

For Immediate Release

YPT Launches 2021.22 Season with *rihannaboi95*

A New Virtual Production of the Governor General Award-Winning Play for Teens by Jordan Tannahill

Toronto, November 16, 2021 – [Young People's Theatre \(YPT\)](#) is thrilled to kick off its 56th season with playwright **Jordan Tannahill**'s powerful virtual play for teens, [rihannaboi95](#). Available online from Nov. 22-Dec. 18, the play features Sunny – aka “rihannaboi95” online – whose whole world threatens to come crashing down when videos of them dancing to their favourite pop singer go viral. Recommended for ages 13-18, the play is a raw, unvarnished account of a teenager with a unique talent in the relentless pursuit of self-expression, despite the danger it poses.

Tannahill is one of Canada's most accomplished playwrights and a 2021 Scotiabank Giller Prize nominee. *rihannaboi95* is one of three pieces featured in their Governor General Award-winning play collection, *Age of Minority: Three Solo Plays*. It received the 2013 Dora Mavor Moore Award for 'Best New Play', Theatre for Young Audiences Division. Acting as Artistic Advisor for YPT's 2021 version of the production is **Bilal Baig** - lead and co-creator of the boundary-breaking series *Sort Of* (CBC/HBO Max). *rihannaboi95* is directed by Dora Award-nominated theatre artist **Tawiah M'Carthy** (*Obaaberima*), and features actor and playwright **Davinder Malhi**.

Originally produced in 2013 by experimental theatre company Suburban Beast, the production resonates in a whole new way in 2021 as teens – and the whole world – moved entirely online to express and connect.

Says new **Artistic Director Herbie Barnes**, “Young people today know how important their online presence is – and how one small step can negatively and immediately alter their world. I believe this play will create much conversation and change for the better.”

rihannaboi95

Written by **Jordan Tannahill**

Directed by **Tawiah M'Carthy**

Featuring **Davinder Malhi**

“rihannaboi95 is the queer story you need to hear... A truly fascinating performance.”

– STU Reviews

Sunny (aka rihannaboi95 online) made some videos and shared them online. And while, yeah, they're getting lots of hits, not everyone likes them. Now, Sunny's whole world is threatening to implode. Hidden in the bedroom of Keira – a drugstore makeup counter clerk – Sunny records a video for their loyal viewers and invokes the spirit of Rihanna to help with the situation.

Artistic Advisor: **Bilal Baig**; Set & Costume Designer: **Camellia Koo**; Lighting Designer: **Michelle Ramsay**; Sound Designer: **River Oliveira**; Stage Manager: **Bradley Dunn**.

A Described Video version is available. All performances include a pre-recorded post-show discussion with members of the creative team. Workshops for schools, as well as a study guide, are also available.

rihannaboi95 was first produced in Canada by Suburban Beast (Toronto, ON) from April 23 to 28, 2013. The play was performed nightly in a bedroom and live-streamed over the Internet for audiences to watch from their computers.

Jordan Tannahill, Playwright

Jordan's plays have been translated into ten languages, and won several awards including the Governor General's Award for Drama in 2014 for *Age of Minority: Three Solo Plays*, and again in 2018 for *Botticelli in the Fire & Sunday in Sodom*. His performance texts and productions have been presented at venues including Canadian Stage, The National Arts Centre of Canada, The Young Vic, Sadler's Wells, Festival d'Avignon, The Lincoln Centre, the Deutsches Theatre, The Edinburgh International Festival, and on London's West End. His second novel, *The Listeners*, was nominated for the 2021 Giller Prize.

Tawiah M'Carthy, Director

Tawiah is a Ghanaian-born, Toronto-based Theatre Practitioner, notable as a Dora-nominated playwright and performer. Tawiah's credits include *Black Boys* (Saga Collectif); *Obaaberima* (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); and *Yen Ara Asaase Ni* (Obsidian Theatre - 21 Black Futures). Tawiah is a founding member of Saga Collectif and Blue Bird Theatre Collective and has worked at theatre companies across the country including Soulpepper Theatre, Stratford Theatre Festival, Shaw Theatre Festival, Factory Theatre and The National Arts Center. Tawiah was the artistic director of the 2020 Festival of Ideas and Creation and currently the artist outreach and development coordinator at Canadian Stage. Tawiah is also a co-director of the Emerging Creators Unit at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Davinder Malhi, Performer

Davinder is an actor, playwright, director, and a recent graduate from York University's acting conservatory. His art explores the meeting place between realism and surrealism, with a special focus on bringing Brown bodies into that space. He hopes to use his process to foster communities that work towards a Brown Queer future. Davinder was a member of Shakespeare in the Ruff's Young Ruffians Apprenticeship Program, Shadowland Theatre's Summer Internship program, and Theatre Ontario's Youth Advisory Committee. Some acting credits include *Concord Floral* (Canadian Stage); *Elizabeth Rex* (York University); and *Towards Rebirth* (Shakespeare in the Ruff). He also directed *Just Pervs* at the 2021 Toronto Fringe and is co-writing his first full-length play, *choti choti batain*.

Bilal Baig, Artistic Advisor

Bilal Baig (they/them) is a queer, trans-feminine, Muslim playwright, performer and workshop facilitator. Bilal's first play, *Acha Bacha*, had its world premiere in 2018 and has been published by Playwrights Canada Press. Other written work in development includes *Kainchee Lagaa*, *Kitne Saare Laloo Yahan Pey Hain*, and *I want that free mind!* Bilal is a core team member at non-profits such as Story Planet and Rivers of Hope, where they develop and facilitate workshops for youth in under-resourced neighbourhoods in Toronto focused on creative writing and literacy (Story Planet), and combatting Islamophobia through the arts (Rivers of Hope). Bilal is the lead and co-creator of the CBC/HBO Max/Sienna Films series *Sort Of*.

Camellia Koo, Set & Costume Designer

Camellia is a Toronto-based set and costume designer for theatre, opera, dance and site-specific performance installations. Recent designs for theatre and opera include collaborations with Factory Theatre, The National Arts Centre, Soulpepper Theatre, The Shaw Festival, The Stratford Festival, Tarragon Theatre, Why Not Theatre, Against the Grain, Boston Lyric Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Edmonton Opera, Helikon Opera (Moscow), Minnesota Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Santa Fe Opera, and Tapestry Opera. She is a graduate of Ryerson Theatre School and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design (U.K.). Camellia has received six Dora Awards (Toronto), a Sterling Award (Edmonton), a Chalmers Award Grant, 2006 Siminovitch Protégé Prize, and the 2016 Virginia and Myrtle Cooper Award for Costume Design.

Michelle Ramsay, Lighting Designer

Michelle is a lighting designer who works with dance, theatre, and opera companies across Canada. Selected designs include: *Under the Stairs* (YPT); *Sherlock Holmes and the Raven's Curse* (Shaw Festival); *acts of faith* (Factory Theatre); *Lady Sunrise* (Factory Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Theatre Rusticle); *The Jungle* (Tarragon Theatre); *trace* (Factory Theatre); *Broken Tailbone* (Nightswimming); *The Russian Play* (Shaw Festival); *Shanawdihit* (Tapestry Opera); *Through the Bamboo* (Uwi Collective); *Lilies* (IlemonTree Creations/Why Not); *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Obsidian/Nightwood); *The Royale* (Soulpepper); *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Stratford Festival); *Daughter* (Quiptake/Pandemic). She has received eight Dora Awards, a SATAward, and the 2008 Pauline McGibbon Award. She is on the board of the Associated Designers of Canada.

River Oliveira, Sound Designer

River Cecil Oliveira (they/he) is a queer, trans and disabled multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto. Over the past year and a half, he has had the privilege and the pleasure of working as a designer, playwright, and performer on projects that have centered, uplifted, and amplified queer and trans voices. They are very excited to be continuing this work at Young People's Theatre on this production of *rihannaboi95*. River has previously been involved in Nightwood's Innovators Program, Paprika Festival's Design Lab, and Toronto Fringe's TENT Program, and has most recently worked as a sound designer for Theatre Passe Muraille's production of *11:11*, which was remounted at Prairie Theatre Exchange this past October. They are currently a member of the VIBE Arts 2021 Emerging Arts Educators program, and are co-creating two plays with support from the Ontario Arts Council's Recommender Grant for Theatre Creators Program. For more information on what River is up to, visit riveroliveira.com.

Bradley Dunn, Stage Manager

Bradley's select theatre credits include *Missing* (Pacific Opera Victoria); *Chicago* (Globe Theatre); *Dear Evan Hansen* (Mirvish Productions); *The Baroness and the Pig*, *Henry V* (Shaw Festival); *King Charles III*, *My Night with Reg* (Studio 180/Mirvish); *My Name is Asher Lev* (Studio 180/Harold Green); *The Comedy of Errors* (Thousand Islands Playhouse); *The Wizard of Oz* (The Grand Theatre); *The Heidi Chronicles*, *The Odd Couple* (Soulpepper); *You Will Remember Me* (Studio 180/Tarragon); *It's A Wonderful Life* (Theatre Aquarius). Bradley is a graduate of McMaster University and Sheridan College.

About Young People's Theatre

Young People's Theatre (YPT) is North America's oldest – and Canada's largest – professional producer and presenter of theatre for young audiences. Over the past 56 years, YPT has staged many of the most important plays that form the canon of work for youth in our country. YPT continues to develop new work and create partnerships with theatre companies across the country and around the world. The enriched learning experiences of YPT's Education & Participation Department provide young people with opportunities to develop their whole being. Through Drama School programs, workshops in community shelters and agencies, educational initiatives in Toronto classrooms, and training and apprenticeship opportunities, we place learning at the centre of everything we do. With new online drama-based programming, YPT continues to support the needs of educators, students and families by creating innovative opportunities for online learning. Visit youngpeoplestheatre.org to learn more.

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