Directed by Stephanie McKee and developed by dancers Kesha McKey, Kai Knight, Jeremy Guyton, poet Sunni Patterson and drummer Jawara Simon, Gomela takes us on a journey through time and space. Making evident the connection between Africa, Haiti, and New Orleans, Gomela highlights the vibrant and percussive movements and stories that breathe life into ancient African dance and drumming and contemporary artistic expression, such as spoken word, hip-hop and jazz. Gomela is an experience of collective memories passed down from generation to generation, a tapestry woven by a group of multi-disciplinary artists who represent the diversity of African Americans who call New Orleans home.

Gomela is based on hope, survival, courage and the resilience that exists in the face of oppression. It is about the heartbeat of a people that will never die, the culture and traditions that continue to evolve, grow and survive the test of time. It illuminates Place Matters—gentrification and the Right of Return of New Orleanians displaced after Katrina; and Black Lives Matter—the beauty and resilience of black people, past and present.

Lighting designer Evan Spigelman, sound designer Muthi Reed, projection designer Jason Foster, costume designer Ja’Nese of Aya Designs and recorded music by trumpeter Troy Sawyer and singer Janet “Sula Spirit” Evans of Zion Trinity bring life to the sights and sounds of Gomela.

Gomela/to return: Movement of Our Mother Tongue is made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Theater Project, with lead funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Gomela/to return: Movement of Our Mother Tongue is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by Carver Community Cultural Center in partnership with Carpetbag Theatre, Ignite/Arts Dallas @ SMU Meadows School of the Arts and NPN. For more information: www.npnweb.org. Additional support comes from the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and from individual donors.
Stephanie McKee
DIRECTOR
Stephanie V. McKee is a performer, choreographer, educator, facilitator and cultural organizer who is deeply committed to creating art that substantively reflects disparate conditions, as leveraging it as a powerful tool for change. Based in New Orleans, she is the Artistic Director for Junebug Productions Inc., the organizational successor to the Free Southern Theater (FST), which was formed in 1963 to be a cultural arm of the Civil Rights Movement and was a major influence in the Black Theater Movement. Ms McKee is a member of Alternate ROOTS, a board member of National Performance Network and is a New Voices emerging Leader alumnus and a 2015 APAP Leadership Fellow. As an organizer, she was the founding Director of the 7th Ward Neighborhood Center, a part of Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans an organization committed to the revitalization of communities by increasing the number of homeowners and transforming vacant or substandard properties into sustainable homeownership as well as improving quality of life of residents through targeted community and leadership development, education, and collaboration. Stephanie was the Director of the New Orleans Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute 2009-2015 and was Co-Artistic Director for the 2011 Homecoming Project.

Jeremy Guyton
ENSEMBLE
Jeremy Guyton is a dancer, choreographer, and teaching artist currently serving as the In-School Education Director for Dancing Grounds. A Los Angeles native, he attended Georgetown University where he received a B.A. in Theatre and Performance Studies in 2012. While at Georgetown, he danced with Groove Theory, a hip hop team, for three years. Prior to joining the Dancing Grounds staff, Jeremy taught Kindergarten (2012-13, 2013-14) and K-3 Dance (2014-15) at Success Prepatory Academy. He is currently a company member of KM Dance Project and B.U.K.U. Dance Krewe. He can be seen next in Goat in the Road Productions’ upcoming show, Foreign to Myself. Ka Knight ENSEMBLE Kai Knight is a choreographer, performer and instructor. She is currently an active dance member with Bamboula 2000 and Kumbuka African Dance and Drum Collective. She is also the Founder/Director/Choreographer for Silhouette Dance Ensemble a Christian Contemporary Performance Company with members ages ranging from 5-adults. She is the founder and ministry leader of Surrender through Dance Outreach Ministry. She is the Founder/ Director of Seasons Center LLC. Through Seasons Center, Kai Knight uses performing arts programs to inspire creativity, develop talents, and create jobs by hosting dance theater productions.
Kesha McKey
ENSEMBLE
Kesha McKey is a choreographer, educator and performing artist in New Orleans. She is a graduate of NOCCA, receiving her BS from Xavier University and her MFA in Dance Performance from UW-Milwaukee. She is the Artistic Director of KM Dance Project presenting choreography for Roots Week 2016 and the Peridance 2016 APAP Showcase. Kesha is a 2016 Dancing While Black Fellow, a 2015 The Distillery CAC resident artist and a scholarship recipient of 2016 Jacob’s Pillow Improv Traditions and Innovation. She serves on the faculty of Urban Bush Women’s SLI, NOCCA Dance Department and Kuumba Institute at Ashé CAC. Sunni Patterson ENSEMBLE Armed with an engaging story, voice, and presence, New Orleans native and visionary, Sunni Patterson, has been the featured performer at many of the Nation’s premier spoken word venues, including HBO’s Def Poetry Jam and BET’s Lyric Cafe. She has also shared her work on the Arsenio Hall Show, TEDWomen (Momentum 2015), and on several international stages. Inspired by her words, Beats by Dre commissioned Sunni to provide the soundscape for tennis great, Serena Williams’, workout (wireless beats) commercial, and the congratulatory piece for Williams’ third US Open win (Congratulations Serena ft. Sunni Patterson). As a highly sought after lecturer, workshop facilitator, and performer, she deliberately uses art as a tool to recognize, address, and eliminate all forms of oppression. She has trained under great scholars, allowing her to become a Certified Professional Life Coach (CPC), a certified instructor of Chi Kung (Qi Gong) and Tai Chi for Health, and a diligent student in the healing and spiritual arts. Believing in the transformational role poetry and spoken word plays, Sunni’s mission is to aid in the awakening, the revival, and the remembrance of our gifts and voices.

Kai Knight
ENSEMBLE
Kai Knight is a choreographer, performer and instructor. She is an active member in the New Orleans based cultural performance companies; Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective and Bamboula 2000 Band. She is the Artistic director of Silhouette Dance Ensemble/Dance Theater Community Company and Breathe! / A Multi-Cultural Collective Breath through Movement Company. In 2017, she choreographed for “Le Code Noir,” directed by Tommye Myrick. Kai is a resident teacher at Dancing Grounds and the founder and director of Seasons Center which host multi-cultural programing that assist women, families and communities by application of faith, education, and the performing arts. She is currently enrolled at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to better provide individual, social and community healing through the integration of faith into the performance arts and social work.

Sunni Patterson
ENSEMBLE
Armed with an engaging story, voice, and presence, New Orleans native and visionary, Sunni Patterson, has been the featured performer at many of the Nation’s premier spoken word venues, including HBO’s Def Poetry Jam and BET’s Lyric Cafe. She has also shared her work on the Arsenio Hall Show, TEDWomen (Momentum 2015), and on several international stages. Inspired by her words, Beats by Dre commissioned Sunni to provide the soundscape for tennis great, Serena Williams’, workout (wireless beats) commercial, and the congratulatory piece for Williams’ third US Open win (Congratulations Serena ft. Sunni Patterson). As a highly sought after lecturer, workshop facilitator, and performer, she deliberately uses art as a tool to recognize, address, and eliminate all forms of oppression. She has trained under great scholars, allowing her to become a Certified Professional Life Coach (CPC), a certified instructor of Chi Kung (Qi Gong) and Tai Chi for Health, and a diligent student in the healing and spiritual arts. Believing in the transformational role poetry and spoken word plays, Sunni’s mission is to aid in the awakening, the revival, and the remembrance of our gifts and voices.
Jawara Simon
ENSEMBLE
Jawara Atiba Simon is a native New Orleanian born in the 7th ward and the son of the late great percussionist, Kenyatta Simon. Since the age of five Jawara has performed with two of New Orleans’ first African dance companies: Kumbuka Drum and Dance Collective and Culu Traditional African Children’s Dance Company. Jawara has not only studied under his father, but he has studied with Mechach Silcis, Sundiata Keita, Nana Cimati Bini Zulu, Moussa Traore, and Soule Diop to name few Jawara has performed numerous time at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival with artist such as, Bill Summers, Casa Samba, House of Blues All Stars, Jazz Crusaders, Percussion Incorporated, along with a host of others. Jawara is currently teaching folklore music from West Africa, Cuba, Haitian, and Brazilian culture throughout our youth while continuing his father’s legacy.

Kiyoko McCrae
DRAMATURG
Kiyoko McCrae is a cultural organizer who directs and produces live performance and film productions aimed at creating social change. She recently co-directed a video of Sunni Patterson’s poem “Black Back” and produced short documentaries Free Southern Theater: Beginnings (2016) and A Conversation with John O’Neal (2015). She has directed theater productions Lockdown (2013), This Pen Is Red (2010), Voices from the Back of the Classroom (2009), and Finding Joy in Unlikely Places (2008) through the community arts course From Community to Stage she co-taught with founder John O’Neal at Tulane University (2008-2011). She has served as Music Director for Urban Bush Women’s Summer Leadership Institute (2012-2015). She has worked as an organizer with El Puente and United for Peace and Justice and was awarded a Kopkind Colony Fellowship for her organizing work after visiting Iraq in 2004. She graduated from NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts with a BA in Theater Arts and studied with Jan Cohen Cruz, renowned practitioner of activist and community-based performance.

Jason Foster
PROJECTION DESIGNER
Jason Foster was born in Kingston, Jamaica where he lived for six years before moving to the United States. With short stays in New Jersey and Minnesota he has lived the majority of his life in the South. This nomadic lifestyle has contributed to his ability to tell stories and connect with people across all walks of life. Shortly after moving to New Orleans in 2010, Jason met David Bear and soon thereafter they started Foster Bear Films in the fall of 2011. Jason has also taught film classes to the New Orleans community through the New Orleans Video Access Center and Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools.
Serena Muthi Reed
SOUND DESIGNER
Serena Muthi Reed is a composer and technology designer with media, performance, and public art works. Born in Detroit, raised in Philadelphia and currently a migrant local to New Orleans, Jackson Mississippi, Arusha Village in Tanzania, and Alabama where Serena’s Grandmother Liddie Belle Thompson is from. Serena documents to amplify Black stories, sound & vernacular and to bring the noise.

AYA Designs Global
COSTUME DESIGNER
Established in New Orleans in 2011 and since 2012 where its production takes place, the brand, AYA DESIGNS GLOBAL, is best described as a fusion between traditional cultures/sub-cultures and contemporary fashion. In fact, Ja’nes Galathe and Dana Leon-Lima credits their passion for fashion through Women in their family, dance, travel, music and lifestyle exposure for the eclectic aesthetic and multi-culturalism present in their work. “As Teaching Artists we began to expose our students to cultural dance, dialogue and costume design. Which led to educational conversations about the diaspora that empowered our students with knowledge of history and self worth.”
TOUR DATES

January 19-22, 26-29, 2017
Ashé Cultural Arts Center
New Orleans, LA

April 7-8, 2017
South Dallas Cultural Center
Dallas, TX

March 10, 2018
Carver Community Cultural Center
San Antonio, TX

March 16-18, 2018
7 Stages
Atlanta, GA

April 20-21, 2018
Contemporary Arts Center
New Orleans, LA

TBD
The Carpetbag Theatre
Knoxville, TN
“...Gomela is a mesmerizing tapestry of creative forces that conveys the breadth of African-American history while emphasizing the resilience of black people.”
- Mary Rickard

“Gomela spins inspiration from both the Black Lives Matter and gentrification-focused Place Matters movements into a provocative piece fusing African drumming, dance, spoken word, hip-hop and jazz.”
- Bryan Rindfuss

“The Louisiana theatre company creates art in the name of social justice”
- Allison Considine
The effect of the choreography was one that evoked an emotional response that was both frightening and powerful.

- Danielle Georgiou

Billed as a journey through time and space, ‘Gomela’ is another intriguing exploration of the African Diaspora.

- David Lee Simmons
BOOKINGS

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