November 6, 2017

The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater presents

_Eclipsed_ by Danai Gurira

*A senior thesis production featuring Ugonna Nwabueze with guest director Shariffa Ali at Princeton University*

Photo caption: The cast of Eclipsed (left to right) Myesha Jemison ’18, Feyisola Soetan ’19, Ugonna Nwabueze ’18, Mofopefoluwa Olarinmoye ’20, and Ozichi Okorom ’20

Photo credit: Justin Goldberg

**What:** _Eclipsed_, Danai Gurira’s gripping drama that tells the story of five extraordinary women brought together by upheaval in their homeland of Liberia and their tale of survival, hope, humor and resilience near the end of the Second Liberian Civil War.

**Who:** Presented by Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater, featuring senior Ugonna Nwabueze with guest director Shariffa Ali

**When:** November 10, 11, 16, 17 and 18 at 8 p.m. Panel discussion of African American artists on the Princeton campus following the November 18 performance.
Where: Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center, 91 University Place in Princeton

Tickets: $12 general admission in advance of show dates, $8 for students, and $17 general admission purchased the day of performances at the box office

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater at Princeton University will present *Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira, featuring senior Ugonna Nwabueze with guest director Shariffa Ali, on November 10, 11, 16, 17 and 18 at 8 p.m. Performances will take place in the Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center, 91 University Place. A panel discussion with African American artists working on the Princeton campus will follow the November 18 performance.

Gurira’s gripping drama tells the story of five extraordinary women brought together by upheaval in their homeland of Liberia and their tale of survival, hope, humor and resilience near the end of the Second Liberian Civil War. In the play the captive wives of a rebel officer band together to form a fragile community – until the balance of their lives is upset by the arrival of The Girl, recently abducted by the officer. Two of his older wives do what they can to help and care for her in the dilapidated, one-bedroom shack the women share. Just as The Girl begins to adjust to life at the compound, the entire community is thrown off balance when a fourth wife returns from the battlefield, after having escaped the army camp to fight as a soldier in the resistance. Struck by the realization that she may not have to resign herself to the grim reality of life in the army compound, The Girl must choose whether to stay with the women who have done so much for her, or to take charge of her own destiny and fight for her freedom. With deep emotional strength, brutal honesty, and a surprising degree of humor, the women of *Eclipsed* fight to survive.
Eclipsed was originally developed with support of McCarter Theatre, which also developed and premiered Gurira’s play The Convert during its 2011-12 season.

The play was nominated for a Best Play Tony Award in 2016 and Gurira received the Sam Norkin Playwriting Drama Desk Award. The Broadway production, starring Academy Award-winner Lupita Nyong’o (12 Years a Slave), received five additional Tony nominations with a win for costume design. It was the first play with an all-black and female cast and creative team to premiere on Broadway.

Nwabueze, an English major pursing certificates in theater and African American studies, proposed Eclipsed as her senior thesis for theater because she felt it was a story that had not been told on the Princeton campus. She is also president of Black Arts Company Drama, a student theater group; an A. Scott Berg Fellow; and volunteers as a drama teacher for junior high school students. Nwabueze, a first generation Nigerian American whose family has seen wartime conditions similar to those in Eclipsed firsthand, was interested in responsibly telling the story of the women in the play. She believes this production may be the first all-black female cast of a Princeton theater production. She proposed professional director Shariffa Ali to direct the project. Nwabueze had seen Ali’s work on another production of the play.

While her family’s history connected Nwabueze to the themes of Eclipsed, she felt she needed to research the role of The Girl before tackling it as an actor. With funding through the Lewis Center’s Alex Adam Award, she traveled this past summer to Ghana conducting interviews and photographing in Accra at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees headquarters; in Buduburam, once a refugee camp but now a flourishing town that serves as home for a large population of Liberian
refugees where she also volunteered as a theater teacher to the local children; and to Krisan, an active refugee camp that is home to 1,700 people displaced from several African nations. Based on what she describes as a life-changing experience in meeting and talking with these individuals, she is now also working on a documentary film on the experiences and plight of these refugees and is writing a new play set in a fictional African nation grappling with the devastating aftermath of a bloody tribal war.

The production has a relationship to Princeton’s history and the show’s second weekend run will coincide with the University’s historic Princeton and Slavery Project symposium. The Project is a multi-year scholarly investigation of Princeton’s historical engagement with the institution of slavery. The symposium on November 17 and 18 will feature a keynote by Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison; world premiere of “The Princeton and Slavery Plays” at McCarter Theatre, seven newly-commissioned short plays based on historical documents uncovered as a part of the research project; and a public conversation with artist Titus Kaphar at the University Art Museum related to a new sculpture commissioned for the Project that explores the ways in which identity, racial structures, and economies are created in visual form. Some alumni and faculty of Princeton were leading proponents of the early 19th century movement to resettle former slaves from the Americas to Africa, and the Republic of Liberia was founded as a settlement by the American Colonization Society, who believed the black community would face better chances for freedom in Africa than in the U.S.

Ali, who is directing the production, was born in Nairobi to Kenyan and Ethiopian parents, who raised her in Swaziland and South Africa. She considers herself ‘Afropolitan’ – a citizen of the continent of Africa. In New York, for two years running she was a producer on The 24 Hour
Plays: Nationals, three days of workshops for actors, writers, directors and producers 25 years of age and under. For the Alchemical Theater Laboratory she directed, choreographed and co-produced Still, and interned at the Public Theater, where she is now a Community Coordinator in the new Public Works department. She has served as Assistant Director to Cynthia Nixon for Rasheeda Speaking, Steve and Motherstruck!

The cast of Princeton undergraduates, in addition to Nwabueze includes, Myesha Jemison ’18, Ozichi Okorom ’20, Mofopefoluwa Olarinmoye ’20, and Feyisola Soetan ’19. Professional designers on the production include You-Shin Chen for sets, Ntokozo Kunene for costumes, Alex Mannix, Princeton Class of 2012, for lighting, and consultant Troy Burton. Other students involved with the production include Tamia Goodman ’19 as associate director, Rasheeda Saka ’20 as stage manager, Tom Kingori ’19 as sound designer, Kathleen Feng ’18 as assistant lighting designer, Julia Mosby ’19 and Chase Hommeyer ’20 as assistant stage managers, and Chamari White-Mink ’20 on run crew.

Faculty member and theater director Elena Araoz is serving as acting advisor, and Jane Cox, lighting designer and director of the Program in Theater, is serving as design advisor for the production.

Tickets for Eclipsed are $12 general admission in advance of show dates, $8 for students, and $17 general admission purchased the day of performances at the box office. Tickets are available through the McCarter box office online at ticketing.mccarter.org or calling 609-258-2787, and through University Ticketing online at tickets.princeton.edu or calling 609.258.9220, or stop by the Frist Campus Center or Lewis Arts complex ticket offices. Tickets will also be available at the door prior to performances.
To learn more about this event, the Program in Theater, and the more than 100 other performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts, and lectures presented by the Lewis Center, most of them free, visit arts.princeton.edu.