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CATCO rings in the new year with *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* Jan. 27

Witty and heartwarming play offers refreshing spin on Mean Girls, life lessons for all ages

Jocelyn Bioh's witty and thought-provoking comedy, *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*, called "a must-see for school girls, mean girls, and all people, everywhere" by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, opens the 2022 theatre season at CATCO Jan. 27-Feb. 13.

The play, which examines the social life of teen girls in the vein of the cinema classic, *Mean Girls*, is set at an elite boarding school in Ghana and tackles issues of class and beauty standards. Popular student Paulina controls the social scene at the prestigious Aburi Girls Boarding School, but the teen queen's throne is threatened when a new student arrives from America.

"We can't wait for central Ohio audiences to watch and discover this comedic and heartfelt drama that sheds light on the challenges teen-aged girls everywhere confront in this refresh of a popular genre that also shares important life lessons for all ages," said Shanelle Marie, director of *School Girls*.

Since *School Girls* opened Off-Broadway in 2017, it has been popular with regional theatres nationwide and received acclaim from audiences and reviewers. *Variety* described the play as "full of light and laughter" while the *Chicago Tribune* called it "highly entertaining and moving." *The New York Times* wrote: "The nasty-teen comedy genre emerged wonderfully refreshed and even deepened by its immersion in a world it never considered."

Playwright Bioh is a Ghanaian-American writer, playwright and actor. She graduated from [The Ohio State University](#) with a BA in English and theater and received her master's degree in playwriting from [Columbia University](#). In addition to *School Girls*, her other well-known plays include *Nollywood Dreams*, *African Americans*, *The Ladykiller's Love Story*, and *Happiness and Joe*. *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* won the 2018 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play.

School Girls is recommended for ages 12 and up, and has a run time of approximately 90 minutes.

To learn more about the play, there will be a talkback following the Sunday, Jan. 30, performance, featuring members of the cast and creative team. Francine Marchelle, CATCO's education director, will moderate.

Performing in the cast are:

- Kerri Garrett (Paulina Sarpong), an interdisciplinary artist and Clark Atlanta University alum from Columbus but based in Atlanta, who intertwines dance, film, and fashion to create compelling narratives about the black experience. Her credits include *Sorry About That*, *360 Degrees of Blackness*, *Salt City: An Afro-Futuristic Choreopoem* and *Hand's Up*. She is also a trained dancer with multiple choreography credits.

- Lisa Glover (Ericka Boafu), a local singer/songwriter, actor and dancer, who is making her CATCO debut. Some of her favorite theatre credits include Deena Jones (*Dreamgirls*); Anita (*West Side Story*); Whatshername (*American Idiot*); and Brooke/Vicki (*Noises Off*).
- Taylor Nelson (Ama), who made her acting debut in ArtPrize 2009 in *Rabbitmitten, U.S.A.* and studied Black and Africana Studies at Denison University. She was recently seen in the Association of University Women's #StandUpToSexism campaign, as well as the indie film *Poser* at the Tribeca Film Festival, and performed in Actors' Theatre of Columbus' production of *The African Company Presents Richard III*.
- Shauna Marie (Nana), who recently performed in CATCO's production of *Mr. Burns, a post-electric play* as Quincy/Lisa and in *Ain't Misbehavin'* with Trinity Theatre Company at District West in Columbus. Other recent CATCO productions include *My Way, A Musical Tribute to Frank Sinatra* and *Eubie!*
- Jacinda Forbes (Mercy), a senior at Ohio State, where she is studying theatre and strategic communications. She has been involved in Off the Lake Productions' *She Kills Monsters* and *9 to 5: The Musical*; other credits include *Her Naked Skin* and *Legally Blonde: The Musical* at Ohio State's Department of Theatre.
- Sermontee Brown (Gifty), a dancer, singer, producer, actor and model, who is making her CATCO debut in *School Girls*. No stranger to performing – she started dancing at age 3 – she is thrilled to be acting again.
- Wilma Hatton (Headmistress Francis), a longtime Columbus actor, who was most recently seen in Actors' Theatre of Columbus' production of *The African Company Presents Richard III*. Other acting credits include *Company* and *Curtains* with Gallery Players; *Hairspray* with Weathervane Playhouse; *A Raisin in the Sun* with SRO Theater; *How We Got On* and several productions with Available Light Theater; and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* with Short North Stage, as well as many commercials and short films.
- Anita Davis (Eloise Amponsah), a Columbus-based actor, vocalist, dancer and model whose numerous credits include work in theatre, film, television, music, video, voiceover and print. She has performed nationwide in such productions as *Steal Away*; *Stepper's Ball*; *Sisters*; *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*; and *The Trip*. Her film credits include *The Endangered*; *Compensation*; *Cruel and Unusual*; and *Turning the Corner*, along with the made-for-TV movies *Skin Complex* and the Emmy Award-winning *Our Father*.
- Latifat Sulaimon (Understudy: Paulina, Ama, Nana, Mercy, and Gifty), who is pursuing a BFA in communications of technology with a dance minor at Ohio State. Recent credits include: *Swing for Judy*, *Joan and Alicia* in *Small Mouth Sounds*, (Southern Plain Productions); '80s college student in *Wheat Germ* (Netflix); and Ama in *School Girls*; *Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Westerville South).

School Girls' Director Marie directed *Water Gun Song* in *Short Plays Toward an Antiracist Tomorrow* in fall 2020 and performed in *Home* in 2019 at CATCO. Previously, she was the assistant director of *The Color Purple* with State of the Arts Productions, and a frequent artistic collaborator and board member of the Maroon Arts Group. Her favorite moments on stage include performing for actor, poet and playwright Ruby Dee; Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*; Marrell in *This* with Available Light Theatre; and as a Tedx Columbus Women speaker. Her first acting teacher was her grandmother, who brought Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poetry to life.

Other members of the creative team are: Delaney Althaus, wardrobe; Becky Barger Amato, assistant stage manager; Noelle Anderson, music director; Darin Keesings, lighting designer; Tony Koehler, production manager; Lisa McLymont, set designer; Brenda Michna, co-master electrician; Esther Sands, costume designer; Mukwae Wabei Siyolwe, dialect coach; Brooklyn Sabino Smith, props designer; Isaac Steinhour, technical director; Kirsten Upchurch, stage manager; Diallo Wilkerson, sound designer; and Rowan Winterwood, master electrician.

Tickets for *School Girls* are \$45 each and can be purchased at <https://www.catco.org/2021-22/school-girls/> Thursday, Jan. 27, 7:30 p.m., and Friday, Jan. 28, 8 p.m., are preview performances; opening night is

Friday, Jan. 29, 8 p.m. Performances during the run are Thursdays, 7:30 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays, 8 p.m.; and Sundays, 2 p.m.

Students may purchase \$20 tickets two hours before any performance at the Riffe Center box office, 77 S. High St., Fourth Floor. One ticket per valid student ID can be purchased based upon availability.

As part of CATCO's commitment to ensure that theatre is accessible to every member of the central Ohio community, the theatre offers a Pay-What-You-Can (PWYC) ticket option for the previews of every play at both mainstage and theatre for young audience productions. For *School Girls*, preview performances are Thursday, Jan. 27, 7:30 p.m. and Friday, Jan. 28, 8 p.m. PWYC works like this:

PWYC tickets can be purchased in advance by calling 614.469.0939 or visiting the CBUSArts Ticket Center at 39 E. State St. Downtown. The ticket center is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and the telephone center receives calls Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Same-day tickets are available two hours before the show in-person at the Riffe Center box office, 77 S. High St., Fourth Floor.

For the safety of our staff, actors and audience beginning in October, CATCO will require proof of COVID-19 vaccinations or proof of a negative PCR test within 72-hours of attending a production for all patrons 12 years of age and older. We will additionally require mask-wearing indoors at our theater for all audience members and staff until further notice.

Remaining shows in CATCO's 2021-22 season include *Luchadora!*, Feb. 17-March 6, 2022; *Head Over Heels*, March 17-April 3, 2022; and *Prima Donna*, April 28-May 15, 2022.

CATCO's 37th season is made possible in part by state tax dollars allocated by the Ohio Legislature to the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. CATCO is also supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

CATCO also appreciates the support of the William C. & Naoma W. Denison Fund of The Columbus Foundation, assisting donors and others in strengthening our community for the benefit of all its citizens, and the Greater Columbus Arts Council, supporting the city's artists and arts organizations since 1973. Other supporters include The Shubert Foundation Inc. and Nationwide Insurance Foundation.

About CATCO

CATCO is central Ohio's leading professional Equity theatre company, providing exceptional productions and educational programs for adults and young people, in response to our community's needs. We believe theatrical storytelling transforms people of all ages by immersing them into immediate, communal experiences. CATCO exists to harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy. For more information, visit catco.org.

CATCO's Vision

CATCO strives to become a nationally recognized, anti-racist contemporary theatre company that anchors a thriving Columbus theatre ecosystem in an empathetic, equitable world.

CATCO's Purpose/Mission

To harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy.

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