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Educator, Artist, and Advocate Cessalee Smith-Stovall joins Seattle Children's Theatre as Director of Belonging & Inclusion.

(Seattle, Wash.) SEATTLE – December 6, 2023 – After interviewing an incredible cohort of applicants from around the world, **Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT)** announces Cessalee Smith-Stovall as their new Director of Belonging and Inclusion. The Director of Belonging and Inclusion, a new position for SCT, was created to be intentionally separate from Human Resources, and will not be involved with employment-related tasks. This position will instead focus on uplifting the voices of those working with SCT and will lead the organization's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (I.D.E.A) work and goals. Cessalee connects her theatre and performance practice, expertise as an educator, lived experience as a Black artist, and passion for engagement through the arts to deliver programming that serves artists on a global scale.

"This is a historic and necessary addition to our Directors cohort and pivotal in our collective goal to weave our I.D.E.A values into the infrastructure of SCT. Cessalee Smith-Stovall brings years of experience, a nuanced understanding of our industry and a value-driven approach based in relationship building. I am looking forward to working with and learning from her."

-Idris Goodwin, Artistic Director, SCT

Originally hailing from Indianapolis, Cessalee developed a love of theatre while involved with Young Actors Theatre during childhood. She attended Florida State University, receiving a degree in Theatre, has earned certificates in Diversity and Inclusion from Purdue and Cornell Universities, a graduate certificate in Arts Leadership from University of Massachusetts, and a Mental Health First Aid certification. Professionally, Cessalee worked as an actor in regional, touring, and TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences) productions including *Seussical*, *Cats*, *Hairspray*, and *Tarzan* across the US for 15 years. She then joined the company of the national tour for *The Book of Mormon*, which she continued for over five years.

Cessalee then settled in Australia where she met her husband, Scott and had her daughter, Alula Valyntine. This role holds a special place for Cessalee due to her experience growing up working in the theatre-for-youth space and she is ecstatic to share this Seattle adventure with her daughter, who has helped her see directly how important representation is in theatre and across all industries.

“I'm thrilled to join a company deeply committed to fostering empathy, inclusivity, and anti-racism. SCT's belief in the power of theatre to inspire and its dedication to ensuring every child sees themselves represented align perfectly with my values.”

- Cessalee Smith-Stovall

Cessalee's experiences make her uniquely qualified to support diversity, equity, inclusion and mental health in the performing arts sector. In 2017, Cessalee founded **Stage A Change**, an organization that works to amplify, create and sustain professional opportunities for artists of color in Australia. In 2022, Cessalee was named a Westpac Social Change Fellowship for her I.D.E.A work in the arts. She spent time in the US and UK to investigate current and shifting patterns overseas. She also received a Betty Amsden Foundation scholarship to further her learning on intimacy and identity in the arts and was named a member of the 2023 ArtEquity BIPOC Leadership Circle. Cessalee is a certified intimacy professional for screen and live performance through Intimacy Directors and Coordinators and co-produced the first **Global Majority Intimacy Conference** in New Orleans in 2023. She is on the editorial board for the Journal of Consent Based Practices and contributed to The Intimacy Coordinator's Guidebook, which will be published in 2024.

“SCT's ongoing commitment to anti-racist work since 2017 shows dedication, yet the journey towards real cultural change demands continuous efforts, which I'm eager to contribute to. I look forward to serving in support of the board, staff, artistic partners, audience and local community.”

Said Smith-Stovall

Cessalee hopes that her work will help SCT to become industry leaders in diversity, belonging, and inclusion work. It's crucial that theatre for young audiences represent a wide range of youth experiences and that those stories are being told by those who can best inform the text. Cessalee believes that by discussing and implementing both ground- and glass-breaking best practices, we will continue to diversify our industry, both onstage, offstage, and in the audiences, making space to hear more voices, understand more stories, and engage more authentically.

About SCT:

Since 1975, SCT has been a leading generator of new works, aiming to provide youth of all ages access to professional theater and theatre education. Under new initiatives, SCT for All provides low-cost and free tickets to young people and families. In addition, every first and fifth grade classroom in Seattle Public Schools can receive free tickets under **One&Five**. Learn more information about both of these programs at sct.org.

The 2023-2024 season is supported by generous contributions from season sponsors **Microsoft**, **ArtsFund**, and **The Shubert Foundation**, which will help the organization serve 130,000 annually and provide more than 60,000 free or significantly reduced tickets to children in the Puget Sound area.

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