Is God Is

An Obsidian Theatre Company,

May 6 - 32, 2022

And Canadian State to-Production

By Aleshea Harris

Marilyn & Charles Baillie Theatre



It is such a gift to be diving back into live theatre with this production.

Is God Is takes the experiences of Black women and Black people and mythologizes them, creating a story that is truly unapologetic, free, and fuelled with a kind of propulsive action that is so satisfying to bring to life.

What makes the play so exciting is that it challenges the idea of respectability politics and how we expect Black women to behave in society. It further humanizes the experiences and the complexities of how Black folk move in the world based on what we have inherited and what we desire to become.

Is God Is is at its centre about a desire for freedom and for justice. It is about breaking the cycles that bind us and fighting to take back the power that we are so often robbed of...

To say more would be to give too much away.

Thank you so much for taking this journey with us. I hope you enjoy it.

Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu

This sacred land has held story for thousands of years: stories that live in the fabric of who we are as a nation. Canadian Stage would like to acknowledge and thank the original caretakers and knowledge keepers of this territory: The Anishinaabe Nations (including the Mississaugas of the Credit River), The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Wendat and Metis Nations. We give thanks to the Nations recorded and unrecorded, acknowledged and unacknowledged, who also share the responsibility for this territory. We honour the Dish With One Spoon Treaty and our responsibility to peaceably share and care for the resources that surround us. We are honoured to be in this meeting place called Tkaronto that many First Nations, Inuit and Metis people from across Turtle Island call home.

Cast

Tyrone Benskin **Man**

Matthew G Brown
Chuck Hall

JD Leslie

Swing - Anaia, Racine, She, Angie

Oyin Oladejo

Racine

Savion Roach

Scotch

Sabryn Rock

Angie

Alison Sealy-Smith

Vanessa Sears

Anaia

Michael Wamara
Swing - Chuck Hall,

Riley, Scotch, Man

Micah Woods Riley

Jennifer Dzialoszynski
Fight Director
& Intimacy Coachx
Matthew G Brown
Fight Captainx
Jaz 'Fairy J' Simone
Movement Director
Jennifer Toohey
Dialect Coach

Casting Consultant

Emerjade Simms
Audition Reader

Hannah Antaki

Creative

Aleshea Harris **Playwright**

Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu

Director

Raha Javanfar

Lighting Designer

Ken Mackenzie

Set Designer

Thomas Ryder Payne
Sound Designer

Laura Warren

Projection Designer

Ming Wong

Costume Designer

Emilie Aubin

Stage Manager

Ada Aguilar

Assistant Stage Manager

daniel jelani ellis
Assistant Director

Production

Tristan Goethel

Technical Director

Aidan Ware

Assistant Technical

Director

Mary Spryakis

Head of Props

Karen Rodd

Masks & Prosthetics

Chunah Philadelphia

Props Assistant

Laura Delchiaro

Head of Wardrobe

Carly Beamish

Stitcher

Crew

Josh Vlodarchyk Head Technician (Baillie Theatre)

Jon Cunningham Head Technician (Upstairs Theatre)

Notes

Is God Is is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.

concordtheatricals.com

This production runs approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

Canadian Stage, Obsidian Theatre
Company and Necessary Angel
Theatre Company are members of the
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Theatres (PACT), the Toronto Alliance
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engage professional artists who are
members of Canadian Actors' Equity
Association under the terms of the
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Ada Aguilar — Assistant Stage Manager

Ada Aguilar is so happy to be backstage again after 2+ years of virtual and hybrid theatre/film projects and cancelled productions that never made it to the stage, like *Solaris* (Canadian Stage) and *Blacktop Sky* (Obsidian/Crow's). Notable past credits: virtual stage manager, *The Lab*, 2021-2022

(Stratford Festival); White Girls in Moccasins (Manidoons/Buddies); Spectators' Odyssey – o dell'Inferno (DLT/Luminato); The Runner (Human Cargo *2019 Dora Award winner); School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls Play (Obsidian/Nightwood *2019 Dora Award winner); Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train, August: Osage County, 88 Keys; Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts I, II, III) (Soulpepper); Wedding Party (Crow's/TIFT).



Emilie Aubin — Stage Manager

Emilie is a stage manager for theatre and experimental performance based in Tkaròn:to. Select credits include: Cast Iron, 21 Black Futures, Pass Over, School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play, hang (Obsidian Theatre); Harper Regan (Canadian Stage); It Comes in Waves (Bluemouth Inc and

Necessary Angel); Century Song, Infinity (Volcano Theatre); Underneath It All (New Harlem Productions); Art (Soulpepper); You Are A Field, Lady Baby, Portrait (The Dietrich Group); The Men in White (Factory Theatre); Tributaries (LuminaTO 2017); Freedom Singer (Project:Humanity); We Keep Coming Back (Selfconscious Theatre); Counting Sheep (SummerWorks 2015); M'dea Undone (Tapestry Opera).



Tyrone Benskin — Man

Tyrone Benskin is an award winning actor, Director and former member of Parliament who's 40 year career spans theatre, television, film and the world of voice. Theatre credits include celebrated performances in *Wade in the Water* (Black Theatre Workshop/Centaur Theatre) and his award winning

performance in *Marjorie Prime* (Segal Centre). Tyrone has also performed at the NAC, GCTC, Neptune and Passe Maurielle. His over 150 film and television credits include starring roles in *Debris* and *The Lost Symbol*, (NBC); *Pillow Talk* (Crave); and *Transplant* (CTV/NBC). His film credits include *Pieces of a Woman*, *Death of a Ladies Man* and *Moonfall*. Tyrone is the current Interim Artistic Director of Black Theatre Workshop. He served as National VP of ACTRA and is a dedicated arts and community advocate.



Matthew G Brown — Chuck Hall

Canadian Stage: Hair, A Midsummer Nights Dream (High Park). Elsewhere: Billy Elliot, Little Shop of Horrors, To Kill A Mockingbird, Twelfth Night, The Who's: Tommy, Fiddler on the Roof (Stratford Festival); Calpurnia (Nightwood); Sister Act (Drayton); Wizard of Oz, Jacob Two Two meets

the Hooded Fang, Cinderella: A RATtical retelling (YPT); I Think I Can (YPT, N.A.C); Hair (The Grand), Jersey Boys (Dancap, Dodgers). Selected Film & TV: Good Witch (Hallmark); The Kennedys (History Television); Open Heart (YTV); Odd Squad (PBS); Hailstorm (CFC); Instant Star (CTV); MR D (CBC); National Commercial campaigns for Turbo Tax, McDonalds, Rogers and Presidents Choice among others. Training: Randolph College, The CFC Actors Conservatory. For updates, follow me on Twitter & Instagram: @ItsMrMGB



Jennifer Dzialoszynski — Fight Director

Jennifer is a fight director, stage combat instructor, actor, and voice artist. She is incredibly proud to be among the fierce, talented, passionate team assembled for *Is God Is.* "Twin? Damn." Selected Credits: *Three Women of Swatow, Theory, Girls Like That* (Tarragon Theatre): *The Nether* (Coal Mine/

Studio 180); Poison (Coal Mine); Hello Bertha, Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen, Rococo, Lithuania (Shaw Festival); Boeing, Boeing, Perfect Wedding (Magnus Theatre); Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Taming of the Shrew (Shakespeare Bash'd). As an actor, Jennifer has appeared in theatres across Canada including; The Shaw Festival, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, The Citadel, Canadian Stage, Shakespeare Bash'd, Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company, The Grand Theatre, among others.



daniel jelani ellis — Assistant Director

daniel jelani ellis is a multidisciplinary artist rasied in Jamaica.
His art practice includes performance-installation creation, playwriting, dub poetry, and acting. danjelani challenges colonial cultural authority by examining and exploring the ways this authority clashes, connects, and

intersects with Afro-diasporic traditions and methodologies. His artistic work is Afrocentric and celebratory. danjelani is passionate about arts-based community organizing for social justice. As a Black queer immigrant he is committed to celebrating those of us who live within the margins. danjelani is the Metcalf Artistic Director Intern at Obsidian Theatre. He lives in Tkaròn:to and is a caretaker to plenty plants and Mosi the dog.



Aleshea Harris — Playwright

Aleshea Harris's play *Is God Is* (directed by Taibi Magar at Soho Rep and Ola Ince at the Royal Court) won the 2016 Relentless Award, an OBIE Award for playwriting in 2017, the Helen Merrill Playwriting Award in 2019 and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. *What to Send Up*

When It Goes Down, a play-pageant-ritual response to anti-blackness, had its critically-acclaimed NYC premiere in 2018 (directed by Whitney White and produced by The Movement Theatre Company), was featured in the April 2019 issue of American Theatre Magazine and received a rare special commendation from the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. The play was subsequently re-mounted at Woolly Mammoth, A.R.T., BAM and Playwrights Horizons. Her newest play, On Sugarland (directed by Whitney White) premiered at New York Theatre Workshop in the spring of 2022.

Awards: Windham-Campbell Literary Prize, Mimi Steinberg Playwriting Award, Hermitage Greenfield Prize, Horton Foote Playwriting Award, Arts and Letters Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Harris is a two-time MacDowell Fellow and has enjoyed residencies at the Hermitage Artist Retreat, Hedgebrook and Djerassi.



Raha Javanfar — Lighting Designer

A lighting/projections designer, musician, theatre performer, and educator, Raha is a multi-faceted artist, working on and behind stages across Canada and internationally. Design credits include *Brothers Size* (Soulpepper) garnering her a Dora nomination, *Riverboat, Voyager* (Soulpepper), *Miss*

Cast and Creative biographies

Caledonia (Tarragon), amongst others. Raha has toured internationally with renowned Baroque Orchestra, Tafelmusik, as projections designer. She was co-recipient of the Siminovitch Protege Award, and currently teaches lighting design at X University. She is front-woman and bassist of blues/R&B band, Bad Luck Woman & Her Misfortunes, was one of six co-creators of the Dora nominated *Now You See Her*, and a Slaight resident artist at Soulpepper Theatre.



JD Leslie — Swing

Scarborough native and graduate of the University of Windsor's BFA Program, JD is honored to be a part of this production. Upon her graduation, JD has developed a background in devised/physical theatre, and playwriting, and has trained with Factory Theatre's Factory Mechanicals ('18/'19)

and Second City's Bob Curry Fellowship ('19). JD Would like to thank Her Mother, Camille, Cadence, and #BBFA for their love and support. THEATRE: *The Spectator's Odyssey - O'dell'Inferno* (DLT Theatre); *Queen Goneril -* Her Words Festival - Cordelia (2021); Portia's *Julius Caesar -* Soothsayer (Hart House Theatre); *Elbow Room -* Kia (TO Fringe Festival 2019); Newmarket National Ten Minute Play Festival. FILM & TELEVISION: *Good Witch*; *The Anniversary*. OTHER: Roseneath Live Streams - *Like We Used Too* ('22); *Diaspora Dialogues -* Definition ('22)



Ken MacKenzie — Set Designer

Ken MacKenzie is an award winning set, lighting, and costume designer who has worked across Canada, the United States. Ken's past Canadian Stage Company credits include *Sweat* (Set Design) and *Romeo and Juliet/Midsummer Night's Dream* (set and lighting design). Other theatre credits:

Sherlock Holmes and the Raven's Curse (Set Design, Shaw Festival); Stars:Together (Set & Lighting design, Crow's Theatre); and Almighty Voice and his Wife (Set design, Soulpepper theatre). Ken is a faculty member at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon and is the President of the Associated Designers of Canada, Local ADC659.



Oyin Oladejo — Racine

Oyin Oladejo, a graduate of Humber College Performance Program, is a Toronto based artist. Born in Nigeria, Oyin relocated and settled in Canada in her late teens. Selected theatre credits: *Cherry Orchard* (Modern Times Theatre); *Hamlet* (Shakespeare Theatre Company, DC); *Crucible, Tartuffe*,

Eurydice, Happy Place, Spoon River, Dolls House, Noises Off (Soulpepper Theatre); Tomorrow Love (Outside the March); The Father (Coalmine Theatre); In This World (Roseneath Theatre - Dora Award). Film & Television: Star Trek Discovery (CBS); Six Guns for Hire (Feature); Endlings (CBC) Other Credits: The Father (Assistant Director), Director/Ted Dykstra; Aliens (Assistant Director), Director/Mitchell Cushman; Dear Jesus (Producer/Short film).



Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu — Director

Mumbi is an acclaimed theatre creator and director raised in Kenya and Victoria, BC and based in Toronto. She is the Artistic Director of Obsidian Theatre, Canada's leading creator for Black Art as well as Founder/Artistic director for the experimental theatre company IFT - It's A Freedom Thing

Theatre. Recent directing credits *Cast Iron* (Obsidian/Factory); *21 Black Futures* (Obsidian/CBC Arts); *Trout Stanley* (Factory Theatre); *The Brothers Size; Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Soulpepper Theatre); and *Oraltorio: A Theatrical Mixtape for* (Obsidian Theatre/Soulpepper). Mumbi is also the recipient of many awards including a Dora Award, a Toronto Theatre Critics Award, a Pauline McGibbon Award and a Mallory Gilbert Protege Award.



Thomas Ryder Payne — Sound Designer

Thomas Ryder Payne is a composer and sound designer for theatre, dance and film. Selected past theatre work includes designs for Stratford, Shaw, Mirvish, Soulpepper, CanStage, Tarragon, Factory, TPM, YPT, Crows, Modern Times, Aluna, BIBT, Nightwood, Toronto Dance Theatre, NAC, Theatre Calgary,

GCTC, RMTC and many others. Thomas has received 4 Dora awards and 25 nominations.



Savion Roach — Scotch

Savion is from Scarborough,ON, and went to school at the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal. He first fell in love with theatre and acting after his Mother took him to see a show called UMOJA at Mirvish. That was his first time seeing live theatre and more importantly seeing people who

looked like him on a stage. He also writes and records his own music under the name SAATURN and is apart of an up and coming creative collective by the name of All Around Theatre. *Gloria* (ARC/Crows Theatre).



Sabryn Rock — Angie

Sabryn Rock is an award-winning actor of screen and stage. For Canadian Stage: Sweat (Asst. Director). Film/TV: the critically acclaimed CBC/BET+ series The Porter, Two Sentence Horror Stories (CW); Welcome to Sudden Death (Universal); Black Mirror (Netflix); and Station Eleven (HBO Max).

Theatre: The Royale (Toronto Theatre Critics Award); Rose (Dora Nominations; Soulpepper); Fun Home (The Musical Stage Company/Mirvish); The Last Wife (The Globe Theatre); Passing Strange & Caroline, or Change (Dora nominations; Musical Stage); Ruined (Obsidian/Nightwood). Sabryn is the voice of Koki on PBS Kids' animated series Wild Kratts. She is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, the Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre and the Actors' Conservatory at the Canadian Film Centre.



Alison Sealy-Smith — She

Born in Barbados, Alison is an accomplished, award-winning actor, director and producer whose professional career began in 1981. Since then she has worked with theatre companies across Canada and in Barbados including Stage One Productions, Theatre Calgary, Young Peoples Theatre, Nightwood

Theatre, Canadian Stage and the Stratford Festival. Most recently, Alison is very proud to have been a part of Obsidian Theatre Company's ground-breaking series 21 Black Futures and, their live audio version of Cast Iron, co-produced with Factory Theatre. Alison is a Founding Member of the Obsidian Theatre Company (Toronto) and served as Artistic Director from 2000-2006. She is also Founding Artistic Director of Diasporic Arts Productions (Barbados) and a Producer with The Gap Theatre (Barbados).



Vanessa Sears — Anaia

Vanessa Sears is a Dora, Toronto Theatre Critics' Award, Critic's Pick and BroadwayWorld Award winning artist living in Toronto. She is delighted to be making her debut with Canadian Stage and Necessary Angel while returning to Obsidian Theatre after *Passing Strange* and *Caroline*, or Change.

Selected credits: An Octoroon, Grand Hotel, Magician's Nephew, Holiday Inn (Shaw Festival); Why We Tell The Story, Billy Elliot, Little Shop of Horrors (Stratford Festival); Kinky Boots (Mirvish); Mary Poppins, The Wizard of Oz (Young People's Theatre). Selected TV/Film: Y the Last Man (FX); Sex/Life, Suits (Netflix); 14 Love Letters (Feature). Directing: Finding Black Joy (The Grand); Baapii Roho (Musical Stage Company); Holiday Inn (assistant director Shaw Festival); Wedding Band (Stratford Festival Meighen Forum).



Jaz 'Fairy J' Simone — Movement Director

Jaz 'Fairy J' Simone, formerly known as Jasmyn Fyffe, is a Barbadian-Canadian multi hyphenate artist based in Toronto ON. Her career spands 15 years of work in choreography, movement direction (MD) vocal and dance performance, dance improvisation and creative mentorship. She has been

working as an MD and choreographer for theatre since 2017 when she made her debut as Co-Choreographer for For Coloured Girls directed by Djanet Sears. 2018 she was choreographer for Other Side of the Game directed by Nigel Shawn Williams and 2019 MD for The Brothers Size directed by Mumbi Tindyebwa and she is thrilled to be working with Mumbi on "Is God Is" this spring. Jaz will be making her debut at Stratford Festival this summer.



Jennifer Toohey — Dialect Coach

Jennifer Toohey a dialect coach, director, performer and educator, is thrilled to be dialect coaching her first show with Obsidian Theatre Company.

Jennifer is in her third season as a dialect coach at The Shaw Festival of Canada, where coaching credits include: *The Russian Play, Man and*

Superman, Sex and Victory. Other coaching credits: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time (All for One Productions); Tribes, Superior Donuts, The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid, Between Riverside and Crazy, Miss Bennett: Christmas at Pemberley (Road Less Travelled Productions); Detroit '67 (Paul Robeson Theatre); Table Manners and Mrs. Warren's Profession (Mad Cow Theatre). Jennifer is an Associate Professor of theater at SUNY Buffalo State College and is a proud member of Canadian Actor's Equity and the Voice and Speech Trainer's Association.



Michael Wamara — Swing

Michael is excited to be making his Canadian stage debut in *Is God Is*. He recently worked with O Dell'Inferno as an ensemble at Saint Lawrence Centre for the Arts. He is a graduate of X University (formerly known as Ruerson) where he studied Performance. As a young Black Actor, it's

important to Michael to unapologetically share vulnerability & honesty. When the weather is clear & sunny you can find Michael working with Shakespeare in the Ruffs young Ruffians.



Laura Warren — Projection Designer

Laura Warren is a Saskatchewan-raised, Toronto-based, designer for theatre, dance, live music, and opera. Projection design credits include: 21 Black Futures (Obsidian Theatre/CBC Arts); Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes (Tarragon Theatre); In Absentia (JDdance); Pomegranate

(Pomegranate Opera); *The Black Drum* (Deaf Culture Centre/Soulpepper); *Grace* (Nightwood Theatre/Crow's Theatre); *Unholy* (Nightwood Theatre); *Oraltorio: A Theatrical Mixtape* (Obsidian Theatre/Soulpepper); *Bearing* (Signal Theatre/Luminato); *Frescobaldi and the Glories of Rome, Illuminations, A Medieval Christmas* (Toronto Consort); *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Toronto City Opera); *No Strings* (Attached) (Pink Pluto/Eventual Ashes/Buddies in Bad Times).



Ming Wong — Costume Designer

Ming is a Toronto costume designer, stylist, and wardrobe technician. She has worked on a variety of projects ranging from dance, theatre, film, and television. Canadian Stage: New Monuments, Unsafe, Life After Selected Credits: Pipeline (Soulpepper), Orphans for the Czar, Julius

Caesar, The Wedding Party (Crow's Theatre), Hamlet 911 (Stratford Festival); Trouble in Mind, Just to Get Married (Shaw Festival), Hansel und Gretel (Canadian Opera Company), Every Day She Rose (Nightwood Theatre), The Color Purple (Citadel Theatre/RMTC) DIGITAL: Alice in Winterland (Ross Petty Productions), Sāvitri (Against the Grain), Alice in Wonderland (Bad Hats Theatre/Soulpepper) AWARDS: Ming is the proud recipient of the 2021 Virginia & Myrtle Cooper Award ONLINE: www.mingwongdesign.com



Micah Woods — Riley

Micah Woods is an Actor of Trinidadian decent who hopes to influence the black theatre/television community through a body of work that is meant to inspire viewers while bringing awareness to the presence of colourism within the industry. Micah is a graduate of both the 2018 York University

Acting conservatory and the 2021 class of the Stratford festival Birmingham conservatory. Through these programs he has been able to tackle roles including Dido in *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage* directed by Peter Hinton and Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by P. Pasyk. Micah is currently looking forward to his Canadian Stage/ Obsidian Theatre debut and is preparing for his 3rd season at the Stratford Festival of Canada.



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Alan Dilworth

Necessary Angel Theatre Company was founded in 1978. It is considered one of English Canada's most vital original creation and producing organizations.

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Coming soon...

The Great Fire by Roland Schimmelpfennig, translated by David Tushingham

We continue to tour our immersive vinyl audio experience for an audience of eight, with upcoming "listenings" in Toronto this spring.

Please visit www.necessaryangel.com/the-great-fire for more details.

CRASH, the film

Necessary Angel and Riddle Films are in the studio filming Pamela Mala Sinha's multi-award-winning tour-de force play *CRASH*, with Necessary Angel Artistic Director Alan Dilworth directing. Pamela was Necessary Angel's inaugural Playwright-In-Residence.

NEW by Pamela Sinha

Necessary Angel is working in association with Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (RMTC) to present the world premiere of Pamela Mala Sinha's latest play NEW in Winnipeg in November 2022, with Alan Dilworth directing. In Spring 2023 Necessary Angel will produce the Toronto premiere of NEW in association with Canadian Stage and RMTC.

OBSIDIAN THEATRE COMPANY

Our mandate is to bring the Black voice to Canada's cultural forefront. Over the past couple of years with the amplification of the Black Lives Matter movement and other movements of social unrest, it has become a priority for us to continue to challenge the idea of a monolithic Black experience.

Now, we seek to intentionally shed a light on the richness and complexity of the Black community by showcasing Blackness in all of its intersections.

We are so happy to be back to doing live theatre again with you all as we collectively emerge from the trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We showed resilience over the past two years with the creation of our Award-Winning series, *21 Black Futures*, in a historic partnership with CBC Arts.

With fortitude, we kicked off our current season with *Cast Iron* by Lisa Codrington, Co-produced with Factory Theatre as a binaural audio drama and we are happy to be working with our co-producing partners, Necessary Angel and Canadian Stage on this exciting Canadian premiere of *Is God Is* by Aleshea Harris.

To end our season, we are thrilled to partner with Musical Stage Company to bring to life a groundbreaking musical that started out in our Playwrights Unit; *Dixon Road* by Fatuma Adar, which will be premiere at High Park in June. Don't miss it!

We are so happy to be able to bring back live theatre for your enjoyment and we look forward to your continued support.

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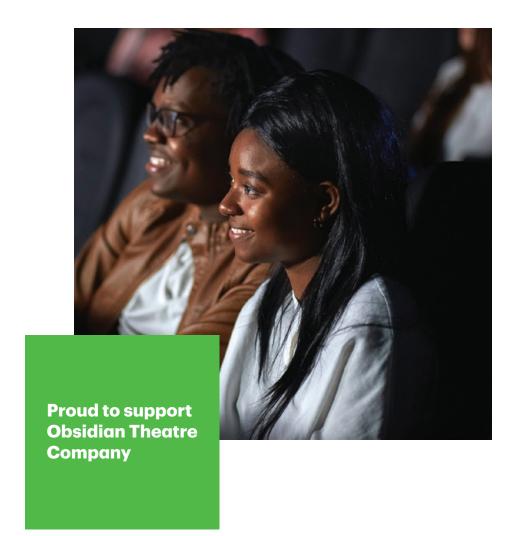
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