

KARAMU

A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE

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PRESENTS

LANGSTON HUGHES'

BLACK NATIVITY

ALLEN THEATRE AT PLAYHOUSE SQUARE



DOBAMA THEATRE



**“THE MARCH SISTERS
UNWRAP THE CLASSIC TALE
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.”**



LITTLE WOMEN

DECEMBER 1–31, 2023

WRITTEN BY:
Heather Chrisler

DIRECTED BY:
Melissa Crum

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WELCOME TO CPH AT PLAYHOUSE SQUARE



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WELCOME TO CPH



Welcome to Cleveland Play House. As the nation's first resident theatre, we have been proudly producing theatre by Clevelanders for Clevelanders since 1915. That means more than 12 million people have attended over 1,600 productions, including over 100 world and/or American premieres.

That avid, loyal audience is one reason Cleveland has been recognized as the 12th most arts-vibrant community in the United States while simultaneously ranking as the 54th largest city in the United States. It is a point of civic pride that we punch above our weight.

As a resident company at Playhouse Square, the second largest performing arts complex in the country, we are surrounded by this vibrancy — the 11 venues, eight resident companies, two institutions of higher learning, art galleries, shops, and restaurants energize the area and deliver with economic impact. Cuyahoga County arts nonprofits and their patrons contributed over \$533 million to the local economy in 2022 and these same arts entities spent nearly \$390 million last year on things like supplies, services, promotion, and payroll, about double the national average. And that's just the beginning.

With abundant potential for future growth alongside local public support, it is an exciting time for the arts in Cleveland. So much of our future success depends on the health and vitality of our local arts ecosystem. Luckily, we at Cleveland Play House have found optimism, joy, and strength in our dozens of local partnerships across the city. Karamu House is one of these longstanding relationships. Now in our second year of co-producing *Black Nativity* at the Allen Theatre, we deeply value the relationship and artistic collaboration which has developed. We can't wait for you to witness this astonishing production and look forward to future collaborations which will continue to add to the rich cultural fabric of Northeast Ohio.

Thank you for joining us for *Black Nativity*. We are so honored to welcome you to our home.

Happy Holidays!

Rachel L. Fink, *Managing Director, Cleveland Play House*



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Applause is a weekly show highlighting creative people in our community.

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The **Shuffle** podcast is your backstage pass to our region's independent music scene.

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KARAMU

A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

Karamu Memberships Available Now!



Each membership receives a commemorative identification card designed and personalized with the picture of one of our most famous alumnus and supporters. Select your membership, tell your friends to join and let them know you are committed to Karamu, Cleveland's Greatest Jewel. Become a "card carrying" member of Karamu today!

UPCOMING SHOWS AT KARAMU HOUSE!

2023-24

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Jan. 26 - Feb. 18

THE BREAKFAST AT THE BOOKSTORE

Written by Lisa Langford
Directed by Nina Domingue

Mar. 8 - 31

IT HAPPENED IN ATLANTA

Written by Michael Oatman
Directed by Tony F. Sias

Apr. 26 - May 19

CHOIR BOY

Written by Terell Alvin McCraney
Directed by Nathan Henry

2023-24 SEASON



THURGOOD

SEPT 9 - OCT 1
ALLEN THEATRE

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OUTCALT THEATRE

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ALLEN THEATRE

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KARAMU

A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

In partnership with Cleveland Play House

+ support from Playhouse Square
presents

LANGSTON HUGHES' BLACK NATIVITY

Co-Directed by **TONY F. SIAS & ERRIN WEAVER**

MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT &
MUSIC DIRECTOR
DR. DAVID M. THOMAS

CHOREOGRAPHER
ERRIN WEAVER

SCENIC & DIGITAL
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December 1 – 16, 2023 | **ALLEN THEATRE**

Black Nativity is produced by special arrangement with DRAMATIC PUBLISHING, Woodstock, Illinois

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ABOUT THE PLAY

Karamu House, the centerpiece of Cleveland's historic Fairfax neighborhood and the oldest Black producing theatre in the country, presents the soul-stirring, gospel celebration *Black Nativity* in the Allen Theatre. Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* tells the nativity story from a Black perspective using a Griot to narrate the journey. Poetry, scripture, gospel music, and dance combine in Karamu's Afrofuturist reimagining of the story. In the production, the past, present, and future co-exist in continuum asserting, we were there, we are here, and we will be for years to come!

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

"Black Nativity"
"Joy To The World"
"My Way Is Cloudy"
"No Room At The Inn"
"Most Done Traveling"
"Oh Jerusalem In The Morning"
"Wasn't That A Pity And A Shame"
"What You Gonna Name Your Baby?"
"Joy To The World (Reprise)"
"Christ Is Born"
"No Good Shepherd Boy"
"Go Tell It On The Mountain"
"Behold The Star"
"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"
"Sweet Little Jesus Boy"
"Oh, Come All Ye Faithful"

ACT II

"Meetin' Here Tonight"
"Holy Ghost, Don't Leave"
"We Shall Be Changed"
"The Blood Saved Me"
"Leak In The Building"
"Nobody Like The Lord"
"His Will Be Done"
"Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody"
"Get Away Jordan"
"Packin' Up"
"Joy To The World (Reprise/Closing Medley)"

CAST (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

CAST

Christina Johnson (Narrator/Griot)

VOCAL ENSEMBLE

Jinle Glover
Bonita Jenkins
MAXX
Joshua McElroy
Renata Napier
Arielle Pope
Avery Lamar Pope
Corin B. Self
CorLesia Smith (Understudy)
Kevin Smith
Sydney Smith
Steven Weems

ORCHESTRA

Dr. David M. Thomas, Conductor + Keyboard I
Jabril Barnes, Trumpet
Kevin Byous, Guitar
Wayne A. Deadwiley Sr., Bass Guitar
Kevin Frazier, Keyboard II
AJ Kluth, Saxophone
Tommy Lehman, Trumpet
Dominick Wallace, Percussion
Zach Warren, Trombone
Deion Williams, Drums

DANCERS

Kailyn Mack as Mary, Nehemiah Spencer as Joseph,
Jalen Black, Jennae McCully, Jameelah Rahman, Ron'Dale Simpson, Samara Steele

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

INTERIM TECHNICAL DIRECTOR Prophet D. Seay
ASSISTANT TECHNICAL DIRECTOR Vince Tose
WARDROBE COORDINATOR/DRESSER Brielle McGrew
SOUND ENGINEERS Jordan Demich-Bogner, Kimberly Grice
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LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR Aaron Frazier
FOLLOW SPOT OPERATORS Christina Easter, Boyd Manuel
DRESSERS Rodtrise Floyd, Akilah Marie Y. Marshall, Sara Ratliff
STITCHERS Morgan Bedilion, Aimee Morgan, Kathryn Musselman, Cristine Patrick, Donna Pedaci
CRAFTSPEOPLE Sydney DeMatteis-Geib, Ennin Geib
SCENIC CARPENTERS Norris Brown Sr., Isaac Washington
SCENIC PAINTER Justine Schneider
STAGE CREW Victoria Rapchak, Emma Sherban

THIS PLAY WILL BE PERFORMED WITH AN INTERMISSION.

Wowed by the set? Feel free to snap a photo before the show, during intermission, or after the show. Don't forget to tag Karamu House (@KaramuHouseInc on Twitter and Instagram) and Cleveland Play House (@cleveplayhouse on Twitter and Instagram) and use the hashtag #KaramuBlackNativity #BlackNativityAtCPH #CPHHolidays

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SPECIAL THANKS to Cain Park, Inlet Dance Theatre

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE



In October of 2022 Karamu House and the Cleveland Play House embarked on an exciting partnership and as a result of our success we are excited to return to the Allen Theater at Playhouse Square to present Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity*. As the oldest Black producing theatre in the nation, working alongside the nation's first regional theatre, we speak to our storied pasts as collaborators and trailblazers in American theatre. Both companies, founded in 1915, agree that embarking on this historic event is but one of many examples of how community partnerships can together showcase local talent, provide employment opportunities, and provide holiday entertainment for all ages.

Additionally, in partnering with Co-Director, Errin Weaver, we have reconceptualized production design. This year *Black Nativity* is set in an Afrofuturist landscape, drawing on the rich and varied cultures of different regions and ethnicities that continue to influence culture around the world. At its heart, Afrofuturism is the assertion of the concept that past, present, and future exist simultaneously — the idea that Black people were here, are here, and will be here for generations to come. We draw on the wisdom of the past, as we navigate the present and envision possible futures. There are new musical arrangements by Dr. David M. Thomas, drawing on the musical traditions throughout the diaspora and across time. The color palettes in the lighting, set, and costume design, reflect the rich tones of Western regions on the continent. The choreography draws from traditions throughout the African Diaspora.

Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* has become a Karamu Holiday tradition. Returning to Playhouse Square for the holidays reunites us with more of the Cleveland audience and aligns with our mission to create for all audiences while honoring the Black experience. We are thrilled that you all have gathered with us this holiday season, enjoy the show!

—Tony F. Sias



Thank You

Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation for awarding a \$4 million challenge grant to Karamu House. The Foundation will match every dollar raised to support remaining infrastructure and capital improvements. Join us in solidifying the future for Karamu's Next Generation.

Donate here: [Karamuhouse.org/donate](https://www.karamuhouse.org/donate)

For more information about supporting Karamu House in meeting this challenge contact Sadie Winlock at 216-795-7070 ext. 231, swinlock@karamuhouse.org

ABOUT KARAMU HOUSE

On June 15, 1915, two Oberlin graduates, Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, founded the Playhouse Settlement House at the corner of East 38th Street and Central Avenue. With a vision that was revolutionary at the time, the couple set out to create a gathering place where people of different racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds could meet and bond.

The early years of the 20th century witnessed a large influx of African-Americans from the South. Resisting pressure to exclude their new neighbors, the Jelliffes insisted that all races were welcome at the Playhouse Settlement, and they soon discovered that the arts provided the perfect common ground. The institution quickly became a magnet for many of the best Black artists of the day. Dancers, printmakers, actors, and writers all found a place where they could practice their crafts. The first theatrical productions at the Playhouse Settlement were staged in 1917.

In 1920, the Jelliffes sponsored the Dumas Dramatic Club, later renamed the Gilpin Players in 1922 after the noted black actor Charles Gilpin. A theatre was acquired adjacent to the settlement in 1927 and named Karamu House Theatre. (“Karamu” in Swahili means “a place of joyful gathering.”) In the 1930s, the Gilpin Players began to collaborate with Karamu alum Langston Hughes. In 1940, a modern dance troupe from Karamu House, trained by Marjorie Witt Johnson, won the praise of *Life* magazine for an appearance at the New York World’s Fair.

Following a fire which destroyed the theatre in 1939, the entire Playhouse Settlement was renamed Karamu House in 1941. Karamu’s Early Childhood Development Center was built in 1945 at East 89th Street and Quincy Avenue. In 1949,



through the aid of Leonard Hanna Jr. and the Rockefeller Foundation, Karamu boasted two theatres, the 200-seat Jelliffe Theatre and the 100-seat Arena Theatre, at the same location.

Today, Karamu is recognized as the oldest Black producing theatre in the nation, and is the beating heart for the entire community. Karamu’s mission is to produce professional theatre, provide arts education, and present community programs for all people while honoring the Black experience. All are welcome regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, age, or ability. Legendary artists including Langston Hughes, Ruby Dee, Robert Guillaume, Ron O’Neal, Bill Cobbs, Debra Byrd, James Pickens Jr., Vanessa Bell Calloway, and Imani Hakim have been associated with the 108-year-old “place of joyful gathering.” Karamu House is supported in part by state tax dollars allocated by the Ohio Legislature to the Ohio Arts Council (OAC). The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. Karamu House is also supported in part by the residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

For more information about supporting Karamu House, visit karamuhouse.org/contributions.

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Jim Simler
Rhonda Trice
Sandra Truett
Barbara Vickers
Christine Walsh
Charmelle Woods
Cliffora Wright

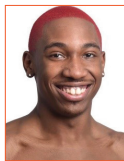
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WHO'S WHO



JALEN BLACK (*Dancer*) is a Cleveland native who started dancing under the tutelage of Errin Weaver. He also danced under the tutelage of Jessica Spurlock at the Tri-C Arts Academy, where he performed with many artists and dancers. He had the privilege of dancing under Elane Gibbs-Redman, LaVerne Wilcox, and Dianne McIntyre. He is an alumnus of the Cleveland School of the Arts where he studied dance. He is currently attending the University of Toledo to study education. He is the dance choreographer and teacher at his home church, New Life at Cavalry, where he has arranged numerous shows for the congregation and the city. He has attended numerous dance conferences, held in cities such as Los Angeles, California and Dayton, Ohio. He was also a part of the Reflections Dance Theatre founded by Nehemiah Spencer. He quit dancing for a while but is ready to step back into his craft.



JINLE GLOVER (*Vocal Ensemble*) graduated from Cleveland School of the Arts and Cuyahoga Community College in 2019, and Kent State University in 2023. They hold an Associate Arts Degree and a Bachelor's of Music with a concentration in Voice Performance. Jinle held a two year internship as a vocalist in the Chorale at the Church of the Covenant from 2017-2019. They were on the Olivet Baptist Church Praise Team in 2019. Jinle was also the Ambassador to the School of Music at Kent State in the 2021-2022 school year. Jinle is currently collaborating with the Karamu House Theater having coached the closing musical of the 2022-2023 season as well as the Assistant Vocal Director of Karamu's Summer Arts Education program. Jinle teaches Karamu Voice for Actors this Fall season. Jinle's professional IG: @olufemising for GROUNDWORK vocal coaching.



BONITA JENKINS (*Vocal Ensemble*) is a Cleveland native singer, who has been singing since the age of 4. She starred in her very first stage play in the 5th grade and it was there that she was smitten by

the desire to perform on stage. While spending time in Chicago, Bonita performed in several community productions and also traveled with Rev. Milton Brunson's & the Thompson Community Choir performing at the Kennedy Center. Her love of theater has opened many opportunities to perform on stage. Recent performances include several years in Karamu House's production of *Black Nativity* and *Aida*. At the Brecksville Community Theater Bonita was in *Sister Act*. She performed in Weathervane Playhouse's *Dreamgirls* and *Memphis*. In September 2022 Bonita won the Best Featured Performer in a Musical for her performance as Soloist in *The Color Purple* at the 69th annual Chanticleer Awards. Bonita is excited and grateful for this journey.

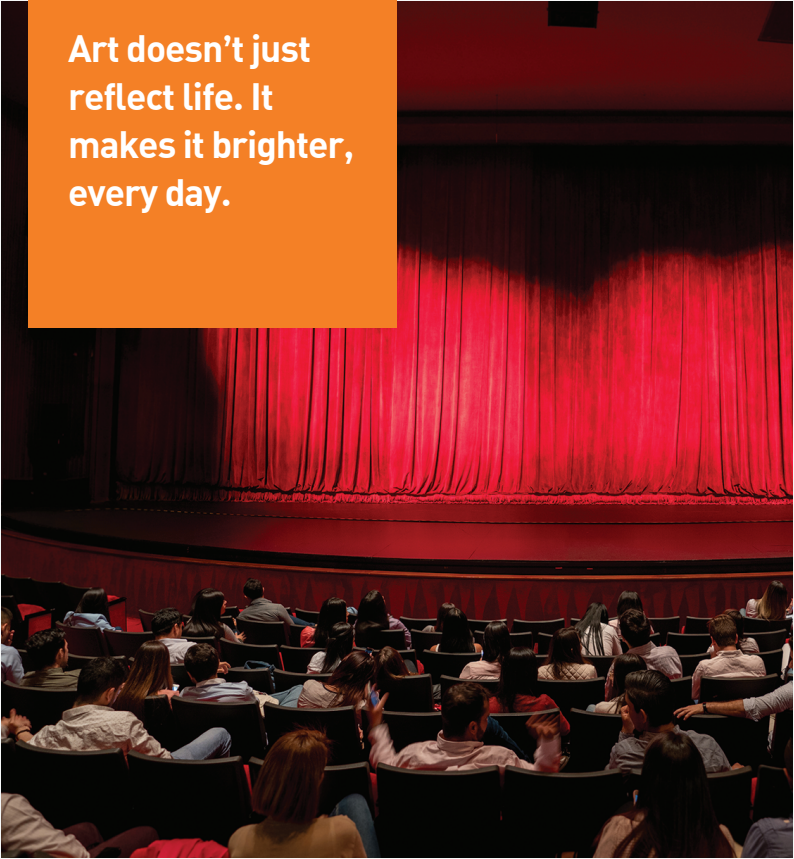


CHRISTINA JOHNSON (*Narrator/Griot*) is a native Cleveland Singer, stylist, songwriter, visual artist and poet. Since her very first stage performance, as a child, in *Geminia- a Space age Cinderella*, the arts have become more than the performance but a catalyst for learning, peace, and balance. Christina has been a part of several script development groups locally. The love of the arts keeps her connected on stage, as well as working behind the scenes of productions. She recently performed in Karamu House's social justice series *Juneteenth* and *Freedom After Juneteenth*, and many years of *Black Nativity*. Christina has also been seen in *The Wiz* (as Evillene), *The Color Purple* (as Sofia), *Crowns, My Brother's Keeper, Sister Act, And Her Hair Went With Her, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (as Ma Rainey) *Stew*, and *Can I Touch It*, to name a few.



KAILYN MACK (*Mary*) is a Cleveland native and alumni of Cleveland School of the Arts, where she studied as a dance major. Kailyn received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance from Wright State University. During college Kailyn trained with Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (DCDC2). She has been featured in the *Plain Dealer* and cleveland.com for her role as 'Mary' in Karamu's *Black Nativity*. Some of her other performances include *Aida* (Karamu House),

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Dreamgirls, and *Memphis* (Weathervane Playhouse). Kailyn is the new dance instructor at Newton D. Baker School of the Arts and is a teaching artist in the Cleveland community. She is excited for what the future holds as she continues to share her gift through performance, instruction, and choreography. "Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So, use your gift well." 1Peter 4:10.



MAXX (*Vocal Ensemble*) A graduate of Notre Dame College with a BA in Theatre Entrepreneurship; where they were a key point in building NDC's Theatre department and program. MAXX has been performing since they were five years old and were determined to make their passion a career. They had their start at Karamu and are elated to be returning to show what has been instilled. They have worked with Cleveland Public Theater, Playhouse Square, and Beck Center. This year's credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Spongebob The Musical*, *Once On This Island*, *Clyde's* and headlining their first solo show *Growth Of A Goddess*. MAXX prides themselves on showing gratitude to God for their gifts and talents by pouring into others through the arts and is elated to be joining individuals that strive for the same! Always remember to breathe through life; *Smell the Lillies and Blow Out the Candles!* IG/ TikTok: big.maxx94



JENNAE MCCULLY (*Dancer*) was born and raised on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio. She began taking dance classes at Karamu House, while also dancing for both her church and high school. She went on to dance in various productions in the city like *Cleveland Dance Project* and *How I Got Over* (under *Black Nativity's* Associate Director Errin Weaver). Also, Jennae danced for the Cleveland Monsters Hockey Team for two seasons. Currently, she works as the dance teacher at the newly opened Superior School for the Performing Arts in East Cleveland, along with teaching praise dance to youth at Antioch Baptist Church. When she isn't hitting the stage this holiday season, she is a member of Reflections Dance Theater and Mojuba! Dance Collective. This is Jennae's second

year being a part of *Black Nativity*, and she is excited to share her talents on stage with all the other wonderful artists once again!



JOSHUA MCELROY (*Vocal Ensemble*) is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art with a Bachelor's in Video, and he is the CEO of AlyNova Productions. Joshua got started in theatre over a decade ago as the Director of the Shaker Heights Improv Team. He's been a part of Case Western Reserve University's IMPROVement and part of a comedy group at the Hilarities 4th Street Theater. Joshua's been in plays at Ensemble Theatre, Waterloo Arts Center, Cuyahoga Community College, convergence-continuum, French Creek Theatre, Great Lakes Theatre, Cleveland Public Theatre, Dobama Theatre, and recently at Cain Park in *RENT!* Joshua began with musicals at Karamu House such as *The Color Purple*, *The Wiz*, *Passing Strange*, *Aida* and Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity*. In the last decade there hasn't been a season that Joshua hasn't been in a production at Karamu. He's excited to be in back in *Black Nativity* for a fourth time. IG: @kingmcelroy93



RENATA NAPIER (*Vocal Ensemble*) is a Psalmist, actress, performer, singer, songwriter, praise leader, and Karamu Alumna. At Karamu House her resume includes *Black Nativity*, *The Colored Museum*, *God's Trombone*, *The Color Purple*, and *Waiting to End Hell*. Recently, she collaborated with Mojuba! Dance Collective in *Where The Light Enters* at Cleveland Public Theater. As Psalmist and praise and worship leader, she shares her gifts in ministry at her home church, The Apostolic Church of God in Christ. She's a member of Sigma Alpha Iota music sorority and has worked for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district for over 16 years. Renata has an Associates of Arts degree from Cuyahoga Community College and a bachelor's degree in Communication Management from Cleveland State University. Special thank you to her family and friends for the endless love and support on another beautiful journey of *Black Nativity!*

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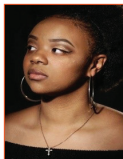


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ARIELLE POPE (*Vocal Ensemble*) is excited to be making her professional debut at Karamu House this year. She has a background in music at her father's church, Higher Hope Ministries. Her main job is being an educator at a charter school on the West Side of Cleveland. She is grateful for her brothers (Andrew and Avery) for pushing her to audition for the play.



AVERY LAMAR POPE (*Vocal Ensemble*) is a storyteller and author from Cleveland, OH, telling stories through mediums including: acting, poetry, music, and playwriting. Acting: Tantrum Theater,

Cleveland Play House, Playhouse Square, Great Lakes Theater, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Cleveland Public Theatre, Dobama Theatre, and Karamu House. Playwriting: Horizon Theatre Company, Dobama Theatre, and First Look Buffalo Theatre Company. He's performed poetry on local and national stages, is a founding member of Sparrow's Fortune Spoken Word Collective, and is a self-published author having released *A Dozen Roses (... and other flowers too)*. He's also been a teaching artist, having touched the lives of young artists at Cleveland Public Theatre, Playhouse Square, Great Lakes Theater, and Idaho Shakespeare Festival. He thanks Karamu House and all of the powerful artists he's blessed to tell this story with and is incredibly grateful to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, his family, and his close friends for their support. Psalm 91.



JAMEELAH RAHMAN (*Dancer*) is a talented dancer and choreographer originally from Cleveland, Ohio. She first began her dance, theatre, and capoeira journey at Rainey Institute. She is a graduate

from Cleveland School of the Arts and was a participant in All-City dance ensemble in her youth. She has trained and performed at several International Blacks in Dance conferences. She has been a part of several Karamu productions, *Leap of Faith*, *Black Nativity*, and *Aida*. She has also been a part of several productions with Mojuba! Dance Collective, *How I Got Over* and more. She is currently a member of Blakk Jakk Dance Collective with aspirations to grow and mature as a creative being.



CORIN B. SELF (*Vocal Ensemble*) is an actor, singer, dancer and educator from Cleveland, Ohio. After studying Theatre at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland he decided to teach for Baltimore City Public Schools and teach Arts Education for the U.S. Dream Academy, which is an after-school program for the youth in the community. His most recent works have included (Errol Philander) in *Statements After An Arrest Under the Immorality Act* at Convergence-Continuum, (Macduff) in *Macbeth* for Cleveland Shakespeare Festival, and (Monsignor O'Hara) in *Sister Act: The Musical* at Karamu House. He also shot a short film in 2006, *2nd Shift* (Rahsaan) which was featured on BET Independent Film Channel.



RON'DALE SIMPSON (*Dancer*) has a passion for dance that has allowed him to pursue a successful career as an artist, choreographer, and producer. He has experience in a wide range of dance styles, including hip hop, Afro-fusion, Step, and modern dance. As the founder and artistic director of Blakk Jakk Dance Collective, Ron'Dale has created a platform for dancers of color to showcase their skills and build their professional network. In addition to his work with BJDC, Ron'Dale has collaborated with various organizations in the community including the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning, Karamu House Theatre, Cleveland Public Theatre, Cleveland Dance Movement, The Movement Project and the Rainey Institute. He has also worked with Cleveland Public Libraries and CMSD schools, bringing the joy of dance to local students.



CORLESIA SMITH (*Vocal Ensemble Understudy*) was born in Mississippi, has lived all around the country, but calls Cleveland home. You may have recently seen her as Cmae in Karamu House's production of *The Mountaintop* and in *Greenwood: An American Dream Destroyed* as Della. Notable credits include Amina (Alternate) in *Dance Nation* at Dobama Theatre, Carrie Pipperridge in *Carousel* with Mercury Theatre Company, Elizabeth in *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* at Case Western University, Nina 2 in *Simply*



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Simone and Sherry/Renata/Desi in *Passing Strange* at Karamu House.



KEVIN SMITH (*Vocal Ensemble*) realized his passion for music while singing in the church choir of his father's church. He later joined the John F. Kennedy high school choir which won numerous competi-

tions under the direction of Patricia Connors. His first singing debut on stage was singing "Be A Lion" from *The Wizard of Oz*. Kevin has sung in various choirs and groups. He continues singing as background and lead vocalist in many groups under the direction of Dr. David Thomas. Kevin is also acquainted with the recording studio. He has spent many hours recording with various groups and songs he has written. Kevin is honored to share his talent in *Black Nativity*.



SYDNEY SMITH (*Vocal Ensemble*) is extremely excited to be back working with Karamu on this wonderful production! She was last seen on Karamu's stage in *The Bubbly Black Girl Who Sheds Her*

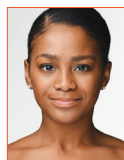
Chameleon Skin (Miss Pain/Nilda). Some of her other credits include *Insurrection: Holding History* (Octavia/Katie-Lynn), *Panther Women: An Army for the Liberation* (Woman 6), *Hairspray* (Ensemble/Motormouth U/S), and *For Colored Girls...* (Lady In Orange). She would like to thank this extremely talented cast and crew for making this such a great experience and her family and friends for their constant support.



NEHEMIAH SPENCER (*Joseph*) is an award-winning professional dancer and choreographer from Cleveland. Nehemiah attended Cleveland School of the Arts, where he studied dance. Through over-

coming the hardships of poverty, and as a Black male dancer, Nehemiah followed his dreams to attend Juilliard School and earned a bachelor's in fine arts in dance. Nehemiah performed as a dance soloist in the Broadway production of *The Wiz*. Nehemiah traveled the world as a principal dancer with Complexions Contemporary Ballet and with Abraham-in-Motion, under the direction of Kyle Abraham. He's also worked with Dianne McIntyre, Edna Duffy, and Reggie Kelly. He recorded with Jill

Scott in her music video *Back Together*. He choreographed three musicals: *Dreamgirls*, *42nd Street*, and *Memphis*. Nehemiah worked with The Silhouettes, on the documentary *The Shadow Between Us*, directed Lance Murphey and producer/composer Obadiah Baker. This film premiered at the 2020 Toronto Black Film Festival and received numerous awards and screenings worldwide.



SAMARA STEELE (*Dancer*) began her dance training in Cleveland, OH. She recently graduated *cum laude* from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program. She had the immense honor of being the inaugural recipient of the Ballet in Cleveland Misty Copeland Scholarship in 2015. She has performed works by choreographers such as Jeffrey Page, Alvin Ailey, Robert Battle, and Crystal Pite. Samara has furthered her training and experience with several organizations including Jacob's Pillow, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Columbus City Ballet School, and the Radio City Rockettes. She has been privileged to perform at Lincoln Center, Cleveland Playhouse Square, as well as Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. Samara gives all glory to God and endless love to her family and friends for their support.



STEVEN WEEMS (*Vocal Ensemble*) began singing at the age of 4 in his church adult choir. He attended Central State University and also studied in Salzburg, Austria. Steven also served as administra-

tive assistant and interim conductor to the Grammy nominated CSU Chorus, participated in Master Classes; including one with George Shirley, and represented CSU in the inaugural performance of The 105 Voices of History National HBCU Choir at the Kennedy Center. Steven sung throughout the United States, Austria, France, Germany, China, and received awards including a winner from the Ohio Advanced Men's Division of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. Steven has sung with The Dayton Opera, all three of The Cleveland Orchestra's adult choruses, and was the Chorus Master for the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company's *In the Spirit of* concert. He sings with the Linking Legacies and serves as the Choral and Media Director at The Philippi Missionary Baptist Church in Cleveland.

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LANGSTON HUGHES (*Playwright*) Famed poet and playwright, Langston Hughes was commissioned in 1961 to create a gospel drama to be staged that Christmas. In November of that year, Langston began a gospel play based on the theme of the Nativity. One idea above all guided him; he would attempt to make black gospel music the heart and soul of the drama, and not merely its adornment. Langston went directly to major sources of gospel music in Harlem in search of inspiration for lyrics and music. Haunting the store-front churches and temples, he slipped in among the faithful while the services were in full swing and the melodic and religious fervor rose to its zenith. Then he hurried back to his desk to revise and revamp his text. His hard work brought results. On December 6, he sent his drama agent the script of *Wasn't That A Mighty Day!* later called *Black Nativity*. *Black Nativity* marked a major breakthrough in the gospel music form. As with his evolving mastery of the blues in the 1920s, Hughes now deliberately allowed black music and religion to overwhelm the traditional play form. The musical opened December 11, 1961, on Broadway. The response was extraordinary. Unanimously the critics hailed *Black Nativity* as a major entertainment. To the *Mirror*, the show offered “an exciting blend of text, dance, spirituals and hymns,” and the *Post* marveled at its “spirit, zest and uninhabited joy.” — Arnold Rampersad, excerpt from *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967 I Dream A World*.

TONY F. SIAS (*Co-Director*) is the President + CEO of Karamu House, Inc., America's oldest Black producing theatre. Under Sias, Karamu stabilized finances, raised over \$10 million for restoration, and increased attendance. Prior to Karamu, Sias served in roles for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District including Director of Arts Education and Artistic Director of Cleveland School of the Arts. He received critical acclaim for directing Karamu's production of *Freedom on Juneteenth*, and in October 2021 Sias performed narration with The Cleveland Orchestra in *Sinfonia No. 5 "Visions"* by George Walker. His work has been highlighted in *The New York Times*, *American Theatre Magazine*, on NBC's *Today Show with Al Roker*. Sias served as a delegate from the U.S. Department of State in Istanbul, Turkey, representing the Council of International Programs in the Youth Arts for

Peace Project. In 2018, he was inducted into The HistoryMakers, the largest African American oral history archive collection in the U.S. In 2019, Sias was named the Cleveland Arts Prize, Barbara S. Robinson award winner. In 2021, Sias received the Community Leader Award from *Cleveland Magazine*. He is a Fellow of the National Arts Strategies Chief Executive Program through Harvard Business School. Sias serves as a National Board Member for the League of Historic American Theatres. He is a Boards Member of Cleveland School of the Arts and the Assembly for the Arts. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in dramatic art from Jackson State University and a Master of Fine Arts in acting from The Ohio University.



ERRIN WEAVER (*Co-Director/Choreographer*) is a choreographer, community activist, and the Executive Artistic Director of Mojuba! Dance Collective (@mojubadance), an African contemporary dance company based in Cleveland, Ohio. Errin attended Tennessee State University on a performing arts scholarship. While living in Chicago, she performed with the renowned Muntu Dance Theatre, under the direction of Amaniyeya Payne. She holds a Masters in Public Service from DePaul University and an MFA in Choreography and Interdisciplinary Studies from Wilson College. With over twenty years in the field, Errin has taught, been in residency, and sat on panels regarding sacred dance rooted in the Gospel tradition and Africanist dance forms extensively. Through her work, she has created the Black Choreographers Incubator, hosted and taught at conferences, and become a published author. She has been featured on WEWS and Spectrum News regarding her work using movement to address trauma and promote healing, and selected as a fellow for 21st Century Dance Practices with The National Center of Choreography. Her work in dance and community continues to be highlighted through the opening of the Mojuba! Center of Dance and Culture, which offers classes in cultural dance forms and wellness for both youth and adults (www.mojubadance.com).



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DR. DAVID M. THOMAS (*Music Director/Conductor*) was born in Youngstown and relocated to Cleveland after touring with Dizzy Gillespie, Albert Ayler, Jean Carne, Major Harris formerly of The

Delfonics, and Rose Royce. David was listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in American Education* and received two Jazz Legend awards. David studied at The Dana School of Music at Youngstown State and The Cleveland Institute of Music. He received a bachelor's and master's in music education from Case Western Reserve, as well as a Master of Music Composition from Cleveland State. David did post-graduate work at Royal Holloway College (U.K.), Camden University (London), and then completed his doctoral of music education at Kent State. His compositions include music for choir and orchestra, entitled "The Creation Sermon," "Songs of a Journey to Freedom," for the Cleveland Chamber Symphony Orchestra, and the Cleveland Municipal All-City Chorus combined with local church choirs. He has composed for the jazz group Pieces of a Dream, and The Silver Burdett Educational Music Series. He has music published by GIA Publications, Inc and co-authored the book *A Child's First Book of Spirituals*, which received the Coretta Scott King Award. He has music-directed *Dreamgirls*, *Rent*, *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, *The Wiz*, *Aida*, *Blues in the Night*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Memphis*, and more.

T. PAUL LOWRY (*Scenic & Digital Media Designer*) is a Cleveland-based projection, scenic and lighting designer. Recent designs include *Egress* at Cleveland Play House; *Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Irregulars*, *Ella Enchanted*, *The Nether*, *Airness*, and *Kill Move Paradise* at Dobama Theatre; *Black Nativity*, *Greenwood*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* at Karamu House; *The 39 Steps*, *Via Brooklyn*, and *Jane Eyre* for Cleveland Musical Theatre. Recent music and dance design include projects with International Festival of Arts & Ideas, ChamberFest Cleveland and GroundWorks Dance Theater.

INDA BLATCH-GEIB (*Costume Designer*) Commercial design for Krylon, Bryant & Stratton, Footlocker, The West Virginia Lottery's national campaigns, Ohio Lottery, Microsoft, Under Armour, McDonalds, TroyBuilt, Meijer, The

Original Mattress Factory, Cleveland Cavaliers' 1970-80's themed videos, and other national spots. Concert and festival design include Machine Gun Kelly's US/European Tours, ESTFEST and Wolstein Arena productions. Set styling for *Harper's Bazaar* UK Scarlet Johansson cover and spread, catalogue set styling for Foundations and Kilgore Trout. Her designs have been showcased in exhibits at The Smithsonian, with film projects including Ohio Art Direction of *The Signal* and *The Con*. Theatrical Design includes the special off-Broadway Production of *Kris Kringle: The Musical*, Cleveland Play House's production of *Native Gardens*, and multiple productions for the Colombian National Opera. Music Video Design for MGK's Alpha Omega and Let You Go releases. Inda has been the Resident Designer for Karamu, Cleveland Public Theatre, Magical Theatre, and Cleveland Institute of Music.

COLLEEN ALBRECHT (*Lighting Designer*) is a lighting designer and photographer living in Northeast Ohio. She designed for convergence-continuum, Cleveland Opera, Playhouse Square, Great Lakes Theater in collaboration with Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland Institute of Music, Beck Center, The Fine Arts Association, Heights Youth Theatre, True North Cultural Arts, Magnificat, Baldwin Wallace University, Cleveland State University, Cain Park, and Karamu House. At Karamu House, in addition to *Black Nativity*, she designed *Sassy Mamas*, *Simply Simone*, *Fences*, *A Day of Absence*, *Two by Tennessee*, *The Velocity of Autumn*, *Aida*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Mountaintop*, and *Clyde's*. She designed the All-City Musical productions with Cleveland Metropolitan School District All-City Arts at the Ohio Theatre since 2008. She obtained her BFA in production design and technology from Ohio University and her MFA in lighting design from the University of California, Irvine. Love to Will, Tom, Abbey, Leo, and little Danny. Welcome back, everyone!

RICHARD INGRAHAM (*Sound Designer*) Richard is a freelance sound designer, educator and audiovisual systems consultant having worked at numerous theatres, schools and attractions in the Cleveland area and throughout the US including: Ashland University, Beck Center

for the Arts, Baldwin-Wallace University, Cain Park, Carnegie-Mellon University, Chagrin Falls Performing Arts Academy, Cleveland Play House, The Cleveland Public Theatre, Cleveland State University, Dobama Theatre, The University of Evansville, Great Lakes Theater, Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, The Jewish Community Center of Cleveland, Oberlin College, Playhouse Square Center, and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. He has also worked as a consultant to award winning software companies that create products for live event production including Stage Research and Richmond Sound Design.

DRED GEIB (*Props Manager*) is a production designer for IBG Designs and specializes in properties, costumes, and sets. He lives and works in the Northeast Ohio area and focuses mainly on theater, film, and art installation.

BRIELLE MCGREW (*Wig Designer/Costume Coordinator*) is a Cleveland native who has worked in wardrobe since 2012. She is a proud alumnus of the CMSD All-City Arts program and is now Wardrobe Supervisor for the program. Brielle is the resident Costume Shop Manager/Wig Artisan for Karamu. She is also the wardrobe assistant for Cleveland Public Theater. Brielle has worked entertainment costuming at Walt Disney World as the costumer for the Star Wars franchise. She has also done wardrobe for the Cleveland Institute of Opera, Dobama Theatre, Apollo's Fire, Cleveland Play House, Playhouse Square and many more. She has wig designed for Karamu House's *Greenwood: An American Dream Destroyed*, *Clyde's* and *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*. She was the wig tech for Cleveland Play House's *American Mariachi*. In addition, Brielle has costume designed for the short film *Ancestors*, Cleveland Public Theatre's premiere of *Can I Touch It*, and Karamu's arts education programs.

SHANNON MCMANUS (*Stage Manager & Production Manager*) is thrilled to be returning to Playhouse Square with Karamu House again! She spent two years in the Berkshires working for

Capital Repertory, Shakespeare & Company and WAM Theatre. She has been working professionally in Cleveland for four years with other wonderful companies including Cleveland Play House, Oberlin-Wellington Project, Cleveland Public Theatre and Cain Park. Her credits include *Black Nativity* '21- 23, *Jacked!*, *Loush Sisters* '19, *Getting Near to Baby*, *The Magic Negro*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Last Wife*, *Emperor of the Moon*, *Emilie Defends Her Life Tonight*, *The Mountaintop*, the *Legends of Broadway/Broadway Live!* Tour, *Red Summer*, and *The Rescue of John Price*. She would like to thank her family and friends all over the country for their collaboration and support.

TYREE J. FRANKLIN (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is a Cleveland based stage manager and Artist with his BFA in Stage Management from Wright State University. His recent stage management credits include: *Everybody* (CWRU/CPH), *Passage* (CWRU/CPH), *Erma Bombeck* (CPH), *The Tempest* (CWRU/CPH), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Karamu House), *Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Here Chameleon Skin* (Karamu House) and this will be his fifth season working on Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* (Karamu House). He is also a new playwright with his show *Tales of a Fat Man*, which was featured at CPT's Pandemonium '23. He would like to thank his family and friends for their continued love and support!

CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE, founded in 1915 and recipient of the 2015 Regional Theatre Tony Award, is America's first professional regional theatre. Throughout its rich history, CPH has remained dedicated to its mission to inspire, stimulate, and entertain diverse audiences across Northeast Ohio by producing plays and theatre education programs of the highest professional standards. CPH has produced more than 100 world and/or American premieres, and over its long history more than 12 million people have attended over 1,600 productions. Today, Cleveland Play House celebrates the beginning of its second century of service while performing in three state-of-the art venues at Playhouse Square in downtown Cleveland.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		 <p>YOU CAN'T STOP THE BEAT hairspray BRADLEY'S TONY AWARD-WINNING BEST MUSICAL IS BACK</p>			<div style="background-color: #800040; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">DECEMBER</div> <p>A Christmas Carol Black Nativity</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; text-align: center;">1 2</p>	
A Christmas Carol Black Nativity Steve Martin & Martin Short		Hairspray	Hairspray Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol Hairspray Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol Hairspray Hip Hop Nutcracker Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol Hairspray Black Nativity
A Christmas Carol Hairspray Dave Koz and Friends Black Nativity			Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker Raymond Arroyo Christmas Merry and Bright Black Nativity	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker Jim Brickman's A Joyful Christmas Mannheim Steamroller Black Nativity
A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker Jim Brickman's A Joyful Christmas A Family Christmas We The Kingdom & Matt Maher	 <p>Mrs. Doubtfire The New Musical Comedy</p>		A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker	A Christmas Carol The Nutcracker A Magical Cirque Christmas
	JANUARY		 <p>BEVY ANDERSSON & BIRNY LEVINS MAMMA MIA! THE SMASH HIT MUSICAL...ABBA!</p>		Flanagan's Wake Champions of Magic	Flanagan's Wake Champions of Magic
Elvis Tribute Artist Spectacular Champions of Magic		Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake The Killer B's
Mrs. Doubtfire		Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake Paul Taylor Dance Company
Mrs. Doubtfire Nimesh Patel: Fast and Loose Tour		Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake	Mrs. Doubtfire Flanagan's Wake The Rainbow Fish Shen Yun
Mrs. Doubtfire The Rainbow Fish Shen Yun		Mamma Mia!	Mamma Mia!			

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