

THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES

BY VIVIAN J.O. BARNES

DIRECTED BY TAYLOR REYNOLDS



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FEBRUARY 4-MARCH 3

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Filming, recording, or taking photographs of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited. Please silence your cell phones and any other noisemaking devices.

Please keep aisles clear for actor entrances and exits.

A NOTE FROM MARIA



Though I have never been to a Homecoming, I mostly certainly have seen the film of Beyonce's concert at the Coachella Festival MULTIPLE times. An inescapable pop culture phenomenon, "**HOMECOMING**" pays tribute to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with great fanfare, thrilling choreography, and utmost precision. Beyonce's perfectionism (and exceptionalism)

is also on full display in this Netflix special, inspiring legions of fans...including the precocious and hilarious characters in ***THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES***.

Vivian J.O. Barnes is a writer from Stafford, Virginia and was one of the first recipients of our Weissberg Commissions, a program honoring theatre lover and philanthropist Marvin Weissberg for generative theatre-makers who represent artistic innovation in our field and share Woolly's vision for a just world. Working on this play with Vivian has been an honor, as she is a thoughtful, intentional writer and collaborator. And FUNNY. The exploration of Black femalehood is at once exhilarating and devastating, and I know it will resonate both specifically and universally. Obie-winning director Taylor Reynolds previously worked with Woolly to produce the tour of ***WHAT TO SEND UP*** that toured to Duke Ellington, Howard University, and THEARC. We are delighted to work with her now as a director; her insight and skill from workshop to full production have manifested a glorious world to bolster the written word.

This is Vivian's first professional full-length production. Ever! Thank you for being here to support launching the career of

this up-and-coming new voice in the American theater.

Woolly Mammoth has a long-standing history and affiliation with Howard University, which you can read more about in Kristen Jackson's article in this playbill. And with ***THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES***, we have been able to go even further: We have given two current Howard students their first professional jobs understudying the cast, as well as created credited internships for students in various departments in our theatre that will extend beyond the life of the show. The point is that Woolly stands as a steadfast advocate for the advancement of HBCUs and recognizes the indispensable role they play in shaping the lives of Black people. Thank you to Chair Nikkole Salter, Professor Eric Ruffin, and all who have helped make these collaborative efforts such a remarkable success!

Theatre is a space to create CULTURE together, to make MEANING together, and to hold space with each other in the joy and difficulty of moving forward to the best of our ability. But what is "best?" Who determines that? And at what cost?

I cannot wait to talk to you about this show. You will get a post-show email with a survey—please do respond. I read every single entry and share many of your thoughts with the artists so they can also understand what audiences are walking away with...this is especially important with new work like this!

Hasta la próxima,



Maria Manuela Goyanes, Artistic Director
Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY

MARIA MANUELA GOYANES
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

KIMBERLY E. DOUGLAS
MANAGING DIRECTOR

PRESENTS THE *WORLD PREMIERE OF*

**THE SENSATIONAL
SEA MINK-ETTES**

BY **VIVIAN J. O. BARNES**

DIRECTED BY **TAYLOR REYNOLDS~**

DRAMATURG
SONIA FERNANDEZ

COSTUME DESIGNER
DANIELLE PRESTON+

LIGHTING DESIGNER
MINJOO KIM+

SCENIC DESIGNER
PAIGE HATHAWAY+

SOUND DESIGNER
TOSIN OLUFOLABI

STAGE MANAGER
JULIA SINGER*

HAIR & WIG DESIGNER
LASHAWN MELTON^

CHOREOGRAPHER
ASHLEIGH KING~

CASTING
DANICA RODRIGUEZ

Developmental support provided through the Weissberg Commissions funded by the Weissberg Foundation. Vivian J.O. Barnes is a recipient of a Venturous Playwright Fellowship supported by Venturous Theater Fund. The Fellowship was created with the Lark Theatre and is now in partnership with the Playwrights' Center.



(~) Recognizes representation by the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society (SDC), a national theatrical labor union.



(+) Recognizes representation by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE. (^) Recognizes representation by Make-up Artists & Hair Stylists, Local 798 of the IATSE.



() Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

CAST

Shanteé	Billie Krishawn*
Aleyse.....	Lauren Fraites*
Maya	Kimberly Dodson*
Kiera.....	Sabrina Lynne Sawyer*
Racquel/Dionne	Kalen Robinson*
Gabby/Nikki.....	Khalia Muhammad*

UNDERSTUDIES

For Aleyse/Kiera: Wynter Cook. For Gabby/Racquel: Mahlet Gebreyesus.
For Shanteé: Kalen Robinson. For Maya: Sabrina Lynne Sawyer.

CREW & PRODUCTION TEAM

BOLD Assistant Director	Fatima Dyfan
Band.....	Experience Band & Show
Associate Lighting Designer	Scott Monnin
Associate Scenic Designer.....	Megan Holden
Associate Sound Designer	Di Carey
Assistant Stage Manager	Jazzy Davis
Production Assistant.....	Sydney Bronaugh
Wardrobe Supervisor.....	Breanna Dunbar
Props Supervisor	Caitlin Bouxsein
Dance Captain	Kalen Robinson
Light Board Operator	Alex Anthes Rojas
Lighting Programmer	Matthew Cheney
Howard University Lighting Design Intern	Trinity Joseph
Howard Univ. Artistic Office Intern.....	Mariah Belle Williams
Howard Univ. Gen. Management Intern	Amanda Thompson
Sound Board Operator	Preston Heard
Hair and Makeup Crew.....	Sherri Curtis
Production Assistant.....	Stephen Lyons
Costume Assistant	Sydney Bronaugh
Costume Shopper.....	Cody Conrad Von Ruden
Special Effects Consultant.....	Richard Bloch

CREW & PROD. TEAM (CONT.)

Scenic Charge..... Yaritza Pacheco
 Electricians..... Elijah Thomas, Milan Robinson,
 Grayson Moreno, Simon Sinnriech, Elizabeth Burch,
 Sydney Bronaugh, Alexander Kim
 Scenic Painters..... Aiden Galbraith, Suzy Alden,
 Caroline Austin, Karis Sneed
 Scenic Overhire ..Mickey Cappiello, Will Maresco, Vika Hearne,
 Isaac DeMarchi, Sydney McNeil, Jaimee Fricklas, Eli Kern,
 Michael Turner, Neil Stafford, Andy Reilly, Sharon Zheng
 Key Art Design: Sylvie Lass. Key Art Photo: Teresa Castracane.

CONTENT TRANSPARENCY

This play involves discussion and depiction of depression, suicidal ideation, and disordered eating. This play also includes profanity and sexual content. This production includes the use of haze, flashing lights, sudden loud noises, and items that fall onstage.



Pictured: The cast of ***THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINKETTES*** at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Photo Credit: Teresa Castracane.



VIVIAN J. O. BARNES

VIVIAN J. O. BARNES (*Playwright, she/her*) is a writer from Virginia. Her short plays have been produced at Ensemble Studio Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Montana Repertory Theatre. She has developed plays at MCC, Geffen Playhouse, Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage Theatre, Clubbed Thumb and the Ojai

Playwrights Conference. She is a former Venturous Fellow with The Playwrights Center and The Lark. She is a proud member of the Writers Guild of America.

ABOUT THE SHOW

STADIUM LIGHTS. ✨ **SCREAMING FANS.** 🎤
ONE SHOT AT EXCELLENCE. 💣

The Sensational Sea Mink-ettes are days away from their Homecoming half-time dance performance and the pressure is on. The student body, the administration, the alumni, their families—everyone is expecting perfection. As the big day creeps closer, the women must contend with flaring tempers, bodies pushed to their limits, and what it means to be a team in Vivian J.O. Barnes' funny and surprising world premiere play.

OPENING NIGHT: FEBRUARY 10, 2024

SHOW RUN TIME: This play runs for a duration of 90 minutes continuously, without an intermission.

CAST



BILLIE KRISHAWN (*Shanteé, she/her/they*) is excited to make her Woolly Mammoth debut. As a DC native and Duke Ellington alum she's passionate about caring for the community through activism and advocacy. If there's any chance of changing the world, we have

to work together to do it. She's a two time Helen Hayes award winner, but her greatest work is her daughter Elby Zen Clover. Some of her acting credits including: *Till Trilogy*, Mosaic Theatre Company; *JUMP* at Everyman Theatre; *Blood at the Root* at Theatre Alliance; *Joy That Carries You* at Olney Theatre Center; *Angels in America*, Arena Stage; *Until the Flood* at Studio Theatre; *HERstory* at The Kennedy Center; *Melancholy Play* at Constellation Theatre; *Airness* at 1st Stage and Keegan Theatre; *Something Moving*, Fords Theatre. Major film credits include Amazon Prime's *Water in a Broken Glass*. You can follow her journey on instagram: @AbsoluteReality or by visiting www.BillieKrishawn.com.



LAUREN FRAITES (*Aleyse, she/her*). Like Aleyse, Lauren is a freshman to Woolly Mammoth, and she's so excited to be making her debut! Since graduating in 2020 from the George Mason School of Theatre, Lauren has been working in theatre and film in the DMV

and NYC areas. Recent works include, the world premiere of *John Proctor is the Villain* at Studio Theatre, a soloist for *Sizzling Summer Nights* at Signature Theatre here in DC and the world premiere of *The Things She Held* at Chain Theater in NYC. Lauren would like to thank her friends and family for always encouraging and supporting her. @laurenfraites.

Photo Credit: Billy B Photography



KIMBERLY DODSON (*Maya, she/her*) is a performer/director born and raised in Baltimore, MD. She holds a B.A. in Acting and Performance Studies and a double minor in Dance and Sociology but honestly she got it so long ago now, she barely remembers. She gotta keep it in though cause she's still paying for it. Ha! She loves that you love theater. She hopes it inspires you, and challenges you. That it lets you see the most human parts of yourself. She loves new works and hopes to continue to make bold, beautiful theater. She promises to continue to work toward an equitable and safer theater industry. After 8 years in NYC on Regional stages and Broadway, she's thrilled to call Baltimore home again and to be making her DC Theater debut at the wonderful and radical Woolly Mammoth. Big thank you to her fiance for keeping her fed. IG: kdotsdotcom.

Photo Credit: DJ Corey Photography



SABRINA LYNNE SAWYER (*Kiera, she/her*) is thankful to return for the full production of *The Sensational Sea Mink-ettes* after workshopping it at Woolly Mammoth this past fall. She has performed in the DC area in *The Winter's Tale* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Folger Theatre, *The Cake* at NextStop and Prologue Theatre, and toured nationally with the Olney Theatre Center-based National Players in *A Raisin in the Sun* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Other credits include: the Boston premiere of *Chicken & Biscuits* (Elliot Norton award for Outstanding Play); and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and *Henry IV Pt 2* at the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival. She received her B.A. in Theatre (Acting) from the University of Southern California, and is always studying and avidly excited about the ways that theatre can create space for community. She is south side Chicago and God's child, through and through. sabrinalynnesawyer.com.



KALEN ROBINSON (*Raquel/Dionne, she/her*) is excited to make her Woolly Mammoth debut! She is DMV based actress from Atlanta, GA. This southern belle has attended arts school since the 3rd grade and received her BFA in Musical Theatre at Howard University

in 2020. She has always wanted to be a majorette and is excited to live that dream through her art. Kalen credits her success to God and her endlessly supportive village of family and friends who believe in her! Regional Credits: Theatre Alliance/The Kennedy Center: *Look Both Ways* (Ensemble); Imagination Stage: *Nate the Great* (Annie), *The Hula Hoopin' Queen* (Kameeka); Signature Theatre: *Passing Strange* (Swing); Constellation Theatre: *Once on This Island* (Ti Mounel); Folger Theatre: *Our Verse In Time to Come* (Sprite); Fulton Theatre: *Cinderella* (Stepsister), *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Logainne S.); Round House Theatre: *Spring Awakening* (Thea). Instagram: @k_nicole143.



KHALIA MUHAMMAD (*Gabby/Nikki, she/her*) is an actor and writer originally from Memphis, TN (home of the best BBQ). She studied Psychology at Syracuse University and moved to the DC area after graduation. She is thrilled to have her Woolly Mammoth debut! Khalia was

mostly recently seen onstage in *Diagnosed* and *The Bluest Eye* at Theater Alliance (nominated for BroadwayWorld's 2023 Best Ensemble). She can also be seen in the upcoming feature film *For What It's Worth* (BET+) set to premiere in the spring. She is currently a Meisner student at Houde School of Acting. When not on stage or on set, Khalia may be found reading an intoxicating thriller, watching an unhealthy amount of YouTube videos, or frequenting her favorite record store. Khalia is honored to have the opportunity to help tell this story about Black experiences. You can find out more at www.actorkhaliamuhammad.com.



WYNTER COOK (*Aleyse, Kiera U/S, she/her*) is a Senior BFA Musical Theatre Major at Howard University from Detroit, Michigan. Throughout her pursuit of the performing arts, she has embodied characters both on stage and on screen. Since arriving at Howard University she has notably performed in *Coming Home: A Musical Revue* (Ensemble), *Brown Girl, Brown Stones* (Narrator) a stage reading at Shakespeare Theater Company, and most recently the Howard University production of *Black Nativity* (Soloist/ Ensemble). Wynter looks forward to bringing life to impactful stories and characters throughout her career. Wynter has been blessed to have family, friends, and professors guide and continuously support her as she has begun her career in the performing arts; special thanks to each and every one.



MAHLET GEBREYESUS (*Gabby, Racquel U/S, she/her*) is overjoyed to make her professional debut in *The Sensational Sea-Minkettes* at Woolly. She is currently a sophomore BFA Musical Theatre major at Howard University. She was recently in Howard University's production of *Black Nativity* this fall. She learned so much from that experience as an actress and person. She is ecstatic at the opportunity to be a part of this project and grow in her artistry even further. She hopes the audience can walk away with a strong understanding of community, representation, and love. Instagram: @mahlet.gb.

CREATIVE TEAM

Photo Credit: Brandon Nick



TAYLOR REYNOLDS (*Director, she/her*) is overjoyed to be making her Woolly Mammoth debut. Taylor is an OBIE-award winning director based in New York, originally from Chicago (which she will always call home). She is returning to DC after directing *Fat Ham* at Studio

Theatre earlier this season. Directing new plays is what keeps her in the American theatre. Other selected directing credits: *This Land Was Made* (Vineyard Theatre), *Clyde's* (Berkeley Rep/Huntington Theatre), *Tambo & Bones* (Playwrights Horizons/CTG), *Man Cave* (Page 73), *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* (Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, New York Times Critic's Pick), *Plano* (Clubbed Thumb, Drama Desk nomination for Best Director). She is the 2021 LPTW Lucille Lortel Award recipient, a New Georges Affiliated Artist, 2017-2018 Clubbed Thumb Directing Fellow, and Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab alum. BFA, Carnegie Mellon University. Member of SDC. Find out more: www.iamtaylorreynolds.com, IG: @treynold.

SONIA FERNANDEZ (*Dramaturg, she/her*) is a dramaturg, administrator & producer specializing in new work. She is happiest in a new play process. Currently serving as Director of New Work at Woolly, Sonia was previously interim Artistic Director & prior to that Associate Artistic Director of Magic Theatre in San Francisco. Favorite production dramaturgy credits include *unseen* by Mona Mansour at OSF, the world premiere of *Don't Eat the Mangos* by Ricardo Pérez González, *The Chinese Lady* by Lloyd Suh at Magic, *Quixote Nuevo* by Octavio Solis at Cal Shakes, and the world premiere of *Incendiary* by Dave Harris at Woolly. She is the proud mama of two awesome humans, two terriers & 47 plants.

DANIELLE PRESTON (*Costume Designer, she/her*) is a costume designer based in Washington D.C. NYC: *Where Words Once Were* (Lincoln Center) Regional: *Fat Ham*, *Clyde's*, and *P.Y.G. or the Mis-Education of Dorian Belle* at Studio Theatre, *Blues for an Alabama Sky* at Barrington Stage Company, *The Sensational Sea Mink-ettes* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, *Passing Strange* and *Penelope* at Signature Theatre, *A Nice Indian Boy* at Olney Theatre Center, *Locomotion* at Children's Theatre Company, *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play* and *The REALNESS* at the Hangar Theatre, and *Quamino's Map* at Chicago Opera Theater. Danielle received the 2022 OPERA America Tobin Director-Designer Prize, William R. Kenan Jr. Fellowship in Costume Design with The Kennedy Center, and the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute Fellowship in Costume Design. She holds an MFA in Costume Design from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. She is a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829. On social media @danielleprestondesign (Instagram) daniellepreston.com.

MINJOO KIM (*Lighting Designer, she/her*) is excited to make her debut at Woolly Mammoth Theatre. She is an internationally working lighting designer who approaches design from dynamic and diverse visual perspectives. Selective DC credits include *Fat Ham* at Studio Theatre, *Ink* at Round House, *King of the Yees* at Signature Theatre, and *The Brothers Paranormal* at Olney Theatre. Off-Broadway credit includes *Demon* at The Bushwick Starr. Regional credits include *American Fast* at City Theatre, *The Chief* at Pittsburgh Public Theater, *The Royale* at Kansas City Rep, *Clue* at Bristol Riverside Theatre, *Violet* at TheatreSquared, *Life Sucks* at Cygnet Theatre, *One in Two* at Diversionary Theatre. International credits include South Korea; *The Two* (Space Owul), *Crimson Girl* (Dongsoong Art Center), *Die or Not* (Seoul Art Space Mulla), China; *Mask on/off* (Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre). Her work *The Royale* was selected for the National Exhibit at Prague Quadrennial in 2023. Website: minjoo-design.com.

PAIGE HATHAWAY (*Scenic Designer, she/her*) is a DC based scenic designer, and is grateful to be back at Woolly Mammoth. Recent DC credits include *The Mountaintop*, *Jennifer Who is Leaving*, and *On the Far End* at Round House Theatre; *The High Ground* at Arena Stage; *No Place to Go* and *Rent* at Signature Theatre. Recent regional credits include *On Clover Road* at Santa Fe Play House; *Assassins* at Arden Theatre; *A New Brain* at Barrington Stage; *Miss Molly* at Amphibian Stage; *A Distinct Society* at Writer's Theatre; and *Mary Poppins* at The Muny. She received her MFA in Scenic Design at the University of Maryland, College Park, and her BFA in Scenic Design from the University of Oklahoma. Website: paigehathawaydesign.com Instagram: [@paigehathawaydesign](https://www.instagram.com/paigehathawaydesign).

TOSIN OLUFOLABI (*Sound Designer, she/her*) is excited to return to Woolly Mammoth and design her first show as a company member. DC/MD: *Gloria* (2018 Helen Hayes Nomination for Outstanding Sound Design for a Hayes Production); *Incendiary*; *There's Always the Hudson* and *Hi, Are You Single?* (Woolly Mammoth); *Ain't No Mo* (Woolly Mammoth/Baltimore Center Stage); *Life is a Dream* (Baltimore Center Stage); *Crying on Television*, Ken Ludwig's *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, *The Sound Inside*, *The Chinese Lady* (Everyman Theater); *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*; *it's not a trip it's a journey* (Round House Theatre); *The Thanksgiving Play* (Olney Theatre Center); *A Wind in the Door* (Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences); *Lovers' Vows* (We Happy Few); *Head Over Heels* (Monumental Theater); *Lela & Co.* (Factory 449). NYC: *Bite Me* (WP Theater).

JULIA SINGER (*Stage Manager, she/her*) is thrilled to be working at Woolly Mammoth for the first time! Other credits include Signature Theatre: *Ragtime*, *Into the Woods*, *She Loves Me*. Ford's Theatre: *The Trip to Bountiful*, *My Lord, What A Night*, *Silent Sky*, *Fences*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Born Yesterday*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *A Christmas Carol*,

Driving Miss Daisy; The Kennedy Center: The Mortification of Fovea Munson, Acoustic Rooster's Barnyard Boogie, Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!, How to Catch a Star, Me...Jane, Elephant and Piggie's: We are in a Play!; Folger Theatre: Love Labour's Lost, The Winter's Tale; Imagination Stage: Mr. Popper's Penguins, The Ballad of Mu Lan.

LASHAWN MELTON (*Hair & Wig Designer, she/her*) is a passionate, creative, native Washingtonian, and a formally trained barber/stylist with over 18 years of artistic experience. Film credits: *Loiness* (Hairstylist); *White House Plumber* (Hairstylist); *Fellow Travelers* (Hairstylist); *Rustin* (Hairstylist); Regional Credits: Utah Shakespeare Festival: *Raisin in the Sun, Emma the Musical, The Play that Goes Wrong* (Wig Master); Montgomery College: *Little Women* (Wig Design); Gala Theatre: *On Your Feet* (Wig Design); Woolly Mammoth Theatre: *Botticelli in the Fire* (Wig Designer); The Kennedy Center: *The Watson's Go to Birmingham 1963* (Wig Design); Olney Theatre Company: *Comedy of Tenors*; (Wig Design); Woolly Mammoth Theatre: *Describe the Night* (Wig Design); The Round House Theatre: *School Girls* (Wig Design); Woolly Mammoth Theatre: *Fairview* (Wig Design); Arena Stage: *Disgrace*; (Hair Designer); *Smart People* (Assistant Wig Design); *Nina Simone four Women* (Assistant Wig Designer); *Pajama Game* (Assistant Wig Designer); *Snow Child* (Hair and Makeup Design). Education: Fashion Merchandising, Graphic Design, UDC.

ASHLEIGH KING (*Choreographer, she/her*). Born in DC and DMV theatre trained and raised. She has received multiple Helen Hayes award nominations for her direction and choreography. Credits include: Regional: Northern Stage: *'Bov Water, Spring Awakening, Spamalot*; Signature: *Hair, Ragtime, Which Way to the Stage*. Ford's: *Little Shop...*; Va Rep: *Mamma Mia* (RTCC award). DC Area: Kennedy Center: *Fovea*; Studio: *Fun Home*; Woolly Mammoth: *Fairview, Teenage Dick*; Keegan: *Seussical, Legally Blonde* (Helen Hayes Award

winner); Imagination: *Nate the Great, Frog and Toad*; Adventure: *Alexander and the Terrible... , Big River, Make Way for Ducklings, You're a Good Man Charlie Brown, Junie B Jones*.

ORGANIZATIONAL BIOS

THE WEISSBERG COMMISSIONS are Woolly Mammoth's first dedicated commission program and came about through a grant from the Weissberg Foundation in honor of the late Marvin Weissberg, a tremendous philanthropist and theatre lover, who was a mainstay in Woolly's audiences from the beginning. Artists who were born, raised, or based in the DMV area are chosen based on their artistic innovation and the way they center racial justice in their works.

The Weissberg Commissions give generative artists the opportunity to innovate and take artistic risks in the creation of new theatrical works. Woolly additionally provides the developmental support to bring these innovative new works into the world. In addition to this presentation of ***THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES*** by Vivian J. O. Barnes, commissions featured this season include ***we come to collect (a flirtation, with capitalism)*** by the blackening which was workshopped in December as well as a workshop presentation of ***a fine madness*** by Justin Weak's in March.

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION (AEA), founded in 1913, represents more than 45,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote, and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is associated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. For more information, visit www.actorsequity.org.

BODIES, BLACK EXCELLENCE, AND BEYONCÉ:

A CONVERSATION WITH VIVIAN J. O. BARNES

Playwright **VIVIAN J.O. BARNES** sat down with our New Work department to discuss obsessions, dance, and *THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES*.

You grew up in Virginia, not so very far from where we will be producing this play. Can you talk about how you found your way into playwriting?

I grew up in a military family. Before we settled in Virginia, we moved around every couple years. I have three siblings. When you're doing that much moving, you kind of have to become each other's entertainment. We were always very musical-y kind of kids. And I know at some point, I started writing short little skits for us to do.

We were also a big church family. In Virginia we had a church that we went to three times a week and that church had a lot of music and dancing. I started to write little plays for us to do as part of services sometimes. That was my first taste of writing something that was for an audience, and I remember really liking the feeling of like, "oh, people are laughing at this thing that I wrote!" But I never thought about actually being a writer. Then I went to the University of Richmond, and that's where I started to write in earnest after spending a semester abroad in London. I was acting sort of by default because that's what everybody does. But once I started writing, there was a gut feeling of "I think this is what I'm supposed to do."

**What inspired you to write
THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES?**

There's an earlier play I wrote called *JEZEBELS*. It is about these young Black girls at a Christian school and there's a

scene in that play where they do a liturgical dance. I grew up doing liturgical dance at church. It's a small part of that play, and I was really interested in what would the play of just *that part* be? A play about girls who create dances together. I hung on to that idea. And then I saw a video of these dance lines, majorettes at HBCUs, and got really obsessed with watching the videos. It's such a specific kind of dance that is both smooth, but at the same time, so precise. I just couldn't stop watching them. So, then I knew I wanted to write about a team. I have to realize I'm obsessed with something to be, "oh, there might be something in there that I want to write about."

Are there specific videos you love that you can share?

Yes!

Can you talk a little bit about this piece in the context of your other work? What are the themes that you find yourself coming back to in your writing?

For a long time, it was young women, specifically young Black women. And really looking at adolescence. When I started writing, it made the most sense to look back at that specific time in my life because it was the time I had enough distance from to really dig into.

I've always been really interested in bodies. Bodies kind of glitching or going wrong—something's a little up with the body. In **JEZEBELS**, there's the body in terms of sexual awakening. But when you've been told that at all costs, you need to repress any kind of sexual awakening—it creates a kind of war inside the body. Then my play **DUCHESS! DUCHESS! DUCHESS!** that's like, what if your body doesn't totally belong to you because it kind of belongs to the public? It looks at it in this abstract way of a body that's malfunctioning because it's been used in this public way for so long that it's forgotten how to exist privately. **SEA MINK-ETTES** is all about dance and pushing your body to a brink and what it means to really be

inside this physical, physical world. I've started writing a new play that has to do a lot with pain in the body but also sex and the idea of pleasure and pain together and how close they are sometimes.

I'm interested in your fascination with the body and with dance and how that relates to the concept of mind-body duality. In the *SEA MINK-ETTES* these young women ascribe to the idea that the mind can fully control the body and yet we find that it doesn't quite play out that way. I'm interested in these glitches as you say—the moments where the characters short circuit their body by not listening to themselves. Can you talk about how that dynamic in the play?

I think that thing of a gut instinct and, "I know I have a bad feeling," lives in all the characters in this play in some way. And then the question becomes, do you ignore it and how long can you ignore it? Like, "is it weak to ignore it? Or is it actually showing strength to ignore it?" This is a huge thing inside the play because especially when it comes to a group dynamic, that thing of "who's gonna say it first?" I'm like, "if I say it first am I the weak link in this scenario or is that me being a leader actually by acknowledging this thing?"

Yes, and the play is also interested in the individual within a team. If you scratch your nose, you ruin the entire unison formation. You cannot allow yourself to do the thing that you need to do because then you're letting everyone else down. It's a challenging balance to strike for young women figuring out how to be individuals and part of a group. You see this a lot in sports as well, individual and team sports that require distinct types of physical and mental toughness.

The world of sports was another big inspiration. These women in the play are athletes. I've always loved sports movies because I have no interest in watching sports in real life. I don't have the patience for sitting through it. My dad is a huge

football guy and we would bond over the movie *Remember the Titans* and I'm like, "see, I can consume it when it's a great story." Most sports stories follow a really specific trajectory that's always like, "we will have our moment of adversity but ultimately we triumph!" I'm interested in messing with that template.

We have to talk about Beyoncé. She looms large in our cultural imagination. What is your relationship to Queen Bey?

I feel like she is the artist of my life because she's the one person I've [grown] up with and seen through many eras of their career, watching them grow and change. There are specific parts of my life that I associate with certain albums, or certain moments—remembering *B'Day* and "to the left, to the left!" Blasting it in the car and singing along. And then the self-titled album, after she had her baby, I was in my second year of college and it was such a time of rapid growth and change in my life. "I'm not a freshman anymore. I'm a sophomore. So, I know everything now. I'm a woman of the world!" That's such an album of her being like, "I'm sexy and I don't care as much about what people think of me." I felt like my independence was tracking with her independence.

Lemonade was such a huge moment, because I had been in this really White college and that album is so steeped in a very specific kind of southern Blackness that I was surrounded by growing up but had lost a little while I was in college. It was like this moment of regrounding and reawakening.

I have these associations—she's been a part of my life for so much of my life. But I also am perplexed by her. I mean, talk about obsessions. It's not obsession in the way of fan obsession. I'm really interested in the way she presents herself publicly because it's highly curated. You don't get a lot of paparazzi catching her off guard. The way she's moved through the idea of perfection in her career is interesting. I went to see the *Renaissance* tour, which felt like it was not

about perfection the same way as so many of her other eras were. She still is obviously pushing herself incredibly hard, but it's not as much about "look how perfectly we can execute every bit of this." It's more about perfection in the way of "this feels really good to me."

I was reading some reviews of the *Renaissance* film and the headline was like "Beyonce works really fucking hard." It reminds me of Keke and her line, where she imagines Beyonce talking to her, "You are not other people! You do not wallow. Work harder, bitch."

Yes. I mean, there's a whole part of the movie where she talks about how she had to get a knee surgery. She's preparing for this tour and she has the surgery. I think they said two weeks later she's back in rehearsal or something which sounds intense. There's this idea of "You have to keep going. You have to keep pushing yourself." And pushing your body specifically.

I always re-watch the *Homecoming* movie on Netflix. The part that I am obsessed with in that is when she talks at the very end of it. She's done all of this intense cardio to be able to do the two-and-a-half, three-hour show. She stopped eating all this stuff, she stopped doing all of this stuff to be able to present that to us. And at the end of the movie, she says "I will never, never push myself that far again." I am endlessly fascinated by that line because it can mean so many things. It made me wonder: was there ever a certain point where she actually achieved the things she needed to achieve and still kept pushing?

There are people who really romanticize the struggle and doing something the hardest way possible, and sometimes as they get older, they find they actually like ease. It is a better place to come from than torture to get something done. I'm really interested in looking at artists' careers and the way their relationship to difficulty and torturing themselves grows

and changes over time.

Is that something you've discovered for yourself in your writing process?

I wish I could say I only work from a place of ease now but that's just not true yet. When I am able to do it, though, it feels amazing.

What does it mean for you to work on this piece right now in DC? Especially in the context of being Woolly's first produced Weissberg Commission? It is your own homecoming of sorts.

It's really special because I did grow up in the DMV area. Growing up we would come to DC for museums, but not really to go see shows. I grew up in pretty rural part of Virginia, so we also didn't have much local theater. When I was in college, I was in a theater class that took us up to DC to go see plays and it was the first time I was like, "Whoa, art!" It really did blow my mind. It was a new adaptation of *Miss Julie* at Shakespeare [Theatre Company]. Yaël Farber's *Mies Julie*. It's one of those moments that pushed me towards "I don't think I just like theater. I think I want to do theater," and it was in DC. So it's really special to me to then get to have my first fully produced, full length play ever to happen in DC.

SEA MINK-ETTES TALKBACK

JOIN US FOR A CONVERSATION AFTER *THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES*! WOOLLY STAFF WILL BE JOINED BY MEMBERS OF THE CAST TO DISCUSS THE THEMES IN THE PLAY.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH: 2PM (Matinee)

THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES EVENTS

BLACK EXCELLENCE PANEL

We're launching the first preview of **THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES** with a special post-show conversation on Black excellence in the upper lobby on **Sunday, February 4th!** Join us after the show for a special panel featuring **DR. JAMETA BARLOW** (*George Washington University*) and **JESSICA TAYLOR** (*Founder, Therapy for Black Women*), facilitated by **DR. FAEDRA CARPENTER** (*American University*) discussing how the concept of and achievement of Black excellence impacts young women and how this intersects with the themes of the production.

GIRL, THAT'S SCARY

Join us on **February 11th at 2pm** for a special live podcast recording with the team from **GIRL, THAT'S SCARY!** **JAZZMIN** and **KATHLEEN** will be recording an episode of their podcast to discuss how horror and thriller themes intersect with **THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES**. They'll be joined by members of the cast and creative team. The event will be held in the theatre prior to the production's evening performance, so invite all your friends for a double feature event! You can sign up for the event on Woolly's website.

BLACK HORROR PANEL

The team from **GIRL, THAT'S SCARY** will be back again on **February 23rd** for a thrilling post-show conversation on Black Horror and how it relates to themes in **THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES!** **JAZZMIN** and **KATHLEEN** will be chatting with **HILTON GEORGE** (*CEO of BlerDCon*) and **SHARAI BOHANNON** (*Playwright*).

GIRL THAT'S SCARY is a part of the **DREAD** Podcast Network

and you can follow them at @girlthatsscary and don't forget to check out the hashtag #HomegirlHorror while you're at it!

SUPERSIZED SPIT DAT

We're supersizing **SPIT DAT**! Join us on **February 12th at 8pm** for a very special edition of our monthly **SPIT DAT** residency where features will dive deep unto the themes of **THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES**. Features will include **QUEEN CAIN** and **ALEXA PATRICK**. Add to the energy as an audience member or share your own talents on the mic. Hosted by **DREW ANDERSON** with a guest host! RSVP on Woolly's website!

IN THE LOBBY

ISOLATION & DISSECTION: PERFECTION IS A LONELY PLACE, A COLLECTION BY URSHULA DUNN

This collection is an exploration into the loneliness that comes with the striving for perfection that is often expected of Black women. Through her paintings, Dunn examines feelings of emptiness through gestures and embodiment, evoking ideas of hollowness and exploring how melancholy manifests in the body. Like **THE SENSATIONAL SEA MINK-ETTES**, Dunn's work questions what it means to be perceived and how that perception affects identity and embodiment.

URSHULA DUNN (*she/her*) is a 24-year-old, self-taught artist currently based in Washington DC, originally from the Pacific Northwest. She combines bold brushstrokes, shapes, and colors with classical oil painting techniques and realism. As a completely self-taught artist, she's found that portraiture and the human form can be some of the greatest storytellers in art. Even with the augmented nature of her paintings, her goal is for viewers to still find a sense of familiarity and

connection with the images and ultimately find their own meaning in each piece.

Website: Urshula Dunn Art

Instagram: Urshula Dunn (@urshuladunn)

TikTok: Urshula Dunn (@urshuladunnart)

Email: urshuladunnart@gmail.com

WHERE WE BELONG & LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

Woolly's touring production of **WHERE WE BELONG** by **MADELINE SAYET** is returning to DC! In connection to this production running at **The Folger Shakespeare Library** from **February 15 to March 10**, we have a special installation in the lobby discussing the history of local indigenous tribes, as well as the movement towards language reclamation and revitalization, something that is essential to Sayet's beautiful play. In the upper lobby, learn more about local tribes, learn some Algonquin and Powhatan vocabulary, and learn more about how you can support language reclamation efforts.

Special thank you to **DR. BUCK WOODARD** (*The College of William & Mary*) for their assistance in crafting this installation.

To purchase tickets to **WHERE WE BELONG**, go to Folger's website: <https://www.folger.edu/whats-on/where-we-belong/>

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY EVENTS

Woolly will be celebrating Native American artists this spring with two special events!

On **March 5th**, we'll be hosting a special launch event to welcome **MARY PHILIPS** and **MISS CHIEF ROCKA** as Core Partners! The event will feature music by Mary Philips and **THE ZOTIGH SINGERS** alongside dancing from renowned interdisciplinary artist Miss Chief Rocka. Join us for a night of music, dance, and conversation by RSVPing on Woolly's website.

On **March 9th**, Woolly will be hosting a **NATIVE AMERICAN ARTISAN MARKET** in the lobby from 10am to 2pm. In addition to artists selling items from a variety of artistic mediums, there will also be some special artist-led workshops. To see the full list of vendors, visit Woolly's website.

CONNECTIVITY CORE PARTNER EVENTS

Exciting events are on the horizon! Join us on the mainstage on **March 23rd** for a special performance of **UNFORGIVEABLE BLACKNESS** by Woolly's Core Partner, **BLACK IN SPACE**. Then, join us for their **BLACK JOY DISCO** on **May 19th**. To find out more information about the events, visit Woolly's website.

BLACK IN SPACE celebrates the artistry, diversity + resilience of Black LGBTQ+ communities through media, storytelling + technology. <https://www.blknspace.com/>

MIRANDA FAMILY FELLOWSHIP APPLICATIONS OPENING SOON

It's that time again! Woolly is thrilled to be launching the application cycle for the fourth cohort of Woolly's Miranda Family Fellowships. The Miranda Family Fellows are part of a transformative fellowship program in partnership and with a lead gift from the Miranda Family Fund, Lin-Manuel Miranda's family philanthropic fund. This ambitious workforce development program is designed to provide talented candidates from historically excluded communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, with the job experience, resources and training necessary to build their careers as arts administrators or theatre technicians.

This year, Woolly is excited to not only expand to four fellows, but to also extend the fellowship length to two years, beginning in the summer of 2024. Fellowships will be offered in: New Work & Artistic Producing, Connectivity, Marketing,

and Production. Each fellowship is structured as a paid two year-long department-specific entry-level position with health insurance benefits.

Applications will launch in early February and will close in mid-March. To access more information about the program and to apply, please visit <https://www.woollymammoth.net/connectivity/miranda-family-fellowships/>.

WOOLLY X HOWARD UNIVERSITY

THE SENSATIONAL SEA-MINKETTES have impeccable timing... both on the field and off. Set on the campus of a Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs), this show provides an ideal platform to celebrate the last 10-years of the relationship between Woolly Mammoth and Howard University and strengthen our long-standing affiliation. We are proud to share that two current Howard students are currently understudies in the show—providing them with their first professional job opportunities. This semester we are also delighted to welcome Howard students as credited interns in areas such as design, general management, the artistic office, and several other departments of the theatre.

Our sustained relationship deepened in 2014 following workshops led by the Obie award-winning playwright and solo performer Nilaja Sun. These sessions inspired students to pen their own solo pieces, which have become a beloved annual student tradition, hosted by Woolly. In 2018, Howard Professor Eric Ruffin joined Woolly's first-ever Artistic Director search committee, and currently serves on Woolly's Board of Directors. When the pandemic endeavored to keep us apart, we created a regularly occurring virtual salon called the Spotlight Series. This series connected student-artists with artists of color actively working in all aspects of the field, providing them with tools and insights to navigate the industry.

Collaborations with students have resulted in opportunities for them to perform in staged readings, observe working artists in the rehearsal room and during tech, and intern at Woolly for school credit. For Howard University students, Woolly Mammoth serves as a real-world learning lab to demystify the inner workings of a major regional theatre, and a site for exposure to boundary breaking work by artists of color.

Our shows are also made accessible to Theatre and Dance students who can see Woolly shows for free, as a supplement to their theatre education. We took student accessibility to the next level during Woolly's 2019 production of ***WHAT TO SEND UP WHEN IT GOES DOWN***, a play-pageant-ritual-homegoing celebration in response to the physical and spiritual deaths of black people. Before landing at Woolly Mammoth, the play embarked on a local tour of venues operating at the intersection of Black social and cultural life—including Howard University. Those audiences were full of students eager to see their own life experiences reflected onstage, and yearning for the healing space the show provides.

Synergy exists between Woolly Mammoth and Howard University because we hold shared values around anti-oppression, social justice and the power of bold theatre. It is no coincidence that Kimberly Douglas, Woolly's current Managing Director, is a Howard Alum and proud Bison! Our work together has been mutually beneficial, life-affirming, and rooted in respect and shared love of the art form that has given us all so much. We look back on the last 10 years with gratitude and look forward to another 10 years of growth.

WHERE WE BELONG

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Photo by Mark Garvin at Philadelphia Theatre Company

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ABOUT WOOLLY MAMMOTH

The Tony Award®-winning Woolly Mammoth creates badass theatre that highlights the stunning, challenging, and tremendous complexity of our world. Woolly is proud to be considered “a national champion of the new—and frequently provocative—American play” (*Washington Post*).

For over 40 years, Woolly has maintained a high standard of artistic rigor while simultaneously daring to take risks, innovate, and push beyond perceived boundaries. Woolly Mammoth was co-founded in 1980 by Roger M. Brady, Linda Reinisch, and Howard Shalwitz and is now co-led by Artistic Director Maria Manuela Goyanes and Managing Director Kimberly E. Douglas. Located in Washington, DC, equidistant from the Capitol Building and the White House, this unique location influences Woolly’s investment in actively working our mission: To produce courageous and invigorating new work to radically redefine theatre as a catalyst for an equitable, creative, and engaged society.

One of the few remaining theatres in the country to maintain a company of artists, Woolly serves as an essential research and development role within the American theatre.

PLAYS PREMIERED HERE HAVE GONE ON TO PRODUCTIONS AT HUNDREDS OF THEATRES ALL OVER THE WORLD AND HAVE HAD LASTING IMPACTS ON THE FIELD.

A STRANGE LOOP was produced at Woolly in 2021, ran on Broadway from April 2022 through January 2023, and won the Tony Award® for Best Musical in 2022. Other notable highlights include the world premiere productions of Danaï Gurira’s ***ECLIPSED*** in 2009 that later went on to be the first Broadway play with a cast & creative team of all Black women; Bruce Norris’ Pulitzer Prize-winner ***CLYBOURNE PARK*** in 2010; and Anne Washburn’s ***MR. BURNS: A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY*** in 2012. Woolly produces theatre beyond our

building by sending productions like Aaron Posner's ***STUPID F*CKING BIRD*** across the nation, bringing Aleshea Harris' ***WHAT TO SEND UP WHEN IT GOES DOWN*** to neighborhoods throughout DC, and launching a national tour of Madeline Sayet's ***WHERE WE BELONG***.

Woolly has built a reputation for innovation off the stage as well. Woolly values building relationships with its local community and resident artists in the DMV area. Our nationally-acclaimed Connectivity Department is one of the ways we accomplish this by linking Woolly to like-minded community organizations in order to generate mutually beneficial, impact and power-aware partnerships.

WE'VE EARNED OUR REPUTATION BY HOLDING FAST TO OUR CORE VALUES.

We are an anti-racist and radically inclusive community—across race, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, socioeconomic background, and political viewpoint—in which all are encouraged to exchange ideas freely and reach for new understanding. We are a supportive home for creative risk-taking by our company and guest artists, staff, board, volunteers, audiences, donors, and colleagues. Through relentless inquiry and experimentation, we strive for world-class excellence and innovation in every aspect of our work.

OUR AUDIENCE COMPLETES OUR MISSION.

Woolly attracts one of the youngest and most diverse theatre audiences in DC, and we're committed to making our work widely accessible. Woolly was the first to pioneer Pay-What-You-Will tickets in the DMV, which are now available at every single performance. We also offer \$25 day-of-show Stampede Seats, \$25 tickets for all patrons 30 and Under, and a variety of discounts for educators, members of the military, and artists.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR DONORS, SUBSCRIBERS,
AND AUDIENCE MEMBERS. WITH YOUR SUPPORT,
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Pictured in **A STRANGE LOOP**: Jason Veasy, John-Michael Lyles, Jaquel Spivey, John-Andrew Morrison, James Jackson, Jr., Antwayn Hopper.

WOOLLY LEADERSHIP



MARIA MANUELA GOYANES

(she/her) is the **Artistic Director** of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Prior to joining Woolly, she served as the Director of Producing and Artistic Planning at The Public Theater, where she oversaw the day-to-day execution of a full slate of plays and musicals at the Public's five-theatre venue at Astor Place and the Delacorte Theater for

Shakespeare in the Park.

Earlier in her career at The Public, she managed some of the theatre's most celebrated productions, including *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Josephine and I* by Cush Jumbo, *Straight White Men* by Young Jean Lee, *Barbecue* by Robert O'Hara, and *Here Lies Love* by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim.

While at The Public, Maria also held a position on the adjunct faculty of Juilliard and curated the junior year curriculum of the Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU. She has guest lectured at Bard College, Barnard College, Brown University, Columbia University, Juilliard, the National Theater Institute at The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, UCSD, the University of Texas-Austin, and Yale University, among others.

Since 2015, Maria has also served as a member of the board of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre. From 2006 to 2008, she co-chaired the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab with Jason Grote, and from 2004 to 2012, Maria was the Executive Producer of 13P, one of her proudest achievements. Maria is a first-generation Latinx- American, born to parents who emigrated from the Dominican Republic and Spain. She was raised in Jamaica, Queens, and has a collection of hoop earrings to prove it. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in 2001 from Brown University.



KIMBERLY E. DOUGLAS (*she/her*) is the **Managing Director** of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. She has 20+ years of experience in event production management, program development, strategic partnerships, arts education, and the performing arts.

Graduating from Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Kimberly then continued her studies at Howard

University College of Fine Arts graduating with a B.A. in Music Business minor in Jazz Voice.

Kimberly served as the Managing Artistic Director for THEARC Theater, a program of Building Bridges Across the River. For 15 years she led the theater operations for

a 365-seat theater and a Black Box, led the development and fundraising for theater initiatives such as facilities and buildings enhancements and upgrades, curated seasonal programming on THEARC Theater stage and Black Box, and expanded relationships and funding for the iCAN Technical Theater internship. Through her leadership, THEARC Theater is widely recognized as a cultural staple for artists, arts organizations, and community East of the River. Kimberly served as a board member for Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company from April 2021–March 2023 after establishing a long-standing partnership as Woolly Mammoth’s Core Connectivity partner.

Kimberly launched her company KD ARTS Consulting in March 2022, providing program curation and production services, talent and operations management, and arts administration. Through KD ARTS Consulting, she worked with organizations like Demaskus Theatre Collective in residency at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center and The Musicianship’s 2023 Wammie Awards. Currently, Kimberly is co-chair of the D.C. Co-lab Equity and Justice Committee advocating for arts education. She was born and raised in D.C. and presently resides in Upper Marlboro, MD.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Woolly Mammoth acknowledges that our theatre stands upon occupied, unceded territory: the ancestral homeland of the Nacotchtank whose descendants belong to the Piscataway peoples. Furthermore, the foundation of this city, and most of the original buildings in Washington, DC, were funded by the sale of enslaved people of African descent and built by their hands.

*Language developed in consultation
with Dr. Gabrielle Tayac*

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