



I'M BLACK WHEN I'M SINGING, I'M BLUE WHEN I AIN'T

by Sonia Sanchez
directed by Dawn Monique Williams

March 17-April 2, 2023
Third Rail at CoHo Theatre

produced in partnership with
Advance Gender Equity in the Arts: AGE
and World Stage Theatre

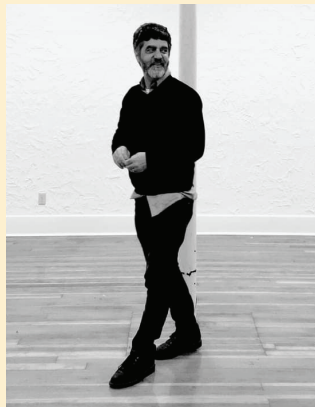


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Announcing The Cuomo Theatre Collaborative

For 26 years CoHo Theatre on NW Raleigh has been a vital resource for artists, and a reliable location for audiences. In 2019 the theatre was booked 51 out of 52 weeks. Prior to his death in November of 2021, Philip Cuomo (CoHo's then Producing Artistic Director) had been working towards the purchase of the CoHo Theatre Building, committed to its preservation as a center for performing arts in the community.



Inspired by Philip's vision and tireless work, three non-profit theatre companies with strong ties to Philip's work and vision – Third Rail Repertory Theatre, Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble (PETE), and CoHo Productions – formed the Cuomo Theatre Collaborative. Working closely with the Philip Cuomo Family Foundation, we are dedicated to preserving Philip's legacy.

Mission

The mission of the Cuomo Theatre Collaborative is to secure a sustainable home for the performing arts at 2257-2259 NW Raleigh Street that provides space, resources, and opportunities to artists and audiences. Through a model of collective leadership, artist empowerment, and affordable access, this space will reverse the gentrification narrative and integrate the arts as a necessary piece of community vitality in Portland's exploding Slabtown neighborhood.

Vision

Performance requires a place. A place to make, to practice, to gather, and to share a visceral experience. Smaller itinerant companies and independent artists are dependent on access to high quality, affordable performance, rehearsal, teaching, and office spaces. Over the last several years, venue after venue has closed or downsized. There is a scarcity crisis that limits opportunities. Covid has compounded the problem. There is no shortage of creative sparks lighting up Portland. They just need the right place to land, catch, and burn steady. The vision of the Cuomo Theatre Collaborative is to provide this place at 2257-2259 NW Raleigh Street.

For more information, or to find out how you can support the Cuomo Theatre Collaborative, email thecuomocollaborative@gmail.com, or reach out directly to Maureen at maureen@thirdrailrep.org.

THIRD RAIL REPERTORY THEATRE PRESENTS

I'M BLACK WHEN I'M SINGING, I'M BLUE WHEN I AIN'T

By: Sonia Sanchez

Directed by: Dawn Monique Williams

Produced in partnership with Advance Gender Equity
in the Arts: AGE and World Stage Theatre

CAST

Reena/Mama B/Toni Ithica Tell[^]
Malika/Chorus Kayla Kelly^{*}
Doctor/Catholic Matron/Chorus Shani Marie Harris-Bagwell
John/Chorus Janelle Rae[^]
Business Manager/Chorus Elijah Sims
Josephine/Chorus Jasmyn Tilford
Attendant/Sam/Mary/Chorus/Malika Understudy ... Amber Walker
Chorus Understudy Tessa May[^]
Reena/Mama B/Toni Understudy Shalanda Sims^{*}

CREATIVE TEAM

Director Dawn Monique Williams
Literary Manager/Dramaturg Pancho Savery
Production Cultural Consultant Shani Marie Harris-Bagwell
Stage Manager Kristina Mast^{*}
Assistant Stage Manager Hailee Foster^{^^}
Lighting Designer Jennifer Lin⁺
Costume Designer Lucy Wells
Assistant Costume Designer Alagia Felix
Scenic Designer Megan Wilkerson
Props Designer Laura Savage
Music Composer/Director Shalanda Sims
Sound Designer/Engineer/Assistant Composer Isaiah Sims
Associate Sound Designer Matthew Rowning
Assistant Composers Derrick McDuffey, Ithica Tell
Fight Choreographer/Intimacy Coordinator ... Kristen Mun-Van Noy[^]
Technical Director/Builder Brian Guerrero
Lead Electrician Dug Martell
COVID-19 Compliance Officer Adam Mun-Van Noy

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[^]Third Rail Open Space Company Member

*Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, [Producer], and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

I'M BLACK WHEN I'M SINGING, I'M BLUE WHEN I AIN'T will run approximately 70 minutes with no intermission.

'Female Heroes in the Land': Sonia Sanchez's *I'm Black When I'm Singing, I'm Blue When I Ain't*

One moment of significance in African American culture was achieved during the Harlem Renaissance (1919-1939). This moment, although brief, produced some of the greatest art of the 20th Century; not only the fiction and poetry of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, and Sterling Brown, but the music of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Paul Robeson; but also the visual art of Aaron Douglas, Augusta Savage, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, James Van Der Zee, and many others.

Although no one would challenge the greatness of this art, there were some limitations on it. As with the European Renaissance, many of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance had white patrons who financially supported them. Hughes and Hurston, who had the same patron, often complained about the limitations she tried to place on their work and research. In fact, one theory of why the Harlem Renaissance ended was because the stock market crash and the ensuing Depression closed down a source of cash white patrons had to give to Black artists. While I reject this theory of why and when the Renaissance ended, there is a question to be asked about did white patrons overly control Black artists, particularly in promoting "primitive" images of Blacks.

Another point of significance was the issue of audience and the purpose of the art. Alain Locke, in many ways the architect or godfather of the Renaissance had this to say in his 1925 essay "The New Negro": "Without pretense to their formal significance, Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia" (Nathan Huggins, *Voices From The Harlem Renaissance* 50). In this quote, Locke makes clear that the art had more than just an artistic purpose, but a political one as well. And as he makes clear later in the same essay, that political purpose had

two ends:

One is the consciousness of acting as the advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with Twentieth Century civilization; the other, the sense of a mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible. Harlem, as we shall see, is the center of both these movements; she is the home of the Negro's "Zionism." (Huggins 54-55)

Note that these ends had both an external and an internal aspect; on the one hand to act as the vanguard for Black nations entering the modern world, and on the other hand to rehabilitate the race in the eyes of the white world; a race considered inferior because of slavery. In light of these aims, how, then, do we judge the Harlem Renaissance's success. James Weldon Johnson perhaps put things most clearly in his 1922 "Preface to the First Edition" of *The Book of American Negro Poetry*:

A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior. (Huggins 281)

There are two possible responses to Johnson and Locke; either they are wrong about the effect of creating great art, or the art that was produced wasn't great. Given the lasting influence of the art listed above, there's no argument to be made that the art wasn't great. Is Johnson correct about the effect of great art in terms of other cultures? The answer would seem to be yes. What, then, makes the US

situation different? The obvious answer is that there was something else happening. And that something else was the long history of US racism. White people have been so invested in seeing Black people as inferior that not even the appearance of great art could change white views. And by “white views,” I mean white views in the US. All the artists mentioned above have been celebrated around the world. On the one hand, that suggests a certain degree of naivety on the part of Locke and Johnson; and on the other, it further argues that if we accept the goals as set out by Locke and Johnson, then we are forced to judge the Harlem Renaissance as a failure. Great art was, in fact, produced; but over the twenty-year period of the Renaissance, the material conditions of Black life did not significantly improve.

Perhaps the more realistic approach is that taken by Langston Hughes in his 1926 essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” where he concludes:

So I am ashamed for the black poet who says, “I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet”...We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too... If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. (Huggins 308-309)

The issue of audience is crucial here. To the extent that it failed, the Harlem Renaissance failed because it put all of its eggs in one basket, and that basket was its dependence on white approval in order to feel successful.

A little more than twenty years later saw the rise of the Black Arts Movement. Its fundamental difference from the Harlem Renaissance was its more militant attitude. A number of events caused this shift: the 1960 trip to Cuba undertaken by Amiri Baraka, Robert

Williams, and Harold Cruse, among others, to witness first-hand the success of the Cuban Revolution; the liberation from colonial rule of most African nations (17 alone in 1960); the 1960 trip to New York by Fidel when he ended up staying in Harlem at the Hotel Theresa and where he met Malcolm X; the failed US Bay of Pigs invasion to overthrow Fidel (1961) and the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis (1962); the attacks on the Freedom Riders (1961); Robert Williams's *Negroes with Guns* (1962), calling for armed self-defense; the 1963 assassination of Medgar Evers the same night as JFK's speech calling white resistance to civil rights “a moral disaster”; the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham killing Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Carole Robertson (childhood friend of Angela Davis), and that was the inspiration for John Coltrane's “Alabama” recorded 64 days later, four days before the assassination of JFK; the 1965 assassination of Malcolm; Stokely Carmichael's work for the Lowndes County of Alabama's Freedom Organization with its symbol of the black panther, which was later adopted by Huey Newton and Bobby Seal; and Carmichael's call for “Black Power” in 1966, among many, many events.

In some ways, one of the more symbolic moves occurred in 1965 when, after the death of Malcolm, Baraka physically moved from the Beat Generation's mecca of Greenwich Village to Harlem, the heart of the Black community. By then he had already published two of his masterpieces, 1963's *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, and the 1964 play *Dutchman*. These two texts, along with his 1964 essay “The Revolutionary Theatre,” made clear that this was literature no longer intended to impress, convince, or even speak to a white audience. Instead, Baraka's work, along with that of fellow theorist Larry Neal, was Black art intended for a Black audience, and designed to make clear the culture of white supremacy. As he said in his 1969 poem “Black Art,” “We want live/ words of the hip world live flesh &/coursing blood... We want “poems that kill.”/ Assassin poems, Poems

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that shoot /guns ... We want a Black poem. And a/ Black World./ Let the world be a Black Poem/ And Let All Black People Speak This Poem/Silently/or LOUD” (S O S: *Poems 1961-2013* 149-150). In “The Revolutionary Theatre,” he notes that “White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them... They will all die because of this” (Home 210-211). He also notes that “Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are victims if they are blood brothers” (213).

In championing these politics, Baraka also championed the politics of jazz, the jazz of the Bebop masters Charley Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and the “High Priest of Bop,” Thelonious Sphere Monk. This was music that was played fast or seemingly off-key so that it couldn’t be copied and watered-down by whites, which had happened during the Swing Era when Glenn Miller, the Dorsey Brothers, and others watered down the music of Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington to make it more palliative to whites. Later, Baraka was also a champion of avant-garde Black music, often referred to as “The New Thing” by musicians such as Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, and above all John Coltrane, whom Baraka refers to in *Black Music* as “the heaviest spirit” (5). One of Baraka’s most enduring essays, also in *Black Music*, is “Jazz and the White Critic, unfortunately still all too relevant, lamenting the fact that most critics writing about jazz are white (For a more contemporary take on this topic, check out Willard Jenkins’s *Ain’t But a Few of Us: Black Music Writers Tell Their Story*, 2022). The Black Arts Movement was about both control of the product and control over how the product was talked about. Black writers began publishing with newly-formed Black publishers; and for a time, unlike during the Renaissance, Black writers controlled the means of production.

For the Black Arts Movement, literature was a form of political action, the belief, in contrast to Auden’s assertion that “For poetry makes nothing happen” (“In Memory of W.B. Yeats”), that in fact, poems can be weapons in the culture war. Joined to the idea of literature as a form of action was the use of vernacular forms of language, the actual sound of a scream, for instance, in Haki Madhubuti’s “Don’t Cry, Scream,” or the screams from Coltrane’s horn. Another characteristic of the work is its communal nature. Identity is more of a group thing than an isolated individual thing. Not coincidentally, the day after Malcom’s assassination, Baraka called for the establishment of BARTS, the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School to consciously join art and politics as the communal path to a sense of Black identity. This was Black literature, written by Black people, written for Black people, and often published by Black people. And so at least theoretically, these artists did not have to deal with the “white gaze” in the way that Harlem Renaissance artists had to, nor did the work attempt to, or even care about, pleasing a white audience, or feeling it had to prove anything to a white audience.

The Black Arts Movement has produced a surprising number of major women writers, including Mari Evans, Adrienne Kennedy, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Jayne Cortez, Toni Cade Bambara, Carolyn Rogers, and Nikki Giovanni. Perhaps the shining light of them all is Sonia Sanchez. Sanchez is primarily known for her work in two realms, poetry and education. She has published numerous volumes of poetry with such provocative titles as *We a BaddDDD People* (1970), *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women* (1974), *Homegirls and Handgrenades* (1985), and *Shake Loose My Skin* (1999), as well as the anthologies *We Be Word Sorcerers* (1973), and *Three Hundred Sixty Degrees of Blackness Coming at You* (1971). In 2021, her *Collected Poems* is published by Beacon Press in Boston. For decades, Sanchez taught at Temple University in Philadelphia; and prior to that, she was involved in the movement that resulted in the

establishment of Black Studies at San Francisco State in the late '60s.

Sanchez's poetic work encompasses many forms, from straight narratives about the politics and reality of Black life, to poems about drug addiction, to hundreds of love poems, to poems about Black rhetoric using Black rhetoric. The beginning of "blk/ rhetoric" is a fine example:

who's gonna make all
 that beautiful blk / rhetoric
 mean something.

like

i mean

who's gonna take

the words

blk / is / beautiful

and make more of it
 than blk / capitalism.

u dig?
 (Collected Poems 27)

Among other things, notice the vernacular spelling of "black" ("blk"), the use of the slash between "blk" and "rhetoric" that causes you to pause, the vernacular language use of "like/i mean," the absence of capital letters, the inconsistent line lengths and spacing, the use of "u" for "you," and the political message that "blk / is beautiful" is not the equivalent of "blk / capitalism." Notice also that the use of "you," in whatever form, clearly implies an audience, and that that audience is clearly Black.

Later in her career, Sanchez often turns to haiku to express herself. Sometimes she sticks to the traditional Japanese form consisting of three lines in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern, and sometimes not. It is interesting to note that the change in form doesn't change the overall intention. In *Morning Haiku*, there are "10 haiku" for Bebop drummer Max Roach, former husband of Abbey Lincoln, "14 haiku" for Emmett Louis Till, "21 haiku" for Odetta, four more for Max Roach,

as well as "5 haiku" for Sarah Vaughan, and poems for both Tupac and Ella Fitzgerald. As with Baraka and others of the Black Arts Movement, music once again functions as the grounding of Black philosophy. Here are the first two haiku for Roach:

Nothing ends
 every blade of grass
 remembering your sound

your sounds exploding
 in the universe return
 to earth in prayer.

(Collected Poems 365)

And here are the first two for Till:

Your limbs buried
 in northern muscle carry
 their own heartbeat

Mississippi...
 alert with
 conjugated pain.

(Collected Poems 369)

The point here is that despite using different forms, music and politics have continued to be among the dominant themes in Sanchez's work. And here, I need to say something about the significance of music. Simply put, for African Americans, Black music in all its forms, from work songs, to the spirituals, to the blues, to gospel, to jazz, to r&b, to hip hop has charted our journey in this country. Music for Black folks is the key to our souls, to riff on W.E.B. Du Bois. Music is our politics, our religion, our philosophy, our art, our literature, and our medicine and healing power all rolled into one. As the map of our culture, it is always about more than entertainment.

Many people have been surprised to learn that in addition to her prolific work as a poet, her *Collected Poems* tips the scale at 403 pages, Sanchez is also a

significant playwright. Her first play, *The Bronx is Next* is published in 1968; and the present text, *I'm Black When I'm Singing, I'm Blue When I Ain't* is from 1982. The title alone stresses the importance of Black music. I am most myself, I am most Black, when I am directly involved with music. And when I'm not, I've got the blues. In recent years, in light of the deaths by police of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tyre Nichols, and so many others, there has been an interesting debate in the Black world about what kinds of Black images should be on stage. Should we continue to portray Black trauma, "victims" to use Baraka's word, if even though true, also acts as a kind of pornography for white audiences and may suggest that trauma and victimhood are all there is about Black life, or should we turn the tables and primarily present images of Black joy? In my personal experience, there seems to be somewhat of a generational gap; that the older one is, the more likely one comes down on the side of continuing to show Black trauma as a slap-in-the-face or wake-up call to whites and a reminder that we are still here no matter what you have done to try to erase us, whereas younger Black artists tend to be more in the camp of "I'm tired of playing those roles and I want to see Black joy portrayed."

Sanchez's *I'm Black When I'm Singing, I'm Blue When I Ain't*, even though written way back in 1982, presents the perfect way of dealing with this seeming dilemma

by playing both sides at once. On the one hand, the main character, Reena, is locked up in a mental facility, and is clearly suffering from some form of multiple personality disorder. Her "reason" for being locked up is that she is the victim of "institutional shit" (100), which she is literally forced to eat. This is clearly a form of "political disease" rather than some form of pathology. She has three "alters" who take the form of the Black women singers Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Abbey Lincoln. Although two of these alters are not identified, there are enough internal clues to identify them. The main character, Reena, is based on Nina Simone. Simone grows up in North Carolina, is a child prodigy as a classical pianist, attends Julliard, but is rejected when she applies for a scholarship at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Reena tells us that she "came from Philadelphia," and that she was a "musical genius" (101). It is subtleties like this that allow us to identify whom the characters are based on. Another example is that she announces, "I'm Reena, the Long Black Lady of Soul" (118), an allusion to Nina Simone's jazz sobriquet "The High Priestess of Soul," and she also asks, "Who else can tell you about...Mississippi and Alabama" (121), an allusion to Simone's most famous song, "Mississippi Goddam," her response to the deaths of Medgar Evers and the four girls from the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham. But this is not just a contemporary story. Reena also tells us, in conjunction with Simone's being "the high priestess," that "I am 3,000 years old.

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I used to reside in the temples in Egypt and I wrote and sang the rites for funerals” (103). While Reena is clearly based on Nina Simone, it is also clear that she is speaking from a long tradition of Black history, going back to the Egyptians. The Egyptians, after all, despite people’s attempts to deny it were, and still are, Africans.

The first of Reena’s alters is Mama B. Mama B is clearly based on Bessie Smith (1894-1937), known as the “Empress of the Blues.” One important thing to note here is the fact that despite being incarcerated in a mental facility, and therefore presumably powerless, Reena makes clear on the topic of the alters that “They can’t appear unless I will it. I’m the strongest of all of them” (105). It is clear that Mama B is based on Bessie Smith because of her singing style, because of her mentioning that she owns her “own railroad car,” and because she is born in Chattanooga. There is also the mention of Mamie Smith (1891-1946) as a predecessor, whose first recording is in 1920, and there is mention of Gertrude “Ma” Rainey (1886-1939), whose first recording is in 1923, the same year as Bessie Smith’s first recording. Most clearly, there is an allusion to Smith’s death. The story that has been told is that she died in 1937 after a car accident and was refused service at a white hospital (a story repeated in Edward Albee’s 1959 play *The Death of Bessie Smith*). That story has by now been disproven, but the essential point has been made that the character is based on Smith.

The second alter, Toni, is based on Billie Holiday; like Holiday, Toni is sent away to a Catholic reform school; and like Holiday, Toni talks about her time cleaning others’ homes and washing steps. She also tells a story of getting a gig at a club that is duplicated in the 1972 film *Lady Sings the Blues* with Diana Ross as Holiday,

and Richard Pryor as “Piano Man.” Later, the chorus asks if she is “Maybe a well/known lady,” an allusion to her nickname “Lady Day,” given to her by tenor saxophone giant Lester Young; and in talking about a place for her to sing says, Let’s try that society way downtown” (115), an allusion to the Café Society Club where Holiday first performed “Strange Fruit,” written by Abel Meeropol, later the adopted father of the children of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. One of the songs Toni sings has a line, “hang our daddies from the highest tree” (117), a clear allusion to “Strange Fruit,” and there are references to heroin, Holiday’s dog, and one of Holiday’s signature tunes, “Fine and Mellow” (116).

The final alter is Malika, whose song we are specifically told is “a la Abbey Lincoln.” Of the four women, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, and Abbey Lincoln, Lincoln lives the longest, until 2010, and so it is appropriate that she is the final version, and tells Reena that she just “wants to continue you in a newer form” (121), that “I will rethread your tongue with silken words” (122), and that “I will rock you in Blackness so you will grow to love yourself” (122).

The play concludes with Malika’s song, in which she says, “We’ve got to change the sound of our kin/From Fear, Silence, Screams in the nite to/ Oooh-oooh-ay-ay-yee-ya-ya...” (125). This perfectly encapsulates how Sanchez solves the Black pain/Black joy dichotomy. Reena is mad, driven there by the institutional shit of white society; and she not only survives, but she survives through the power and the joy of Black music; Black music as part of a community of strong Black women; women who are able to combat the negativity and move from blue to Black. And that’s just what the doctor ordered.

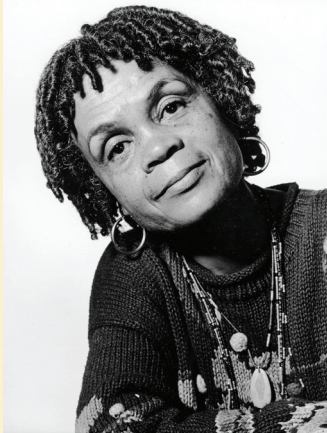


DAWN MONIQUE WILLIAMS (she/her) (Director) is the Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre Company in Berkeley, CA.

Her recent directing credits include an audio version of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* adapted by Lydia R. Diamond (Aurora), Lauren Gunderson's *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* (TheatreSquared), *Letters to Kamala* (American Stage

Company), *Bull in a China Shop* (Aurora), *Earthrise* (Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Moon Man Walk*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (American Conservatory Theatre, MFA program), an audio version of Lynn Nottage's *Las Meninas*, *The Secretaries* (Profile Theatre), *Romeo & Juliet* (Chautauqua Theatre), August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (Le Petit and UNCO),

Lynn Nottage's *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Douglas Morrisson and UNCO), and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Town Hall). Dawn's awards include a Princess Grace Theatre Fellowship, a TCG Leadership U Residency Grant, and a Drama League Directing Fellowship. She holds an MA in Dramatic Literature and an MFA in Directing. Dawn is a proud member of SDC.



SONIA SANCHEZ (she/her) (Playwright)

Poet. Mother. Professor. National and international lecturer on Black culture and literature, women's liberation, peace and racial Justice. Sponsor of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Board Member of MADRE. Sonia Sanchez is the author of over 16 books of poetry including *Homecoming*, *We a BaddDDD People*, *Love Poems*, *I've Been a Woman*, *A Sound Investment and Other Stories*, *Homegirls and Handgrenades*, *Under a Soprano Sky*, *Wounded in the House of a Friend*, *Does Your House Have Lions?*, *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums*, *Shake Loose My Skin*, and *Morning Haiku*. A volume of her *Collected Poems* was published in 2021. Her plays include *Black Cats and Uneasy Landings*, *I'm Black When I'm Singing*, *I'm Blue When I Ain't*, *The Bronx is Next*, *Sista Son/Ji*, *Uh Huh*, *But How Do It Free Us?* and *Malcolm Man/Don't Live Here No More*. In addition to

being a contributing editor to *Black Scholar* and *The Journal of African Studies*, she has edited an anthology, *We Be Word Sorcerers: 25 Stories by Black Americans*. *BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review* is the first African American Journal that discusses the work of Sonia Sanchez and the Black Arts Movement. Sonia is a recipient of numerous awards including the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Award, Lucretia Mott Award, Outstanding Arts Award from the Pennsylvania Coalition of 100 Black Women, Community Service Award from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, American Book Award, Governor's Award for Excellence in the Humanities, Peace and Freedom Award from Women International League for Peace and Freedom (W.I.L.P.F.), PEW Fellowship in the Arts, Langston Hughes Poetry Award, Harper Lee Award, Alabama Distinguished Writer Award, National Visionary Leadership Award, Leeway Foundation Transformational Award, Robert Creeley Award, Poetry Society of America's Robert Frost Medal, Ford Freedom Scholar award from the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Anisfield-Wolf Lifetime Achievement award, Gish Prize, Edward MacDowell Medal, and Jackson Poetry Prize. Sonia Sanchez has lectured at over 500 universities and colleges in the United States and has traveled extensively, reading her poetry in Africa, Cuba, England, the Caribbean, Australia, Europe, Nicaragua, the People's Republic of China, Norway, and Canada. She was the first Presidential Fellow at Temple University and she held the Laura Carnell Chair in English at Temple University.

CAST & CREW



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Toni, Assistant
Composer) is a
proud company
member of Third

Rail Repertory Theatre and is delighted to return to Portland for this amazing show. Ithica is a classically trained actor, singer and voice artist. She made her Atlanta debut as Miss Andrew in *Mary Poppins* (Aurora Theatre). Her vast resume includes Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Yitzhak in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Mazeppa in *Gypsy*, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Othello in *Othello*. Her television appearances include *Grimm*, *The Librarians*, *The Benefits of Gusbandry*, and *Life After First Failure*. Film credits include critically-acclaimed *The Last Champion* and *Losing Addison*. Ithica is lead singer of the band Tell Short Gray and is featured on the album *Northeast Pacific*. <https://www.ithicatell.com>



KAYLA KELLY
(she/her) (Malika/
Chorus) is excited
and grateful to
be working with
and making her
debut with Third

Rail Repertory Theatre. Kayla is from Houston, TX, and holds a Bachelor of Arts from SFASU. After graduating from college, she joined the Portland Playhouse apprenticeship program. Maybe you have or haven't seen her in:

A Book Club Play (Clackamas Rep), *JAWS / Teen Playwright Festival*, *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Portland Center Stage), *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (Company of Fools), *Peter/Wendy* (Bag&Baggage). She enjoys teaching, dabbling in stand-up comedy, writing, and finding creation in everyday life. Thank you to everyone who has made this production possible. Representation truly matters!



SHANI MARIE HARRIS-BAGWELL (she/they/queen)
(Doctor/Catholic Matron/Chorus, Production Cultural

Consultant) holds a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance with an emphasis in Contemporary Commercial Music. She has performed throughout the United States and internationally. Locally she has worked with PassinArt Theater, Original Practice Shakespeare, Portland Actors Ensemble, Shaking the Tree, and Fuse Theatre. This is her first show since Covid began and she is excited to be working with Third Rail! She could not be more humbled by this phenomenal cast.



JANELLE RAE
(they/them)
(John/Chorus)
graduated from Western Oregon University(2017) receiving a Bachelor

of Fine Arts in Acting and a minor in American Sign Language. Rae's over- and underlying passion is storytelling with the purpose of human connection and acknowledgement. Noteworthy performances on stage by Rae include roles in *The Legend of Rock Paper Scissors* (Oregon Children's Theatre); *Jane Doe in Wonderland* (Game Over); *Hamlet* (Valley Shakespeare Company) and most recently *Ronald Reagan Murdered My Mentors* (FUSE Theatre). When Rae is not on the stage they are busy with a 9 to 5, making music or materializing an assortment of crafts with as many strange trinkets they can get their hands on. As a Black, trans, nonbinary artist, Rae strives to make space for any and every kind of person they may encounter with the desire to understand and empathize.



ELIJAH SIMS (he/him) (Business Manager/Chorus) is a Portland native. He started performing at age three and landed

his first major role at age six as Lil Coalhouse in the Broadway tour of *Ragtime*. He performed a variety of roles throughout high school, earning him the designation of "best actor" by his peers. He has most recently worked at World Stage Theatre, Trifles, defunkt theatre, as well as a recent commercial.



JASMYN TILFORD (she/her)
(Josephine/Chorus)
is a multidisciplinary
artist and graduate
of Howard
University's

Department of Theatre. You may have seen her on the Portland Playhouse stage as Mrs. Dinwiddie/Ensemble in *Bella: An American Tall Tale*, and Dick Wilkins and Edna in *A Christmas Carol*. She is currently a company member of Rejoice! Diaspora Dance Theatre. Jasmyn is grateful and full of joy to be a part of this storytelling. The telling of black stories is vital and important, and she is honored to be giving homage to the lives of those that came before her. She thanks her friends and family for their continued support and love towards her career, passions and artistry. And she thanks this marvelous cast, crew and creative team for this lovely experience. "It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it."
-Lena Horne



AMBER WALKER (she/her)
(Attendant/Sam/
Mary/Chorus/
Malika Understudy)
is an actress and
writer currently

based in Seattle and is thrilled to perform in her first Portland show with Third Rail Rep. She received her MFA from the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington in 2022. Most recently, she was seen as

PW (Playwright) in a new works adaptation of *Our Town* called *Not Our Town*, in which the audience could vote on what kind of scenes they wanted to see each night. Other favorite credits include *Twelfth Night* (Viola) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Cecily). When not performing, she can be found reading or writing another cozy fantasy story or working on her aerial skills. (Insta: amberwalks)



TESSA MAY (she/her) (Chorus Understudy) holds a Certificate in The Studio Conservatory (Acting for Stage,

Film & TV) from the American Musical and Dramatics Academy - NYC. Tessa recently played Sophie in Third Rail's production of *Blink*. You may have seen Ms. May in *Troy USA* (as Cassandra) with Bag&Baggage, on tour with The Oregon Children's Theater in *The Adventures of the Tartar Patrol* (as Alex) and in *Superhero Old Folks' Home* (as BabyGirl). Other companies Tessa has worked for include Acting for Kids and Teens and Fertile Ground Film Festival. Tessa loves to teach dance and mentor in her community. Tessa wants to thank her family, friends and fans for all their support! Enjoy!

PANCHO SAVERY (he/him) (Literary Manager/Dramaturg) is a professor of English, Humanities, and American Studies at Reed College, where he teaches courses in American literature post-1850,

African American literature, and modern and contemporary American and European drama. He has given theatre talks at CoHo Theatre, Profile Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Artists Rep, and Portland Playhouse; directed Delve Reading Seminars through Literary Arts in Portland; and has published essays on Robert Creeley, Ezra Pound, Saunders Redding, Ralph Ellison, Cecil Brown, Tennessee Williams, James Baldwin, Robert Farris Thompson, Albert Murray, and others. He serves as Third Rail's Literary Manager and on Third Rail's Board of Directors.

KRISTINA MAST (she/her) (Stage Manager) is a stage manager from Corvallis, Oregon. Select Third Rail stage management credits: *Melancholy Play*, *Arlington [a love story]*, *Kiss, John, Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.*, and *Men on Boats*. She has also worked with CoHo Theatre, Portland Playhouse, PETE, Portland Center Stage, and Clackamas Repertory Theater. She is a company member and resident stage manager for PETE.

HAILEE FOSTER (she/her) (Assistant Stage Manager) has worked on numerous productions as an actress, stage manager, technical coordinator, and production manager. Her list of productions includes: *Oklahoma* (2018), *Steel Magnolias* (2019), and *Legally Blonde the Musical* (2019) at Theatre In The Grove; *Fox on the Fairway* (2021) and *Crimes of the Heart* (2021) at Hillsboro Artists' Regional Theatre; the

CAST & CREW

Bay Area Playwrights Festival Production Coordinator Intern at the Playwrights Foundation (2020); the Company Management Assistant at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2021); and Leading Ladies (2022) at Lakewood Center for the Arts. Hailee is a cohort member of Artists Rep's Pathway Mentorship Program and is Third Rail's new Assistant Production Manager. She hopes to travel to Ireland and Scotland within the next year.

JENNIFER LIN (she/her) (Lighting Designer) is a freelance lighting designer, stage technician, and theater maker who has been working behind the scenes for Portland theater, opera and dance since 2008. Her lighting designs have spanned a wide range of venues, disciplines and styles; from site-specific dance to children's theatre. She is a proud Core Company Member of Third Rail Repertory Theatre, who continue to provide her with fresh challenges and some of her favorite theatrical memories.

LUCY WELLS (she/her) (Costume Designer) is a Portland-based theatrical costume designer. Lucy is originally from Jackson, Mississippi and holds a B.F.A. from the University of Southern Mississippi. Lucy has spent almost 10 years of her career working freelance as a costume designer, costume stitcher, and wardrobe supervisor at such theaters as Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Berkshire Theatre Group in

Massachusetts, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, The Rev Theatre in upstate New York, and Shakespeare & Company in Massachusetts. Lucy is currently the costume shop supervisor/costume designer at Portland Center Stage. Lucy is thankful to be a part of collaborative processes in the Portland area and even more thankful to work in theatre that centers Black voices and stories. This play has activated a special place in Lucy where she was able to reach into her Black southern lineage to find inspiration for the costumes. Lucy is a member of IATSE local 154.

ALAGIA FELIX (she/her) (Assistant Costume Designer) hails from Brooklyn, New York. Alagia's theater career began in academics and has flourished in community based theaters. After graduating cum laude from SUNY Oswego with a BA in Theater (Acting/Directing Track), she has bounced around theaters fulfilling roles as actress, director, stage manager, and African American Hair Designer for varying companies for shows such as *Annie Get Your Gun*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Grease*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*, *Sibling Rivalry*, *The Contract*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Gem of the Ocean* and many others. Alagia practices theater as an ancestral duty of storytelling. She plans to further this transformative art into master study of Drama Therapy specifically for the African Diaspora and underserved communities of color. Community

outreach with a strong focus on youth development and engagement is her passion.

MEGAN WILKERSON (she/her) (Scenic Designer) is a Resident Artist at Artists Repertory Theatre and has been designing in Portland since 2012. She was a recipient of Chicago's After Dark Award for Outstanding Scenic Design and her design work has been recognized by the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Oregonian*, *The Austin Critics Circle*, and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Regionally Megan has worked with The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Skylight Opera, First Stage Children's Theatre, The Michigan Opera, and the Pittsburgh Public Theatre. Recent projects of note include *The Hombres* for Artists Repertory Theatre and *Tiny Beautiful Things* for Portland Center Stage. Megan is a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829.

LAURA SAVAGE (she/her) (Props Designer) is a set dresser and prop maker from the UK. She trained in theatre design but has worked across many industries including film, TV, animation and live performance, creating environments and props to bring stories to life. She was a Props Dresser on films such as *The Imitation Game* and *Ex Machina*, and has worked for Aardman Animations, on productions such as *Shaun the Sheep* and *The Pirates!*. She came to Portland first to work for Laika Studios as a Set

Dresser, then most recently for Shadow Machine on the award winning movie *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*. She has also worked as prop designer for Artists Repertory Theatre on productions such as *1984* among others, and was associate production designer for Mala at CoHo Theatre.

SHALANDA SIMS (she/her) (Music Composer/Director, Reena/Mama B/Toni Understudy) is a happy wife, proud mother, diligent advocate, bridge-builder, and Portland native. She is a performing artist, writer, teacher, mentor, and innovator. A member of the Actors' Equity Association, and the American Guild of Musical Artists, Shalanda has performed with Portland Opera, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage, and the Oregon Symphony. Shalanda majored in Theatre at the University of Portland, and English at Portland State University, is the author of *Night Rhythms*; *The Hooded Quilt Series*, a member of the Dramatist Guild, and has written several plays

including *Vanport (the Musical)* and *Redefining Alberta*. Some of her film and television credits include *The Hunted* (Paramount), *Extraordinary Measures* (CBS Films), *Secrets of Successful Dating* (Otter Creek), and *Faith* (Camp Productions). Shalanda teaches theater and writing for youth and adults, is the founder and director of World Stage Theatre, Black History Festival NW, a lifelong learner, loves spending time with family and close friends, exploring the world, and meeting new people.

ISAIAH SIMS (he/him) (Sound Designer/Engineer/Assistant Composer) is a music producer, audio engineer and lover of manipulating sound. He has worked as an artistic teacher and sound designer, and is skilled in audio post production, media production, studio recording and youth development.

KRISTEN MUN-VAN NOY (she/her) (Fight Choreographer/Intimacy Coordinator) was born and raised on the island of Oahu.

She has been working as a fight choreographer and teacher in the city of Portland, OR for the past 10 years. She owes her training to Dueling Arts International and her time as assistant fight choreographer at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (09-10) with resident Fight Director U. Jonathan Toppo. She has received multiple awards for Best Fight Choreography, most recently *Tender Napalm* (2018) and *Girl in the Red Corner* (2019). When she is not a fight choreographer Kristen is a proud AEA stage manager and Racial Justice facilitator.

BRIAN GUERRERO (he/him) (Technical Director/Builder) was previously honored to serve as the Assistant Director on the Third Rail production of *Or.* In addition to building sets, Brian keeps busy as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Portland and George Fox University. When not working, Brian spends time with his wife, Eve, and his triplets - Hector, Rosie and Ella.

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The list reflects donations received between July 1, 2021 - February 21, 2023. We strive to keep this list up to date and accurate. Please contact development@thirdrailrep.org if there are any corrections or additions. Thank you for your support.

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ABOUT THIRD RAIL REPERTORY THEATRE

Third Rail Repertory Theatre acknowledges that we live and work on the stolen ancestral lands of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other Tribes who made their homes, and continue to make their homes, along the Willamette and Columbia rivers. We acknowledge that the seizure of these lands was by forced and armed removal of these Indigenous communities. Portland's urban Native community is descended from more than 380 tribes, and there are nine sovereign Native American nations located throughout Oregon.

We acknowledge that Third Rail's administrative offices in the Alberta Abbey reside in a building that was historically a religious and community gathering place in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and that the Black community members of the Albina district have been displaced through decades of systemic racism. It is important to note that this displacement contributes to community violence.

We acknowledge that these words are meaningless without action to address the injustices in our community, and we hold ourselves accountable to act in service of dismantling the systems that feed racism and anti-Blackness.

Thank you for making Third Rail your home for outstanding theatre!

The mission of Third Rail Repertory Theatre is to provide a dynamic artistic home for theatre audiences in Portland, foster a professional local company, and bring to life exceptional stories that provoke dialogue, encourage empathy, and inspire curiosity.

Third Rail Repertory Theatre is a Member of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre.

Third Rail Repertory Theatre receives support from the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the State of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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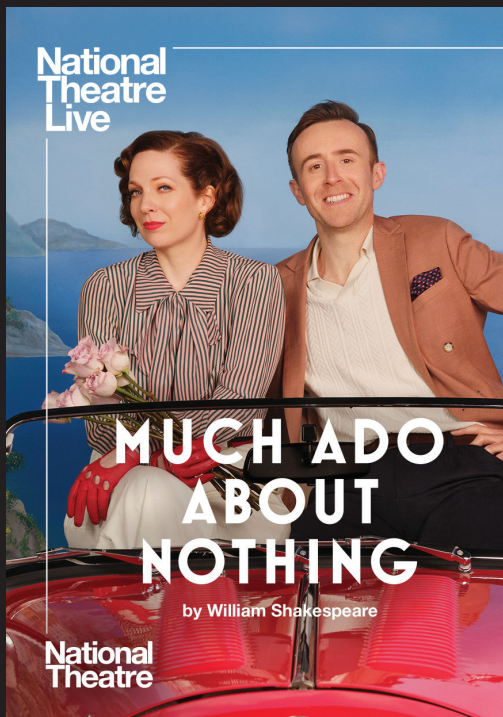
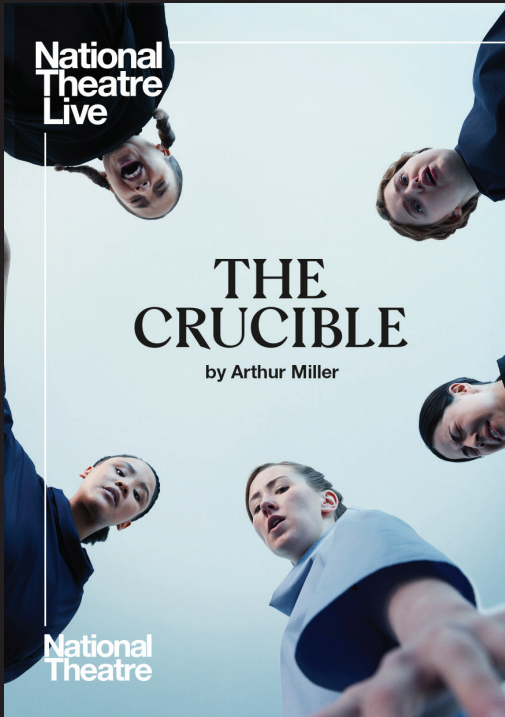
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