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EIGHT ARTISTS SELECTED FOR FIRST SUNDANCE INSTITUTE THEATRE STAGE DIRECTORS WORKSHOP IN ADDIS ABABA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia — Sundance Institute today announced the eight artists currently participating in the 2012 Theatre Stage Directors Workshop in Addis Ababa. The one-week exchange and development program, taking place through Sunday, is part of the Sundance Institute East Africa (SIEA) initiative, which supports the work of theatre artists in East Africa by creating exchange and exposure opportunities between U.S. artists and East African writers, directors, and performers. Under the supervision of Philip Himberg, Producing Artistic Director, and Associate Director Christopher Hibma, the initiative is a core component of the Theatre Program’s year-round efforts. Deborah Asiimwe, Specialist-East Africa and Roberta Levitow, Artistic Associate and Co-Founder-Theater Without Borders co-lead this initiative.

“Sundance Institute has long believed that the best way to support artistic growth is by offering hands-on experiences and collaboration with other artists,” said Keri Putnam, Executive Director of Sundance Institute. “In that spirit, the Theatre Stage Directors Workshop has brought together a range of theatre artists from across the creative spectrum to collaborate on their new work.”

“In the tenth year of our East Africa initiative, we continue to let our previous experiences in the region refine the structure of our program and the support we offer,” said Himberg. “By focusing our efforts this year on the directorial process, our hope is to contribute to the growth of creative leaders in the region and by doing so, stellar work for future audiences to enjoy.”

The Creative Advisor for the Workshop is Liesl Tommy, freelance Theatre Director (South Africa/USA).

The East Africa Initiative is made possible in part by a grant from the New Generations Program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation/The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group. The Sundance Institute Stage Director’s Workshop in Addis Ababa is supported by USA for Africa.

Tesfaye Eshetu Habtu (Ethiopia) was born in 1982 in Merawi, located in West Gojjam, Ethiopia. At Teachers’ College, he received a diploma in History. Tesfaye entered Addis Ababa University’s School of Theatre Arts and received his BA degree with great distinction. He joined the faculty of the School of Theatre Arts and has been teaching as a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre for the past three years, while completing an MA in Cultural Studies. Inspired to work as a theatre director, Tesfaye has directed nine traditional dramas from different regions of Ethiopia, all of which were filmed and presented on Ethiopian national television. One of these productions was presented at the 2008 East African Theatre Institute (EATI) Festival in Addis Ababa, winning First Prize. He worked as an Assistant Director on the feature length film Our Local Artists. Amongst other writings, Tesfaye published his article Historical Evolution and the Ethiopian Drama in Multicultural Societies.

Habiba Issa (Tanzania) has been working as an actress and stage director since completing her degree at the Bagamoyo College of Arts, Tanzania in 2003. She directed the play Dhamana Mabatini written by
Godwin Kaduma. In 2007, she directed Kuku na Mayai Yake. After that she was named the Artistic Director at The Parapanda Theatre Lab Trust in Dar es Salaam. Two of her most successful productions with Parapanda (Tanzania’s leading theatre company) were Mfalme Salatani na Mwanawe Guidon by Alexander Pushkin in 2010, and Nguzo Mama by Penina Muhando in 2011. Habiba seeks to become a more knowledgeable person with independent thinking about composing and directing stage works so that she can share that information with her colleagues at Parapanda (“the mother of stage arts in Tanzania”) and other Tanzanian artists.

Aida Mbowa (Uganda) is a Ugandan director and scholar presently pursing a dual PhD in Drama and Humanities at Stanford University, focusing on dramatic literature and music in the wake of political movements, such as decolonization in East Africa and the African American Black Power Movement. In 2009, she co-directed a multi-media multidisciplinary performance with 10 Stanford students in collaboration with students and practitioners from Makerere University in Kampala, which performed at both the Uganda National Theater and at Stanford University. Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Aida studied in East Africa with the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts International and completed her Bachelor’s degree, graduating magna cum laude with a BA in Performance and Identity Studies from Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. In June 2011, she moved back to East Africa to finish writing her dissertation Dialogic Constructions of a New Black Aesthetic: East Africa and African America, 1952-1979. She has two articles en route to publication. The first, Abbey Lincoln’s Singing Screaming and the Sonic Liberatory Potential Thereafter, will appear in New Perspectives on Performance Studies: Music Across the Disciplines (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012). The second article, Between Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Independence Men, will appear in the anthology Revisiting Modernization in Africa, currently under review with University of Indiana Press.

Rogers Otieno (Kenya), born in rural Kenya and known to his friends as ‘Rojeh’, is one of the brightest young faces of Kenya’s emerging arts scene. An avid performer from childhood, his first stage was the top of his school room desk where he would mimic his teachers. After school he joined a church performance group, which eventually led him to work at the Kenya National Theatre where he learned the ropes of professional theatre. For the past three years, Rogers was the Associate Director in charge of training at Nairobi’s The Theatre Company. Rogers’ original play My Moving Home holds the record for longest running play in Kenya in 2010. Performed in Kiswahili, Sheng (Kenyan street-slang) and English, the play uses music, narration and largely improvised dialogue to imitate the interactive style of street theatre that Rogers feels is closest to the East African traditional method, allowing for interaction with the audience. Rogers has also performed on several Kenyan television programs. For the last 11 years, he has been involved in performance, producing and directing live events throughout Kenya and internationally.

Wesley Ruzibiza (Rwanda), one of Rwanda’s leading dancers and choreographers, is a 2010 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab on Manda alum. Born in Congo in 1980, Wesley began studying contemporary dance in 2000, at the National University of Rwanda. He trained in African contemporary dance techniques with Arts Azimuts, part of the University Centre for Arts & Drama. His professional training continues both nationally and abroad, including through artists’ exchanges and Germaine Acoigny’s renowned Ecole des Sables in Dakar, Senegal. Appointed as head of Dance Department in 2002, he has given workshops on contemporary dance at the NUR University Centre for Arts & Drama and at various programs in Rwanda and abroad. Wesley’s choreographic pieces have been showcased for major cultural events, such as the opening of the Panafriac Festival of Dance (FESPAD), Rwanda’s Heroes’ Day, Genocide Commemoration Day, and the Under 20 African Soccer Cup. Wesley was selected for a choreographic training in Ouagadougou and Paris, which led to the creation of the first professional contemporary dance group in Rwanda, the Amizero Company, of which he is now the director. Amizero Kompagnie’s play Baho won the Silver Medal for Rwanda at the Sixth Annual Jeux de la Francophonie, Lebanon. Wesley holds a B.A. in Dance in Traditional and Contemporary African Style from Ecole de Sables. Wesley has also worked with an international multicultural project for children, The Longest Story in the World, touring in countries including Romania, The UK, and Bangladesh.

Freddy Sabimbona (Burundi), actor, director, producer and journalist - as well as the founding Director of the satirical comedy group Troupe Lampyre - started directing in 2007 with a play entitled Le retour
d’un jeune homme responsable qui s’abstient after working for five years as an actor in Bujumbura, Burundi. Born in Washington DC in 1982, Freddy studied at the Lumière University Faculty of Law before turning to a career in the performing arts. Since founding Troupe Lampyre, he has participated in numerous international festivals and various programs focused on resolving ethnic conflict, including travels in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, L’Ile de La Réunion and France. In July 2011, he directed Mr. President, a play which talks about politics in Burundi from 1988 until 1993.

Azeb Worku Sibane (Ethiopia) lives and works in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She has worked professionally for more than 15 years in diverse roles including actress, production manager, translator, theatre director and playwright. Sibane has performed at Ethiopia’s National Theatre since 1992 and has appeared in works such as Ha-hu Weyim Pe-Pu by Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin and Kedadmas Bashahge by Bealu Girma. In 2006 Sibane directed and acted in Eight Women, originally a French comedy drama that she also translated. The production was staged entirely by women, empowering women in Ethiopia to realize professional works successfully. Additionally, she has performed in numerous plays at the Addis Ababa Cultural Center and in live transmissions at the Ethiopia National Radio. In 2007 Sibane performed at The Swedish Theatre Biennale in Örebro as part of the Performing Arts Cooperation between Sweden and East Africa Project (PACSEA), which promoted knowledge and relationship building between the two regions. In 2008 Sibane was selected for an ApexArt Residency in New York City, where she performed The Devil’s Scarf and The Lion’s Whiskers.

Surafel Wondimu (Ethiopia) is a playwright, actor, director, poet, journalist and literary critic born in 1974 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He graduated from Addis Ababa University (AAU) with degrees in English Literature and in Contemporary Cultural Studies from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Currently, Surafel serves on the AAU Faculty of Humanities as a Lecturer and Assistant Dean. He also runs the private company Aesop Communication, which runs a weekly 19-hour radio program on FM 97.1. Surafel’s work as an artist and journalist for the Ethiopian National Theater and Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency includes: Sekeken, Death Day Party, Tesfa, The Inspector General, The Hidden Specter, and Dismissed. At the 9th Albugaa Theater Festival in Khartoum, Sudan, Surafel was awarded for writing and direction of his own work. In his academic and artistic endeavors, Surafel grapples with questions that stem from the very locale that he lives in and relates it to his daily life experience in this constantly mutating world. His central question is ‘what does it mean to be human for a citizen of this divided world, an African, and Ethiopian?’ He wants to experiment with forms of Ethiopian folk drama to bring ‘traditional’ dramatic elements into the modern mainstream theater, thereby redefining the epistemological location of Ethiopian theater.

Sundance Institute East Africa (SIEA)
SIEA is in the tenth year of an ongoing program promoting exposure and exchange between cultural workers across vast economic, cultural, geographic, and political divides. Cognizant of the pitfalls of international engagement in Africa, SIEA aims towards the empowerment of East African theatre artists as leaders in their own communities, describing their own circumstances, needs, and desires. Engaging high-level East African performing artists to interact in peer-to-peer encounters with the highest level U.S.-based performing artists, the program reaches deep into local communities by offering skills and opportunities to artists with established public platforms. Individual East African artistic voices are mentored and inspired through local cultural advocacy to engage creatively with the tumultuous, often violent, challenges facing the countries of the region. The increased capacity of East African cultural voices to embody truthful, complex, revelatory, subtle, and compassionate reflections of local lives empowers audience members with their own capacities for critical thinking, embracing paradoxes, recognizing the harm done to others, and practicing peaceful coexistence. These strengthened characteristics within communities are vital to constructively engaged public citizens, ultimately impacting local, national and regional social dynamics. The presence of leading U.S.-based artists within East Africa transforms local expectations about American willingness to engage personally and practically, offering transformative experiences that similarly and inevitably impact the American public through the altered world view of American artists.
Sundance Institute Theatre Program
The Theatre Program has been a core component of Sundance Institute since Robert Redford founded the Institute in 1984. The Theatre Program identifies and assists emerging theatre artists, contributes to the creative growth of established artists, and encourages and supports the development of new work for the stage. Under the guidance of Producing Artistic Director Philip Himberg, the Theatre Program is the leading play development program in the United States. Titles such as Spring Awakening, An Iliad, I Am My Own Wife, The Good Negro, Circle Mirror Transformation, Passing Strange, Grey Gardens, Crowns and Marie Antoinette have gone from Theatre Program Labs to production from coast to coast and internationally, garnering multiple Pulitzers, Tonys, Obies and other recognition. The Theatre Program’s East Africa initiative is the only professional program of its type on the continent, offering Labs, cross-cultural exchange, mentorship and exposure to artists in six African countries. www.sundance.org/theatre

Sundance Institute
Sundance Institute is a global nonprofit organization founded by Robert Redford in 1981. Through its programs for directors, screenwriters, producers, composers and playwrights, the Institute seeks to discover and support independent film and theatre artists from the United States and around the world, and to introduce audiences to their new work. The Institute promotes independent storytelling to inform, inspire, and unite diverse populations around the globe. Internationally recognized for its annual Sundance Film Festival, Sundance Institute has nurtured such projects as Born into Brothels, Trouble the Water, Son of Babylon, Amreeka, An Inconvenient Truth, Spring Awakening, Light in the Piazza and Angels in America. www.sundance.org

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