

Coming this Spring...

York College Theatre

concludes its

2014-15 Season of **VISIONS** *with...*

ELTON JOHN & TIM RICE'S



AIDA

THE TIMELESS LOVE STORY

Music by Elton John Lyrics by Tim Rice

Book by Linda Woolverton, Robert Falls and David Henry Hwang

Featuring songs by the team behind THE LION KING and winner of four Tony Awards, AIDA is set in ancient Egypt and tells the story of an enslaved Nubian princess, her conflicted Egyptian captor, and a forbidden love that rocks the ancient world to its core. Part Broadway musical, part dance spectacular and part rock concert, AIDA is an epic tale about the power and timelessness of love.

Directed by Timothy J. Amrhein

Music Directed by Jonathan Quash

Produced by Matthew Katz

May 1 at 7pm

May 8 at 7pm

May 2 at 7pm

May 9 at 7pm

May 3 at 3pm

May 10 at 3pm

THE TIMELESS LOVE STORY
AIDA

May 3 at 3pm
May 2 at 7pm
May 1 at 7pm

May 10 at 3pm
May 9 at 7pm
May 8 at 7pm

Don't Miss It!

Season 2014 - 2015

York College Theatre
presents

Our Lady of 121st Street

by Stephen Adly Guirgis

WARNING:
Explicit Language

Directed by
Michael Earle Fajardo



Little Theatre
94-45 Guy R. Brewer Blvd.
Jamaica, NY 11451
The Milton G. Bassin
Performing Arts Center

Friday March 20 at 4pm
Saturday March 21 at 7pm
Sunday March 22 at 3pm
Tuesday March 24 at 12pm
Friday March 27 at 7pm
Saturday March 28 at 2pm



YORK College

Tickets at Yorkpac.com
Information at 718-262-5375



The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, with or without flash, is strictly prohibited. Cellular phones, beepers and watch alarms should be turned off or set to non-audible mode.

Performing and Fine Arts Department

COMING EVENTS – Spring 2015

MUSIC

YCMC Showcase

TUE 3/24 @ 7 p.m. @ The Jacquet Chapel

York College Gospel Choir presents

Music from THE COLOR PURPLE

SUN 3/29 @ 3 p.m. @ Academic Core Atrium

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH FILM:

Lady Day - The Many Faces of Billie Holiday

TUE 3/31 @ 7 p.m. @ The Jacquet Chapel

YCBB Midterm Teaser

WED 4/1 @ 7 p.m @ Faculty Dining Room (2D01)

SJP Reunion Band

SAT afternoon 4/25 @ Queens Jazz OverGround Festival, Flushing
Town Hall

York College Gospel Choir presents

The Ellington Concert

SUN 4/26 @ 3 p.m. @ Academic Core Atrium

SJP Reunion Band

TUE morning 4/28 @ Spring into Jazz, Queens College

York College Creative Ensemble

WED afternoon 4/29 @ Poetry Month Event, Faculty Dining Room
(2D01)

THEATRE

Elton John & Tim Rice's

AIDA

Directed by Timothy Amrhein

May 1 – 10

Milton G. Bassin Performing Arts Center

SPEECH COMMUNICATION/THEATRE ARTS MAJOR

I. Required Speech Communication and Theatre Arts Courses (12 Credits)

Speech Communication 182 - Voice and Diction (3 Credits)

Theatre Arts 210 - History of Theatre (3 Credits)

Theatre Arts 211 - Basic Acting (3 Credits)

Speech Communication 303 - Ethics & The Freedom of Speech (3 Credits)

II. Speech Communication 490 (3 Credits)

Independent Research

or

Theatre Arts 490 (3 Credits)

Independent Research

III. Speech Communication/Theatre Arts Electives (18 Credits)

Students must concentrate in either Speech Communication or in Theatre Arts and complete at least twelve of their eighteen elective credits in the Concentration that she or he has declared. (A total of 12 credits of SpeechComm/TA coursework must be at the 300-level or higher.)

NOTE: Although Speech Communication students may take as much Theatre Arts *practica* as they please, *no more than 6 credits of Theatre Arts practica* may be applied towards the fulfillment of the Speech Communication Concentration; however, Theatre Arts students *may apply 9 credits of Theatre Arts Practica* towards the fulfillment of the Theatre Arts Concentration. Theatre Arts *practica* courses currently include TA215-19.

*All SpeechComm/TA majors must take SPCH 101 as a Prereq for completion of the Major. Majors in Speech Communication/Theatre Arts must fulfill their General Education Requirements in a discipline other than their major.



Share

Join the **YORK COLLEGE THEATRE** Facebook Group and keep up-to-date with all our productions and course offerings.



YORK COLLEGE THEATRE

Department of Performing and Fine Arts
Timothy J. Amrhein, Chair

Little Theatre/ March 20 - 28, 2015

Presents

Our Lady of 121st Street

By Stephen Adly Guirgis

Directed by Michael Earle Fajardo

SCENIC DESIGN
Andrea Nice

LIGHTING DESIGN
Ryan Hauenstein

TECHNICAL DIRECTION
Benjamin MacKrell

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
*Jessica Pecharsky

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
Judaea Hartley

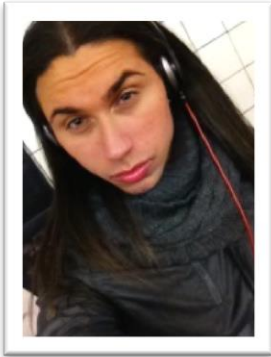
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Khadija Anderson

CAST

Anthony Alicea	Anthony Castro	Kevin Cauvin
Matthew Echevarria	Michael Earle Fajardo	Bellene Fisher
Shakeerah Fredericks	Jonathan Horvath	Uchenna Ijeaku
Bukola Ogunmola	S. Melanie Pierre	Enrique Valdez

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors & Stage Manager

THE CAST

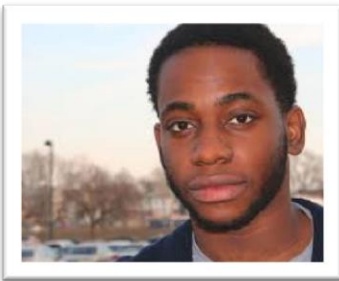


Anthony Alicea (Gail) is a senior at York College majoring In Speech Communication/ Theater Arts. He has had the opportunity to be in three productions at York: *Surburbia*, *Starving But Making It* , and now, *Our Lady of 121st Street*. Anthony also has been a backstage hand doing everything from costumes to helping out with props. A member of the Red Shoes Dance Club and current president of the Drama Royals Club,

Anthony hopes that theater will continue to grow here at York!

Anthony Castro (Flip) is a sophomore.

Last year at York College Theatre he played Charles in *A Strange World in My Mind*, Robert and Henry Irving in *An Evening of Durang*, Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Miles in *She Kills Monsters*. Anthony has been in various productions, both scripted and improvised shows all throughout middle and high school.



Kevin Cauvin (Pinky) is a Theatre Arts major at York College. He has been a part of many York productions. Most recently he performed Kenan in *Teach for America*. Other credits include Orcus in *She Kills Monsters*, Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and ensemble in *The Tuskegee*

Airmen Project. He was also the assistant stage manager for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Kevin is extremely excited to be a part of *Our Lady of 121st street*.

Vincent Banrey, Ph. D.
Acting Dean of Students

Qiana Watson
Acting Executive Director of Legal Affairs

Barbara Manuel
Executive Director of Human Resources

James Minto
Executive Director of Facilities and Planning Operations

Earl Simons
Director of Government and Community Relations

Peter Tighe
Chief Information Officer



YORK COLLEGE ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Marcia V. Keizs

President

Panayiotis Meleties, Ph. D.

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Ronald C. Thomas

Vice President for Administrative Affairs

Dolores Swirin-Yao

Vice President for Institutional Advancement

Ismael Perez

Assistant Vice President for Planning and Budget

Donna Chirico, Ed. D.

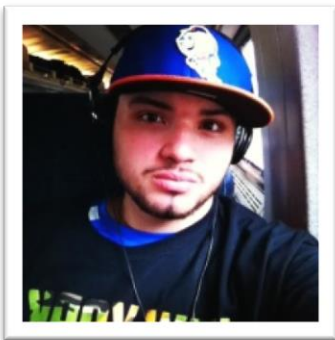
Acting Dean, School of Arts and Sciences

Lynne W. Clark, Ph. D.

Dean, School of Health Sciences and Professional Programs

William Dinello, Ph. D.

Dean, Executive Office



Matthew Echevarria (*Victor*)

is a senior at York studying Community Health Education with a minor in Theatre Arts. The highest ambition for him is to help our youth to the best of his ability. He has been in various York productions including *Heartbeat*, *After*, and *Teach for America*. He started acting through simple acting classes and is a poet who enjoys creatively performing for open mics in the city.

After graduating he intends to become a counselor.

Michael Earle Fajardo (*Balthazar*)

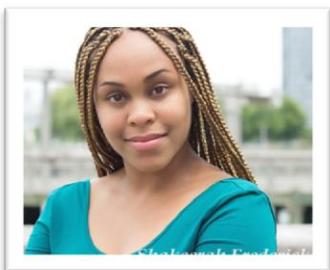
is currently an adjunct faculty member in Theatre Arts at York. He is a graduate of the NYU GradActing program. He has worked professionally in theatre, television, film, and commercials. He is delighted to be making his directing debut with such a wonderful play, cast, crew, and design team. Thank you all.



Bellene Fisher (*Sonia*)

is back again for her third production on the York stage. She was last seen as Smudge in *Strange Worlds in My Mind*. She is an upper junior at York College and is double- majoring in English & Theatre Arts so she could learn the trade of creative writing to help her establish her dream of being an actress and a playwright. She is

also the treasurer of the York College Drama Royals, which she is proud to serve. Bellene's passion for the theater grows stronger by the day, which makes her want to learn all the aspects of theatre besides the craft of acting. That is why even if she is not given the chance to act she will be working backstage.



Shakeerah Fredericks (Inez)

is a senior at York majoring in English with a minor in Theatre Arts. Her previous productions include *Teach for America*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Txt Msg*, *The Middle Class Gentleman*, *The Tuskegee Airmen Project*, *Dreamgirls*, and *Suburbia*.

Jonathan Horvath (*Father Lux*) is an actor, teacher and voice over artist. He is thrilled to be surrounded by the tremendous creative energy of York Theatre students for the past few months. NYC Credits include: *The Animal Kingdom* (Hunger and Thirst Theatre Collective), *Icarus* (NYMF Festival), next performing on the mainstage at the National Puppetry Festival at UCONN in April. Regional: *Shelock Holmes: The Final Adventures* (Arts Center of Coastal Carolina). TV: The token white guy in the (almost) all-Indian TV comedy *Brown Nation*; various and sundry Lego commercials. Jonathan is the founder of Allied Acting Coaching, assisting actors applying for top-tier BFA and MFA Acting programs, and a sailboat captain on the Hudson River. He is a graduate of the Brown/Trinity Rep Acting MFA program. Follow him at @JDHatSea.



Uchenna Ijeaku (Rooftop)

is a senior at York majoring in Speech Communication/Theatre with a minor in Political Science. This is Uchenna's 10th production at York College. Past credits include: *Macbeth*, *Heartbeat/Prosody 400*, *Starving but Making It*, *Slapdash*, *The New Breed*, *The Love Magnet*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *The Tuskegee Airmen Project*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *She Kills*

Monsters. He currently performs for the CUNY Creative Arts Team Project CHANGE. He is a founding member of the LYTE Foundation.

YORK COLLEGE PERFORMING AND FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT

Timothy J. Amrhein – Chair
Joycelyn Heywood - Administrative Assistant
Angela Robinson - CUNY Office Assistant
Evangelista Goris – College Assistant

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Asst. Prof. Smith (Coordinator)
H.E.O. Phelps

FINE ARTS

Assoc. Prof. Buxenbaum (Studio Arts Coordinator)
Asst. Prof. Hajikano
Distinguished Lecturer Prof. Vendryes
CLT Fraser

MUSIC

Asst. Prof. Zlabinger (Coordinator)
Asst. Prof. Lam

SPEECH COMMUNICATION

Lecturer Corkery (Coordinator)
Asst. Prof. Metcalf
Asst. Prof. Gieseler
Prof. Como (Emeritus)

THEATRE ARTS

Asst. Prof. Marion (Coordinator)
Assoc. Prof. Amrhein
Prof. Nickolich (Emerita)
CLT MacKrell
CLT Pecharsky



DAVID T. JONES (*Adjunct Lecturer of Theatre and Drama Club Advisor*) has designed more than 15 of York College Theatre's productions since 2008, including *Anna in the Tropics*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Speak Out*, *Scapin*, *The Tempest*, *Fabulation*, *Fame*, *Rent*, *Dreamgirls*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, and last semester's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is Resident Scenic Designer for The Village Light Opera Group in Manhattan, where he has designed nearly the entire Gilbert & Sullivan canon and countless

musicals and operettas, including *Kismet* and *Bells Are Ringing*. Most recently he (re)designed the revival of *Scrooge* and *Gilbert and Sullivan*. He has also designed various productions in the tri-state area, including *The Merry Widow* at Hartt College as well as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Urinetown*, and *Suessical* for Northern Highlands Regional High School in New Jersey. At York, he teaches Introduction to Theatre and Scenic Painting, among other courses.



TOM MARION (*Assistant Prof. of Theatre and Theatre Arts Coordinator*) holds an M.F.A. in Acting from Rutgers' Mason Gross School of the Arts (with Bill Esper), a Certificate of Vocal Coaching from The National Theatre Conservatory (with Tony Church), and an internship with The Royal Shakespeare Company (with Cecily Berry and Andrew Wade.) He is a Designated Teacher of Linklater Voice, a founding member of the Linklater Center for Voice and Language, and an Associate Teacher of

Fitzmaurice Voicework. He has taught at several studios and professional actor programs in NYC, including NYU, The Actors' Center, Marymount Manhattan College, The New School, and Columbia University. He is a former member of Actors' Equity. At York Prof. Marion has directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Fabulation*, *The Exonerated*, *The Tempest*, and was the creator/director of *Istwa!* (which was subsequently performed at the 2011 International Fringe Festival, NYC) and *SPEAK OUT* (which was subsequently performed at The Bowery Poetry Club in Manhattan and at York as part of Black History Month.)



BARBARA NICKOLICH (*Prof. Emerita of Theatre*) received her formal theatre training from Wheaton College, Northwestern University and New York University. In addition, she has been a student of Bobby Troka, voice coach, in NYC. She has appeared as a performer and director with the CUNY Readers Theatre. She developed a one-woman show, *American Counterpoint*, which she performed in Munich, Germany, Nashville and New York City.



Bukola Ogunmola (Marcia) is a York College graduate. She is excited to be in another York College Theatre play. Her past productions include *Teach for America*, *She Kills Monsters*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *After, A Flea in Her Ear*, and *Dreamgirls*.

Sarabeth Melanie Pierre (Norca)

is a senior at York College studying Music Performance. She plans to go to graduate school in music performance and music education. At York she has acted in *The Love Magnet* and *Starving but Making It*. Outside of York she teaches dance at Covenant Ballet Theater of Brooklyn and has sung with several underground bands for the past five years. She would like to thank her current professor, the inspiring Jonathan Quash, who has always shown a great appreciation the beauty of talent and respect for artistic professionalism.



Enrique Valdez (Edwin) is 20 years old and a Junior at York College. He is majoring in Theatre Arts and minoring in English. Although this is not his first time working with the college on a show, this is his first time acting onstage.

Production



Andrea (Andy) Nice **(Scenic Designer)**

Andrea holds an M.F.A in Scenic Design from Boston University's School of Theatre and a B.S. in Theatre from Skidmore College. She has been designing sets since undergrad, the most recent achievements being the Boston University Opera Institute's *Don Giovanni*, *Godspell* (Algonquin Arts Theatre), *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (Boston Center for American Performance). Andy has also worked with

the Glimmerglass Festival and Opera Saratoga, as well as assisted designers Alexander Dodge, Julian Crouch and Beowulf Boritt. Andy is thrilled to be working with York College for the first time on *Our Lady of 121st St.* (www.anice03.wix.com/anicedesign)



Ryan Hauenstein **(Lighting Design)**

Ryan has designed lights for *I Hope They Serve Beer on Broadway* By: Tucker Max, *Woyzeck Musical Deathmetal* (Gorilla Rep), *Quest for the West: Adventures on the Oregon Trail*, and *A Christmas Carol* (No. 11 Productions), *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* (KRT), and the U.S. premier of *Scandalous! The Musical: The Life and Times of D.H.*

Lawrence (JPAS). He also works with the band Fauno. He has served as Technical Director for Kentucky Repertory Theatre. Ryan holds a B.F.A. in Technical Theatre from Western Kentucky University.

THEATRE ARTS FACULTY



TIMOTHY J. AMRHEIN
(Chair of the Department of Performing and Fine Arts and an Associate Professor of Theatre) holds an M.F.A. from Wayne State University in Theatre Design and Technology. Prior to his arrival at York College, he served as the faculty technical director and designer at the University of Pittsburgh and the faculty designer at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, MI. Though Mr. Amrhein is known for his scenic and costume designs on the York College stage and throughout the tri-state area, he has directed several productions as well. Some of

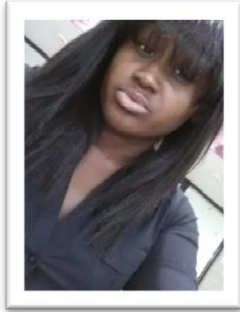
his past directorial credits include: *An Evening of Durang*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *Dreamgirls*, *La Luz De Un Cigarrillo*, *RENT*, *SlapDASH*, *All in the Timing*, *FAME the Musical*, *Yo Soy Latina*, *Scapin*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *Oleanna*, *Into the Woods* and *Once Upon A Mattress*. Mr. Amrhein has also designed both costumes and scenery throughout the United States. Some of his most recent designs have been *No Exit*, *Galileo*, *Endgame*, *Charley's Aunt* and *Antigone* (York College), the first New York City revival of *The Full Monty* and *The Fantasticks* (The Gallery Players) and *Twelfth Night* (Princeton Repertory Shakespeare Festival). Other design and directing credits include work for the Village Light Opera Group, the Princeton Repertory Shakespeare Festival, the River Rep Theatre Company, the Wings Theatre, The Second City (Detroit and Toronto), Carnegie Mellon University, and the California Repertory Theatre. He received the Best Scenic Design award from the NJ Star Ledger for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Detroit Free Press's Theatre Excellence Award for *Saturday*, *Sunday*, *Monday* and *Scapin* and most recently the Award for Creative Excellence for his set design of *The Hedge* from the Arts in Christian Theatre. Prof. Amrhein has also translated the Dominican play, *La Luz De Un Cigarrillo*, by Marco Antonio Rodriguez from Spanish into English with the help of the cast. The English premier was performed in October of 2012 at York College. He is a member of United Scenic Artists, Local 829 and the United States Institute for Theatre Technology.

Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream



***Teach for America* (a new play by Rob Ackerman)**





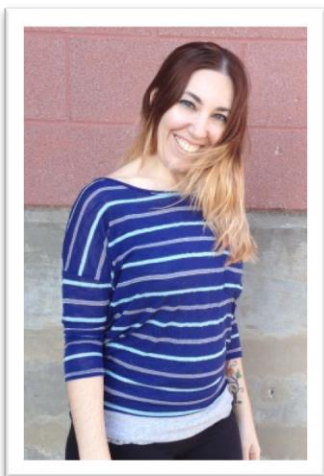
Khadija Anderson (Assistant Director) is a senior at the City University of New York majoring in Entertainment Business and Entrepreneurship. She has graduated from Queensborough Community College where she had the opportunity of being the Assistant Director for the play *Columbinus*. Upon graduating Khadija plans to own an after-school program, as well as a concert hall.



Judea Hartley (Assistant Stage Manager) will be graduating this May with a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a minor in Theatre Arts. Judea has completed two Student Internships at The Supreme Court of the United States assisting Justice Valerie Braithwaite-Nelson and Justice Pam Jackman-Brown. She is the daughter of Pastor Richard Hartley and First Lady Stacey Hartley. Blessed through her parents, she has

traveled and sung in Tokyo, L.A., as well as such local notable establishments as B.B. King's Night Club, Carnegie Hall, and The Apollo Theater. Judea plans to attend Brooklyn College next fall for her Master's in Fine Arts in Radio and Television. Further on, Judea looks to pursue her second Master's Degree in Corporate Communications at Baruch College and a doctorate in Journalism. One day she hopes to have a successful career in radio as a journalist/news reporter and travel all over the world. She also desires to fulfill her dream of acting professionally. Judea loves both her family and God dearly and stands in anticipation in regards to what God has for her.

THEATRE ARTS STAFF



JESSICA PECHARSKY (*Production Stage Manager / CLT*) is a graduate of Hofstra University in dance and theatre. Once at Hofstra, Jessica moved her focus to stage management. She has been stage managing professionally since 2000. She has held resident stage management positions with Streetlight Productions and The Jekyll and Hyde Club. Other companies she has stage managed for include Classical Theatre of Harlem, Centenary Stage, Ma-Yi Theatre, Chester Theater Company, Boomerang Theater, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Working

Theater, Audax Theatre Group, Capacitor, Theatre LILA, Clubbed Thumb, American Globe Theater, Heartists Productions, and Moonwork. Jessica is a member of Actors Equity Association (AEA).

BENJAMIN MACKRELL

(*Technical Director / CLT*) holds a Bachelors Degree in Theater from Goucher College in Baltimore. As Technical Director for Manoa Valley Theater, Hawaii's premier off-Broadway playhouse, he received the award for "Outstanding Technical Direction" from the Hawaii State Theater Council in 2010, a category created that year. He also received Po'okela Awards for his outstanding

set designs for *Little Shop Of Horrors* (2011), *Sleuth* (2010), *Tuesdays with Morrie* (2009) all at Manoa Valley Theater. He was also awarded Broadwayworld.com Outstanding Lighting Design of a Play for *Sight Unseen* at Baltimore's Fells Point Corner Theater in 2006. His passion lies in helping theater artists realize their vision and making it possible for audiences to be emotionally and intellectually transported.



JARAREE MUHAMMED (Backstage Crew) is a sophomore at York College majoring in Theatre Arts. No stranger to the stage, Jabaree has worked in theatre since elementary school. He studied playwriting and Studio Arts in High school. He is a songwriter as well as a playwright and dreams of directing his own movies.

DAVID VOLCY (Backstage Crew) is a sophomore majoring in Speech Communications/ Theatre Arts. He enjoys dancing and music, both as a listener and a writer. It has been his passion to be an artist and entertainer since the age of three. He also has an interest in acting as part of his craft. In his spare time he choreographs and teaches hip-hop 101 to younger and beginning students in his neighborhood. David is no stranger to the York College stage and has been in many productions with the Red Shoes Dance Club. He plans to perform in York College theatre productions before he graduates.

Recently at

York College Theatre ...

Strange Worlds in My Mind (an original York production)



BACKSTAGE

HERMILO BAUTISTA (Props Manager) is a senior at York College majoring in Theatre Arts/Speech Communication. He prefers being called "Milo" by his peers because it's easier to pronounce. Milo has been seen in four York College shows: *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *She Kills Monsters* and *Strange worlds In My Mind*. As a backstage crew member, he helped on *The Love Magnet*, *Starving But Making It* and *Dreamgirls*. Milo has and always will enjoy performing, but for his last semester at York College he decided to work behind the scenes on *Our Lady of 121st Street*.

RUDIANA BUNBURY (Backstage Crew)

JOSE JOEL CRUZ (Backstage Crew) is a sophomore majoring in Theatre Arts. This is his first time working backstage. In his spare time, he makes youtube videos with his brother Christopher. Their youtube tag is JoeStopher. Jose attends acting class every Saturday and has been appearing onstage for the last six years.

DANIELLE DUNN (Backstage Crew) is a business major in HR. She is a senior graduating from York College this semester. Her interests mainly center around sports here at York. An avid athlete (the javelin!), she also has a love for the arts.

JULIAN JONES (Backstage Crew) is a junior at York College majoring in Speech Communications/Theatre arts. He has yet to appear as an actor in a York production. Julian is a student athlete with the York basketball team. He can be seen at the York College gym during the season and around the theatre anytime else.

ISRAEL LEWIS (Backstage Crew) is a lower junior at York majoring in Speech Communications/Theatre Arts who loves acting and music. He has appeared in several short films and plays at St. John's University and at York. He is currently appearing in another off-Broadway play. His future plan is to become one of the greatest actors in history and a master of emotions. He lives by the motto: "Why settle for good when you can be great?"

Costume Cleaning for
York College Theatre
Courtesy of



hallak.com



hallak the COUTURE CLEANER

1232 second avenue
new york, ny 10065
212.832.0750



Thank You!

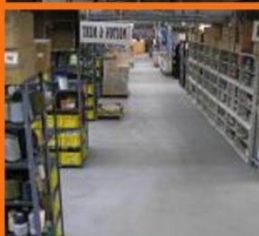
Dr. Andrea Krauss
& the YC Department of Occupational Therapy,
The Village Light Opera Group,
David T. Jones, Gloria Giraldo,
Matthew Katz, Kwame Clarke,
York College Printing Service, Hallak Cleaners
& Materials for the Arts

Various Scenic Materials provided by



materials for the arts
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
NEW YORK CITY

Materials for the Arts, NYC helps artists realize their visions, provides students with a richer educational experience, and furnishes businesses with a simple and efficient way to enhance the cultural life of their city while promoting environmental awareness and reuse.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I first came across “Our Lady of 121st Street” as I was looking for material to use in my acting classes. I had previously read “Jesus Hopped the A Train” (also by Guirgis) and recalled how fresh the language was, how loaded the situations, how refreshingly full and committed the characters were. However, so much of what unfolds in “Jesus Hopped the A Train” happens through extended pieces of dialogue, where one character speaks for minutes at a time (often to the audience). Not so useful when you are trying to get actors to really connect with each other and play off of each other’s energy. So, I decided to take a look at other Guirgis’ plays to see what they had to offer. The first one I picked up was “Our Lady of 121st Street” and my mind was blown.

There are very few plays I have ever read or seen which had an instant, profound effect on me. I’ve enjoyed many, of course, but I’m talking about having a transformative experience, a game-changer. In fact I can list them for you: “Hamlet” (Shakespeare), “The Crucible” (Miller), “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” (Albee), and “Our Lady of 121st Street”. Yes, that is how highly I regard this play.

It is important to point out at this juncture that I am not an authority on what the best plays in the history of the world are. I do not hold a Ph.D. in Dramaturgy. I don’t even know if such a thing exists. I am just an actor (and in this case, just a director) with an opinion. However, it should come as no shock or surprise for anyone to learn that Mr. Guirgis is widely regarded as one of the most important American playwrights writing today and that “Our Lady of 121st Street” has been hailed as the best American play in over a decade by well-respected critics and members of the theatre community (and maybe even some Drs. of Dramaturgy, who knows?)

Or maybe it does come as a surprise. After all, isn't it just a bunch of people cursing in Harlem? Well, yes, profanity is something one immediately associates with Guirgis' characters. But how beautifully they curse! Guirgis has said "The thing I love about language of the street is that it's good for drama, you don't have a lot of time to mince words. People tend to be very direct. You aren't in a living room. But it can still be very poetic and pleasing, at least to my ear."

The same can be said for the characters themselves. They are crude, unrefined, and beautifully, wonderfully flawed. It is through these flaws that we see their soul, really witness them. They do not hide; they do not roll over and complain. They fight and rail in a world that contrives to crush them, and it's a beautiful thing to see.

When reflecting upon why he writes the way he does, Guirgis said "September 11 reinforced for me that whatever I'm writing about, it better be something that really matters to me because we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. And for me it's stories about people in pain in New York." The amazing trick that Guirgis pulls off is that we can so freely laugh at this pain. It is precisely this laughter which gives us access to the pain. It is the gateway which makes it safe (dare I say enjoyable?) to witness.

Guirgis again: "When I go to theater, my hope is that I will laugh, cry, and think... you can get away with a lot if you can offer the audience some laughter. Humor humanizes. It's vital and human and necessary..." With this in mind, I invite you to laugh, cry, and think with us as we inhabit this wonderful world of pain and laughter. Enjoy the show.

- **Michael Earle Fajardo**