





Jason Bowen



George Brown



Nick Rashad Burroughs Melessie Clark





Zachary Downer



Amber Iman



Arica Jackson





Ayana George Jackson Quiantae Mapenzi Johnson



Christina Jones



Parris Lewis



Kareem Marsh



Nayah Merisier



J Paul Nicholas



Isio-Maya Nuwere



Teshomech Olenja



Destinee Rea



Jasmin Richardson



Awa Sal Secka



Austin Scott



Teddy Trice



Ekele Ukegbu



Wade Watson



Reggie D. White



Christopher Henry Young

GODDESS CAST & CREATIVE TEAM HEADSHOTS

THE PUBLIC THEATER ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR SPRING 2025 NEW YORK PREMIERE OF GODDESS

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY MICHAEL THURBER BOOK BY SAHEEM ALI CHOREOGRAPHY BY DARRELL GRAND MOULTRIE ADDITIONAL BOOK MATERIAL BY JAMES IJAMES DIRECTED BY SAHEEM ALI

Casting includes Brandon Alvión, Jason Bowen, George Brown, Nick Rashad Burroughs, Melessie Clark, Zachary Downer, Amber Iman, Arica Jackson, Ayana George Jackson, Quiantae Mapenzi Johnson, Christina jones, Parris Lewis, Kareem Marsh, Nayah Merisier, J Paul Nicholas, Isio-Maya Nuwere, Tesomech Olenja, Destinee Rea, Jasmin Richardson, Awa Sal Secka, Austin Scott, Awa Sal Secka, Ekele Ukegbu, Wade Watson, Reggie D. White, and Christopher Henry Young

Performances Begin with a Joseph Papp Free Preview Performance On Tuesday, April 29 and Run Through Sunday, June 1 Official Press Opening on Tuesday, May 20

March 13, 2025 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham) announced initial casting today for The Public's upcoming musical **GODDESS**. After a successful world premiere at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, **GODDESS** will make its much-anticipated debut in New York. The production will begin in the Newman Theater on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, and will run through Sunday, June 1, with an official press opening on Tuesday, May 20.

GODDESS comes to The Public for its New York premiere featuring music and lyrics by Michael Thurber, book and direction by Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director Saheem Ali, additional book material by James Ijames, and choreography by Darrell Grand Moultrie. A mysterious singer arrives at Moto Moto, a steamy Afro-jazz club in Mombasa, Kenya. She casts an entrancing spell on everyone, including a young man who has returned home from studying in America. Will the big plans for his life—stepping into a political legacy and marrying his fiancée—be upended? Inspired by the myth of Marimba, the Goddess who created beautiful songs from her heartbreak, this new musical is a rousing tale of romance, the supernatural, and the quest towards one's truest self.

"When I was in my late teens growing up in Kenya, I dreamt of one day creating an original musical inspired by a myth about the Goddess of music," shares conceiver and director of **GODDESS**, **Saheem Ali**. "Years later, after immigrating to the United States, I gained the courage to pursue this vision. It's been quite a journey! At the core of the story—about the intersection of the creative and the divine—is a reminder that one can only step into one's power by accepting one's truth. I'm grateful I get the chance to bring this beautiful story set in my home country to my artistic home, The Public Theater."

Casting for GODDESS includes **Brandon Alvíon** (*Ensemble*), **Jason Bowen** (*Madongo*), **George Brown** (*Understudy*), **Nick Rashad Burroughs** (*Ahmed*), **Melessie Clark** (*Mosi/Understudy*), **Zachary Downer** (*Ensemble*), **Amber Iman** (*Nadira*), **Arica Jackson** (*Rashida*), **Ayana George Jackson** (*Siti*), **Quiantae Mapenzi Johnson** (*Ensemble*), **Christina Jones** (*Ensemble*), **Parris Lewis** (*Understudy*), **Kareem Marsh** (*Swing*), **Nayah Merisier** (*Swing*), **J Paul Nicholas** (*Hassan*), **Isio-Maya Nuwere** (*Ensemble*),

Teshomech Olenja (*Tisa/Understudy*), Destinee Rea (*Cheche*), Jasmin Richardson (*Ensemble*), Awa Sal Secka (*Zawadi/Understudy*), Austin Scott (*Omari*), Teddy Trice (*Ensemble*), Ekele Ukegbu (*Understudy*), Wade Watson (*Ensemble*), Reggie D. White (*Balozi*), and Christopher Henry Young (*Understudy*).

The production will include scenic design by **Arnulfo Maldonado**, costume design by **Dede Ayite**, lighting design by **Bradley King**, sound design by **Nevin Steinberg**, hair and wig design by **Nikiya Mathis**, Puppet Design by **Julian Crouch**, and prop management by **Claire M. Kavanah**. **Victoria Navarro** will be the production stage manager. **Thomas Schall** will serve as the fight consultant. **Karishma Bhagani** will serve as the dramaturg and cultural consultant.

The Public is currently presenting **SUMO**, written by **Lisa Sanaye Dring**, directed by **Ralph B. Peña**, and co-produced with Ma-Yi Theater Company and La Jolla Playhouse. Next month, previews will begin for **GLASS. KILL. WHAT IF IF ONLY. IMP.**, a quartet of plays by Caryl Churchill.

Following a significant revitalization, The Delacorte Theater, home of Free Shakespeare in the Park, will reopen in Summer 2025 with a production of Shakespeare's classic comedy **TWELFTH NIGHT**, also directed by The Public's Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director, Tony Award nominee **Saheem Ali**, and featuring Public Theater alumni **Bill Camp**, **Khris Davis**, **Peter Dinklage**, **Jesse Tyler Ferguson**, **Lupita Nyong'o**, **Sandra Oh**, and **Daphne Rubin-Vega** and Public debuts **b**, **Junior Nyong'o**, and **Moses Sumney**. Free Shakespeare will also be accessible across the city through Mobile Unit's **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING**, in a production directed by **Rebecca Martinez** that will tour the five boroughs, and a new Public Works adaptation of **PERICLES**, with music and lyrics by **Troy Anthony** and directed by **Carl Cofield**, at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

The Library serves food and drink beginning at 6:00 p.m. and closing at midnight. The Library is closed on Mondays. For more information, visit <u>publictheater.org</u>.

GODDESS BIOS:

SAHEEM ALI (*Book* and *Direction*) is a proud immigrant from Kenya, currently serving as the Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director of New York's Public Theater. He received Tony, Drama Desk and Lucille Lortel nominations, as well as the Joe A. Callaway award for his direction of *Fat Ham*. He most recently developed the *Buena Vista Social Club* musical at Atlantic Theater Company (Drama Desk nom). His production of *Merry Wives* (Free Shakespeare in the Park) was recorded for PBS' "Great Performances" and was the subject of the HBO documentary *Reopening Night*. Other productions include *Good Bones* (The Public); *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep); *Nollywood Dreams* (MCC); *Romeo y Julieta*, *Shipwreck*, and *Richard II* (radio plays); *Fires in the Mirror* (Signature Theater); *The Rolling Stone* (Lincoln Center Theater); *Passage* (Soho Rep); *Sugar in Our Wounds* (MTC); *Tartuffe* (Playmakers Rep); *Where Storms Are Born* (Williamstown); and *Kill Move Paradise* (National Black Theater). He is a Usual Suspect at New York Theater Workshop, a Sir John Gielgud SDCF Fellow, a Shubert Fellow and the recipient of an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Directing.

MICHAEL THURBER (*Music and Lyrics*) is a Drama Desk-nominated composer and lyricist. Thurber made his international debut with his score for *Antony and Cleopatra*, a co-production between the RSC and The Public Theater directed by Academy Award winner Tarell McCraney. He has composed scores for numerous other Public Theater productions, including the 2021 Free Shakespeare in the Park *Merry Wives*; and *Romeo y Julieta*, a radio play starring Lupita Nyong'o. Thurber was the 2020 recipient of the Bryan Gallace Fellowship grant via SPACE@Ryder Farm. He was the bassist on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" under the leadership of Jon Batiste. He has performed globally with many artists including Chris Thile, Willie Nelson, James Taylor, Mavis Staples, David Byrne, Lawrence, Alisa Weilerstein, Louis Cato, and many more. Thurber teaches at NYU's Clive Davis Institute. He studied music at Juilliard and the Interlochen Arts Academy.

JAMES (*Additional Book Material***)** is a playwright and educator. Ijames is the recipient of the 2022 Pulitzer in Drama for *Fat Ham*, a Pew Fellow for Playwriting, the Terrance McNally New Play Award for *White*, the Kesselring Honorable Mention Prize for *...Miz Martha*, a Whiting Award, a Kesselring Prize for *Kill Move Paradise*, and a 2020 and 2022 Steinberg Prize. The 2023 Broadway production of *Fat Ham* received 5 Tony nominations including Best Play. Ijames an Associate Professor of Theatre at Villanova University.

DARRELL GRAND MOULTRIE (*Choreography*). A recipient of the Princess Grace Choreography Fellowship Award and a graduate of The Juilliard School, Moultrie's select credits include *Fat Ham* (Broadway & The Public), *Good Bones* (The Public), *Merry Wives* (Free Shakespeare in the Park), *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep), *Space Dogs* (MCC), Disney's new revival of *Aida* (the Netherlands), *Invisible Thread* (Second Stage), *Daddy* (The New Group/Vineyard Theatre), *Sugar in Our Wounds* (MTC), and *Witness Uganda* (ART). Moultrie has choreographed premieres for dance companies around the world including American Ballet Theatre, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Smuin Ballet, and Milwaukee Ballet. Moultrie served as a choreographer on Beyonce's "Mrs. Carter" world tour.

BRANDON ALVIÓN (Ensemble/Understudy Balozi/Hassan). The Public debut! National tours: The Color Purple, A Soldier's Play. Select Regional: Primary Trust (Theatre Squared), Blues for an Alabama Sky (Barrington Stage), Toni Stone (Playhouse on Park), As You Like It (Michigan Shakes). MFA: Wayne State. NYCDA Grad. @iactwright

JASON BOWEN (*Madongo*)'s credits include *The Play That Goes Wrong* on Broadway. Off-Broadway: *Half-God of Rainfall* (NYTW/A.R.T.), *Crumbs From the Table of Joy* (Keen Company), *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (Audible Theater), *Native Son* (The Acting Co.), *If Pretty Hurts...* (Playwrights Horizons). TV/Film: "Blue Bloods," "Elementary" (CBS); "Chicago P.D.," "Law & Order: SVU" (NBC); *Mother/Android*, *The Upside*.

GEORGE BROWN *he/him* (*Understudy Balozi/Hassan/Madongo*) is from Buffalo, NY. He is truly thankful for the support from family and friends and gives all glory and honor to God! Founder and director of God's Purchase gospel choir. National tours: *Once on this Island* (Armand), *Elf: The Musical* (Mr. Greenway). Regional: *Rent* (Tom Collins), *The Color Purple* (Mister), *Memphis: The Musical* (Delray Farrell). #TeamAvalon #GoBills @Downtowngebrown

NICK RASHAD BURROUGHS (Ahmed). Broadway credits include *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* (Ike Turner, OBC), *Kinky Boots*, and *King Kong*. First National Tour and regional credits include *Moulin Rouge!* (Toulouse Lautrec), *Something Rotten* (Shakespeare understudy, Minstrel), and *Dreamgirls* at MUNY (James Thunder Early). Burroughs is a Pop Smash Radio Music Award Winner for his album *Groove Machine*. He received a Broadway World Award winner for *Jesus Christ Superstar* (as Judas). @nickrburroughs

MELESSIE CLARK (*Mosi*) is thrilled to make her Public Theater debut! Clark has previously performed Off-Broadway in *A Sign of the Times*. Regional credits include *The Preacher's Wife*; *Once on This Island; Into the Woods*; *Grease*; *The Color Purple*; *Gypsy*, *Little Shop of Horrors*; *School Girls*; *Or, the African Mean Girls Play*; *Two Trains Running*; and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. TV/Film credits include "Archive 81" and *Anything's Possible*. Clark is a *Broadway World* Awards winner and an alum of Point Park University. To God be the glory! @melessieclark

AMBER IMAN she/her (Nadira) Broadway: Lempicka (Tony and Drama League nominations), Soul Doctor, Shuffle Along. Off-Broadway: The Ford/Hill Project, Rent. National Tours: Hamilton. Regional: Goddess (Berkeley Rep), Hippest Trip (A.C.T.), Little Shop of Horrors (Kennedy Center). Film: Steve, Blackberry Winter. TV: "High Maintenance" (HBO). Co-founder of Broadway Advocacy Coalition (Tony Award) and Black Women on Broadway. Howard University. @amberiman_

ZACHARY DOWNER *he/him* (*Ensemble*) is thrilled to be making his Public Theater Debut! Broadway: *MJ the Musical* (Marlon/Nicholas Brothers); *Hello,Dolly!* revival; *Cat*s revival (Mr. Mistoffelees). Off-

Broadway: *Alice by Heart.* Tours: Hugh Jackman's *The Man The Music The Show* world tour. TV: Netflix's "Halston," 43rd Kennedy Center Honors, NBC's "Annie Live!," Nickelodeon's *Blue's Big City Adventure*. Love to family and LakeyWolff&Co. @zachdestyn

ARICA JACKSON she/her (*Rashida*) is making her Public Debut! Broadway credits include *The Book of Mormon*; *Caroline, or Change*; *Waitress*; and *Head Over Heels*. Jackson performed Off-Broadway in *East O' West O'* (Ars Nova) and in the national tour of *Waitress*. Regional credits include *Grace* (Ford's Theatre) and *Trading Places* (Alliance Theatre). Jackson was featured in *This is Not a Love Letter* and "Evil." Jackson graduated from Carnegie Mellon University Drama in 2017. IG: @aaygirl1947

AYANA GEORGE JACKSON *she/her* (*Siti*) is known for her Broadway debut in Tony Award-winning *MJ: The Musical*, originating the role of Michael Jackson's mother, Katherine. Screen credits include "FBI: Most Wanted" (CBS), "Goosebumps" Season 2 (Disney+), "Harlem" Season 3 (Prime Video). Love to my husband & daughter. All praise to God. Ephesians 3:20. @ayanaunrestrained

QUIANTAE MAPENZI JOHNSON *she/her* (*Ensemble*). National tour: *Hamilton* (Ensemble). Regional: *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep), *Hairspray* (North Shore). TV: "Saturday Night Live." Education: Alabama State University BFA in Dance. Thank you, God, for this journey! Love to my family and endless thanks to my mother for always being my #1 supporter. To my husband, thank you for everything! Peace. @ambitiousquiantae

CHRISTINA JONES (*Ensemble/Understudy Nadira/Zawadi/Cheche*) is a dynamic Broadway performer, musician, and songwriter. Theater credits: *The Wiz* Broadway Revival (Dorothy u/s), *Sister Act* (Michelle, Deloris Van Cartier u/s), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Charlaine Woodard), *The Rocky Horror Show* (Janet Weiss). Find more of her on her website and Instagram (@christinajonesofficial). Special thanks to my family, friends, and representation!

PARRIS LEWIS she/they (Understudy Siti /Tisa/Mosi/ Ensemble). The Public: #BARS Workshop. National Tours: Tina! The Tina Turner Musical (Tina Turner); Hairspray (Pearl); The Color Purple (Jarene/ Olivia u/s Shug Avery). Regional: Hello Dolly (Arkansas Rep); Long Way Down (Olney Theatre). STONEWALL (New York City Opera); A Time Like This (Carnegie Hall). Lewis is an educator with the NYCDOE & Future Music Project at Carnegie Hall. @renaissancewoman

KAREEM MARSH *he/him* (*Swing*), a Philadelphia native, began his dance training at 13 and has since built a distinguished career in the performing arts. He has performed in over 13 countries with Holland America Cruise Lines and was featured in *Dance Magazine* in 2017 for his international work. A former member of Philadanco, Marsh also appeared in the 2021 film adaptation of *In the Heights*. Most recently, he was the dance captain and an ensemble member in the Broadway revival of *The Wiz*.

NAYAH MERISIER *she/her* (*Swing*) is a Haitian-American artist from South Florida with a BFA from New World School of the Arts (NWSA). She continued her training with the Alvin Ailey American Dance

J PAUL NICHOLAS he/him (Hassan) is making his Public Theater debut. Off-Broadway credits include Chekhov/Tolstoy: Love Stories; Blood and Gifts; Rosmersholm. Nicholas performed in the national tour of The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time. Regional credits include 24 shows at 20 theaters. TV credits include "FBI" (recurring); "Blue Bloods;" "Mare of Easttown;" "Law & Order: SVU;" (recurring); "Deception;" "The Leftovers;" "Law & Order;" and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent". Nicholas has received two Barrymore awards. He has an MFA from The Shakespeare Theatre Academy. Website: JPaulNicholas.com

ISIO-MAYA NUWERE (*Ensemble*). Hailing from Queens, NY, with Nigerian roots, Nuwere is elated to be back in Mombasa with her *Goddess* family. Formerly in *The Lion King* on Broadway with credits ranging from various avenues of arts and entertainment, Nuwere is forever thankful to God, Family, and Friends for their unwavering support. @Isio.Maya. www.isiomaya.com

TESHOMECH OLENJA she/her (*Tisa*). Olenja was in the national tour of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*. Regional credits include *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep); *The Bluest Eye*; and *Beehive*. Olenja appeared in "Will Trent" (ABC). She is beyond grateful to be joining the *Goddess* cast once again! All thanks to God. @teshomech

DESTINEE REA (*Cheche*). A true spark, Rea has graced Broadway stages in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical, Amélie*, and *The Book of Mormon*. Other credits include *Ragtime* (City Center) and Disney's *Hercules*. Driven by a vision to elevate art and culture, Rea seeks to create work that inspires connection and empowers black women. @destineerea

JASMIN RICHARDSON she/her (Ensemble/Understudy Mosi/Siti/Tisa) is ecstatic to be at the iconic Public Theater in Goddess. Broadway: The Book of Mormon, Getting' the Band Together. First National/ International tours The Bodyguard as Nicki Marron, Memphis (Felicia), Dreamgirls (Deena) etc. Carnegie Hall: Jinkx Monsoon Live in Concert (Vocalist), Lincoln Center: Women Warriors (Vocalist). Check Jasmin out at JasminRichardson.com! IG: Jasmincrichardson

AWA SAL SECKA she/her (Zawadi). Regional credits include Ragtime (Sarah); Goddess (Zawadi); Gun and Powder (Flo); Jesus Christ Superstar (Simon); Into the Woods (Baker's Wife); The Wiz (Glinda); School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play (Ama); Caroline, or Change; (Dottie); Intimate Apparel (Mayme); Aida (Aida); and Memphis (Felicia). Tour credits include Jaja's African Hair Braiding (Bea). Concert credits include Rent (Joanne) and Children of Eden (Eve). Awards include a 2024 Helen Hayes Award Best Actor and a 2023 Helen Hayes Award for Best New Play.

AUSTIN SCOTT he/him (*Omari*) starred as Alexander Hamilton on Broadway and National Tour for two years, originated the role of Joe Scott in the Broadway production of *Girl From the North Country*, and was recently seen as William Shakespeare in & *Juliet*. Screen credits include "Clipped" (FX), *Mr. Monk's Last Case* (Peacock), "Sistas" (BET), and *A Jazzman's Blues* (Netflix).

TEDDY TRICE (Ensemble/Understudy Omari/Ahmed). Broadway: The Book of Mormon. National Tour: Clue: A New Comedy, The Book of Mormon. International Tour: Come From Away (Australia). Off-Broadway: The Butcher Boy (Irish Repertory Theatre). B.A. Theatre from Drury University. Gratitude and love to Ma and Pop, my manager Rochel Saks, and Goddess for their unwavering support. @teddytrice

EKELE UKEGBU she/her (Understudy Rachida/Cheche/Zawadi) holds a B.F.A. in Drama from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She is a passionate actor, singer, and performer with extensive experience in play readings and performances, film acting, and musical theater. Ukegbu believes that acting serves as a conglomerate of the human experience.

WADE WATSON he/him (*Ensemble*) is a New York City native. Credits include Classic Theatre of Harlem productions of *Macbeth* and *The Three Musketeers*. Watson was featured in the hit show "Pose" on FX, as well as the hit show "Dickinson" on Apple TV, to name a few. Dance has taken him to Accra and Cape Coast, Ghana, and recently Cali, Colombia.

REGGIE D. WHITE he/him (*Balozi*) was the Associate Director on *Buzzer* at The Public. White also performed on Broadway in *The Inheritance*. Off-Broadway credits include *Lessons in Survival: 1971* (Vineyard), *Hundred Days* (NYTW), and *I and You* (59E59). Regional credits include *Bayard Rustin: Inside Ashland* (People's Light), *Macbeth in Stride* (A.R.T.), and *The Luckiest* (La Jolla Playhouse). Directing credits include Atlantic Theater Company and Indiana Rep. White is the playwright of *Fremont Ave*. White has appeared in "Gotham" and "Blindspot." Awards include the Colman Domingo Award, TBA Titan Award, and a NAACP nomination. www.reggiedwhite.com

CHRISTOPHER HENRY YOUNG he/him (Understudy Omari/Ahmed/Madongo/Ensemble). Broadway: A Bronx Tale (Jessie). Off-Broadway: The Harder They Come (The Public), National Tours: Company, Hamilton. Regional: The Little Mermaid (Dir. Glenn Casale), Personality: Lloyd Price Musical (Dir.

Sheldon Epps), *Guys & Dolls* (Dir. Mary Zimmerman), *The Wiz* (Dir. Robert O'Hara), *Sweat* (Dir. Kate Whoriskey).

ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both onstage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years
ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that
theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of
Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of
programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free
Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New
York City's five boroughs, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since
premiering HAIR in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently
represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Suffs by
Shaina Taub, and Hell's Kitchen by Alicia Keys and Kristoffer Diaz. Their programs and productions can
also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 60 Tony Awards,
194 Obie Awards, 57 Drama Desk Awards, 63 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critics Circle Awards, 13 New York
Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 65 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes.
publictheater.org

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

The LuEsther T. Mertz Legacy Trust provides leadership support for The Public Theater's year-round activities.

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GODDESS by special arrangement with **Mara Isaacs**, **No Guarantees Productions**, and **Rashad Chambers**.

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