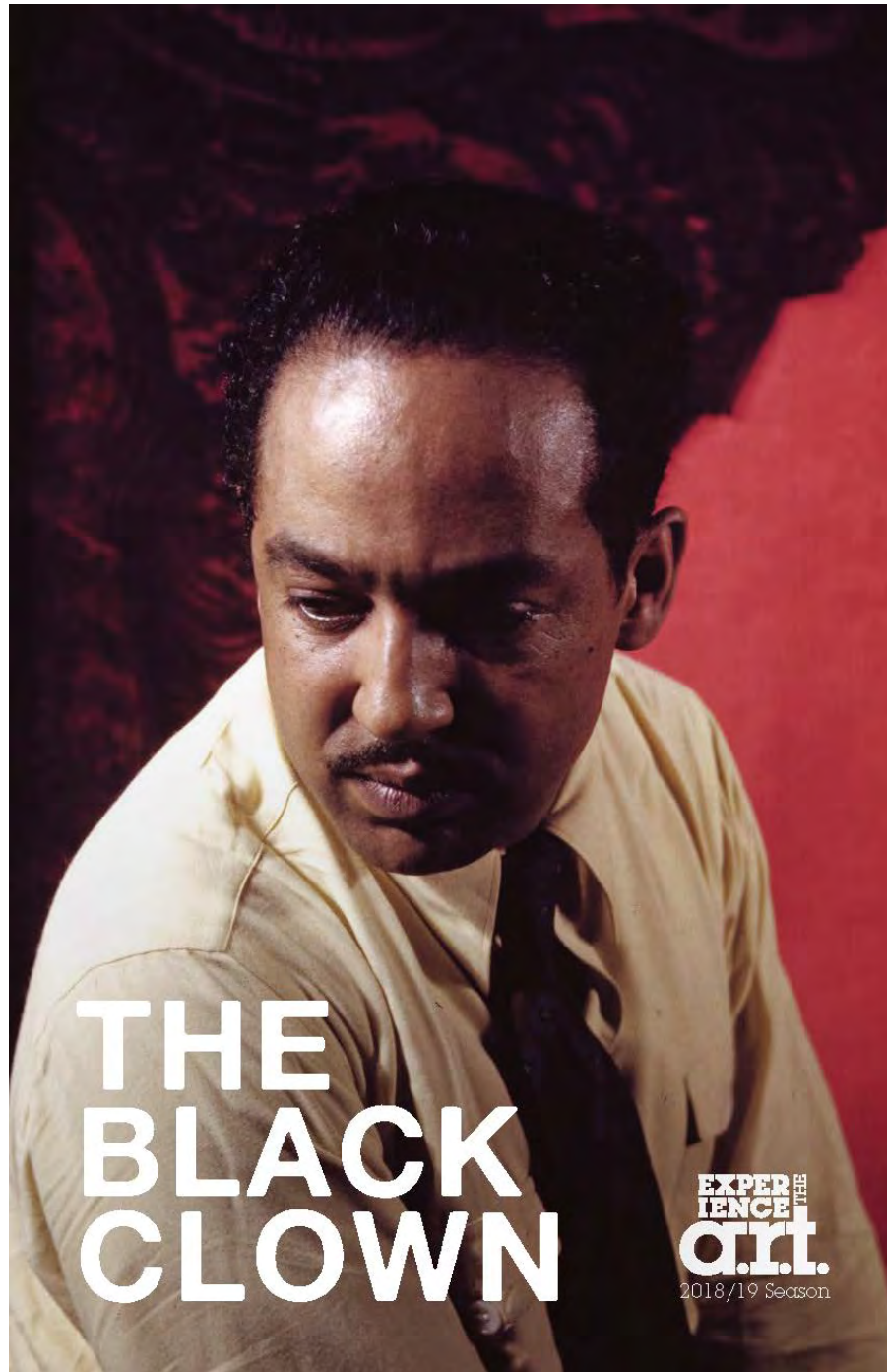


Electronic Press Kit



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American Repertory Theater

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americanrepertorytheater.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 1, 2018

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American Repertory Theater Announces Cast and Creative Team for *The Black Clown*

Cambridge, MA—American Repertory Theater at Harvard University (A.R.T.), under the leadership of Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Producer Diane Borger, announces complete casting and creative team for ***The Black Clown***. The production begins previews Friday, August 31; opens Wednesday, September 5; and closes Sunday, September 23, 2018 at the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, MA.

“You laugh / Because I’m poor and black and funny...”, begins Langston Hughes’ poem, ***The Black Clown***. This world premiere music theater experience fuses vaudeville, opera, jazz, and spirituals to bring [Hughes’ verse](#) to life onstage to animate a Black man’s resilience against a legacy of oppression. The production features **Davóné Tines** (***Crossing*** and ***Run AMOC! Festival*** at A.R.T.) in the title role, an ensemble of twelve, and a new score by **Michael Schachter** (***Run AMOC! Festival*** at A.R.T.).

Tines says, “Langston Hughes’ expansive and penetrating engagement with the life of the other has been a guiding salve since I was first introduced to his work in elementary school. This production provides the opportunity to harness Hughes’ words and my life experience as a Black man to claim humanity for myself, my race, and all people.”

Paulus says, “At the A.R.T. we create work that helps us more fully see and hear each other—work that fosters empathy, dialogue, and transformation. Four years ago, we heard the beginnings of ***The Black Clown*** and we knew immediately that we had to commit to these artists and the development of this work. I’m so thrilled that ***The Black Clown*** is opening A.R.T.’s 2018/19 Season.”

The ensemble includes **Sumayya Ali** (***Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*** at A.R.T.), **Malcolm Armwood** (***Motown the Musical*** National Tour), **Daniel Bellomy** (“The Deuce”), **Dawn Bless** (***Gypsy*** at Porchlight Theater), **LaVon Fisher-Wilson** (Disney’s ***Newsies*** on Broadway), **Lindsey Hailes** (***The Lucky Ones*** at Ars Nova), **Evan Tyrone Martin** (***Duke Ellington’s Greatest Hits*** at Music Theater Works), **Jhardon DiShon Milton** (***A Bronx Tale*** on Broadway), **Brandon Michael Nase** (***Ragtime*** at Tulane Summer Music Theatre), **Amber Barbee Pickens** (Cirque du Soleil’s ***Paramour*** on Broadway), **Jamar Williams** (***Burn All Night*** and ***Witness Uganda*** at A.R.T.), and **Hailee Kaleem Wright** (***Hairspray*** with Jersey Shore Productions).

CREATIVE TEAM

Adaptor/The Black Clown
Davóne Tines

Adaptor/Music/Orchestrations & Arrangements
Michael Schachter

Director
Zack Winokur

Choreography
Chanel DaSilva

Music Director/Keyboard/Additional
Arrangements for the A.R.T. premiere
Jaret Landon

Scenic & Costume Design
Carlos Soto

Lighting Design
John Torres

Sound Design
Kai Harada

Wig and Hair Design
Rachel Padula-Shufelt

Casting
Stewart/Whitley

Associate Music Director
Joelle Lamarre

Production Stage Manager
Taylor Brennan

Assistant Stage Manager
Mario Wolfe

PRODUCTION SUPPORT

Production Sponsor: **Alison and Bob Murchison**

Artistic Residency Support of Davóne Tines: **Katie and Paul Bittenwieser**

Additional Production Support: **National Endowment for the Arts** and **The Hutchins Center for
African & African American Research**

Corporate Education Sponsor: **Bank of America**

TICKETING INFORMATION

Single tickets are now available online at americanrepertorytheater.org, by phone at 617.547.8300, and in person at the Loeb Drama Center Ticket Services Offices (64 Brattle Street, Cambridge). Tickets for \$25 are available, as well as discounts for subscribers, members, groups, students, seniors, Blue Star families, EBT card holders, and others.

PERFORMANCE DATES

7:30PM

August 31

September 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22

2PM

September 2, 9, 16, 23

Press performance: Wednesday, September 5

Open Captioned performances: Thursday, September 20 at 7:30PM; Sunday, September 23 at 2PM

Audio Described performances: Friday, September 21 at 7:30PM; Sunday, September 23 at 2PM

ABOUT AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER

American Repertory Theater at Harvard University (A.R.T.) is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work in Cambridge and beyond. A.R.T. was founded in 1980 by Robert Brustein, who served as Artistic Director until 2002, when he was succeeded by Robert Woodruff. Diane Paulus began her tenure as Artistic Director in 2008. Under the leadership of Paulus as the Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director and Executive Producer Diane Borger, A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by producing transformative theatrical experiences, always including the audience as a central partner.

Throughout its history, A.R.T. has been honored with many distinguished awards including the Tony Award for Best New Play for ***All the Way*** (2014); consecutive Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Musical for ***Pippin*** (2013) and ***The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*** (2012), both of which Paulus directed, and sixteen other Tony Awards since 2012; a Pulitzer Prize; a Jujamcyn Prize for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent; the Regional Theater Tony Award; and more than 100 Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards.

A.R.T. collaborates with artists around the world to develop and create work in new ways. It is currently engaged in a number of multi-year projects, including a collaboration with Harvard's Center for the Environment that will result in the development of new work over several years. Under Paulus' leadership, the A.R.T.'s club theater, OBERON, has been an incubator for local and emerging artists and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models.

As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, A.R.T. catalyzes discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members, acting as a conduit between its community of artists and the university. A.R.T. mentors students in the Harvard Radcliffe Dramatic Club working at the Loeb Drama Center and OBERON, and plays a central role in Harvard's undergraduate Theater, Dance & Media concentration, teaching courses in directing, dramatic literature, acting, voice, design, and dramaturgy.

Dedicated to making great theater accessible, A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area.

Through all of these initiatives, A.R.T. is dedicated to producing world-class performances in which the audience is central to the theatrical experience.

@americanrep

#BlackClownART

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Production Photos | Credit: Maggie Hall

Available for download from

<https://americanrepertorytheater.org/shows-events/the-black-clown/#photos-videos>



The cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



Members of the cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



The cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



Members of the cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



The cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



Members of the cast of *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.



Lindsey Hailes, Hailee Kaleem Wright, Davóne Tines, Dawn Bless, and Amber Pickens in *The Black Clown*. Photo: Maggie Hall.

American Repertory Theater
presents

THE BLACK CLOWN

Adapted from
LANGSTON HUGHES' poem
by
DAVÓNE TINES & MICHAEL SCHACHTER

Music by
MICHAEL SCHACHTER

Scenic & Costume Design
CARLOS SOTO

Lighting Design
JOHN TORRES

Sound Design
KAI HARADA

Orchestrations
& Arrangements
MICHAEL SCHACHTER

Additional Arrangements
for the A.R.T. premiere
JARET LONDON

Hair and Wig Design
RACHEL PADULA-SHUFELT

Casting
STEWART/WHITLEY

Production Stage Manager
TAYLOR BRENNAN*

Music Director
JARET LONDON

Choreography
CHANEL DASILVA

Directed by
ZACK WINOKUR

First performance at the Loeb Drama Center on August 31, 2018.
Created with the kind cooperation of the Estate of Langston Hughes.

PRODUCTION SPONSORS

Production Support of *The Black Clown* is provided by **Alison and Bob Murchison**.
The Artistic Residency of Davóne Tines is generously supported by **Katie and Paul Bittenwieser**.
Additional Production Support is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts** and
The Hutchins Center for African & African American Research.

CORPORATE EDUCATION SPONSOR

Bank of America 

A.R.T. SEASON SUPPORT



The A.R.T. 2018/19 Season is supported in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which receives support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

MUSIC

YOU LAUGH
I AM THE FOOL
STRIKE UP THE MUSIC
THREE HUNDRED YEARS
A SLAVE UNDER THE WHIP
NOBODY KNOWS
FREEDOM!
BLACK IN A WHITE WORLD
SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD
YET CLINGING TO THE LADDER
DAY AFTER DAY
N*GGER
LAUGH AT ME
BUT NO!
SUFFER AND STRUGGLE
SAY TO ALL FOEMEN
CRY TO THE WORLD

This show runs approximately 70 minutes with no intermission.

**Please Note: This production contains racial slurs
and stylized representations of violence—
particularly related to slavery—as well as haze and bright lights.**

CAST

The Black Clown.....**DAVÓNE TINES***
Ensemble.....**SUMAYYA ALI*, MALCOLM ARMWOOD*,**
DANIEL BELLAMY*, DAWN BLESS*,
LAVON FISHER-WILSON*, LINDSEY HAILES*,
EVAN TYRONE MARTIN*, JHARDON DISHON MILTON*,
BRANDON MICHAEL NASE*, AMBER PICKENS*,
JAMAR WILLIAMS*, HAILEE KALEEM WRIGHT*

SWINGS

EMMANUEL HENREID, ASHLEY LALONDE

DANCE CAPTAIN

AMBER PICKENS*

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

MARIO WOLFE*

ORCHESTRA

Music Director/Keyboard: **JARET LONDON**

Trumpet 1: **DAVE ADEWUMI**

Trumpet 2: **JOHN MOORE, JR.**

Trombone: **ROBYN SMITH**

Reed 1: **RAJIV HALIM**

Reed 2: **ISAIAH JOHNSON**

Reed 3: **JASON MARSHALL**

Banjo/Guitar: **THOMAS FLIPPIN**

Drums: **MARIO LAYNE FABRIZIO**

Bass/Tuba: **KATE FOSS**

Associate Music Director: **JOELLE LAMARRE**

Rehearsal Accompanist: **BRIAN GE**

Music Contractor: **JASON FISHER**

Music Preparation by **JAWLINE MUSIC PREPARATION /**

JESSE WIENER & CYNTHIA MENG, Copyists

Music Assistant: **GARRETT SCHUMANN**

ADDITIONAL STAFF

Assistant Lighting Designer.....	KAT C. ZHOU
Associate Sound Designer.....	MICHAEL EISENBERG
Assistant Hair and Wig Designer.....	AMBER VONER
Voice & Speech.....	ERIKA BAILEY
Scenic Associate.....	MARIE DE TESTA

Additional lighting provided by Christie Lites.
Additional sound equipment provided by Sound Associates, Shure.

CASTING

STEWART/WHITLEY

Duncan Stewart, CSA; Benton Whitley, CSA;
Paul Hardt; Christine McKenna, CSA;
Allie Carieri

A.R.T. SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Ian Askew, Harvard University '19, Artistic^
Rhea Bennett, Harvard University '20, Marketing^
Emily Clark, Providence College '19, Development
Sherry Gao, Harvard University '19, Artistic^
Julia Kirwin, Lesley University '19, Graphic Design
Ryan Kapur, Harvard University '20, Artistic^
Hannah Kleinman, University of Kentucky '21, Education
Gregory Lipson, Harvard University '20, Artistic^
Aubriana Mency, Hampshire College '20, Education
Devonne Pitts, Harvard University '21, Artistic^
Abigail Sage, Harvard University '21, Artistic^

^With support from the Harvard University Office of Career Services

SPECIAL THANKS

Bethany Allen, Michael Awkward, Emily Bergquist, Lucy Caplan, Ed and Betsy Cohen, Gina De, Ben Escabedo, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Anthony Hoang, Jenn Liang-Chaboud, Kimiko Matsuda-Lawrence, Timothy Patrick McCarthy, Marta Miller, Anita Patterson, Scott Poulson-Bryant, Greg Reif, John Stauffer, Tazewell Thompson, Abby Wolf, Jonathan L. Walton, Diane Wondisford

Malik Akil, Phillip Attmore, Olutayo Bosede, Dana Marie Ingraham, Leroy Church, Cicily Daniels, Benjamin Mapp, India McGee, Stephanie Holmes, Jaret Williams, Nathan Patten

Mary Schneider Enriquez and the Harvard Art Museums Art Study Center
Matthew Wittmann and the Harvard Theatre Collection at Houghton Library
Dana Knox and Andrew Gitchel, Farkas Hall
Jill Johson and the Harvard Dance Center
Farai Williams and Olawumi Akinwumi, Hibernian Hall
Beinecke Library at Yale University

Institute for the Humanities, University of Michigan
University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance

A MULTITUDE OF VOICES

An interview with Davóne Tines and Michael Schachter

*Davóne Tines is an internationally acclaimed bass-baritone who originated the role of Freddie Stowers in **Crossing**, which premiered in the A.R.T.'s 2014/15 Season and was featured in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's 2017 Next Wave Festival. Michael Schachter is a composer, pianist, and scholar whose music has been commissioned and performed by ensembles around the country. In this interview, A.R.T. Director of Artistic Programs & Dramaturg Ryan McKittrick talks with them about adapting Langston Hughes' poem "The Black Clown."*

Langston Hughes published "The Black Clown" in 1931. What drew you to the poem, and how does it speak to you today?

Davóne Tines: When I first read "The Black Clown" it was like receiving a revelation that gave name to the experience of my existence as a Black man in America that I had never been able to articulate. I identified with this clown whose forced role represents a wholesale relegation of Black existence to something less than human, a farce of a being, a fool only playing at being real. Hughes names this existence, then situates it within the larger context of history to show that the oppression of the present is inextricably linked to the failures of the past. Hughes' clown is able to transcend his oppression by calling on the strength and spirit of his entire ancestry. He connects to a greater mandate from all of time and the universe that humanity is inexorably his to claim. This was a story I knew I needed to live and relive and share.

How did you two start working together on this project?

DT: I was singing for the choir of The National Shrine in Washington, DC. It's a Catholic church with a professional choir, and they sing a lot of beautiful, old liturgical music. It was not the most inspiring job in terms of personal connection. So I sent Mike a note saying I really want to sing something that I feel deeply connected to.

Where did you first encounter the poem?

Michael Schachter: Davóne and I had been talking about Hughes years earlier when we were undergraduates together at Harvard, and when I got his email from church I flipped through a collection of Hughes' poems that my then-girlfriend, now-wife had given me. I was struck by two things about "The Black Clown." The first was its immediacy—it seemed as if it had been written yesterday. The word choices, the issues Hughes writes about, the false promise of what freedom means to marginalized Others in this country seemed just as palpable in 2010 as they did in 1931—and I would argue even more palpable in 2018. And the second thing that struck me was the form of the poem, which partly came out of Hughes' frequenting the speakeasies in Harlem at the time and seeing spoken word performances.



Michael Schachter (L) and Davóne Tines (R) in a developmental workshop for *The Black Clown*.

Mike, what musical traditions have you drawn from and been inspired by in composing the score?

MS: The blues is a major influence. “Three Hundred Years” is set as a work song, and “Say to All Foemen,” which is an exuberant, uplifting number towards the end, is set as a gospel number. Other songs come from New Orleans second line, the spiritual tradition, and Black choral traditions from the late-nineteenth into much of the twentieth century.

Early on in the development of this piece you were thinking about the presence of a chorus, and one of the central elements of this production is a twelve-member ensemble. Why was the idea of a chorus important to you, and what role does the ensemble play in the show?

MS: In the poem Hughes fleshes out his character by connecting his feeling of himself with the experiences of a multitude. So we thought that it was crucial to animate that in the show with the interplay of one voice and many voices. And sonically it just enriches the experience.

DT: The “Black experience” is very complex because it’s the meeting point of a multitude of things. It’s not one idea; it’s not one way of being or having been present in this country; and it can’t be explained or expressed as a monolith. We have other people in the show to reveal different facets of what it is to exist in this context. Langston Hughes was deeply a people person and interacted with a multitude of the movers, shakers, and makers of his day, especially in Harlem. His work catalogues the brilliance and complex humanity of the people around him. So the character of the Black Clown, in bringing this poem to life, activates a symbolic multitude of voices of people who have traveled these paths and are also on this journey along with him in order to further explicate it.

THE BLACK CLOWN

by Langston Hughes

Please Note: This work contains the use of a racial slur.

A dramatic monologue to be spoken by a pure-blooded Negro in the white suit and hat of a clown, to the music of a piano, or an orchestra.

THE MOOD

*A gay and
low-down blues.
Comic entrance
like the clowns
in the circus.
Humorous
defiance.
Melancholy
jazz. Then
defiance again
followed by
loud joy.
A burst of
music. Strutting
and dancing.
Then sudden
sadness again.
Back bent as
in the fields.
The slow step.
The bowed head.
"Nobody knows
de trouble I've
had."
Flinching
under the whip.
The spiritual
syncopated.
Determined to
laugh.
A bugle call.
Gay, martial
music. Walking
proudly, almost
prancing.
But gradually
subdued to a
slow, heavy
pace. "Some-
times I feel
like a mother-
less chile."
Turning futilely*

THE POEM

You laugh
Because I'm poor and black and funny—
Not the same as you—
Because my mind is dull
And dice instead of books will do
For me to play with
When the day is through.

I am the fool of the whole world.
Laugh and push me down.
Only in song and laughter
I rise again—a black clown.

Strike up the music.
Let it be gay.
Only in joy
Can a clown have his day.

Three hundred years
In the cotton and the cane,
Plowing and reaping
With no gain—
Empty handed as I began.

A slave—under the whip,
Beaten and sore.
God! Give me laughter
That I can stand more.

God! Give me the spotted
Garments of a clown
So that the pain and the shame
Will not pull me down.

Freedom!
Abe Lincoln done set me free—
One little moment
To dance with glee.

Then sadness again—
No land, no house, no job,
No place to go.
Black—in a white world
Where cold winds blow.
The long struggle for life:
No schools, no work—

*from one side to
the other.
But now a harsh
and bitter note
creeps into
the music.
Over-burdened.
Backing away
angrily.
Frantic
with
humiliation
and helpless-
ness.
The music
is like
a mourn-
ful tom-tom
in the dark!
But out of
sadness
it rises to
defiance
and determina-
tion. A hymn
of faith
echoes the
fighting
"Marseillaise."
Tearing off
his clown's
suit, throwing
down the hat
of a fool,
and standing
forth,
straight
and strong,
in the clothes
of a modern
man, he proclaims
himself.*

Not wanted here; not needed
there—
Black—you can die.
Nobody will care—

Yet clinging to the ladder,
Round by round,
Trying to climb up,
Forever pushed down.

Day after day
White spit in my face—
Worker and clown am I
For the "civilized" race.

Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!
Scorn crushing me down.
Laugh at me! Laugh at me!
Just a black clown!

Laugh at me then,
All the world round—
From Africa to Georgia
I'm only a clown!

But no! Not forever
Like this will I be:
Here are my hands
That can really make me free!

Suffer and struggle.
Work, pray, and fight.
Smash my way through
To Manhood's true right.

Say to all foemen:
You can't keep me down!
Tear off the garments
That make me a clown!

Rise from the bottom,
Out of the slime!
Look at the stars yonder
Calling through time!

Cry to the world
That all might understand:
I was once a black clown
But now—
I'm a man!



The Black Clown ensemble in a rehearsal.

THE BLACK CLOWN: A HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

The A.R.T. produces boundary-breaking theater through an ongoing process of research, development, and experimentation. A.R.T. world-premiere productions evolve through readings, workshops, and creative conversations with partners at Harvard and beyond.

The Black Clown, one of the world premieres in the 2018/19 Season, was developed at the A.R.T. between 2015 and 2018. The project began with an idea in 2010, when Davóne Tines and Michael Schachter started working on an adaptation of Langston Hughes' poem, "The Black Clown." In 2015, while he was playing the role of Freddie Stowers in the A.R.T.'s world-premiere production of the opera *Crossing*, Tines performed songs from an early draft of *The Black Clown*, and the A.R.T. committed to developing the show.

Over the next three years, the project continued to grow through a series of workshops and convenings. In May 2016, Tines and Schachter participated in a roundtable discussion at the A.R.T. with scholars from Harvard and beyond, engaging in a dialogue about Langston Hughes' life, the Harlem Renaissance, and the poem's contemporary relevance. In September 2017, the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre & Dance, where Schachter is a Ph.D. candidate in Music Theory and Composition, hosted a developmental workshop of the vocal score in Ann Arbor.

This year, the A.R.T. held a two-week developmental workshop at the Loeb Drama Center with Director Zack Winokur. Rehearsals for the project began in Cambridge in July with Winokur, Choreographer Chanel DaSilva, and Music Director Jaret Landon. Scholars from the Harvard and Boston communities visited the rehearsal room as the project developed, and the creative team and cast visited the Harvard Art Museums and the Harvard Theatre Collection as part of their research for the show.

Other A.R.T. World Premieres this season:

Endlings, We Live in Cairo, Dragon Mama, Clairvoyance

SPOTLIGHT: CHANEL DASILVA

Choreographer of *The Black Clown*

by Mario Alberto Zambrano



The doors were closed when I wanted to meet her. Chanel DaSilva and the dancers were having a discussion during the creative process of a new dance piece she was working on. The topic at hand: sexual harassment and physical assault.

PUBLIC/Private premiered last season with the Harvard Dance Project, part of Harvard's undergraduate concentration in Theater, Dance & Media, and circled the indisputable habits of male gaze, objectification, and the slips in physical gesture that fall outside of civilized etiquette. The choreography could've been lighter, could've centered around an issue less intimidating to students at the undergraduate level, but that's precisely why it was an issue that needed to be discussed. Chanel DaSilva isn't making art in order to be nice—she's in it to have a real conversation through performance. Now, she brings this commitment to the A.R.T.'s world premiere production of *The Black Clown*.

Raised in Brooklyn, Chanel graduated

from Juilliard and pursued a career as a dancer and choreographer. She danced with the Trey McIntyre Project for six years before taking a faculty position at the acclaimed LaGuardia High School in Manhattan. She is the co-founder and co-director of *MOVE(NYC)*, a non-profit arts organization whose mission is to revolutionize the dance field by creating greater diversity and equity in the dance profession. The cornerstone of the organization is the Young Professionals Program, which provides tuition-free, high-caliber dance and leadership training to the talented and motivated youth of New York City who would otherwise not have access to this education.

In an interview with student directors in Dance on Camera, an undergraduate course offered at Harvard last spring, Chanel shared her point of view on what choreography is capable of, and how it can be perceived as a tool to change the world. After explaining how the lens through which she makes choreography is not necessarily the lens through which an audience will experience it, she said, "I love that art has the power to be so beautifully subjective. Everyone leaves with a different meaning."



The Black Clown ensemble in a rehearsal.



Mario Alberto Zambrano is a Lecturer in Theater, Dance & Media at Harvard University. A Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a Princess Grace Fellow, and an Iowa Arts Fellow at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he has been a soloist and principal dancer for Nederlands Dans Theater, Batsheva Dance Company, Ballett Frankfurt, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

LANGSTON HUGHES (1902–1967)

by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

With a career that spanned the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties and the Black Arts movement of the sixties, Langston Hughes was the most prolific black poet of his era. Between 1926, when he published his pioneering *The Weary Blues*, to 1967, the year of his death, when he published *The Panther and the Lash*, Hughes would write 16 books of poems, two novels, seven collections of short stories, two autobiographies, five works of nonfiction, and nine children's books; he would edit nine anthologies of poetry, folklore, short fiction, and humor. He also translated Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Gabriela Mistral, and Federico García Lorca, and wrote at least thirty plays. It is not surprising, then, that Hughes was known, variously, as "Shakespeare in Harlem" and as the "poet laureate of the Negro."

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. His father, James Nathaniel, was a businessman, and his mother, Carrie Langston Mercer, was a teacher. Hughes attended Columbia University between 1921 and 1922, and received his A.B. from Lincoln in 1929. His dramatically unorthodox career included stints as a laundry boy, an assistant cook, and a busboy; he also served as a seaman on voyages to Europe and Africa. Fluent in French and Spanish, he lived for various periods in Mexico, France, Italy, Spain, and the Soviet Union. Among the "New Negro" writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes had no peer as an internationalist, a citizen of the world. And yet his cosmopolitanism, rare for any American in his time, never displaced his passionate engagement with, and commitment to, African-American vernacular culture.

Hughes knew *everybody*, although almost no one knew him, or was able to penetrate the veils and masks that the truly vulnerable fabricate to present public personae to the world. Hughes's public faces—despite the fact that he sought and found refuge in his beloved Harlem, he was certainly our most public poet, speaking in one week alone to some ten thousand people—were crafted in such a way that his human substance could not be perceived from among his carefully manufactured shadows. He was apparently a lonely man, and he suffered this isolation in the most private ways, almost never voicing it, despite the fact that he was such a public person. This irony did not escape him; he fondly quoted Dickinson's famous lines

How public—like a Frog—
To tell your name—the livelong June—
To an admiring Bog!

to express his own sense of his predicament. His acquaintances were a veritable "who's who" of twentieth-century art, from Stella Adler and Toshiko Akiyoshi, Thomas Mann and Dorothy Maynor, to Ezra Pound and Allen Tate, to Mark Van Doren, Kurt Weill, Max Yergan, and Yevgeny Yevtushenko. In so many ways and to so many people, Hughes was "the Negro," or at least "Negro literature," its public face, its spoken voice, its cocktail party embodiment as well as its printed texts. What Arnold Rampersad's definitive biography of Hughes makes clear is how deeply ingrained American Negro literature was in the larger American tradition—even if scholars, until very, very recently, had bracketed it, kept it a ghetto apart, as the Harlem of the American canon.

Hughes's books were reviewed widely in mainstream journals by mainstream writers, even if few understood his experiments with black vernacular forms, such as blues, jazz, and dialect. His concern for these forms were shared by his remarkably popular newspaper character, Jesse B. Semple (a.k.a. "Simple"), whose musings and exploits were published in the *Chicago Defender*. Simple's discussion of the nature of be-bop is an example of how rich Hughes's columns were; when juxtaposed against Hughes's comments about the ways that jazz informed his poetry, we begin to understand that we must learn to read Hughes in new ways, both "through" and "against" the African-American vernacular.

Hughes excels in the creation of "images, analogical, melodious, and rhythmical, with assonance and alliteration," Léopold Sédar Senghor remarks. "You will find this rhythm in French poetry; you will find it in Péguy, you will find it in Claudel, you will find this rhythm in St. John Perse.... And it is this that Langston Hughes has left us with, this model of the perfect work of art." In these and other respects, Hughes's best work was his vernacular poetry, cast in "the idiom of the black folk," and found especially in *The Weary Blues*, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, and *Ask Your Mama*.

Hughes, well before his compeers, Sterling Brown and Zora Neale Hurston, demonstrated how to use black vernacular language and music—especially the blues and jazz—as a poetic diction, a formal language of poetry, and at a moment when other black writers thought the task fruitless at best, detrimental at worst. Indeed, so much of the best of the African-American literary tradition—Brown, Hurston, Ellison, Morrison—grows out of his transmutation of the vernacular into the very stuff of literature. Hughes, in other words, undertook the project of constructing an entire literary tradition upon the actual spoken language of the black working and rural classes—the same vernacular language that the growing and mobile black middle classes considered embarrassing and demeaning, the linguistic legacy of slavery. Ironically, we may fail to recognize the sheer boldness of his innovation, in large part because of the very success of Hughes's venture, as it has been adopted, accepted, and naturalized by his literary successors. Even aside from Hughes's range of interests, his command of so many genres, it is in virtue of this signal contribution that Hughes's place in American letters is secure.



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