

Khameleon Productions presents

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY DRAMATIC SOCIETY

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# MEDEA

23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> May | A modern adaptation of Euripides' tragedy  
Keble O'Reilly Theatre | Based on Robin Robertson's translation  
Featuring a BAME cast & crew



“You think that I might be a witch? That I might be a strange, dangerous monster? Because I wasn’t born here and because I am a woman.”

Set in a dystopian world, Jason has abandoned his wife, Medea, and their two children. He is remarrying the princess of the land, with the hope that this partnership will bring him security and prosperity. Medea, a barbarian and now left alone, is seen as a menace to the law and is threatened with banishment.

After pleading for mercy, Medea is allowed one day before she must leave, during which she plans to complete her dark and disturbing quest for "justice".

Medea is not just a play about fidelity, family and revenge, but an inquiry into the psyche of those most marginalised by society. It is an exploration of the themes of identity and belonging, the politics of power and femininity, and a psychological examination of how anyone can be sufficiently inflamed by insult, loss and the threat of isolation to harm the people they most love.

Featuring a BAME cast and crew, Khameleon Productions present a modern adaptation of Euripides’ Tragedy, combining music with movement and spoken word to transform Robin Robertson’s translation into a celebration of culture and exploration of identity.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There are few female roles in theatre of such complexity, depth and ambiguity.

The notions of identity and belonging at the heart of the play are ongoing universal issues. Medea's story is so relatable to the BAME experience - she is an outsider, a foreigner in a land that is not her home. It's this concept of 'otherness' that unites the BAME narrative, and we are really excited to be presenting a fresh approach to this timeless tale.

An all-BAME cast and crew play shouldn't be such a big deal. Theatre has a legacy of community, and it has long been used to express the ideas and realities of a diverse range of communities. It's about reimagining the western canon, and deconstructing the systemic 'normalities' of our immediate societies. The birth of theatre as we know it began with Greek Tragedy; it's about reclaiming this history.



# MUSIC

A defining feature of the Greek Tragedy genre is the Chorus, who in this play are extensions of Medea's persona. The versatility of the chorus as a dramatic device has enabled us to experiment with different forms of expressions such as spoken word, and acapella song. Our vision in creating the soundtrack to the play was to interweave contemporary popular music from the likes of Kendrick Lamar, Stormzy and Ibeyi with traditional South Indian classical sounds as well as familiar African-American spirituals, with the common messages of struggle, peace and endurance pervading throughout every song.

“The measure of any society is how it treats its women and girls

We create

The smart, powerful, creative, accomplished young women

We can fight. I'm here because of you

I'm here because girls like you inspire me

No man in the world

No man is big enough for my arms-

Many of these girls have faced unthinkable obstacles just to attend school...

I told them, I told them that they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect

And I told them that they should disregard anyone

Who demeans or devalues them

They should make their voices heard in the world”

Excerpt of lyrics from No Man Is Big Enough For My Arms by Ibeyi



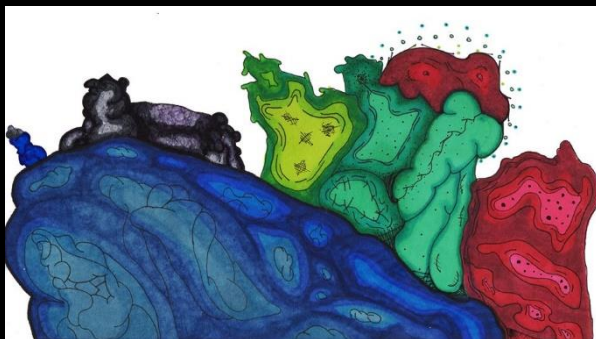
# SET

Drawing on imagery from the horror genre, especially Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), the set was designed to unsettle and intimidate both the characters and the audience. The stark, monolithic tree trunks convey this aspect of horror, constructing a sense of entrapment and creating shadows. The trees stand in juxtaposition with a constructed cage. This contrast between organic and industrial highlights Medea's dislocation. However, in opposition with the phallic and imposing trees, the cage provides sanctuary as well as confinement. Our set is designed to work dynamically with the actors; having a set which is at once imposing and sparse allows the cast to move through the space, exploring the feeling of entrapment and adding to it.

# COSTUME AND MAKEUP

All blacks initially seem an easy 'out' for a costume designer, but it can be a powerful artistic choice. Medea is the only character with colour in her costume. Red holds connotations of blood and danger, and has also been used in the movement for female empowerment, moving away from connotations of promiscuity to a colour actively claimed by women to show a similar desire for freedom.

As much as the aesthetic of the costumes is minimized, makeup and art are emphasised. Drawing on the ideas of Greek masks, activism, and the art of Ori (made famous through Beyonce's *Lemonade*), the chorus and Medea will be covered in intricately designed, starkly contrasted body and face paint. These designs along with all-black costumes will enhance the unique and powerful aesthetic to this play, and its diverse and culturally respectful vision.



Art inspired by themes of the play by Sam Kaner

# SPOKEN WORD

## CHORUS 1 - SPOKEN WORD BY THEOPHINA GABRIEL

Theophina Gabriel is an award-winning published poet and second year Philosophy & Theology student at Regent's Park College. Her creative writing has featured on the BBC, and when not performing spoken word gigs around Oxford she forms part of an award-winning poetry collective back in her hometown Slough.

Her contribution to Medea (No Land Is Big Enough) is based on a poem she wrote recently based on the recent Windrush Scandal. Her work often focuses on themes such as the rift of dual identity, the power dynamics of belonging, and the narrative of Black British people.

## CHORUS 2 - SPOKEN WORD BY ZAD EL BACHA

“Here, Medea’s (fairly legitimate) concerns about being left for a younger, whiter, more socially acceptable woman, after she had sacrificed her life and left everything she had to help Jason, are being dismissed. The sense of alienation of having your experience denied is what I have tried to capture here. Specifically, it’s about this experience in the context of foreign-ness.

Medea is being denied agency over her surroundings, the power to state and name what is happening to her, and hostile narratives are imposed upon her. I’ve tried to capture that sense of losing the good things around you (a lover, a land) as they turn against you. This is particularly relevant to the migration experience. There is a basic disconnect between the world you know (‘home’) and the world that is around you, and everyone is very ready to remind you of that. And there is that comfort of, after all, finding a connection with this new world, slowly making it your own.

Flowers in Europe might not be quite the same as what you thought of as flowers, but if you’re going on a walk on a nice day you will still feel connected to them, and after some time they might start to become fully flowers to you. Until you are reminded, often very violently, that you are not allowed to feel connected to them, that they are not yours, and you have lost everything twice.”

## CHORUS 3 - SPOKEN WORD BY SERENA ARTHUR

Serena Arthur is a second year English student at Mansfield College, Oxford. She is a poet who held the title of Birmingham's Young Poet Laureate 2014-16. She

has performed at places such as Birmingham Town Hall, Writing West Midlands' Birmingham Literature Festival and London School of Economics.

“I wrote this piece for Medea, as something that I hoped would not only fit into the script and use the themes and ideas of the play, but also resonate as one of the many ways that Medea can link to wider societal issues. Medea may have Greek origins, but this BME production speaks to the present day and so, I wanted my spoken word piece to be not only about Medea, but also about anyone like Medea who has been marginalised, isolated by society and is, ultimately, suffering. Though Medea, trapped in the play, cannot hear the plea to not 'give into Fate's call' as the darkness threatens, maybe someone else will.”

## CHORUS 4 - SPOKEN WORD BY SIMRAN UPPAL

“At this point in the original play, the chorus sing an intensely emotional prayer to Helios, the god of the Sun. Medea would originally have been performed as part of a religious festival, and this choral prayer/poem would have been said with real spiritual meaning.

To connect to that, I wove a loose translation of a Vedic prayer to the Sun as creative energy, the famous Gayatri mantra, into the refrain, as well as translations from the original chorus. It is full of awe, wonder, love for the powerful workings of a living universe that we can't quite understand. This awe and confusion is part of how the chorus, and we, try to make sense of what has happened: Medea created life and warmth, and then ripped it apart; she was wronged, but did something incredibly violent; everyone around her blames her for her anger, but she was wronged as a human, as a woman, as a foreigner.

Marginalised groups are always having our right to anger, and the experience of healthy anger, denied to us, and I wanted to question this, and explore how anger and a spiritual awareness of the universe speak to each other.”

# CAST AND CREW

Medea: Charithra Chandran

Jason: Joel Stanley

Aegeus: Karekin Johnson

Creon: Michael Shao & Jeevan Ravindran

Nurse: Maryam Rimi & Ore Laniyan

Messenger: Shreya Lakhani

Tutor: Dhanya Nair

Chorus: Anushka Shah, Olivia Moinuddin, Fis Noibi

Tumi Olufawo, Rore Disun-Odebode, Madhulika Murali, Shekinah Opara

Director: Francesca Amewudah-Rivers

Co-Producer: Rishem Khattar

Co-Producer: Shivaik Shah

Assistant Director: Taiwo Ava Oyebola

Assistant Producer: Krishan Emmanuel

Production Manager: Tracey Mwaniki

Set Design: Lewis Hunt, Isabella Rooney

Graphic Design: Sophie Kuang

Makeup: Shivaik Shah

Costume: Lorraine Dindi

Choreography: Sparshita Dey, Shyam Patel

Movement: Emily Everest-Phillips

Sound Design: Tony Liu

Sound Assistant: Marina Hou

Lighting Design: Christina Hill

Marketing Manager: Nina Crisp

Marketing Assistants: Ramani Chandramohan, Zeynab Alwi, Georgina Ramsay

Stage Manager: Sade Clarke

Spoken Word Artists: Serena Arthur, Zad El Bacha, Theophina Gabriel, Simran Uppal

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