



February 1 – 18, 2024

SHUTTER SISTERS

1st
STAGE 

1st Stage
With generous support from
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Presents

SHUTTER SISTERS

WRITTEN BY
MANSA RA

DIRECTED BY
ERIC RUFFIN+

Featuring

DEIDRA LAWAN STARNES*
MYKAL

TONYA BECKMAN*
MICHAEL

Production & Design

SCENIC DESIGN
KATHYRN KAWECKI

INTIMACY COORDINATOR
LORRAINE RESSEGGER-SLONE

PROPERTIES DESIGN
PAULINE LAMB

STAGE MANAGER
SARAH USARY

LIGHTING DESIGN
ADAM MENDELSON

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
JAIDA GILLESPIE

COSTUME DESIGN
LYNLY A. SAUNDERS

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGN
NIYA JOHN

SOUND DESIGN
DAVID LAMONT WILSON

ASSISTANT SCENIC DESIGNER
RYAN ANTHONY

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
ALEX LEVY

This production is made possible in part by gifts from
our generous 1st Stage donors and with the support of



* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States, appearing under a Special Appearance Contract.

+ Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

THE PLAYWRIGHT



MANSA RA was born Jiréh Breon Holder and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. On October 1, 2020, he changed his name and committed himself to black radical love. He made his debut as a playwright with *Too Heavy For Your Pocket*, a moving drama about a 1960's college student who shocks his family when he joins the extremely dangerous Freedom Rides. *The New York Times* named Ra a “Marquee Name, Now in the Making” while *The New Yorker* praised him as “a gifted writer who will be amazing to watch as his work grows.” His plays have won numerous awards including the Laurents / Hatcher Foundation Award, Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Competition,

Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, and the Fellowship of Southern Writers' 2017 Bryan Foundation Award for Drama.

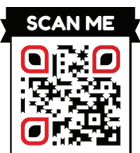
Ra has written and produced on over two-thousand hours of network television. Most notably, "A Seat at the Table" (*New Amsterdam* Season 1, Episode 11) which took his own experience with police to reveal why Dr. Reynolds (played by Jocko Sims) chose to be a surgeon.

His latest Off-Broadway production ...*What the End Will Be* (NYT critics' pick) was produced at the Roundabout Theater in 2022. *The New York Times* applauded it as “everything that is meant when we say that Black lives matter” while *The Wall Street Journal* called it “an undeniable pleasure.”

Mansa Ra is the director of The Paradigms, a devising ensemble which seeks to create more equitable and ethical theater. The Paradigms highlight stories about an authentic Black America that begins before slavery and extends well past President Obama. The ensemble utilizes a process-oriented method of creating stories that re-enfranchises the actors in the development process while inviting journalists, choreographers, and communities from the very start. Stay tuned for The Paradigms' first project: *A Pyramid on the Mississippi*.

Mansa Ra was educated at Memphis Central High School, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Emory University, and earned an M.F.A. in Playwriting from the Yale School of Drama. He credits Sarah Ruhl and Dr. Alison Ligon as the most influential teachers of his academic journey.

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THE DIRECTOR



ERIC RUFFIN is the coordinator of the Acting program for the Howard University Theatre Arts Department. His directing credits include *Marys Seacole* and *Fabulation* for Mosaic Theater, *Stirring the Waters* at The Reach (Kennedy Center), *Mountaintop* and *A Raisin in the Sun* for Lyric Repertory Company, *Three Cheers for Grace* for Young Playwrights Theater, *Sarafina!* at Kennedy Center, *Black Nativity* for Theater Alliance (3 Helen Hayes Awards including Best Musical) and *2-2 Tango* at Studio Theatre. He has also directed *Black Nativity*, *Radio Golf*, *Hurt Village*, *Venus*, *Passing Strange*, and *Cut Flowers* at the Ira Aldridge Theatre. For the Ellington Theatre Department he has helmed

the productions of *Animal Farm*, *The Laramie Project*, *The Bluest Eye*, *In the Red and Brown Water*, and *Twilight: Los Angeles*. Ruffin holds a B.F.A. from Howard University and an MFA from Rutgers University. He is a Stage Directors and Choreographers Associate, and former: Drama League Directing Fellow, Folger Theatre Acting Fellow, NY Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect and Princess Grace Grant recipient. He is currently developing the “1944 Project” examining the Port Chicago disaster. Ruffin serves on Woolly Mammoth Theatre’s Board of Directors.



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THE CAST

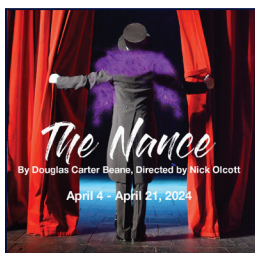


DEIDRA LAWAN STARNES (MYKAL, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR) is an actor, director, writer, and learning facilitator. She was last seen in *Dorothy's Dictionary* at Washington Stage Guild. Her 1st Stage acting credits include *Mlima's Tale*, *Wanda's Way*, *The Mamalogues*, *The Member of the Wedding*, and *The Good Counselor*. Other acting credits include *The Hula Hoopin' Queen*, *Passing Strange*, *Two Trains Running*, *Radio Golf*, *Seven Guitars*, *The Amen Corner*, *King Lear*, *Amadeus*, *Milk Like Sugar*, *Julius Caesar*, *Invisible Man*, *In the Red and Brown Water* and *Intimate Apparel*. Her most recent directing project was *Quilters*. Her production, *The Rainmaker* was nominated for a 2023 Helen Hayes Award for Most Outstanding Production. Other directing credits include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* nominated for six Helen Hayes awards, *'Night, Mother*, *A Civil War Christmas*, *For Colored Girls*, and *The Soul Collector*. She has a BA in Theatre from the UMD, an MA in Producing Film, TV, and Video from AU, and an MFA in Drama from UCONN.



TONYA BECKMAN (MICHAEL) is happy to return to 1st Stage, after appearing in *How the Light Gets In* and *Harvey*. DC credits include Folger Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Round House Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, Kennedy Center, Ford's Theatre, Studio Theatre, Theater J, Constellation Theatre (Helen Hayes Lead Actress nomination for *The Skin of our Teeth*); Mosaic Theater Company, Solas Nua. She is also a company member at Taffety Punk Theatre Company. Regional credits: Cleveland Play House, Cincinnati Playhouse, Fulton Theatre, Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Totem Pole Playhouse, Public Theatre of Maine, Purple Rose Theatre, Human Race Theatre. Tonya is a member of the theatre faculty at George Washington University. www.tonyabeckman.com

NEXT AT 1st Stage



The Nance, April 4 to 21, 2024

By Douglas Carter Beane. Directed by Nick Olcott. This witty, Tony Award-Nominated play, filled with music, dance, and comedy sketches, introduces us to Chauncey Miles, a gay burlesque performer at the Irving Place Theater. *The Nance* recreates the naughty, raucous world of burlesque's heyday and tells the backstage story of Chauncey and his fellow performers. At a time when it was easy to play gay and dangerous to be gay, Chauncey's uproarious antics on the stage stand out in marked contrast to his offstage life. A "funny but bittersweet portrait of a vanished era". -*The Chicago Tribune*

Postcards from Ihatov, June 6 to 23, 2024
Created and directed by Natsu Onoda Power.

WORLD PREMIERE

Adapted from the works of Kenji Miyazawa including the classic "Night on the Galactic Railroad." This spellbinding tale of friendship, self-discovery, and the transcendent power of imagination takes audiences on a cosmic journey through the stars. This world premiere production of visual theater is bursting with imagination and spectacle that the whole family can enjoy.



THE CAST



PAULINE LAMB (MYKAL U/S AND PROPERTIES DESIGN) designs props, sets, and costumes throughout the DC area while also performing, choreographing, and teaching. She has a BA in Performance Studies from UNC Chapel Hill. Previous design credits include *Picasso* at GALA Hispanic Theatre (Props + Costumes), *The Hula Hoopin Queen* at Imagination Stage (props), *Alice in Wonderland* at Chesapeake Shakespeare Company (props), and *Seussical*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *WinterFest*, and *The Little Mermaid* at Adventure Theatre (props + puppets) among others! Previous acting credits include Mama in *The Bluest Eye* (Theatre Alliance), Daisy in *Diagnosed* (Creative Cauldron) Woman 2 in *From the Mississippi Delta* (The Essential Theater), Simone in *Weep* (Nu Sass), and Sylvia in *Blight* (Pinky

Swear Productions). Her choreography has been featured at Imagination Stage, 1st Stage, Pallas Theatre Collective, Adventure Theatre and varying schools through the DMV. She's thrilled to be back for her third show with her powerhouse 1st Stage family!



VALERIE ADAMS RIGSBEE (MICHAEL U/S) is thrilled to make her 1st Stage debut. In the DC-area, she's appeared in *Miracle on 34th St*, *Sister Act*, and *Escape to Margaritaville* (Toby's Dinner Theatre); *Shakespeare in Love*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, and *Next to Normal* (Helen Hayes Winner, Outstanding Musical) (Keegan Theatre); *The Remains* (Studio Theatre); *Museum 2040* (4615 Theatre Company); *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *Urinetown* (Helen Hayes Nominee, Outstanding Musical) (Constellation Theatre); *James & the Giant Peach* (Helen Hayes Recipient, Outstanding Ensemble) Adventure Theatre); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Next Stop Theatre); *Bonnie and Clyde* (Monumental Theatre); and *Doctor Faustus* (Brave Spirits Theatre). She played Mrs. Cratchit in a national tour of *A Christmas Carol*, and has

performed regionally at the Guthrie Theatre, Advice to the Players (NH Theatre Award Finalist, Best Supporting Actress), Papermill Theatre, Acadia Repertory, and more! www.actorval.com



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– THE PRODUCTION TEAM –

KATHRYN KAWECKI (SET DESIGN) Previous 1st Stage credits; *How the Light Gets In* (HHA Nomination), *columbinus*, *The Farnsworth Invention*, *The Good Counselor* (costume and set), *Hero's Welcome*, *Lobby Hero* (costume and set), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Old Wicked Songs* (costume and set), *Proof* (costume and set; HHA Helen Nomination for Set Design), *Swimming With Whales*, *Trevor* (costume and set), and *Trying*. Upcoming: *The Return of Ulysses* (INSeries, costume); *Romeo & Juliet* (Chesapeake Shakespeare). DMV: *As You Like It*, *Anne of the Thousand Days* (Chesapeake Shakespeare); *You...or Whatever I Can Get* (Flying V, costume); *The Late Wedding* (Hub Theatre); *Enron* (4615). Regional: *The Taste of It* (NYC, costume & set; NYIT Nomination); *Elijah* (Boulder; Henry Nomination); *Avenue Q* (Lyric Stage, Boston); *My Fair Lady* (Boston; IRNE Nomination). She teaches at Bowie State University and previously taught for Gettysburg College and NDSU. www.kawecki-art.com

ADAM MENDELSON (LIGHTING DESIGN) is excited to light his first show at 1st Stage. He is also the Senior Lecturer in Lighting and Sound Design at the University of Maryland Baltimore County where he has been on the faculty since 2012 and helped prepare the new theatre spaces for the opening of the state-of-the-art Performing Arts and Humanities Building. He previously taught at the University of Wyoming, the University of Texas- Arlington, Stephens College (Columbia, MO), and Lawrence Academy (Groton, MA). His design work has been seen across the US and as far afield as Scotland. Recently, he has worked on shows for the Everyman Theatre (Baltimore, MD), the Kennedy Center (Washington DC), (Classic Theatre of Maryland (Annapolis, MD), Perisphere Theatre (Silver Spring, MD) Rep Stage (Columbia, MD) Lexington Children's Theatre (Lexington, KY), and the Towson University Department of Dance. He is a 20 year member of USITT and currently serves as the International Representative for the Lighting Commission and is the Lighting Delegate to OISTAT. He lives in Catonsville MD with his wife, Catherine, and their menagerie, Lailah and Kona.

LYNLY A. SAUNDERS (COSTUME DESIGN) *One Man, Two Guvnors* (1st Stage). Local: *Approaching Ali*, *An American Soldier*, *Better Gods*, *Proving Up*, *Così fan Tutte* (Washington National Opera); *The House with Two Doors*, *Commedia Romeo and Juliet*, *Missed Connections*, *Love Like Tuesday* (Faction of Fools); *Interstellar Ghost Hour* (Longacre Lea); *Brain People*, *Voices Underwater* (Rorschach Theatre); *The Mai*, *Scenes From the Big Picture*, *Woman and Scarecrow* (Solus Nua); *West Side Story*, MASS (National Symphony Orchestra); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Chesapeake Shakespeare Company). Regional: *Barber of Seville* (Glimmerglass Festival); *Faust* (Wolf Trap Opera); *Idomeneo* (Aspen Music Festival); *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (San Antonio Opera). Upcoming: *Barber of Seville* (Opera Theatre of St. Louis).

DAVID LAMONT WILSON (SOUND DESIGN) is thrilled to be making a return to 1st Stage, where he last sound designed *The Mamalogues*. He is especially thrilled to be working with this fantastic cast and crew. Wilson's most recent sound designs include this season's critically acclaimed production of *Confederates* at Mosaic Theater, *Chicken & Biscuits* at the Virginia Repertory Theatre, the off Broadway production of *Queens Girl In The World* for Abingdon Theatre Company, and *School Girls, Or The African Mean Girls Play* for Hangar Theatre Company. Favorite sound designs include the Atlanta Alliance Theatre production of *The C.A. Lyons Project* (Suzi Bass Award nominated), *Wig Out* at Studio Theatre, *The Welder's Not Enuf Lifetimes*, Charter Theatre's production of *Am I Black Enough Yet?*, *Dead Man Walking* at American University, and *Titus* for the Washington Shakespeare Theatre. His resume also includes designs at the Kennedy Center, Signature Theatre, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, Catholic University, and Georgetown University to name a few.



Thank you to Fiore Montessori and our Learning and Engagement Facilitators for their work in building a theatre program partnership for 2023-2024!

For more information on our Learning and Engagement partnerships, please email deidrastarnes@1ststage.org.

–THE PRODUCTION TEAM–

LORRAINE RESEGGGER-SLONE (INTIMACY COORDINATOR) *Quilters, The Chosen, The Last Match, The Rainmaker, How the Light Gets In, The Phlebotomist, Secret Things, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1st Stage); *The Garden, How to Catch Creation* (Baltimore Center Stage); *Spring Awakening* (Woolly Mammoth); *Describe the Night, BLKS, Botticelli in the Fire, Oedipus el Rey, Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play* (Round House Theatre); *Much Ado About Nothing, Our Town, The Silent Woman* (Shakespeare Theatre Company); *Pramkicker* (Taffety Punk), *Romeo and Juliet, Titus Andronicus* (Taffety Punk Grrrrls), *Tis a Pity She's a Whore* (Academy for Classical Acting) Theatre at Monmouth Summer Repertory 2022. Education—MFA: Virginia Commonwealth University.

SARAH USARY (STAGE MANAGER) is a stage manager based in northern Virginia. Previous credits—*The Chosen, The Last Match, The Member of the Wedding, Fly By Night, The Farnsworth Invention* (ASM), and *My Name is Asher Lev* (1st Stage); *Frankenstein, The Mountaintop, The Wolves, East of Eden* (NextStop Theatre Company); *She Kills Monsters* (Maryland Entertainment Group); *Assassins, Dracula* (Cumberland Theatre); *West Side Story* (SM), *Newsies, Mamma Mia!, Sweeney Todd, Little Shop of Horrors, My Fair Lady, The Pirates of Penzance* (ASM, Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre). Education—BFA Theatre Design and Production, Shenandoah University.

JAIDA GILLESPIE (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR) is honored to be a part of the *Shutter Sisters* team! She is a graduating Senior Acting major at Howard University. This is her first professional show directing and she can not thank Eric Ruffin enough for this opportunity. She previously co-directed *Emergency* by Daniel Beaty with Howard Players at Howard University. She believes her work at BADA (British American Drama Academy), assistant stage managing *Seven Guitars* at Howard, and continuous work in acting with her classmates and professors helped to guide her in this production. She looks forward to directing more projects in the future as this process inspires her to continue this work.

NIYA JOHN (ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGN) is an emerging Lighting Designer from PG County, Maryland and is elated to be making her 1st Stage debut! She is a senior at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County where she is working towards a BA in Theatre Design and Production. Previous design credits include *Intimate Apparel* (Fells Point Theatre Company), *Gideon's Knot* (Laurel Mill Playhouse), and *You Can See Me In The Dark* (UMBC). Upcoming credits include *Green Theatre Revolution* at UMBC. She would like to thank her family, friends, and all the teachers in her life for their support.

RYAN ANTHONY (ASSISTANT SET DESIGN) is a DMV based theater and film artist. Recent credits include two national tours, one as a stage manager for the National Players with Olney Theater Center, and an actor with Brightstar Touring Theatre. Ryan has mainly served at 1st Stage as one of the box office associates. He is extremely excited and honored to make the transition in joining the production team, and soon hopes to one day be a performer at 1st Stage!

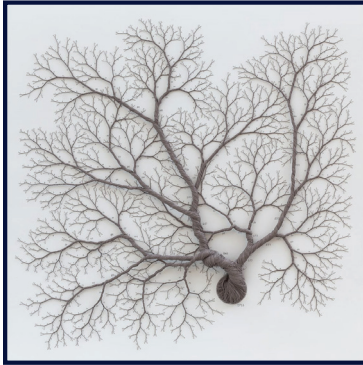
ALEX LEVY (ARTISTIC/ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR) Alex's 1st Stage directing credits include *The Chosen, The Last Match, How the Light Gets In, The Phlebotomist, Secret Things, Trying, columbinus*, the American premiere of *Hero's Welcome*, the world premiere of *Swimming with Whales* (6 HH nominations including "Outstanding Director"), *The Farnsworth Invention* (6 HH Nominations including "Outstanding Director"), *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* (winner of 2 HH Awards and The BroadwayWorld Award for "Outstanding Production of a Play"), the regional premiere of *Trevor* (2018 Helen Hayes nomination for "Outstanding Production of a Play"), *Lobby Hero* (named Best Regional Revival of 2016 by *The Wall Street Journal*), *Proof, The Good Counselor* (BroadwayWorld DC Award for "Best Director of a Play"). Since Alex joined 1st Stage, the company has won several awards including the American Theatre Wing's "National Theatre Company Grant" and was named "One of America's most impressive smaller theater companies" by *The Wall Street Journal*. In addition, the company has won or been nominated for the Helen Hayes Award for "Outstanding Production" eight times. Alex holds an MFA in Directing from The University of California-Los Angeles.



DESIGN SPOTLIGHT

SCENIC DESIGNER
KATHRYN KAWECKI

My creative process is often one of transformation. When I read a script and start to think about the characters, experiences, and the ways their stories are connected with their world, I begin brainstorming thematic ideas and images that I hope will lead to some kind of visual metaphor to inform the audience's understanding of the play. Often, my earliest ideas spiral out or lead me down rabbit holes of discovery before the final design coalesces. For *Shutter Sisters*, my starting point was imaging diverging pathways and looking at visual representations of pathways with numerous divisions, which reminded me of a network of roots branching out.



Janaina Mello Landini 4

As I was driving to campus for class, I suddenly remembered the tree-like forms she creates using one simple material: strands braided into rope; using the artisanship of rope making (and unmaking), she twists out branches and roots and even entire trees. **It dawned on me quite simply that the roots felt incomplete because they were only part of the whole: we needed the full tree to be seen.**

Yes, roots tell the story of the past, places, and people from which we come, but it is the tree that shows where we are going. What's more, by making our tree for *Shutter Sisters* out of rope twined together, we show the connectedness of the many individuals making up our families, our community, our world. And in unwinding those ropes and strands as the tree transforms from a trunk into limbs and then branches and then twigs, we also see the self-determination of growth we all go through while claiming our own paths in life, just as the end buds of twigs reach out for their own light and grow into future.

Roots connect to this story and initially led to a thought that literal roots might visibly support the physical space Mykal and Michael exist in on stage. That visual, however, did not feel quite complete even though the roots felt appropriate. In instances of feeling that a design is unfinished (which, I won't lie, feels daunting when deadlines are rapidly approaching), I need to trust that marinating on the problem will lead to a solution. In this case, that solution came through recalling the work Janaina Mello Landini, a Brazilian installation artist, who I first learned of 10 years ago.



Janaina Mello Landini 2



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE ANONYMOUS PRODUCERS OF **SHUTTER SISTERS**

BECOME A PRODUCER

Producerships give 1st Stage the foundation to take risks and offer the necessary resources to a production's creative team to realize their vision. It is a vital partnership that provides the opportunity to elevate the work to a higher level, bringing in the most talented artists and designers to create world-class theatre right here in Tysons.

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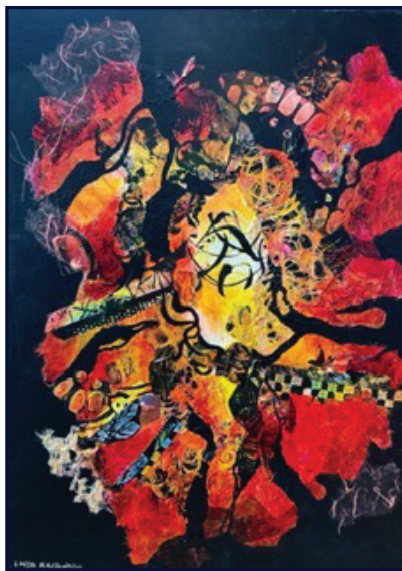
Contact Heidi Fortune Picker for details at heidifortune@1stStage.org

IN THE GALLERY

LINDA MALDONADO

Collage in All Directions

Linda Maldonado is an experimental painter working in acrylics, watercolors and collage. She has taught collage classes in the area and exhibited at a number of galleries and venues. She is president of Potomac Valley Watercolorists, a juried organization of watercolor painters. She says about her work, "When I first tried my hand at collage, I was dazzled by the possibilities. There were so many different ways to create my own collage papers, for starters. Tissue paper and newsprint became my chosen surfaces. Staining, stamping, stenciling, making my own stamps from mat board, foam sheets, soft-carve blocks and heat-press foam. I coated tissue and rice papers with different acrylic mediums and paints to transform them into colorful and textured raw materials. Then I applied them to paper and canvas surfaces, composing abstract and semi-realistic artwork, often layering papers with paint brushwork." Linda can be reached at Lindacollage@gmail.com



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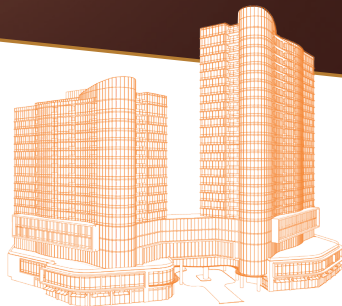
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