



**PRESS RELEASE**

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CONTACT: Joanna Penalva,  
Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications  
315-443-2636 or jlpenalv@syr.edu

**Syracuse Stage concludes the 2021/2022 season with performances of  
'salt/city/blues' and 'The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe'**

*Stage partners with Everson Museum of Art and Syracuse's Juneteenth celebration*



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**At a Glance**

- "salt/city/blues," June 9 – 26 at Syracuse Stage. Tickets at [www.syracusestage.org/saltcityblues](http://www.syracusestage.org/saltcityblues).
- "The Most Beautiful Home . . . Maybe," June 16 – 18 at Syracuse Stage. Free event.
- "15-81" featuring architect and urban designer Sekou Cooke's project "We Outchea: Hip-Hop Fabrications and Public Space." On display at Everson Museum of Art through August 21.

SYRACUSE, NY - [Syracuse Stage](#) concludes the 2021/2022 season with a new play on the mainstage, an original play about housing insecurity in America and partnerships with [Everson Museum of Art](#) and Syracuse's Juneteenth celebration. Corollary events around the shows and partnership include artist talks and panel discussions at Syracuse Stage and the Everson Museum. Collectively, the shows and added events focus attention on important concerns for the Syracuse community, especially relating to the history of the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward and the impact of the construction and impending dismantling of the I-81 overpass.

The main components of the partnership are Stage's production of resident playwright Kyle Bass' "salt/city/blues," "The Most Beautiful Home . . . Maybe" by artists and activists Mark Valdez and Ashley Sparks and the Everson Museum exhibit "15-81" featuring architect and urban designer Sekou Cooke's project "We Outchea: Hip-Hop Fabrications and Public Space."

"A rich array of artistic work marks the conclusion of Syracuse Stage's 21/22 season," said Bob Hupp, artistic director, Syracuse Stage. "These works highlight what Syracuse Stage does best as we shine a spotlight on issues that affect all of us who call Syracuse home. Through our creative lens we explore and give voice to the obstacles and opportunities that engage our community. Through new work, discussions and collaborative interactions, we strive to give everyone a new way of thinking about and addressing seemingly intractable challenges."

### **'salt/city/blues'**

Directed by Gilbert McCauley, "salt/city/blues" is a contemporary drama set in a downtown bar in a fictionalized Syracuse where a controversial highway project that has long divided the city is due to be dismantled. What comes next for the city, the once thriving neighborhood destroyed by the highway and the individuals who frequent the local watering hole Topsy's Pub threads through the narrative of the play.

With gentrification underway in the neighborhood and more change coming soon, the fate of Topsy's is uncertain, as are the fates of those whose lives are connected to it. This includes Prof D (Leo Finnie) a Black man who claims to be 81 years old and who lives in an apartment above the bar. He is a storyteller and a blues aficionado with a killer collection of vintage vinyl, who also claims to be a retired professor. Carrie (Joey Parsons) is the bartender, 30s, white and a veteran of the Iraq war, who has her eye on a small parcel of land with apple trees. The resident barfly is a fiftyish white man named Fish (Rand Foerster) who likes his drink too much and can make enough trouble to occasionally get himself barred from Topsy's.

The newcomer to the scene is Yolonda Mourning (Chantal Jean-Pierre), a Black woman in her 40s, who is a consultant for the city on the highway project. She is not typical of Topsy's clientele. She has recently moved to a new apartment in the downtown neighborhood after separating from her husband. Her son Malcolm (Jeremiah Packer), 17, is the fifth character. He aspires to be a blues musician and has a tense relationship with his mother.

"This is a story about a town and a bar at a crossroads, and five people who are at crossroads in their lives," McCauley said. "We often arrive at places where we have to make decisions and figure out what direction to take. That's what facing these characters, and what we face that today, even as a nation, as a country. Where are we going?"

Bass based Topsy's on a real Downtown Syracuse pub and many parallels exist between the Salt City of the play and Syracuse. But Bass points out, the Salt City of the play is more of a fraternal twin to Syracuse. The play, he says, is inspired by this community.

"salt/city/blues" runs June 9 – 26. Tickets are on sale now at [www.syracusestage.org](http://www.syracusestage.org).

### **'The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe'**

"The Most Beautiful Home . . . Maybe," is an original work of devised theater whose goal is to use the imaginative resources of theater to explore solutions to chronic housing problems plaguing the country. Through workshops that bring together stakeholders involved in housing policy—politicians, developers, advocates, activists, the homeless—Valdez and sparks seek creative solutions to housing insecurity by challenging participants to consider the question "What if everyone in this country had a home?" The input collected at the workshops forms the basis for the performance piece. Syracuse Stage has hosted four workshops in the lead up to the performance and local participants have included Deka Dancil, diversity, equity and inclusion specialist, St. Joseph's Health; Lanessa Chaplin, Esq., Project Counsel, New York Civil Liberties Union; and author and playwright Dr. Juhanna Rogers, among others.

To date, "The Most Beautiful Home . . . Maybe" has performed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the Mixed Blood Theatre, and recently at Los Angeles' REDCAT in the Walt Disney Concert Hall Complex. In speaking with the LA Times, sparks said that the skills theater artists have "are actually superpowers for solving community problems and creating spaces for people to have hard conversations."

"What would we create?" Valdez asks. "What kind of high density, co-op driven models of housing could we create? How do we build the additional 68 million homes that we need? How do we incentivize mom-and-pop landlords to keep their units affordable?"

Valdez and sparks note that the pandemic has exacerbated an already widespread and chronic problem, with many middle-class Americans experiencing housing insecurity.

"I can feel my body get lighter when I imagine that world where people are not living in the fear and stress of being unhoused or losing their home, or worried about where they're going to live when they're old," sparks says. "Our country would actually just be healthier and more prosperous if there was housing stability."

"The Most Beautiful Home . . . Maybe" runs for three performances only, June 16, 17 and 18 at 7:30 p.m. in the Arthur Storch Theatre at Syracuse Stage. Admission is free.

### **Everson Museum of Art and Juneteenth Partnerships**

The exhibit "15-81" presents Cooke's project "We Outchea: Hip-Hop Fabrications and Public Space" alongside documents relating to the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward. Commissioned by New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2021 as part of the exhibition "Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America," "We Outchea" focuses on the legacy of placement and displacement of Black residents in Syracuse and considers various events in the city's history—the razing of the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, the building of multiple public housing projects and the construction of Interstate-81—while simultaneously critiquing recent proposals to replace low-income communities with mixed-income housing.

By contextualizing the “We Outchea” project with photographs and ephemera that tell the story of the once vibrant 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, Cooke points to a post-81 Syracuse future of entrepreneurship and innovation. “15-81” is on display through August 21.

Patrons of the “15-81” exhibit and members of the Everson will receive \$10 off admission to “salt/city/blues” at Syracuse Stage. Stage patrons get free admission to the Everson with proof of purchase of “salt/city/blues” tickets.

Events at Stage and the Everson will also be officially part of Syracuse’s annual Juneteenth celebration. The June 12, 7:30 p.m. performance of “salt/city/blues” will be Juneteenth Night at Syracuse Stage. Juneteenth Festival organizers will be available at Stage with information about the upcoming Festival on June 17 and 18. Discount tickets will be available for “salt/city/blues” and the Everson will host a free screening on June 18 of Bass’ one-person play “Citizen James, or the Young Man without a Country” as part of the Juneteenth celebrations. Originally, commissioned for Stage’s Backstory educational program, the play depicts young James Baldwin at La Guardia airport awaiting a flight to Paris that will give him refuge from the racist violence of America in the 1940s and set him on the path to becoming a towering influence in the Civil Rights movement.

“The path to creating new work is not always predictable, especially today, but the rewards of this effort can be immeasurable,” added Hupp. “We’re honored to produce resident playwright Kyle Bass’s powerful new play and to present our participatory co-production with Minneapolis’ Mixed Blood Theatre. Taken as stand-alone works, they offer exciting and unique theatrical opportunities. Taken together, ‘salt/city/blues’ and ‘The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe’ afford the one-of-a-kind experience we are committed to creating for Central New York.”

### **Syracuse Stage Covid-19 Safety Guidelines**

Masks are required at all times by everyone regardless of vaccination status, except while eating or drinking in designated areas. Food and drink will not be permitted in the auditorium. Syracuse Stage will no longer check for vaccination or negative test status.

#### **‘salt/city/blues’**

Written by Kyle Bass

Directed by Gilbert McCauley

Scenic design by William Bloodgood

Costume design by Devario D. Simmons

Lighting design by Kathy A. Perkins

Sound design by Gregory Robinson

Choreography by Olivia Lacie Andrews

Composer: James Gordon Williams

Fight Director: Alec Barbour

Associate Lighting Designer: David M. Bowman

Production Stage Manager: Stuart Plymessenger\*

Casting: Bass/Valle Casting

June 9 – 26, 2022

#### **Cast (in alphabetical order)**

Leo Finnie\* ..... Prof D

Rand Foerster\* .....Fish

Chantal Jean-Pierre\* ..... Yolonda Mourning  
Jeremiah Packer\* ..... Malcolm  
Joey Parsons\* ..... Carrie Simmons

### **Understudies**

For Carrie Simmons – Christine Albright\*

For Fish – Michael Breese Barbour\*

For Malcolm – Dylan Castro

For Prof D – David A. Shakes\*

For Yolonda Mourning – Esther Winter

\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

### **'The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe'**

Written and directed by Mark-n-Sparks (ashley sparks & Mark Valdez)

Scenic, properties and costume design by Nephelie Andonyadis

Lighting design by Lonnie Rafael Alcaraz

Media designer and technology supervisor: Jake Pinholster

Sound designer, composer and musical director: Victor Zupanc

Choreographer: Kelli Foster Warder

Assistant media designer: Matt Soson

Project coordinator: Michael Garcia

Stage Manager: Maria Oliveira

Produced by Mixed Blood Theatre

June 16 – 18, 2022

### **Cast** (in alphabetical order)

Hannah Pepper Cunningham\* .....Zendra

Karla Mosley\* ..... Zébra

Bruce Young\* ..... Zebdrix

Donovan Stanfield ..... Zee

Joe Strachan ..... Zoe

\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

### **Special Events**

June 9

#### **M&T Bank Pay-What-You-Will Performance @ 7:30 p.m. for "salt/city/blues"**

There will be 76 tickets available for whatever price patrons wish to pay. Pay-what-you-will tickets must be claimed in person at the Box Office or by phone on the day of the performance, subject to availability.

The Box Office opens at 10 a.m. and will remain open until the start of the show. There is a limit of four tickets per person.

June 12

#### **Actor Talkback for "salt/city/blues" (free for ticket holders at 7:30 p.m. performance)**

A Q&A session with the actors following the 7:30 p.m. performance. The talkback will be held in the Archbold Theatre.

June 12

**Juneteenth Night at Syracuse Stage**

Members of the Juneteenth committee will be at the 7:30 p.m. performance with information about the upcoming Juneteenth Festival and Ancestral Celebration.

June 15

**Wednesday @ 1 for "salt/city/blues"** (free for ticket holders at 2 p.m. performance)

Join "salt/city/blues" playwright Kyle Bass and Syracuse Stage artistic director Bob Hupp for a discussion on creating new work for the theatre.

The Wednesday @ 1 discussion will be held in room 141.

June 15

**Open Captioning at 2 p.m. "salt/city/blues" Performance** for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

June 15

**Pre-show discussion with "salt/city/blues" playwright Kyle Bass at 6:30 p.m.** (free for ticket holders at 7:30 p.m. performance)

Bass will discuss the inspiration and process of writing a new play.

June 16

**Free performance of "The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe" at 7:30 p.m.**

Tickets are required for this performance and may be obtained at [www.syracusestage.org](http://www.syracusestage.org).

June 17

**Panel discussion with Kyle Bass and ashley sparks at 6:30 p.m.**

Join "salt/city/blues" playwright Kyle Bass and "The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe" co-creator and co-director ashley sparks for a panel discussion moderated by Joann Yarrow, director of community engagement at Syracuse Stage. The panel will discuss the intersection of arts and activism and how thinking creatively can help address and find solutions to community problems.

June 17

**Free performance of "The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe" at 7:30 p.m.**

Tickets are required for this performance and may be obtained at [www.syracusestage.org](http://www.syracusestage.org).

June 18

**Prologue at 1 p.m. for "salt/city/blues"** (free for ticket holders)

A pre-show discussion with Syracuse Stage artistic director Robert Hupp and "salt/city/blues" playwright Kyle Bass one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in Room 141.

June 18

**ASL Interpreted Performance at 2 p.m. of "salt/city/blues"** for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

June 18

**Screening of "Citizen James, or the Young Man without a Country" at Everson Museum of Art**

In celebration of the exhibition "Sharif Bey: Facets" and Juneteenth, the Everson Museum will host a free community day with educational activities and events that celebrate African and African-American

culture and heritage. A screening of “Citizen James, or the Young Man Without a Country,” is part of a series of free events from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m., which also includes a gallery walk with artist Sharif Bey, stories of liberation from the Onondaga County Library, Pan-African flags crafts with educator Vanessa Johnson, a presentation by James Gordon Williams and more. “Citizen James, or the Young Man without a Country” will screen at 11 a.m. in the Everson Auditorium. Immediately following the screening is a talk with Kyle Bass and Joann Yarrow.

June 18

**Free performance of “The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe” at 7:30 p.m.**

Tickets are required for this performance and may be obtained at [www.syracusestage.org](http://www.syracusestage.org).

June 19

**Prologue at 1 p.m. for “salt/city/blues”** (free for ticket holders at 2 p.m. performance)

A pre-show discussion with Syracuse Stage artistic director Robert Hupp and “salt/city/blues” playwright Kyle Bass one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in Room 141.

June 23

**Prologue at 6:30 p.m. for “salt/city/blues”** (free for ticket holders)

A pre-show discussion with Syracuse Stage director of community engagement Joann Yarrow one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in Room 141.

June 25

**“salt/city/blues” Audio Described Performance at 2 p.m.** for patrons who are blind or visually impaired.

June 25

**Open Captioning at 7:30 p.m. “salt/city/blues” performance** for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

June 26

**Open Captioning at 2 p.m. performance of “salt/city/blues”** for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

#### ABOUT SYRACUSE STAGE

Founded in 1974, Syracuse Stage is the non-profit, professional theatre company in residence at Syracuse University. It is nationally recognized for creating stimulating theatrical work that engages Central New York and significantly contributes to the artistic life of Syracuse University, where it is a vital partner in achieving the educational mission of the University’s Department of Drama. Syracuse Stage’s mission is to tell stories that engage, entertain and inspire people to see life beyond their own experience. Each season 70,000 patrons enjoy an adventurous mix of new plays, and bold interpretations of classics and musicals, featuring the finest theatre artists. In addition, Stage maintains a vital educational outreach program that annually serves more than 21,000 students from 16 counties. Syracuse Stage is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, and a member of the Arts and Cultural Leadership Alliance (ACLA), the University Hill Corporation and the East Genesee Regent Association. Syracuse Stage is a member of The League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the largest professional theatre association in the country.



Syracuse Stage | Artistic Director: Robert M. Hupp | Managing Director: Jill A. Anderson  
820 E. Genesee St. | Main: [315-443-4008](tel:315-443-4008) | Box Office: [315-443-3275](tel:315-443-3275) | [www.SyracuseStage.org](http://www.SyracuseStage.org)

