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Nick Rashad Burroughs



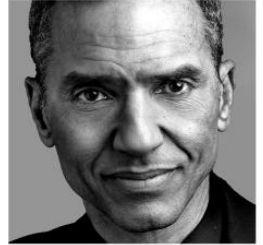
Melessie Clark



Amber Iman



Arica Jackson



J Paul Nicholas



Isio-Maya Nuwere



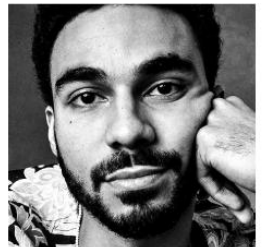
Teshomech Olenja



Destinee Rea



Awa Sal Secka



Austin Scott



Quiantae Thomas



Wade Watson



Reggie D. White

GODDESS CAST & CREATIVE TEAM HEADSHOTS

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

**CONCEIVED BY SAHEEM ALI
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY MICHAEL THURBER
BOOK BY JOCELYN BIOH
CHOREOGRAPHY BY DARRELL GRAND MOULTRIE
DIRECTED BY SAHEEM ALI**

Casting includes Nick Rashad Burroughs, Melessie Clark, Amber Iman, Arica Jackson, J Paul Nicholas, Isio-Maya Nuwere, Tesomech Olenja, Destinee Rea, Awa Sal Secka, Austin Scott, Quiantae Thomas, Wade Watson, and Reggie D. White

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

November 19, 2024 – 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, conceived and directed by Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director **Saheem Ali**, features music and lyrics by **Michael Thurber**, a book by Tony Award nominee **Jocelyn Bioh**, and choreography by **Darrell Grand Moultrie**. Performances 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.

The critically acclaimed team behind the 2021 Free Shakespeare in the Park production of *Merry Wives* returns to The Public with the New York premiere of a new musical conceived and directed by Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director **Saheem Ali**, featuring music and lyrics by **Michael Thurber** and a book by Tony Award nominee **Jocelyn Bioh**. 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 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 to my creative siblings **Michael Thurber** and **Jocelyn Bioh**, for sticking beside me through the years, as we now bring this beautiful story set in my home country to my artistic home, The Public Theater.”

Preliminary casting for **GODDESS** includes **Nick Rashad Burroughs** (*Ahmed*), **Melessie Clark** (*Mosi/Understudy*), **Amber Iman** (*Nadira*), **Arica Jackson** (*Rashida*), **J Paul Nicholas** (*Hassan*), **Isio-Maya Nuwere** (*Ensemble*), **Teshomech Olenja** (*Tisa/Understudy*), **Destinee Rea** (*Cheche*), **Awa Sal Secka** (*Zawadi/Understudy*), **Austin Scott** (*Omari*), **Quiantae Thomas** (*Ensemble*), **Wade Watson** (*Ensemble*), and **Reggie D. White** (*Baloz*). Additional casting will be announced later. Original casting for **GODDESS** was by Whitley Theatrical, with casting for The Public’s production by Taylor Williams.

The production will include scenic design by **Arnulfo Maldonado**, costume design by **Dede Ayite**, lighting design by **Bradley King**, and sound design by **Nevin Steinberg**. **Victoria Navarro** will be the production stage manager. Additional designers for the production will be announced at a later date.

In the new year, with Ma-Yi Theater Company and La Jolla Playhouse, The Public kicks off 2025 with **SUMO**, a mesmerizing new drama set in the sacred world of Sumo wrestling by **Lisa Sanaye Dring**. The Astor Place season continues with **GLASS. KILL. WHAT IF IF ONLY. IMP.**, a quartet of inventive plays written by groundbreaking playwright **Caryl Churchill** and directed by **James Macdonald**, followed by this production of **GODDESS**. The Public will also produce a world premiere audio play of **LET’S KEEP DANCING: A Death Row Story** by **John Purugganan** about two souls fighting to survive death row.

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 an all-star cast of Public Theater alumni, including **Peter Dinklage**, **Jesse Tyler Ferguson**, **Lupita Nyong'o**, **Sandra Oh**, and more to be announced in 2025.

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 publictheater.org.

GODDESS BIOS:

SAHEEM ALI (*Conceiver and Director*) 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.

JOCELYN BIOH (*Book*) is an award-winning, Tony Award-nominated Ghanaian-American writer/performer from New York City. Her written works for theater include: *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (MTC) which premiered on Broadway in 2023 and was nominated for 5 Tony Awards including Best Play, *Merry Wives* (Public Theater/Free Shakespeare in the Park, PBS *Great Performances*, 2022 Drama Desk Award Winner for Outstanding Adaptation), *Nollywood Dreams* (MCC Theater), book writer for the musical *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep, 2022), the multi-award-winning *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play* which was originally produced at MCC Theater in 2017/2018 and has gone on to have over 65 regional productions and premiered in the U.K. in 2023. Bioh was a 2017 Tow Playwriting Fellow and has won several playwriting awards including being awarded the Dramatist Guild Hull-Warriner Prize (in both 2018 and 2024), Steinberg Playwriting Award, Lortel, and Drama Desk. Bioh has also written for TV on "Russian Doll," Spike Lee's "She's Gotta Have It" (Netflix), "Tiny Beautiful Things" (Hulu), the new Star Wars series "The Acolyte" (Disney+).

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.

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.

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 credits include *Lempicka* (Tony and Drama League nominations), *Soul Doctor*, *Shuffle Along*. Off-Broadway credits include *The Ford/Hill Project* and *Rent*. Iman was in the national tour of *Hamilton*. Regional credits include *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep), *Hippest Trip* (A.C.T.), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Kennedy Center). Film credits include *Steve* and *Blackberry Winter*. Iman was featured in "High Maintenance" (HBO). She is the co-founder of Broadway Advocacy Coalition (Tony Award) and Black Women on Broadway. Iman is an alum of Howard University. @amberiman_

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

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

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 (*Omarí*) 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).

QUIANTAE THOMAS she/her (*Ensemble*) performed in the national tour of *Hamilton* (Ensemble). Regional credits include *Goddess* (Berkeley Rep), *Hairspray* (North Shore). Thomas has appeared on “Saturday Night Live!” She holds a BFA in Dance from Alabama State University. Thank you, God, for this journey! Love to my family, endless thanks to my mother for always being my #1 supporter, and to my husband--thank you for everything! Peace. @ambitiousquiantae

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 (*Balozí*) 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

ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage 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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Anna L. Weissberger Foundation.

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

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