WORKshop Series

# ATTHE RRAFER STAND book by Alani iLongwe

music and lyrics by Rowen Casey

September 27 - October 10

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## AT THE RIVER I STAND

book by Alani iLongwe music and lyrics by Rowen Casey directed by taneisha duggan

### THE CAST

Eddie "Fats" Malone King Johnny Ms. Velvet Ray Devon Anita HARVY BLANKS RODRICK COVINGTON TINA FABRIQUE ALANI iLONGWE CHRISTINA SAJOUS

#### THE ANCESTORS

THEODORE ALEXANDER CELINE EDMONDSON

Music Director Choreography Stage Manager ROWEN CASEY TSIAMBWOM "T" AKUCHU KATE J. CUDWORTH

Video Editing by ALONZO BECKETT/NE VIDEO ENTERTAINMENT Music Mix/Mastering by MATT BERKY/MASSIVE PRODUCTIONS, LLC Casting by DESTINY LILLY, CSA

Cover Design by Michael McKiernan

Actors appear with the permission of SAG/AFTRA

AT THE RIVER I STAND is a part of the WORKshop Series\*

\*Focused on early development projects, conceived and written primarily by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), the WORKshop series reflects the moment we're in. Featuring five compelling stories that offer opportunities for critical thinking, thoughtfulness, humor and uplift.

TheaterWorks is celebrating its 35th season as a non-profit, professional theater company. Founded in 1985.

AT THE RIVER I STAND is the 1st production of the 2020-2021 Season. and the 1st production in the WORKshop series.

TheaterWorks • 233 Pearl Street • Hartford, CT 06103 • 2020

## WHO



HARVY BLANKS (Eddie "Fats" Malone) is making his TheaterWorks Hartford debut. He has performed in regional theatre for over 30 years. As a member of the Denver Center Theatre Company for 28 years, Harvy portrayed such comedic characters as: Banjo in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and The Witty Gambler in *Three* 

Men and a Horse. He also performed 9 of August Wilson's 10-play Century Cycle including Boy Willie in The Piano Lesson, Gabe in Fences, Loomis in Joe Turner's Come and Gone, Turnbo in Jitney and West in Two Trains Running. Harvy received accolades for his radio performances in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, and three character roles in August Wilson's Century Cycle, both performed with New York Public Radio, directed by Rubin Santiago-Hudson. Harvy completed August Wilson's 10-play epic by appearing in Ma Rainey's Black Bottom at Portland Stage in Portland, ME. He also played patriarch Donald in Danai Gurira's world premier of Familiar at Yale Repertory Theatre. Musical theatre credits include Jim in Big River and Purlie in Purlie Victorious. Harvy currently splits his time between New York and Colorado.



**RODRICK COVINGTON** (King Johnny) is making his **TheaterWorks Hartford** debut. Rodrick is an Activist, passionate about systemic transformation. Last seen in *Joseph* at the Lincoln Center. Broadway: *The Lion King*, Tony Award Winning Revival of *Once on this Island*. Off Broadway: *Joan of Arc* (Public Theatre), *Invisible* 

Thread (Second Stage), Central Avenue (Signature Theatre), Drumstruck (Dodger Stages). Touring: Fosse. International: The Brothers Size (Baxter, Market Theatre). Regional: Witness Uganda (ART), Pippin (Mark Taper Forum), The Brother/Sister Trilogy (Steppenwolf), The Brothers Size (Syracuse Stage), Venice (Kirk Douglas). World premiere of In the Red and Brown Water, Jelly's Last Jam (Alliance) 1 Peter 4:8... Grateful for Jay... @RodrickCovington



**TINA FABRIQUE** (Ms.Velvet Ray) was last seen at **TheaterWorks Hartford** in ELLA. Broadway/ NY/ Nat'l Tours: Gospel at Colonus; Bring In Da Noise; Ragtime; Once on This Island; How To Succeed; 70 Girls 70; Best Little Whorehouse; ELLA; Truly Blessed; Dessa Rose; The Wiz; The First Noel; Ma Rainey's Black Bottom; Harlem Song; Dolphins and

Sharks; Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope; Bubbling Brown Sugar. She is featured in the Netflix film The Boys in the Band being released on September 30th, 2020. TV and Film credits include: Singing the classic theme song of the TV show Reading Rainbow. Also: Blue Bloods; God Friended Me; New Amsterdam; Law and Order: SVU; Law and Order: Criminal Intent; Mrs. Fletcher, The Last OG; Black Magic For White Boys.



ALANI ILONGWE (Book Writer/Devon) is excited to be back at TheaterWorks Hartford. Earlier this year, his new musical AT THE RIVER I STAND was invited to the Johnny Mercer Writers Colony at Goodspeed before coming home to TheaterWorks Hartford. TV includes Castle (ABC), Major Crimes (TNT), Blue Bloods (CBS),

Law & Order (NBC), Cousins for Life, Casagrandes, and Loud House (Nickelodeon). Theater credits include Matthew Lopez's The Legend



of Georgia McBride (Ensemble Theatre Company), August Wilson's Two Trains Running (Seattle Repertory Company/Arena Stage) and Dominique Morisseau's Sunset Baby (TheaterWorks Hartford). New York University's Tisch School for the Arts, Ron Howard Fellowship. Graduate of Maggie Flanigan Studio. A member of the inaugural class of NAMT's Festival Observership for Early Career Directors. Co-founder of Open City Acting Studio and Open City Theater.



CHRISTINA SAJOUS (Anita) is making her TheaterWorks Hartford debut. Broadway credits include: Spongebob Squarepants (Sandy Cheeks), Spider Man: Turn off the Dark (Arachne), American Idiot (Extraordinary Girl), Baby It's You (Shirley), and Holler If Ya Hear Me. TV credits: Chicago Med (NBC), Blue Bloods (CBS), Spongebob Squarepants Live

(Nickelodeon), Jesus Christ Superstar Live (NBC). Education: New York University Tisch School of the Arts.



THEODORE ALEXANDER (Dancer) is a Baltimore based dancer and artist who has been honing his dance techniques since 2015. Recently, he graduated from Point Park University with a B.F.A in Dance. While at Point Park, Theodore had the pleasure of performing works by Nacho Duato, Jason McDole and Crystal Frazier. Theodore's

artistic inspiration comes from the simple things in life that make every moment beautiful. He believes that art is an expression of internal and external emotional sources. He would like to thank all of his mentors for their patience and careful guidance. @voracious\_artistry.



**CELINE EDMONDSON** (Dancer) Celine "BOOM" Edmondson began her professional dance career while attending the University of the Arts where she earned her BFA in Dance. Shortly after signing to Clear Talent Group New York, Celine became a part of the Brooklynettes dance team. As a Brooklynette, Celine has been able to travel

and perform all over the world and has also choreographed for the team. She is now Co-Captain and has had the opportunity to present her choreography at the 2019 Global Games in China as well as performing at the 2020 NBA All Star Weekend. Celine has also performed with artists such as Bebe Rexha, Meghan Trainor, DJ Khaled, and more. She is a brand ambassador for Black Pyramid and performed at the 2020 VMAs with Maluma.



**ROWEN CASEY** (Composer/Lyricist) is a songwriter, composer, and professional musician. A multi-instrumentalist rigorously trained on the violin since the age of five, his wide resumé spans from performing in concert halls under Leonard Slatkin to fiddling on country hits at the House of Blues. As a songwriter, this wide array of experience has

shaped a diverse palette of musical styles. His work has been heard on stage and screen, most notably Off Broadway at the Minetta Lane Theatre and the New York Musical Festival. After growing up in a small town, Rowen attended the Interlochen Arts Academy and NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He is a former finalist in National Public Radio's From the Top, an Anna Sosenko Trust Award recipient, and part of the 2020 Johnny Mercer Writer's Colony at Goodspeed Musicals.

## WHO



taneisha duggan (Director) is a director, producer and arts administrator. She is the Producing Associate at **TheaterWorks Hartford.** Directing credits include: *Blue Door* (Juilliard) Actually (TheaterWorks Hartford), *Hooded: or Being Black for Dummies* (Juilliard), and various workshop readings. Upcoming: INK'D Festival at Playwright's Realm.

She trained as an actor at SUNY - Purchase College in The School of Theater Arts and Film, and has appeared on regional stages in Connecticut and New York, including TheaterWorks Hartford, Long Wharf, LaMama, and HartBeat Ensemble. She is a 2016 National Arts Strategies Creative Community Fellow. She's a mama of two boys and believer in radical love-filled disruption.



**TSIAMBWOM "T" AKUCHU** (Choreographer) is an actor, dancer, and theatre artist based in Atlanta, GA whose work has been presented on stages like the Kennedy Center and Joe's Pub at The Public. He was most recently featured as part of DANCE NOW NYC's Encore series in January as part of a curated dance festival. Some recent

acting credits include *The Nether* (Theatre Emory) and *The Flick* (Dramatic Repertory Company). See more of his work at akuchu.com



**ROB RUGGIERO** (Producing Artistic Director) has been part of **TheaterWorks Hartford** artistic leadership for 26 years. He has directed over 60 shows, including TWH productions of *The Legend of Georgia McBride, Constellations, Next to Normal, Relativity* (starring Richard Dreyfuss) and *Christmas on the Rocks*, which he also conceived.

His Broadway credits include *Looped* (starring Valerie Harper in a Tony-nominated performance) and *High* (starring Kathleen Turner) which had its world premiere at TWH. He also conceived and directed the musical revue *Make Me a Song: The Music of William Finn* which moved off-Broadway and was nominated for Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards. Rob conceived and directed *Ella*, a musical about Ella Fitzgerald, which saw sold-out runs in 24 regional theaters and was produced as a National Tour. His work on plays and musicals has received multiple awards in Connecticut and around the United States. In his eleventh collaboration with Goodspeed Musicals, Rob directed *Oliver*, where he also directed many award-winning musical productions. His adaptation of *Show Boat* is now being licensed by the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization. Internationally he directed *Fiddler on the Roof* in Athens, Greece.

KATE J. CUDWORTH (Production Stage Manager) has enjoyed seven seasons with TheaterWorks Hartford including American Son, The River, Hand to God, The Invisible Hand, The Legend of Georgia McBride, The Wolves, Fade, Next to Normal, Sunset Baby, Relativity, Midsummer, Woody Sez, and Becoming Dr. Ruth. Off-Broadway: Freud's Last Session, [title of show]. NY/Regional: Barrington Stage Company (8 seasons including Freud's Last Session; Dr. Ruth, All The Way; Joe Iconis' The Black Suits), Atlantic Stage Company, Hartford Stage, Manhattan School of Music (4 seasons), Yale Opera, York Theatre Company, Bronx Opera Company, Fringe NYC, NYMF.

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### From the Playwright

As is consistently true, history has a tendency to repeat itself.

The same could be said of the events that transpired in the United States in the Spring of 1968 and how they mirror our nation's socio-political climate today.

We remember well the daily reports of unarmed black men and women gunned down by police. We remember the around the clock media coverage of Black Lives Matter protesters on one side of the street and police officers armed in riot gear on the other. We remember the marathon of videos depicting nationwide police brutality posted to our timelines and the unapologetic light they shined on systemically enforced racial bias in law enforcement. Racial bias that could have started honest conversations and much needed policy changes, but were ultimately drowned under the tsunami of "All Lives Matter" hashtags and those gasping for air while wheezing, "I can't breathe!"

This time of great turmoil led to one the most divisive and controversial presidential elections this nation has ever seen. But it wasn't anything new to our history. For in Memphis of 1968, their citizens were also living in a time of great racial divide. A divide that saw the rise of the Black Power Movement, the fall of the Civil Rights Era, and the Mayoral election of an avowed segregationist who, during his campaign, called for the "unionization of the white vote" to "Make Memphis Proud Again". While the Sanitation Strike itself polarized the city, ultimately it was the citizens of Memphis who found the resolve to put their differences aside in order to fight for the equality of all...after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

We aim to use the world of musical theater to present a palpable yet unwavering account of a not so distant moment in our collective pasts. While our presentation is a bare bones representation of the music and narrative to date, through further development we look forward to building toward the



fully immersive experience that will allow audiences to take a deep dive into this moment in history and the fictional benefit concert and characters inspired by it.

Our musical resonates today, because it continues to ask the following questions: Can the American people truly come together, despite the differences that threaten to tear us apart? Is it possible for everyday citizens to create systemic change without putting themselves in mortal danger? Is it possible for America to reconcile its violent past and the crimes committed to birth a nation or are we destined to repeat the history, missteps, and oversights of those who came before into the foreseeable future?

This show serves as a looking glass on which audiences can peer into our shared history, reflect our present and look into the future with the question, "Where will I choose to stand?" dancing on our tongues.

Alani iLongwe

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Dean Batchelder, Billy Ciff, Hartford Stage, Lara Kirksey, Massive Productions, NE Video Entertainment, Open Studio Theater Company, TD Bank

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2020 - 2021 Season

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