

WACO THEATER CENTER
PRESENTS

KEEPER OF SADNESS

with Artist-In-Residence
JADE SOLOMON CURTIS

a SOLO MAGIC production



PROGRAM SPONSORSHIP



DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
City of Los Angeles

JUNE 9
8:00 PM

Dear Patrons,

Welcome to the final program of WACO Theater Center's 2022/23 artistic season as we celebrate 5 years supporting the dreams of artists and young people. We are honored by your presence at our presentation of Jade Solomon's Keeper of Sadness.

Your support tonight directly benefits the artists, young people and community members that WACO serves across Los Angeles and beyond.

The arts provide a gateway to the stories and histories of our communities. They allow us to laugh, cry, reflect and heal. We know the power of art and will continue to invest in education programs and world class productions.

We both know what it means to have a strong support system to guide you through life. We are proud to share that our first class of mentees in Tina's Angels and Richard's Warriors graduated and we are so excited for what is next in their future.

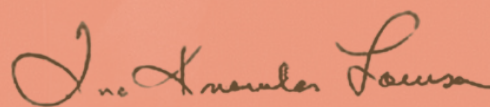
As we culminate our artistic season, *Black with a Capital B*, we look to deepen our commitment, and expand our footprint to reach more artists and young people who we know will change the world.

Enjoy yourself tonight--as we recognize the contributions and experiences of Black women. We look forward to seeing you again at the theater, and invite you to join us, as we celebrate 5 years and our journey into the future.

Together—we are WACO. We are creating a home Where Art Can Occur.



Richard Lawson
Founder & Artistic Director



Tina Knowles Lawson
Founder & Artistic Director

Founded in 2017 by Richard and Tina Knowles Lawson, WACO (Where Art Can Occur) Theater Center is located in the burgeoning North Hollywood Arts District of Los Angeles and is one of the few cultural institutions in the country providing contemporary performing and visual arts of the African Diaspora.

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Mission Statement

WACO Theater Center is a performing and visual arts organization dedicated to the empowerment of Los Angeles artists, young people and stories of the African diaspora.

We present, commission and develop artistic works to provide artists and young people a platform and voice to showcase their creativity.

Values Statement

WACO's artistic and education programs are driven by four values. We create work that unapologetically:

- **Centers Black art and culture** from a diasporic lens and voice.
- **Incubates and launches new creative ideas** to memorialize the past and envision the future of Black life.
- **Is collaborative and leads with an Ubuntu mindset**, "I am, because we are."
- **Serves the needs of the community** including the social, economic and civic priorities of our neighbors and Black Los Angeles.

KEEPER OF SADNESS

with Artist-In-Residence

JADE SOLOMON CURTIS

in partnership with Solo Magic

Keeper of Sadness (KOS) is a work-in-progress showing developed by Jade Solomon Curtis during her time as an artist in residence at WACO. This iteration of KOS is a part of an ongoing exploration of expansive and versatile dance production incorporating various artistic and healing mediums. KOS delves into the profound and lasting impacts of transgenerational trauma, pervasive stereotypes, and the erasure of the contributions Black women make to the lives of countless others. KOS endeavors to provide a platform for the anguish that has long resided within the depths of numerous disregarded Black women throughout history. These women, often forced to stifle their pain to survive, have endured the burden of genetically recycled trauma without the means to release it. Through this artistic endeavor, KOS seeks to shed light on this narrative and offer a channel for the cathartic expression and recognition of their experiences.

"Black women are often alone in their grief because they are socialized to be strong and stoic, and therefore perpetuate the stereotypical "strong Black woman" trope. The need to be strong and stoic is dangerous for Black grieving women because it is incredibly difficult to acknowledge the need for help."

- Stacy Scott, Ph.D., MPA.

Movement I: The Unraveling

The first movement of KOS evokes Curtis's powerful memory of watching maternal figures (mothers, grandmothers, and aunties) prepare for church or a night out. These women presented their best selves while having to conceal the unraveling happening beneath.

Movement II: The Grief

Building upon the preceding narrative, the performer navigates through the five stages of Black grief, as identified by Stacy Scott: despair, self-blame, move to action, endurance, and survival. The artist weaves in and out of these emotional stages offering a poignant exploration of the complex journey toward healing and resilience in the face of adversity.

Movement III: The Joy

The third movement explores the profound impact of the Black Church on the experience of Black Women. Growing up in Texas, the Southern Church was a significant part of Curtis's foundation. Within those walls, she experienced profound gratitude and wept tears that helped her find a connection between her joy and pain. Today the closest parallel she finds to that triumphant feeling resides in house music.



Jade Solomon Curtis (Director & Choreographer) is a choreographer, dance artist, curator, and the Founder of Solo Magic, a non-profit arts initiative that collaborates with innovative artists to create socially relevant engagements; "Activism is the Muse". She is also the creator of the Radical Black Femme Project (www.RBFP.org). This globally-focused residency program supports creative work in resisting racism, subverting transphobia, and supporting justice, safety, and equity with an emphasis on counter-culture conversations.

Curtis received her BFA from Southern Methodist University and is the recipient of fellowships, residencies, and grants from the Bossak-Heilbron Charitable Foundation, Artist Trust, University of South Carolina, Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Base Experimental Arts + Space, 4Culture, Artist Trust, Where Art Can Occur (WACO), Duke University (SLIPPAGE LAB) and New England Foundation for the Arts National Dance Project among others.

Her works have been commissioned by the University of Washington's Meany Hall as a part of Saul Williams' Motherboard Suite, directed by Bill T. Jones, Seattle Art Museum as a part of the landmark exhibition, Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic, Central District Forum for Art & Ideas, Grammy Award-winning jazz composer, John Clayton and acclaimed saxophonist, Lakecia Benjamin. Additionally, her works have been presented by the Northwest African American Museum's Complex Exchange: Jacob Lawrence's Great Migration, Velocity Dance Center, Spectrum Dance Theater, Chan Center of the Arts, Monmouth University, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, University of Albany, and Seoul International Dance Festival to name a few.

A celebrated former dancer of Donald Byrd's Spectrum Dance Theater, Curtis is also the subject of an Emmy Award-winning short film, Jade Solomon Curtis, directed by Ralph Bevins. She has also performed with and as a member of Alison Chase Performance, Opus Dance Theater, Wideman/Davis Dance, and Seattle's highly respected 5th Avenue Theater's productions of Oklahoma, Kiss Me Kate, Carousel, Man of La Mancha, and Holiday Inn.

A sought-after instructor, Curtis teaches and facilitates workshops with youth and adult professionals in contemporary dance, ballet, and creative dance processes. She has taught classes, workshops, and hosted internships at Tacoma Urban Performing Arts Center (TUPAC), Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, Lake Washington Girls Middle School, Seattle Girls Middle School, Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, University of Washington, Skidmore College and Arizona State University.

Curtis' endeavors also expand beyond the stage. As the Chief Operations Officer for the nonprofit PACE, Curtis strategically leads various program executions and operations.



Akoiya Harris (Research Consultant) is a movement artist based in Seattle, Washington. Her work uses a queer Black gaze to look at the ways art holds personal and communal histories. As a choreographer, she has shown work at the Seattle Art Museum, Wa Na Wari, Mad Art Gallery, Base Art Space, Friends of the Waterfront, Northwest Film Forum, The Moore Theater, and 12th Ave Arts. Akoiya's practice is rooted in finding the ways oral history, archival research, and poetry can be interwoven into dance works. She has also performed with Spectrum Dance Theater, Will Rawls, Zoe | Juniper, Third Rail Projects, and Black Collectivity. She also has the pleasure of teaching at Pacific Northwest Ballet and Ailey Camp.



Arif Gursel, a.k.a. Don Dada Shotta (Audio Designed & Documentarian), is a multi-hyphenate creative professional leading music, photography, film, and fashion projects for VIBEHEAVY. Gursel comes from a long line of entertainment professionals on the industry's professional and creative sides. He has produced films, collaborated with visual and dance artists on multi-medium projects & crafted music for top indie artists as well as commissions to provide remixes for major label artists. He is currently working on launching an independent label group and producing multiple projects that span genres from jazz to hip-hop to house and the untapped sound of alternative Afropop.



Jessica Amber Pinkett (Dance Artist) is an artist. Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, she knew that art would be the moving force to cultivate her career. After studying at George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology and graduating with honors from Towson University, she brought her talents to New York City where she joined Ailey II, junior company of the world renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She later joined the main company in 2018. Her early career work has been in the performing arts, choreography and teaching. She transitioned into film and photography, while still exploring the vastness of the arts and humanities. Jessica is passionate about community outreach, making art more accessible to the public, mental health awareness, advocacy and accessibility.



Michele Dooley [she/he/they] (Dance Artist) is a dance artist and teacher from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She began her dance training at The Institute of the Arts, graduated from The Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts, and later earned her BFA in Dance from The University of the Arts. Michele has completed programs with Bates Summer intensive, BalletX Summer Program, and DCNS Summer Dance Intensive and has worked with choreographers Gary Jeter, Tommie-Waheed Evans, Aszure Barton, Jermaine Spivey, Milton Myers, Spenser Theberge, and Nora Gibson, amongst others. She has had the privilege of working with Eleone Dance Theatre and Spectrum Dance Theater. She is currently a company artist with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.



Cristina Orbé (Workshop Facilitator) co-founded FEEST, a nationally recognized youth leadership, policy and food justice organization and was a Kellogg Foundation Grantee. She is one of the organizers and facilitators of the Black Women's Rest and Restoration Retreats. She was a touring musician for 14 years, released 3 albums, participated in several international artist residencies and has collaborated on various interdisciplinary projects. Currently, she channels earth songs to and through the land, animals, the plants to individuals, groups and at sacred sites. She has also spent over a decade healing via indigenous medicine and ceremony. Most recently, she's training in approaches to collective and ancestral trauma.



Nia-Amina Minor (Dramaturg) is a movement artist originally from Los Angeles. Her creative work focuses on the body and what it carries using physical and archival research to explore memory and history. She approaches her practice as an imaginative space grounded in rhythm where improvisation, Black vernacular movement, and choreography meet. Nia-Amina holds a MFA from UC Irvine and a BA from Stanford University. She has guest lectured and been a visiting artist at CalArts, University of Washington, Saddleback College and Cypress College. In 2021, she was recognized as Dance Magazine's 25 Artists to Watch. Currently, she is a dance curator at Wa Na Wari, a 2022 Velocity Dance Center Made in Seattle Artist in Residence, and Dramaturg for the Keeper of Sadness project.



Nile Alicia Ruff (Dance Artist) is a Life Force in the Movement and Healing Arts cultivated in Chocolate City, DC. Nile grew from teachers at Kankouran West African Dance Company, Jones-Haywood School of Ballet, Coyaba Dance Theater and Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Nile earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Point Park University and a year long scholarship to The Ailey School. Upon graduating, Nile has worked professionally with Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, Attack Theater, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Spectrum Dance Theater+Donald Byrd, Akoiya Harris and Dance Iquail. Nile uses Blackness and the chanting of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo to transform, revive and nurture. Nile thanks family, friends, teachers, ancestors, Jade Solomon and everyone who is involved in Solo Magic. Black is Beautiful.



Maria Boxill is a licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) who walks alongside youth and adults to address trauma through a multicultural / social justice lens. Maria's counseling experience results from many years of service to and within marginalized communities in various inner cities around the world. Maria believes that holistic attunement is key to healthy development of individual and communal identity. She works tirelessly to increase understanding about and to deconstruct systems that hinder advancement while increasing a sense of healing, self-awareness, and resilience.

"We are not created to exist in isolation. When we are at our best, we serve as beacons of hope shining light on lessons learned and experiences weaving a beautiful tapestry of endurance, determination, pride, unity, and hope." – Maria Boxill (LMHC, MACP)

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Cornelius Humphries, *Special Events Coordinator*
Kobe Lamaur, *Box Office*
Nijeul X, *Producer*
Shay Wafer, *Producer*
Steven Foley, *Producer*

NEXT UP AT WACO

June 14 at 6:00 PM

Gloria Molina Grand Park, Olive Court

THE LORRAINE HANSBERRY INITIATIVE

ELEVATING OUR PAST & INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Hansberry Initiative collaborators and local artists will be present for the unveiling of *To Sit A While* in Gloria Molina Grand Park. They will share information about Lorraine Hansberry's legacy, offer details about the upcoming activations and share more about the Lilly's scholarship program. Scheduled Speakers and Performers:

Julia Jordan, The Lillys Executive Director

Alison Saar, *To Sit A While* sculpture artist

Adrian Dunn and the Adrian Dunn Singers

Open to the public.

Additional participants to be announced at a later date.

**Sign up for the WACO monthly newsletter
and be the first in line for tickets!**

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Presentation of Keeper of Sadness



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