



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONTACT:

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ROUND HOUSE THEATRE KICKS OFF 47TH SEASON
WITH ACCLAIMED NIGERIAN-AMERICAN DRAMA

SOJOURNERS

WRITTEN BY MFONISO UDOFIA

DIRECTED BY VALERIE CURTIS-NEWTON

September 11 – October 6 at Round House Theatre

Bethesda, Md. (August 6, 2024) – Round House Theatre kicks off its 2024-2025 Season with an acclaimed Nigerian-American drama, *Sojourners*, written by Mfoniso Udofia and the first play in her nine-part Ufot Cycle. Directed by Valerie Curtis-Newton, *Sojourners* is a testament of the complexity of the American Dream through the lens of Nigerian culture. Press Night is on Monday, September 16 at 7:30pm. **Please see below for complete program details and ticket information.**

Abasiama and her husband Ukpong are Nigerian immigrants studying and living in Texas in the 1970s. Ukpong is exhilarated by the promises of America, but Abasiama is homesick and frustrated by Ukpong's frequent absences. As Abasiama struggles with the physical pain of her pregnancy, the demands of work and schooling, the isolation of being away from her family, and the uncertainty of her future, an unexpected community inspires her to forge her own path. The first play in Mfoniso Udofia's epic nine-part Ufot Cycle depicting the Nigerian-

American experience, *Sojourners* is a “moving and powerful” (*The New York Times*) testament to the complexity of the American dream.

“We’re ecstatic to kick off the 2024-2025 season with Mfoniso Udofia’s *Sojourners*,” says **Artistic Director Ryan Rilette**. “Mfoniso’s 9-play Ufot Cycle is one of the most ambitious, epic, and thrilling things happening in American theater today. We are excited to officially introduce the cycle with *Sojourners*, the origin story, after developing *Adia & Clora Snatch Joy*, one of the later plays, in our National Capital New Play Festival in 2023. We have also commissioned another of the Cycle plays, so we expect that *Sojourners* will be the first of many Mfoniso plays that you will see at Round House in the coming years.”

“I’m so excited to work on Mfoniso’s beautiful play,” says **Director Valerie Curtis-Newton**. *Sojourners* is a story about an immigrant, Abasiama, who is caught in the tug-of-war between loyalty to Nigeria and the lure of the American Dream. We are asking to imagine the feeling of stepping off a plane in a new country. Everything is unfamiliar. So different from your expectations. Everything is part real and part illusion, just like the life she was promised. Abasiama learns that the world is taut and full of dualities: Dreams vs. Reality; Freedom vs. Encumbrance; and Duty vs. Choice. She must discover her own way – combining the old ways and the new.”

The brilliant cast includes **Opa Adeyemo** (*The First Deep Breath* at Geffen Playhouse), **Renea S. Brown** (*The Mountaintop* and *Nollywood Dreams* at Round House Theatre), **Kambi Gathesha** (*What to Send Up When it Goes Down* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company and *The Bakkhai* at Baltimore Center Stage), and Billie Krishawn (*Metamorphoses* at Folger Theatre and *Angels in America* at Arena Stage).

The cast is joined by a dynamic creative team, which includes Scenic Designer **Paige Hathaway**, Costume Designer **Ivania Stack**, Lighting Designer **Porsche McGovern**, Sound Designer **Kenny Neal**, Properties Coordinator **Chelsea Dean**, Dialect Coach **Dawn-Elin Fraser**, Ibibio Consultants

Francesca and Ekemini Ekpo, Casting Director **Sarah Cooney**, Dramaturg **Naysan Mojgani**, and Production Stage Manager **Jazzy Davis**.

Tickets may be purchased by calling 240.644.1100 or ordering online at RoundHouseTheatre.org. Round House Theatre is located at 4545 East-West Highway, one block from Wisconsin Avenue and the Bethesda station on Metro's Red Line.

ARTIST INFORMATION

Mfoniso Udofia (Playwright) is a first-generation Nigerian-American storyteller and educator. She attended Wellesley College and obtained her MFA from the American Conservatory Theater [ACT]. While at ACT, she co-pioneered The Nia Project, which provided artistic outlets for San Francisco youth.

Followed by the 2024 production of *Sojourners* at Round House Theatre, both of her plays, *Sojourners* and *The Grove*, will be produced by the Huntington Theatre in 2024-2025. *Sojourners*, *Runboyrun*, *Her Portmanteau*, and *In Old Age* have been seen at New York Theatre Workshop, American Conservatory Theater, Playwrights Realm, Magic Theater, National Black Theatre, Strand Theater, and Boston Court. She's the recipient of the 2021 Horton Foote Award, the 2017 Helen Merrill Playwright Award, the 2017-18 McKnight National Residency and Commission, and is a member of New Dramatists.

Mfoniso is currently commissioned by the Huntington Theatre, Round House Theatre, Hartford Stage, Denver Center, ACT, and South Coast Repertory. Her plays have been developed by Manhattan Theatre Club, ACT, McCarter Theatre, OSF, New Dramatists, Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor, Hedgebrook, Sundance, Space on Ryder Farm, and more.

Since 2018, Mfoniso has been working extensively in television. She has written on such acclaimed shows as *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix; *A League of Their Own* on Amazon; *Let the Right One In* on Showtime; and *Pachinko* (Peabody Award), *Little America*, and *Lessons in*

Chemistry (WGA Nomination), all on Apple TV+. She has also developed films for HBO, Legendary, and Amazon.

Valerie Curtis-Newton (Director) is the Head of Directing and Playwriting at the University of Washington's School of Drama. Valerie also serves as the Artistic Director for The Hansberry Project. Her recent work includes *Trouble in Mind* at The Guthrie Theater; *Selling Kabul* and *Nina Simone 4 Women* at Seattle Repertory Theatre; *Wedding Band* and *Black Nativity* at Intiman Theatre; *Last Night and The Night Before* at both Denver Center Theatre and Steppenwolf; *Blues For An Alabama Sky* at Playmakers Repertory Theatre; *Clyde's* and *The Mountaintop* at ArtsWest, among others. Valerie holds a BA from Holy Cross College and an MFA from the University of Washington.

CAST INFORMATION (ALPHABETICAL)

Opa Adeyemo (Ukpong) is a graduate from the Juilliard School of Drama. He recently starred in *The First Deep Breath* at Geffen Playhouse under the direction of Steven H. Broadnax. He shot a supporting role on one of the final episodes of *The Good Fight* and starred in the short film *The Extenders*, directed by Derrick Sanders. When he's not working on plays or for the camera, you can find him with your ears. Opa loves the art of song and is working day in and out to share this love with the world.

Renea S. Brown (Moxie) is excited to return to Round House Theatre after winning the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Performer in a Play as Camae in *The Mountaintop!* Previous Round House credits include Dede in *Nollywood Dreams*. DC credits include *Metamorphoses*, *Our Verse in Time to Come*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Folger Theatre; *Tempestuous Elements* and *Change Agent* at Arena Stage; *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* at Shakespeare Theatre Company; *Love Factually* at The Kennedy Center; and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* at Chesapeake Shakespeare Theatre Company; Regional credits include *The Wolves* at McCarter Theatre; *Othello*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Twelfth Night* at Island Shakespeare Festival; and

Much Ado About Nothing and *A King and No King* at American Shakespeare Center. MFA: Academy of Classical Acting. Instagram/TikTok: @Therealdarklady

Kambi Gathesha (Disciple) is making his Round House Theatre debut. DC area credits include *What to Send Up When it Goes Down* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company and *The Bakkhai* at Baltimore Center Stage. Broadway credits include *The Music Man*, where he served as assistant to choreographer Warren Carlyle. Off-Broadway credits include *What to Send Up When it Goes Down* at Playwrights Horizons, the Public, and ART New York. Regional credits include *Mlima's Tale* at Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and *Big Love* at Williamstown Theatre Festival. Film and television credits include the Amazon Prime series *Big Dogs*.

Billie Krishawn (Abasiama) is a multi-disciplinary artist, activist-advocate, and two-time Helen Hayes Award winner. Recent credits include *Metamorphoses* at Folger Theatre; *The Sensational Sea Mink-ettes* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company; *Till Trilogy* at Mosaic Theatre Company; *Angels in America* at Arena Stage; *JUMP* at Everyman Theatre; *Blood at the Root* at Theatre Alliance; *The Joy That Carries You* at Olney Theatre; *Until the Flood* at Studio Theatre; *HERstory* at The Kennedy Center; *Melancholy Play* at Constellation Theatre; *Airness* with 1st Stage and Keegan Theatre; and *Something Moving* at Ford's Theatre. Television credits include *Water in a Broken Glass* on Prime Video. Instagram: @AbsoluteReality
| www.BillieKrishawn.com

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Sojourners

Written by Mfoniso Udofia

Directed by Valerie Curtis-Newton

Sep 11 – Oct 6, 2024

CAST LIST (alphabetical order):

Opa Adeyemo: Ukpong

Renea S. Brown: Moxie

Kambi Gathesha: Disciple

Billie Krishawn: Abasiama

WHERE:

Round House Theatre, 4545 East-West Highway in Bethesda (one block from Wisconsin Ave. and Metro's Bethesda station). For directions, parking, and public transportation info, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/Visit-Us/.

ABOUT THE PLAY:

Abasiama and her husband Ukpong are Nigerian immigrants studying and living in Texas in the 1970s. Ukpong is exhilarated by the promises of America, but Abasiama is homesick and frustrated by Ukpong's frequent absences. As Abasiama struggles with the physical pain of her pregnancy, the demands of work and schooling, the isolation of being away from her family, and the uncertainty of her future, an unexpected community inspires her to forge her own path. The first play in Mfoniso Udofia's epic nine-part Ufot Cycle depicting the Nigerian-American experience, *Sojourners* is a "moving and powerful" (*The New York Times*) testament to the complexity of the American dream.

DATES AND TIMES:

Sojourners runs from September 11 to October 6, 2024. Performances are Tuesday through Thursday at 7:30 pm, Friday and Saturday at 8:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 pm.

Audio described performance: Saturday, September 21 at 2:00 pm

Open captioned performance: Saturday, September 28 at 2:00 pm

Mask-required performances: Tuesday, October 1 at 7:30 pm; Saturday, October 5 at 2:00 pm

TICKETS:

Tickets can be purchased by calling 240.644.1100, ordering online at RoundHouseTheatre.org, or visiting the box office. Available ticket discounts include:

- **Free Play** – free tickets for students ages 13 through college: Round House Theatre's Free Play initiative ties into our greater strategy to develop theatre audiences of

tomorrow by providing rich, meaningful arts experiences today. For more information, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/FreePlay or email Education@RoundHouseTheatre.org.

- **On the House** community ticket access program: Round House's next step to remove barriers that can make it difficult for some members of our community to experience our work is On the House, which provides complimentary group tickets to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and community-serving organizations with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. For more information, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/On-Stage/On-TheHouse or email Community@RoundHouseTheatre.org.

- **Pay-What-You-Can performances:** PWYC tickets go on sale online or by phone only (no walk-up sales) beginning three weeks before the first performance of each show. The patron decides the admission price. Limit of two tickets per order. PWYC tickets are available for performances on Wednesday, September 11 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, September 14 at 2:00 pm and are subject to availability.

- **Blue Star Theatre Program:** Active-duty military personnel, veterans, and their immediate family qualify for a \$10 discount off the single ticket price. Learn more at RoundHouseTheatre.org/On-Stage/Tickets.

- **2-For-1 Tuesday:** For all Tuesday performances of *Sojourners*, all seats are buy one, get one free. 2-for-1 Tuesday tickets are available online or by phone (240.644.1100) with promo code TWOFORONE. Discounts may not be combined. Not valid on previously purchased tickets.

- **Group Sales:** Groups of 10 or more can save 10% off the single ticket price and are exempt from single ticket fees. These tickets must be reserved and purchased in advance by calling 240.644.1100 or emailing GroupSales@RoundHouseTheatre.org.

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE HEALTH & SAFETY POLICIES

Round House Theatre no longer requires that audience members wear masks for most performances in our theatre. However, masks are required for certain performances and for events in other Round House spaces, including our Event Room. We continue to strongly recommend masks as the best way for individuals to protect themselves from COVID-19 and other seasonal viruses, and we ask our audience members to respect the choices of others.

Round House will offer a limited number of mask-required performances for audience members who may prefer a fully masked environment. **Masks are required for performances on October 1 (7:30 pm) and 5 (2:00 pm).**

ABOUT ROUND HOUSE THEATRE

Round House Theatre is one of the leading professional theatres in the Washington, DC area, producing a season of new plays, modern classics, and musicals for more than 50,000 patrons each year at our theatre in Bethesda. Round House has been nominated for 227 Helen Hayes Awards and has won 52, including four Outstanding Resident Play Awards and the Charles MacArthur Award for Original New Play in 2016. Round House's lifelong learning and education programs serve more than 5,000 students each year at its Education Center in Silver Spring, in schools throughout Montgomery County, and at our Bethesda theatre. Cornerstone programs include Free Play, which provides free tickets for students ages 13-college, the Teen Performance Company, which culminates in the student-produced Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, Summer Camp for students in grades K-12, and a full slate of classes for adults and youth.

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