one of the most celebrated productions of the inaugural Women's Voices Theater Festival, *Queens Girl in the World*.”

Jennings, Hernandez, and Rose are joined by an all-star design team: Deb Sivigny (set and costume design), Sarah Tunderman (lighting and projection design), and David Lamont Wilson (sound design).

Noted playwright Caleen Sinnette Jennings: “It's very moving for me to be giving birth to this incredibly personal new play surrounded by such talented and passionate collaborators – including director Paige Hernandez who helped usher forth *Queens Girl in The World*, which

was commissioned by Ari Roth at Theater J back in 2014. It's wonderful to be reunited with him and with a dear collaborator, Erika Rose, one of DC's most powerful and versatile actors. This semi-autobiographical play is a tribute to the huge, beautiful, complex Nigeria of the 1960s and how it made me who I am."

Director Paige Hernandez added: "Erika Rose is a tremendous and versatile actress whose heart and work ethic never cease to amaze me. I'm thrilled that we get to work together in this capacity. She and I were students together at the University of Maryland College Park so this connection is truly full circle. I'm also fortunate to have such an incredible design team. We've all worked together on various projects which makes our collaboration even more meaningful. I'm excited for the audience to see how much a thoughtful design can really make a solo show soar."

In addition to being Mosaic's offering to the Women's Voices Theater Festival, *Queens Girl in Africa* also formally kicks off the theater's new Locally Grown Mosaic initiative, which will commission new works by DC playwrights.

"Locally Grown Mosaic is designed to invest in our diverse artistic community right here in DC, to promote local artists and perspectives, and to produce works that jumpstart conversations about issues directly influencing our neighborhood," continued Roth. "We are thrilled to be launching this initiative with *Queens Girl in Africa*, which will highlight and champion the incredible talents of a local playwright, director, actor, and design team."

### **Additional Information about *Queens Girl in Africa***

**Opening Night:** Monday, January 8 at 7:30 PM

**Weekly Schedule:** performs Wednesday-Friday at 8 PM; Saturday at 3 PM and 8 PM; Sunday at 3 PM and 7:30 PM

**Ticket Prices:** \$20-\$65

**Special Performances and Post Show Discussions:** PWYC preview on January 4 at 8 PM; Weekday Matinees at 11 AM on January 11 and February 1. A full list of discussion dates and discussant bios will be available on [mosaictheater.org/discussions](http://mosaictheater.org/discussions).

ALL PERFORMANCES WILL INCLUDE OPEN CAPTIONS PROJECTED ON THE SET

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION VISIT:

[HTTP://WWW.MOSAICTHEATER.ORG/QUEENS-GIRL-IN-AFRICA](http://WWW.MOSAICTHEATER.ORG/QUEENS-GIRL-IN-AFRICA)

**VALET PARKING AVAILABLE AT 1360 H ST NE**

### **About Caleen Sinnette Jennings**

Caleen Sinnette Jennings is an actor, director, playwright, and a founding member of The Welders, a D.C. Playwrights' Collective, which won the 2016 John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company. Dramatic Publishing Company has published eight of Jennings' plays, and her work has appeared in seven play anthologies. In 2014, her play, *Not Enuf Lifetimes*, ran at the Atlas Center for the Performing Arts. In 2015, her play, *Queens Girl in*

*the World*, had an extended run at Theater J. In the same year, she was commissioned by the Kennedy Center to write a stage adaptation of Walter Dean Myers' novel, *Darius & Twig*, which was produced at the Kennedy Center Family Theatre and will tour in 2018. Jennings has received playwriting awards from the Kennedy Center and The Actor's Theatre of Louisville, as well as four nominations for outstanding new play from the Helen Hayes Awards. She is Professor of Theatre in the Department of Performing Arts at American University, where she joined the faculty in 1989. In 2003, she received A.U.'s Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award. She has been a faculty member of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Teaching Shakespeare Institute since 1994 and she was Project Manager on a 2016 NEH grant to the Folger entitled *Crosstalk: D.C. Reflects on Identity and Difference*. Jennings received a B.A. in Drama from Bennington College and an M.F.A. in Acting from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

### **About Paige Hernandez**

Paige is a multidisciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer and playwright. Paige is also known for her effective fusion of theatre, hip-hop, dance and education. As a critically acclaimed director and dancer, Paige's choreography has been seen all over the world, most notably at Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Forum Theatre and at Woolly Mammoth Theatre. She recently received an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council as well as two Helen Hayes nominations for choreography and performance. With her company B-FLY ENTERTAINMENT, Paige tours internationally with her original works including *Liner Notes*, *The Nayika Project*, *7th Street Echo*, *All the Way Live!*, *Havana Hop*, *PAIGE IN FULL* and her hip hopera, *Stomping Grounds*.

[www.paigehernandez.com](http://www.paigehernandez.com)

### **About Erika Rose**

Erika Rose last appeared at Mosaic Theater Company in their inaugural production, the world premiere of *Unexplored Interior (This is Rwanda)*. Other regional credits include: *An Octoroon*, *Mr. Burns: A Post Electric Play*, *Lenny & Lou* and *The Mineola Twins* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company where she is a proud company member; *The Father* at Studio Theater; *Falling Out of Time* and *In Darfur* (Helen Hayes Award) at Theater J; *Pretty Fire* (Helen Hayes Nomination) at The African Continuum Theatre Company; *The Brand New Kid*, *Knuffle Bunny*, *Oliverio!*, *As You Like It* and *Alice* at The Kennedy Center; *The Soul Collector* and *Stick Fly* at Everyman Theater; *The Book Club Play* and *Pippin* at Round House Theatre; *The Bluest Eye* at Theater Alliance; *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing* at The Shakespeare Theatre Company. Other theaters include: Project Y; Hangar Theatre; Arden Theatre Company; Philadelphia Theatre Company; Pioneer Theater. Erika studied at The University of Maryland, College Park and The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. [www.erikarose.com](http://www.erikarose.com)

### **About the Women's Voices Theater Festival**

The Women's Voices Theater Festival is dedicated to highlighting the scope of plays being written by women and the range of professional theater being produced in the nation's capital region. The Festival's debut in 2015 featured world premiere plays by female playwrights on stages across Washington, D.C. and was heralded as a landmark in striving for gender parity in American theater. Led by seven of Washington's largest theaters—Arena Stage, Ford's Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Studio Theatre, Signature Theatre, Round House Theatre, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company—the Festival leverages collaboration among regional

theater producers to create a platform for the nation's most talented and innovative female and female-identifying playwrights and their newest plays.

Presenters in the 2018 Festival include 4615 Theatre Company, Alliance for New Music-Theatre, Ally Theatre Company, Arena Stage, Baltimore Center Stage, Brave Spirits Theatre, Convergence Theatre, dog & pony dc, Folger Theatre, Ford's Theatre, Mosaic Theater Company, Nu Sass Productions, Olney Theatre Center, Pointless Theatre Co., Rainbow Theatre Project, Rapid Lemon Productions, Rep Stage, Round House Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Signature Theatre, Spooky Action Theater, Strand Theatre, Studio Theatre, Taffety Punk Theatre Company, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company.

Allison Janney is the Honorary Chair of the 2018 Women's Voices Theater Festival.

To learn more, visit [WomensVoicesTheaterFestival.org](http://WomensVoicesTheaterFestival.org)

### **About Mosaic Theater Company of DC**

Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company of DC is committed to making transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones, and 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. Visit us at [mosaictheater.org](http://mosaictheater.org).

### **Remaining Opening Nights for Season Three:**

**Tuesday, April 3, 2018:** *Paper Dolls*

**Monday, May 7, 2018:** *Hooded, Or Being Black for Dummies*

**Monday, June 11, 2018:** *The Vagrant Trilogy*