



Dartmouth College

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***Barber Shop Chronicles* explores a safe haven for men of the African diaspora; at Dartmouth, show is cornerstone in a season exploring stories of diaspora and cross-cultural exchange**

HANOVER, NH— For generations, African men have gathered in barber shops. Yes, they get haircuts, but the barber shop also serves as a political platform, pulpit and confessional—somewhere to go for unofficial advice, to keep in touch with the world and, of course, argue about soccer.

This special cultural enclave is brought to life in the heart-warming, rollicking and insightful play [\*Barber Shop Chronicles\*](#), coming to the Hop **January 17-19** after a North American tour and a smash-hit run in the UK. The Hop shows are the only ones on the tour taking place outside of a major metropolitan area. The company's Hop residency also will include related pre- and post-show events that dive into the show and the issues it raises (the schedule will be shared at [hop.dartmouth.edu](http://hop.dartmouth.edu)).

Written by Nigerian-born British playwright Inua Ellams, *Barber Shop Chronicles* takes place over one day in barber shops in six different cities: Johannesburg, Harare, Kampala, Lagos, Accra and London. Transitioning between the locations with brief, funky interludes of music and dance, the play keeps each shop's storyline moving like a line of spinning plates, the 12 cast members donning different characters and their distinct regional accents. Based on conversations Ellams overheard in barber shops in London and Africa, the play invites the audience into a uniquely masculine environment where the banter may be sharp, but the truth always telling. The barbers of these tales are sages, role models and father figures, they are the glue that keeps men together.

Critics have praised *Barber Shop's* inventive stagecraft, wonderful performances and pitch-perfect storytelling, all of which make give the play universal appeal. "Ellams isn't just sharing the experiences of people we seldom see on our stages, he does so with a color, force and boundlessness of intellectual inquiry," write The Telegraph (UK). Wrote The Independent: "Joyous. Brilliantly acted. Life-affirming. Go." As written by Ellams, who emigrated from Nigeria to London as a teenager, the dialogue has "the sort of giddy verbal jam session one associates with the plays of August Wilson," wrote *The New York Times*.

Wrote the *Boston Globe*: "The men ... banter, bicker, spin yarns, confide in or confront one another... Their conversations cover a wide range and, crucially, the play's issues seem to emerge organically from the concerns of each character: the treatment of immigrants; the complexities of dating; the challenges of fatherhood (and how much weight to give the examples set by their own fathers); the role of language in

sustaining national identity, the political leaders who inspire and the ones whose corruption disgusts; the tensions between generations whose experiences and perspective could not be more different; the toxic legacy of colonialism.”

“There’s always been a need for black men to find spaces where they could commune without fear of a sort of judgmental or voyeuristic gaze,” said Ellams told the *Harvard Gazette* recently. “Barbershops are that space.” Although the voices vary in the different locations the play takes us to, themes emerge, Ellams said. “There are cross-generational conversations going on; different types of people with different monies in their pockets clashing. There are the same questions about fatherhood, about masculinity, about belonging, about the legacy of colonization coming up.”

Although the play doesn’t include African Americans, American audiences have responded strongly to the play’s themes, Ellams said. “People of various cultures who have digested negative stereotypes of black and African men love the play because it undoes a lot of those stereotypes,” he said. They just see “people on stage being people.” Fundamentally, he said, he wants audiences everywhere “to see that there isn’t a monolith,” he said. “There isn’t an African monolith, there isn’t a black monolith, a human monolith. We are all intensely, intensely different but all intensely, intensely the same, and that mixed bag of humanity is worth celebrating.”

At the Hop, *Barber Shop Chronicles* connects with themes developed over the entire 2018-19 season. “This dynamic production is the perfect addition to a season that celebrates diverse stories and showcases artists whose lives and work transcend the boundaries nation and culture.” said Hop Director Mary Lou Aleskie. “*Barber Shop* shows us the joyful humanity and communities we find in each other, even when we are far from home. It is a great honor to have this company and this vital production to Dartmouth.” Other upcoming Hop shows and artists exploring cultural identity include **Ana Tijoux, Flor de Toloache, Indigenous Rising** and **Camille Brown**.

*Barber Shop Chronicles* was co-commissioned by Fuel and the National Theatre. Development funded by Arts Council England with the support of Fuel, National Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, The Binks Trust, British Council ZA, Òran Mór and A Play, a Pie and a Pint. This event was made possible by support from the British Council. The Hop performances are funded in part by the Wetzel Family Fund for the Arts.

#### **MORE ABOUT...**

The [National Theatre](#) is one of the United Kingdom's three most prominent publicly funded performing arts venues, alongside the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Opera House. Founded in 1963 and located in Central London’s South Bank area, the organization presents a varied program, including Shakespeare, other international classic drama, and new plays by contemporary playwrights. Each of the three auditoriums in the complex can run up to three shows in repertoire, thus further widening the number of plays which can be put on during any one season. In 2009, it began its *NT Live* video broadcasts which have since been shown in more than 2,500 venues in 60 countries around the world. Responsible for smash-hits such as *War Horse* and *One Man, Two Guvnors*, the venue presents over 20 productions every year. Committed to providing low-cost tickets to a significant portion of its seats, the Theatre fills more than 90 percent of its seats, on average. The organization is committed to nurturing new talent, from writers and directors to creative artists and performers, and also acts as an educational hub managing a range of learning programs.

Born in Nigeria in 1984, [Inua Ellams](#) is an internationally touring poet, playwright, performer, graphic artist and designer. He is an ambassador for the Ministry of Stories and has published four books of poetry: *Candy Coated Unicorns and Converse All Stars*, *Thirteen Fairy Negro Tales*, *The Wire-Headed Heathen* and *#Afterhours*. His first play, *The 14th Tale*, was awarded a Fringe First at the Edinburgh International Theatre

Festival and his fourth, *Barber Shop Chronicles*, sold out its run at England's National Theatre. He is currently touring *An Evening With An Immigrant* and working on *The Half God of Rainfall*, a new play in verse. In graphic art and design, online and in print, he tries to mix the old with the new, juxtaposing texture and pigment with flat shades of color and vector images. He lives and works from London, where he founded the Midnight Run, a nocturnal urban excursion. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

### **The Hopkins Center for the Arts**

Founded in 1962, **The Hopkins Center for the Arts** ("the Hop") is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.

### **CALENDAR LISTINGS**

#### **National Theatre: *Barber Shop Chronicles***

Zippering between Johannesburg, Harare, Kampala, Lagos, Accra and London, this flamboyant musical feast by the UK's preeminent theater company captures the heart and soul of the barber shop as a place for men of Africa and the African diaspora to gather and talk—with some hair-trimming on the side. With a punchy, truth-telling script by Nigerian-born poet/playwright Inua Ellams, barbers and their customers joke, squabble, tell tall tales and (of course) discuss soccer—all the while raising profound issues of migration, race, masculinity and fatherhood. The 12 bustling actors use bursts of song, chant and movement to engineer transitions from one country and character to another.

Thursday, January 17, 7 pm

Friday and Saturday, January 18 & 19, 8 pm

The Moore Theater, Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College

\$60/50/30, 18 & under \$25, Dartmouth students \$10

[Hop.dartmouth.edu](http://Hop.dartmouth.edu) or 603.646.2422

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