



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Release Date:** 4/5/2022

**End Date:** 5/28/2022

## ***Sovereignty* highlights the complex past and precarious present of the Cherokee Nation**

**Olympia, WA** – April 5, 2022 – Coinciding with the passage of landmark [House Bill 1725](#) creating the first alert system for missing or murdered Indigenous women and people in Washington State, Harlequin Productions presents *Sovereignty* by Mary Kathryn Nagle, May 6 – May 28 at the State Theater. Esther Almazán (Yaqui/Yoeme Tribe) will direct.

*Sarah Ridge Polson, a young Cherokee lawyer, fights to restore her Nation's tribal jurisdiction while confronting the ever-present ghosts of her grandfathers. Stretching from 1830s Cherokee Nation (now present-day Georgia) through Andrew Jackson's Oval office, along the fateful Trail of Tears, to the Cherokee Nation in present-day Oklahoma – Sovereignty tells an epic tale of the powerful intersections of personal and political truths, bridging our country's distant past and imminent future.*

Featuring direction, set, costume and lighting design by Native artists as well as five Native actors, *Sovereignty* is a continuation of Harlequin's commitment to rethink and reframe, not only which stories are seen on its stage, but who is presenting those stories to audiences.

In her director's notes on the production, director Esther Almazán, who is from Tucson, writes:

My own Sonoran Desert home has its Saguaro sentinels guiding me back home, along with the promise of the soothing scent of the creosote bush. What then, was it like for the Cherokee to be tricked by treaties from the place they called home, moved by violence from their ancestral lands? How many sacred structures did they leave behind?

...I dedicate my work at Harlequin Productions to the brothers and sisters who were forced to walk that long trail, leaving behind everything that meant home and losing thousands of loved ones along the way. I honor the Steh-Chass people on whose ancestral land we stand to tell this tale and ask their blessings for our efforts.

Native rights lawyer and playwright Mary Kathryn Nagle, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, has written a dense script full of historical context. Of particular focus is the signing of the Treaty of New Echota (which became the legal basis for the forcible removal of the Cherokee known as the Trail of Tears) by Major Ridge and his son John Ridge, and the reverberations of that decision for the Ridge family today. The play moves constantly between the 1830s and the present; double-casting actors in roles in both time periods further highlights how strongly the past continues to shape those in the present day.

In a 2021 [New Yorker profile](#) and interview of Ms. Nagle, she says that one piece of her mission as a playwright is to humanize Native people, making it more difficult to stereotype and discriminate against them. As she told profiler Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, “Most people have never seen an authentic Native person portrayed onstage. The more we become humans that non-Natives have to interact with, the more difficult it becomes to justify a legal narrative that dehumanizes us.”

\*\*\*

## Production Information

**Mary Kathryn Nagle** (*Playwright*) is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and a partner at Pipestem Law, a firm specializing in tribal sovereignty of Native nations and peoples. The majority of her work in court involves fighting for the inherent right of Indian Nations to protect their women and children from domestic violence and sexual assault. She served as the first executive director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program from 2015 to 2019.

**Esther Almazán** (*Director*) is a Yaqui/Yoeme Theatre Artist from Tucson with an MFA in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University. Her scripts have been staged for The Institute of American Indian Arts, ASU's Mainstage, Write Now, El Ojito Springs, Spinning Dot Theatre, Cadenza Theatre, Pandora Festival, and Apron Strings Project. Her play, *Indian School*, received the Kennedy Center Latinx Playwright Award for Distinguished Achievement, the ariZoni Theatre Awards of Excellence, and was a semi-finalist for the Eugene O'Neill NPC. She has directed for Borderlands Theater, Something Something Theatre, Beowulf Alley Theatre, ASU TheatreLAB, SheWorXX, and Winding Road Theater Ensemble. She is a proud recipient of the Gammage Scholar Award.

**Tommer Peterson** (*Scenic Design*) is a Métis Nation independent theater artist and designer. He is currently at work on a new movement play, *City of Refuge* for ReAct Theatre, Seattle. Recent set design credits include *A Winter's Tale* (Seattle Shakespeare Company 2016), *The Other Place* (Seattle Public Theater, 2016) *The Birds* (Strawberry Theatre Workshop, 2016), *Love Song* (KTO Productions, 2016), *99 Ways to Fuck a Swan* (The Ensemble, 2015), *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (The Ensemble, 2013), *Highway 47* (American Records, 2013), *Three Sisters*, (Juniata College, 2012), *Mistakes Madeline Made* (Washington Ensemble Theater 2008), *Bobbie and Jerome*, *Dinah Was*, and *Obama, The Musical* (Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center, 2006, 2007, and 2009).

**Raphael Regan** (*Costume Design*) is a Sisseton-Wahpeton, Eastern Cherokee and Diné costume designer based in New York City. His credits include *The Heart Stays* (feature film), *Collective Noun* (Corkscrew Theatre Festival), *King Lear*, *Apartment 3A*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Race*, *Escape from Happiness* (Stella Adler), *Taiga in the Berkshires*, *In search of* (Williamstown Theatre Festival) *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Pippin*, and *9 to 5* (Highlands Playhouse). He received his MFA in Costume Design and Production from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music (CCM).

**Olivia Burlingame** (*Resident Lighting Designer*) is proud member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and has designed in Olympia for the last eight years. Some favorites include *Man of La Mancha*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Equivocation*, and *On the Verge*. Olivia graduated from Central Washington University with a BFA in Theater Design and Technology. She has also worked with

Tacoma Opera, Theater Artists Olympia, Olympia Family Theater, Tacoma Arts Live, SMU, SPSCC, and Seattle Children's Theater.

The nine-person cast features Native actors **Steve Wood**, **Josephine Keefe**, **Kenneth Ruthardt\***, **Lance Claymore** and **Esteban Bailon**, all making their Harlequin debuts. Also making their debuts are **Avery Clark\*** and **Erica McAdams**. Returning to Harlequin: **Jason Marr** (*Henry V, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*) and **Nathan Rice** (*A Christmas Carol, The Highest Tide*).

**WHAT:** Harlequin Productions presents *Sovereignty*, a historical drama about the Cherokee Nation's past and present by Mary Kathryn Nagle, featuring Native artists. Directed by Esther Almazán.

**WHEN:** May 6 – May 28, 2022

**WHERE:** State Theater, 202 4<sup>th</sup> Ave East, Olympia, WA 98501

**TICKETS:** Tickets are available online at [harlequinproductions.org](http://harlequinproductions.org), by phone at **360-786-0151**, or in person **12-5:30 pm, Tuesday-Saturday at the Washington Center**, and **beginning 2 hours before performances at the State Theater**.

General admission tickets are \$35

Senior 60+/Military \$32

Student/Youths Under 25 \$20

Rush Tickets (half-hour prior to showtime) General \$19; Senior/Military \$17, Student/Under 25 \$12.50; Teens/Under 20 \$5

**SPECIAL DATES FOR THE AUDIENCE:**

**Preview:** Thursday, May 5 at 7:30 pm

*Tickets to the Preview are \$20 General Admission*

**Opening Night:** Friday, May 6 at 7:30 pm

**Pay-What-You-Can:** Three performances TBA prior to opening

**CATEGORY:** Historical Drama

**AGE RECOMMENDATION:** 11 and over with guidance

**CAST:**

Steve Wood	<i>John Ridge</i>
Josephine Keefe	<i>Sara Ridge Polson</i>
Kenneth Ruthardt*	<i>Major Ridge/Roger Ridge Polson</i>
Lance Claymore	<i>Elias Boudinot/Watie</i>
Esteban Bailon	<i>John Ross/Jim Ross</i>
Avery Clark*	<i>Andrew Jackson/Ben</i>
Jason Marr	<i>Samuel Worcester/Mitch</i>
Erica McAdams	<i>Sarah Bird Northrup/Flora Ridge</i>
Nathan Rice	<i>White Chorus Man</i>

\* Indicates membership in the Actor's Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

*Harlequin Productions is a professional not-for-profit theater company in Olympia, WA. We seek to invigorate, educate, and empower our community and all people to feel more, think more, play more, and judge less through the mirror of real live theatre.*

**PR:** Helen Harvester, Marketing and Communications Director  
helen@harlequinproductions.org