

Cover Image - Poster for Black Boys

A BUDDIES IN BAD TIMES THEATRE PRODUCTION

BLACK BOYS

CREATED BY

SAGA COLLECTIF

STARRING BY

**STEPHEN JACKMAN-TORKOFF,
TAWIAH BEN M'CARTHY + THOMAS OLAJIDE**

DIRECTED BY

JONATHAN SEINEN

CHOREOGRAPHY BY

VIRGILIA GRIFFITH

DRAMATURGE BY

MEL HAGUE

SET + COSTUME DESIGN BY

RACHEL FORBES

SOUND + VIDEO DESIGN BY

STEPHEN SURLIN

LIGHTING DESIGN BY

JARETH LI

ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER

ARLEN AGUAYO-STEWART

STAGE MANAGEMENT BY

LAURA BAXTER

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR BY

ADRIEN WHAN

COMMUNITY OUTREACH BY

SEDINA FIATI

Advertisement Image for Lulu v.7 Aspects of a Femme Fatale

On stage at Buddies May 1-30, 2018

Black Boys was developed in the Buddies Residency Program,
sponsored by BMO Financial Group.

CREATORS' NOTE

Saga Collectif was formed in 2012. We came together to create from an experiential place, digging deeply into the lives of three young individuals to confront issues of race, sexuality, and gender through a complex and passionate exploration of Blackness and masculinity in raw and unapologetic terms. Using the safe space of the *Black Boys* project, we each challenged ourselves to face the unknown to discover personal truths. In a climate of continued violence against the Black male body and in a culture where artists of colour are still severely underrepresented, Saga Collectif says, we are here and we are resilient.

Our process began as a conversation about our experiences as theatre artists and the kind of performances we weren't seeing on stage. Since then, this project has become a significant part of our artistic practice and personal journeys. As we have shaped this piece from the lived experiences of Tawiah, Stephen and Thomas, both Virgilia and Jonathan have been welcomed to speak to their experiences as a Black Womxn of Trinidadian/Nigerian descent and as a cis gender male of Dutch heritage. While the piece is called *Black Boys*, our collective has always welcomed every member to bring their whole selves to the project, our differences a tension alive in our group and a site for reflection and interrogation. For Virgilia, who brought a necessary female perspective on Black masculinity, working on this piece meant looking at herself as a Black woman and acknowledging that some of the same traumas and challenges are embedded in her own experiences. For Jonathan, the only white person in the collective, this meant attending to blind spots and inherited privilege in the male-dominated theatre industry and in the Eurocentric patriarchal Canadian society. With understanding and generosity for each other, working on *Black Boys* has opened our eyes and our artistic processes up to diversity in a real way. We are grateful and humbled because this project has transformed our lives and our work.

We needed to form our own company because determining our own vibe allows us to go further, and the diverse collection of artists with varying identities we have brought together for *Black Boys* is the catalyst that informs our decision-making and our creative process. We believe our company Saga Collectif and this, our first production, demonstrate an integrated intercultural process of artistic creation where collaboration is key. To our minds, this is the only way forward. Indeed, our approach challenges the conventional structures of theatre production; our process is one that responds to the needs of the piece over any hierarchical stratification. The fundamental value of this project is that the queer Black perspective has primacy.

Working from the outside and supported by dramaturge Mel Hague, who

has provided necessary perspective, context and consideration, Virgilia and Jonathan have used their craft to realize our vision as fully as possible, responding to the sensitivity of the subject matter. It was important to capture each creator's unique style and rhythm in our effort to liberate the Black male body, acknowledging history and traumas while expressing the power and beauty of the Black experience. Our goal was to bring Thomas, Tawiah and Stephen to the stage in a way that is risky, honest, and innovative, collectively imagining a healing Black narrative.

It is very important to us that this production of *Black Boys* brings young queer people of colour into the theatre. As we have discussed in our creative process, the racism that is felt against the Black body within mainstream society and the LGBTQ+ community continues. This experience, which is shared by many POCs (people of colour) and QPOCs (queer people of colour) is not recognized by our community at large, much less represented in our theatres. With this project, and through our Outreach and Accessibility programs, we want to engage an audience that does not go to the theatre, because too often they do not see their lives reflected, and when they do, people of colour are not the ones telling the stories or signing the cheques. This time is different.

We hope to offer ourselves as examples of those who see limits and choose to transcend them, and we want to encourage our audiences, especially QPOCs, to connect with their own agency and imagination.

The time is now for people of colour to regain ownership over their skin, hearts and minds, and through *Black Boys*, Stephen, Thomas, and Tawiah are doing that exact thing. Through this co-production with Buddies, a Black queer perspective is found on the main stage of a Toronto theatre at a time when it is deeply needed.

-- The founding members of Saga Collectif are Virgilia Griffith, Stephen Jackman-Torkoff, Tawiah Ben-Eben M'Carthy, Thomas Olajide, and Jonathan Seinen.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

STEPHEN JACKMAN-TORKOFF

CREATOR + PERFORMER

Stephen is very hopeful for the future. Stephen believes in a lot of things. Stephen is a Pisces.

TAWIAH BEN-EBEN M'CARTHY

CREATOR + PERFORMER

Tawiah is a Ghanaian-born theatre artist. His playwright / creator / performer credits include Blue Bird, Body 13, Obaaberima (Dora Award for Best Production) and The Kente Cloth. Tawiah has worked with theatre companies such as, The National Arts Centre of Canada, The Cultch Vancouver, Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, Obsidian Theatre, MTSpace Theatre, The Globe Regina and InterArts Matrix as actor, playwright and/or director. Tawiah is a Co-Founder of Blue Bird Theatre Collective and Saga Collectif. @TawiahMcarthy | @BlueBirdTheatre | @SagaCollectif

THOMAS OLAJIDE

CREATOR + PERFORMER

Thomas Olajide is a Dora Mavor Moore Award-nominated, Toronto-based actor from Vancouver, British Columbia and a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada. His film credits include Inhuman Condition (Nominated for Best Original Program or Series Produced for Digital Media – Fiction in the 2017 Canadian Screen Awards) and Mariner (Part of the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival's Canada's Top Ten). Olajide's theatre credits include: Black Boys (Saga Collectif and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); Love's Labour's Lost, Hamlet, The Taming of the Shrew, King Lear, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Beaux Stratagem (Stratford Festival); Macbeth, Taming of the Shrew and The Winter's Tale (Canadian Stage); The Whipping Man and Ruined (Obsidian Theatre); Binti's Journey (Theatre Direct); This Must Be The Place (Architect Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille); Sia (Cahoots Theatre Company and Pyretic Theatre Company); Oliver! (National Arts Centre) and And Slowly Beauty (Belfry Theatre and National Arts Centre). In 2014, he received the Stratford Festival's Peter Donaldson Award for Great Promise in Shakespeare and the Classics. Thomas is currently a resident at the Canadian Film Centre's 2017 CBC Actors Conservatory Program and is set to graduate early this year.

VIRGILIA GRIFFITH

CREATOR + CHOREOGRAPHER

Virgilia Griffith is a Toronto based theatre artist. Winner of the Meta Emerging Artist Award for Gas Girls. She was also a Dora Mavor Moore nominee for Outstanding Female in an Independent Division for her performance of Honesty directed by Jordan Tannahill. Selected credits include: Da Kink In My Hair (Theatre Calgary / NAC), How We Are (Mikaela Davies and Polly Phokeev Productions), Up The Garden Path (Obsidian Theatre Company), Byhalia, Mississippi (Cue6), The Power of Harriet T! (Carousel Players/ Black Theatre Workshop). Virgilia is honoured to be choreographing on Black Boys.

JONATHAN SEINEN

CREATOR + DIRECTOR

Jonathan Seinen is a theatre artist, Co-Artistic Producer of Architect Theatre, Artistic Associate with lemonTree creations, and a founding member of Saga Collectif. Theatre credits include: Director/Creator: Boys In Chairs (SummerWorks, Jon Kaplan Spotlight Award), a piece about love, sex and desire created with disabled queer men; Actor/Creator: Like There's No Tomorrow (Architect/SummerWorks), based on first-hand research into the Northern Gateway Pipeline, directed by Anita Rochon; Director/Playwright: Unknown Soldier (SummerWorks), inspired by the actions of Chelsea Manning, and; Actor/Producer: Body Politic (lemonTree/Buddies, Dora Award for Best New Play), about the groundbreaking gay liberation newspaper. He was a 2017 participant in the the RBC Emerging Artist Program: Director Development Residency at Canadian Stage and the Michael Langham Workshop for Classical Direction at the Stratford Festival. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Theatre Directing at Columbia University in New York.

MEL HAGUE

DRAMATURGE

Mel Hague is a Toronto based dramaturge and curator. Mel is a proud Queer woman of Jamaican-Canadian heritage. Mel is the Rhubarb Festival Director and Company Dramaturge at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, and the Artist Development Coordinator and Company Dramaturge at Obsidian Theatre Company. Previously, Mel has worked with Factory Theatre, Banff Centre Playwrights Colony, bcurent performing arts, fu-Gen Asian Canadian Theatre, Eastern Front Theatre, Queer Acts Festival, The Paprika Festival, and Mulgrave Road Theatre. Mel wrote the Play Notes included in the Playwrights Canada Press Edition of Shakespeare's Nigga by Joseph Jomo Pierre. Recent dramaturgy work includes Venus' Daughter by Meghan Swaby (Obsidian Theatre Company, February 2016) and Up the Garden Path by Lisa Codrington (Obsidian Theatre Company, April 2016). Mel has an MFA in Theatre from York University.

RACHEL FORBES

SET + COSTUME DESIGN

Rachel is a Toronto based set and costume designer. Recent design credits include: Set and costume designs for Turkey Shoot (Single Thread), Bleeders (Watah Theatre), How Black Mothers Say I Love You (Trey Anthony Productions), Black Boys (Buddies in Bad Times/Saga Collectif), Brimstone and Treacle, Talking Heads I and II (Precisely Peter). Set Design for Esu Crossing the Middle Passage (Watah Theatre), Contempt (Safeword), We Must Have More Men! (Theatre by the Bay), Mary Poppins (Steppin' Out Productions), Potosi (Good Old Neon), Next to Normal (Clearwater Theatre). Assistant Designs for Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God (NAC/ Centaur Theatre/BTW), Niagara (Panamania), Watching Glory Die (Canadian Rep Theatre). Rachel has had the pleasure of working with many companies in Toronto including Obsidian Theatre, Buddies in Bad Times, VideoCabaret, Nightwood Theatre, and Acting Upstage.

STEPHEN SURLIN

SOUND + VIDEO DESIGN

Stephen Surlin is a designer, visual artist, and sound designer based in Toronto. Surlin's interdisciplinary process bridges digital production methods and analog materiality to augment the familiar and question reality. Surlin uses field recordings, spoken word, found sounds, and musical composition to create the divergent soundscape of Black Boys. Surlin has a background in Recording Arts, Fine Arts and Design, recently graduating from OCAD University's Graduate Program in Design. Surlin has had work in the Summerworks Theatre Program, Buddies In Bad Times Theatre's Residency Program, Nuit Blanche, Xpace Cultural Centre, and OCAD University.

JARETH LI

LIGHTING DESIGN

Jareth is a freelance lighting designer based in Toronto. Select lighting designs include: The Glass Menagerie, Casimir and Carolin (The Howland Company); Sinners' Lounge (Canada's Wonderland); Dusk Dances (Dusk Dances – Sylvie Bouchard); Crazy For You (Port Hope Festival Theatre); The Trial of Judith K (Thought for Food Productions); Mourning Dove (Sudbury Theatre Centre); Dangerous Liaisons (Red One Collective/Storefront); The Widow (Summerworks); Disco Pigs (A Lasting Dose Productions). Jareth is a member of the Associated Designers of Canada.

ARLEN AGUAYO-STEWART

ASSISSTANT CHOREOGRAPHER

Arlen is so privileged to be a part of this iteration of this incredible experience. Montreal-born and Toronto-based, Arlen works and participates in theatre, film, television, circus, and dance. Theatre credits include: Marina Moreira's MARRY ME MARRY ME MARRY ME MARRY ME, Donna Michel's Dark Love, and Zoe Erwin-Longstaff's HALF GIRL/HALF FACE. Film: Las Routas en Febrero a Uruguayan Québécois co-production, Drake Doremus' Zoé premiering in 2018, and Uppsala award winning film Soother. TV: The Bold Type, In Contempt, and TAKEN.

LAURA BAXTER

STAGE MANAGER

The 20th of November, Arigato Tokyo, Obaaberima, The Maids, The Silicone Diaries, Breakfast, Neon Nightz (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre), You Will Remember Me, NSFW, God of Carnage, Clybourne Park (Studio 180 Theatre), Tails From the City, The Public Servant, The Story, Happy Days, All That Fall, And Up They Flew (Common Boots), Elle (Theatre Pasee Muraille), Dirt, Jitters (Soulpepper), Hamlet, All's Well, Julius Caesar, Comedy of Errors, As You Like It, Titus Andronicus, The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Winter's Tale (Canadian Stage Shakespeare in High Park), Venus in Fur (CanadianStage), Soliciting Temptation, More Fine Girls (Tarragon Theatre), Speaking in Tongues, Festen (The Company Theatre), A Sleigh Ride Christmas Carol, Everyone, The Story, Macbeth (Caravan Farm Theatre), Age of Arousal, Toronto the Good, (Factory Theatre).

SEDINA FIATI

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Sedina Fiati is a Toronto based performer, producer, creator and activist. She proudly identifies as queer, femme and of African descent. She is Managing Producer at The Storefront Theatre and 2nd VP for Canadian Actors' Equity Association's council. Recent projects: Outreach & Communications (The Unbelievers, SummerWorks), Producer (Letters to the Universe, Buddies in Bad Times), Performer (The Blind Eye, Threepenny Opera). Sedina welcomes opportunities to engage with projects that embrace social justice and the arts and is so honoured to be a part of Black Boys.

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