



**IAMA THEATRE COMPANY SETS
CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR
WORKSHOP PRODUCTION OF
DOUGLAS LYONS' NEW COMEDY
“DON'T TOUCH MY HAIR”
FEBRUARY 13-24, 2025**

LOS ANGELES, CA (8 January 2025) — **IAMA Theatre Company**, committed to cultivating new voices and creating new, boundary-pushing work, continues its 17th season with the workshop production of *Don't Touch My Hair* by **Douglas Lyons**, directed by **Velani Dibba**. A piece about friendship, this new work follows lifelong best friends Eemani and Jade as they decompress over a good blunt, not knowing the weed is laced with something else. As the duo spiral into a hilarious hallucination, they are able to confront the oppressors of the past dead-on. The cast for *Don't Touch My Hair* features **Sarah Hollis, Jasmine Ashanti, Jenna Anne Johnson***, **Mike Bash** and **Michael Rishawn**. *Don't Touch My Hair* will be performed **February 13–24, 2025** at **Atwater Village Theatre**, 3269 Casitas Ave, Los Angeles. Tickets (\$35) are available at **iamatheatre.com**. (* denotes IAMA Theatre Company Ensemble Member)

Don't Touch My Hair marks the final work created in the Douglas Lyons' “The Deep Breath Trilogy: New Plays for Black Women.” The trilogy launched with the family play *Chicken and Biscuits* on Broadway September 2021, called “pure entertainment” by *TheaterMania*, followed by the romantic comedy *Table 17*, named a Critics Pick by *The New York Times* which declared the Off-Broadway play that premiered September 2024 as “something we’ve been missing: a gentle, hopeful good time out in the world, in the company of other humans. This is theater as comfort food, and it satisfies a genuine craving.”

“As a company that fosters an inclusive community to inspire and propel theatremakers, IAMA is so excited for Douglas Lyons' hilarious and poignant play to be given our first workshop production of this kind, where we get to invite our audience into the creative process,” said

IAMA Theatre Company Artistic Director **Stefanie Black**. “Douglas has been a dream collaborator since we began working on his play and we can't wait to share his work, here in Los Angeles. Workshop productions at IAMA live in the space between a staged reading and opening night of a world premiere production. This season we are focusing on process not product. This is a thrilling new way to support artists and new works by empowering the creative team and actors to continue to explore the world of the play, each night, in front of an audience with design elements and continuous rehearsal throughout the limited run.”

Douglas Lyons (*Playwright*) is a multi-hyphenate artist. As a writer, he earned a GLAAD nomination for his Broadway playwriting debut, *Chicken and Biscuits*, which was the second most produced play across America during the 2022/23 season. His most recent play, *Table 17*, premiered Off-Broadway at MCC Theater, earned a *New York Times* Critics Pick and won two 2024 AUDELCO Awards for Best Playwright and Outstanding Ensemble. Lyons also served as a writer on both seasons of Apple TV's Emmy Award-winning series “Fraggle Rock.” His Broadway acting credits include *The Book of Mormon*, plus the original casts of *Beautiful* and the Tony Award-winning Broadway revival of *Parade*. Tour credits include *RENT*, *Dreamgirls* and *The Book of Mormon*. As a composer-lyricist, his music and lyrics have been featured on Nickelodeon, BET Plus, Apple TV, CBS' “Sunday Morning Show” and more. His musicals include *Polkadots* (Off-Broadway Alliance Winner Best Family Show, Atlantic Theater Company), *Beau* (Adirondack Theatre Festival), the world premiere of *Five Points* (Theater Latté Da) and more. He is currently developing television with Skydance and Ryan Reynolds' Maximum Effort.

“*Don't Touch My Hair* is dedicated to the dozens of fabulous Black women in my orbit. They constantly inspire me with their light, their spirit, their intelligence, love and friendship. I wanted to create a world that discussed America's race problem without forcing Black Queens to endure the harm they live every day,” shared playwright Lyons. “In this play, Black women have superpowers, and one day, America will realize they always have. To premiere this workshop production in Los Angeles with IAMA Theatre Company is a career dream come true. IAMA has been part of this play's development since its first 20 pages back in 2020, when *Don't Touch My Hair* was commissioned by Queens Theatre. This production will mark my L.A. playwriting debut, and I couldn't imagine a more supportive and artist driven company to partner with on this

adventure.”

Directing *Don't Touch My Hair* is **Velani Dibba**, who recently served as associate director on the Geffen Playhouse's *Waiting for Godot*. The L.A.-based director and multidisciplinary artist focuses on the collision of cultures through design-focused and ensemble-driven pieces. Dibba's stage work includes *Pride and Prejudice* with The Dramat at Yale Repertory Theatre, *we need your listening* at New Ohio Theatre Ice Factory Festival, *Apologies to the Bengali Lady* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, The Tank NYC and The Gathering, *I Pledge Allegiance* at the UNESCO International Theatre Festival, World Congress and TCG National Conference and *Space Odyssey* at Columbia School of the Arts. She is an inaugural Fellow at the Laboratory for Global Performance & Politics in Washington D.C., a former Global Cultural Fellow at the University of Edinburgh and a former SITI Company artistic associate.

“*Don't Touch My Hair* is about the undue scrutiny we place on Black women and how they present themselves. This scrutiny reflects an ownership mindset that is rooted in our country's past. It is deeply exciting to be collaborating with IAMA Theatre Company on a staged workshop of Douglas' uniquely dynamic writing,” said director Dibba. “Yes, it's about how racism in many ways hasn't changed. It's also about how Black women haven't changed. Black women have been funny, vulnerable, driven, irreverent and sarcastic throughout history, and that's kind of ridiculous given everything we've been through. Audiences can expect an antebellum satire with hijinks, superpowers, and time travel. And if that sounds ridiculous, I would ask – why can't our joy be as ridiculous as our oppression?”

IAMA Theatre Company has assembled a talented cast for *Don't Touch My Hair*, including **Sarah Hollis** as Eemani, a hard worker with optimistic spirit who is dramatically honest to a fault. Hollis is an actor, writer and producer making her IAMA Theatre Company debut. Her notable theatre credits include *Intimate Apparel* at Arizona Theatre Company, *Clue* at Paper Mill Playhouse and La Mirada Theatre, *Tiny Beautiful Things*, *King Charles III* and *Pygmalion* at Pasadena Playhouse and *A Raisin In The Sun* at A Noise Within. Hollis' screen credits include “My Divorce Party,” “The Unit,” “Lie to Me,” and a 10-episode arc on “24.” A seasoned voiceover actor, she has voiced characters in “The Search for WondLa,” “Big Nate” and recently she was crowned new Disney royalty out of the “Frozen” universe for “Frozen: Forces of

Nature,” a podcast starring her character, Queen Disa. **Jasmine Ashanti** plays Jade, a very single and hopeless romantic with dry humor and no patience, lifelong best friend to Eemani. Making her IAMA Theatre Company debut, Ashanti has performed with Ojai Playwrights Conference, La Jolla Playhouse, Berkeley Rep, Pasadena Playhouse, Skylight Theatre Company and Rogue Machine Theatre. Her television credits include “Shameless,” “The Good Doctor,” “Lucifer,” “Black-Ish,” Netflix’s “On My Block,” “Grey’s Anatomy,” Hulu’s “Wu-Tang: An American Saga,” “East New York,” and Amazon Prime Video’s “Upload.”

IAMA Theatre Company Ensemble Member **Jenna Anne Johnson** will take on the role of Susan, a woman sincere in her heart, but all wrong in her actions. Johnson has most recently performed in *The Last Bohemian* and *The Infinite Swell* as part of IAMA’s ongoing immersive theatre hotel collaborations with Marc & Rose Hospitality. Other theatre credits include *Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Shakespeare Center of LA, *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit...* at Geffen Playhouse, and *Cult of Love* at IAMA. Her television credits include playing Kev’s sister, Bambi, on “Shameless” and Walker in MAX’s “Holiday Harmony.” Making his IAMA Theatre Company debut is **Mike Bash** playing Harold, a sweetheart with unfortunate breath who tries too hard to impress. On television and film, he can be seen in “Shameless,” “Julia,” “The Orville,” “Law and Order,” “Rescue: Hi Surf,” “The Upshaws,” “Madame Web,” “Any Day Now,” “Not For Nothing” and “Rebel Girls.” **Michael Rishawn** is set to play Alick, a shy, guarded handsome man who eventually makes his presence known. Also making his IAMA Theatre Company debut, Rishawn is best known for his work on Broadway, television, and film. He can be seen guest-starring on CBS’ “FBI: Most Wanted,” Disney’s hit series, “BUNK’D,” “Raising Dion” and Netflix’s “Survival of the Thickest.” Other TV credits include MAX’s “And Just Like That” and multi-camera comedy series “Crutch” on Paramount. On stage, Rishawn has originated roles in several world premiere plays: Douglas Lyons’ *Table 17, Handjob* at Echo Theatre Company and Jordan E. Cooper’s high-octane Broadway comedy *Ain’t No Mo’* produced by Lee Daniels. He can also be seen in John-Michael Powell’s independent feature, “The Send Off,” which debuted at Cinequest and is available on Prime Video/Apple TV.

The production team bringing *Don't Touch My Hair* to life on stage includes **Erica Ammerman** (Lighting Designer), **Roz Bevan** (Associate Director), **Jordan Bass** (Casting Director), **Brendan**

Doyle (Original Sound Design), **Shelia Dorn** (Wig Designer), **Dennis Ho** (Production Stage Manager), **Celina Lee Surniak** (Intimacy & Fight Director), **Ethan Pakchar** (Original Compositions), **Zachary Phaneuf** (Technical Director), **Devario Simmons** (Costume Designer), **Jonathan To** (Sound Programmer) and **Randy Wong-Westbrooke** (Set Designer). The standbys for *Don't Touch My Hair* are **Jamal Henderson**, **Obehi Janice**, **James Luster** and **Marnie Price***. (* denotes IAMA Theatre Company Ensemble Member)

ABOUT IAMA THEATRE COMPANY

Founded in 2007, **IAMA Theatre Company** is a Los Angeles-based ensemble of artists committed to cultivating new voices, creating new works that push boundaries and take risks, and fostering an inclusive community that inspires a new generation of theatermakers and audiences. Designated by *Playbill* as “one of 20 regional houses every theater lover must know,” “an LA intimate theater gem” by *KCRW*, and a “creative force on the local theatre scene” by the *Los Angeles Times*, the award-winning company is dedicated to developing and producing new plays and musicals by emerging and established playwrights, including over 30 world, West Coast and Los Angeles premieres. Recent and current Broadway productions that first started at IAMA include Max Wolf Friedlich’s *JOB* and Leslye Headland’s *Cult of Love*. The backbone of the company, IAMA’s Ensemble Members have been featured in numerous critically acclaimed TV shows and films as well as a vast array of theatre and live performances on and off Broadway, across the country, and around the world. IAMA is invested in challenging audiences with authentic experiences that reflect the complex modern world.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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WHEN: **February 13-24, 2025**

SHOWS: **8pm, Thursdays-Mondays** (no performance Monday, Feb. 17)

WHERE: **Atwater Village Theatre**, 3269 Casitas Avenue, Los Angeles

TICKETS: **\$35 (includes fees)**

INFO: Information and tickets are available at **iamatheatre.com**

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<https://cbpr.co/press/donttouchmyhair>