YALE SUMMER CABARET

MEZA

Blessings

by Gloria Majule

August 14th, 6:00pm
Blessings

by Gloria Majule

Creative Team

DIRECTOR     Alex Keegan
DRAMATURG    Ashley M. Thomas
STAGE MANAGER Edmond O’Neal
SOUND DESIGNER Liam Bellman-Sharpe

Cast

MAMA             Alexandra Maurice
REBEKA           Tavia Hunt
DETECTIVE LAURENT Maal Imani West
BARAKA           Nomè SiDone

Stage directions read by Tyler Cruz
**Blessings.**


n. the act or word that one blesses; a special favor, mercy, or benefit; a favor or gift bestowed by God, therefore bestowing happiness.

But this definition is by far my favorite—grace.

I do not know how else Black women get up in the morning to pray, to cook, to work, to sing, to clean, to bury their plants, and then bury their dead without grace. This isn’t a grace simply instilled by a higher power, but a grace that Black women possess and offer to the world. It’s the grace Black women have to not burn down the world but instead burn a candle. It’s a grace that Black women share with those who are least deserving to even know our names. It’s a grace that moves Black women to be victor instead of victim.

And here is a play that tells us just that. *Blessings* has mercy on us. When we are faced with pain, Gloria Majule offers us peace. We go beyond the news headlines of police brutality and dive into the aftermath of a family trying to pick up the pieces. Following three Black women from three distinct walks of life, we witness the strength of a movement. It was never up to the masses to determine the validity of our lives. Black Lives Matter. We have always known that. But it is the Black women who make movements move. From Fannie Lou Hamer to Winnie Mandela to Evelyn Mushi we’re reminded time and time again that justice lies in the laps of Black women. *Blessings* invites us into the sacred space of Evelyn, Rebeka, and Detective Laurent’s hearts without respite. We watch grief and joy unfold all at the same time.

And so to the ancestors for showing us favor, sharing us with grace, and showering us with blessings we whisper:

thank you
thank you
thank you.

“...when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing, or special patronage, without violence and without suing, or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me...”
MEZA’s Story

We’re so grateful that you’ve decided to join us this summer. We are two directing students, Christopher Betts and Alex Keegan, and three theater management students, Carl Holvick, Sami Cubias and Jason Gray. We came together earlier this year with an aligned purpose - we wanted to be part of a Summer Cabaret that was radically inclusive, artistically daring, and community-oriented. We articulated a set of values that resonated deeply for each of us: a reclamation of space by giving voice to narratives that have been overlooked or distorted in mainstream theatre, liberation to think and create freely, outside the confines of a busy academic year; curiosity to investigate brave, challenging work, community built through season programming as well as a host of readings, workshops and events aimed to engage greater New Haven, and celebration; celebrating the human spirit in all aspects of our theater making.

We called our season A Seat at the Table, and were raring to go with artists and creative staff engaged and finances mapped out.

Then Coronavirus hit.

And we all took a big step back. We gave ourselves grace and time to take in the moment, to process the grief and frustration, and the endless questions - at the core of which was/is: what does theater mean in this moment?

We surveyed the community to ask you essentially the same thing. We meditated on your amazing responses and used them to fuel an exciting retreat with our artistic collaborators where we were able to reimagine what the Summer Cabaret could be and who we might serve.

It became very clear that we needed to use our platform to address the Black Lives Matter movement and do our part to lend energy, engagement and nurturing to the monumental change taking root in our country and around the world to fight racial injustice. It also became clear that instead of asking for a Seat at the Table, we wanted and needed to build a table of our own, both as a leadership team and as citizens of a fundamentally flawed society. And so this summer’s project, MEZA, was born. Meza, a Swahili word meaning Table, is offered as a unifying theme for our season, and by larger implication, as a way forward for all of us.
Our Purpose

Yale Summer Cabaret: MEZA sets out to rediscover the fundamental joy of theater making during a time of great uncertainty, and to reimagine the American theater as a site of true equity and inclusivity. Rather than mourn what we’ve lost, we believe in the power of this moment to crack open systemic practices and ideologies meant to serve a privileged few. By committing our artistic season to the development of new works by Black women playwrights, we aim to play a small role in laying the groundwork for a new table, one that centers Blackness unapologetically, and makes room for nuanced explorations of the Black experience. As part of a season that combats anti-Blackness, MEZA also endeavors to shine a light on local organizations and businesses that lift up the Black community through our Community Spotlight series, and to educate the next generation of socially conscious theater makers through our MEZA’s Makers youth workshops.

Leadership Team

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS
Christopher D. Betts
Alex Keegan

MANAGING DIRECTORS
Sami Cubias
Jason Gray
Carl Holvick

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Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration
Creative Team

Alex Keegan - DIRECTOR

Alex’s recent directing includes Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, Tilted by Gloria Majule (Yale Drama), Cock by Mike Bartlett, Lenny’s Fast Food… by Angie Bridgette Jones (Yale Cab), Auntie Vanya by Reed Northrup (Ars Nova ANT Fest), She Kills Monsters by Qui Nguyen (Geva Fellowship), Tough by Margot Connolly, Selkie by Krista Knight (Williamstown), Primary by Gracie Gardner (IRT/Sanguine), and new works with O’Neill Theater Center YPF, Ensemble Studio Theatre, MCC FreshPlay, and Cherry Lane Theatre. She created Aplomb, a play considering a queer young woman’s experience with anxiety disorder, which was developed through The Habitat and NYTW’s Adelphi Residency. She’s received an EST/Sloan New Play Commission, Drama League Artist Residency, and is an alum of Middle Voice at Rattlestick, The Civilians R&D Group, Williamstown Directing Corps, Lincoln Center Directors Lab, Geva Theatre Center Directing Fellowship, and 24 Hour Plays Nationals. BA: Brown University, MFA candidate: Yale School of Drama.

Gloria Majule - PLAYWRIGHT

Gloria is a playwright from Dodoma, Tanzania presently residing in New Haven, Connecticut. She is an M.F.A. Playwriting candidate at the Yale School of Drama. Gloria holds a B.A. from Cornell University in Performing & Media Arts and Spanish. Selected plays include Culture Shock (Bay Area Playwrights Festival: Finalist), Uhuru (formerly known as Tilted, Yale School of Drama) and Life Sentence (Schwartz Center For the Performing and Media Arts). Gloria is fluent in Kiswahili and is currently learning French.
Creative Team

Ashley M. Thomas - DRAMATURG

Ashley M. Thomas was born and raised in Harlem, New York. A writer and researcher—she is interested in exploring the intersections of culture, politics, and Beyoncé through a Black feminist lens. She is a proud alum of the First Wave Urban Arts Scholarship at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work. She is currently an MFA candidate studying Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at Yale School of Drama.

Liam Bellman-Sharpe - SOUND DESIGNER

Liam is a recent graduate of the Yale School of Drama’s MFA program, where his composition and design credits include *Mr. Burns: A Post Electric Play*, *as U Like it*, *The Tempest*, *Bakkhai*, and *Elon Musk and the plan to Blow Up Mars the musical*. Additional credits include composition for *I Am My Own Wife* at Long Wharf Theatre, *from/to nothing* at the New Haven Festival of Arts and Ideas, as well as scores for dance and theatre in Australia and Hong Kong.

Edmond O’Neal - STAGE MANAGER

Edmond is a third-year M.F.A. candidate at Yale School of Drama, where his credits include *Fun Home*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*, and Assistant Stage Manager on *Measure for Measure*, *Locusts* and *Seven Spots On the Sun*. His other credits include *Is God Is*, *We Are Proud to Present*, *School Girls; or, the African Mean Girls Play* (Yale Cabaret); *Latinos Who Look Like Ricky Martin* (Verano Cabaret); *Grey Gardens*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *The Flick*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (Lyric Repertory Company); and *Gertrude and Claudius* (Orlando Shakespeare Theater). He holds a B.A. in Theatre Studies from the University of Central Florida.
Cast

Alexandra Maurice - MAMA

Alexandra Maurice is a rising third year actor at the Yale School of Drama. She’s grateful to the entire Summer Cab team, her cast and crew, and Gloria for the opportunity to tell this story.

Tavia Hunt - REBEKA

Tavia is a SF Bay Area native and a rising Second Year Actor at the Yale School of Drama. She holds a BFA in Music Theatre from Elon University (2011). Credits include: Is God Is (Yale Cabaret), The Salt Women (Carlotta Festival), Girls (Yale Repertory Theatre).
Cast

Nomè SiDone- Baraka

Nomè SiDone is a first-year M.F.A. candidate at Yale School of Drama. His credits include Joseph Asagai (Yale Repertory Theatre) Richard II, The Heart of Robin, The Sea Maid, The Taming of the Shrew (Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival); The Unspoken 200 (Saint Clements Theatre); A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Mended Wing Theater Company); Airline Highway, Antony and Cleopatra, Six Degrees of Separation, Where We’re Born, A Movie Star is Born... (UNC School of the Arts); Take One Step, The Servant of Two Masters (Peppercorn Theater Company).

Film: Supernova and Rota. B.F.A., University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Instagram: @nomesidone

Maal Imani West - DETECTIVE LAURENT

Maal Imani West is a Southern writer and performer in New Haven, CT. Recently seen in The Salt Women (Carlotta Festival), Hamlet (Shakespeare Repertory Projects, Yale School of Drama), How Black Girls Get Over Fuckbois: Vol 1 (Langston Hughes Festival)
Community Spotlight

One Village Healing (OVH) is a BIPOC led initiative that centers radical inclusion, affinity healing, and joyfulness as core elements of collective healing. OVH also centers the specific healing needs of those most impacted by systems of oppression by offering healing sessions that use holistic modalities like reiki, meditation, yoga, dance, music, and visual art as tools for increasing resiliency, mindfulness, healing, and liberation from systemic oppression. OVH offers wellness seekers: practitioners trained in anti-oppression and pro-liberation practices; free and pay what you can access to healing services; affinity healing sessions; and welcoming accessible spaces for all bodies.
Announcement

Following the performance, join us for our Season Talkback. Hear from the artists, ask questions, celebrate our season.
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