



February 10, 2023

CPH is, and remains, committed to telling stories that matter and that reflect the diversity of our community. CPH commissioned *I'm Back Now: Returning to Cleveland* from Charly Evon Simpson, a gifted playwright who wrote a compelling story dealing with Cleveland and a spectrum of Black experiences going back to the Fugitive Slave Act. CPH hired a host of talented actors and designers to work with Stori Ayers, the show's director, in presenting this world premiere. This impactful story had been scheduled to open tonight, February 10.

Cleveland Play House acknowledges there were missteps in efforts to respond to a sexual assault that occurred to a CPH actor involved in rehearsals for *I'm Back Now: Returning to Cleveland*.

Out of respect for those affected by the assault, we have not publicly addressed the specifics of the incident. In light of recent reports, however, we would like to provide some context for the aspersions being circulated. Last month, an artist involved with *I'm Back Now* was forcibly kissed by a person not affiliated with CPH in an elevator of an apartment complex where CPH had housed its visiting artists for eleven years. After learning about this incident, CPH offered support, asking what the actor needed and whether the actor felt safe at the apartment complex. CPH offered to assist the actor in filing a police report, but the actor declined. CPH provided contact information for an employee assistance program. What CPH did not do, and should also have done, was to (1) immediately notify the director of the show, who was independently contracted by CPH, and (2) immediately move the victim to different housing.

When the show's director learned of the traumatic event and CPH's responses to it during a rehearsal about 48 hours after the incident, the director conveyed disappointment to CPH management. At this point CPH began to move the entire cast out of the apartment complex the following day. CPH also apologized and offered to hire different CPH personnel to coordinate with the show and to request a Board-level investigation. Numerous CPH Board members then participated in a lengthy audio-video call in which the play's director, playwright, and other artists described their concerns. The artists were asked what CPH could do. There were no responses to CPH's offers or requests for what else could be done at this point. Unfortunately, the show's rights were pulled by the playwright later that day.

This account of the events that took place does not undermine or diminish the trauma the actor experienced, nor the disruption to the personal and performing lives of the artists who had planned to be part of a meaningful world premiere. CPH acted swiftly based on the information and privacy concerns at the time, but those actions fell short. We acknowledged this at the time privately to the director and playwright, and now share that apology with everyone.

We have begun a process of reviewing our internal policies and procedures, based on the recommendations of an already-completed investigation conducted by an external human resources firm paid by CPH.

We are heartbroken that the community of artists involved with the production have felt let down and unsafe. We further recognize this week's dialogue has deeply impacted the CPH staff, Cleveland community, and other CPH artists nationally. This is a time for us to do better. To all those who have been impacted by these events, we wish to say that we are very sorry. We are committed to the process of healing, and will learn from this time in our journey forward.

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