

A WORLD PREMIERE VIRTUAL FESTIVAL

KICKBACK

A partnership with **REBUILD FOUNDATION** Conceived & Directed by **MIKAEL BURKE**



ABOUT
FACE
THEATRE

DEC 12 2020 - **JAN 12** 2021
Streaming at **ABOUTFACETHEATRE.COM**



**ABOUT
FACE**
THEATRE

ABOUT FACE THEATRE creates exceptional, innovative, and adventurous theatre and educational programming that advances the national dialogue on sexual and gender identity, and challenges and entertains audiences in Chicago and beyond.

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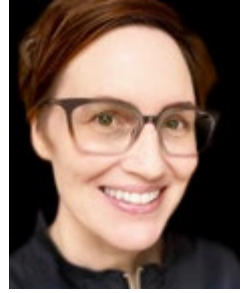
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FROM ABOUT FACE THEATRE'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Thank you for joining us to launch About Face Theatre's 25th season!

Since our founding, About Face productions have lit up different theatres, school auditoriums, art museums, and park district buildings in neighborhoods throughout Chicago. We started dreaming up a site specific production within the gorgeous architecture of the Stony Island Arts Bank nearly two years ago. This remarkable genre-expanding digital project would not be possible without the generous partnership from the people at Rebuild Foundation and the Illinois Humanities.

Identity is complex and so much of queer history and the history of Black culture remains hidden away or undocumented. One of the many gifts of this festival format is the way each individual piece activates the archives through a range of offerings, methods, moments, and stories that claim space and celebrate Black lives.

The team on this project has really taken it to the next level. Working from home and expanding collaborative possibilities, they signed on during the unbelievable Summer of 2020 to manifest *KICKBACK* with the visionary Mikael Burke who provided the guiding hand and brought it all together. Thanks for joining us, we're excited that you're here.

On behalf of the AFT staff and Board, welcome to *KICKBACK*.


Megan Carney
About Face Artistic Director

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF *KICKBACK*



"History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history." -James Baldwin

The seed of *KICKBACK* was simply a desire for joy, a yearning for Black stories above and beyond the trauma so regularly paraded across Chicago stages. But when the pandemic disrupted our lives, something shifted. That desire for joy did not go away, it only become more apparent.

With so much uncertainty in the world, I sought out joy wherever I could find it, and I realized I most often found it in the form of my past. I found comfort and safety in the things, places, and people I knew well, and there was something truly heartening about remembering that humanity is no stranger to times like these. So as 2020 continued on to become the year none of us will ever forget, this need for past and history to give way to joy became the real heart of the *KICKBACK* process.

This project is all about looking backward to find new ways forward. We have a great opportunity to revisit our histories and learn from them. We look back and appreciate where we came from as we celebrate where we are now and grapple with how far we still have to go. Each of us carries a history and vision as unique as ourselves. This series celebrates that by inviting artists to develop new works for our present moment, inspired by our past and looking toward our future. A celebration. Joy as resistance. We are living through history right now. What will we make of it?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mikael Burke'.

Mikael Burke
About Face Associate Artistic Director
KICKBACK Director



Watch the *KICKBACK* introduction video and all of the performances at aboutfacetheatre.com/kickback

Click or tap any image with the play icon to be taken to that video in your browser.

ABOUT FACE THEATRE
presents

KICKBACK

A Partnership with
REBUILD FOUNDATION

Conceived & Directed by
MIKAEL BURKE

Production Stage Manager **LOGAN BOYD JONES***
Production Assistant **NATHANIEL THOMAS**
Video Post Production **TIMMY SAMUEL, STARBELLY STUDIOS**

COMMISSIONED ARTISTS

**DIONNE ADDAI
KIRSTEN BAITY
ZAHRA GLENDA BAKER
ROBERT CORNELIUS*
JENN FREEMAN
KEYONNA JACKSON
BEN F. LOCKE**

**SHANTA NURULLAH
PAUL OAKLEY STOVALL*
MICHAEL TURRENTINE
CORI WASH
VIC WYNTER
AVERY R. YOUNG**

COLLABORATING ARTISTS

**IREASHIA M. BENNETT
VICTORIA BOATENG
ANDREW COLEMAN
DARIEN
ANNA DAUZVARDIS
JIREH L DRAKE
OMAR DYETTE
ALEXA GRÆ
KENYA ANN HALL
TINA M HOWELL**

**TRACIE KUNZIKA
CRYSTAL TINA JACKSON
RENÉE LOCKETT
MORGAN McNAUGHT
JOHN NELSON
SARAH PATIN
SHARIBA RIVERS
DARLING SHEAR
NICOLE WADDINGTON
SHANĀ I YOUNG**

* Member of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers



ABOUT REBUILD FOUNDATION

Rebuild Foundation is a platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation. Our projects support artists and strengthen communities by providing free arts programming and creating new cultural amenities. Rebuild's mission is to make art accessible by demonstrating the impact of innovative, ambitious, and entrepreneurial arts and cultural initiatives. The work is informed by three core values: black people matter, black spaces matter, and black things matter. Rebuild leverages the power and potential of communities, buildings, and objects that others have written off. Founded and led by artist Theaster Gates, Rebuild Foundation extends the social engagement of Gates' studio practice to the South Side of Chicago and beyond.

The Stony Island Arts Bank is a hybrid gallery, media archive, library, and art center in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. Designed by William Gibbons Uffendell and built in 1923, the bank at 68th Street and Stony Island Avenue was once a vibrant community savings and loan bank. By the eighties, the branch had closed, and the building remained vacant and deteriorating for decades. Reopened and radically restored in October 2015 by artist Theaster Gates, the building now serves as a space for creatives and neighborhood residents to preserve, access, reimagine and share their heritage – and a destination for artists, scholars, curators, and collectors to research and engage with world-class art and South Side history.

The Arts Bank houses four major collections:

- the Johnson Publishing Archive, a collection of more than 15,000 books, periodicals, furnishings and ephemera donated by the Johnson Publishing Company, publisher of the seminal *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines;
- the University of Chicago Glass Lantern Slides, over 60,000 slides of art and architectural history from the Paleolithic to Modern eras;
- the Edward J. Williams Collection, over 4,000 objects of “negrobilia,” mass cultural objects and artifacts that feature stereotypical images of black people; and
- Frankie Knuckles Collection, the personal vinyl collection of the godfather of house music.

KICKBACK serves as part of Rebuild Foundation's year-long initiative to raise awareness and provide resources and sanctuary for marginalized communities impacted by the HIV/AIDS crisis, made possible by funding that Rebuild received from the 2018 (RED) Auction.



PANGEA

Written & performed by Dionne Addai,
with performers Victoria Boeteng, Omar Dyette, and Sarah Patin, percussionist
Victoria Boateng, and production manager Kenya Ann Hall

Using poetry, music, and movement, this piece discusses the history and legacy of colonization, the ancient struggle for civil rights, and the conundrum of black kings and queens.



Dionne Addai (she/they) is an actor, writer, and teaching artist local to Chicago. She graduated from Loyola University with degrees in Gender Studies and History. She enjoys creating art that reduces the stigma that can come with talks about sex and sexuality. As an actor she's recently been seen in *Nina Simone: Four Women* (Merrimack Repertory Theater), *Eclipsed* (Pegasus/Theater on the Lake), and *We are Pussy Riot* (Red Tape Theatre). For information on her teaching artist work, check out icah.org/fyi. She is represented by Actor's Talent Group.

ARTIST REFLECTION



My name is Dionne Addai and I am of two or three worlds. Maybe more. My parents immigrated to the United States in the early 90s. They left Ghana because a line of dictators had destabilized the economy. Instability was sparked by western powers: British colonial rule and the self interested meddling of the US government. I was born in Chicago, and raised in both Nashville, TN and Decatur, IL. I grew up going to black churches and predominantly white schools. I kissed a girl for the first time when I was 23.

That is a sliver of what forged me, shaped my interests. I'd never heard of the Arts Bank before this project. When we received a description of the collections, I knew I wanted to look at the Egyptian glass slides and African historical section of the Ebony and Jet research library right away. I found the slides I needed, some of royals and architecture, others of servants and slaves. We always credit leaders with historical accomplishments. We don't remember the many names of laborers who made it possible for monarchs to build their legacies. That has always bothered me, as a student of history. Those rulers often control historical narratives. Therefore, those narratives are often embellished and incomplete.

I randomly picked up a few books in the research library and started reading. I love graphic novels and comics, so *Power to the People! South Africa in Struggle: A Pictorial History* stood out to me. The history of colonization and the struggle for basic human rights rang familiar. The loss of black lives because of deception and greed is a trend we still see play out today. Police in this country repeatedly protect property over people. Black folks are over policed, arrested, and forced into legal slavery. While reading I was struck by how similar oppression has been taking place for so long in every corner of the world. Workers continually exploited and manipulated into fighting amongst themselves. I wanted to create work that focuses on examining the cycle.

After that I had a pretty clear idea of the film I wanted to make. I found images of nergobilia that highlight the way white american marketing dehumanized Black people. I overheard *Pangea*, a record that Mars (Rebuild's program coordinator) was playing from the Frankie Knuckles collection. I think it'll fit the vibe as well.

I'm grateful for this fascinating process. I'm always learning.





OM MISSION

Written & performed by ShaZah (Shanta Nurullah and Zahra Baker)

An exploration of Black lesbians from the Harlem Renaissance to present day Chicago, culminating in a vision for our future.

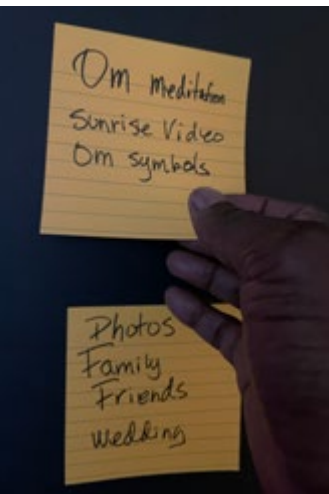


ShaZah is the duo of **Shanta Nurullah (she/her)** and **Zahra Baker (she/her)**. This partnership draws upon the talents that Zahra and Shanta share as storytellers, actors, musicians, writers and teaching artists. They create and perform work that draws heavily from African and African-American folkloric, storytelling and musical traditions for adult and youth audiences. Recent performances include the Gwendolyn Brooks Centennial, the Logan Square Apple Fest, Hothouse Anniversary, and *Wiggleworms* at Navy Pier. ShaZah has opened for international artists The Comet is Coming and the Junius Paul Quartet. They have also adapted to presenting their work on virtual platforms, including *Hothouse Global* and *Ronapalooza*. Zahra has worked in the past with AFT as a performer and teaching artist.



ARTIST REFLECTIONS

We were first inspired by the orientation video tour conducted by Julie Yost of the Stony Island Arts Bank. We were struck by her statement that the University of Chicago's Art History glass slide collection was most significant to Black history "by omission".



One of the glass slides in that collection was of two female circus performers.

As two female performers, (often on display), we started brainstorming ideas of what it feels like to walk in the world as women loving women. When we arrived at the Arts Bank, we sought out Johnson Publishing archives and library in search of a presence of Black Lesbians. The main Ebony article (August 1952) that we found was written by Gladys Bentley, a former Harlem Renaissance "cross dressing" blues singer who emphatically denounced her prior life and headlined her article "I'm a Woman Again".



Upon further research, we found that Gladys Bentley had lost most of her work as American trends swayed toward conservatism. She had financial responsibilities and an ailing Mother. Apparently, she felt compelled to remake her public image. We were saddened that she had to take such extreme measures but wondered how many of us have felt that only a portion of our "self" was welcome in the room.

We have chosen to explore the questions of inclusion and acceptance inside of the black community. Why is positive Black lesbian representation important? How have we been made invisible and how have our positive stories been overlooked or omitted?

Our show features original music, photos, video and audio clips. We have written a tribute to the loud and out blues women of the 20's and 30's, interviewed and extracted excerpts from 6-8 Black Lesbians, and created a heart meditation.



Om Mission seeks to expand the heart to see and respond to the best in each other. By highlighting the stories of Black Lesbians, our desire is to explore the possibility of an environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive for all.



“Do BLACK LIVES MATTER?”

Created by Ben F. Locke,
with photographer Nicole Waddington

An introduction to an upcoming feature-length documentary that asks the question, “Do Black Lives Matter?” The film asks Black people from the often-ignored places of Chicago if they think Black Lives Matter, if their life matters, what do they want to be remembered for, etc. to get a sense of our own perspective on our lives.



Ben F. Locke (he/him) is an actor, director, choreographer, teacher/coach and writer with a double degree in Theatre and Human Services from Millikin University. He’s excited to flex his artistic muscles with this new project through About Face Theatre. He’s an Artistic Associate with Random Acts Chicago, the Casting Director for The Passage Theatre, as well as a company dancer with Ardent Dance Company. Some of his work can be found on the New Play Exchange.

You can also connect with him on Instagram @trickyrabbit86 or Twitter @its_locke. “What we do matters. Who sees us matters. If we died today, did we hoard ourselves away, did we keep our resources for ourselves or did we invest in others to take over and grow without us?”

ARTIST REFLECTION

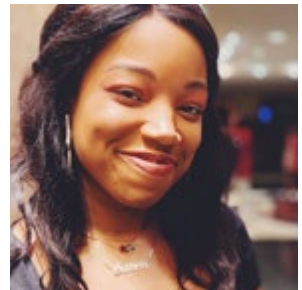




WHAT WE SEE

Written & performed by Kirsten Baity, Keyonna Jackson, & Cori Wash

A series of short pieces exploring and exposing the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of growing up Black and queer in the USA.



Kirsten Baity (they/them) is a playwright, actor, theater educator, and social media manager for Intimacy Coordinators of Color. Their work focuses on joy and liberation. They have consulted on two curriculums to help uplift young people in the education system and feel most fulfilled when their work is in service of amplifying voices that are usually silenced. They believe that art is a powerful tool that can shift public consciousness and that power is best used when it's in service of marginalized communities.

Keyonna Jackson is a southside poet and writer. Through her art, she explores the meaning of the many identities and labels both the world and herself placed on her and how she has learned to live life with those labels attached to her name.

Cori Jean Wash (she/they) is a 22-year-old black, femme, bisexual poet, theatre artist, advocate for black liberation and human rights who was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. She's the youngest of two and has had a love for performing since she was a little kid and has been involved in theatre since high school. She would like to give a big thanks to everyone who supports her, who is supporting this project and hopes folks are staying safe!

ARTIST REFLECTIONS



KIRSTEN: This process made me think about myself in ways that I try not to. I normally try to avoid thinking about what white America sees because it's depressing and anxiety inducing. As I state in my piece. There are so many different perceptions and expectations that trying to live up to them is impossible and honestly some of those stereotypes and ideas are harmful. Writing this forced me to think about who I am. I had to think about more than just the labels that I fall under and think about what it is really like not just as a Black person but to be me specifically. Working with Mikeal was helpful because the way he posed the questions in a way that felt respectful and that this project was about sharing our stories and telling the truth rather than being concerned about making the truth palatable for the audience. This experience also feels like a good career move. I hadn't done anything on film before and now everyone is asking for reels. This is something I'd feel good about putting in my reel or sending to people. Overall I had a lot of fun filming and getting to work with everyone.



CORI: Drawing inspiration from the pieces I saw from the Stony Island Art Bank was the easy part whereas finding what part of my story as a black woman I wanted to share was the most challenging because there are so many facets and I wanted to make sure I was using the right language, I wanted to stay true to my form of art, my writing and my vision to give people a genuine experience. Overall, the entire process was very rewarding because once I had my focal point, pen touched paper and the rest was history.



KEYONNA: Writing this piece felt like writing my frustration with the world as I saw it. The hypersexualization of sapphics, black women, racial gaslighting, and self-proclaimed activism was right in front of me this entire year. I wanted to let out my frustration creatively. Writing helps release that frustration and I feel more powerful when I put my words together artistically. I know I was writing from my poem through my own perspective, but I know people regardless of gender and race can connect to my anger. I've seen those who aren't LGBT+ rage at the social and systematic inequality we received. I have seen white people speak out about their privilege and how to properly use it. This year filled me with anger and I wanted to write how angry I am, but also how trapped I feel. When you feel like the odds are against you both socially and systematically, sometimes you can't help but feel trapped and hopeless. But I know for certain things will get better. Hopefully, I live to see that change.



FRANKIE & LABI SAVED US

Written & performed by Robert Cornelius & Paul Oakley Stovall
with percussionist John Nelson

An artist suffers PTSD due to the current pandemic, and finally seeks help to sort out the feelings that are resurfacing. A play about mental health and survival, swimming in an unfamiliar milieu, black men seeking therapy... from black male therapists.



Robert Cornelius (he/him) is a Gay Black artist born and raised in Chicago, and a veteran of over three decades in the Chicago arts scene. He is an actor, singer, writer, educator, and activist that has spent much of his career fighting for justice and equality for Black people and the LGBTQIA community. Most recently onstage he was seen in *Her Honor*, *Jane Byrne* written and directed by J Nicole Brooks at Lookingglass Theatre, and *Lottery Day* by Ike Holter at The Goodman Theatre—both world premieres. He spent over a decade as Arts Education Director at Victory Gardens Theater, working to help young people find their voices. He is thrilled to be a part of this wonderful project at About Face Theatre.



Paul Oakley Stovall (he/him) has been an Artistic Associate at AFT since 1999. As an actor he's been seen all over Chicago, National, and International stages. Currently, he plays George Washington in the first national tour of Lin Manuel-Miranda's *Hamilton*. On TV/Film, he's been seen on *Shameless*, *Chicago Fire*, *Empire*, in Robert Altman's *The Company* and in John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus*. His play *Immediate Family* was directed by Phylicia Rashad at the Goodman and Mark Taper Forum. As a producer, his KernoForto Productions has two festival darlings currently in circulation: *Columbus* and *Buffalo*. He is also an Executive Producer on the Swedish indie smash hit *Are We Lost Forever*, and *Netuser* (written and directed by AFT co-founder Eric Rosen and starring Denis O'Hare). Currently, Paul is in Dublin researching/writing a new limited series about Frederick Douglass and workshopping his new musical, *Clear*.

ARTIST REFLECTIONS



ROBERT: So, when I first started the pandemic first hit, and people started dying, and there was no plan or hope for a cure, I was triggered and having flashbacks to when I was first coming out and into myself, and the AIDS crisis hit. There were so many similarities. That parallel became the basis for my piece.

I reached out to Paul, who I have been friends with for years, and we brainstormed and came up with a collaboration. So the larger piece became two parts, where the first part is my character seeking out help for the first time with Paul's character and the roads that brought both of them to this moment, and then the second half of the piece, which I will leave to Paul to detail.

PAUL: I feel like there was a bit of fate involved in all of this. As the project was introduced to me, I of course began thinking of my own PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE... and we've all had plenty of time in 2020 to consider these things. The trip to the ArtsBank with Robert Cornelius is really where it all began to come together for me. He was much clearer in what spoke to him and what he was seeking: A personal response to the onset of the AIDS pandemic. Robert and I sat together, and dove into Frankie Knuckles, other historic black LGBTQ icons... and most importantly perhaps... each other.

I sat across from this man, my friend, colleague, and cohort. We laughed, reminisced, and although we hadn't been in the same room for awhile, we might as well have seen each other the day before. It began to dawn on me that the survival of the gay black man is not guaranteed, and often our honor and our mental health are called into question. Historically the tale that has been told is: black people are liars and heathens and savages, gay people are

liars and sexually promiscuous and less than. So if you're black AND gay, you are most likely a volatile combination of the two.

During our day of research, I stumbled onto the artist Labi Siffre. His music and story stirred me. As it happens, he's the most famous songwriter you've never heard of, the most sampled musician in history (Kanye, Eminem among those who have "borrowed" from him), and I began to feel **cheated** that I'd never heard of him. I began to feel that the fix was in, that black gay men are solely responsible for our survival. And that's when the idea came to ask Robert to partner our pieces, and I would portray a black gay male therapist who Robert had come to see...to tell his story...and that we could also use the counterpoint of Frankie Knuckles's thumping house beats and Labi Siffre's folksy acoustic melodies to show a wide array of musical blackness.

My therapist character therefore will be more fictional, although not at all far from how I grew up, as he listens to Robert and uses Labi Siffre to try to help Robert heal.





LITANY | PT. IV | EBONY

by Jenn Freeman

Take a voyage with artist Jenn Freeman | Po'Chop onto the historical pages of *Ebony Magazine*. Set to a soundscape created by Chicago's DJ Dapper, *EBONY* is a playful celebration of Black unity and power.

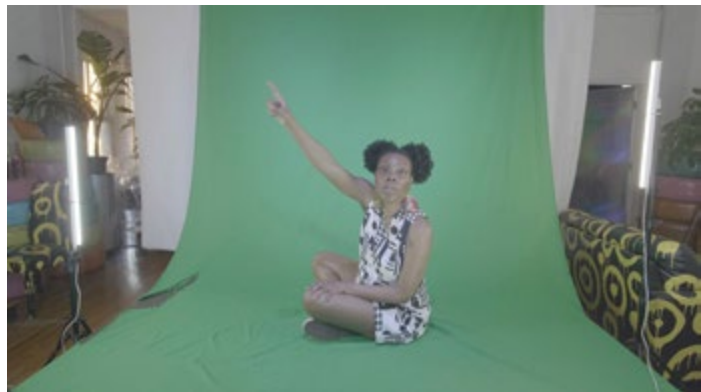


Chicago-based burlesque artist **Jenn Freeman**, also known as **Po'Chop**, uses elements of dance, storytelling, and striptease to create performances and inspire students and collaborators across the country. Po'Chop has performed at the Brooklyn Museum in Brown Girls Burlesque's *Bodyspeak*, and headlined shows in New Orleans, Minneapolis, St. Louis and New York. Po'Chop is a Board Member and Cast Member for *Jeezy's Juke Joint*, an all black burlesque revue. Po'Chop performs on Netflix's *Easy* (Season 2), appears in music videos for songs by Jamila Woods and Mykele Deville, and is a muse for co-created experimental dance films such as *Home | Here*. Jenn Freeman was awarded as a 2017 3Arts Make A Wave Artist, selected as a 2018 Chicago Dancemakers Lab Artist and as a 2019 Urban Bush Women Choreographic Fellow Candidate, and most recently can be found collaborating with Rebuild Foundation as their 2020 Chicago Dancemakers Forum dancer in resident.



ARTIST REFLECTION

My aunt used to do women's hair outta her kitchen. As a child I spent Saturday afternoons at the foot of a swiveling yellow leather chair while church women told stories of travelling cousins and sinning deacons. My aunt used to keep a wicker basket full of the latest magazines for folks to thumb through as they got their hair did. Among these glossy pages were editions of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Amidst the scent of sizzling hair, I spent hours flipping through *Ebony* in awe. Marveling at the colorful ads, the depictions of city life, the elegance of the fashion editorials and the hairstyles. As a lil' Black girl growing up in rural Missouri, *Ebony* was my introduction to the mantra "Black is Beautiful."





BLACK WOMAN ON PURPOSE

Written & Composed by Michael Turrentine,
with performers Anna Dauzvardis, Renee Lockett, and Shariba Rivers

What starts out as a normal weekly family zoom call between a Grandmother, a Mother, and Her Daughter morphs into a beautiful coming out moment and a spoken shared word that is outward to the audience/watchers.



Michael Turrentine is an actor, writer, activist, and social justice educator originally from Oklahoma, but is excited to be hunkered down in the Windy City of Chicago. He is excited to be a part of the *KICKBACK* Commission and ecstatic to be working with About Face. He is represented by Gray Talent Group.

ARTIST REFLECTION

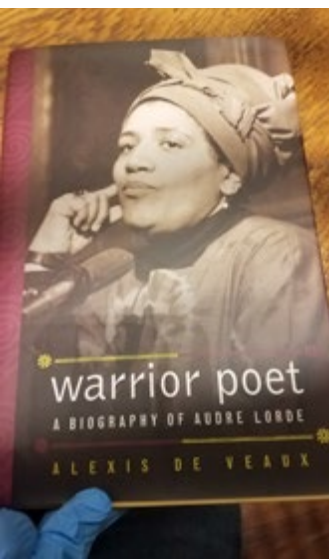
A Celebration of Black Women!

I actually began this process not knowing at all what I was thinking about writing about. The idea of our writing playground being larger than life with no limitations other than the fact that we should be inspired by an item or several at the Arts Bank honestly was daunting for me! I began brainstorming about random thoughts I could find myself writing down; black queerness in later years of age, blackness in the time of quarantine, queerness in the time of 2020, etc. My brain was going wild, until I had a conversation with my mother when an unexpected death in the family reared its head. While talking to her as we discussed funeral plans, I looked her in the eyes and uttered the question, "How do you do it?". "Do what?" she responded. "This. Keep everything going when it's, like, WAY too hard to." She then looked at me, smiled, and said "Because we have to." I smiled back and said, "You're a superhero." And to this she laughed and said one of the deepest phrases I had heard. "No, I'm a Momma".

Suddenly I knew exactly what my inspiration for my piece would be; black women. My mother in particular, but the essence of what I see every day that black women do to quite literally hold the world up. So it was obvious when I came across a book of poetry in the Arts Bank by the phenomenal Audre Lorde (In particular, her poem Stations jumped out), I had to use it as my main source. Audre is a black, queer, warrior poet and she is fabulous! And then my next step was odd but I thought it essential. I began messaging all of the black fem folks in my life and asking them one simple question; "Would you please finish the second half of this phrase with what you think it means to be a black woman? Black Woman On Purpose = "What?"

I honestly didn't know what my responses would be, but message after message began coming back and the responses were amazing, insightful, beautiful, heartbreaking, deep, thought-provoking, and exactly what I needed to finish this piece. I am honestly really excited about what this piece means and what comes out of it.

"Is queerness all that different from empathy? Maybe queerness is just finding comfort, solace, and safety in the familiar." I wrote that at the beginning of writing this piece and I think it is absolutely another little nugget in the project that I think shines. I love being black. I love black people. I love being queer. And being that combination makes me feel like a superhero a lot of the time. And that's what I think of black women. That's what I think of my mom. Y'all are superheroes.





SEE US AS WE ARE

Written & performed by Vic Wynter,
with performers Ireashia M. Bennett, morgan mcnaught, jireh l drake, darien,
ALEXA GRÆ, Darling Shear, and Tracie Kunzika, and video editor Tracie Kunzika

Even in moments of our erasure we still find a way to show up and influence culture in so many different ways. What a better way to tell that story than through the conduit of Frankie Knuckles, a queer house music icon. Through movement I wanted to tell the story of the space we are given historically contrasts the full lives we live and the space we deserve to take up.



Vic Wynter (they/them) is a queer nonbinary Chicago based performance artist. Vic, being self-taught, has always found a home in performance. Their practice, formed of trial and error, was birthed from their time at the Neo-Futurarium. They've danced with the *Fly Honeys*, assistant directed, premiered autobiographical work, and with an ensemble created an educational outreach show. They weave their experiences into stories reminding us, we are all connected even in a world trying to stifle our powerful voices.

ARTIST REFLECTION



Some of the documents that I was finding in the [Stony Island Arts Bank] archives were pathologizing homosexuality. It seemed as though the clinical understanding or healing of homosexuality was the extent to which this identity could be discussed. There were a couple books on more iconic queer figures but of the tens of thousands of books that exist in the library—I stood before a pile of only about 15-20 books that had to do with queer/trans identity.

In this archive that holds various pieces of black culture and history, it came as no surprise that the sources I did find discussed queer identities in this way. There is a long standing history of homophobic attitudes within the black community and in attempt to preserve what is deemed a respectable history, we (black queers) often slip through the cracks. One thing that became very clear to me was that even still we (black queers) find a way to shine through. We sort of hide in plain sight out of necessity but also, in being who we are, many times gets overlooked.

I found a photo set of black folks captured through the eyes of a photographer where the folks seemed inherently queer. I could see myself in them. That led me to think about the space we are given throughout history and how that never quite does justice the full lives we live.

The vibrancy of our queer lives can somewhat be captured by The Godfather of house Music: Frankie Knuckles. I wanted to use his music because, as a queer black man, he was a pioneer of house who captured joy through the means of experimental music. His songs and sets were meant for everyone, but over the years his sounds could be a source of comfort to queers in nightlife and beyond. The Warehouse in '77 was a sanctuary for black queers as well as others. His goals were community orientated and he accomplished that and more. What he created speaks to the many ways in which black queers set trends and shift culture all the time. He is honored and loved, as he should, but many times others do not get that same respect.

Community feels like the root at what I have seen of many queer pioneers. Take for example William Dorsey Swann, one of the first documented drag queens born enslaved and later became free. They created a safe haven for black queers, Swann put on the first drag balls and had a home that was referred to as a brothel but what he did was provide a safe haven for what were probably sex workers to do their jobs. Swann was referred to as "The Queen," and from what I saw I would speculate that they were gender queer.

When approaching my art, I feel through my process. I like to engage and connect with folks and the best



processes that I have been part of have been a source of community and healing. I feel as though queers naturally build community with one another out of necessity. We take the best care of each other. Throughout this pandemic, the most help and care I received was from queers, black trans queers who were and continue to provide consistent mutual aid for the community. One of my goals for this work was to reflect that back in giving space and funds to black queer trans folks to speak to how they'd like their stories to be told. I felt it important to try and capture folks as the royalty that they are and so (because of the times) I also went and took photos of folks through their glass doorways/windows. The joy I get from capturing folks in what makes them feel good is a priceless gift I have gotten from doing this. It feels important to document these things. It feels important to document our stories as we want them to be told and making them readily available to the next generation. I want for our (black queer trans history) be written for and by us. I don't want queer youth having to dig to find our stories, when we are everywhere and exist in some many vibrant beautiful forms. We are full of life and deserve to take up space. There will no longer be questions or speculations of whether or not we exist because we are telling our stories. We won't continue to be edited out of history when we contribute so much to it.

Movement as storytelling, movement as therapy. I am not formally trained in dance but I love the ways we can communicate when we dance. The shapes we can make with our bodies. I don't always have the words but I love to emote through my limbs. I went through a 6-8 month period where I was immobile and that definitely weighed heavy on my spirit because I had to rely so much on other folks. It made me reflect on how sort of magical it is that the body heals itself. How grateful I am for what I can do with my body when I am intune. In this improvisational movement I want to show what it feels like to have my story be constrained by various factors but how that can blossom when given the space to exist as it is. The beauty of full expression.



JOHN 11:35 [FO(R) ALL DE LAZURUS(IS)]

Written & performed by **avery r. young**,
with performers Andrew Coleman, Tina M Howell, Crystal Tina Jackson, and
Shanā I Young

A 3-part sermon of service addressing the erasure of varied blk bodies (specifically trans-bodies) in the age of #BLKLIVESMATTER. Through narrative, scripture, poetry, movement and sound, a dirge that desires the power of resuscitation for the names that make the front page news and names that have not.



Interdisciplinary artist and educator **avery r. young** is a 3Arts Awardee and one of four executives for The Floating Museum. His poetry and prose are featured in several anthologies and periodicals including; *Berkeley Poetry Review 49*, *Poetry Magazine*, and photographer Cecil McDonald Jr's *In The Company of Black*. He is the featured vocalist on flouist Nicole Mitchell's *Mandorla Awakening* (FPE Records) and is currently touring with her Black Earth Ensemble and his funk/soul band de deacon board. Young's latest full length recording *tubman*. (FPE Records) is the soundtrack to his first collection of poems, *neck-bone: visual verses* (Northwestern University Press).

ARTIST REFLECTION

john 11:35

[fo(r) all de lazarus(is)]

reflection 1 . picture 1



in the picture with tina, me, nay-nay & drew, i am fixing trying to fix a potential wardrobe malfunction. nay-nay is checking her phone & drew is silently running choreography. & we're all looking down though. so now i see prayer. or an altar call. in midst of piano chair & garments. we be blk folk in front of crystal eyes behind her lens, almost ready. intending to meet a task. beat a clock. & (per assignment) have church. fellowship. we be blk folk ready to tarry on the story of that one time when hey-zeus resuscitated him beloved one by calling him from his grave. i think about sis. aretha in front of a choir assembled by james cleveland & directed by alexander hamilton. she singing about how she about to review the story. the story of mary and martha. & how 4 days prior their brother had passed away. i think about the lost of 2021. the knee in neck. the bullet in bone. the bricks in windows. the masks. the masks. the masks, & the masks. i think about how i grew up around folk who sang & believed pharaohs army drowned in the red sea. and how that mean that no matter what pharaoh do, we work with powers that are greater. that power propelled everything that happened within the 30 minutes after this photograph of tina, me, nay-nay & drew was taken. within 30 minutes tina, me, nay-nay, drew & crystal summoned an intersection of blk body, experience and identities into a space that made room for those names, spirits and lives to matter inside dance & song blk!



reflection 2 of picture 4



its me. the dude placing a mic into a stand. its me. that dude who talked through 3 different dreams for this moment & wrote 2 different proposals & 3 different scripts. its me. a dude who decided to explore the names that got hashtags and all the names of the blk trans bodies that did not. not to complicate or make political. but to honor & offer reverence. in about an 80 something minutes after this photo was taken, i along with tina, nay-nay (who is behind me) crystal & drew was talking about naming them all lazarus & telling them to come forth blk!

notes on de black bible (kjbv)

an archive

inside de johnson library @ stony island arts bank



aint nan nudda book don been wif me long(r).
aint nan nudda book done felt so much of
my eye(s). saw jee-sus weep. in glow-spell of john.

11th chapter. thirty-fif verse.
made it firs(t) poem. spoken off-book.

psalms one hunnid still be salve
on ery ache. i turn to de gospel(s) of matthew
mark & luke. be in fellowship wif a woman wif an
issue
of blood whose faith made her whole.

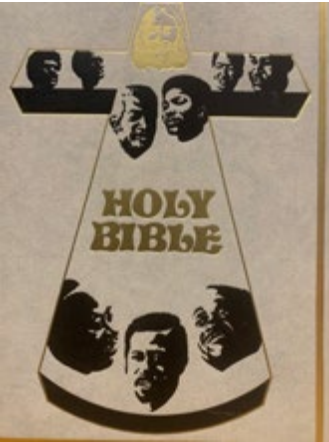
den flip it negro-odyssey. or devotional.

deliver(d) in de tradition of james
weldon johnson – or de good reveren(d)
turner who chew(d) up shakespeare
& spat it out a blue(r) poetik. now we massa
blas(t) ev.ver.ree wall wif us speak.

whoa. i say unto we.
aint nan fiyah like a holyghos(t) fiyah
cause de holyghos(t) fiyah burn bush.

liberatin all de dark(s)
underneef de steeple to move.
dance. praise. trombone. harp.

blk!





20/20



This Bitter Earth

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During AFT's 2019-2020 season, we persisted through amazing challenges to continue to connect with our community and continue telling LGBTQ stories.

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The Gulf



Dada Woof Papa Hot



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To create exceptional, innovative, and adventurous theatre and educational programming that advances the national dialogue on sexual and gender identity, and challenges and entertains audiences in Chicago and beyond.

OUR VISION

To be a nationally recognized, inter-generational, and community-focused LGBTQIA arts organization by creating theatre that fosters awareness, understanding, and celebration of all forms of sexual and gender expression.

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS FUNDERS

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