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CAST AND CREATIVES IMAGES FOR DOWNLOAD

**AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER ANNOUNCES
CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR WORLD-PREMIERE
*DIARY OF A TAP DANCER***

AYODELE CASEL

**EXPLORES IDENTITY AND LEGACY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PLAY
DIRECTED BY TORYA BEARD WITH DANCE, NARRATIVE, AND SONG**

Performances Begin December 12 — Tickets On Sale Now

Cambridge, MA—American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University, led by Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Director Kelvin Dinkins, Jr., announced today the cast and creative team for the world premiere of ***Diary of a Tap Dancer***. Written and choreographed by Drama Desk nominee **Ayodele Casel** (***Chasing Magic***, ***Funny Girl***) and directed by **Torya Beard** (***Chasing Magic***, ***Waitress***, ***Funny Girl***), ***Diary of a Tap Dancer*** begins performances at the Loeb Drama Center in Harvard Square, Cambridge on Thursday, December 12, 2024, opens officially on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, and runs through Saturday, January 4, 2025.

Trailblazing tap dancer and choreographer Ayodele Casel and longtime collaborator director Torya Beard (***Chasing Magic***, ***Funny Girl***) return to A.R.T. this holiday season to share the joyful, resilient, and liberating spirit of tap. The electric new play weaves together dance, narrative, and song to reveal the power of reclaiming language, culture, and one's own identity. This world premiere production

traces Ayodele's life from her roots in The Bronx and Puerto Rico while celebrating the extraordinary and often-overlooked women tap dancers who paved the way.

"I was called to write *Diary of a Tap Dancer* to amplify our voices, family stories, and artistic lineages and to reflect the multitude of languages that we use to uplift and honor our cultural histories," says Casel.

The cast includes **Ayodele Casel**, **Naomi Funaki**, **Afra Hines**, **Quynn L. Johnson**, **Funmi Sofola**, **Liberty Styles**, **Annaliese Wilbur**, and **Ki'Leigh Williams**. Full bios are included below.

Erin McCoy is the production stage manager. **Eloia Peterson** is the assistant stage manager. Casting is by **Jason Thinger, CSA**.

Casel (Writer and Choreographer) and **Beard** (Director) are joined on the creative team by Tony and Drama Desk Award winner and Olivier Award nominee **Susan Hilferty** (Design Dramaturg and Artistic Advisor), Tony and Drama Desk Award-nominated **Tatiana Kahvegian** (Scenic Design), **Camilla Dely** (Costume Design), Tony Award-nominated **Brandon Stirling Baker** (Lighting Design), **Sharath Patel** (Sound Design), Lucille Lortel and Drama Desk Award nominee **Katherine Freer** (Projection Designer), **Carlos Cippelletti** (Co-Composer, Pianist), **Ethan Pakchar** (Co-Composer), **Earon Nealey** (Hair, Wig, and Makeup Designer) and **Jesse Alick** (Dramaturg).

Yasmine Lee is the associate director, **Matthew Buttrey** is the associate scenic designer, **Amanda Roberge** is the associate costume designer, **Jessica Creager** is the associate lighting designer, and **Joshua Nguyen** is the associate sound designer.

Production support of *Diary of a Tap Dancer* is provided by **Leslie and Howard Appleby**.

A.R.T.'s 2024/25 Season support is provided by **Harvard University**, **The Barr Foundation**, **The Bob and Alison Murchison New Work Development Fund**, **The Shubert Foundation**, **National Endowment for the Arts**, **Massachusetts Cultural Council**, **Barton & Guestier**, and **Meyer Sound**.

DIARY OF A TAP DANCER TICKETING INFORMATION

Tickets from \$35 are available at AmericanRepertoryTheater.org/DiaryofaTapDancer. Discounts are available to students and ticket-buyers under age 25, Blue Star families, EBT cardholders, seniors, Harvard faculty and staff, and others. More information at AmericanRepertoryTheater.org/PlanYourVisit.

BIOS

AYODELE CASEL (she/her) is a Doris Duke Artist in the dance category, is an award-winning and critically acclaimed tap dancer and choreographer. Born in The Bronx and raised in Puerto Rico, her practice centers on narrative works rooted in expressions of selfhood, culture, and legacy. Casel is hailed as a "tap dancer and choreographer of extraordinary depth" (*The New York Times*) and a "down-

to-earth storyteller" with "needlepoint intricacy of her footwork" (*The New Yorker*). Known for her skilled and imaginative improvisation, Casel's projects include her concert and Bessie Award-winning film "*Chasing Magic*" and her Drama-Desk-nominated work as tap choreographer for the Broadway revival of "*Funny Girl*."

With frequent collaborator Torya Beard, she co-directed a short film, "Rooted," for PBS' ALL ARTS, a digital series for New York City Center "Diary of A Tap Dancer, v.6: Us", and "Sophisticated Ladies" (University of Michigan). She was also the featured "Artists at the Center" at New York City Center in 2023 and an Artist in Residence at Little Island, where she also served as co-curator of the *Little Island Dance Festival*. Casel was a 2019-2020 fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, an artist-in-residence at Harvard University, and is the recipient of a United States Artists Award, Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, Doris Duke Artist award, and Flo-Bert award. In 2021, Casel was depicted on a U.S. Postal Service Forever Stamp celebrating tap dance. She is an alumna of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and The William Esper Studio. Casel is the co-director of Operation Tap, an online tap dance educational platform, DLNY Tap Dance Project, and serves on the Board of New York City Center.

TORYA BEARD (she/her) Broadway: *Funny Girl* (Assistant Director), *Waitress* (Assistant Director), *The Lion King* (Swing, Dance Captain). Educational: *Sophisticated Ladies*, University of Michigan (Co-Director/Choreographer), *Pippin*, Syracuse University (Director). She is the recipient of APAP's Inaugural CIPA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Creative Producing. Recent: *Jesus Christ Superstar: Highlights from the All-Female Studio Cast Recording* (Executive Producer), 2023 Bessie Awards (Creative Producer). Torya is Artistic Director at Excellence Community Schools, Co-Founder of the social enterprise tall poPpy (with Darren Biggart and Jeanine Tesori) and sits on the boards of Earl Mosley's Diversity of Dance, percussive dance company Sole Defined and Raja Feather Kelly's dance-theatre-media company, the feath3r theory (TF3T).

Torya's creative partnership with Ayodele Casel has been a significant collaboration. The pair has developed numerous projects. Among them, *While I Have The Floor*, *Rooted* for ALL ARTS' Past, Present, Future Film Festival, Bessie Award-winning dance film, and subsequent stage production, *Ayodele Casel: Chasing Magic, Freedom... In Progress* for Max Roach 100, *Ayodele Casel + Arturo O'Farrill*. New York City Center commissions include the digital series *Diary of a Tap Dancer V.6: Us*, *Where We Dwell*, the inaugural five-borough tour of *On The Move*, and most recently, *Ayodele Casel / Artists At The Center*. Beard and Casel are Resident Directors of Dance Lab New York's Tap Project and were co-curators of the Little Island Dance Festival.

NAOMI FUNAKI (she/her) A.R.T.: ***Ayodele Casel: Chasing Magic***. Performances at Infinity Tokyo, Guggenheim Bilbao, Lincoln Center, New York City Center, Radio City Music Hall, MET Gala, Joyce Theater. Film/TV: *Ayodele Casel's Chasing Magic*, *Ayodele Casel's Rooted*, *Voices Rising*, All Arts TV; *Gutto Chikyubin*, Japan. Awards: 2023 Princess Grace Award, 2024 Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch".

AFRA HINES (she/her) A.R.T.: Debut. Broadway: *The Who's Tommy* (u/s Acid Queen, u/s Mrs. Walker), Bob Fosse's *Dancin'*, *Funny Girl* (u/s Emma), *Hadestown* (u/s Persephone), *Summer* (u/s Disco Donna), *Shuffle Along*, *Motown* (u/s Teena Marie), *Soul Doctor*, *Ghost* (u/s Clara, u/s. Louise), *In The Heights*, *Wicked*. National Tour: *Hamilton*. TV/Film: "Annie Live!" (Tap Soloist), "Fosse/Verdon," "Boardwalk Empire" (Onyx Girl). Developmental: *Death Becomes Her* (Viola).

QUYNN L. JOHNSON (she/her) A.R.T.: Debut. Projects: *Ayodele Casel: Chasing Magic*, the Joyce Theatre; *Great Gatsby*, The Washington Ballet; *Dormeshia: Unsung Heroes of the 20th Century*, Jacob's Pillow; *Zaz: The Big Easy*; *Latida Negro*; Savion Glover's TiiDii3000 Company. Tour: *After Midnight* (Soloist), Norweigan Cruise Line. Co-founder of SOLE Defined, International Arts Based Educator and recipient of the John F. Kennedy Center Local Dance Commissioning Project 2020. Education: Harvard University and Howard University. Quynn has designed and implemented arts-based programs in Uganda, South Africa, New York, Iowa, DC, and Michigan.

FUNMI SOFOLA (she/her) A.R.T.: Debut. Off-Broadway: *Jelly's Last Jam*, Encores!. Regional: *BZZZ*, The Joyce Theater; *Anything Goes* (Pre-Production Dancer), The Muny. Education: Commercial Dance, B.F.A., Pace University.

LIBERTY STYLES (she/they) A.R.T.: Debut. International Tour: *Rhythm-a-Ting*. Other Live Performance: *Aquatic*, The Yard; *Orlando Hernandez and the Knee-Heart Connection*, New York Live Arts; *Love Movement*, AMP by Strathmore; *Gotham Kings*, The Django; *NYC Queer Music Festival*, 3 Dollar Bill; *Apollo Amateur Night*, Apollo Theater; *Hot & Fresh Burlesque*, House of Yes. Recorded Media: *On a Modern Genius Vol. 1*, Stoney Lane Records; *Flipside*, *Roam Wide*, *Drive*, Self-Released. Education: American Studies B.A., Columbia University.

ANNALIESE WILBUR (they/them) A.R.T.: Debut. Broadway National Tour: *Funny Girl* (ADC, Swing, Rat Tat Duet Cover). Regional: *Pippin* (Fastrada u/s), Reagle Music Theatre; Education: Musical Theatre B.F.A., Boston Conservatory at Berklee.

KI'LEIGH WILLIAMS (she/her) A.R.T.: Debut. Off-Broadway: *Tap Kids* (Myself). Theater: Cirque Du Soleil's *Reflekt*, (Dancer), *Syncopated Ladies* Tour (Tap Dancer). TV/Film: "Spirited" (Tap Dancer); "Encore" (Dancer), Disney+; Remy Martin Commercial ft. Usher (Lindy Hop Dancer). Education/Training: Forensic Science, Point Park University.

ABOUT AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER (A.R.T.) AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking theatrical experiences that catalyze dialogue and transformation. Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus began her tenure in 2008 and co-leads the theater in partnership with Executive Director Kelvin Dinkins, Jr., who began his tenure in June 2022.

A.R.T. is a creative hub, launching productions seen on Broadway, across the US, and around the world and receiving dozens of Tony, Drama Desk, Olivier and other nominations and awards throughout its 45-year history. As the professional theater on campus, A.R.T. plays a central role at Harvard University, catalyzing discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange, and sharing University resources with the broader community. Driven by its value to lead with inquiry, A.R.T. builds community with audiences, artists, students, staff, and neighbors across Greater Boston, embracing theater's power to cultivate the full breadth and beauty of our shared humanity.

In 2026, A.R.T. will relocate from Harvard Square to its new home in Allston, the David E. and Stacey L. Goel Center for Creativity and Performance. Currently under construction, this new, inspiring

center will include flexible adaptive spaces to rehearse, create, teach, and convene in community, fueling A.R.T.'s vision and creative work for years to come.

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