



The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

FAMILY THEATER

February 15–24, 2019

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts presents

A World Premiere Kennedy Center Commission

She A Gem

Written by Josh Wilder

Directed by Paige Hernandez

With Moriamo Temidayo Akibu, Aakhu TuahNera Freeman,
Heather Gibson, Alicia Grace, and Kashayna Johnson

Choreographer

Jocelyn Isaac

Double-Dutch Coach

Ebony Ingram

Scenic Designer

Debra Kim Sivigny

Costume Designer

Sarah Woodham

Lighting and Projections

Designer

Rob Siler

Sound Designer

Kenny Neal

Assistant Scenic Designer

Emily Lotz

Assistant Director

Michael Mobley

Production Stage

Manager

Rachael Danielle Albert

Casting Director

Michelle Kozlak

General Manager

Harry Poster

Executive Director

Mario Rossero

Producing Director

David Kilpatrick

Part of *The Human Journey Exploration*.

Performances for Young Audiences is made possible by Bank of America.

Additional support for *She A Gem* is provided by Adobe Foundation, The Clark Charitable Foundation; Mr. James V. Kimsey; The Macy's Foundation; The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation; Park Foundation, Inc.; Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; an endowment from the Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation; U.S. Department of Education; Washington Gas; and by generous contributors to the Abe Fortas Memorial Fund and by a major gift to the fund from the late Carolyn E. Agger, widow of Abe Fortas.

Major support for the Kennedy Center's educational programs is provided by

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The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in this auditorium.

PROGRAM NOTE

Welcome to the Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences's production of *She A Gem*. Jump into our story about three teenagers in Philadelphia on a double-dutch team whose worlds are changed when a pregnant teen from North Philly comes to town.

This world premiere Kennedy Center commission from playwright Joshua Wilder, in collaboration with artful director Paige Hernandez, is the first production to result from a commissioning project based on the 2018–2019 season theme, *The Human Journey*. *The Human Journey*, a collaboration between the Kennedy Center, National Geographic Society, and National Gallery of Art, invites audiences to investigate the powerful experiences of migration, exploration, identity, and resilience through the lenses of the performing arts, science, and visual art. Wilder's powerful piece draws on all aspects of the human journey to explore the lives of four young black women poised between their past and their future. This story asks the important question, what does it mean to be a part of a family and a community, and who will become the Gem?

We encourage you to stay for our post-show Deep Dive to help better unpack the themes of *She A Gem*.

If you have comments or questions about the show or would like to share feedback, please contact Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences at kctya@kennedy-center.org. We'd love to hear from you!

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for more information on our season!

@KenCenTYA

SYNOPSIS

Three teenagers—Krystin, Jaleesa, and Amber—form a double-dutch team in inner city Philadelphia to compete in their neighborhood pageant.

Then they meet a smart, pregnant teen from North Philly who can jump double-dutch almost better than any of them. Just as the girls anticipate learning about their futures, they'll learn something important about her past that affects them all.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Kashayna Johnson	Krystin
Heather Gibson	Jaleesa
Alicia Grace.....	Amber
Aakhu TuahNera Freeman.....	Topaz
Moriamo Temidayo Akibu.....	Symone
Alicia Grace.....	Amber
Whitney Geohagan.....	Understudy
Tamieka Chavis.....	Understudy



She A Gem is a professional production employing members of Actors' Equity Association.



UNITED SCENIC ARTISTS represents the designers and scenic painters for the American Theatre.

Please check houseboards for any program changes.

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

Josh Wilder (*Playwright*) is a playwright from Philadelphia. His work has been developed and produced at various regional theaters and festivals across the country including The Fire This Time Festival; New York Theatre Workshop; Great Plains Theatre Conference; the Kennedy Center; Oregon Shakespeare Festival; 2015 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference; Milwaukee Rep; Company One; and InterAct Theatre Company. Recent commissions include, *Love's Labour's Lost* for *Play On!* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival and *She A Gem* for the Kennedy Center. He is the recipient of the Holland New Voices Award, The Lorraine Hansberry Award, and an ASCAP Cole Porter Prize. Wilder is a former 2014 Jerome Fellow and the first national recipient of the Jerome Many Voices Fellowship at The Playwrights' Center. Wilder has been in residence at The Royal Court Theatre in London; Sundance at UCross; and served as co-artistic director at The Yale Cabaret

for its 50th season. M.F.A.: Yale School of Drama.

Paige Hernandez (*Director*) is a multi-disciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer, and playwright. As an AEA equity actress, Hernandez has performed on many stages throughout the country. She has collaborated with the Lincoln Center and has been commissioned by several companies including the National New Play Network, the Smithsonian, the Kennedy Center, and the Glimmerglass Festival. She is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council as well as two Helen Hayes nominations for choreography and performance. Hernandez has also been named a "classroom hero" by *The Huffington Post*, a Citizen Artist Fellow with the Kennedy Center, 40 under 40 by *The Washington Post*, and one of Six Theatre Workers You Should Know by *American Theatre*

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

Magazine. With her company B-FLY ENTERTAINMENT, Hernandez continues to develop and tour original work internationally. paigehernandez.com

Jocelyn Isaac (*Choreographer*) is a lecturer at Howard University, and holds an M.F.A. in dance from SUNY Purchase College Conservatory of Dance and a B.F.A. in dance from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she trained with the second company of Philadanco!, Danco2. Her dance training includes: Ballet Theatre of Maryland, Mark Morris Dance Group, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and the Contemporary Dance Company of Cuba. Performance credits: *The Chocolate Nutcracker* at the Lincoln Theatre, D.C.; *All Shook Up*, *Annie*, and *South Pacific* at the Jenny Wiley Theatre, Kentucky (dance captain); *The Christmas Spectacular* at La Comedia Theatre, Ohio; *FAME* at the SurfFlight Theatre, New Jersey; Mystic Lake Casino Hotel, Minnesota; Tiger Lily in Jenny Wiley Theatre's *Peter Pan*; June in *Chicago* at the Media Theatre, Pennsylvania; Dynamite and Lil Inez understudy in *Hairspray* aboard Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas; *Guys and Dolls* at the Olney Theater Center, Maryland; and *The Wiz* at Ford's Theatre, D.C. (dance captain). Isaac choreographed *UP! Dance Project*, D.C.; *DeRail the Underground Truth*, at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, D.C.; and for performances at Hershey Park, Montgomery College's Summer Dinner Theatre, and The International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference, Louisiana.

Ebony Ingram (*Double-Dutch Coach*) was born and raised on the south side of Chicago, Illinois. She began her dance training at Studio One at the age of 13. At 14 she auditioned and was accepted into the Chicago Academy for the Arts where

she majored in dance. While at the Academy, she was afforded opportunities to be trained by internationally acclaimed dancers and choreographers including Randy Duncan, Anna Paskevaska, Nick Pupillo, and many others. In 2009 Ingram moved to Washington, D.C., to attend Howard University where she majored in history with a focus on Africa and the diaspora. She continued her dance training independently and developed her voice as a choreographer through the many opportunities afforded to her including choreographing for the DC Hip Hop Theater Festival as well as dancing for DC Jazz Festival. Most recently she was awarded The Miya Hisaka Choreographers Incubator grant for her work *Altar*.

Debra Kim Sivigny (*Scenic Designer*) is a costume and scenic designer, company member at Rorschach Theatre, and a producing playwright with the Welders Playwrights Collective. Recent D.C. design credits include costumes for *Sing to Me Now* at Rorschach Theatre, *Small Mouth Sounds* at Round House Theatre, *Swimming With Whales* at 1st Stage, *John* at Signature Theatre, *Every Brilliant Thing* at Olney Theatre Center, and scenic designs for *Big River* at Adventure Theatre and *Twilight LA: 1992* at Rep Stage. In fall 2017 she wrote and set designed *Hello, My Name Is...* a critically acclaimed immersive event about Korean adoptees. Her fabrication work has also been experienced at Drink Company's *Game of Thrones* Pub and the Royal Wedding Pub. She received the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Set Design for *Forgotten Kingdoms* at Rorschach Theatre. She is a new faculty member of George Mason University's School of Theater. Debsivigny.com

Sarah Woodham (*Costume Designer*) *Behind the sheet* at Ensemble Studio

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Theater. She is also a recent graduate of Yale School of Drama, where her credits include *Field Guide*, *The Hour of Great Mercy*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and *Amy and the Orphans*. Other credits include *Styx Songs* (Yale Cabaret), *Phaedra's Love*, and *Adam Geist* (Yale Summer Cabaret). She holds a B.F.A. in fashion and design from The University of Trinidad and Tobago (Caribbean Academy of Fashion and Design), where she designed *An Echo in the Bone* for The Trinidad Theatre Workshop.

Kenny Neal (*Sound Designer*). Kennedy Center: *Digging Up Dessa*; Constellation: *The Master and Margarita*; Signature: *Heisenberg*, *John*, and *The Gulf*; Theater J: *Becoming Dr. Ruth*; Studio: *Straight White Men*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, and *Choir Boy*; 1st Stage: *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, *Well*, *Floyd Collins*, *Old Wicked Songs**, and *Bat Boy*; Taffety Punk: *Pramkicker* and *Mom Baby God*; NextStop Theatre: *Eurydice*; Flying V: *Brother Mario*; Pinky Swear: *Lizzie!*; Adventure Theatre MTC: *Frosty the Snowman*, *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook**, *Aladdin & The Wonderful Lamp*, *The Lion*, *The Witch & The Wardrobe*, *Jumanji*, and *The Emperor's Nightingale*. *Helen Hayes Award nomination for sound design.

Rob Siler (*Lighting and Projections Designer*). Kennedy Center: *Night Train 57* (Family Theater) and *Bhoomi* (Millennium Stage). Off-Broadway: *Occupied Territories* (59E59). Regional (select credits): *Damascus*, *Becoming Dr. Ruth*, *Disgraced*, and *Outside Mullingar* (Florida Repertory Theatre); *Erminia/The Enchanted Forest* (Opera Lafayette); *Brooklyn*, *Bonnie & Clyde*, and *Urinetown* (Monumental Theatre Company); *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Orphée aux enfers* (Maryland Opera Studio); *Floyd Collins* and *Into the Woods* (Weathervane

Repertory Theatre); and *Les Misérables* and *Red* (Riverside Theatre). Assistant: *A Delicate Balance*, *The Front Page* (Broadway); *Broadway Center Stage: In the Heights* (the Kennedy Center); *The Prince of Egypt* (Tuacahn Amphitheatre); *The Invisible Hand*, *In the Heights*, *Carousel* (Olney Theatre Center); and *Three Sisters* (Studio Theatre, DC). B.F.A. from Shenandoah University, M.F.A. from University of Maryland. Love and thanks to Colleen. www.silerlights.com

Emily Lotz (*Assistant Scenic Designer*) is a freelance designer based in Washington, D.C., and a current instructor at the University of Maryland, College Park. Credits include *She Stoops to Conquer* at the Chesapeake Shakespeare Company, *Peter & the Starcatcher* at The Redhouse, *Always... Patsy Cline* at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, *Princess & the Pauper: A Bollywood Tale* at Imagination Stage, as well as *Love and Information* and *The Wild Party* at the University of Maryland, College Park. Recent credits include *Three Sister/No Sisters* at Studio Theater, *Macbeth* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, *Cinderella* at Imagination Stage, and *Born Yesterday* at Ford's Theatre. For more information on Lotz's work please visit her website at emilylotzdesign.com.

Michael Mobley (*Assistant Director*) is excited to continue working with the Theater for Young Audiences department at the Kennedy Center. He is so grateful to be a part of an important piece of theater that puts a spotlight on lives we barely see on the stage. His one-act play, *Caroline's Bakery*, was a 2018 regional finalist for the John Cauble Award for Outstanding Short Play. His other one-act, *Freedom*, was read at the KCACTF Region 2 festival. His full-length play, *Modern-Day Saints, or The Sanctified Ones*, was developed at Frostburg

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State University. Recently Mobley was awarded a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts.

Michele Kozlak (*Casting Director*), in her 12th season as casting director, is responsible for casting the Kennedy Center's Theater for Young Audiences in-house and touring productions, as well as the New Visions/New Voices new play festival. In addition to her work with the Kennedy Center, she has also served as the casting director for the VSA Playwrights Discovery Program productions (2008–2011), and a casting consultant for the NSO Pops *Showboat* Concert, and the National Gallery of Art's productions of *Color's Garden*, *Forward, 54th!*, and *Who's in the Hopper*. Prior to her work as a casting director, she was the national touring coordinator for the Kennedy Center's Theater for Young Audiences program and then the manager of theater programming. Kozlak is currently working as a freelance casting director in the Washington, D.C., area and is the producing artistic

director and founder of Arts on the Horizon, a nonprofit theater company specifically designed for children ages 0–6 in Alexandria, Virginia.

Rachael Danielle Albert (*Stage Manager*) is thrilled to be making her Kennedy Center TYA debut with *She a Gem*. Other Kennedy Center credits: *Bright Star*. Regional credits: *Botticelli in the Fire* (Woolly Mammoth); *The Wolves* (Studio Theater); *Native Gardens, A Raisin in the Sun, Watch on the Rhine, Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End, and The City of Conversation* (Arena Stage); *Seize the King, Up Here, Ether Dome, and Peer Gynt* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Rich Girl* (The Old Globe); *Sylvia* and *Souvenir* (New London Barn Playhouse); and *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Stage 773). New York credits include: *The Roads to Home* (Primary Stages); *Maize & Blue* on Broadway; and *The Last Word* (NYMF). Founding member: Ubuntu Theater Project (Oakland, California). M.F.A.: University of California, San Diego. B.F.A.: University of Michigan. Proud AEA member.

MEET THE CAST

Moriamo Temidayo Akibu (*Symone*). Hello, you! Future Productions: Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company: *Describe the Night*. Past productions: Kennedy Center: *How to Catch a Star*; *Ping Chong and Company: Coffeehouse Chronicles #124* (La MaMa ETC); Shakespeare Theatre Company: *The Ruby Sunrise*; The Keegan Theatre: *Now Casting* (director); Mosaic Theatre Company: *Isms: A Tragicomedy*; Forum Theatre: *Love and Information*; Longacre Lea: *The Interstellar Ghost Hour*; and Smithsonian's Discovery Theater: *African Roots Latino Soul*. Dance credits: *Spring Awakening, Wake Up!* (MK Abadoo), *Temidayo, How*

do You Spell Femophobic? (Gesel Mason), and *A Curious Invasion: Governor's Island*. B.A. theater: University of Maryland. IG: @xo_temidayo. Thank you for reading!

Tamiaka Chavis (*Ms. T Understudy*) is delighted to be working on her first show with the Kennedy Center TYA in *She A Gem!* Select regional credits include performances with Mosaic Theatre Company: *CHARM*; Constellation Theatre Company: *Caucasian Chalk Circle*; Chesapeake Shakespeare Company: *The Tempest, Macbeth, Henry IV 1 & 2, A Christmas Carol, and Romeo and Juliet*;

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Ally Theatre Company: *Rabbit Summer* and *Clover*; The Hub Theatre: *The Late Wedding*; NextStop Theatre: *Middletown*, *Eurydice*, and *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*; Smithsonian Discovery Theater: *Mother Earth and Me* and *Lions of Industry-Women of Invention*; and Atlas TYA: *Stay Awake*. Select television/film credits include *Anacostia* (2015, 2017, and 2018 Emmy-nominated Daytime Digital Drama Series, and numerous Indie Series Awards and nominations including Best Lead Actress); HBO's *The Wire*; and *Torn*. She is a resident acting company member and teaching artist with Chesapeake Shakespeare Company and Ally Theatre Company. Chavis is a faculty member and graduate of The National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Aakhu TuahNera Freeman (*Ms. T/Ms. Mary*) is pleased to return to the Kennedy Center once again. Previous Kennedy Center productions include *Color Me Dark: A Story of the Great Migration North*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Great Quillow*, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. Some of her more recent work includes *Proof* at Olney Theatre Center and *Death of a Salesman* at the Ford's Theatre. Freeman has also appeared in productions at Arena Stage, Woolly Mammoth, Theatre Alliance, and Everyman Theatre.

Heather Gibson (*Jaleesa*) is making her Kennedy Center debut with *She A Gem*. She is a DMV native who received her bachelor's in theater from University of Maryland, College Park. Her theater credits include *Smart Girl* in *Judy Moody & Stink: The Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Treasure Hunt* (Adventure Theatre); *Abigail* in *Silent Cries of the Good Woman* (Bleu Royalty Productions); and Actor

in 2018 New Play Festival (Young Playwrights Theater). Her film credits include: *Eve in Space in Between* (252 Productions), *Student in Citizen Science Project* (Cortina Productions), and Chaina Brooks in *For My Man* (TV One). Gibson is beyond excited to work with the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts and be a part of such an amazing cast. heatheragibson.com

Whitney Geohagan (*Understudy*) is excited to be working on *She A Gem* with so many other talented black women. She is a recent graduate of the University of Maryland's Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies Program. While there, she was a part of several shows. Her credits include: *Tartuffe*, *Baltimore*, *The Wild Party*, *Melancholy Play*, *Swirl* (A Staged Reading), and *Love and Information*. She also has had several of her plays read both at UMD and at the Kennedy Center. She is humbled by the opportunity the Kennedy Center has given her to hone her craft. "Thank you Mom and Dad for all you've done to make this possible."

Alicia Grace (*Amber*) is a D.C. actor and University of Maryland alumna. Grace has performed in university productions such as *The Call*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Love and Information*, and *Eurydice*. In addition to her work at Maryland, Grace has had the pleasure to participate in various professional projects in the D.C. area. This is her first professional production.

Kashayna Johnson (*Krystin*), a Helen Hayes nominee, is a graduate from the Theater Lab's Honors Conservatory. She also studied abroad in England where she received classical training with BADA (British American Dramatic Academy) in their *Midsummer's Program*

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at Oxford University. She is more than thrilled to be making her official production debut with this beautiful cast of women in the world premiere of *She A Gem* by the amazing Josh Wilder. Josh, thank you for writing this piece and for creating a space for those hidden gems in our communities to be seen and heard. Paige, thank you for being such a

fierce director, mentor, and sister friend. And KC-TYA, thank you for this opportunity. Credits include: *Milk Like Sugar*, Mosaic Theater; *For Colored Girls*, Theater Alliance; *Romeo and Juliet*, Prince George's Shakespeare Theater Festival; *Stick Fly*, Port City Playhouse; *How We Got On*, Forum Theatre; and *Dark House*, Capital Fringe.

EDUCATION AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

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As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and cultivate the Citizen Artists in all the people we serve. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

Upcoming Performances for Young Audiences

March 15–24, 2019

The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963

Eisenhower Theater

Ages 9+

March 29–31

Voyagers: A Dance Among the Planets

Family Theater

Ages 5+

April 13, 2019

The Me I Want to Sing

Family Theater

Ages 12+

ABOUT THE HUMAN JOURNEY

The Human Journey is a collaboration between the Kennedy Center, National Geographic Society, and the National Gallery of Art, which invites audiences to investigate the powerful experiences of migration, exploration, identity, and resilience through the lenses of the performing arts, science, and visual art.

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