NINA SIMONE: FOUR WOMEN

BY
CHRISTINA HAM

DIRECTED BY
KENNETH L. ROBERSON

Scenic Design  Christopher Rhoton
Costume Design  Michael Alan Stein, USA
Lighting Design  Lee Fiskness, USA
Sound Design  Lindsay Jones, USA
Piano & Vocal Arrangement  Darius Smith
Music Direction  Daniel Riley
Production Stage Manager  Rita Vreeland, AEA
Casting by Paskal Rudnicke Casting

OPENING NIGHT: FEBRUARY 1, 2019
at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie

Nina Simone: Four Women is produced by special arrangement with Alexis Williams, BRET ADAMS, LTD., 448 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036. www.bretadamsltd.net

Nina Simone: Four Women was commissioned by Park Square Theatre, St. Paul, Minnesota. Richard Cook, Artistic Director, and Michael-Jon Pease, Executive Director, and received its first public performance on March 8, 2016.
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CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Sydney Charles*................................................................. Nina Simone
Deanna Reed-Foster*.............................................................. Sarah
Ariel Richardson................................................................. Sephronia
Melanie Brezill*................................................................. Sweet Thing
Daniel Riley*................................................................. Sam Waymon

Understudies: Dionne Addai (Nina Simone), Michelle Bester (Sarah),
Alanna Lovely (Sephronia, Sweet Thing)
Understudies will not substitute for listed players
unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

*N Member of the Actors Equity Association,
the union of professional actors and stage managers.

Nina Simone: Four Women will be performed without intermission.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant Director............................................................. Nik Whitcomb
Properties Master............................................................. Jared Davis
Production Assistant....................................................... Katy Garcia
Production Dramaturg...................................................... Lauren Shouse
Assistant Dramaturg.......................................................... Emily Lovett
Technical Consultant....................................................... Emily Kneer
Violence Consultant......................................................... Rachel Flesher

Video and/or audio recording of this performance
by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited.

MUSIC CREDITS

“I Loves You Porgy”
George Gershwin, Du Bose Heyward and Ira Gershwin
© 1935 (Renewed) Ira Gershwin Music (ASCAP), Unknown Publisher (Ns) and Dubose and Dorothy Heyward Memorial Fund Pub. (ASCAP). All Rights on Behalf of Ira Gershwin Music Administered by WB Music Corp. All Rights Reserved.

“His Eye is on the Sparrow”
Traditional Gospel Hymn
Written by Civilia D. Martin and Charles H. Gabriel

“God Be With You ’Til We Meet Again”
Traditional Hymn
Lyrics by Jeremiah Eames Rankin, Music by William Gould Tomer

“Nobody”
Music by Bert Williams and Lyrics by Alex Rogers
“Sinnerman”
Nina Simone
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“Images”
Based on the poem by Waring Cuning

“Brown Baby”
Lyrics and Music by Oscar Brown, Jr
Published by Bootblack Publishing Company, LLC (BMI)
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“Brown Baby”
Written by Oscar Brown, Jr
Used by permission of Edward B. Marks Company

“Mississippi Goddam”
Nina Simone
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“Shout Oh, Mary”
Written by Christina Ham

“Four Women”
Written by Nina Simone
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FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Last year, Nina Simone was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. How she has been overlooked thru the years is appalling, really. This is an artist whose genius is undeniable. Her ability to create music improvisationally was astonishing. Classically trained from a very young age, she had musical gifts beyond most of her peers, and her vocal style was singular. She did not coddle the musical establishment; her music didn’t fit into Top 40 radio, or even R&B stations. Her music was courageous and fierce, as exemplified by the title “Mississippi Goddam,” making her an important voice for the civil rights movement. Her titanic talent was too much for an industry that only wanted to own its artists and turn them into hit-making machines, without the jagged edge of politics that might offend the consumerist public.

A graduate of Julliard, Nina Simone’s music spanned styles from classical to gospel to improvisational jazz. She applied to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia but was rejected, largely as a result of racism. Ironically, the Curtis Institute would confer an honorary degree on her years later. *Rolling Stone* would eventually name her one of the most important vocalists of all time.

Unlike Martin Luther King Jr’s philosophy of passive resistance, Nina Simone’s activism leaned more towards the Black Panther movement and her neighbor Malcolm X. Simone performed and spoke at many civil rights gatherings, such as at the Selma and Montgomery marches. The recording industry feared her temper and her activism, but to many she was simply the most honest black woman in America. She eventually relocated to Barbados and later to Liberia, Amsterdam, and finally to southern France. She famously said, “if you want to hear me sing you’ll have to come to France.”

It seems that the current revitalized interest in Nina Simone’s music fits the mood of the current civil rights movement; the anger over police brutality, the murder of Laquan McDonald here in Chicago, the church bombing in South Carolina, all cry out for her musical articulation of rage and justice. And when I read the script and saw the production at the Arena Stage last year, I was struck by how much I didn’t realize about her life and her leadership in the 1960s civil rights movement, as well as the vital importance of women’s leadership in the movement.

Nina Simone’s music and her singularity deserve a broader audience. Christina Ham’s piece not only helps expand that audience, but serves as a call and response to Nina’s music in concert with her beliefs.

BJ Jones, Artistic Director
What was your inspiration for writing *Nina Simone: Four Women*?

The inspiration came as a commissioning opportunity from Park Square Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Artistic Director, Richard Cook, and one of the local actresses who had been in quite a few of my plays/workshops were looking to do a play on Nina Simone. We had all wanted to collaborate at some point and I was interested in doing it as long as I could go deeper and not write a jukebox musical. I wanted to write a play with music looking at Nina’s shift from being just an artist to becoming an artist and activist after the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

Do you feel a personal connection to Nina Simone?

I do feel a personal connection to Nina Simone and this moment in history because we are both artists and also the incident that shifted the kind of work that she did as an artist had to do with the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church which my mother’s family attended at the time. Nina describes that hearing about these little girls being killed in the bombing was like Paul on the road to Damascus. It forever changed her life and she could no longer create on the sidelines the way that she had been.
What is your favorite Nina Simone song and why?

Targeting my favorite Nina Simone song is tough. I think it has to be “Four Women,” the song that provides the framework for the play. I would say that she does so much in this song when it comes to really talking about the colorism that separates and creates infighting among the black women in the black community. I also love it because she acknowledges and sees these varied black women and gives them space in the song, including for herself. I think that’s the thing that Nina’s music does so beautifully. Like a great artist, she sees the situation and calls it out for what it is. What it does is it creates a platform for a group of women that are typically invisible.

What do you hope audiences leave the theatre talking about?

What I hope the audiences leave the theater talking about is a greater understanding of Nina and the role her music played in the civil rights movement. I think also through the lens of her music, the audience can also learn about how black women, who were at that time, the backbone of the civil rights movement were also put in the backseat when it came to the work that we did and how our needs still came after the black man’s needs. There are also parallels between the four women that are alive and the four little girls that were killed—they’ll never grow up to be these four women that now struggle to understand each other.

What are you working on next?

I’m working on a play with music that looks at The Real Ambassadors album that was previously a musical. It was created by Iola Brubeck with music by her husband David, and featured Louis Armstrong, Carmen McRae, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. I’m also working on a theater-for-young-audiences adaptation of The Watsons Go To Birmingham for the Kennedy Center that will be produced in March.
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MELANIE BREZILL (Sweet Thing) is thrilled to make her Northlight Theatre debut! Broadway and National Tours: The Book of Mormon and Mamma Mia!. Regional credits include: Little Shop of Horrors, Aida (Drury Lane); Last Stop on Market Street, My Wonderful Birthday Suit, and The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane (Chicago Children's Theatre); Man In the Ring, Caroline, Or Change (Court); A Christmas Carol, Crowns (Goodman); The MLK Project (Writers); Yeast Nation (American Theater Company); Living Green (Victory Gardens); Once On This Island (Porchlight). TV Credits: Empire. Next up: For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf at Court Theatre. She would like to thank her family, friends, and Stewart Talent for their love and support!

SYDNEY CHARLES (Nina Simone) is an award-winning actress hailing from Chicago, who committed her life to acting after years in Corporate America. Select Chicago credits: Flyin West (American Blues), Father Comes Home From the Wars (Goodman), Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (Court), Insurrection: Holding History (Stage Left), Lottery Day (Goodman, New Stages), three editions of The Fly Honey Show (The Inconvenience), Spamilton Chicago (Royal George), An Octoroon (Definition Theatre), The Wiz (Kokandy), Prowess (Jackalope), and Dessa Rose (Bailiwick Chicago). Her directing debut was with Wildclaw Theatre with their yearly Deathscribe Festival of Horror Plays, and she just served as Associate Director for The Shipment at Red Tape Theatre. TV/Web: The Haven, The T, and Shameless (Showtime). She is proud to be an artistic associate with Firebrand Theater - the recently formed feminist musical theater company. Sydney thanks God for every opportunity and her circle for supporting her every step of the way. Represented by Stewart Talent.

DEANNA REED-FOSTER (Sarah) is an Emmy Award and Jeff Award winning actress who is thrilled to be making her Northlight Theatre debut. She was last seen in SideShow Theatre's HeLa. She has worked with many theaters in the Chicago area including Strawdog, Steppenwolf, Black Ensemble, Pulse Theatre, Court, Shattered Globe (Ensemble Member) and The New Colony (Ensemble Member). Deanna can be seen in a recurring role on NBC’s Chicago Fire and she can also be seen in several films like Widows, Last Flag Flying, Southside With You, and Roll Bounce. Deanna is represented by DDO Chicago.

ARIEL RICHARDSON (Sephronia) is thrilled to be making her Northlight Theatre debut. An alum of Oklahoma City University, Ariel received her BFA in Acting. She was most recently seen in Oak Park Festival Theatre's production of African Company Presents Richard III. Other theatre credits include Southern Gothic (Windy City Playhouse) and An Octoroon (Definition Theatre Company). Her television credits include Empire (FOX Television Network) and The CHI (Showtime). Ariel is represented by Stewart Talent. Endless love and thanks to her family and friends.

DANIEL RILEY (Sam Waymon/Music Director) is thrilled to make his Northlight debut! Dan was last seen in American Blues Theater’s production of Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story (Jeff Award, Best Ensemble and Best Musical, Midsize). He has worked in theatre and cabaret with numerous groups in and around Chicago, most recently Paramount Theatre, Davenport’s Piano Bar, and the Ravinia Festival. Dan also coaches and
accompanies soloists and choirs of all ages in many styles of music. He regularly sings at Holy Name Cathedral and with the Lakeside Singers, and can be seen Sunday mornings on WGN-TV singing for Mercy Home for Boys and Girls. Thanks to Kenneth and the team for the opportunity! “If music be the food of love, play on.”

KENNETH L. ROBERSON (Director)
Director credits: Ethel (Alliance Theatre and Alabama Shakespeare Festival); Crowns, Lady Day at the Emerson Bar and Grill (Arena Stage); Once on This Island (Baltimore Center Stage); Wycliffe Gordon’s Jazz a La Carte (Harlem Jazz Shrines Festival); Frog Kiss (Virginia Stage); Urinetown, Into The Woods and Pippin (Indiana University). Choreography Broadway and Off-Broadway: Avenue Q (Tony Award Best Musical), All Shook Up, Purlie, Colman Domingo’s A Boy and His Soul, John Leguizamo’s Freak, Seven Guitars and The Piano Lesson. Choreographer TV and Film: HBO’s Lackawanna Blues, Preaching to the Choir, and John Leguizamo’s House of Buggin’ (Emmy nomination outstanding choreography). Also a performance artist, his one man shows have played New York Public Theatre, Joe’s Pub the Triad Theatre, and Baltimore Center Stage. A graduate of the University of Georgia, he is currently Professor of Practice at Indiana University in the Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance Department.

CHRISTINA HAM (Playwright)
Christina’s plays have been developed and produced both nationally and internationally with the Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Center Theater Group, The Guthrie Theater, Ensemble Studio Theatre, The Goodman Theatre, Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Tony Award winning producer Arielle Tepper Madover off-Broadway at Theater Row, and the Tokyo International Arts Festival among many others. Christina is a two-time recipient of a McKnight Fellowship in Playwriting and a Jerome Fellowship from the Playwrights’
Center in Minneapolis, the Marianne Murphy Women & Philanthropy Award in Playwriting, a MacDowell Colony Artist Residency, and a previous nominee for Center Theater Group’s Richard E. Sherwood Award for Distinguished Emerging Theater Artist. She has received commissions from the Kennedy Center, The Guthrie Theater, and Ensemble Studio Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, among many others. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California and holds an MFA in Playwriting from The UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television where she was a Graduate Opportunity Fellow.

CHRISTOPHER RHOTON (Scenic Design) is delighted to be designing for Northlight for the first time. He earned his M.F.A. in Scenic Design from Indiana University in 2015 and has been freelancing in Chicago since graduating. He regularly assists Kevin Depinet on productions in the Chicago area and all over the world. Recent productions include The Wizard of Oz (co-design with Kevin Depinet, Paramount Theatre), Into the Woods (Music Theater Works), A Chorus Line (Metropolis Performing Arts Center), Tuning In (Bloomington Playwrights Project), Tartuffe (Wheaton College), Seussical! (Drury Lane), and The Emperor’s New Clothes (Marriott). Huge thanks to Kenneth Roberson for this amazing opportunity to work together again. For more information, visit www.Christopher-Rhoton.com

MICHAEL ALAN STEIN (Costume Design) returns to Northlight where he previously designed Thunder Knocking at the Door, Off-Broadway: Absolution (St. Luke’s Theatre); Happy Family, Devoted Dreams (Beckett Theatre); How to Write While Sleeping (Soho Rep). Chicago: Beauty’s Daughter (American Blues Theatre), Vivisections of a Blown Mind (Goodman); Nikki Giovanni: A New Song for a New Day (Steppenwolf). Regional: The Christians, Seven Guitars (Baltimore Center Stage); Seven Guitars (St. Louis Black Rep); The Old Settler (Geva Theatre Center); Colored Museum

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LEE FISKNESS (Lighting Design) returns to Northlight Theatre after having designed Souvenir. He has designed for companies including Steppenwolf, Goodman, Chicago Shakespeare, Drury Lane, Marriott Theatre, Court, Writers, Victory Gardens, Windy City Playhouse, Lookingglass, Griffin, About Face, Manhattan School Of Music, Opera Colorado, Portland Opera, Kentucky Opera, People’s Light & Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory, Two River Theatre, Minneapolis Music Theatre, and others. He has worked on the lighting teams for TV shows including: The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Rosie Show, and The Steve Harvey Show, Fox Sports, and Chicago Bears Network. He received a MFA in Design from Northwestern University. Lee was the Lighting Director at The Santa Fe Opera where he worked for 17 seasons. www.leefiskness.com

LINDSAY JONES (Sound Design) Broadway: The Nap, A Time To Kill, Bronx Bombers. Off Broadway: Privacy (Public Theater), Bootycandy (Playwrights Horizons), Mr. Joy (LCT3), Slave Play (New York Theatre Workshop), Rx (Primary Stages) and many others. Regional: Guthrie, Hartford Stage, Alliance Theatre, Goodman, The Old Globe, ACT, Chicago Shakespeare, Steppenwolf, La Jolla Playhouse, Arena Stage and many others. International: Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Canada), Royal Shakespeare Company (England), as well as productions in Ireland, Austria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Scotland.

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Awards: seven Joseph Jefferson Awards and 24 nominations, two Ovation Awards and three nominations, L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award, three Drama Desk Award nominations, two Helen Hayes nominations, two Barrymore nominations, as well as many others. Film scoring credits include HBO Films’ A Note of Triumph (2006 Academy Award, Best Documentary) and many others.

RITA VREELAND (Production Stage Manager) is proud to be the stage manager for Nina Simone, her 32nd Northlight production. Other recent projects: The Polar Express train ride, seven seasons of The Christmas Schooner at Mercury Theater, and productions at Victory Gardens, Route 66 Theatre Company, Theatre at the Center, and Northlight’s productions of Chapatti and Stella & Lou in Galway, Ireland. She is the proud wife of actor Tom Hickey and mom to six-year-old Charlie, and has been a member of Actors’ Equity for 18 years. Thank you for supporting live theatre!

BJ JONES (Artistic Director) is in his 21st season as Artistic Director of Northlight. Mr Jones is a two-time Joseph Jefferson Award Winning actor and a three-time nominated director. He has directed the world premieres of Relativity, Charm, Faceless, White Guy on the Bus, Chapatti, The Outgoing Tide, Better Late, and Rounding Third. Notably he has directed productions of Outside Mullingar, Grey Gardens, The Price, The Lieutenant of Innishmore, and The Beauty Queen of Leenane. As a producer he has guided the world premieres of Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley, Shining Lives, The Last Five Years, and Studs Terkel’s ‘The Good War.’ Additional directorial credits include Pitmen Painters (Timeline); 100 Saints You Should Know (Steppenwolf); Glengarry Glen Ross (Alliance Theatre, Atlanta); The Lady with All the Answers (Cherry Lane, New York); Animal Crackers (Baltimore Center Stage); Three Musketeers, The Tempest, Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing (Utah Shakespeare Festival), and four productions at the Galway International Arts Festival. As a performer, he has appeared at Northlight, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Court and other theatres throughout Chicago. Film/TV credits include The Fugitive, Body Double, Law and Order: Criminal Intent, Early Edition, Cupid, and Turks, among others.

TIMOTHY J. EVANS (Executive Director) leads Northlight Theatre’s overall strategic, management and long-range initiatives. Prior to his arrival at Northlight, Tim spent over 20 years at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in management and producing positions. He created, curated and produced Steppenwolf’s acclaimed TRAFFIC Series including a partnership with Chicago Public Radio for subsequent broadcasts. Tim founded Steppenwolf Films, of which he is still a partner with Gary Sinise, Terry Kinney and Jeff Perry, to develop film and television projects. He has served on the Board of Trustees of the League of Chicago Theatres and on the theater selection panel for the Princess Grace Foundation Awards. He also serves on the USA selection committee for The Eisenhower Fellows, Philadelphia, PA. Previously, Tim served on the board of the Independent Film Project (IFP) and was a charter member of the Governor’s Task Force for Media Development.
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ABOUT NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

Northlight distinguishes itself in the landscape of Chicago theatre through its compelling and compassionate work onstage and innovative and impactful work offstage, including dynamic education and community engagement programs. Northlight’s story begins in 1974, when Gregory Kandel, Mike Nussbaum, and Frank Galati established the Evanston Theatre Company in the Kingsley Elementary School Theater on Green Bay Road in Evanston. The company evolved and expanded in the two decades that followed, moving between several different locations in the North Shore area and adopting the name Northlight Theatre.

Northlight settled into its current home at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie in 1997. From then on, Northlight began a new era of growth, quickly developing into one of the largest nonprofit theatres in the Chicagoland area led by Artistic Director BJ Jones, who took over in 1998. In 2007, he was joined by Executive Director Timothy J. Evans. Under their joint leadership, Northlight has established itself as a regional magnet for critical and professional acclaim and a home for talent of the highest quality.

Today, Northlight’s programming includes:

**MAINSTAGE** Northlight produces five mainstage productions per season, with a spectrum of work ranging from timely world premieres to refreshed classics.

**NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT** By the end of the 2018-19 season, Northlight will have brought over 40 world-premiere plays to life and is the recipient of ten Edgerton Foundation for New Play Awards.

**EDUCATION** Our comprehensive arts education program serves over 3500 students per year through workshops, low-cost performance access, and in-school residencies ranging from adaptations of familiar stories to student-devised theatre for social change.

**AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT** A variety of free audience events such as Backstage with BJ, community panels, and post-show discussions add depth and context to each production and offer a platform for civil discourse.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** These tailored programs use theatre arts and theatre-related skills to build bridges with other non-profit organizations, working to both support their missions and extend our reach to diverse audiences.

Through its work onstage and in the community, Northlight Theatre aspires to promote a change of perspective and encourage compassion by exploring the depth of our humanity across a bold spectrum of theatrical experiences.
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WRITTEN BY AUGUST WILSON
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Contact Morgan Ulyat at 847.324.1613 or mulyat@northlight.org, or donate online at northlight.org.
THE NORTH SHORE CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS IN SKOKIE opened in 1996 and operates as part of the Village of Skokie’s plan to provide cultural, and educational programs, benefiting the citizens of Skokie and the surrounding communities.

IN CONSIDERATION OF OTHER PATRONS

- Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

- Please turn off your cell phones and refrain from using them during the show. They are distracting to the performers and your fellow audience members.

- The North Shore Center features a ListenTech RF assistive listening system available for all shows on a first come / first served basis. We ask that patrons using these devices please leave a driver’s license, state ID card or credit card with the House Manager until the device is returned at the end of the performance.

- Lost and Found: please call (847) 679-9501 ext. 3202 for lost items.