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Miracle in Rwanda

Based on the true story of Immaculée Ilibagiza

Live Streaming Saturday, April 10 - Recorded performances April 16-26, 2021

(Pittsburgh, PA – March 22, 2021) The Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh and Prime Stage Theater are proud to present an original production of ***Miracle in Rwanda*** in honor of Genocide Awareness Month.

Written by **Leslie Malaika Lewis** and **Edward Vilga** the play is an uplifting message of forgiveness and compassion based on the life of New York Times bestselling author of *Left To Tell*, **Immaculée Ilibagiza**. Acclaimed Rwandan actor, singer, poet and social justice activist **Malaika Uwamahoro** stars in this production of the one-woman play. It is directed by **Steven Wilson**.

“The Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh has worked with Prime Stage Theatre for many years to harness the power of theater to bring to life stories of resilience and hope from the Holocaust, and in April 2021, from a survivor of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. We are grateful for this partnership, as we observe Memorial Day for the genocide in Rwanda and Yom HaShoah to remember the martyrs, survivors, liberators, and rescuers from the Holocaust,” said **Lauren Bairnsfather**, Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh Director.

Genocide is the intentional action to destroy a people—usually defined as an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group—in whole or in part. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda was a systematic campaign by the ethnic majority Hutus aimed at wiping out every member of the minority Tutsi group. From April 7 through July 4, 1994, During a 100 day period an estimated 1 million Tutsi people were slaughtered.

“Producing this show has been an amazing experience. The genocide of the Tutsis that took place in 1994 in Rwanda isn’t a story many of us in the United States know. To be able to learn about this tragic piece of world history and share the story of Immaculee who lived through this has been truly amazing,” said **Tina Marie Cerny**, Prime Stage Theatre Managing Director, “Many people are unaware that there is a genocide awareness month, that genocide happens as much as it does. With our partnership with the Holocaust Center we are honored to create awareness around these stories.”

The one-woman play is about much more than just the details of this dark period in time of Rwandan history. It is a play about **Immaculée Ilibagiza**, a 24-year-old woman who hid in a tiny bathroom with seven other women for 91 days, surviving the unprecedented

onslaught of rape and murder that overcame the country in the spring of 1994. This real-life story of faith and survival is one of personal empowerment, of overcoming all obstacles through the power of faith, and ultimately finding peace of mind amidst unbelievable hardship. **Immaculée** was able to survive the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi through prayer and her dedication to her faith that kept her afloat in the most trying of times. Through this faith she was able to walk away with the power of forgiveness.

“What inspires me to be performing in this play, is the fact that I am a Rwandan, applying my voice, skills, culture and history to bring a Rwandan story to life on stage. Finding ways in the arts to tell stories through theatre, film, music, dance, lighting, writing, set and sound design are really powerful platforms for stories like Immaculee Ilibagiza's,” said **Malaika Uwamahoro**, Actor, “Art is not only entertaining and captivating it can also be immersive, educational, transformational and inspire healing. I am very inspired to be performing this play and use my artistic skills to tell a story that is close to my history and heart. I hope people in the audience get to learn more about what happened during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.”

Immaculée tells the story of the first time the killers came looking for them and how it felt as if their knives and machetes were already cutting her although she was safely hidden. After they left she could feel physical pain. She realized that her thoughts were killing her before the killers ever did.

While these murders went on, **Immaculée** survived by praying the rosary incessantly in every waking moment. She made that room into a monk's cell. She finally overcame her inability to forgive her family's murderers through a spiritual transformation that can only be described as miraculous. She found peace in herself without any of her external circumstances changing. She was not able to get out of the room, but she could get out of the prison in her mind.

“It truly is an honor to have the opportunity to collaborate with Malaika to help tell this important story. Personally, I had a surface knowledge of the genocide against the Tutsi people in Rwanda. The opportunity to do a deeper dive, having to research the details and learn from Malaika is a rare gift that being a theatre professional offers,” said **Steven Wilson**, Director, “This is a story about faith, hope and forgiveness. It is a reminder that forgiveness is just as important to the well being of the person forgiving as the person being forgiven. Malaika Uwamahoro is one of the most gifted performers I have ever had the pleasure of collaborating with. She plays a bunch of different characters in this play and flows seamlessly from one to the next. This play is an extreme workout for a performer and Malaika makes it look easy. My role is to make sure that Malaika has everything she needs to craft her performance. I also serve as the bridge between performer and audience. This play represents a small window of the larger tragedy that took place in Rwanda and my hope is that audiences will want to dig deeper and educate themselves more about this history.”

We are haunted by the stories and images of too many mass atrocities. Remembrance is very important. We owe it to the victims and their families. Teaching younger generations about genocide is challenging, but it is a moral duty.

“The true story of ***Miracle in Rwanda*** for Genocide Awareness Month in April enables the partnership between Prime **Stage Theatre** and **The Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh** to enlighten, educate and inspire more people of all ages through theatre, literature and the arts with this story of survival, hope and faith,” said **Wayne Brinda**, Prime Stage Theatre Producing Artistic Director.

Music for the production will be provided by Rwanda’s singer/songwriter **Teta Diana**. She was born in Nairobi, Kenya and returned to Rwanda after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. She blends her native language Kinyarwanda with English and Swahili to create traditional music closely tied to Rwandan identity. She has performed at various cultural events in Rwanda and abroad. In 2013, she joined Art for Peace Association that aimed at creating a safe space for Rwandan youth to speak about their experience reflect on Rwanda’s history and forge a renewed sense of belonging.

This program was made possible thanks to generous support from Jewish Women’s Foundation of Pittsburgh, Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD).

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets and registrations: <https://hcofpgh.org/rwanda>

Opening night will feature a talkback after the performance with **Malaika Uwamahoro** and **Immaculée Libagiza**, hosted by **Dr. Lauren Bairnsfather**, Director of the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh.

Opening Night Performance and Talkback

- Opening Night including Talkback: Saturday, April 10, 2021 at 8 PM **\$25**
- Talkback Only: Saturday, April 10, 2021 at 9:20 PM **\$5**

Recorded Link 24-hour Access Pass April 16-26, 2021 \$10

Audio Description and Closed Caption are available with recorded links

Classroom Registration for Student Matinees:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/miracle-in-rwanda-student-matinee-tickets-145897185409>

Group Tickets: Contact Jackie Reese at jreese@hcopgh.org



Malaika Uwamahoro, Actor

Malaika Uwamahoro is an artist born in Rwanda, and a Theatre Studies BA graduate from Fordham University in NYC, The Acting Track. She was able to attend Fordham as a proud recipient of a Rwandan Presidential Scholarship. She has performed her own poetry on stages around the world, including Forbes Women Africa in Durban South Africa, the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and African Union Summits in Addis Abbaba and Kigali. In 2014, she made her Off-Broadway debut at Signature Theatre in the world premiere of Katori Hall's *Our Lady of Kibeho*. Other theatre in the US includes: *Dance Africa* (BAM), *Miracle in Rwanda* (Theatre Row, New York), *Cartography* (New Victory Theatre, New York, NYUAD Abu Dhabi), *Bishop* (Fordham/Primary Stages, NYC), and *Africa's Hope* (USC Bovard Theatre, CA). International theatre: *Les Os que Craquent* (Theatre de Poche, Belgium.) Film: *Notre Dame Du Nil*, (Dir. Atiq Rahimi), *Loveless Generation*, (Dir. Thomas Petkovski), *Un Plain Parfait* (Dir. Pascal Chaumeil), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Dir. Roger Spottiswoode). Best Actress Award at Vues D'afrique Festival International de Cinéma au Montréal, Nominee for Best Solo Performance Audelco VIV Awards 2019, Nominee for Best Actress Golden Orange International Film Awards, BFA 2017.



Steven Wilson, Director

The play is directed by **Steven Wilson** who is a freelance director, actor and educator specializing in creating and nurturing collaborative, ensemble theatre with an emphasis on including and community building. His directing work has been seen regionally in Chicago (A Red Orchid Theatre, *The Hypocrites*, *Collaboration*), Arkansas (Theatre Squared), Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh Public Theatre, *City Theatre*, *No Name Players*) and

Austin, Texas (Hyde Park Theatre, Zach Theatre). He has worn many different hats throughout his career serving as a dramaturg for new play development, working in non-profit fundraising, self production and leading new play development initiatives. He spent four years as casting director with The Hypocrites where he was a longtime company member and an integral contributor to the growth of the organization. Recently, he finished a season long directing fellowship with Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida. While there he was the assistant director on three productions, supported the Literary Department with dramaturgy, facilitated pre-show discussion events surrounding the productions and conducted all understudy rehearsals. He is currently an adjunct professor with Point Park University and Seton Hill University.



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