

EMPAC

**POOR
PEOPLE'S
TV ROOM**

**OKWUI
OKPOKWASILI**





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In *Poor People's TV Room*, artist Okwui Okpokwasili performs with three other women in a work that features live song, dance, and text amid other media including television, audio recording, light, plastic, cloth, and wood. I am thrilled to welcome Okwui back to EMPAC. She has been here previously to perform in productions by choreographers Nora Chipaumire and Ralph Lemon. Now returning as choreographer herself, Okwui brings a style that transcends genre categories like “experimental theater” and “conceptual choreography” by creating a multi-media world that envelops her audience for the duration of the show.

Poor People's TV Room takes inspiration from the Bring Back Our Girls campaign, started by a group of Nigerian women in 2014 to raise awareness about the Boko Haram kidnappings of 300 young Chibok girls. The campaign turned into a global movement after gaining widespread attention through social networking platforms such as Twitter. Since the speed of this online phenomenon ultimately overpowered the voices of the indigenous Nigerian women who started the movement, Okwui uses live performance to refocus our attention in *Poor People's TV Room*. Acknowledging a history of Nigerian women's collective action, she weaves the Bring Back Our Girls narrative with The Women's War of 1929, an early anti-colonial revolt organized by women of six Nigerian ethnic groups. The performance takes unexpected turns to explore Nigerian time, perception, media, violence, and identity. Along the way, the work incorporates myriad references to Nigerian culture and the African diaspora, ranging from the Nigerian film genre Nollywood to Oprah.

Poor People's TV Room highlights the role of contemporary media in the experience and external perceptions of African diaspora. At the same time, the temporality of live performance and the extended duration of the performers' movements and vocalizations disrupts the rapid speed at which information is disseminated in our digital era—a speed that has the capacity to externally shape and/or erase personal identity as in the case of the Bring Back Our Girls movement.

—ASHLEY FERRO-MURRAY, ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF THEATER/DANCE

POOR PEOPLE'S TV ROOM

Conceived, Co-Written and Performed by **Okwui Okpokwasili**

Co-Written and Directed with Scenic and Lighting Design by **Peter Born**

Movement and Original Songs Created by Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born

Produced by **MAPP International Productions** in association with **New York Live Arts**, and created with lead support from New York Live Arts' Resident Commission Artist Program

Performed by **Thuli Dumakude**, Okwui Okpokwasili, **Katrina Reid** and **Nehemoyia Young**

Production Manager, **Santino Lo**

Saxophone music performed by **Sedric Choukroun**

FUNDING CREDITS

Poor People's TV Room is produced by MAPP International Productions in association with New York Live Arts, with lead support from New York Live Arts Resident Commission Artist program.

It has been commissioned by the American Dance Institute and the Walker Arts Center. *Poor People's TV Room* is a project of Creative Capital. It has received funding from The MAP Fund, supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. *Poor People's TV Room* was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and from the National Endowment for the Arts. It is supported by developmental residencies at The Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography at Florida State University in Tallahassee, FL; Brooklyn Creative Arts LAB (BRIC); Lower Manhattan Cultural Council; Denniston Hill Residency; Times Square Alliance Artists in Residence; "Alternative Spring Break: NYC Performing Arts" at Columbia; and 92Y in New York; The Rauschenberg Residency (Robert Rauschenberg Foundation) on Captiva Island, FL; and Wesleyan University in Middlebury, CT. An early work-in-progress iteration of *Poor People's TV Room* was presented by Lincoln Center in the David Rubenstein Atrium in June 2014.



BIOGRAPHIES

Okwui Okpokwasili is a New York-based writer, performer and choreographer. In partnership with collaborator Peter Born, Okpokwasili creates multidisciplinary projects. Their first New York production, *Pent-Up: A Revenge Dance* premiered at Performance Space 122 and received a 2010 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for Outstanding Production; an immersive installation version was featured in the 2008 Prelude Festival. Their second collaboration, *Bronx Gothic*, won a 2014 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for Outstanding Production and continues to tour nationally and internationally. In June of 2014, they presented an installation entitled *Bronx Gothic: The Oval* as part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s River to River Festival. An early iteration of their current project *Poor People’s TV Room* was presented by Lincoln Center in the David Rubenstein Atrium in June 2014.

As a performer, Okpokwasili frequently collaborates with award-winning director Ralph Lemon, including *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*; *Come Home Charley Patton* (for which she also won a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award); a duet performed at The Museum of Modern Art as part of *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*; and, most recently, Ralph Lemon’s *Scaffold Room*. She has appeared as an actor in many productions, including Nora Chipaumire’s *Miriam*; Julie Taymor’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; Kristin Marting’s *Sounding*; Young Jean Lee’s *LEAR*; Richard Foreman’s *Maria del Bosco*; Richard Maxwell’s *Cowboys and Indians*; and *Joan Dark* (The Goodman Theater/The Linz European Capital of Culture). Film credits include *Malorie’s Final Score*, *Knut Åsdam’s Abyss*, *The Interpreter*, *The Hoax* and *I Am Legend*.

Okpokwasili’s residencies and awards include The French American Cultural Exchange (2006-2007); Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography Choreographic Fellowship (2012); Baryshnikov Arts Center Artist-in-Residence (2013), New York Live Arts Studio Series (2013); Under Construction at the Park Avenue Armory (2013); New York Foundation for the Arts’ Fellowship in Choreography (2013); Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s Extended Life Program (2014-15); The Foundation for Contemporary Arts’ artist grant in dance (2014), BRIClab (2015), Columbia University (2015) and the Rauschenberg Residency (2015).

Peter Born is a director, designer and filmmaker. In addition to his work with Okpokwasili, he is currently collaborating with David Thomson on a cycle of installation/performances revolving around a post-sexual incarnation of Venus, happening throughout 2015-16. He designed and created the set for Nora Chipaumire's *rite/riot*, and he has created performance videos with Chipaumire, Thomson, and Daria Fain, among others. He works as an art director and prop stylist for video and photo projects with clients such as *Vogue*, Estee Lauder, Barney's Co-op, Bloomingdales, Old Navy, "25" magazine, Northrup Grumman and *The Wall Street Journal*, with collaborators including Kanye West, Barnaby Roper, Santiago and Mauricio Sierra, Quentin Jones and NoStringsUS Puppet Productions. He is a former New York public high school teacher, an itinerant floral designer, corporate actor-facilitator and furniture designer. His collaborations with Okwui Okpokwasili have garnered two New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Awards.

Thuli Dumakude (Performer) is winner of the Sir Lawrence Olivier Award in London and the Obie in New York for her lead role in Poppie Nongena. She's the winner of three Audelco Awards in New York for writing, directing, and performing her one-woman show *Buya Africa*, for which she also won the FNB Vita Award for performances at the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Her performance credits include: Rafiki in *The Lion King* on Broadway, Poppie Nongena in New York, London, Toronto, Australia and Chicago; Bongi in *Bongi's Journey* at Crossroads Theatre; *Lost in the Stars*, *Kamadonsela* (Lady Macbeth); *Welcome Msomi's Umabatha* in South Africa, London, Israel and New York City; *Halala* the musical; *Sheila's Day* at Crossroads Theatre, Grahamstown Festival and The Market Theatre in Johannesburg; *Madre*, in *Juan Darien*, directed by Julie Taymor; and *Grandma* in *Generations* at Soho Rep.

Dumakude is the co-founder and director of a female a-cappella group, THOKOZA, which sang at Nelson Mandela's 80th birthday celebration in South Africa. They also performed at Riverside Church for Madiba's memorial service; Carnegie Hall with Ladysmith Black Mambazo; Riverside Church in *The Footsteps of Mandela*; Playroom Theater off-Broadway; and *I Sing for Freedom* at Lincoln Center. Dumakude was the vocal coach for *Sarafina* on Broadway and vocal coach and musical director for *Sheila's Day*. She was the assistant director and choreographer for *Umabatha* (The Zulu Macbeth). She choreographed for Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago and Dinizulu Dance Company

and was the Dance Director for IZulu Dance Theatre Company for 10 years. Film credits include movies *Cry Freedom* and *Power of One* where she appeared as a soloist; and *Serengeti* for Imax Theatre.

During Apartheid, Dumakude toured the world in live concerts raising awareness about the plight of her fellow South Africans. She continues to work with Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and the Lion King Companies in America, providing them with hand-beaded merchandise to raise funds for HIV/AIDS part of which goes to AIDS organizations in South Africa. She works with a group of 20 rural women in the village of Galibasi in Muden KZN in South Africa that do beadwork and sell to theater-goers in NYC. Dumakude was invited by the Department of Education in New York City to tour schools teaching about the role of Africa in the world through music and dance.

Santino Lo (Production Manager) Originally from Hong Kong, and currently based in New York, Santino Lo is a creative producer and production manager working extensively with interdisciplinary works in dance, music, and theater. Familiar with the needs of different performing arts disciplines, and with professional experience with companies large and small, Santino aims to assist artists in creating works of art that speak to the public.

Santino's current projects include Jonah Bokaer's *Rules of the Game*, Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*, Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's *River To River Festival*, and more. Santino is also the executive producer for MADArt Creative, currently in partnership with Yale Science Diplomats at Yale University, creating a large-scale performance on quantum physics.

Katrina Reid (Performer) is a performing artist and writer. She currently has the great fortune to work with David Thomson, Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born, and Third Rail Projects. Her own work has been presented at Current Sessions, Gibney Dance's Double Plus series, Cocoon Theatre, Studio 26 Gallery, BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center, Warefamos, Dance Chance Atlanta, and Florida A&M University.

Nehemoyia Young (Performer) is a Brooklyn-based dancer, choreographer, educator, and cultural activist. She believes dancing is the transformational healing of our personal and collective traumas, and offers this gift through performance, healing, and community art. Nehemoyia received her BA in Psychology from Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, where she began dancing professionally for T. Lang Dance Company. Since then she has had the pleasure of working with an abundance of inspiring NYC artists and is currently performing with Maria Bauman Dance, Andre Zachary/Renegade Performance Group, and Sydnie L. Mosley Dance Company. When offstage, she is working as a dance and creative-movement teaching artist for GlobalArts to Go, a Multicultural arts, education, training, and entertainment organization which serves diverse community programs and NYC Public Schools.

MAPP INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS (Producer) is a nonprofit producer of major performing arts projects that raise critical consciousness and spark social change. We support all phases of an artist's creative process, from concept and production to premiere and touring, while also engaging audiences in the issues behind the art. Through this heightened focus, we support an evolving and elite cadre of creators whose work ignites communities worldwide.

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