



Press Release

Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Avenue, London, EC1R 4TN

Matsena Productions/ House of Absolute *Shades of Blue/ Warrior Queens*

Sadler's Wells Theatre, EC1R 4TN

Friday 6 & Saturday 7 May 2022

Tickets: £20-£25

Ticket Office: 020 7863 8000 or www.sadlerswells.com

Matsena Productions and House of Absolute present their latest work for the first time in Sadler's Wells Theatre on **Friday 6 & Saturday 7 May** in a **double bill** as part of the **Well Seasoned Programme**, a Sadler's Wells initiative to platform and celebrate work by Black dancemakers.

Anthony Matsena was a Sadler's Wells Young Associate in 2018 and Julia Cheng has been a Sadler's Wells' Breakin' Convention Associate since 2018. Pursuing their journeys across the Sadler's Wells stages, with this production they both present works that explore the relationships to adversity and ancestry.

Shades of Blue was conceived by artistic directors and brothers Kel and Anthony Matsena to question the relation one holds to the colour blue today – soothing for some, it can be threatening for others. *Shades of Blue* was created in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests that crystallised the strength of communities in the face of racist policing. It beats to the tune of change through the means of a potent mix of dance, poetry, theatre and music - where performance and protest clash, flirt and mould.

Performed by nine artists, the show aims to make the audience rethink their position in society and celebrate a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable future, made by all, with all.

Members of the creative team working on this production include actor Alfred Enoch, who is the dramaturg of this piece, LX designer Ryan Joseph Stafford and composer Lara Agar.

Talking about the show coming to Sadler's Wells Theatre, Kel Matsena, Matsena Productions' Co-artistic Director, said: *"It's hard to find the perfect words to express how excited we are about presenting Shades of Blue in Sadler's Wells Theatre this May. It's something we'd always dreamt of but never imagined it would come this quickly.*

"It's down to our amazing team of supporters and collaborators who continue to inspire us to break boundaries and be bold in all that we do. It's also down to the refreshing and forward-thinking approach Sadler's Wells have taken to trust us with such an opportunity. It's a special thing that we and so many other young artists and artists of colour are finally being given a voice on a national & international scale. We truly believe we are living inside a new renaissance and are honoured to be part of this new and exciting narrative."

House of Absolute's Artistic Director and Olivier Award nominated choreographer Julia Cheng presents *Warrior Queens* – a multidisciplinary work that interrogates displacement, cultural hybridity and power. Inspired by the legendary folk myth of 'Hua Mulan' and Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando', the piece delves into ancestry and lineage through exploring yin yang energy, identity, adversity and the strength of the modern-day woman warrior.

Choreographed by Cheng, the work is performed by six dance artists, a live percussionist, vocalist and three live musicians of the Philharmonia Orchestra who create the live musical soundscape of the piece.

Julia Cheng said: *"We are so grateful to be presenting Warrior Queens at Sadler's Wells as part of the Well Seasoned programme! Alongside a collaboration with Philharmonia Orchestra and their musicians, we have also been supported by a range of organisations such as DanceEast, University of Bedfordshire and Arts Council England that really believe in our work and our ethos as a company.*

"House of Absolute strive to create work that connects to all walks of life, that represents the demographic and cultures of the communities that inspire our artistry each day. Warrior Queens cuts deep into my gut as a visual inner fight of strength, a community of matriarchal power. It studies the complexities of oppression in all its acute and obvious forms. In today's world having grown up in western environments, being exposed to constant polar imagery of societal pressures, gender inequalities, ideals of beauty, strength and what power is, we are on a journey together to connect back to the true essence of ourselves without all the extra added noise and expectation. Celebrating the uniqueness of our ancestry, lineage, the bloodline that runs through our faces and bodies."

Sir Alistair Spalding, Sadler's Wells Artistic Director and Chief Executive, said: *"We are looking forward to presenting the timely works by Anthony, Kel and Julia. They have been supported both through our artist development programmes and the great work of Breakin' Convention – and we are now proud to bring Shades of Blue and Warrior Queens to wider audiences in the Sadler's Wells Theatre as part of the Well Seasoned programme."*

ENDS

Press contact: Lucy Colomb at lucy.colomb@sadlerswells.com or on 07858687839.

Press Night: Friday 6 May 7.30pm

Press images can be downloaded from <http://media.sadlerswells.com> – please sign up to log in.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Listing information:

Friday 6 & Saturday 7 May 2022

Standard no under 5s.

Shades of Blue contains themes of bereavement/death. Physical Violence: Physical Assault (simulated violence). Discrimination: Racism. Mature sexual themes: Partial nudity. Strong language.

Effects: Haze effects, loud music, strobe lighting

Post show talk with Alistair Spalding and the creative teams on the Friday – BSL interpreted

Running time: *Shades of Blue* 45 mins & *Warrior Queens* 40 mins

Tickets: £20-£25

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About Anthony And Kel Matsena

Anthony Matsena / Co-artistic Director

Anthony is a Zimbabwean-born and Welsh-raised choreographer, performer and director working between the mediums of dance, theatre, music and poetry. His work often is politically charged, hoping to make sense of his experience of being brought up in an Afrocentric house and having Eurocentric schooling. He has built a love and curiosity for telling stories that express themes of culture, race, change and belonging. Anthony co-founded **Matsena Productions** (formerly Matsena Performance Theatre) with his brother Kel in 2017 as a reaction to the lack of representation they were seeing in schools, on stage and on screen. They both felt there were very few companies that made work around black stories while using their different skills in African dance, hip-hop, contemporary, rap, theatre and poetry. Anthony's break-out moment came as a Sadler's Wells Young

Associate in 2018, creating works for Lilian Baylis Studio Theatre and the main stage. Recent commissions include Sadler's Wells, BBC, National Dance Company Wales, Jasmin Vardimon 2, Messums Wiltshire, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and CAPA College. He is also an associate artist with National Dance Company Wales and Messums Wiltshire. Anthony also sits on the board as a trustee for National Youth Arts Wales - also chairing the Diversity and Inclusion board for National Youth Dance Wales. Anthony is continuing work on his award-winning short film 'Are You Numb Yet?': a work telling the story of a black man dealing with the effects of two pandemics - COVID-19 and the global BLM movement. Blending and growing ideas from the short, he has created a work titled 'Shades of Blue', which will have its main stage in Sadler's Wells Theatre debut in May 2022.

Kel Matsena / Co-artistic Director

Kel Matsena is a Zimbabwean born and Welsh raised actor, dancer and writer. Kel began dancing in a street dance trio with brothers Anthony and Arnold, performing at festivals, charity events and appearing on television. He then began ballet and contemporary dance with Turning Pointe Dance Academy and County Youth Dance Company, later discovering his love for acting at Gower College Swansea. He recently graduated from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and his recent credits include BBC Doctors, 'BOING' at The Bristol Old Vic and 'A Monster Calls' UK/US Tour. He co-founded Matsena Productions with Anthony Matsena and since then they have used the company to create a platform for bolder and more diverse storytelling. He recently co-wrote "Are You Numb Yet" which won the "International Infallible Award" for "best show" at 2020's digital ED Fringe Festival.

Shades of Blue was originally commissioned by Sadler's Wells and BBC to be part of the BBC Digital Program Dancing Nation in 2021. This is Matsena Productions' first full length show that has been made possible thanks to co-producers Sadler's Wells and Dance East and supporters Taliesin Arts Center, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Black History Wales/Cymru, Race Council Cymru, Arts Council England and Arts Council Wales.

Creative team credits:

Company: Matsena Productions

Artistic Directors : Anthony Matsena & Kel Matsena

Associate Director: Arnold Matsena

Lighting Designer: Ryan Joseph Stafford

Associate Lighting Designer: Charly Dunford

Dramaturg: Alfred Enoch

Assistant Writer: Charlie Layburn

Music Composer: Beth Lewis

Music Composer: Lara Agar

Costume Designer: Cory Shipp

Rehearsal Director: Olivia Grassot

About Julia Cheng

Julia Cheng founded House of Absolute in 2014, she is a creative director, choreographer and dance artist with an impressive portfolio of works presented nationally and internationally.

Julia is a 2022 Olivier Award nominated choreographer, in recognition of her critically acclaimed choreography on West End's *Cabaret* at the Kit Kat Club.

Julia has worked with Chinese Arts Now, an organisation championing British East-Asian artists. Cheng also has co-directed operas, one of which was awarded the George Butterworth Prize 2020 with composer Alex Ho. She has curated cross-art form exhibitions, theatre shows, dance films and youth productions.

Julia is also a judge and mentor for BBC Young Dancer, mentor for the biggest UK Hip Hop Festival Breakin' Convention, and patron of Next Generation Youth Theatre in her hometown of Luton.

Having judged, won and competed in many Hip Hop battles since 2007, her prolific reputation has led to campaigns with Dr Martens, Vogue Italia, Wella, Kowtow New Zealand, BBC World Service Persia.

Her influences draw from her dance training of Hip Hop dance, Waacking, contemporary dance, martial arts, theatre studies and eastern philosophy. She prides herself on combining collaborative approaches to processes and has collaborated with poets like Lavinia Greenlaw, to music artists Shingai and Floacist, composers Simon McCorry and Alex Ho, artist/sculptor Laila Muraywid, curator Kerry-Campbell and theatre director/activist Daniel York-Loh.

Having recently choreographed for double-bill opera *The Seven Deadly Sins & Mahagonny Songspiel* with director Isabelle Kettle for the Royal Opera House, Julia is currently working on House of Absolute's Philharmonia Orchestra Artist in Residence 2022 projects, developing her production with Sadler's Wells for May 2022, and directing 'anti-opera' *Untold* with composer Alex Ho for Europe tour in 2023.

About House of Absolute

A multidisciplinary powerhouse cultivating the preservation of wisdom within art. Through honest and daring innovations we endeavour to dismantle systems of oppression advocating for communities and cultures, centred by our multi continental values of Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

Founded in March 2014, House of Absolute bring together a collective of highly talented creative artists, dancers, singers, musicians, galvanising collaborative works within hip hop theatre, live art and film.

House of Absolute specialise in Waacking, contemporary, Hip Hop, Locking, Krump and Popping.

Vocalists, poets, choreographers, composers and practitioners of House of Absolute offer an array of workshops, facilitating spaces for development and wellbeing. Creating performances for theatre, exhibitions, site specific, events, fashion, festivals, commercial and corporate sectors.

We have a sustainable internal ecosystem of resources and expertise within our collective.

With cross-generational extensive knowledge and experience, we deliver with precision and dedication, and are passionate about womxn, justice, empowerment and inclusivity.

Previous commissions include Philharmonia Orchestra Artists in Residence (2020-22), *Skin Deep Sonic Transmissions* (2019), *Stardust* with V&A Museum (2018) and *Human Jukebox* with Imagine Luton Festival (2017).

House of Absolute includes Julia Cheng, Ffion Campbell-Davies, Saskia Horton, Serena Williams, Lulu Mebrahtu, Diva-J, Faye Reader, Melissa Liandouzi and Emily Labhart.

About Sadler's Wells

Sadler's Wells is a world-leading dance organisation. We strive to make and share dance that inspires us all. Our acclaimed year-round programme spans dance of every kind, from contemporary to flamenco, Bollywood to ballet, salsa to street dance and tango to tap. We commission, produce and present more dance than any other organisation in the world. Since 2005, we have helped to bring close to 200 new dance works to the stage, embracing both the popular and the unknown.

Each year, over half a million people visit our three London theatres - Sadler's Wells Theatre, Lilian Baylis Studio and Peacock Theatre. Millions more attend our touring productions nationally and internationally or explore our digital platforms, including Sadler's Wells Digital Stage. In 2023 we're opening a fourth London venue in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Sadler's Wells East will house a 550-seat mid-scale theatre, as well as facilities for the Choreographic School and Hip Hop Theatre Academy.

Supporting artists is at the heart of our work. We have associate artists and companies, which nurture some of the most exciting talent working in dance today. We host the National Youth Dance Company, which draws together some of the brightest young dancers from across the country. Sadler's Wells Breakin' Convention runs professional development programmes to champion and develop the world's best hip hop artists, as well as producing, programming and touring groundbreaking hip hop performances.

Around 30,000 people take part in our learning and engagement programmes every year. We support schools local to our theatres in Islington and Stratford, designing experiences for children and young people to watch, explore and critically engage with the arts. We also run Company of Elders, a resident performance company of dancers aged over 60 who rehearse with renowned artists to make new work for public performances locally, nationally and internationally.

Sadler's Wells is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

www.sadlerswells.com

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