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## ***APORTIA CHRYPTYCH: A BLACK OPERA FOR PORTIA WHITE*** **SHINES LIGHT ON A BLACK CANADIAN MUSIC ICON** **World premiere presentation will include a free, livestreamed broadcast on June 15**

**Toronto** – Nova Scotian contralto Portia White was the first Black Canadian concert performer to achieve international fame in the mid-20th century and was hailed as the best classical voice of her generation. Yet, despite her accomplishments, her story has been largely erased from Canadians’ collective memory. *Aportia Chryptych: A Black Opera for Portia White* is a bold, new Black opera from Canadian director and librettist **HAUI** and Toronto and New York-based composer **Sean Mayes** that sets out to reclaim Portia White’s story.

The world premiere presentation takes place **June 14, 15, and 16, 2024** at the **Canadian Opera Company Theatre at 227 Front St. E.**, with a special Q&A with the opera’s creators following each performance. In celebration of Portia White, opening night audiences are encouraged to wear white, honouring the Canadian artist’s name, life, and incredible legacy.

“What a poetic justice to share Portia’s story in the art form that rejected her in her lifetime,” says **HAUI**. “And, in sharing this, to be presented by the largest opera company in Canada...talk about justice!” The award-winning multidisciplinary, mixed media artist has previously incorporated theatre, dance, film, and visual arts to bridge the gap between art and activism through the exploration of themes of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

“One thing that’s important for audiences to know is that this opera is not a biopic,” adds **HAUI**. “The story begins at the end of Portia’s life, as she’s immediately thrust into the spirit realm where she’s fractured into her body, her soul, and her spirit. And it ends up being a navigation of the intermediate realm, and how Portia must learn to let go of her earthly bonds in the hopes of ascension.”

### **THE LOOK AND SOUND OF *APORTIA CHRYPTYCH***

**Sean Mayes** enjoys an active career as a composer, conductor, orchestrator, author, and educator across North America and Europe with work that spans opera, Broadway, classical, and pop. In composing *Aportia Chryptych*, he says the creative team sought to create a score that would break down musical silos and unite artistic and cultural communities. “The sound world is incredibly diverse,” says **Mayes**. “You’ll hear spoken word, rap, hip-hop, and R&B. But it also crosses into what most of us associate with quote-unquote ‘opera’ and takes place at the intersection where these seemingly divergent worlds collide.” Sound designer **Wayne Hawthorne** helps merge the opera’s vocals with a diverse range of musical components, creating a harmonious space that aptly mirrors Portia’s inner self and delivers a powerful and disruptive impact.

Set and projection designer **Laura Warren** has designed a dark, reflective space meant to represent the *bardo* which, in Buddhist belief, is the state of existence between death and rebirth. Projections act as fragments of memory, moving the audience through the people and places of Portia’s past, enhanced by evocative lighting from **Bonnie Beecher**, whose work to date includes lighting design for over 400 theatre, opera, and dance productions. Costumes from **Diséiye Thompson** range from the period of Portia White’s life right up to the present, mixing African, mid-20th century, and modern day styles to capture the opera’s storyline. **Aria Evans** joins the creative team as choreographer and intimacy director.

## **BRINGING LIFE TO PORTIA’S STORY**

Canadian soprano **Neema Bickersteth** brings her “commanding stage presence” (*The Globe and Mail*) to the role of Portia Body; **Bickersteth** recently wowed audiences in the title role of the award-winning 2023 Toronto production of Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha* and also serves as dramaturg for this world premiere of *Aportia Chryptych*. Midwest Emmy-winning American soprano **Adrienne Danrich**, whose “supple voice” has been called “meltingly tender” by *Opera News*, takes on the role of Portia Spirit. **Danrich** is joined by **SATE**, a Canadian contralto whose sound is rooted in blues but who *Exclaim!* magazine recently wrote has been known to push at musical limits; **SATE** performs the role of Portia Soul. Young Toronto-based treble **Henos Girma** is currently studying at St. Michael’s Choir School and completes the cast as Portia’s son, Jimmie.

“It’s so important for us to uplift Canadian figures,” says **HAUI**. “In the opera, we say Portia’s name over 100 times—and I’ve done that deliberately, so that we don’t forget her. I hope that people take away from this that we never forget her again.”

Adds **Mayes**, “As artists, and especially as people who create, as people who are tasked with demonstrating our humanity as human beings, we have an obligation to make sure that our stories are reflective of what we truly are and the direction that our world is truly going in.”

*Aportia Chryptych: A Black Opera for Portia White* is performed in English, Creole, and Jòal with English SURTITLES™.

## **A SPECIAL LIVESTREAM PRESENTATION**

In order to share the world premiere of *Aportia Chryptych: A Black Opera for Portia White* with as many audiences as possible, the **Canadian Opera Company** will be sharing a one-time, livestreamed presentation of the opera on **Saturday, June 15 at 2 p.m. Eastern Time**.

Register for free at [coc.ca/Aportia](https://coc.ca/Aportia).

## **CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM**

<b>Portia Body</b>	Neema Bickersteth
<b>Portia Spirit</b>	Adrienne Danrich
<b>Portia Soul</b>	SATE
<b>Jimmie</b>	Henos Girma
<b>Composer</b>	Sean Mayes with HAUI
<b>Librettist and Director</b>	HAUI
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Sheree Spencer
<b>Dramaturg</b>	Neema Bickersteth
<b>Conductor</b>	Sean Mayes
<b>Set &amp; Projection Designer</b>	Laura Warren
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	Bonnie Beecher
<b>Costume Designer</b>	Diséiye Thompson
<b>Sound Designer</b>	Wayne Hawthorne
<b>Choreographer and Intimacy Director</b>	Aria Evans
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Kat Chin
<b>Assistant Stage Manager</b>	Jessica Severin

**With the COC Orchestra**

## **TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets for *Aportia Chryptych: A Black Opera for Portia White* are \$75. Tickets can be purchased online at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca) or by calling the **Canadian Opera Company Box Office** at 416-363-8231. For more information, please visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Season Sponsor:** BMO Financial Group

*Aportia Chryptych: A Black Opera for Portia White* is produced by the **Canadian Opera Company**, in association with the **National Arts Centre's National Creation Fund**, **Canada Council for the Arts**, and **Ontario Arts Council**.

**Associate Producer:** Sheree Spencer

**Presenting Sponsor of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiatives:** TD Bank Group

**Major Cultural Event 2024:** Pride Toronto

The **COC Orchestra** is generously sponsored, in part, by **W. Bruce C. Bailey**, in honour of Christie Darville, COC Deputy General Director, and Johannes Debus, COC Music Director, and in part by **The Schulich Foundation**

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## **ABOUT THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY**

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. General Director Perryn Leech joined the company in 2021, forming a leadership team with Music Director Johannes Debus and Deputy General Director Christie Darville. The COC enjoys a loyal audience, including a dedicated base of subscribers, and has an international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation. Its diverse repertoire includes new commissions and productions, local and international collaborations with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracts the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. The company is an incubator for the future of the art form, nurturing Canada's new wave of opera performers and creators with customized training and support. The COC's purpose-built opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, is hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. For more information, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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