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**The Rep Kicks Off 2021-2022 Season With World Premiere of**

***Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the Life of Miriam Makeba**

*Grammy-nominated singer Somi stars in co-production that will travel the U.S.*

**ST. LOUIS (August 17, 2021)** – [The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis \(The Rep\)](#) is set to launch its electrifying 2021-22 live theatre season with the world premiere production of *Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the life of Miriam Makeba, written and performed by Grammy-nominated international music sensation [Somi Kakoma](#). Presented by The Whitaker Foundation, the show runs **September 10, 2021 to October 3, 2021 at The Loretto-Hilton Center for the Performing Arts**.

Under the direction of **Lileana Blain-Cruz**, the rolling world premiere production of *Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the life of Miriam Makeba, will journey from the **Repertory Theatre of St. Louis** to the **McCarter Theatre Center** to **ArtsEmerson** to a New York City collaboration with the **Apollo Theater**, **National Black Theatre** and **New York Theatre Workshop**, all in partnership with **Octopus Theatricals**. The soul-stirring production includes a live jazz band playing original music and reinterpretations of Makeba's remarkable catalog.

The arts organizations came together as a collective to bring *Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the life of Miriam Makeba, back to life after the initial production and world premiere scheduled for April 2020 at The Rep was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These esteemed theatrical companies joining forces for this shared production marks a long-awaited return of live theatre after the most challenging time for both artists and patrons of the arts.

“As the daughter of Rwandan and Ugandan immigrants, this show is personal because Miriam Makeba paved the way for artists like me,” said Somi. “This work is about uplifting her legacy as a conscious revolutionary who brought Africa to the world’s center stage.”

Somi, whose jazz music and social consciousness has drawn comparison to Nina Simone, was nominated for a 2021 Grammy Award and received an NAACP Award for her album, *Holy Room: Live At Alte Oper*. Her 2017 album, *Petite Afrique*, won a 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album. Her new album honoring Makeba, titled *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*, was released in July.

Somi, who wrote and stars in the musical, takes the audience to Makeba's final performance where she raises the conscience and the consciousness of a people. The ancestors are calling – transporting her through the music and fractured memories of her past on a spiritual journey of reconciliation.

Born in Johannesburg in 1932, Makeba called attention to apartheid in South Africa, where the white-led government forced racial segregation from 1948 to 1991. In 1968, Makeba married Black Panther and civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael and soon fell out of favor in the United States.

“It is an incredible gift to open our season with Somi’s incomparable portrayal of the beauty and complexity of Miriam Makeba’s journey.” said Hana S. Sharif, Augustin Family Artistic Director at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. “I am delighted that St. Louis audiences will be the first to experience this stunning production after 18 months of anticipation. It is a great joy to work with my colleagues across the country to support the launch of *Dreaming Zenzile*.”

Following the premiere at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, *Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the life of Miriam Makeba will receive additional productions at McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, N.J., and New York Theatre Workshop in New York City, in partnership with National Black Theatre and Octopus Theatricals.

Directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz, the production stars Somi Kakoma as Miriam Makeba. Supporting cast includes Phindi Wilson, Phumzile Sojola, Naledi Masilo and Aaron Marcellus as the Sangoma Chorus. Hervé Samb will serve as musical director with musicians Toru Dodo, Sheldon Thwaites and Pathe Jassi. Marjani Forte-Saunders (choreography), Ricardo Hernandez (scene design), Mimi Plange (costume design), Yi Zhao (lighting design), Hannah Wasileski (projections design) and Justin Ellington and Bill Kirby (sound design). Special thanks to The Miriam Makeba Estate, The Mama Africa Cultural & Social Trust, and The Miriam Makeba Foundation for their support and permission to create this work.

*Dreaming Zenzile*, Based on the life of Miriam Makeba is developed by Octopus Theatricals and the National Black Theatre, co-commissioned by Joe's Pub at The Public and ArtsEmerson, Boston, and developed with the support of The Apollo Theatre. It was further developed at the Sundance Institute Theatre Lab in 2019, and received residencies with SEI Innovation studio at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, The Clarice Smith Center's Artist Partner Program, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Rauschenberg Residency/Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and UCLA Center for the

Art of Performance. The original music and arrangements of *Dreaming Zenzile* were made possible through the French American Jazz Exchange, a joint program of FACE Foundation and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with generous funding from Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, SACEM, Institut Français and the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication.

### **About Somi**

Somi Kakoma was born in Illinois to immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda. Known in the jazz world simply as 'Somi', she has built a career of transatlantic storytelling, and is the first African woman ever nominated in any Grammy jazz category (2021, Best Jazz Vocal Album for *Holy Room*; 2021 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocal Album). Somi's previous albums include *Petite Afrique* (2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album) and her major label debut *The Lagos Music Salon* feat. special guests Angélique Kidjo and Common. Both albums earned her ECHO Award nominations in Germany for Best International Jazz Vocalist. Somi recently announced a new studio album honoring the great South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba, to be released in July 2021. Somi is a Soros Equality Fellow, a USA Doris Duke Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, and a former artist-in-residence at Park Avenue Armory, Rauschenberg Residency at Captiva, Baryshnikov Arts Center and UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance. Somi holds undergraduate degrees in Anthropology and African Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Master's degree in Performance Studies from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and is the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique cultural agency and record label.

### **About The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis**

The Rep is the St. Louis region's most honored live professional theatre company. Founded in 1966, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis is a fully professional theatrical operation belonging to the League of Resident Theatres, The League of St. Louis Theatres and is a constituent member of Theatre Communications Group, Inc., the national service organization for the not-for-profit professional theatre. Visit [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org) for more, and find The Rep on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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