



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Chan Centre Presents Profound New Dance Project Exploring Privilege and Power Led by Acclaimed Seattle-Based Dancer/Choreographer

In a fierce and immersive performance, Jade Solomon Curtis takes a pointed look at the historic and ongoing oppression of Black people through the lens of a singularly powerful slur.

Vancouver, BC — The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia presents *Black Like Me: An Exploration of the Word N-word*, a multimedia performance born of artistic collaboration and performed solo by dance artist **Jade Solomon Curtis**, on November 20 and 21, 2019 at the Chan Centre's Telus Studio Theatre as part of the Beyond Words series. *Black Like Me* includes contributions from a team of forward-thinking artists and activists, resulting in a layered and thought-provoking work that raises important questions about language, history, prejudice, and reclamation.

The work, for which Curtis says "activism is the muse", combines physical, verbal, visual, and sonic language to tell five narratives and perspectives in a unique way. Inspired by present-day youth and their casual use of one of the most defamatory and racially-charged labels in our language, the n-word, a collective of artists and visual design experts came together in the creation of *Black Like Me* to enhance a central message—that the word itself cannot be transformed. Curtis questioned including the word itself in the title of her piece, but knew that her discomfort meant she had to. "It's supposed to make you uncomfortable—it makes me *hella* uncomfortable," she said in a 2017 interview. Though Curtis says she can't trace back to her first encounter with the n-word, she has experienced it in its many forms over the years—both thrown at her as a hateful and racist insult, and used as a positive term of endearment towards her by others in the Black community. "[It] has always been a word that loomed around me like a dark cloud, holding my black skin hostage."

"I first saw *Black Like Me* in a small, bare-bones arts space outside of Seattle," says Wendy Atkinson, Chan Centre Programming Manager and curator of the series. "In addition to dance, Jade wove historical video clips, music, and lighting to powerful effect. The group of us lucky enough to see that performance were mesmerized. She is a compelling performer with a provocative message that kept the audience talking and thinking long after the performance. Three years later, the content of *Black Like Me* is sadly even more relevant for the Black community and POC across our country. I believe Vancouver audiences will be both engaged and challenged by Jade's performance, which allows for continued conversations about privilege, power, and how we move forward."

Curtis created *Black Like Me*, her first evening-length work as an independent artist, following four seasons as a celebrated soloist at Donald Byrd's Spectrum Dance Theater where she was beloved by the local Seattle dance crowd. The piece also marked the launch of her nonprofit organization, Solo Magic, which was formed as a platform to connect activist-minded artists. Says *SeattleDances* of Curtis, "She is a riveting performer (as anyone who saw her when she was with Spectrum can attest), but in her own work, her terrific facility coalesced with her unique artist's voice to transfixing effect."

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In developing *Black Like Me*, Curtis worked closely with her partner and artistic collaborator Arif Gursel, founder of VibeHeavy Media Curation & Digital Design, as well as lighting and projected media designer Reed Nakayama, sound composer Barry Jones (aka DJ Topspin/Blendiana Jones), and Atlanta-based animation and media designer Daniel Barnes. "It was truly a collaborative process and I have never done anything like that before," says Curtis.

Jade Solomon Curtis is a dance artist and choreographer who integrates classical technique and African-American vernacular movements with mixed media and Hip Hop culture. Her work often ponders tradition and reinvention, social constructs, and social justice. She was a 2018 Artist Trust Fellow and a 2017 University of South Carolina Inaugural Visiting Fellow; received the 2017 Seattle Office of Arts & Culture CityArts Project Award, the 2017 4Culture Artist Project Award. She was a 2017 Velocity Dance Center artist-in-residence and a 2018 Base Experimental + Art artist-in-residence. In March 2019, Curtis was an artist-in-residence at SLIPPAGE Lab at Duke University.

About the Beyond Words Series

The Chan Centre's multidisciplinary Beyond Words series was launched in 2012 to explore the power of storytelling through performance as an agent of change and means of igniting conversation. Previous events have included sold-out engagements with avant-garde multimedia artist Laurie Anderson, as well as throat singer Tanya Tagaq and Greenlandic mask dancer Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory. Next in the Beyond Words series is Brendan McLeod's *Ridge* on March 26 2020, a vivid and kinetic ride through history and a visceral exploration of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

About the Chan Centre for Performing Arts at UBC (chancentre.com)

Since 1997, the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts has earned an international reputation for its striking design, stellar acoustics, and exceptional programming. Artists, critics, and patrons alike are unanimous in their praise of the facility, winning it a place among North America's top-rated performing arts spaces. Featuring three unique venues—the Chan Shun Concert Hall, the Telus Studio Theatre, and the Royal Bank Cinema—the Chan Centre is a vital part of UBC campus and community life where artistic and academic disciplines merge to inspire new perspectives on the world around us. Past performers and speakers include Wynton Marsalis, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Renée Fleming, Dan Savage, Yo-Yo Ma, Jane Goodall, Herbie Hancock, Lila Downs, and Anoushka Shankar.

LISTING INFORMATION

Chan Centre Presents *Black Like Me: An Exploration of the Word N*

Date:	November 20, 2019 at 7:30pm + November 21, 2019 at 12:30pm
Ticket Price:	\$35/\$27/\$15
Address:	Chan Centre for the Performing Arts University of British Columbia 6265 Crescent Road Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1
Box Office:	604-822-2697 / chancentre.com Open Tue–Sat, 12pm–5pm
Website:	chancentre.com
Link to Artist Photos:	chancentre.com/press-downloads/

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For further media information:

CLAIRE MOHUN | 604-822-1241
claire.mohun@ubc.ca
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts