MASS MoCA 2022 Benefit Features World Premiere of Angélique Kidjo’s Yemandja

Theatrical production written by Naima Hebrail Kidjo, directed by Cheryl Lynn Bruce, and featuring production design by Kerry James Marshall

North Adams, MA, December 8, 2021 — Yemandja, a new music theater work conceived by and starring global music songstress and four-time Grammy award winner, Angelique Kidjo will be the centerpiece of MASS MoCA’s annual benefit on Saturday March 5, 2022 at 4:00pm. A post-performance cocktail hour will be followed by dinner with the cast and an art auction in MASS MoCA’s Building 6: The Robert W. Wilson Building. In addition to the benefit performance on March 5, a general admission evening performance of Yemandja will be held on March 4.

Inspired by her ancestors, her family, and Africa’s resilience, singer and storyteller Angélique Kidjo’s timely theatrical work is both a family drama and historical thriller, redolent of Greek tragedy with themes of love, betrayal, honor, free will. Set in 19th century Dahomey, the West African kingdom that once occupied the territory that is now Benin, the slave trade is omnipresent. In the port city of Ouidah, where the world of the gods is close to that of men, Yemandja—a deity of water and fertility, played by Kidjo—has given her protégée Omolola a secret gift: the power of song to change the course of history. But there is one caveat: the power only works if one’s heart is pure. As DeSalta, a Brazilian slave trader who has struck a deal with King Akaba and controls the city, kills or enslaves those around Omolola, she struggles to access her song, her desire for revenge threatening to surpass her will to be a positive force.

Written by Naima Hebrail Kidjo, this fully staged production is directed by Cheryl Lynn Bruce, designed by Kerry James Marshall and features a cast of 14 performers and musicians. Yemandja has been in rehearsals and production as part of MASS MoCA’s artist-in-residency program and will travel to The Broad Stage in Santa Monica, Cal Performances in Berkeley, the Kennedy Center and the Holland Festival following the world premiere. Additional performances are planned for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 seasons.

MASS MoCA 2022 Benefit & Performance
Saturday, March 5, 4pm
On sale January 5
Tickets start at $250

General Admission Performance
Friday, March 4, 8pm
MASS MOCA member presale: January 13
General on sale: January 14
Pricing to be announced
Yemandja Creative Team
Conceived by Angélique Kidjo, Jean Hebrail & Naïma Hebrail Kidjo
Book & Lyrics by Naïma Hebrail Kidjo
Music by Angélique Kidjo & Jean Hebrail
Developed with and Directed by Cheryl Lynn Bruce
Production Designer Kerry James Marshall
Music Director Darryl Archibald
Lighting Designer Kathy A. Perkins
Projections Designer Rasean Davonte Johnson
Costume Designer Mary Jane Marcasiano
Choreographer Beatrice Capote
Sound Designer Kumi Ishizawa
Dramaturg Iyvon E.
Sensitivity Coach Ann James
Casting Andrea Zee

Yemandja is co-commissioned by ArtsEmerson, The Broad Stage at Santa Monica College, Brown University Arts Institute, Cal Performances, Ruth and Stephen Hendel, Holland Festival, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, MASS MoCA and Yale Schwarzman Center. Produced by THE OFFICE performing arts + film.

Programming at MASS MoCA is made possible in part by the Barr Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Mass Cultural Council, and the Joe Thompson "Yes" Fund.

MASS MoCA’s Artist-in-Residence program is supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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About MASS MoCA
MASS MoCA is one of the world’s liveliest centers for making and enjoying today’s most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19th-century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world’s most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit www.massmoca.org.

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