



presents

STEW

By Zora Howard

Directed by Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako
March 15 – 31, 2024

CAST

Kataka Corn* – Lil’ Mama
Varinique “V” Davis – Nelly
Shermona Mitchell – Lillian
Shaunyce Omar* – Mama
Lexi Warden – Lil’ Mama Understudy

CREATIVE TEAM

Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako[†] – Director
Parmida Ziaei – Scenic Design
Danielle Nieves – Costume Design
Connie Yun[†] – Lighting Design
Erin Bednarz – Sound Design
Jasmine Lomax – Intimacy Consultant
Quetzie Taborga – Casting Director
Thorn Michaels – Assistant Lighting Designer

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Anna Vraney* – Stage Manager
Isabella Marziello – Production Assistant

Theatre and Season Partners



STEW is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc www.concordtheatricals.com

World Premiere of STEW was produced by PAGE 73 PRODUCTIONS
(Michael Walkup, Artistic Director; Amanda Feldman, Managing Director; and Rebecca Yaggy, Director of Development)

Special Thanks:

Julie Renée Butler; Claude and Alex Howard; Michael Walkup; Kari Olmon; Page 73’s 2019 Interstate 72 Cohort; Colette Robert; Portia; Kristin Dodson; Toni Lachelle Pollitt; Nikkole Salter; the entire creative team of STEW’s NYC Premiere produced by Page 73 Productions; Justin Emeka; Collaborative Artists Bloc (CAB); Keiana Richárd; Deborah Stein; Marybeth Ward; and Dominique Morisseau.

For Tajai Rice.

And

For all of the women who raised me.

*Members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

[†]ACT Core Company member



CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE

STEW

By Zora Howard

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Mboligikpelani Nako

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PATRON INFORMATION

During the Show

The videotaping or making of electronic or other audio and/or visual recordings or streams in any medium, including the internet, is strictly prohibited, a violation of the author(s)'s rights and actionable under United States copyright law. For more information, please visit:

<https://concordtheatricals.com/resources/protecting-artists>

Audience members are cordially reminded to silence all electronic devices.

Please do not walk on the stage before, during, or after the show.

Food and Drink

Bar service and concessions are available in the lobby. Cash and cards accepted. No outside food or drink is allowed.

Group Sales

Groups of 10 or more can save on most productions. For more information, go to acttheatre.org/visit/ discounts.

Smoking Policy

Smoking is NOT allowed in any part of the building or within 25 feet of the entrance.

Firearms Policy

No firearms of any kind are allowed in any part of the building.

Lost and Found

Please contact the Box Office at boxoffice@acttheatre.org or call 206.292.7676. For Box Office hours visit acttheatre.org/visit/box-office

COVID Safety Policy

ACT's COVID-19 safety policies will continue to be reviewed and updated based on the advice of local health authorities, federal government guidance, and evolving circumstances.

Accessibility

ACT offers the Figaro MobiTxt® Closed Captioning System for audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing. This system is offered at all performances in most of our theatres. ACT is also equipped with the Williams Sound® Audio Equipment, which amplifies stage sounds with the aid of headsets and also provides sound for our Audio Description performances. Both devices can be reserved at the time of ticket purchase and/or requested upon arrival to the theatre at the Accessibility table (please ask staff for assistance).

Large Print Programs are available and can be picked up at our Accessibility table.

Audio Description and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation is offered at the following performances:

STEW, Saturday, March 30 at 2pm

The Lehman Trilogy, Saturday, May 11 at 2pm

ACT Contemporary Theatre Contact Information

700 Union Street, Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: 206.292.7676
acttheatre.org



A Letter from the Artistic Director JOHN LANGS

The Tucker women have been on our minds for a long time. We first fell for them three years ago when ACT's Curation Committee read the play together. "I never wanted to leave that kitchen" was a comment uttered by one of our committee members that echoes back to me whenever someone asks about this play.

"In the kitchen... our walls come down, our secrets are revealed, and vulnerabilities are laid bare."

Families and food are two of the defining influences that shape our lives, and bringing them together as both the backdrop and the substance of this story was one of Zora Howard's beautiful tactics in creating the powerful delivery system for the world she asks us to contemplate.

The sharpness of the writing captured us, but what drew us back to this script again and again was the clear reflection of humanity. The humor, the characters, the relationships, and the complexity and contradictions of family that are so recognizable. These all take place in the most universal of all locations.

In the kitchen, as we participate in the act of living our bonds are built, our walls come down, our secrets are revealed, and vulnerabilities are laid bare.

Looking into Mama's kitchen as shaped by Zora Howard we can see how one generation affects the next and, in our struggle to break the cycle of a previous generation, powerful echoes are heard and seen.

As a child I watched and listened as my grandmother shared all her wisdom with her three daughters in the kitchen while she prepared recipes handed down from the old country. Roll the dough and talk about the goings on in our town. Create the filling and gossip about the most recent church service. Boil the stock and share the fear that keeps you up at night. Evenly place the filling on the dough as you offer your compassion and experience. Cut the dough into squares and exchange your fellowship in loneliness. Twist the dough and crack the joke that dispels the preciousness and reminds you that humor is the best medicine. Twist the dough around the filling and offer guidance and grace. While the recipes are different, what is learned in the kitchen shapes our lives and echoes into generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Langs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.



A Letter from Director CLAUDINE MBOLIGIKPELANI NAKO

echo (from Oxford Languages)

noun

1. a sound or series of sounds caused by the reflection of sound waves from a surface back to the listener.
2. a close parallel or repetition of an idea, feeling, style, or event.

verb

1. (of a sound) be repeated or reverberate after the original sound has stopped.
2. (of an object, movement, or event) be reminiscent of or have shared characteristics with.

***I know all the words. I just don't remember the order.
Time gets a little... tricky. Or, it gets trickier with time.
-Mama, STEW [Act I, Sc. 1]***

On STEW...

Phrases repeat:

Each time with subtle riffs upon the tune.

Notes bent or squeezed or changes in the rhythm

Put emphasis on words you may have missed.

Great histories echo through these women's lives
Of dreams and fears and secrets held too tight,
Of breaking points. Of broken points. Of love
And grief and sorrow for a fractured world.

She prays for peace and echoes just grow louder.

Now listen. Do you hear the phrase repeat?
What's new this time?

- Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako

ACT has renewed our commitment to our mission, values, culture, and the creation of New Works. We are publishing them here to invite conversation and hold ourselves accountable.

OUR MISSION

ACT is a contemporary theatre where artistic ambition and civic engagement unite.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ACT Contemporary Theatre acknowledges that the land on which this theatre stands is part of the ancestral homelands of the **Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Duwamish, Snoqualmie, and Tulalip** peoples along the waterways of the **Salish Sea**. We honor the **29 federally recognized sovereign nations** within the state of Washington as well as **the many other unrecognized peoples in this area**.

As we gather and strive to share stories of our world with joy and clarity, **we honor with gratitude the original stewards and storytellers of these lands — past, present, and future**. We value the immense contributions, sacrifices and **resilience of Indigenous People** here, and fully **acknowledge** the profound multi-generational impact that colonization has had on Native people everywhere, including ongoing disparities, racism, and political and social **INVISIBILITY**. **To heal, we need truth and understanding that everyone actively participates in, together.**

This land acknowledgment is one small act in recognizing the importance of continuing to care for the land and acknowledge our important relationship with the original people of this place we call home who are still here. **We are all in relationship to each other.**

WE BELIEVE ACT STATEMENT OF VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

ACT believes in the power of theatre to change lives. For too long, the lives of our institution has focused on have been predominantly white and able-bodied. We acknowledge that ACT has worked inside biased systems that have continued to center only a small group of our global community. We want our art to be joyful and our work to have a spirit of adventure, so we commit to building thoughtful guardrails to bolster an environment where we can all be brave and buoyant together.

Developed by the Staff, Core Company and Trustees of ACT Contemporary Theatre, this statement of values and commitments was created to ensure the well-being of artists, collaborators, board members, and staff to engage in the spirit of an ever-improving process.

OUR VALUES

We are people-led and art-centered.

We believe in creating a safe space in which to do dangerous work.

We depend on each other for clear, honest, and responsible communication.

We believe that the building of excellent art is risky and joyful, and takes time.

We strive to ensure that artistic trust is baked into the way we work.



See a PDF of our "We Believe" document.

THE 2022 Tony Winner for Best Play! LEHMAN TRILOGY

by
Stefano
Massini

adapted by
Ben Power

directed by
John Langs

April 26 - May 12



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THE

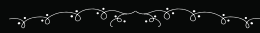


CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE

reENGAGEMENT PARTY



friday, april 19 @7pm



food, music, drinks, & more!

to purchase tickets, contact kristine.haroldson@acttheatre.org

THANK YOU TO OUR INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS!

As the leading voice for contemporary theatre in the Pacific Northwest, ACT is deeply grateful for the support of our donors. Thank you to these Institutional Partners and more who power audacious theatre and bold New Works!

Join ACT in creating bold, relevant theatre while elevating your business and offering your employees and clients exclusive benefits. Our corporate sponsor tiers begin at \$5,000 and provide unique marketing opportunities that place your organization center stage.

We can find a partnership opportunity that works for you. To learn more, please email Katie McKenna, Development Officer for Institutional Partnerships, at katie.mckenna@acttheatre.org.

We look forward to working with you!



Who's Who in STEW

CAST



Kataka Corn*
(they/them)
Lil' Mama

Kataka Corn is honored to make their ACT debut! Select

Credits: *Hedwig and The Angry Inch* (Yitzhak) at ArtsWest, *The Wiz* (Dorothy) and *Afterwords* (Jo u/s) at The 5th Avenue Theatre, and *Mamma Mia!* (Sophie u/s, Ensemble) at Village Theatre. Kataka is grateful for the support of their community and family.



Varinique Davis
(she/her)
Nelly

Grandma 4eva. Love to the dolls <3 Enjoy! linktr.ee/VDavis515



Shermona Mitchell
(she/they)
Lillian

Shermona Mitchell is an actor, director, and adaptor, transplanted in Seattle by way of Kentucky. In addition to working artistically for over two decades in Seattle, Shermona has enjoyed a myriad of opportunities both nationally across Washington, Oregon, and Pennsylvania and internationally in Canada and Turkmenistan. Shermona's work has been seen on stages at The 5th Avenue Theatre, Sound Theatre Company, ACT, Intiman Theatre, Washington Ensemble Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Anything is Possible Theatre, and theater simple, among many others. Shermona also serves as Co-Artistic Director for Sound Theatre Company.



Shaunyce Omar*
Mama

Shaunyce Omar holds a B.A degree in Theatre from

Southern University and A&M College. Her regional credits include: Seattle Rep, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Intiman Theatre, True Colors Theatre, Village Theatre, The Ensemble Theatre Houston, Alley Theatre, and TUTS. National Tour: *Menopause the Musical*. TV/ Film credits include *The Librarians*, *Last Seen In Idaho*, and *Portal Runner*. Her voice can also be heard as the character Madison Grant in the *State of Decay: Lifeline* video game. Shaunyce is the recipient of two Gregory, Footlight, Broadway World, and The 5th Avenue Theatre Subscriber's Choice awards. In addition to stage and screen work, Omar is a teaching artist and has taught in both public and private schools, arts organizations, and overseas as a Master Sensei of Gospel Music in Japan. "Lead With Love"



Lexi Warden
(she/her)
Lil' Mama Understudy

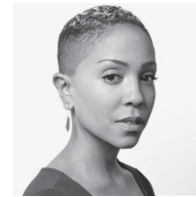
Lexi Warden is a theatre artist, educator, and

advocate based in Seattle. She is incredibly grateful to make her ACT debut amongst such a fantastic group of artists. Recent credits include Laurel in *The Flight Before Xmas* (Macha Theatre Works), Roxy in *ROE* (Whidbey Island Center for the Arts), choreographer for *Comedy of Errors* at Seattle Shakespeare Company, associate choreographer/Swing for *Miss You Like Hell* at Strawberry Theatre Workshop, and assistant choreographer for *Public Works: The Tempest* at Seattle Rep.

*Member of AEA

† Member of ACT Core Company

CREATIVE



Zora Howard
Playwright

Zora Howard is a Harlem-bred writer and performer. Plays include *STEW*

(2021 Pulitzer Prize Finalist; Page 73 Productions); *THE MASTER'S TOOLS* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); *BUST* (2022 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Finalist; 2022 L. Arnold Weissberger New Play Award Finalist); *HANG TIME* (2022 Creative Capital Award Finalist); and *GOOD FAITH*. Her work has been developed at Ojai Playwrights Conference, SPACE at Ryder Farm, The Lark, Primary Stages, and Cape Cod Theatre Project, among others. In 2020, her film *Premature* (2020 Film Independent John Cassavetes Award nominee), which she co-wrote with director Rashaad Ernesto Green, opened in theaters following its world premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. Zora is the inaugural Judith Champion Fellow at MTC, a 2022 Lilly Award and Helen Merrill Award recipient and is currently under commission from Seattle Rep, MTC, and Wessex Grove.

Erin Bednarz
Sound Design

Erin Bednarz works in sound, music, production, and performance. Awards: LA Drama Critics Circle, Gregory (Seattle, WA), Broadway World (Regional). Press mentions: Wall Street Journal, New York Times. Off-Broadway: *MAC BETH* (Red Bull, Hunter Theater Project, Seattle Rep), *The Convent* (Rattlestick). Regional: Sara Porkalob's *The Dragon Cycle* (Pittsburgh Public, American Rep, Marin Theatre Company, Center Rep, Diversionary, Intiman); *A Few Good Men* (Pittsburgh Public); *Teenage Dick*. Public Works' *The Tempest*, *Lydia and the Troll* (Seattle Rep); *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *The Thin Place* (ACT); *Choir Boy* (ACT/5th Avenue); *Wonder Boy*, *Spring Awakening* (5th Avenue); *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Seattle Children's); *Wild Horses*, *Two Mile Hollow* (Intiman). Teaching: Pomona College, Cal Poly, NYU, Atlantic Acting

School, Cornish College of the Arts, University of Washington. @play__pranks

Jasmine Lomax

Intimacy Consultant

Jasmine Lomax is a Cornish College of the Arts Original Works graduate working tirelessly to help shape the Seattle Theater Community into a healthy, creative, and collaborative environment. Some of their recent credits include *Trouble in Mind* (director) with the Burien Actors Theatre, *The Niceties* (associate director/ fight choreographer) with Intiman Theatre, *Tiara's Hat Parade* (director) with Book-It Repertory Theatre, *Pass Over* (intimacy director/ co-fight choreographer) with The Spot Sun Valley, *This Bitter Earth* (intimacy director) with Seattle Public Theater, and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (assistant director) with Book-It Repertory Theatre. For fun, follow them on Instagram (@jasmineissublime) for more information on upcoming projects and to take a peek at their work with Delta Dental of Washington as the Tooth Fairy!

Isabella Marziello

(she/her/ella)

Production Assistant

Isabella Marziello is thrilled to be joining ACT for STEW! Isabella's credits include; Village Theatre: *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, *Hello Dolly!*, *How to Break*, ArtsWest: *Q Brothers Christmas Carol*, Washington Ensemble Theatre: *Dream Hou\$e*, Seattle Children's Theatre: *The Boy Who Kissed the Sky*, *In the Forest Grim*, Seattle Repertory Theatre: *Emerald City Development Workshop*, *Bruce*, and *Ghosts*. Isabella holds a B.A. in Theatre Arts from University of Puget Sound. In her free time, she enjoys reading and hiking through the forest. She sends her thanks to her friends and wonderful fiancé for their constant love and support.

Thorn Michaels

Assistant Lighting Designer

Thorn Michaels has designed and assisted for The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Opera, Village Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT,

Santa Fe Playhouse, Kentucky Opera, Lincoln Center, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, San Francisco Opera, New York City Ballet, and others. She was the 2016 Gilbert Hemsley intern and holds an M.F.A. in lighting design from the University of Washington. For more about her work, please visit thornmichaels.com.

Claudine Mboligikpelani

Nako†

Director

Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako is a multifaceted artist whose work includes directing, teaching, performing, and collaborating with innovators who spark her curiosity. Nako is the writer and composer of the musical *Photosynthesis* (photosynthesismusical.com) which was developed at the 2023 JMF Writers Grove at Goodspeed Musicals and featured in Goodspeed's 2024 Festival of New Musicals. Associate directing credits: *Sweat* (ACT); *Songs for a New World*, *Mamma Mia!* (Village). Performance credits: *The Crucible*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Dracula*, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play* (ACT); *As You Like It*, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Seattle Rep); *Little Bee* (Book-It); *Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White* (SCT); *My Heart is the Drum*, *Big River* (Village); and *A Bright Room Called Day* (Williams Project). Film/TV: *Raising Dion*, *Outside In*, *Everything Sucks!* (Netflix); *Three Busy Debras* (HBO Max); *Grimm* (NBC). Nako is a proud member of AEA & SAG-AFTRA.

Danielle Nieves (she/her)

Costume Designer

Danielle Nieves is thrilled to be back with the wonderful artists at ACT. Her work has been seen previously at ACT (*A Case for the Existence of God*, *Every Brilliant Thing*), The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Village Theatre, The Old Globe, Dallas Theater Center, South Coast Repertory, Goodman Theatre, St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and Cleveland Playhouse. Off-Broadway credits: *Pity in History*, *No End of Blame*, *Gertrude The Cry*, and *Lovesong of the Electric Bear* for PTP/NYC at the Atlantic Stage 2. Danielle

holds an M.F.A. in Costume Design from the University of California Irvine and a curatorial certification for Japanese and Western costumes from the Kyoto Costume Institute. daniellenieves.com

Quetzie Taborga (they/them)

Casting Director

Quetzie Taborga is a Neurodivergent, Queer, Fat Latine artist and healer with a cute lil patchy beard. They are a storyteller, activist, and educator who revels in the power and impact of works written for and by the historically oppressed. They have worked locally with Seattle Opera, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Village Theatre, Seattle Rep, and others, as well as regional theatres across the country. They are currently in the process of obtaining their master's degree in Couple and Family Therapy, specializing in Drama Therapy. "We must be impatient for change. Let us remember that our voice is a precious gift and we must use it." - Claudia Flores

Anna Vraney* (she/her)

Stage Manager

Anna Vraney is beyond thrilled to be back at ACT for this production. Some previous credits include *Choir Boy* (ACT), *Hello Dolly!* (Village Theatre), *Goodnight Moon* (Seattle Children's Theatre), *Into the Woods* (The 5th Avenue Theatre), *Shout, Sister, Shout!*, *The Children* (Seattle Repertory Theatre), and *Always... Patsy Cline* (Taproot).

Connie Yun† (she/her)

Lighting Designer

Connie Yun is pleased to return to ACT where she last designed *A Case for the Existence of God*. Recent Seattle area designs include *Samson and Delilah* for Seattle Opera and the world premiere of *The Boy Who Kissed the Sky* for Seattle Children's Theatre. Other recent designs include *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato* for Curtis Opera Theatre, *The Marriage of Figaro* at Portland Opera and New Orleans Opera, *The Royal Shepherd* at Orpheus PDX, and *La Cenerentola* at Kentucky Opera. She has also designed

Who's Who in STEW

* Member of AEA

† Member of ACT Core Company

for Seattle Rep, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Tacoma Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Palm Beach Opera, and Madison Opera. Upcoming engagements include *Madame Butterfly* for Opera Philadelphia, *Maria de Buenos Aires* for Florentine Opera, and *Salome* for Des Moines Metro Opera. Connie is a Core Company member for ACT, member of United Scenic Artists Local USA-829, and mentor with the ETC Fred Foster Student Mentorship Program. connieyun.com

been a scenic and production designer with many Seattle theaters including ACT, Village Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, ArtsWest, Taproot Theatre, and Seattle Public Theater, among others. When not designing, Parmida performs, choreographs and teaches as a movement artist. Parmida has been the recipient of multiple residencies including the Summer of 2023 Body, Space, Time Residency at UW Department of Dance and 2022 Northwest Creator Residency at Village Theatre. parmidaziaei.com

ACT operates under agreements with the following:



This theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Parmida Ziaei (she/her)

Scenic Designer

Parmida Ziaei is an Iranian multidisciplinary artist and designer based in Seattle and the co-founder of Seda Iranian Theatre Ensemble. Parmida has

"In 2020, we launched Acts On Stage with a focus to center the talents, voices, and works of People of Color and Creatives of Faith.

We are on a mission to **Change Lives Dramatically** through programs & performances that elevate the arts, artists, and all audiences!

Our vision is to be a driving force behind a new era renaissance where creativity creates social change!"

Acts ON STAGE
Theater Company

Executive Director
Michelle Lang-Raymond & Artistic Director
Isiah Anderson, Jr.

Get to know us!
www.ActsOnStage.com

Introducing ACT's community partner for STEW, Acts on Stage

ENGAGE THE SAGE

student matinees

Let ACT
Contemporary
Theatre's stage be
your classroom!

ACT's unique **Engage the Stage** program invites students to experience a theatre production in a **dynamic learning environment**. Recommended for 6-12th grade and college classrooms.

Explore the magic and the making of theatre through **up-close conversations** with theatre professionals about their craft, careers, and connection to the play.

- » Hear **directly from the actors and members of the creative team** about their artistic process
- » Watch an **excerpt from our professional production** to see them in action with full costumes, set, and production elements
- » Discuss further in a **deep-dive Q&A**

Energize your classroom with experiential learning and new perspectives. **Ignite passion and curiosity in the arts** as we actively demonstrate how theatre activates your curriculum – and your life.

Engage the Stage introduces students to different approaches to creative pathways, and shows how culture, academics, art, tech, and science collaborate in **powerful storytelling**.

STEW



The practicality and poetry of metaphor: *As 3 generations of women cook together on stage, how do we bring out the metaphors of recipes and legacy while also actually cooking stew?*

March 26 at 11am



The theatricality of history: *How do 3 actors create an epic sense of scale and bring history alive in a way that only theatre can?*

May 7 at 11am

Tickets: \$12/student, 1 free chaperone per 10 6-12th grade students. Additional chaperone tickets are \$12. Contact groups@acttheatre.org to reserve your tickets.

Students and chaperones are invited to use their Engage the Stage ticket to return and see a regular public performance for free! (Subject to availability)



ACT Staff

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Shaunyce Omar as Mama in STEW; image by Howard Shack

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Director of People and Culture

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Theresa Oborn
Stephanie Watson
Props Artisans

Kelly Caffey
Stitcher

Jeremy Hollis
Scenic Assistant

Marty Sisk
Electrician

Kevin Wilson
Painter

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Avery Clark
Khanh Doan
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Keiko Green
Rachel Guyer-Mafune

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Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako
Brandon O'Neill
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Boiling Down *STEW*

An Interview
with Claudine
Mboligikpelani Nako



You've been on the ACT stage in quite a few roles. How does it feel to make your directorial debut at ACT?

I had a great time working with John Langs as the Associate Director of ACT's 2022 production of *Sweat*, so the offer to helm my own production was an incredibly exciting opportunity that I couldn't pass up. I've learned so much from the challenging variety of roles I've been able to play at ACT both on stage and off in my work as a Core Company member. I am delighted to add "Director" to that list of roles, and I'm deeply moved that I get to make my debut with this beautiful play.



Varinique "V" Davis, Shaunyce Omar, Kataka Corn, and Shermona Mitchell in *STEW*.

Could you tell us about how you balance life as a writer, director, and actor? What attracts you to each role?

As soon as I figure that out, I'll let you know! Balance is elusive for many folks who make their living as artists. We tend to cycle back and forth between seasons of abundance and dry spells, and the patchwork nature of our employment can make stability a real challenge. I love the specificity, creativity, and collaboration that is required to do this work well. I'm attracted to projects that pique my curiosity, and I especially love taking on roles where I see an opportunity to subvert expectations.

How does *STEW* speak to you?

STEW speaks to the complex humanity of Black womanhood. It doesn't limit or simplify our experience. These women are intelligent, passionate, joyful, curious, afraid, hopeful, vulnerable, courageous, loving, and yes angry--because why the hell shouldn't they be? Zora Howard gives us this rich language with many, many layers of meaning. Each time I read this play I discover another moment in which I understand something new about these characters that I am convinced I already know so well, and I'm humbled to have them remind me that there is always more to learn.

You put the *STEW* cast together with the casting director. What is so exciting about this cast?

Each person in this cast is a smart artist whose individual and collaborative approach to storytelling excites me. I was looking for actors who were very willing to play. As you'll see in this production, things aren't quite what they seem in the world I've envisioned for this piece, so I really needed people who understood the assignment and these actors absolutely do.

What's next for you?

Putting my writer's hat back on! My new musical *Photosynthesis* was featured in Goodspeed's 2024 Festival of New Musicals in January. My next goal is to record a demo album and mount a workshop production. The story, set in Seattle's Central District, centers on a Black woman searching for light in dark times. For news and updates about this project, please sign up for the mailing list at photosynthesismusical.com!

Scenes from the STEW Meet & Greet

Photos by McKenna Deen

