MEZA

Daughters of the Confederacy

by Angie Bridgette Jones

August 8th, 7:00pm
Daughters of the Confederacy

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Creative Team

DIRECTOR         Christopher D. Betts
DRAMATURG        Faith Zamblé
STAGE MANAGER    Edmond O’Neal
SOUND DESIGNER   Liam Bellman-Sharpe

Cast

ELIZABETH        Ciara Monique McMillian
ROSINA           Abigail C. Onwunali
ALEXANDRA        Tyler Cruz
ST. MARTIN       Anthony Holiday
MARGARET         Sarah Lyddan
WILLIAM          John Evans Reese

Stage directions read by Tavia Hunt
Can I tell you a joke? If you’re still reading this program note, I’m going to take that as a “yes.” Now, to be honest, it’s not a joke I wrote, but in order to understand this play, I think you need to hear it. Ready? Ok. So, in his 2004 special Never Scared, Chris Rock is talking about racism, and he says, “If you’re black, America’s like the uncle that paid your way through college but molested you.”

Are you laughing? I hope so. Because, to laugh, is to acknowledge that what he’s saying is true. To laugh, is to acknowledge, albeit indirectly, that American history is tangled up with a legacy of sexual violence. Under normal circumstances, we wouldn’t laugh at these things, but humor has a way of disarming us, and directing our attention to subjects we would much rather ignore. Which is why, when it comes to race, the phrase “black humor” is a double entendre.

On its face, black humor is a comedic genre that invites us to reimagine our relationship to ugliness. It takes death, violence, and harassment as its material, and spins into something we can process and understand. For Black people (especially Black comedians), negotiating the horror and beauty of American life is a matter of survival. We laugh to keep from crying.

We also laugh because sh*t is funny.

Less funny is the real-life United Daughters of the Confederacy. Composed of women who can trace their ancestry back to Confederate soldiers, the UDC is (more-or-less) a tea party for racist white women—which pains me to say because I love tea. But, I digress.

Daughters of the Confederacy is, like its namesake, deeply concerned with legacy and birthright too. However, this play understands that Black people are equal claimants in the South’s inheritance, something the UDC can never admit. The story follows three sisters—all conceived through the rape of their enslaved mothers. Who happen to be looting the plantation they grew up on... A haunted plantation. Just a casual Tuesday.

Daughters of the Confederacy wants to ask us about legacy, and what it takes to face the past, while shaking loose from its grasp. And then, shock us into laughter.
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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Sylvia Van Sinderen & James Sinclair
Christopher D. Betts - DIRECTOR

Christopher’s recent credits include, *Is God Is, littleboy/little man, We are Proud to Present…, Fireflies* and *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Yale Cabaret). Collaborations include Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* (PopArt Jo- hannesburg/ Market Theatre Lab); a series of new works with the Obie Award-winning Fire this Time Festival; the workshop of *Goodnight Tyler* (Kennedy Center/Alliance Theatre); *The Cave: A Folk Opera* (New York Premiere); *CARRIE* (2015 BroadwayWorld Best Musical nomination) and *Barbecue* (The Public Theatre). Betts is a recipient of the Julie Taymor World Theater Fellowship, the 2019 Richie Jackson Artist Fellowship and a two-time recipient of the SDCF Observership. Christopher received his BFA in drama from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and is pursuing his MFA in directing at Yale School of Drama. He is an Artist-in-Residence at both Kampala International Theater Festival and Pop Art Johannesburg and a teaching artist at The Market Theatre Lab. [christopherdbetts.com](http://christopherdbetts.com) IG: @chris.tagram

Angie Bridgette Jones - PLAYWRIGHT

Angie is an Atlanta native and received her B.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Angie has worked for corporations such as Jax Media, Fox Searchlight Pictures and New Dramatists, and for TV shows including *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and *Younger* (Season 4). Her work has also been included in the Circle in the Square The Circle Series in 2019. Angie is currently in New Haven, Connecticut pursuing her M.F.A. in Playwriting at the Yale School of Drama.
Faith Zamblé - DRAMATURG

Faith is a dramaturg, writer, and multidisciplinary artist hailing from the Midwest and various corners of the African diaspora. She graduated in 2017 from North Park University with a BA in Media Studies and Fine Art, eventually finding her way to advocacy work in Washington D.C. and, later on, a residency at Trestle Art Space in Brooklyn, NY.

She would like to remind you that black lives have always mattered.

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

Abigail C. Onwunali - ROSINA

Abigail is a rising second year at the Yale School of Drama. Credits include: *it’s not a trip it’s a journey* at the Chautauqua Theatre Company, *The Salt Women* and *Swimmers* at the Yale School of Drama, *Is God Is* at the Yale Cabaret, *Girls* (Understudy) at the Yale Repertory Theatre.

Ciara Monique McMillian - ELIZABETH

Ciara Monique is a recent graduate of Yale School of Drama. YSD credits include: *Trouble in Mind; Blues for Miss Lucille; Marty and the Hands That Could; Fireflies* (Yale Cabaret); *Alma* (Yale Cabaret); *Is God Is* (Yale Cabaret). Yale School of Drama’s Carol Finch Dye Acting Award recipient 2020.

Tyler Cruz - ALEXANDRA

Tyler is a rising second year acting MFA candidate at the Yale School of Drama. Recent past credits include the Hangar Theatre’s production of *Shayla and the Magic Paintbrush*, the YSD production of *The Salt Women*, and the Yale Cabaret production of *Littleboy/Littleman*.

IG: @tylerrcruz
Cast

Anthony Holiday - ST. MARTIN

Holiday is currently attending the Yale School of Drama, class of 2021/2022, where he will be training in Acting to receive his Masters degree. Where he’s been in productions of *Ain’t no dead thing* by a.k. Payne. *Mr.Burns* by Anne Washburn in the character of Homer and Marge. *Measure for Measure* in the character of Claudio. *Locust* by Chris Núñez in the character of Amos. *Lenny’s fast food kids gang* by Angie B. Jones in the character of Walter “wavy” Jackson.

He’s from New Jersey, born and raised. He’s done extensive training at the Atlantic Conservatory as well as Brookdale Community.

Sarah Lyddan - MARGARET

Sarah is a rising third year actor at the Yale School of Drama. YSD credits include: *Henry VI Part 3, YELL, Reykjavik, Tilted* and *Measure for Measure*. Last year, she played Dionysos in the Yale Summer Cabaret production of *BAKKHAI*.

Thank you and much love to the MEZA team for this community and this communion!

IG: @sarahlyddamn

John Evans Reese - WILLIAM

John graduated with YSD’s lost class of 2020 due to the COVID crisis. YSD: In His Hands; or the gay christian play; The Last Days of Judas Iscariot; Pivot; Shoot Her, Shooter; Trouble in Mind; and shakespeare’s as u like it. Other credits Cock (Yale Cabaret); A Taste of Honey (The Pearl Theatre, directed by Austin Pendleton); Way to Heaven (Repertorio Español); Lord of the Flies (BSC); An Inspector Calls (PTC); This is Our Youth (W.H.A.T); The History Boys (PBD); YSD’s Oliver Thorndike Acting Award Recipient. Jerome L. Greene Fellow 2019-2020 @johnevansreese
Community Spotlight

Sandra’s Next Generation Restaurant

(203) 787-4123
sandrasnextgeneration.com

It is said that cooking is an act of love. If that is true, then my career was born from my mother’s heart. All that I am and all that I know as a cook I learned from her. It was at her knee that I learned how to infuse chicken and pork, fish and vegetables with love and a blend of seasonings to create soul food.
-Sandra Pittman

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.

onevillagehealing@gmail.com
onevillagehealing.org
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Blessings
by Gloria Majule
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Following the performance,
join us for our
Season Talkback
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