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**US PREMIERE OF OLIVIER AWARD-WINNING PLAY, *SLEEPOVA* BY
NIGERIAN-BRITISH WRITER MATILDA FEYİŞAYO IBINI, LAUNCHES AT
OLNEY THEATRE CENTER**

**Paige Hernandez directs the frank and funny celebration of female
friendship between four Black-British teens confronting adulthood**

OLNEY, MD — February 19, 2025 — Olney Theatre Center produces the U.S. Premiere of *Sleepova* in the Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab, March 26 - April 27, 2025. The play arrives in the DMV having won the **2024 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Affiliate Theatre** (the London equivalent of “Off-Broadway”) and the **UK Critics’ Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright** for author **Matilda Feyişayo Ibini**. **Paige Hernandez** directs the four-actor ensemble of **Tymetrias L. Bolden** (Funmi), **Ciara Hargrove** (Elle), **Nykila Norman** (Rey), and **Jasmine Proctor** (Shan). Headshots for all the above are available [here](#).

Press are invited to attend either Saturday, March 29 at 8:00 pm or Sunday, March 30 at 1:30 pm – pending availability. Interested critics should email wbrown@olneytheatre.org to request press tickets along with their preferred performance date and time. Tickets are \$31 - \$95 and are available online at olneytheatre.org/sleepova or at 301-924-3400.

Whether or not sleepover parties with friends were part of your upbringing, you’re invited to join Elle, Shan, Funmi, and Rey at theirs. These four Black British teenagers are growing up fast, each coping with their unique challenges of disability, sexuality, religion, and family. But even these issues – whether living with sickle cell disease, coming out, a crisis of faith, or a romantic misadventure, are confronted with humor, sincerity, and optimism. **The Guardian** said the show has, “All the clumsiness and wide-eyed excitability of the best coming-of-age dramas... an exhilarating tableau of imperfect young friendship and you leave wanting an invite to their next party.”

Playwright Matilda Feyişayo Ibini says, "It has been a long dream of mine for my work to reach places and audiences I can't get to. So to have *Sleepova*'s US premiere at the Olney Theatre Center is a dream come true. *Sleepova* is an invitation to audiences into the lives of these 4 young Black British girls and how differently we all come of age. I hope audiences come ready to laugh, dance and be reminded the power of friendships."

Jason Loewith, Olney Theatre’s Artistic Director says “Ever since I saw *Sleepova* in London at the amazing Bush Theatre, I’ve wanted to share it with our audiences. Matilda is a singular playwright, and **with this play, she celebrates a community at once utterly familiar and**

strikingly different from what we know here in the United States. We're so proud to give Matilda's play its American premiere."

Matilda Feyişayo Ibini is a multi-award-winning, bionic playwright, author and filmmaker of Nigerian heritage from London. Matilda was selected as a Star of Tomorrow 2020 by Screen Daily Magazine; a feature film screenplay they co-wrote with Gabriel-Bisset Smith was selected as part of The Brit List 2020; they were an Arts Foundation Futures Award 2021 Finalist; a BFI Flare x BAFTA 2023 mentee; and Inevitable Foundation x Loreen Arbus Elevate Collective Award Grantee 2024. As a playwright, Matilda's debut play *Muscovado* premiered in October 2014 and subsequently won the Alfred Fagon Audience Award 2015. They have written audio dramas for BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4 and Audible. Matilda's next play *Little Miss Burden* premiered at the Bunker Theatre in 2019 and won a Popcorn Finalist Award 2020. *Sleepova* is her most recent work and the first to be performed outside the United Kingdom.

She explains that, "I adopted the term '**bionic**' when I became a full-time wheelchair user and had metal implanted into my leg after a traumatic fracture, even though the term encompasses my experiences from birth, that I have always needed some form of technology, equipment, or adaptation to live." One of *Sleepova*'s main characters Shan, is living with **sickle cell disease**, Ibini explains, "I wrote Shan and her experience in a way that I would have loved to see this type of character growing up. **Living with a chronic condition isn't the be-all and end-all of my life.** And that there are other ways to live, and just because my life doesn't look like that of my peers or siblings even, doesn't make my life tragic or any less valid. It's simply different."

The artistic team, in addition to Hernandez, includes Scenic Designer **Shartoya R. Jn. Baptiste**, Lighting Designer **John D. Alexander**, Costume Designer **Danielle Preston**, Sound Designer **Crescent R. Haynes**, Projections Designer **Zavier Augustus Lee Taylor**, Intimacy and Fight Choreographer **Sierra Young**, Dialect Coach **Gerrad Alex Taylor**, Assistant Director **Dannielle Hutchinson**, Assistant Lighting Designer **Niya John**, Stage Manager **Kelsey N. Jenkins**, and Assistant Stage Manager **Ebony Gennes**. Understudy swings for the production are **Leilani Clendenin** (Funmi/Rey) and **Courtney Simmons** (Elle/Shan).

To help audiences get in the *Sleepova* spirit, anyone attending a performance in pajamas can receive 25% off their first drink!

Sleepova was commissioned by and premiered at the Bush Theatre in London, Artistic Director Lynette Linton.

DETAILS

Sleepova

By Matilda Feyişayo Ibini

directed by Paige Hernandez

Previews March 26, 27, and 28 at 7:30 pm

Invited Press opening Saturday, March 29 at 8:00 pm or Sunday, March 30 at 1:30 pm

Email wbrown@olneytheatre.org to reserve

Runs until: Sunday, April 27, 2025 in Olney Theatre Center's Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab

Tickets \$31 - \$95. Discounts are available for groups, seniors, teachers, active military, first responders, and students. Visit olneytheatre.org/discounts for details.
Purchase via olneytheatre.org/sleepova or 301-924-3400

Performance Times

Regular performances are Wednesday-Saturday at 7:30 pm;

Matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 1:30 pm.

No Saturday matinee on March 29.

On Wednesday, April 2, there will be a matinee performance at 1:30 pm. However, there are no Wednesday evening performances on April 2 or 9.

See below for special Affinity Nights for *Sleepova*

ACCESSIBILITY

Audio described performance on Wednesday, April 16 at 7:30 pm

Sign interpreted performance on Thursday, April 17 at 7:30pm

Behind the Scenes and Beyond the Stage

Behind the Scenes

Panel Discussion

Black in America and Britain: Immigrant Narratives from the African Diaspora

Date: Saturday, March 29, 2025, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Location: Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab

\$10 / Free for members

Sleepova written by Nigerian British playwright Matilda Feyiṣayo Ibini centers the story of four British girls originating from different African diaspora. In this thought-provoking panel, we will explore the complexities of identity, belonging, and race through the lens of the Black immigrant experience in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Drawing comparisons between these two countries, the conversation will unpack the distinct challenges faced by African immigrants to the U.S. and Black immigrants to the UK, and how these intersect with the experiences of native-born African Americans and British-born Black people. Join us for a conversation moderated by Dean Stephanie Shonekan that not only deepens our understanding of the play's themes but also fosters a greater appreciation for the diversity within the global Black experience.

Moderator: Suzan Jenkins

Speakers: Dean Stephanie Shonekan, Bola Aduena, Rochelle Rice and Montgomery County Councilmember Will Jawando

In The Community

Story Time at the Olney Library with

Story Reader **Kike Ayodeji**

Date: Sunday, March 30, 2024, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Location: Olney Public Library (3500 Olney Laytonsville Rd, Olney, MD 20832)
No RSVP. Just show up!

Kike Ayodeji is a Nigerian American actress born and raised in Maryland, where she fell in love with storytelling as an art form at a young age. As a young girl, she would borrow tons of books from the library to read her way into a euphoric world where the characters became real and relatable. This love for the art of storytelling and imagination would spill over into her adulthood and sparked her passion for acting.

Beyond the Stage

West African Dance Workshop

Date: Saturday, April 5, 2024, 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Location: Actors Hall at Olney Theatre Center

\$10

Join us for an exciting West African Dance Workshop with Lashawnda Iya Ifanike Batts! This event offers a hands-on learning experience about traditional West African dance, music, and rhythms. No matter your skill level, you'll be guided through the basics and feel the joy of movement.

Book Club

Title: *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2024, 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Location: Omi's Pavilion

RSVP to attend the discussion.

Bring a snack to share. Beverages will be provided.

Beyond the Stage:

Podcast Recording Live On Stage: My Sister's Keeper

Date: Saturday, April 26, 2024, 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Location: Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab

\$10

Join *The Sleepless Nights* Podcast for a special episode exploring the meaning and importance of sisterhood. Where is it? How do you find it? And what to do if you lose it.

AFFINITY NIGHTS FOR *SLEEPOVA*

African Diaspora Affinity Night

Thursday, April 24 at 7:30 pm

Special Post-Show Discussion

The characters in *Sleepova* juggle multiple identities, but one of particular importance is their connection to their Nigerian and Jamaican heritage. This is a special performance for everyone connected to or interested in the global African Diaspora.

Girls Night Out

Thursday, April 17

Pre-show drinks at 6:30 pm

Show at 7:30 pm

Grab your BFF and meet us for drinks in the Mezzanine on the Roberts Mainstage prior to the performance of *Sleepova* in the Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab.

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Mission

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

Vision

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

History

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center (OTC) now produces year-round world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginations of familiar titles; presents the work of leading companies; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors the next generation of theatremakers. For more than 8 decades, OTC has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in central Maryland.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia de Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, among many, many others. Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, non profit organizations and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, and is a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

As of September 2024, Olney Theatre Center employed 50 full time staff, 20 part-time positions, 13 early career apprentices, and more than 400 professional artists. The Theatre intends to continue expanding to better meet the needs of our community.

For more information, please visit olneytheatre.org.

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