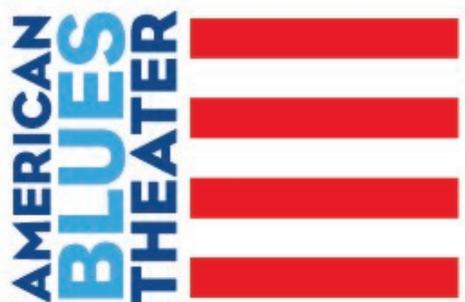




Beauty's Daughter

by DAEL ORLANDERSMITH



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

BEAUTY'S DAUGHTER

Written by Dael Orlandersmith

Directed by Ron OJ Parson

STARRING



Wandachristine*

This Obie Award - winning play by Dael Orlandersmith depicts one woman's journey through life's obstacles in an East Harlem neighborhood. Artistic Affiliate Wandachristine takes on six different characters during the course of this solo play—some broken, some on the way down, and all memorable.

** Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Note from Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside	Page 4
About Playwright Dael Orlandersmith.....	Page 5
Interview with Playwright Dael Orlandersmith.....	Pages 6-7
Interview with Solo Performer Wandachristine.....	Page 8
Interview with Director Ron OJ Parson.....	Page 9
Designers' Corner: "The Backstory" with Paul Deziel.....	Page 10
Designers' Corner: Sketches from Designers.....	Page 11
About East Harlem.....	Pages 12-13
"Papo's Paper": About James Baldwin and Piri Thomas.....	Pages 14-15
"Louie's Struggle": Artists and Addiction.....	Pages 16-17
"Louie's Struggle": Heightened Senses in Those Who Are Blind and Deaf.....	Page 17
"Mary's Record Collection": About Bessie Smith, Memphis Minnie, and More.....	Pages 18-19
"Anthony's Idols": About Charlie Parker and Miles Davis.....	Pages 20-21
"Beauty's Dance Career": Segregation in Burlesque.....	Pages 22-23
"Diane's Influences": About Arthur Rimbaud and Lou Reed.....	Pages 24-25
About American Blues Theater.....	Pages 26-27

BACKSTAGE Contributors

Elyse Dolan
Assistant Producer
American Blues Theater

with Gwendolyn Whiteside, Wandachristine, Ron OJ Parson,
Paul Deziel, Michael Alan Stein and Caitlin McLeod



NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**

Welcome to American Blues Theater's 32nd Season "The Beat Goes On". For over three decades, our Ensemble has told stories of the American identity. We are thrilled to present the Chicago premiere of *Beauty's Daughter* written by lauded playwright Dael Orlandersmith.

Ms. Orlandersmith said, "There is nothing more gorgeous than being in a room with a play or watching someone on stage delineate the human condition." Writing of her East Harlem native residence, the fully-embodied characters in *Beauty's Daughter* show us their experiences in both actions and words.

East Harlem has the highest concentration of shelters and social service facilities in Manhattan, with 8 homeless shelters, 36 drug & alcohol treatment facilities, and 37 mental health treatment facilities. It has the highest jobless rate in the city. *The New York Post* called part of the neighborhood "the most dangerous blocks in the city".

In reference to prostitutes and drug-addicted East Harlem residents, Orlandersmith gives "Diane" a line: *The only thing that separates me from them is the books in my room.*

Take a moment to reflect how you move – both philosophically and physically – in this world. What external influences created your voice, opinions, even the way you ride public transportation? While these characters' environments and personal challenges might not match your experience, you are made richer for knowing each of them. •



Artistic Director
Gwendolyn Whiteside



Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside addresses the crowd at the 2015 *Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival*

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT DAEL ORLANDERSMITH



Playwright Dael Orlandersmith

Dael Orlandersmith, born Donna Dael Theresa Orlander Smith Brown in 1959, lived in public housing in New York City's East Harlem. Her mother sent her to a Roman Catholic parochial school, after her father died when she was young. She attended Hunter College but left to attend acting classes at the HB Studio and Actors Studio. She wrote of her work: "There is a theme throughout the work that I write...about childhood and the sins of the father, the sins of the mother, and how people take on the very thing they don't like about their parents and they become them."

Her play *Beauty's Daughter* premiered Off-Broadway at the American Place Theatre in January 1995. Directed by Peter Askin it is a one-woman performance piece. Orlandersmith received the 1994-1995 Obie Award Special Citation for this play. Part of her award-winning *Beauty's Daughter's* program can be heard as a segment of a September 1996 taping of radio show *This American Life*; in this segment, Orlandersmith performs "When You Talk About Music," in which she portrays a 31-year-old Italian male who meets a black woman at a mutual friend's wedding and finds how much he misses musical expression.

Orlandersmith's next two solo shows, *Monster* and *The Gimmick*, were both produced Off-Broadway at the New York Theatre Workshop in 1996 and 1999, respectively. *The*

Gimmick received a Special Commendation for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

Yellowman premiered Off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club in October 2002. Orlandersmith won the 2003 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *Yellowman*, and was a finalist for the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The two main characters in the play, Alma, a dark skinned middle aged woman, and Eugene, a light skinned middle aged man live in Coastal South Carolina. *Yellowman* focuses on the issue of colorism in the black community through the character's love story.

Forever was commissioned Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles and premiered in 2014. The play was presented Off-Broadway at the New York Theatre Workshop in April 2015. The one-woman play is a "semi-autobiographical exploration of the family we are born into and the family we choose." *Until the Flood*, commissioned by The Repertory Theatre of St Louis, premiered in the fall of 2016. The play is a sensitive and moving portrayal of the people in the St Louis community, and how they feel about an event that placed St. Louis in a spotlight it didn't expect or relish.

In Chicago, Orlandersmith is an Artistic Associate at the Goodman Theatre, where she has performed her plays *Black n Blue Boys/Broken Men* and *Stoop Stories*.

Her other plays include *My Red Hand*, *My Black Hand*; *Raw Boys*; *The Blue Album*; *Bones*; and *Horsedreams*. She is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant; the Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights; a Guggenheim award; the 2005 PEN/Laura Pels Foundation award for a playwright in mid-career; and a Lucille Lortel Foundation Playwrights Fellowship. •



Playwright Dael Orlandersmith in *Forever* at New York Theatre Workshop

(edited from [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dael_Orlandersmith) and [GoodmanTheatre.org](https://www.goodmantheatre.org/))

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT DAEL ORLANDERSMITH

The full version of this interview, conducted by Stuart Miller, originally appeared in the December 2015 issue of *American Theatre* magazine under the title “Dael Orlandersmith Is a Poet of Life’s Complexity”.



Playwright Dael Orlandersmith in *Stoop Stories* at Goodman Theatre

Dael Orlandersmith prefers to focus on one play at time, delving deeply into her research and writing. “I hate multitasking,” she says. Yet as she sat down this fall for lunch in the East Village, Orlandersmith was in the midst of work on a one-woman play about a young Danish girl’s life-changing encounter with Billie Holiday, on another one-woman play about last year’s police shooting and subsequent unrest in Ferguson, Mo., and on a young adult show about surviving adolescence. Oh, and she’s also prepping for a Portland production of her one-woman memoir play, *Forever*, which earned acclaim in Los Angeles, New Haven, and New York. Life, it turns out, doesn’t afford the luxury of one project at a time to an artist who stubbornly refuses to pursue more commercial options.

“The reality of it is that there’s no money in what I do, so I’ve got to keep going,” Orlandersmith says. And so she does. “I’ve got to finish a draft of my Ferguson play this weekend, and then do some twisting and turning on my Billie Holiday play.” Orlandersmith, who was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and Drama Desk nominee in 2002 for her first two-hander, *Yellowman*, says “I could keep writing a variation of *Yellowman*, but I wouldn’t be able to live with myself.” When people suggest she mix in commercial projects with her more challenging personal work she says, “I can’t just turn it on and off like that. I don’t seek to

challenge myself; this is just the way blood beats. It’s in my DNA.”

Her singlemindedness is something people who work with her are extremely grateful for. “There aren’t that many artists that have her kind of commitment, and she does it all so singularly and beautifully,” says Jim Nicola, artistic director of New York Theatre Workshop, where Orlandersmith performed *Forever* as well as her earlier one-woman shows *Monster* and *The Gimmick*. “She is such a powerful presence onstage physically and spiritually, so you want to know who that is and what she has to say. And then she turns out to be an extraordinary poet of the complexities of life.”

Listen to Orlandersmith detail the complexities of her own biography in *Forever* and you’ll realize that nothing ever came easy for her. But despite—or because of—that, nothing ever stopped her. Her earliest one-woman plays, such as the Obie-winning *Beauty’s Daughter*, had plenty of autobiographical details. But in *Forever* she forced herself to directly confront her rape as a teenager, and most significantly, her turbulent relationship with her mother....

Growing up in Harlem, Orlandersmith got grief from her peers for listening to “white” music like The Doors and The Who, but such tastes helped propel her beyond her immediate world. In *Forever*, she credits Morrison for leading her to poets ranging from Blake to Rimbaud. (Rock music remains central in her life. Our interview frequently veers off topic to musical matters; at one point she talks about how much she really wants to meet Pete Townshend, and at another point we start recommending new bands to each other. Orlandersmith’s suggestions include Warpaint and Hooray for the Riff Raff.)...

The [*Forever* workshop] process not only reshaped the play but also Orlandersmith’s feelings about her mother. “It forced her to come to terms with their relationship, and she finished in a different place,” Neel Keller says. Orlandersmith agrees. “I had to make her understandable so she could be written fully, she had to be fully realized as a human being.” To Nicola, this is quintessential Orlandersmith. “She doesn’t ever tell a tale just to tell you the wounds and arrows of fate that have befallen her characters. There’s a sense of redemption and healing, a journey from darkness to some kind of transcendence. She takes us out of our fears and transforms them.” Still, despite her unconventional plays and personal topics, Orlandersmith emphasizes the basics.

“Theatre works by storytelling and character,” she says,



recalling the time she sat in the audience for *Death of a Salesman*...and noticed a Hasidic Jew and a Sikh sitting next to each other. “They didn’t know each other, but after the show both were weeping and saying, ‘That was my father.’ That’s what I’m talking about.”

That essence will serve Orlandersmith in what she calls the “tricky” task of creating a play out of the killing of Michael Brown and all that followed in Ferguson. She says that when Seth Gordon, associate artistic director of the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, approached her about the topic, she knew that she didn’t want to follow the Anna Deavere Smith model of reportage. She went to St. Louis and talked to Brown’s father, stepmother, and plenty of others, but says she is creating composite figures “that come out of my head: a guy in a barbershop, a kid. I’m not free to tell this any way I want, but I am free to use the truth of imagination.”

Orlandersmith says her play will have an almost Rashomon-like approach, and that she cautioned everyone she spoke to that “if you are looking for a sense of justice, that’s not what I’m doing. I’m telling many truths. I don’t have to represent.” That said, of course, she adds that she will not be shy in including her feelings about the violence against black men by the police; she will just make sure to embed the issue within the characters. “Dael will bring her unique voice to this because she is interested in the history, the way events fit in over long sweeps of time,” says Keller, who will direct; he points to a subtle moment by her



Playwright Dael Orlandersmith in *Until the Flood* at Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

family’s South Carolina burial plot in *Forever* where she says, “Slave ship song I never heard of, come to me.”

Orlandersmith plans to bring a similar sensibility to her Billie Holiday play, though it will be utterly different. The show will feature a white woman (she is hoping for Kathleen Chalfant, but who isn’t?), looking back at an encounter with Holiday when she was a girl and the singer visited her home. Large parts of the play will be in Danish; Orlandersmith doesn’t speak the language but says she used online dictionaries to translate. She is close to finishing a draft and trying to raise money through Kickstarter to allow her to go to Denmark to do research—even though her commission from Chicago’s Goodman Theatre has led her to imagine that the story is being told in flashback by the Danish woman, now an immigrant in Illinois. “I’ve been working a lot outside of New York, because they take more chances on my work,” she says. “I will go anywhere they are willing to take chances.”

While her work is definitively non-commercial and she’s not seeking work writing for TV, Orlandersmith admits she’d love to do some screen acting to earn money to subsidize her writing. But not only is she not getting cast (“Maybe I’m an unusual type,” she says wryly), she even had her longtime agent write her off. She’d like to get another one, “but I’m not going to kill myself looking,” she says, which makes sense considering how busy she is.

She says she does have a screenplay idea that brings together many of her passions. She’s long wanted to tell the story of the late Phil Lynott, the half-black, half-Irish frontman of the band Thin Lizzy. And there are two of her own plays she wants to go back and redo. “When they were first read the reactions were strong, but when they got in production they didn’t work,” she says. “I let certain directors dictate and I should have been firmer with what I wanted to do.” She refuses to name the plays because she doesn’t want to sound vindictive toward the directors. “It’s my responsibility. It starts with me.”

With all that on her plate, Orlandersmith keeps accepting the coffee refills. She’s also feeling some tension in her back, she says. After our interview, she tells me, she’ll seek to unwind with one of her favorite non-writing activities—perhaps go to the gym, take a nap, or meditate. She is also trying to get back to playing the guitar after a long layoff—even though that means adding one more item to her to-do list. She had been playing acoustic guitar, but what she really wants is an electric. “I want to make some noise.” •

INTERVIEW WITH SOLO PERFORMER **WANDACHRISTINE**

Assistant Producer Elyse Dolan discusses *Beauty's Daughter* with actor and American Blues Theater Artistic Affiliate Wandachristine.

ED: What excites you most about performing *Beauty's Daughter*?

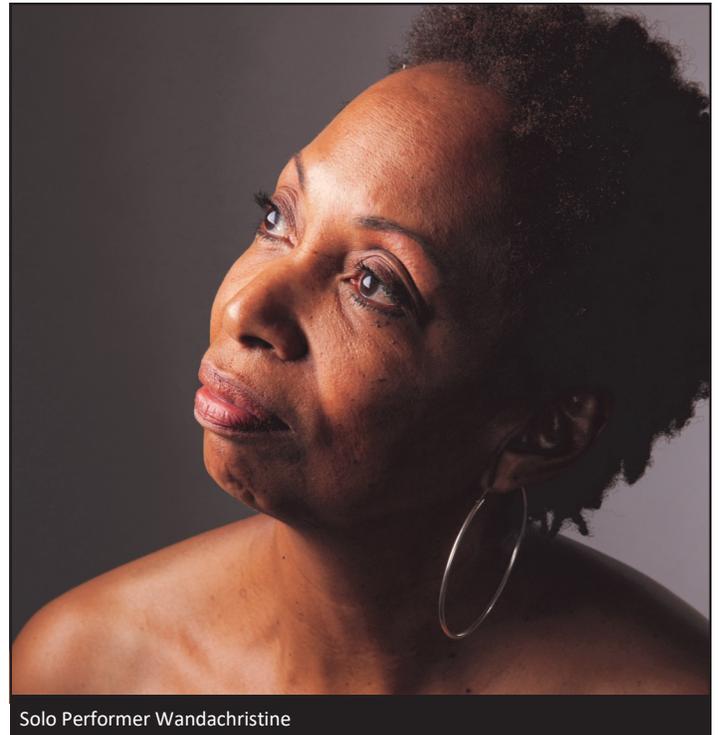
W: This has been one of the most “exciting” roles of my career, next to playing Rose in a touring production of *Fences*. I love playing different characters, I always have, even when I’ve done animated projects. I remember once auditioning for a voice over job that was intended for a male and the client hired me from my agent’s submission; they had no idea that I was a woman, and the look on their faces when I showed up at the studio was one of the most priceless moments that I shall always treasure. That’s exactly how I feel about performing this piece, I hope that every audience member forgets about “me” Wandachristine, and they actually see and become a part of the world with each of the characters I become.

What kind of research have you done in preparation for this role?

I worked a lot with our Dramaturg, Wilson Cain III, who also happens to be a very close friend. He gave me interviews and a great deal of research material of Dael Orlandersmith’s work, which helped to give me a sense of her writing and who she is as a performer. Dael is an incredible writer and actress and I wanted to make sure that I was true to her work in my performance. I listened to a lot of old blues music, rock, and jazz; all of the songs that we use in the show and then some. I immersed myself into her poetry and rhythms. I also worked with a great dialect coach, Kathy Logelin, so that I could find their individual voices and not have them sounding like caricatures. My young Latino friend Je’sus Lopez helped me find Papo! Every time I saw him, he would make me speak Spanish and act like Papo... he still does!

Do you have a favorite character of the six characters you play in *Beauty's Daughter*?

ABSOLUTELY... Mary Askew! First of all my mother’s name is Mary and she’s my inspiration for everything that I do; she’s my muse. Mary’s words of wisdom reminds me of some of the things that my own Mother says to me every day. She consistently reminds me to enjoy life and to embrace my gifts. Mary Askew, reminds us all that life is about more than just collecting things, it’s about “feeling.” “You gotta keep feeling things to stay alive.”



Solo Performer Wandachristine

What do you enjoy about working with Ron OJ Parson?

Ron is one of the most gifted and talented directors in theatre. He’s brilliant! It’s not only a humbling experience, but an enjoyable one as well. Ron directed me in Writer’s Theatre production of *Old Settler* and we would ride the train together sometimes, he would tell me such fascinating stories. He’s a great storyteller and he would always make me laugh, and at that time I needed his humor as I had just found out that my brother was terminally ill. Ron is an actor’s director, a true artist, a sensitive artist, and he always has his actors’ trust. He likes for his actors to collaborate with him and that’s one of the reasons why I have so much respect for him. I asked him to join me; because I wanted and needed someone that not only knew “me” as an actress; but would challenge me to go further than I’ve ever gone before on stage... and BABYYYYYYYY, that’s exactly what he’s done!

How is performing a solo show different from performing with a large cast of actors?

No egos! No dressing room drama! And for an entire evening it’s just “me” and an audience. I LOVE IT! •

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR **RON OJ PARSON**

Assistant Producer Elyse Dolan discusses *Beauty's Daughter* with director Ron OJ Parson

ED: What excites you about directing *Beauty's Daughter*?

RP: Working with Wandachristine is the exciting thing about this project. We worked together once at Writers' so when she approached me, I said yes before I even read the play.

Is directing a solo show different than directing a show with a larger cast?

Well, in a way it is a large cast because she is playing so many characters... so in that sense it is just like directing any play. One person shows are different considering you are just working with one person, but they are just as difficult.

What do you enjoy about working with Wandachristine?

As I said, it is always a joy because Wandachristine has a vibrant personality, she is so full of energy it is hard to not get caught up in her excitement and exuberance.

What themes of this show do you think will resonate with Chicago audiences?

Well not only Chicago but anyone: it is a journey that many of us can join Wandachristine on. I think many of us when we are alone with ourselves we reflect and reminisce about our lives and our neighborhood, and think about the moments that shaped our lives...

What projects are you working on next?

It has been a busy year... and such a fulfilling year, I have really enjoyed all my shows this year: *East Texas Hot Links* at Writers' Theatre was exciting; *Blues For An Alabama Sky* at Court Theatre; *Paradise Blue*, which is still running at TimeLine Theatre; and after *Beauty's Daughter* it is *5 Guys Named Moe* at Court Theatre. Then I'm out of town for my 23rd August Wilson production—*Fences* at Kansas City Rep—then up to Northlight Theater for *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morriseau, before being back at TimeLine Theatre for a Brett Neveu premiere, *To Catch a Fish*. It is truly a blessing. •



Director Ron OJ Parson

DESIGNERS' CORNER: "THE BACKSTORY" WITH PAUL DEZIEL

American Blues Theater Artistic Affiliate Paul Deziel is the Projection Designer for *Beauty's Daughter*. We asked Paul to share some lesser-known facts about himself in "The Backstory."

If I weren't a designer:

I'd like to be an astronaut, or an astrophysicist—space fascinates me and I want to know what is in the oceans beneath the ice on Europa.

Childhood nickname:

Paulie-Pooh

Best career advice I've received:

Don't be an a**hole. Be the "Lindsay Jones" in the room—be positive: if the equipment catches fire and explodes, don't yell and scream, put on a smile and be constructive on how to move forward.

Favorite part of the job:

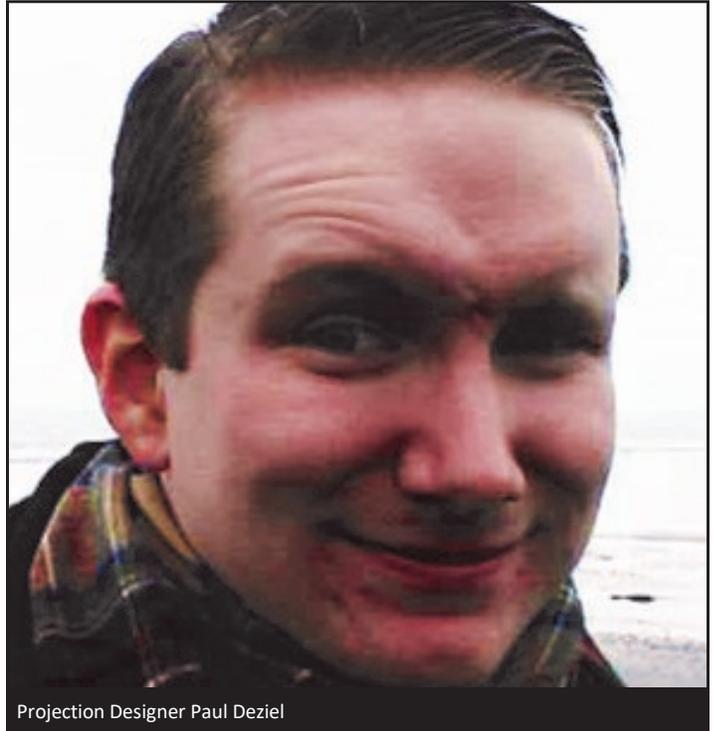
While I enjoy storytelling and sometimes making silly videos, the people are what keeps me more than anything else. I have been lucky enough to work with extraordinarily talented individuals—some of whom I joke with that "I am doomed to work with forever," which is a good thing.

Worst part of the job:

Dowsers. While they are often quite necessary, the logistics of implementing them and the absurd amounts they eat into budget are infuriating. And seeing the flap cover the projector black is a pet-peeve of mine. Internal shutters on projectors are always preferred.

How I made my first dollar:

The first dollar that I made theatrically (and possibly just in general), was doing run crew for a dance concert my sisters participated in. During the transitions between pieces, I would change the gels of the side light.



Projection Designer Paul Deziel

Last meal you'd want:

Duck, with a fine Belgian beer brewed by monks. Or just a Ruby Red Squirt and a homemade peanut butter cookie.

Favorite item of clothing:

I don't get much use from it but my top hat. It is not the best top hat, a little too "Mad Hatter" in its angles, but it does its job and it fits my fat head.

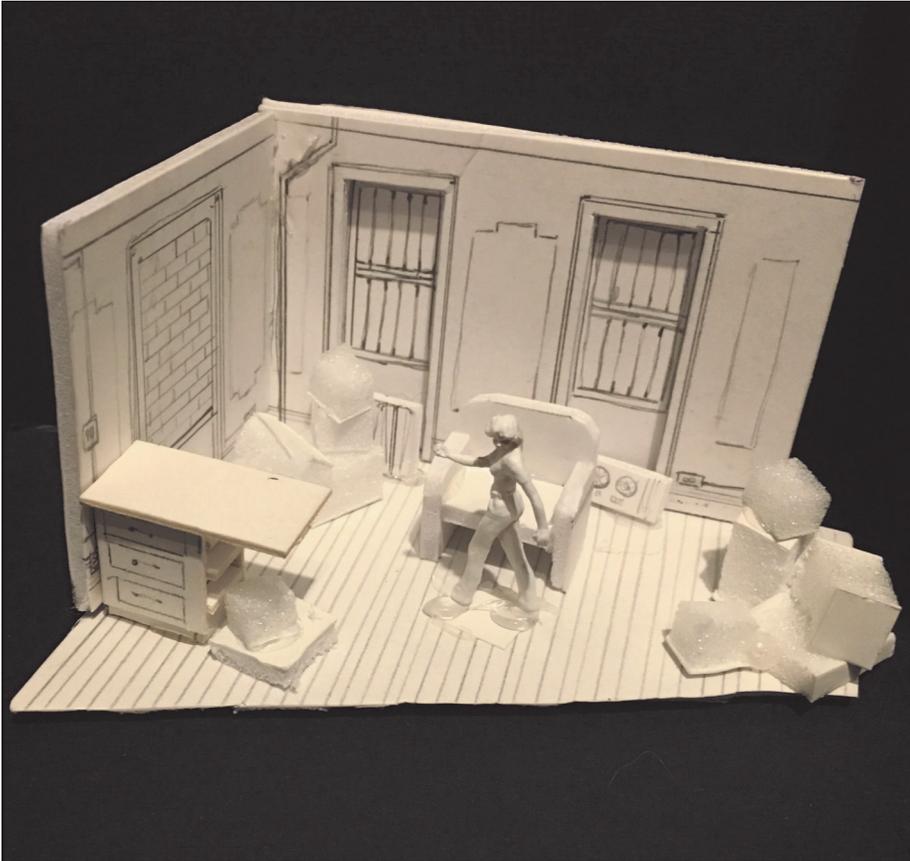
If you could invent one thing:

Solar-powered drones that could absorb vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, in attempts to combat climate change.

One of my hidden talents:

I make a pretty good bowl of ramen. •

DESIGNERS' CORNER: SKETCHES FROM DESIGNERS



Above:
Scenic design model
for *Beauty's Daughter*
by Scenic Designer Caitlin McLeod

Right:
Early costume design sketch
for *Beauty's Daughter*
by Costume Designer
Michael Alan Stein



ABOUT EAST HARLEM

East Harlem, also known as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio, is a neighborhood of Upper Manhattan, New York City. At the time of the 2010 census, the population was estimated to be 116,000, and the median household income was \$21,480. Despite its name, it is generally not considered to be a part of Harlem.

The neighborhood is one of the largest predominantly Latino communities in New York City, mostly made up of Puerto Ricans, as well as sizeable numbers of Dominican, Cuban, and Mexican immigrants. It includes the area formerly known as Italian Harlem, in which the remnants of a once predominantly Italian community remain. The Chinese population has increased dramatically in East Harlem since 2000.

Social problems, including poverty, crime, and drug addiction, have plagued the area since the 1970s. Although crime rates have dropped from the historically high numbers of the past, East Harlem suffers from Manhattan's highest violent crime rate. It has the second highest concentration of public housing in the United States, closely following Brownsville, Brooklyn. East Harlem has the highest concentration of shelters and treatment facilities in Manhattan. It also has the highest jobless rate in the entire city.

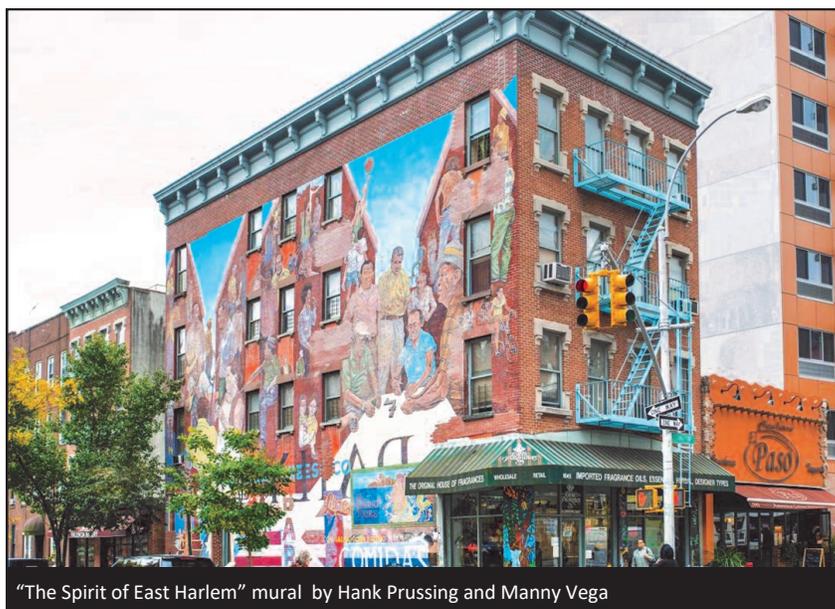
However, East Harlem is now undergoing some gentrification. In February 2016, East Harlem was one of four neighborhoods featured in an article in *The New York Times* about "New York's Next Hot Neighborhoods." A real-estate broker described it as "one of the few remaining areas in New York City where you can secure a good deal." Beginning in 2016, the New York City government was seeking to rezone East Harlem "to facilitate new residential, commercial, community facility, and manufacturing development."

Early History

The area which became East Harlem was rural for most of the 19th century, but residential settlements northeast of Third Avenue and East 110th Street had developed by the 1860s. The construction of the elevated transit line to Harlem in 1879 and 1880, and the building of the Lexington Avenue subway in 1919, urbanized the area, precipitating the construction of apartment buildings and brownstones. East Harlem was first populated by poor German, Irish, Scandinavian, and Eastern European Jewish immigrants, with the Jewish population standing at 90,000 around 1917. In the 1870s, Italian immigrants joined the mix after a contractor building trolley tracks on First Avenue imported Italian laborers as strikebreakers. The workers' shantytown along the East River at 106th Street was the beginning of an Italian neighborhood, with 4,000 having arrived by the mid 1880s.

Italian Harlem: 1880s—1930s

Southern Italians and Sicilians, with a moderate number of Northern Italians, soon predominated the area, with each street featuring people from different regions of Italy. The neighborhood became known as "Italian Harlem," the Italian American hub of Manhattan; it was the first part of Manhattan to be referred to as "Little Italy." There were many crime syndicates in Italian Harlem from the early Black Hand to the bigger and more organized Italian gangs that formed the Italian-American Mafia. The Italian neighborhood approached its peak in the 1930s, with over 100,000 Italian-Americans living in its crowded, run-down apartment buildings. The Italian community in East Harlem remained strong into the 1980s, but it has slowly diminished since then. However, Italian inhabitants and vestiges of the old Italian neighborhood remain. According to the 2000 Census, there were only 1,130 Italian-Americans still living in this area.



"The Spirit of East Harlem" mural by Hank Prussing and Manny Vega

Rise of Spanish Harlem: 1930s—1950s

Puerto Rican and Latin American immigration after the First World War established an enclave at the western portion of East Harlem—around 110th Street and Lexington Avenue—which became known as "Spanish Harlem". The area slowly grew to encompass all of East Harlem, including Italian Harlem, as Italians moved out—to the Bronx, Brooklyn, upstate New York and New Jersey—and Hispanics moved in during another wave of immigration in the 1940s and 1950s.

The newly dominant Puerto Rican population—which reached 63,000 in 1950—continued to define the neighborhood according to its needs, establishing bodegas and botánicas as it expanded. Catholic and evangelistic Protestant churches appeared in storefronts. Although "Spanish Harlem" had been in use since at least the 1930s to describe the Hispanic enclave—along with "Italian Harlem" and "Negro Harlem"—the name began to be used to describe the entire East Harlem neighborhood by the 1950s. Later, the name "El Barrio" ("The Neighborhood") began to be used, especially by inhabitants of the area.

Rise of Crime and Recent Gentrification: 1960s — Now

In the 1950s and 1960s, large sections of East Harlem were leveled for urban renewal projects, and the neighborhood was one of the hardest hit areas in the 1960s and 1970s as New York City struggled with deficits, race riots, urban flight, gang warfare, drug abuse, crime, and poverty. Tenements were crowded, poorly maintained, and frequent targets for arson. In 1969 and 1970, a regional chapter of the Young Lords which were reorganized from a neighborhood street gang in Chicago by Jose (Cha-Cha) Jimenez, ran several programs including a Free Breakfast for Children and a Free Health Clinic to help Latino and poor families. The Young Lords came together with the Black Panthers and called for Puerto Rican independence and neighborhood empowerment. By the beginning of the 21st century, East Harlem was a racially diverse neighborhood, with about a third of the population being Puerto Rican. As it has been throughout its history, it is predominantly a working-class neighborhood.

Until 2006, property values in East Harlem climbed along with those in the rest of New York City. With increased market-rate housing, including luxury condos and co-ops—most built on formerly vacant lots—there has been some decline of affordable housing in the community. A number of young professionals have settled into these recently constructed buildings, which has caused rents to rise, more buildings in the area to get gut renovations, and is changing area demographics.

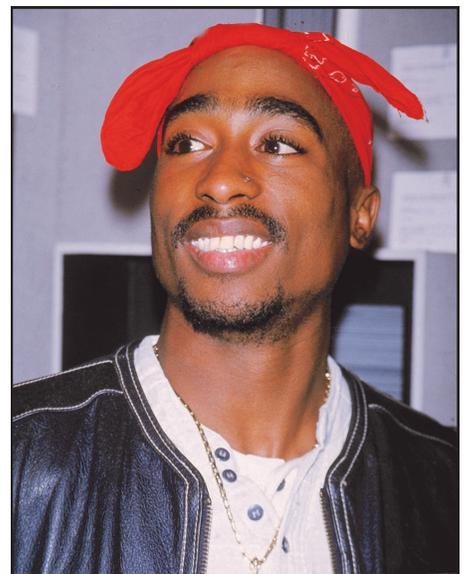
Notable individuals from East Harlem include Al Pacino, Tupac Shakur, Piri Thomas, Marc Anthony, Ronnie Spector (of the Ronettes), Tito Puente, and Fiorella La Guardia. •



Ronnie Spector



Al Pacino



Tupac Shakur

“PAPO’S PAPER” ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN & PIRI THOMAS

In *Beauty’s Daughter*, Papo—a Puerto Rican teenager from the Lower East Side—tries to convince Diane to write his English paper for him. The topic of that paper is James Baldwin’s and Piri Thomas’ influences on American literature.

James Baldwin

Although he spent a great deal of his life abroad, James Baldwin always remained a quintessentially American writer. Whether he was working in Paris or Istanbul, he never ceased to reflect on his experience as a black man in white America. The eloquent voice of James Baldwin spoke of the pain and struggle of black Americans and the saving power of brotherhood.

James Baldwin—the grandson of a slave—was born in Harlem in 1924. By the time he was fourteen, Baldwin was spending much of his time in libraries and had found his passion for writing. During this early part of his life, he followed in his stepfather’s footsteps and became a preacher. Of those teen years, Baldwin recalled, “Those three years in the pulpit – I didn’t realize it then – that is what turned me into a writer, really, dealing with all that anguish and that despair and that beauty.” Eager to move on, Baldwin knew that if he left the pulpit he must also leave home, so at eighteen he took a job working for the New Jersey railroad.

After working for a short while with the railroad, Baldwin moved to Greenwich Village, where he worked for a number of years as a freelance writer, working primarily on book reviews. He caught the attention of the well-known novelist, Richard Wright—and though Baldwin had not yet finished a novel, Wright helped him secure a grant with which he could support himself as a writer. In 1948, at age 24, Baldwin left for Paris, where he hoped to find

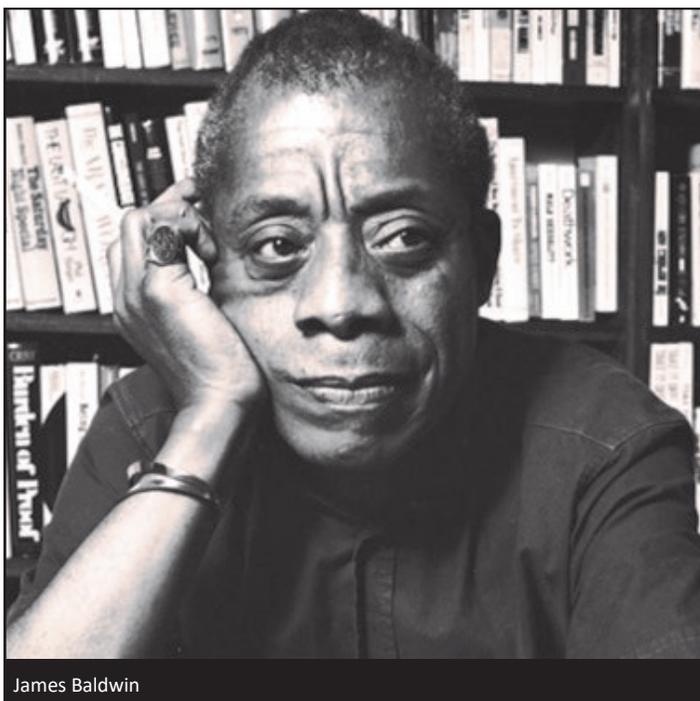
enough distance from the American society he grew up in to write about it. After writing a number of pieces for various magazines, Baldwin went to a small village in Switzerland to finish his first novel. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, published in 1953, was an autobiographical work about growing up in Harlem. The passion and depth with which he described the struggles of black Americans were unlike anything that had been written.

Though not instantly recognized as such, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* has long been considered an American classic. Over the next ten years, Baldwin moved from Paris to New York to Istanbul, writing two books of essays, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), as well as two novels, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) and *Another Country* (1962). The essays explored racial tension with eloquence and unprecedented honesty; the novels dealt with taboo themes (homosexuality and interracial relationships). By describing life as he knew it, Baldwin created socially relevant, psychologically penetrating literature, and readers responded. Both *Nobody Knows My Name* and *Another Country* became immediate bestsellers.

In the early 1960s, overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility to the times, Baldwin returned [to America] to take part in the civil rights movement. Traveling throughout the South, he began work on an explosive work about black identity and the state of racial struggle, *The Fire Next Time* (1963). This, too, was a bestseller: so incendiary that it put Baldwin on the cover of *TIME*. For many, Baldwin’s clarion call for human equality became an early and essential voice in the civil rights movement. Though at times criticized for his pacifist stance, Baldwin remained an important figure in that struggle throughout the 1960s.

After the assassinations of his friends Medgar Evers, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, Baldwin returned to France, where he worked on a book about the disillusionment of the times, *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974). Even though Baldwin had encapsulated much of the anger of the times in this book, he always remained a constant advocate for universal love and brotherhood.

By 1987, when he died of stomach cancer at age 63, Baldwin had become one of the most important and vocal advocates for equality. James Baldwin created works of literary beauty and depth that will remain essential parts of the American canon. •



James Baldwin

Piri Tomas

For Piri Thomas, being a dark-hued Latino in 1930s New York was far from the best of worlds. His siblings were fair-skinned, like his Puerto Rican mother, but he took after his black Cuban father, whose unsettled feelings about race scarred both of them. Thomas fell into gangs and drugs, shot a police officer during a robbery, and ended up in prison for seven years.

He emerged from incarceration a writer, whose journey of self-discovery brought him enduring recognition as the author of a coming-of-age classic, *Down These Mean Streets*. The 1967 memoir, often compared to Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, remains in print and is read widely in schools as a stylistic achievement and testament to the human spirit.

Thomas influenced younger generations of Latino writers, such as Dominican-American novelist Junot Díaz, whose *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. "Thomas was one of my most important influences," Díaz told *The Times* in an email. "He was the first Latino Caribbean writer I encountered who wove the U.S. Latino experience into a larger American conversation...He was a brilliant memoirist, and few could match his lyricism or his unadorned, demolishing honesty."

Thomas was a pioneer of "Nuyorican" literature, the poetry and prose produced in the wake of a massive emigration of Puerto Ricans to New York in the 1950s. "His work helped to open the doors of the publishing and academic worlds to numerous Latino authors, and helped open the eyes of mainstream American readers to the sometimes harsh realities of Nuyorican life in the 1960s and beyond," said Daniel Gallant, executive director of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, an arts organization that Thomas helped found in 1973.

Although best known for his memoir, Thomas was also a poet who gave exuberant readings of his work on college campuses and in prisons, where he held writing workshops and shared with inmates his hard-won life lessons.

The oldest of seven children, he was born Juan Pedro Tomas in East Harlem on September 30, 1928. His name was later anglicized as John Peter Thomas. His mother called him Piri. His youth was formed by the Great Depression and by racism, which he experienced not only in the outside world but at home with his father, who favored his light-skinned children. When the family moved to Long Island, Thomas' torment worsened. His siblings could pass for white, but he could not. Drowning in rage and confusion, he dropped out of school and moved back to Harlem, where he lived on the streets. When he was 15, his mother died of cancer. At 20, he was in a shootout with police during a robbery and wound up in Sing Sing. He chose to improve his mind, and he earned a high school equivalency degree. He read voraciously—the Bible, the Koran, Confucius, Nietzsche, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Ellison—and he pondered the traumas and tragedies of his life.

When he was released in 1956, he had completed a manuscript, but it went nowhere as he struggled to make his way in the straight world, working odd jobs and raising a family. Eventually, he found success helping to rehabilitate drug addicts and ex-cons, which drew the attention of an editor at Knopf. He rushed home to find his manuscript, only to discover it had been incinerated with the trash. He spent five years reconstructing his story.

In 1967, his efforts were rewarded with admiring reviews. "Piri Thomas screams back at a world that walked on him," sociologist Lewis Yablonsky wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "and the sounds are clear, clean and worth hearing."

At schools, juvenile detention centers, and prisons, Thomas spoke about tapping the creative spirit to overcome violence and alienation. Piri Thomas passed away in 2011 at age 83. •



Piri Thomas

"LOUIE'S STRUGGLE" ARTISTS & ADDICTION

In *Beauty's Daughter* the protagonist, Diane, visits her father, Louie, who used to be a successful musician, but now panhandles on the street as he struggles with addiction. This article by Galen Guengerich, Ph.D. originally appeared in a February 2014 issue of *Psychology Today* under the title "Why Creativity is a Risky Business."

Every time a hugely talented actor (Philip Seymour Hoffman) or musician (Amy Winehouse) or writer (Christopher Hitchens) dies too young from alcohol or drug-related causes, the perennial question gets posed: does alcohol and drug use help foster the creative process? If Christopher Hitchens hadn't been such a prodigious drinker, for example, would he still have been Christopher Hitchens the writer?

The list of legendary writers who were legendary alcoholics might suggest that the answer is no: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Kerouac, Capote, Parker, Chandler, Cheever—and the list could go on. Looking at the evidence from this narrow perspective, one could conclude that relinquishing control to alcohol or drugs helps fuel the creative process. As Fitzgerald once said, "First you take a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes you."

But where does the drink take you? Sometimes, it takes you to a tragic end, as illustrated by the pantheon of hugely creative people whose lives, not to mention careers, were destroyed or cut short by alcohol and drugs. Because of their talent, it's easy to overlook their struggles with addiction—or even attribute their creativity to their reliance on alcohol and drugs.

But scientists have learned that people whose minds and lives are controlled by alcohol or drugs are not more creative or more successful as a result. When asked by *Scientific American* magazine whether there's a link between creativity and addiction, neuroscientist David Linden of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine responded succinctly, "No." To suggest otherwise confuses coincidence with cause.

Addiction is a disease, not a shortcut to success. Hugely talented people who struggle with drugs and alcohol should be loved, and treated, and supported in every way. But their dependence on alcohol and drugs should not be seen as the source of their creativity, and thus mollycoddled.

In fact, we have a good idea where creativity comes from. David Shenk, in his recent book *The Genius in All of Us: New Insights into Genetics, Talent and IQ*, finds that what we call genius or brilliance comes from less risky sources, many of which we can and do control. As Shenk puts it, extraordinary talent and achievement is "the combined consequence of early exposure, exceptional instruction, constant practice, family nurturance, and a child's intense will to learn."

Shenk goes on to caution against using this as a simple formula for creative success. He says, "Like a brilliant soufflé, all of these ingredients must be present in just the right quantity and mixed with just the right timing and flair. Almost anything can go wrong." In other words, even though the process isn't entirely controllable, your chances of a successful soufflé will certainly decrease as the chef's control of the process decreases.

That said, it's also true that outstandingly creative people somehow get released from the usual way of looking at things or doing things. In a recent book titled *The Unleashed Mind: Why Creative People Are Eccentric*, Shelley Carson points out that creativity and eccentricity are often rooted in the same cause, which has to do with how we process information. Because the volume of data



Amy Winehouse



that streams into our minds is staggeringly vast, most of us have built-in cognitive filters that keep most of it out. We simply can't deal with the volume otherwise.

Highly creative people, it turns out, break through the usual constraints and let in a lot more of the available information, and thus they need to process and organize this increased information flow in untypical ways. The term for this trait, Carson explains, is cognitive disinhibition, which Carson describes as "the failure to ignore information that is irrelevant to current goals or to survival."

This ability to look at the world differently—to think outside the box—can also pose ethical hazards, which is where creativity's real risks lie. Looking at the world differently includes looking at rules differently. Writing in the journal *Psychological Science*, Francesca Gino and Scott Wiltermuth report that "the sentiment expressed in the common saying 'rules are meant to be broken' is at the root of both creative performance and dishonest behavior. It also provides new evidence that dishonesty may therefore lead people to become more creative in their subsequent behaviors." Gino and Wiltermuth conclude, "By acting dishonestly, people become more creative, which allows them to come up with more creative justifications for their immoral behavior, and therefore more likely to behave dishonestly." Creativity is risky business—but not because creativity happens when people lose control of their lives to drugs or alcohol. It's risky because creativity makes it easy for hugely creative people, as well as those who admire what they create, to justify bad behavior. •

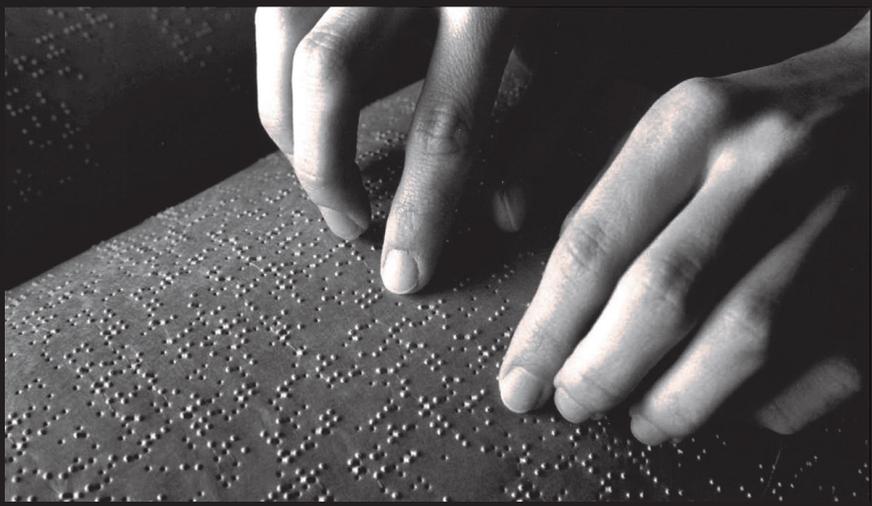
HEIGHTEN SENSES IN THOSE WHO ARE BLIND AND DEAF

The character of "Louie" is also blind, and has exceptional hearing. The below selection from an article by Mary Bates, which originally appeared in a September 2012 issue of *Scientific American*, explains that there is science behind this phenomenon.

It's an oft-repeated idea that blind people can compensate for their lack of sight with enhanced hearing or other abilities. The musical talents of Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles, both blinded at an early age, are cited as examples of blindness conferring an advantage in other areas. Then there's the superhero Daredevil, who is blind but uses his heightened remaining senses to fight crime.

It is commonly assumed that the improvement in the remaining senses is a result of learned behavior; in the absence of vision, blind people pay attention to auditory cues and learn how to use them more efficiently. But there is mounting evidence that people missing one sense don't just learn to use the others better. The brain adapts to the loss by giving itself a makeover. If one sense is lost, the areas of the brain normally devoted to handling that sensory information do not go unused—they get rewired and put to work processing other senses.

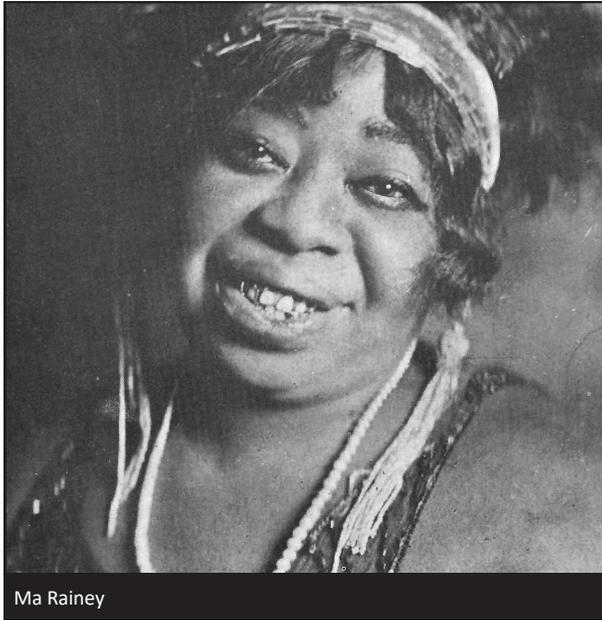
Understanding how the brain rewires itself when a sense is lost has implications for the rehabilitation of deaf and blind individuals, but also for understanding when and how the brain is able to transform itself. Researchers look to the brains of the deaf and blind for clues about the limits of brain plasticity and the mechanisms underlying it. So far, it appears that some brain systems are not very plastic and cannot be changed with experience. Other systems can be modified by experience but only during particular sensitive periods (as is the case with language acquisition). Finally, some neural systems remain plastic and can be changed by experience throughout life. Discovering factors that promote brain plasticity will impact several areas: how we educate normally developing as well as blind and deaf children; rehabilitation after brain injury; and the treatment (and possible reversal) of neurodegenerative diseases and age-related decline. •



"MARY'S RECORD COLLECTION" ABOUT BESSIE SMITH, MEMPHIS MINNIE, AND MORE

In *Beauty's Daughter*, Diane's elderly dear friend and former neighbor, Mary Askew, prepares a box of records to give to Diane. These records include Ma Rainey's "Love Sick Blues," Bessie Smith's "Sugar in My Bown," Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain," and Memphis Minnie's "Memphis Blues."

Ma Rainey

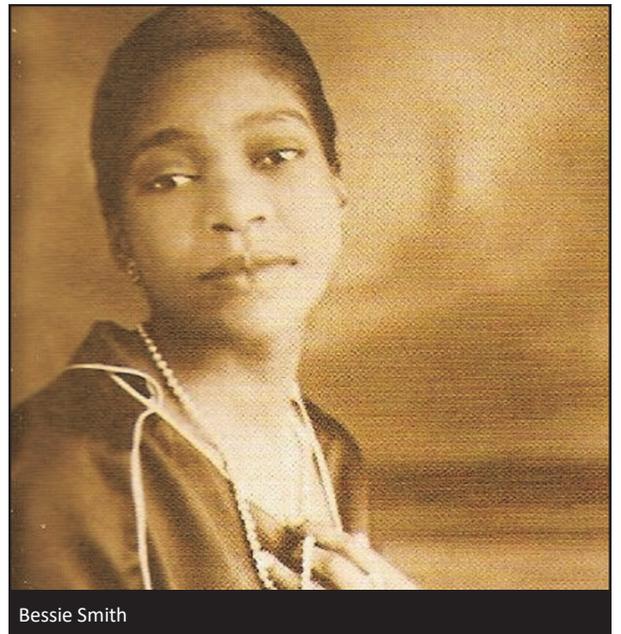


"Ma" Rainey (born Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett on September 1882 or April 26, 1886) was one of the earliest African American professional blues singers and one of the first generation of blues singers to record. She was billed as the "Mother of the Blues." She began performing as a young teenager and became known as Ma Rainey after her marriage to Will Rainey in 1904. Her first recording was made in 1923. In the next five years, she made over 100 recordings. Rainey was known for her powerful vocal abilities, energetic disposition, majestic phrasing, and a "moaning" style of singing. Her powerful voice was never adequately captured on her records, because she recorded exclusively for Paramount, which was known for its below-average recording techniques and poor shellac quality. However, her other qualities are present and most evident in her early recordings "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues." Rainey recorded with Louis Armstrong, and she toured and recorded with the Georgia Jazz Band. She continued to tour until 1935, when she retired. She died of a heart attack in 1939, at the age of 53. Rainey was inducted into the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990. •

Ma Rainey

Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith (born April 15, 1894) was the most popular female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s. She is often regarded as one of the greatest singers of her era and was a major influence on other jazz singers. All contemporary accounts indicate that while Rainey did not teach Smith to sing, she probably helped her develop a stage presence. Smith began forming her own act around 1913, and by 1920, she had established a reputation in the South and along the East Coast. Bessie Smith was signed to Columbia Records in 1923 by Frank Walker, a talent agent who had seen her perform years earlier. Both sides of her first record were hits. Smith became a headliner on the T.O.B.A. circuit and rose to become its top attraction in the 1920s. Working a heavy theater schedule during the winter and performing in tent shows the rest of the year (eventually traveling in her own railroad car), Smith became the highest-paid black entertainer of her day. Columbia nicknamed her "Queen of the Blues," but the press soon upgraded her title to "Empress of the Blues." Smith had a strong contralto voice, which recorded well from her first session, which was conducted when recordings were made acoustically. With the advent of electrical recording, the sheer power of her voice was even more evident. Smith's career was cut short by the Great Depression, which nearly put the recording industry out of business, and the advent of "talkies," which spelled the end of vaudeville. She never stopped performing, however. The days of elaborate vaudeville shows were over, but Smith continued touring and occasionally sang in clubs. In 1929, she appeared in a Broadway musical, *Pansy*. On September 26, 1937, Smith died after being critically injured in a car crash while traveling along U.S. Route 61. •



Bessie Smith



Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson

Robert Leroy Johnson (May 8, 1911 – August 16, 1938) was an American blues singer-songwriter and musician. His landmark recordings in 1936 and 1937 display a combination of singing, guitar skills, and songwriting talent that has influenced later generations of musicians. Johnson's shadowy and poorly documented life and death at age 27 have given rise to much legend. One Faustian myth says that he sold his soul to the devil at a local crossroads of Mississippi highways to achieve success. As an itinerant performer who played mostly on street corners, in juke joints, and at Saturday night dances, Johnson had little commercial success or public recognition in his lifetime. After the reissue of his recordings in 1961, on the LP *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, his work reached a wider audience. Johnson is now recognized as a master of the blues, particularly of the Mississippi Delta blues style. He is credited by many rock musicians as an important influence; the blues and rock musician Eric Clapton has called Johnson "the most important blues singer that ever lived." Johnson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in its first induction ceremony, in 1986, as an early influence on rock and roll. •

Memphis Minnie

Lizzie Douglas (born June 3, 1897), known as Memphis Minnie, was a blues guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter whose recording career lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s. She recorded around 200 songs. In 1910, at the age of 13, she ran away from home to live on Beale Street, in Memphis. She played guitar on street corners for most of her teenage years, occasionally returning to her family's farm when she ran out of money. Her sidewalk performances led to a tour of the South with the Ringling Brothers Circus from 1916 to 1920. She then went back to Beale Street, with its thriving blues scene, and made her living by playing guitar and singing, supplementing her income by prostitution. She began performing with Joe McCoy, her second husband, in 1929. They were discovered by a talent scout for Columbia Records, in front of a barber shop, where they were playing for dimes. She and McCoy went to record in New York City and were given the names Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie by a Columbia A&R man. Over the next few years they released a series of records, performing as a duet. They divorced in 1935. By 1935 Minnie was established in Chicago and had become one of a group of musicians who worked regularly for the record producer and talent scout Lester Melrose. Back on her own after her divorce, Minnie began to experiment with different styles and sounds. She also toured extensively in the 1930s, mainly in the South. In the late 1930s, Minnie married the guitarist and singer Ernest Lawlars, known as Little Son Joe. They began recording together in 1939, with Lawlars adding a more rhythmic backing to Minnie's guitar. By 1941 Minnie had started playing electric guitar, and in May of that year she recorded her biggest hit, "Me and My Chauffeur Blues." In the 1940s Minnie and Lawlars continued to work at their "home club," Chicago's popular 708 Club, and also played at many of the other better-known Chicago nightclubs. Minnie continued to record into the 1950s, but her health began to decline. With public interest in her music waning, she retired from her musical career, and in 1957 she and Lawlars returned to Memphis. She suffered a stroke in 1960, which left her confined to a wheelchair. Lawlars died the following year, and Minnie had another stroke a short while after. She spent her last years in the Jell Nursing Home, in Memphis, where she died in 1973. •



Memphis Minnie

"ANTHONY'S IDOLS" ABOUT CHARLIE PARKER AND MILES DAVIS

In *Beauty's Daughter*, Anthony—a working class Italian American—is a former saxophone player and hugely passionate about jazz music, including his music idols: Charlie Parker and Miles Davis.

Charlie Parker



Charlie Parker

At age eleven, he had just begun to play the saxophone. At age twenty he was leading a revolution in modern jazz music. At thirty-four, he was dead from years of drug and alcohol use. Today, Charlie “Yardbird” Parker is considered one of the great musical innovators of the 20th century. A father of bebop, he influenced generations of musicians, and sparked the fire of one of the most important and successful American artistic movements.

Born in 1920, Charlie Parker grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. By age twelve he was playing in the high school marching band and in local dance hall combos. It was then that he first heard the new sounds of jazz. Hanging around the Kansas City clubs, the young Parker went to hear every new musician to pass through. As a teenager he married his childhood sweetheart, Rebecca Parker Davis. They had a child, but as Kansas City declined as a center for jazz, Parker longed to leave his hometown for New York. So, just around age twenty, Parker sold his horn, left his family, and hopped on a train to New York, where he was destined to change the face of American music forever.

In New York, Parker had difficulty finding work at first, but playing with Jay McShann’s band he began to develop his fiercely original solo style. Within a short while he was the talk

of the town and Dizzy Gillespie and other members of the Earl Hines band convinced Hines to hire him. Gillespie and Parker became close friends and collaborators.

The seeds of modern jazz, or “bebop,” as the new style came to be called, were also being sown by now legendary pianists Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, drummers Kenny Clark and Max Roach, and trumpeter Miles Davis. All were frequent Parker collaborators on recordings and in the lively 52nd Street clubs that were the jazz center of the mid-1940s. Beyond his amazing technical capacity, Parker was able to invent a more complex and individual music by disregarding the four- and eight-bar standards of jazz and creating solos that were both fluid and harsh.

Though the experiments of jazz were being heard worldwide, in the United States much of the popular media ignored the music and concentrated on the culture. Jazz critic Leonard Feather noted, “There was no serious attention paid to Charlie Parker as a great creative musician ... in any of the media. It was just horrifying how really miserably he was treated.”

It was not until his tour of Europe that Parker began to receive the attention he deserved. Visiting Paris in 1949, Parker was greeted with an almost cult status. His European trips also encouraged him to expand his musical arrangements, including backing strings for both touring and recording. However, as continuing personal and creative pressures mounted, he went into a tailspin: drinking, behaving erratically, and even being banned from “Birdland,” the legendary 52nd Street club named in his honor. Throughout this time, however, one thing remained intact—Parker’s playing continued to exhibit the same technical genius and emotional investment that had made him great.

In 1954, while working in California, Parker learned of the death of his two-year-old daughter, and went into further decline. He separated from his then common-law wife, Chan Parker, and was reduced to playing in dives. The cheap red wine he had become addicted to was exacerbating his stomach ulcers, and he even once attempted suicide.

On March 9, 1955, Charlie Parker died. The coroner cited pneumonia as the cause, and estimated Parker’s age at fifty-five or sixty. He was only thirty-four. Though Parker was a titan among jazz musicians of the time, it would take the country at large years to learn that for a short while one of the most profoundly original American musicians had walked among them virtually unrecognized. •

Miles Davis

Miles Davis is the most revered jazz trumpeter of all time, not to mention one of the most important musicians of the 20th century. He was the first jazz musician of the post-hippie era to incorporate rock rhythms, and his immeasurable influence on others, in both jazz and rock, encouraged a wealth of subsequent experiments.

Davis was raised in an upper-middle-class home in an integrated East St. Louis neighborhood. In 1941 he began playing the trumpet semiprofessionally with St. Louis jazz bands. Four years later, his father sent him to study at New York's Juilliard School of Music. Immediately upon arriving in New York City, Davis sought out alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, whom he had met the year before in St. Louis. He became Parker's roommate and protégé, playing in his quintet on the 1945 Savoy sessions, the definitive recordings of the bebop movement. As a trumpeter Davis was far from virtuosic, but he made up for his technical limitations by emphasizing his strengths: his ear for ensemble sound, unique phrasing, and a distinctively fragile tone.

He started moving away from speedy bop and toward something more introspective. Drugs were prevalent on the club scene in this era, and by 1949 Davis had become a heroin addict. He continued to perform and record over the next four years, but his disease kept his career in low gear until he cleaned up in 1954. The following year, he formed a group with drummer Philly Joe Jones, bassist Paul Chambers, pianist Red Garland, and tenor saxophonist John Coltrane. This incarnation of the Miles

Davis Quintet quickly established itself as the decade's premier jazz group. Davis' work moved toward greater complexity—as on his orchestral collaborations with Gil Evans—and greater simplicity, as on *Kind of Blue* (1959). Here he dispensed with chords as the basis for improvisation, instead favoring modal scales and tone centers. The five tracks released have gone on to be some of jazz's most well known.

In 1968 Davis began the process that eventually brought him to a fusion of jazz and rock. With *Miles in the Sky*, the quintet introduced electric instruments and the steady beat of rock drumming to their sound. Davis never left the chemistry of his ensembles alone for long. New members came and went as his creative whims dictated. In 1970 he put together what he called "the best damn rock & roll band in the world," and, with no rehearsals and virtually no instructions, let them jam. The result was the historic *Bitches Brew* which sold over 400,000 copies. In the three years following *Brew's* release, Davis amassed the kind of audience that rock stars enjoyed, performing in packed concert halls around the world.

A 1972 car crash that broke both his legs put a temporary stop to this activity and marked the beginning of his growing reclusiveness. The recordings he made between 1972 and 1975 advanced the ideas presented on *Bitches Brew*, extracting the percussive qualities of tuned instruments, making greater use of electronics and high-powered amplification, and deemphasizing individual solos in favor of ensemble funk. The music was roiling and fierce. *Agharta*, recorded live in Japan in 1975, was his last album of new material for five years. He spent much of that time recuperating from a hip ailment. With the encouragement of his new wife, actress Cicely Tyson, he reemerged in 1981 with a new album and concert appearances. While many old supporters were disappointed by his newly acquired pop clichés (including some vocals), *The Man With the Horn* was his most popular release since *Bitches Brew* and marked his return to live concerts.

In 1989 Davis published his controversial autobiography (cowritten with poet Quincy Troupe). While detailing Davis' drug problem and romantic involvements, the book was noticeably skimpy in its praise for important Davis collaborators. In 1990 Davis received the Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement. Davis died in September 1991, reportedly suffering from pneumonia, respiratory failure, and a stroke. The posthumously released *Doo-Bop*, a jazz/hip-hop collaboration with rapper Easy Mo Bee, indicated that Davis' penchant for experimentation would be key to his legacy. •



Miles Davis

(edited from RollingStone.com)

“BEAUTY’S DANCE CAREER” SEGREGATION IN BURLESQUE

In *Beauty’s Daughter*, Beauty—Diane’s mother—is a former dancer who speaks about the segregation in burlesque and exotic dancing that she experienced as a young woman. She also compares her career to her contemporaries, Gypsy Rose Lee and Ann Corio.

During the Victorian era, burlesque appeared in the third act of a musical variety performance, featured alongside minstrel shows and vaudeville comedy routines. Performers would usually use farce to satirize common political beliefs or literary works. The term burlesque comes from the Italian word *burla*, referring in theater to a practical joke or comedic interlude in commedia dell’arte performances. It was a highly profitable form of highbrow theatrical entertainment.

Since the mid 19th century, African-American performers have been part of the vaudeville, minstrel, and burlesque traditions in America. Yet these forms of entertainment often



Black and White Revue Poster



Jean Idelle

parodied and trivialized the African-American experience for cheap laughs. In the 1920s, “Black and White” burlesque revues became popular, with one act featuring white performers and the other act black performers. Performances were as segregated as America was at the time.

As audiences integrated, white troupes began to hire one or two performers of color that they could bill as “featured attractions.” However, these burlesque dancers were publicized as “exotics” with producers using descriptors like “jungle fever” or “voodoo mistress” on posters and playbills. Frequently, women of color were only booked if they performed acts which reinforced racist stereotypes.

Jean Idelle was one of the first African-American women to perform in an all-white burlesque troupe. Idelle studied dance at the Katherine Dunham School of Dance in New York City. After a brief stint in Dunham’s experimental troupe, Idelle was discovered and made a headliner for Minsky’s Burlesque Shows between 1950 to 1964. •

Gypsy Rose Lee



Gypsy Rose Lee

Gypsy Rose Lee was born in Seattle, Washington on January 8, 1911, however, she always gave January 9 as her date of birth. She was known as Louise to her family. Her sister, actress June Havoc, was born in 1912. Their mother, Rose Thompson Hovick, forged various birth certificates for each of her daughters—older when needed to evade varying state child labor laws, and younger for reduced or free train fares. The girls were unsure until later in life what their years of birth were. After their mother's second divorce, June supported the family by appearing in vaudeville, being billed "Tiniest Toe Dancer in the World" when she was only 2½. Much to her mother's displeasure, June eloped in December 1928, and went on to pursue a brief career in marathon dancing, a more profitable vocation than tap dancing. Louise's singing and dancing talents were insufficient to sustain the act without June. Eventually, it became apparent that Louise could make money in burlesque, which earned her legendary status as an elegant and witty striptease artist.

Her innovations were an almost casual stripping style compared to the herky-jerky styles of most burlesque strippers (she emphasized the "tease" in "striptease"), and she brought a sharp sense of humor into her act as well. She became as famous for her onstage wit as for her stripping style, and – changing her stage name to Gypsy Rose Lee – she became one of the biggest stars of Minsky's Burlesque, where she performed for four years. She was frequently arrested in raids on the Minsky brothers' shows. During the Great Depression, Lee spoke at various union meetings in support of New York laborers.

After the death of their mother, the sisters now felt free to write about her without risking a lawsuit. Gypsy's memoirs were published in 1957 and were taken as inspirational material for the Jule Styne, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents musical *Gypsy: A Musical Fable*. June Havoc did not like the way she was portrayed in the piece, but she was eventually persuaded (and paid) not to oppose it for her sister's sake. The play and the subsequent movie deal assured Gypsy a steady income. Lee died of lung cancer in Los Angeles in 1970, aged 59. •

Ann Corio

Ann Corio was born in Hartford, Connecticut on November 29, 1909. While still in her teens, Corio's good looks and shapely physique landed her showgirl roles that led to her becoming a hugely popular striptease artist. Her rise to stardom as a featured performer on the burlesque circuit began in 1925, working in theatres such as the famous Minsky's Burlesque in New York City and Boston's old Howard Theatre.

After Mayor Fiorello La Guardia closed down New York City's burlesque houses in 1939, Corio made her way to Los Angeles. Between 1941 and 1944 she appeared in several Hollywood "B" motion pictures which featured her in scanty costumes. Corio had a long successful career dancing on stage. In 1962 she put together the nostalgic off-Broadway show *This Was Burlesque* which she directed and in which also performed. In 1968, she wrote a book with the same title. Her fame was enduring enough that in the 1970s—when Corio was retired and in her sixties—she twice was a guest on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. In 1981, *This Was Burlesque* played Broadway at what was then known as the Princess Theatre. Corio died at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center in Englewood, New Jersey on March 1, 1999, aged 89. •



Ann Corio

"DIANE'S INFLUENCES" ABOUT ARTHUR RIMBAUD AND LOU REED

In *Beauty's Daughter* it is suggested that two major influences on Diane's poetry are 19th century French poet Arthur Rimbaud and 20th century rock star Lou Reed. In interviews, playwright Dael Orlandersmith has revealed that these two artists are also significant influences on her own writing—this is one of several autobiographical elements in *Beauty's Daughter*.

Arthur Rimbaud

A volatile and peripatetic poet, the prodigy Arthur Rimbaud wrote all of his poetry in a span of less than five years. His poem "Voyelles" invoked synesthesia, marking him as a founder of French symbolism, and his *Une Saison en Enfer (A Season in Hell)* is considered one of the first works of free verse. His poetry was subconsciously inspired and highly suggestive; his persona was caustic and unstable. Though brilliant, during his life his peers regarded him as perverse, unsophisticated, and youthfully arrogant, and he died virtually indifferent to his own work.

Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud was born October 20, 1854, in the small French town Charleville. His father, an army captain, abandoned the family when he was six. His mother, née Vitalie Cuif, was an overbearing and protective woman. By the age of thirteen, he had already won several prizes for his writing and was adept at composing verse in Latin. His teacher and mentor Georges Izambard nurtured his talents and passion for literature, although Madame Rimbaud strongly disapproved when her son brought home a copy of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.



Arthur Rimbaud

His school shut down in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, and the young Rimbaud took the opportunity to seek adventure, running away from home twice. He left again after Napoleon III's surrender a few months later, and wandered the countryside until he ended up in Paris. Then sixteen, he lived as a vagabond on the streets until the poet Paul Verlaine noticed him. Verlaine was thoroughly astonished by this boy's talent after having read *Le Bateau ivre (The Drunken Boat)*, and took him home to live with him and his new wife. Though Rimbaud's social ineptitude and harsh manners forced him to move out, he and Verlaine became lovers. Shortly after the birth of his son, Verlaine left his family to live with Rimbaud. Their infamous affair was erratic and often hostile. After eighteen months living together in three countries, their relationship ended abruptly, following an incident where a drunk and hysterical Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the hand.

Rimbaud returned to Charleville and wrote a large portion of *Une Saison en Enfer (A Season in Hell)*. The book was published in 1873 in Brussels, but the majority of the copies sat in the printer's basement until 1901 because Rimbaud could not pay the bill. He continued his writing and his travels, frequently returning home for short stays. At nineteen he stopped writing poetry completely. He needed to ensure his and his family's financial security, and so he took jobs in African towns as a colonial tradesman. His only writing after 1875 survives in documents and letters. In his correspondence with family and friends, Rimbaud indicates that he spent his adulthood in a constant struggle for financial success. His travels left him sick; he grew weary with the climate and culture in

the towns where he worked. In 1891, he noticed a pain in his knee. After delaying, he endured a painful trip to Marseilles in May, whereupon doctors were forced to amputate his leg. The cancer, however, continued to spread. He died on November 10, 1891, at the age of 37.

In 1895, Verlaine published Rimbaud's complete works, and thus secured his ex-lover's immortal fame. Both Rimbaud's life and poetry has inspired a great number of poets and artists, including the French symbolists, Surrealism, the counter-culture Beat Movement, and the musicians Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison and Patti Smith. •

Lou Reed

As the lead singer and songwriter of the Velvet Underground in the 1960s, Lou Reed helped invent punk rock and while writing about femme fatales, black angels and heroin. In the process, he also brought a stormy dissonance to the foreground, helping to expand the vocabulary of the electric guitar.

Born on March 2, 1942, Lewis Alan Reed grew up on Long Island, and attended Syracuse University, studying poetry and journalism. After leaving Syracuse, Reed returned to New York and worked for Pickwick Records, taking part in the studio group that recorded various Reed-penned songs. With future Velvet Underground member John Cale he formed a band called the Primitives, which then became the Warlocks. In the mid-1960s, Reed and Cale connected with Sterling Morrison and Moe Tucker to form the Velvet Underground. The band recorded four classic, highly influential albums between 1966 and 1970, investigating life's darker side positioning themselves as an East Coast antidote to the West Coast sunshine of the hippie era.

Reed's 1970 departure from the Velvet Underground was bitter; he did not even stay to complete their fourth album, *Loaded*, though songs from that project ("Sweet Jane" and "Rock & Roll") would become cornerstones of his live show and reputation. He became a virtual recluse for nearly two years, until moving to England and beginning a solo career in 1972 with a potent self-titled debut that sustained the intensity of his Velvet work. However, *Transformer* (1972) was his pop breakthrough. Produced by David Bowie, it yielded Reed's only Top 20 hit, "Walk on the Wild Side," an ode to the denizens of Andy Warhol's 1960s films. With Bowie's aid, Reed made the transition to the glitter rock of the period, camping up fashion sense with bleach-blond hair and black fingernail polish. Glam rock was the rage at the time, and Reed was one of its central figures. In what was to become a common shifting of tone, his 1973 follow-up *Berlin* was as grim as *Transformer* had been playful.

Reed's recordings have continued to flaunt this kind of unpredictability. A pair of live albums drawn from the same set of concerts featured heavy-metal versions of Velvet Underground tunes, while a later tour was built on theatrics. For example, he pretended to shoot up while performing the song "Heroin." After another live album, he followed with *Metal Machine Music*, a double album of grating, vocal-less dissonance.

He married Sylvia Morales on Valentine's Day 1980, and his songs about the seamy side of life began to appear alongside essays on domestic contentment—"I'm an average guy," he sang on his critically acclaimed 1982 album *The Blue Mask*. The



record introduced a trilogy that reminded fans just how powerful Reed could be when firing on all cylinders. With a band that found him trading guitar lines with Robert Quine, his new music became sleek yet ornery. Then, switching labels to Sire, he seemed reborn yet again as he filled the masterful *New York* (1989) with character sketches and insightful musings about his home. Artistically he'd always been associated with the city's push 'n' shove personality, and the portraits that comprised this disc—made with a new band that featured guitarist Mike Rathke and bassist Rob Wasserman—were piercing.

1990 saw the near-impossible happen: The Velvet Underground reunited in France to play a benefit, and in 1993, toured through Europe, sharing shows with U2. It didn't last as long as they'd hoped, though. A keenly anticipated swing through America was cancelled without any particular reason given. The band united once more 1996 when it was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame; their performance was dedicated to Morrison, who died the previous year.

Reed remained active doing benefits and composing music through the 1990s and 2000s. In his 40 year solo career, Reed released 22 studio albums and 11 live albums. On October 27, 2013, he died from liver disease at his home in Southampton, New York, at the age of 71. •

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

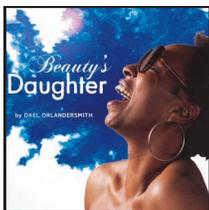
Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious 2016 National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.

Our diverse and multi-generational 37-member Ensemble has over 530 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2016, our theater and artists have 186 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and over 31 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

For over thirty years, American Blues has created essential productions and live theatrical experiences for Chicagoland. Their best known production is Chicago's holiday tradition *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* that has entertained over 50,000 patrons since 2002! Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote American Blues is "exceptional" and the company "feels like home." Chris Jones of *Chicago Tribune* claimed Blues is "strikingly honest [with] deep emotional souls."

In addition to first-class theater, American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve the community. They provide an integrated arts education program to Chicago Public Schools that serves over 1,500 students annually. They hold "Pink Previews" which donates a portion of box office sales to breast cancer research. They donate thousands of complimentary tickets to underserved communities. They provide community engagement events called "Town Halls" for patrons following Sunday matinee performance, including curated discussions with Northwestern University psychologists. As a Blue Star Theater, they honor military service and first-responders through various initiatives. Former President of Illinois Labor History Society, Larry Spivak wrote, "American Blues is a dynamic force in Chicago – connecting culture, art, history, and politics into a holistic, aesthetic experience." •

SEASON 32 "The Beat Goes On"

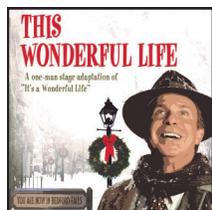


by Dael Orlandersmith

Chicago premiere

Directed by
Ron OJ Parson

July 7- Aug 5, 2017



by Steve Murray

Chicago premiere

Directed by
Carmen Roman*

Nov 2 - Nov 26, 2017

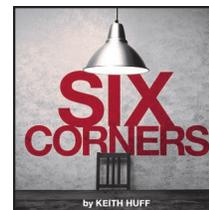


from Frank Capra's film

Directed by
Gwendolyn Whiteside*

Music direction by
Michael Mahler*

Nov 17, '17 - Jan 6, '18

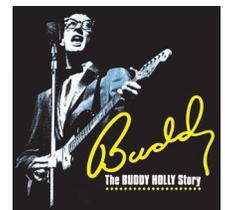


by Keith Huff

World premiere

Directed by
Gary Griffin

Feb 16 - Mar 25, 2018



by Alan Janes

Directed by
Lili-Anne Brown

Music direction by
Michael Mahler*

Apr 27 - May 26, 2018

*Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

ABOUT **AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE THEATER

PERFORMANCE VENUE

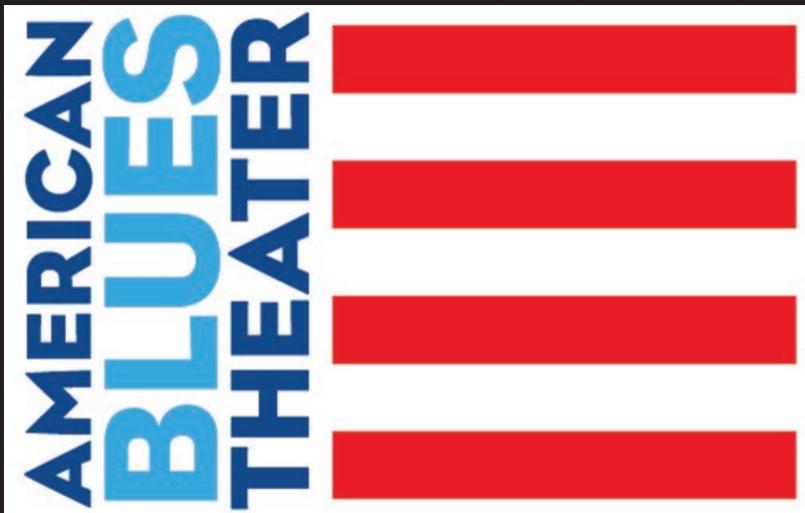
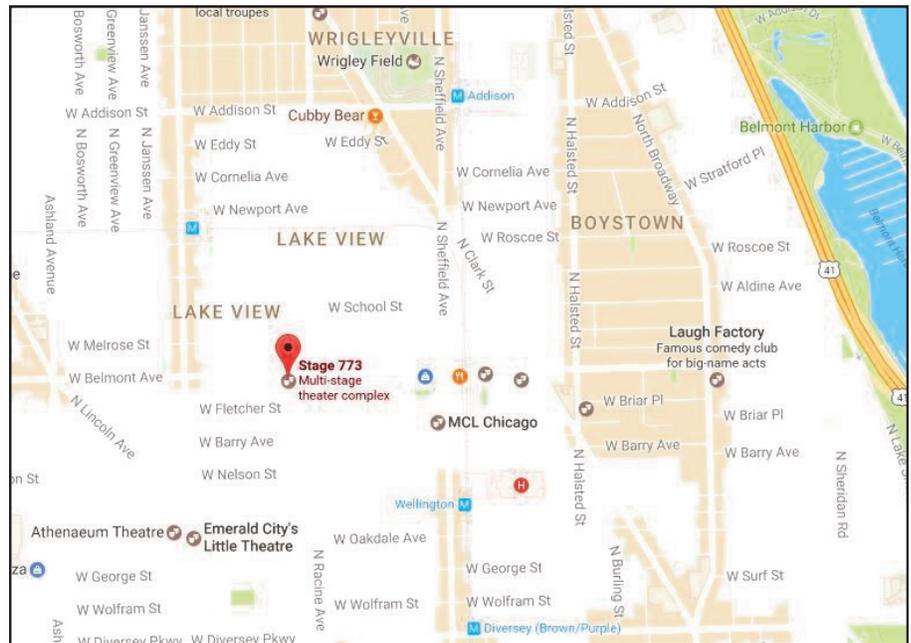
Stage 773
1225 W Belmont Ave
Chicago, IL 60657

BOX OFFICE

(773) 327-5252
Group sales (773) 654-3103

FOR MORE INFORMATION

AmericanBluesTheater.com



American Blues Theater is supported in part by The Davee Foundation, The MacArthur Funds for Arts & Culture at Prince, the Shubert Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, SMART Growth Grant, Arts Work Fund, Illinois Arts Council Agency, Anixter Foundation, Actors' Equity Foundation, Northern Trust, Eurex, Benjamin Rosenthal Foundation, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and the Chip Pringle Fund. ComEd is the 2017-2018 Season Lighting Sponsor.