



For Immediate Release

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**WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY
PRESENTS CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED
THE CONVERT BY DANAI GURIRA**

**PREMIERE PRESENTATION IN WASHINGTON, DC
BY OBIE AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT AND ACTOR**

(Washington, DC) OBIE Award-winning playwright (*Eclipsed*, *In The Continuum*), and stage and television actress (AMC's *The Walking Dead*) **Danai Gurira** returns to Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company with her rich, unflinching, and compassionate new play, ***The Convert***, directed by Woolly Company Director **Michael John Garcés** (*Oedipus el Rey*), February 13 – March 10, 2013.

Set in 1895 amid the colonial scramble for Southern Africa, the play follows Jekesai, a young girl who escapes village life and a forced marriage arrangement, ultimately discovering Christianity under the guidance of an African teacher. However, as anti-colonial sentiments rise to a boiling point, Jekesai must choose between her new European God and the spirits of her ancestors. "Intense and deeply affecting" (*Chicago Tribune*), ***The Convert*** examines complex cultural and religious collisions that shaped the post-colonial world, the reverberations of which are still felt in Zimbabwe today.

The Convert, the first of a trilogy and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts Art Works grant, was commissioned by Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles and will explore Zimbabwe's coming-of-age from a female perspective. In 2012, the premiere production—a co-production between the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ; the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, IL; and the Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles, CA—received the Edgerton New American Play Award, the Stavis Award, and six Ovation awards. Woolly Mammoth received a National Endowment for the Arts New Play Development grant to support the creation of the final play focused on twenty-first century Zimbabwe.

"Woolly is proud to continue our association with playwright Danai Gurira and Woolly Company Director Michael John Garcés," says Woolly Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz. "Danai's intensely personal new drama about the clash of native religion and Christianity in what is now known as Zimbabwe follows the brilliant successes of *In The Continuum* and *Eclipsed*. Heartrending and humorous, ***The Convert*** firmly establishes Danai as one of the finest playwrights in our global village."

Community engagement activities surrounding *The Convert* are featured in Woolly's "House Lights Up!" programming profile below.

Woolly Mammoth's Season 33, themed **My Roots, My Revolution**, includes a group of unforgettable characters who choose whether to embrace their legacies, run from them, or invent a whole new future. Works include Kristoffer Diaz's *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* (Sept 3 – Oct 7), Mia Chung's *You for Me for You* (Nov 5 – Dec 2), **Danai Gurira's *The Convert*** (Feb 13 – Mar 10), Mike Daisey's *American Utopias* (Mar 25 – Apr 21), and Aaron Posner's *Stupid Fucking Bird* (May 27 – June 23). This holiday season featured Shenoah Allen and Mark Chavez's *The Pajama Men: In The Middle of No One* (Dec 11 – Jan 6).

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

DANAI GURIRA (Playwright) co-created and performed in the award-winning two-woman play, *In The Continuum*, which premiered off-Broadway and toured the US and Southern Africa. For her work on that production, Danai won a 2006 Obie Award, the 2006 Outer Critics John Gassner Award, the 2004 Global Tolerance Award (Friends of the United Nations), and was honored by the Theatre Hall of Fame. She has also won the Whiting Award, Best Playwright with NAACP, and her play *Eclipsed*, which appeared at Woolly in 2009, won Best New Play at the Helen Hayes Awards. She is the recipient of the 2008 TCG New Generations Program travel grant for *Eclipsed* and has taught playwriting and acting in Uberia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. She received her MFA in acting from New York University and was a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University. Danai was born in the US to Zimbabwean parents and raised in Zimbabwe. Currently, Danai can be seen as Michonne in the award-winning AMC series, *The Walking Dead*.

MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS (Director) is the Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles where he recently directed *Café Vida* by Lisa Loomer. He is also a Company Member at Woolly, where he directed *Oedipus el Rey* by Luis Alfaro and two plays by Craig Wright: *Grace* and *Recent Tragic Events*. Other recent credits include *Placas* by Paul Flores at the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre in San Francisco and Steven Adley Guirgis' *The Motherfucker with the Hat* at South Coast Repertory Theatre. His production of *red, black and GREEN: a blues* by Marc Bamuthi Joseph, which premiered at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, was recently presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and will be seen at Washington, DC's Atlas Performing Arts Center this May.

The Convert cast will include Woolly Company Member Dawn Ursula* (*Clybourne Park*, *Eclipsed*), Starla Benford*, Nancy Moricette*, Irungu Mutu*, JaBen Early, Alvin Keith*, and Erik Kilpatrick*. The creative team will include set design by Woolly Company Member Misha Kachman, costume design by Helen Huang, lighting design by Woolly Company Member Colin K. Bills, and sound design by Ryan Rumery. Additional credits include Kim James-Bey (dialect coach), John M. Baker (dramaturgy), and Kristy Matero* (production stage manager).

*Member, Actors' Equity Association

The Convert runs February 13 – March 10, 2013; Wednesdays–Fridays at 8pm, Saturdays at 3pm and 8pm, and Sundays at 2pm and 7pm. Friday, February 15 will be a Pay-What-You-Can performance beginning at 8pm.

TICKETS

Tickets for ***The Convert*** start at \$35, and can be purchased through the Woolly Mammoth Box Office at **202-393-3939**, online at **www.woollymammoth.net**, or in person at 641 D Street, NW (7th & D). For directions and parking information, please visit **www.woollymammoth.net**.

HOUSE LIGHTS UP! EVENTS

House Lights Up! is a series of high-profile panel discussions, lectures, debates, film-screenings, concerts, readings, and other special events, curated by Woolly's Connectivity Department.

The Encyclopedia Show **Thursday, February 7 at 8pm** *Woolly Rehearsal Hall*

The Encyclopedia Show is a live variety extravaganza that commissions local and touring artists and experts from many disciplines to use their talents and present a verbal and musical Encyclopedia entry each month. Join Woolly and the Encyclopedia Show DC in February for a whimsical mix of comedy, music, poetry, and performance art, as we explore the theme of "THE SAINTS". Visit facebook.com/EpediaDC for more information.

Changing the Face of the Empowered **Saturday, February 16 at 6pm** *Woolly Rehearsal Hall* Book tickets at www.woollymammoth.net

Join the Zimbabwe Education Fund (ZEF) for a pre-show reception, which includes a silent auction and complimentary drinks and hors d'oeuvres. This special event will raise funds to afford children in Zimbabwe a quality education they would not have access to otherwise. Help raise awareness about the power of education, the crippling effects of poverty, and the ground breaking work currently being done in Zimbabwe. Special guest speakers will include the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Zimbabwe. For more information, visit www.zimbabweeducationfund.org.

The Legacy Program: Residency Student Performance **Friday, February 22 at 8pm** *Woolly Rehearsal Hall*

Enjoy a performance, written and performed by Duke Ellington School of the Arts students, dramatizing their explorations of personal genealogy, cultural identity, and African ancestry. After the performance, the students will receive the results of their DNA ancestry tests, revealing the lost specificity of their African ancestry. Don't miss this powerful, thought-provoking, and entertaining experience. This program is derived through a partnership between The Continuum Project, Inc., African Ancestry, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and Woolly Mammoth, and has been generously supported by the DC Commission on Arts and the Humanities. For more information, visit www.thecontinuumproject.org.

Lobby Experience: Self- Directed Q&A with Playwright Danai Gurira *Woolly Upper Lobby*

Make your way to any of the ten listening stations in the Upper Lobby and hear directly from playwright Danai Gurira about her inspiration and the process of writing *The Convert*.

Post-Show Discussions **Following Saturday Matinees** *Woolly Theatre*

Saturday, February 23

In collaboration with the DC Mayor's Office on African Affairs
Topic and panelists TBA

Saturday, March 2

Topic and panelists TBA

Saturday, March 9

Join the cast and creative team of *The Convert* in a conversation about the making of the production.

Research Your Heritage

Woolly offers their patrons the opportunity to receive a 10% discount on professional ancestry research by Keith Josef Adkins. Keith Josef Adkins is a genealogist and African-American history enthusiast with a special interest in the social and economic patterns of free people of color and so-called "favored" slaves. He has been providing family history research for the last ten years. Some of his clients include award-winning journalist Farai Chideya (CNN, ABC News, NPR's *News and Notes*), Broadway and Tony Award-nominated actor Colman Domingo (*Scottsboro Boys*, *Passing Strange*), and award-winning TV writer and novelist Nichelle Tramble (*Justified*, *Mercy*, *Women's Murder Club*, *Harper's Island*). Keith is currently working as a genealogical consultant for a forthcoming project on an American president. For more information, visit www.kjfamilyresearch.com.

Trace Your DNA with AfricanAncestry.com

Woolly offers their patrons the opportunity to receive a free African Ancestry tote bag when placing an order for an African Ancestry Test Kit. Founded in 2003 by Dr. Rick Kittles and Gina Paige, this Washington, DC based company has helped more than 100,000 people connect with their original roots in Africa. African Ancestry is the world leader in tracing maternal and paternal lineages of African descent. With the industry's largest and most comprehensive database of more than 32,000 indigenous African DNA samples, African Ancestry determines specific countries of origin—and in most cases—ethnic groups with the highest level of accuracy. African Ancestry is committed to providing a unique service to the black community, working daily to improve the cultural, emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic well-being of peoples across the African Diaspora. For more information, visit www.africanancestry.com.

Footlights Dinner**Tuesday, February 26 at 6:30pm**

Alfio's Trattoria, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD

Cost: \$20

Meet members of the cast and artistic team of *The Convert* over dinner for an in-depth discussion about the play. RSVP to Phyllis Bodin at 301-986-1768 or phylbo@verizon.net. For more information, visit www.footlightsdc.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 7 8pm The Encyclopedia Show

February 13 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*

February 14 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*

February 15 8pm PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 16 6pm Changing the Face of the Empowered Pre-show Reception
February 16 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 17 7pm OPENING/PRESS NIGHT of *The Convert*
February 20 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 21 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 22 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 22 8pm The Legacy Program Performance
February 23 3pm, 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 23 Post-show Discussion (matinee only)
February 24 2pm, 7pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 26 6:30pm Footlights Dinner
February 27 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
February 28 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 1 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 2 3pm, 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 2 Post-show Discussion (matinee only)
March 3 2pm, 7pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 6 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 7 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 8 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 9 3pm, 8pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*
March 9 Post-show Discussion (matinee only)
March 10 2pm, 7pm PERFORMANCE of *The Convert*

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Facebook.com/woollymammothtc
Twitter.com/woollymammothtc (#WoollyConvert)
Blog: woollymammothblog.com

ABOUT WOOLLY

Now in its 33rd Season, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company continues to hold its place at the leading edge of American theatre. Acknowledged as “one of the most influential outposts for the best new American plays” (*The Washington Post*), and “known for its productions of innovative new plays” (*The New York Times*), Woolly Mammoth is a national leader in the development of new works, and one of the best known and most influential mid-sized theatres in America.

www.woollymammoth.net

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