

OSF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

L E T T E R



October 11, 2022

We, the members of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) Board of Directors, would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for the outpouring of support for our Artistic Director, Nataki Garrett, which has come from our community and across the country. Through this letter, we express how outraged we are that Ms. Garrett, OSF's first African-American Artistic Director, has been subjected to threats against her life and how distressed we are that at least one other staff member of color has had similar damaging experiences. This letter evidences our strong support for Ms. Garrett, a transformational artist and leader, and dismay that some individuals have created a hostile environment for her leadership. This has to stop.

Artistic Directors exist to bring outstanding art to their communities, and occasionally attract criticism for their artistic choices. That is to be expected. All forms of intellectual and artistic discussion of OSF performances are welcome, and listening to our audiences and community is an important part of our role. But Ms. Garrett has encountered repeated opposition that has nothing to do with the merits of her work or reality. Sadly – in fact, shockingly – there have been accusations against her that appear to be based solely on her race and gender and by her desire to welcome people who have too long been marginalized in the American theater. She has also received a barrage of harassing local press coverage and social media postings that appear to show racial bias and inaccurately accuse her of ignoring OSF's longstanding audience. Ms. Garrett has championed inclusion among OSF's audience and donor base, because we need more, not fewer, people in our theaters. We appreciate our loyal supporters and are thrilled that Ms. Garrett has the vision to continue and expand that base.

The Board endorses and shares Ms. Garrett's strategic vision for the Festival, which is ambitious, expansive, inclusive, and accessible. She brings a new energy to OSF that encompasses the best of the classics – from Shakespeare to other canonical playwrights – and also welcomes innovative contemporary work and cutting-edge technology and digital offerings. She has programmed Shakespeare plays in both 2022 and 2023, the first seasons she has curated, and her enthusiasm for directing next season's *Romeo and Juliet* knows no bounds. She respects the past, embraces the present, and is working with us to set an essential course for the future. The new direction means change, but we see this change as both inevitable to stay relevant and imperative to be sustainable.

Ms. Garrett, apart from being a director extraordinaire and forward-looking administrator, deserves thanks and praise for keeping the Festival afloat against all odds in these difficult past two years. Her relentless fundraising has brought \$19 million in COVID relief funds to OSF, a lifeline that allowed OSF to continue to exist despite the catastrophic disappearance of revenue during the pandemic and damage to property and employees' homes from recent wildfires. In keeping OSF operating, she has benefited the community at large. Indeed, her decision to run two plays in 2021, when it would have been easier to halt all productions until 2022, was motivated by her desire to help local businesses and industries by attracting visitors – as well as locals who were sheltering-in-place – to come into town. She understands and fosters the symbiotic relationship between the town and the Festival.

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OSF is integral to the Rogue Valley, just as this community is integral to OSF's success. We must work together to support Ms. Garrett and other leaders and artists of color and remove the threats so they can do their jobs without being targeted and harassed. We must all be proactive and speak out in favor of fairness and objectivity in local press coverage. You can also help Nataki and OSF by bringing your friends and families to see some of our exceptional shows, this year and beyond. Join us in doing all we can to keep Ashland as an inviting and respected center for theater and culture, and a fair and welcoming society for all.

The Board of Directors of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Actions from the joint letter of the Dramatists Guild and Theatre Communications Group:

Four Ways Theatremakers Can Support Nataki Garrett

1 **OSF Website.** Leave a comment expressing support for Nataki on OSF's website:

<https://www.osfashland.org/contact-us>

2. **OSF Social Media.** Post a statement of support for Nataki and tag OSF's social media channels.

OSF Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/osfashland>

OSF Twitter: <https://twitter.com/osfashland>

3. **Ashland.news.** Write to the Ashland.news editor Bert Etling at betling@ashland.news.

Ashland.news columnist Herbert Rothschild, is urging his readers to "keep talking about this subject — among yourselves and with OSF management as well as in this publication. The stakes for Ashland are high." We disagree with Rothschild's characterization of the Festival but endorse the need to share thoughtful opinions.

4. **The Oregonian.** Write a letter to The Oregonian, the largest paper in Oregon: letters@oregonian.com

OR Tweet a statement in support of Nataki and tag The Oregonian.

<https://twitter.com/Oregonian>