

SESSION 3 - A PROLOGUE TO HARLEM'S LEGACY OF BLACK THEATRE

SEEKING THE UNTRAMMELED SELF: HARLEM THEATER IN ITS HEYDAY

In 1949, *Florence*, set in a southern train station, debuted at Harlem's St. Marks Church on 125th Street. The following year, *Florence* was produced again at the Club Baron on Lenox Avenue, a gathering spot famous since the Harlem Renaissance. The 1950 program also included *Just a Little Simple*, which dramatized the Langston Hughes stories. The double bill drew a huge audience. When asked about moving the hit downtown, Alice Childress, who wrote *Florence* and adapted Hughes, declined.

She was writing for the community, not commercial attention, she said. A pioneer member of the American Negro Theater (ANT), Childress spent every spare moment mastering stagecraft in front of and behind the scenes. Five years before writing *Florence*, Childress was nominated for a Tony for her role in *Anna Lucasta*, which ANT adapted and produced on Broadway in 1944, featuring a black family.

Childress is one of thousands, who make up the story of Harlem theatre, from the Lincoln to the Lafayette and beyond, all pushing to be sympathetically seen. The emblematic Childress devoted her career to positively portraying an extended community, viewed by outsiders as always lesser and unworthy. In her eyes, blacks, whether called Negroes or African Americans or something else, were often insightful and not invariably criminal. Home and belonging was what they sought. For a time, in the 20th century, from one fraught era to another, they had both, untrammelled, in Harlem.



DR. KHALIL GIBRAN MUHAMMAD is the Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and a Visiting Professor at the CUNY Graduate Center. Khalil holds a doctorate in US history from Rutgers. He is the author of *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, which won the 2011 John Hope Franklin Best Book award in American Studies. His research focuses on racial criminalization in modern U.S. History. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors for his commitment to public engagement.



BARBARA LEWIS, PH. D heads the Trotter Institute for the Study of Black History and Culture at UMass Boston, where she is an Associate Professor in the Department of English. As a cultural historian, she has published on the black arts movement of the sixties, the drama of August Wilson, lynching and performance, and minstrelsy. Prior to being named Director of the Trotter Institute, she was Chair of the Department of Theatre at University of Kentucky.

CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM B. BRANCH



WILLIAM B. BRANCH Playwright, Editor, American Book Award Winner, Screenwriter, Producer, Critic. Degrees from Northwestern University and Columbia University; studied at Yale University. Awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for Drama and Performing Arts. Taught at Cornell University and William Paterson College. Author of filmstrips, screenplay outlines, TV and radio

scripts. Directed in Television and Radio. Noted plays: *A Medal for Willie*; *In Splendid Error*. Noted film: *Together for Days*. Editor and contributor: *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*. Editor and contributor: *Crosswinds: An Anthology of Black Dramatists in the Diaspora* and many more.

SESSION 4 - HARLEM BLACK THEATRE PANEL

NEW HERITAGE THEATRE GROUP FOUNDED 1964

The oldest black nonprofit theater company in New York City. Three divisions: IMPACT Repertory Theatre, Roger Furman Reading Series and New Heritage Films give training, exposure and experience to new and emerging artists, playwrights, directors and technicians of color. Founded by the late Roger Furman, currently headed by Executive Producer Voza Rivers and Executive Artistic Director Jamal Joseph.



VOZA RIVERS
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Founding Member

Voza Rivers, founding member of New Heritage Theatre Group, (est. 1964) is an accomplished theatre, music, film, and events producer. Co-Founder/Executive Producer of IMPACT Repertory Theatre; 1st Vice President, Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce; Executive Producer and Vice Chairman, HARLEM WEEK, The Harlem Music Festival, and Chairman of the Harlem Arts Alliance.

NATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FOUNDED 1968

Founded by Dr. Barbara Ann Teer in 1968, is a internationally recognized cultural and educational institution. Dr. Teer was a pioneer in brining black theatre where artists of African descent actually live and work. NBT is the first revenue-generating black arts complex in the country, an innovative arrangement through which for-profit businesses who shared NBT's values rented retail space to subsidize the arts.



SADE LYTHCOTT
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CEO

Sade Lythcott, is the daughter of Dr. Barbara Ann Teer, founder of the NBT. Following her mother's death in 2008, Sade was appointed CEO of the NBT, and is also co-chair of the Coalitions of Theaters of Color. She is a recipient of the 2015 Rising Star Award from 651 ARTS, received the Key to Harlem for her excellence in the Arts, and the Larry Leon Hamlin Legacy Award from Black Theatre Network.

THE H.A.D.L.E.Y. PLAYERS FOUNDED 1979

The Harlem Artists' Development League Especially for You, a.k.a. The H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players, is a non-profit 501©(3) theater established in 1980 in the Harlem by Ms. Gertrude Jeannette. Serving a diverse audience of all cultures and backgrounds the HADLEY players has received numerous awards and rave reviews from audiences and critics.



GERTRUDE JEANNETTE
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Founder, CEO Emeritus

Ms. Jeanette founded the H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players to answer the need of professional artists to develop their talents in the theatre and to enrich the cultural life in the Harlem Community. She has worked as a professional actress in radio, stage, film and TV. Her numerous awards include being inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame.

THE CLASSICAL THEATRE OF HARLEM FOUNDED 1999

The Classical Theatre of Harlem is a multiple AUDELCO and Obie award winning theatre company which tells stories as seen through the lens of the African Diaspora and does work that honors the cultural legacy of the neighborhood in which it was founded.

**TY JONES**

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Producing Artistic Director

NAACP Award Winner, Ty Jones is the Producing Artistic Director of the Classical Theatre of Harlem (CTH). He is a 2013 recipient of the Council of the City of New York Proclamation Award. His role with CTH since 2003 has included: Actor, Producer, Managing Director, Development Director and Board Chair.

TAKE WING AND SOAR PRODUCTIONS, INC. FOUNDED 1999

Take Wing And Soar Productions exists primarily to help classical actors of color to realize their full potential. The mission of the theatre production company is to support emerging and professional classical artists of color, by fostering their artistic achievement and personal growth, by providing opportunities for career development, and by developing creative programming that fosters diversity in classical theatre.

**DEBRA ANN BYRD**

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**Founder and
Producing Artistic Director**

Debra Ann Byrd is the Founder and Producing Artistic Director of the Harlem Shakespeare Festival and Take Wing And Soar Productions. She has guided the company's growth from its birth in 1999 into a viable support organization serving women, youth, classically trained artists of color and theater arts groups throughout New York. As an actor, producer, arts manager, and business leader she has received more than 20 awards and citations.

FAISON FIREHOUSE THEATRE FOUNDED 2000

The Faison Firehouse Theatre was created as an incubator for creative projects, dedicated to engaging young people in the preservation and dissemination of Harlem's historical past while teaching them how to develop the technical skills needed to entertain a 21st Century audience.

**GEORGE FAISON**

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Artistic Director

Mr. Faison is an award winning, internationally celebrated producer, writer, essayist, composer, director, choreographer and dancer, for film and stage. He made history in 1975 as the first African American to win a Tony Award for best choreography for *The Wiz*. In 2000, Mr. Faison, along with co-founder Tad Schnugg, established The Faison Firehouse Theater located in Harlem.

THE MOVEMENT THEATRE COMPANY FOUNDED 2007

With all of their programming, The Movement Theatre Company seeks to create an artistic social "movement" that engages uptown audiences in a rich theatrical dialogue, enlightens communities of color to the important issues affecting our world, and empowers emerging artists to find and explore the many sides of their unique voice.



DEADRIA HARRINGTON

Producing Artistic Leader

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Deadria Harrington, a multifaceted theater artist and Producing Artistic Leader with The Movement Theatre Company [TMTC]. Hailing from MN, select credits include: *The Body Unbound* (TMTC), *Look Upon Our Lowliness* (TMTC), *Catalyst Moving The Black Theatre Legacy Forward* (The National Black Theater) and *The Architecture of Becoming* (Women's Project).

LIBERATION THEATRE COMPANY FOUNDED 2009

Liberation Theatre Company was established as a home for creative, emerging Black playwrights, providing resources to develop their work, nurturing and inviting them to express themselves in a supportive and focused environment.



SANDRA A. DALEY-SHARIF

Producing Artistic Director

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Sandra has earned her merits in the arts as an award winning playwright and producer, professional actress, director, and dramaturg. She was recently awarded The Josephine Abady Award, for her contribution of cultural diversity to American theatre. She is founding member of Obie Award winning Harlem9 (48Hours in... Harlem).

HARLEM9 FOUNDED 2010

Founded in 2010, Harlem9 is a collaborative producing organization based in Harlem comprised of a group of Black theater professionals from various production backgrounds. Our goal is to produce theater together, exploring the past, present and future of black culture, and celebrating its rich and diverse history of storytelling.



BRIAN E. GLOVER

Producer

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Bryan E. Glover is an independent arts producer who has supported the arts and emerging artists for over 25 years, having worked with a diversity of artists in a variety of contexts and cities. He is also a leadership and life coach, using creativity to access joy, passion and possibilities.