

## **ARTIST INFORMATION**

### **Christopher Parks**/Director, Playwright

Other TYA playwriting credits include *The Adventures of Perseus*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Tempest*, a *Puppet Play*, *The Odyssey Experience*, *Lucky Girl* (co-writer), *Peter Pan 360*, and editor/writer of additional materials for Jack Gelber's unfinished last play, *Dylan's Line*, all for McCarter Theatre Center. *Sunjata Kamalenya* was first produced as a reading at New Visions/New Voices at The Kennedy Center in May 2010 and had its first workshop production as a part of the McCarter Lab 2010. Prior to his work at the McCarter Theatre, Christopher was co-founder of the New Jersey Renaissance Kingdom, where he served as one of the principal playwrights and directors during the ten years of his involvement. A dedicated Shakespearean Director, Christopher has directed *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest* (NJ Renaissance Kingdom); *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Pericles*, *Macbeth*, and *Winter's Tale* (McCarter Summer Shakespeare); *Henry IV, parts I and II* (Muse of Fire Films), *Macbeth* (Inclination), *Hamlet* (Muse of Fire), and *The Tempest* (Fordham University). Christopher is a graduate of Mason Gross, School of the Arts.

### **David C. Conrad**/Historical Consultant

Dr. Conrad holds a Ph.D. in African History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is retired as Emeritus Professor of History at the State University of New York, Oswego. From 1986 to 2008 he served as President of the Mande Studies Association, an organization of several hundred scholars from thirty countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. Specializing in oral tradition, indigenous religion and early kingdoms of the Western Sudan, he conducts ongoing research in Guinea and Mali, which he visits at least once a year.

### **Balla Kouyate**/Composer, Balaphone

Balla Kouyaté, from Mali, was given the name of his ancestor, Balla Fasseké Kouyaté, the first Djeli of the Mande Empire and owner of the very first balafon. Balla was raised in the Djeli tradition, learning from his father from the age of six. In 1994, he was a member of the renowned Ensemble Nationale du Mali. Balla has been featured on at least 45 albums, including Yo-Yo Ma's, *Songs of Joy and Peace*, Angélique Kidjo's *Oyo* and Vusi Mahlasela's *Say Africa*. He tours frequently with his own group, World Vision.

### **Zenzélé Cooper**/Jelimuso

Last seen in *The Body Washer* (Rapscaillon Theatre Collective, NYC), Zenzélé Cooper recently completed an international tour with the Blessed Unrest Theater Company in *Doruntine*, the first US-Kosovar theater collaboration. Her other adventures include *Trojan Women* (The Classical Theatre of Harlem, NYC), *The Comedy of Errors* (The American Globe Theatre, NYC) and *The Illusion* (The Berkshire Theatre Festival, MA). Zenzélé was born in Harrisburg, PA and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rutgers University.

### **Rahsaan Kerns**/Player 2

This is Rahsaan's fifth year touring with McCarter Theatre Center's Education Department, and he is absolutely thrilled! Previously seen in McCarter's *The Odyssey Experience*, Rahsaan continues to hone his skills as an actor and teaching artist as a member of the *Sunjata Kamalenya* company. Rahsaan has studied theater in both Philadelphia and New York, worked in regional theater, and done background work in film/television, including NBC's hit drama "Law and Order."

### **Nakeisha Daniel**/Player 3

Nakeisha is a native of Atlanta, Ga. Regional credits include: Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (The Nebraska Shakespeare Festival), Amelia in *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Arizona Broadway Theatre), Narrator in *Disney's Aladdin Jr.* (Alliance Theatre Company), and Sarah in *Ragtime* (Charleston Stage Company). Nakeisha recently graduated from the MFA Acting program at Penn State. She received a BFA in Musical Theatre from Shorter College.

### **Bruce A. Lemon**/Player 4

Bruce is thrilled to work with McCarter Theatre Center on his first show out of graduate school. He was most recently seen in *Why They Came*, a finalist in the Strawberry One-Act Festival at The Riant Theatre. Select New York Credits: *Big Tex*, *Orestes 2.0*, *The Blacks* (Dir. Hope Clarke), *Richard III*, *Hecuba*. Select Film Credits: "Gang Tapes" (Lions Gate Films), "Killing The Dog" (Six Part Productions), "The Prospect Heights Affair" (Sepia Studios). MFA in Acting, The New School for Drama, 2010. Born and raised in Watts, Los Angeles, CA.