

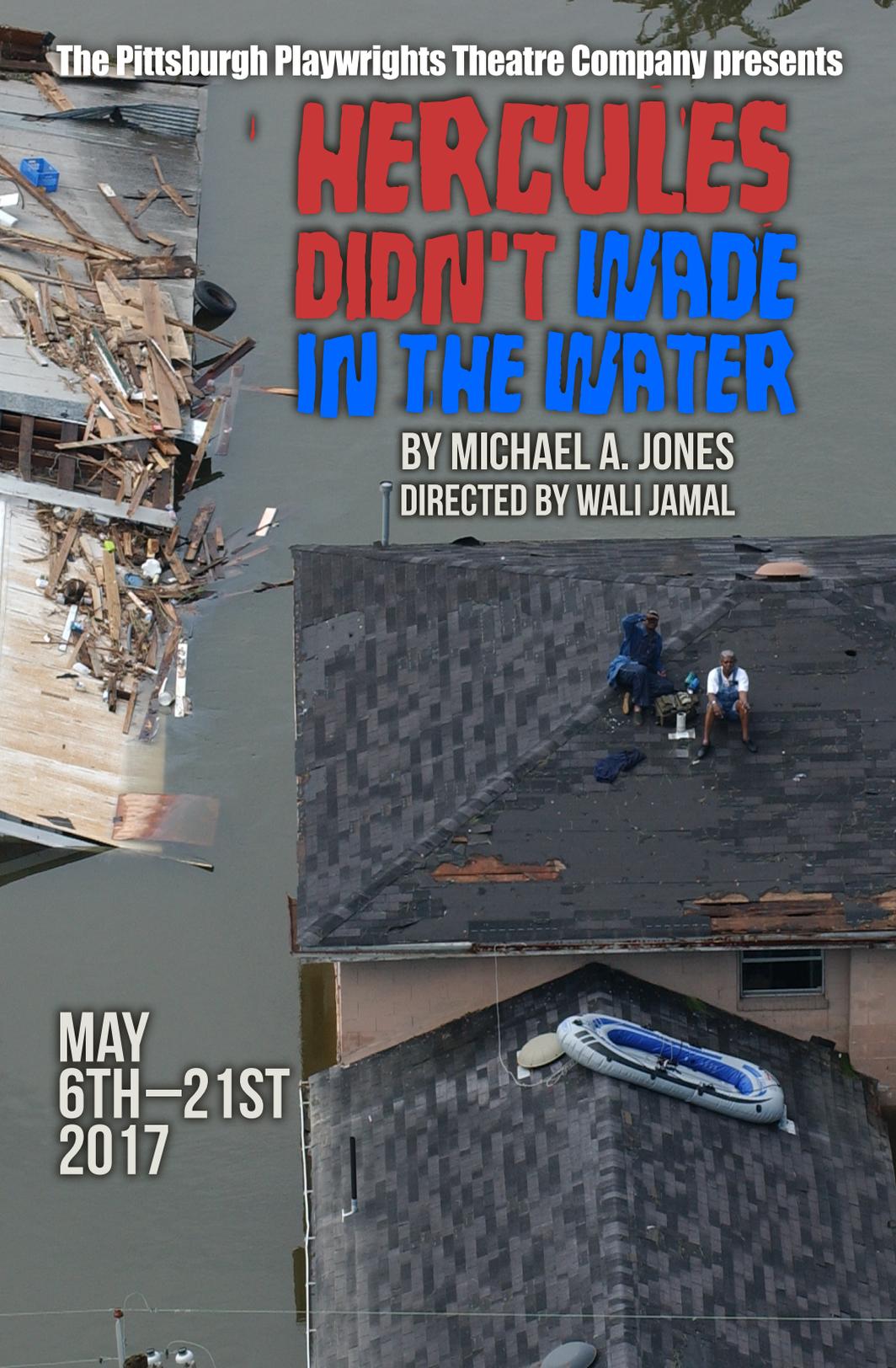
The Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company presents

HERCULES DIDN'T WADE IN THE WATER

BY MICHAEL A. JONES

DIRECTED BY WALI JAMAL

MAY
6TH—21ST
2017



WELCOME



It's a pleasure to produce the work of Homewood native Michael A. Jones. Mr. Jones' naturalistic characters not only illuminate the stage, their stories also mirror our community and its struggles to stay afloat in life. It's refreshing to have the opportunity to produce Pittsburgh playwrights that have creative ideas and fantastic stories to tell, and Mr. Jones is one such individual.

Mark Clayton Southers
Founder & Producing Artistic Director

ABOUT THE PLAY

Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water

by Michael A. Jones
directed by Wali Jamal

TUPELO	Sam Lothard
MAXINE	Shanita Bivins
EUGENE	Corey Lankford
CHAR	Shaun Nicole McCarthy
YOUNGBLOOD	Lamar K. Cheston*

*Appears courtesy of Actors' Equity Association

This play is presented in one act without an intermission.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina unleashed its destructive power across the Gulf Coast of the United States. Among the hardest hit was the city of New Orleans, which not only sustained a direct hit from the hurricane winds and rain but suffered from massive flooding as the aging, defective levee system failed. With more than 80% of the city flooded, hundreds of people drowned or succumbed to dehydration and exposure. The water lingered for weeks, displacing countless residents and businesses, some permanently; even buildings that withstood the initial onslaught deteriorated as they sat in fetid water and much of the city had to be razed to the ground. Hurricane Katrina ended lives, destroyed communities and impoverished thousands. Despite the overwhelming tragedies wrought by the hurricane, many resilient New Orleans residents have worked to rebuild their city and honor those who lost their lives and livelihoods in the disaster.

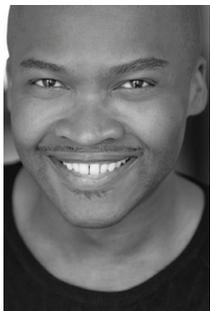
SPECIAL THANKS

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Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh





PLAYWRIGHT | MICHAEL A. JONES' writing credits include the plays *It Takes a Village to Raise...Hell*, produced by the Marian Holden Theatre, *Family Matters*, produced at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company, *Angela's Justice*, produced at Theater for the New City, and *Josh: The Black Babe Ruth*, produced at Woodie King Jr's New Federal Theatre, New Horizons Theater, and Theater for the New City. He has written numerous screenplays and was commissioned to write *The Skin I'm In*, a play that is touring New York public schools. He is a founding member of the Uptown Playwrights' Workshop. As an actor, he has performed in plays such as August Wilson's *Women* (Audelco Award), *Fences* (Audelco Award), *Josh: The Black Babe Ruth*,

Wild Children (written by Vincent Pastore of the HBO series *The Sopranos*), *365 Plays/365 Days*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Black Girl*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. His films include *Family Matters*, with Arthur French, *No Tips, No Love*, and *An Unremarkable Life* (with Charles Dutton). www.sauce mike.webs.com

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE: I wrote *Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water* out of a need to express my feelings around the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In order to accurately portray the facts surrounding the hurricane's impact, I researched information via interviews, documentaries, a visit to the city, and reading materials. I visited New Orleans in 2008 and cannot forget the emptiness in the air in the Lower Ninth Ward, where houses had once stood. I really meditated on how I could possibly tell a specific, honest, non-judgmental story. My feelings on displaced people have always been strong. Over four hundred years ago my ancestors were displaced and forced to labor without equal compensation. The stress, anxiety, and instability that comes from displacement can have debilitating effects that can last generations. Meeting a person who had been displaced from New Orleans a year after Katrina was an emotional experience for me. His voice, his attempts to sound stable, his eyes told a different story. He was possibly traumatized. During the workshop process, the play would always provoke rich conversations about various topics: the American Dream, struggle, love, trust and distrust, etc. I hope this play somehow continues to serve as a springboard for discussion and ultimately action!



DIRECTOR | WALI JAMAL I wish to combine a brief bio with my notes, for brevity and to leave space in this program for more important matters. I am more commonly known to the theatre world of Pittsburgh as a "seasoned" (old) actor. When I was offered the opportunity to direct this play, I didn't hesitate to accept the job. I believe the young playwright, Michael A. Jones, did a fine job at crafting a serious, sensitive, poignant, hard-hitting play that has some of the funniest moments anyone could hope to see on stage. Though it has been some time since directing a full-length play, I've had some noteworthy one-act plays to my credit. Under my direction, the one-act play *Home Again* by Nik Nemeč (2016 Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater Festival in

Black and White) was awarded Best Play and Best Supporting Actress Hazel Leroy. Another directorial milestone for me was in another Black and White Festival with the one-act play by Bob Gorkczyka, *The Other Side*, which won Best Play, Best Actor Joseph Martinez, Best Supporting Actor Mark C. Thompson, and myself for Best Director. But enough about me; this play, *Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water*, is a crystal-clear look into the lives of regular, salt-of-the-earth, honest, hard-working black people who were already struggling to make it when confronted with this deadly catastrophe that would snuff out lives by the score and wrought nearly incalculable damage to New Orleans and the neighboring regions. When a script is cleverly written to display the lives of regular, REAL PEOPLE, there is little need for elaborate settings and impressive props or costumes. A play of this caliber is DIALOGUE-DRIVEN, meaning it can be performed nearly anywhere, in any venue, WITH NO SET AT ALL. All that remained for me as a director was to assemble the right actors to give breath and a pulse to these well-written entities. I must say that I could not find a better cast if I tried. Enjoy.

BIOGRAPHIES



MAXINE | SHANITA BIVINS is delighted to debut her role as “Maxine” in *Hercules Didn’t Wade in the Water*. When not playing a heart-broken, grief-stricken woman looking for forgiveness, Shanita can be found dancing like no one is watching. In between songs, Shanita is probably spending her time finding more opportunities to work both on and behind the stage. Shanita has been honored to work as a member of the production team, as Stage Manager, for Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre’s summer 2016 *Seven Guitars* and this season’s *Findings*. Shanita’s onstage work ranges from making you fall in love, with her portrayal of love goddess Erzulie in *Once On This Island*, to the sultry Ruby in August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars*. If none of the above applies,

you might find her improving her skills, grinding towards working in the next Emmy Award-winning Shonda Rhimes series or in any feature with Gugu Mbatha-Raw!



YOUNGBLOOD | LAMAR K. CHESTON* is honored to be in his first production with Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. He is a New York City native, and graduate of Hofstra University where he received his Bachelor of the Arts in Theater. He is spiritually grounded at New Life Cathedral under Archbishop Robert Rochford, and a firm believer in the statement “If there is no struggle there is no progress.” Credits: *Black Angels Over Tuskegee* (Off-Broadway), *Oedipus Rex* (PICT Classic Theatre), *Josh: The Black Babe Ruth* (New Horizons Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakesperience Productions), *Topdog/Underdog*, *Othello*, and *The Great White Hope*. He thanks his family, mentor, and fraternity brothers for their continued support, and leaves you with the scripture, “the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.” www.LamarKCheston.com

*Appears courtesy of Actors’ Equity Association

BIOGRAPHIES



EUGENE | COREY LANKFORD was born and raised in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. He pursued his passion for the arts beginning in high school through all four of the school’s musicals and attended Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA, to study Theater Communications. He departed early from college and began writing his own work and created the Oasis Theater Company. He wrote and directed productions such as *Hellway to Heaven*, *Forgotten*, *Scrooged* and *Mr. Almost Right*, to name a few. He has branched off into the public theater and movie scene, working with Pittsburgh Playwrights, New Horizons Theater, Sherri Lynn Productions, Words With Wings Productions and Paramount Pictures for the recent film premiere of August Wilson’s

Fences directed by Denzel Washington, which debuted globally. Corey is excited for the phenomenal opportunity to share the Pittsburgh Playwrights stage to echo the greatness of the many that’ve performed before him. He looks forward to future endeavors with the theater company.



TUPELO | SAM LOTHARD has been acting, writing and directing since 2007. Sam received a Best Actor Nomination in Pittsburgh Playwrights’ Theatre Festival in *Black and White* in 2013. He’s performed as Uncle Moses in *The Ballad of Emmett Till*, LoBoy in *Lower Ninth* and is Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre’s featured actor for this season. Following that, Sam will be seen in *Kalopsia* at the New Hazlett Theater. He’s thankful for the experience that phenomenal cast members and directors have poured into him. “Many thanks to God, my family, and friends. Put God first. Shoot your shot. Chase your dreams.”



CHAR | SHAUN NICOLE MCCARTHY is excited to be returning to the Pittsburgh Playwrights stage. Shaun Nicole has been studying theatre arts and performing locally for many years. She was most recently seen in New Horizon Theatre's production of *Josh: The Black Babe Ruth* (Grace Fournier). Some of her favorite credits include *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Nurse Ratched), *Ruined* (Josephine), *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All For You* (Diane Symonds), and *Raisin in the Sun* (Ruth Younger). Shaun is a full-time assistant teacher at Carlow University's Early Learning Center, as well as a part-time massage therapist. Special thanks to her friends, family, Dominican baby, and twelve little monsters, who treat her as though she's the funniest teacher on

the planet. As always Shaun Nicole dedicates her performance to her parents Linda SuAnn McCarthy and James Frank Richardson Jr. She does her best every day to make them proud. I love you and miss you always.

STAGE MANAGER | WILLA "KATY" COTTEN is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She has toured America and Europe with gospel groups, and was named 1997 Soprano of the Year by renowned gospel artist Rev. James Moore, and 2004 Soloist of the Year by the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses. Recently she was invited to sing with the New Millennium Gospel Singers at the annual Gospelkor Festival in Stockholm, Sweden. She has appeared in productions of Rob Penny's *Clean Drums*, *Among the Best*, and *Raisin* at Kuntu Theater, and in *I Gotcha*, *The Story of Joe Tex* and *The Soul Clan* for New Horizon. For PPTCO's 2013 Festival in Black and White she starred in *And To All A Good Night*. She feels that singing is simply telling a short story inside a melody. But singing the gospel renews, restores, rejuvenates and revives us. It makes the heart listen.

PRODUCTION MANAGER | MONTEZE FREELAND has worked with PPTCO since 2013. He's managed the productions of *Lights Out*, *Findings*, *Seven Guitars*, *Dulcy* and *The Piano Lesson*. In 2015 he organized the Theatre Festival in Black & White and returned as Assistant to the Director of the festival in 2016. As always, it's a pleasure to watch the artists create through their talents.

COSTUME & MAKEUP DESIGN | CHERYL EL-WALKER is an award-winning multidisciplinary artist and Pittsburgh native. Cheryl's directing credits include Ray Werner's *Stay*, Lissa Brennan's *And To All A Good Night* and Kim El's *Straightening Combs* (Pittsburgh Hill House and D.C. Black Theatre Festival). Her creative work has been seen in nine of August Wilson's plays. She has earned many Onyx Awards from the the African American Council of the Arts including Best Make-up Artist, Best Costume for a Musical, Best Leading Actress, Best Costume Design for a Play (four times), plus the PPTCO 2012 Legacy Award. Her stage direction of *And To All A Good Night* in 2013 received five more awards, including Best Director. In addition to stage work, Cheryl is also the facilitator for her quarterly make-up workshop series, "About Face." Cheryl is married with a teenage son. She is an alumna of Point Park University.

BIOGRAPHIES

SCENIC PAINTER | DIANE MELCHITZKY has designed and built Pittsburgh Playwrights sets since our 2003 debut. She recently worked as a carpenter on the movie *Fences* directed by Denzel Washington and completed the set design for the Gateway High School production of *Cinderella*. Her work for *Fences* can be seen on display at the August Wilson Center.

SOUND DESIGN | MARK WHITEHEAD is the founder of Saints & Poets Theater, for which he produced and directed the world premiere of Christiane D's *Saffronia*, and the local premieres of Sam Shepard's *The Late Henry Moss* and Donald Freed's *Secret Honor: The Last Testament of Richard M. Nixon*. He was a member of timespace, for which he produced *hamletmachine* and directed *4-H Club* and *Insignificance*. Additional directing credits include *Comfort Zone*, *The Revenants* for PPTCO, *Cry Havoc*, *Taking Sides*, and *Fool for Love*. Mark is Resident Sound Designer for PPTCO and The Unseam'd Shakespeare Company, and has designed for numerous local theaters. Mark has won Onyx awards for best sound design three years in a row for his work on PPTCO's annual August Wilson productions. He was named best sound designer and listed among the best directors in City Paper's 2001 theater round-up, and was named best sound designer of 2000 by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Mark was a founding producer of The Dark Night Cabaret performance series. He has also produced and directed music videos for several local bands.

HERCULES STAFF

PLAYWRIGHT	Michael A. Jones
DIRECTOR	Wali Jamal
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Monteze Freeland
STAGE MANAGER	Willa "Katy" Cotten
SOUND DESIGNER	Mark Whitehead
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Madeleine Steineck
COSTUME DESIGNER	Cheryl El-Walker
MAKEUP DESIGNER	Cheryl El-Walker
VIDEO DESIGN	Wali Jamal
SCENIC PAINTER	Diane Melchitzky
SET CONSTRUCTION	Kenny Carter, Austin Sills
VIDEO TECHNICIAN	Wali Jamal
SOUND TECHNICIAN	Wali Jamal
PROPS	Austin Sills
CREW	Willa "Katy" Cotten

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Pittsburgh Playwrights THEATRE COMPANY



DID YOU KNOW... Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company will travel this summer to the prestigious Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland and the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem NC, with last season's hit play *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John* by Mark Clayton Southers. The production will feature its original cast, pictured above: Chrystal Bates, Kevin Brown and Tami Dixon.

We have received a generous matching grant of \$10,000 for this production. You can **double** the impact of your donation by donating today.

Financial support from patrons like you helps us to pay the theatre artists, build sets, advertise the show and produce the program book in your hand. Your tax-deductible contribution helps us fulfill our mission to produce the work of Pittsburgh playwrights and makes our 2017 Season of World Premieres possible. **Thank you for your support.**

Visit our website at pghplaywrights.org/donations or mail your check made out to **Pittsburgh Playwrights** to:

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