

The Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company proudly presents

Savior Samuel

By Mark Clayton Southers

Directed by Monteze Freeland

Dramaturgy by Dr. Kyle Bostian

Feb. 14th – March 16th, 2019

**Trust Arts Education Center
805 Liberty Avenue**

WELCOME



A lesson sixteen years in the making.

I wrote *Savior Samuel* in 2002. It was my fourth play in as many years. My first three plays were picked up and produced immediately in three different American cities. I was off to a hot start, I won a few awards and in my mind I was well on my way to being a successful playwright like my mentor August Wilson.

I put the final touches on this play, printed out scripts and invited a handful of theatre folks to read and listen to it at my former photography studio which now serves as the dining room in our Hill District residence.

I thought the reading went well; however, one guest took issue with some of the subject matter. Being a new playwright, and what I would characterize as sensitive to a certain degree, I let this person's reaction to hearing *Savior Samuel* dim the fire that I had

lit for it. So this, what I thought was a controversial play, sat in a box in my attic for the past sixteen years.

In 2017, my Artistic Associate Monteze Freeland suggested that we produce a play of mine for our upcoming 15th Anniversary Season. "Do you have any plays that haven't been produced yet?" he asked. I mentioned *Savior Samuel* to him. He read it and suggested that we do it and that he would love to direct it. I'll be honest with you. I had to refamiliarize myself with the text. I wrote it in a time of fearlessness. Oh, I wish I could revisit those times. Well, here it is. A life lesson in letting someone's opinion dim your own light. I'm anxious to hear your thoughts. Thank you for being in the house!

Mark Clayton Southers
Founder, Producing Artistic Director, and Playwright

PLAYWRIGHT | MARK CLAYTON SOUTHERS and his family of five reside in Pittsburgh's historic Hill District. He is an award-winning playwright, photographer, scenic designer, theatrical producer and stage director. He is the founder and producing Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company where he has produced well over 150 full-length and one-act plays, including August Wilson's complete ten-play American Century Cycle. Mr. Southers is a published poet and playwright as well. His play *Ma Noah* was the recipient of the 2004 Theodore Ward prize at Columbia College, Chicago. His poem play *Angry Black Man Poetry aka End Angered Species* had a successful run at Teatr Śląski in Katowice, Poland in 2009. His play *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John* was featured at the 2017 National Black Theatre Festival and also had a three week run at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland. He was the Artistic Director for the 2016 year-long August Wilson Festival at Short North Stage in Columbus Ohio. Mark is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, a board member of the August Wilson House and the former Artistic Director of the August Wilson Center in Pittsburgh PA.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Mark Clayton Southers' *Savior Samuel*

Directed by Monteze Freeland

Dramaturg Kyle Bostian

BENJAMIN Wali Jamal

VIRGINIA Cheryl El-Walker

ESSIE Aaliyah Sanders

RORY Jonathan Berry

NELLIE Dominique Briggs

DUKEM Sam Lothard

SISTER BETHANY Marsha Mayhak

MOTHER SUPERIOR Susie McGregor-Laine*

Act One: The Clayson home, 1877

Act Two: The Dobbs home and a convent school for Indian Children, 1877-1884

ASL Interpreter for Aaliyah Sanders - Cathy Morgan

Performance ASL Interpreters: Heather Gray, Jennifer Flaggs, and Nicholas Miller

*Actor appears courtesy of Actor's Equity

DRAMATURG | KYLE BOSTIAN specializes in the development of new plays. He holds an MFA in Playwriting (University of Washington) and a PhD in Theatre and Dramaturgy (Florida State University). He's taught playwriting at several universities and regional theatres. He's provided new play dramaturgy for works by Arthur Kopit (Tony nominee and Pulitzer finalist), Lucy Alibar (Oscar nominee), and many others, including local writers Mary Lippie (for NEW stAGE) and Philip Real (for 12 Peers). Previous PPTCO credits including directing Alexis Payne's *Perception* for the Theatre Festival in Black and White and dramaturgy for Mark Clayton Southers' *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John*. A number of Kyle's own plays have been honored in national competitions and produced at professional and college venues. His short work *Irony of the Second Degree* is published in 24 Gun Control Plays (NoPassport Press) and, sadly, continues to be performed across the United States and around the world.

BIOGRAPHIES



DIRECTOR | MONTEZE FREELAND has worked with PPTCO since 2013. He's managed the productions of *Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water*, *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. In 2017, he directed *Miss Julie*, *Clarissa* and *John* at PPTCO, at the National Black Theatre Festival, and at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He is an accomplished actor and was named 2017 Performer of the Year by the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. "As always, it's a pleasure to watch the artists create through their talents."

Religion and spirituality have been the biggest struggle of my life. Growing up in a Catholic and Jehovah's Witness home created battling views on how to live life. But the one constant was that God was a source of strength, patience, love and forgiveness. *Savior Samuel* portrays how those pillars of faith were the backbone of our ancestors' lives. I believe faith pushed our ancestors to fight so that we can thrive.

I chose to direct *Savior Samuel*. A director is normally asked to direct a project, but after reading a sample of it, I knew that its controversial and bold themes would excite Pittsburgh audiences. I want you to feel uncomfortable and I want you to feel anger, but ultimately I want you to understand why these people have to do what they do. Understanding is what can unite us. Our understanding of one another, regardless of our opinions, leads to forgiveness and healing.

Putting up a new work is no easy task! In the past ten years, I have directed and acted in over 20 productions that have premiered in Pittsburgh. The process is always the same. Tedious crafting, carefully balancing egos to do the work justice, and then the wait to see if it works. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. But the thrill of the journey is what brings me back to the blank board of creativity. For this production, I wanted to highlight the hurt that humans feel and how we turn to prayer, silent or spoken, for healing. We've all prayed for something, and when those prayers are answered, what happens the day *after* that prayer is fulfilled? How do we live in the world with that feeling that the universe or God listened and provided? How does it change us? These are the conversations I hope you're having while driving home or talking about our choices over a drink.

This production answered many of my prayers. I was led to the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, where we met the wonderfully talented Aaliyah Sanders who plays Essie. Trust me when I say I never thought that we'd find a young, Black deaf actress to fill the role. It happened. The venue you're sitting in provided a naturally specific ambiance for this show just when our Playwrights home is being renovated. Working with familiar artists inspires me to dig deeper. Meeting new artists like Latrice Lovett (lighting design) and Dwayne Fulton (Composer) pushes me to create in a new way. These were silent wishes that came true.

We intentionally focused on making this production accessible to you, to younger you and older you. So the music isn't what you'd expect, the dialect may come and go, you may even spot modern devices like a pair of glasses or hearing aid. Or you're sitting next to an interpreter who is signing for a patron. Theater is meant to meet you at the door, invite you in and then take you on a journey of understanding another's truth.

Monteze Freeland
Director, Artistic Associate and Production Manager

BIOGRAPHIES



RORY | JONATHAN BERRY is very excited to perform in Mark's latest play. He has performed on Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company's stage as Floyd Barton in *Seven Guitars*, Youngblood in the 2016 staged reading of *Jitney*, Citizen Barlow in *Gem of the Ocean*, and Levee in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. He won an Onyx Award in 2007 for playing Joe in *Pill Hill*. He has since had the pleasure of working with the Shona Sharif African Dance and Drum Ensemble (Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* for 18 years), as well as productions for the Theatre Factory, Bricolage, the Organic Theater, the Human Race Theatre Company of Dayton, Ohio, City Theatre, and New Horizon Theater. Jonathan can be seen in the movies *Lightweight* and *The Next Three Days*. Special

thanks to Mark Clayton Southers, my friend and theatre big brother, for this opportunity.



NELLIE | DOMINIQUE BRIGGS is excited to return to Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre as Nellie in Mark Southers' *Savior Samuel*. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Duquesne University and loves spending her time on stage and screen. Her notable theater performances include *King Hedley II*, *Ruined*, *The Ballad of Emmett Till*, *Lundyn Bridges*, Ray Werner's *Christmas Star*, and *Tambourines to Glory*. She has also appeared in films such as *Southpaw* (Antoine Fuqua) as Aileen, and *Set Free* (Patrice Johnson) as Danielle Singleton. Dominique also loves to write. Her first children's book, one of a four-book series, is set for publication in February 2019, and she is absolutely thrilled.

When not performing or writing, she enjoys spending time with her loved ones. She wishes to thank her friends and family for always believing in her, her baby girl, Rhea, and her husband, Cedrice, for his support as she continues to chase her dreams.



VIRGINIA and Hair/Makeup Design | CHERYL EL-WALKER (a Pittsburgh native) is a veteran stage actor and director, as well as an award-winning costume design and make-up artist. Her work has been seen in all ten of August Wilson's plays, completing the American Century Cycle with *King Hedley II*. Her talents have received seven Onyx Awards from the African American Council of the Arts, a Best Director award from the Theatre Festival in Black and White, and the Legacy Award from Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. Her most recent performance was the role of Charlesetta in *East Texas Hot Links*, followed by costume and makeup design for *In The Heat of The Night*, *King Hedley II*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and the Ray Werner Play Festival.

BIOGRAPHIES



DUKEM | SAM LOTHARD was born in Youngstown Ohio and now resides in Pittsburgh PA. He has written, directed, and performed plays for over ten years, most recently as Mister in August Wilson's *King Hedley II*. Some of his favorite acting credits include: August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *King Hedley II*; Dr Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Sherri Lynn's *The Bold and the Sanctified*; as well as *Findings, Lights Out*, and *Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water*, all at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company; Monteze Freeland's *Kalopsia*; and Dr. Tameka Cage Conley's opera *A Gathering of Sons*. "I am honored to share the stage once again with my theater family and to perform for the first time with some newly-adopted theater family members.

I love you all. Shout out to my Big Bro Mark for all he has done to help me grow in this theater journey, and I pray I do his work justice. Put God first. Shoot your shot. Chase your dreams."



BENJAMIN | WALI JAMAL has the distinction of having appeared in all ten of August Wilson's American Century Cycle plays for PPTCO! He recently portrayed August Wilson himself in Mr. Wilson's autobiographical solo show *How I Learned What I Learned*, making him the only actor in the world to appear in all eleven of August Wilson's plays! A long-time favorite of PPTCO audiences, his roles in our productions of August Wilson's plays include: both Boy Willie and Avery in our two productions of *The Piano Lesson*, Hedley in *Seven Guitars* (twice!), Wolf in *Two Trains Running*, Bono in *Fences*, Doub in *Jitney*, Caesar in *Gem of the Ocean*, Toledo in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, Sterling in *Radio*

Golf, Seth Holly in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and Elmore in *King Hedley II*. A prolific Pittsburgh actor, he has worked with just about every theatre company in Pittsburgh, including the Public, City, Bricolage, and barebones. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette named him 2018's Performer of the Year.



SISTER BETHANY | MARSHA MAYHAK is a graduate of Duquesne University's Theater Arts program. She has worked with a number of companies around the city, including PICT Classic Theatre, Gemini Children's Theater, Throughline Theatre Company, Little Lake, and Steel City Shakespeare Center.

BIOGRAPHIES



MOTHER SUPERIOR | SUSIE MCGREGOR-LAINE* is very happy to be a part of the outstanding cast of this great new play by Mark Southers. This is her fourth production with PPTCO; her last appearance was in *The Battle of Homestead*. Susie started her theatrical career in 1967 with the Hong Kong Stage Club where she lived prior to coming to the USA in 1968. Susie has had the opportunity to work with numerous theatre companies in the area since 1968: Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Pittsburgh Playhouse, Quantum Theatre, Kinetic Theatre, Open Stage, barebones productions, Pittsburgh Irish & Classical Theatre (now PICT Classic Theatre), Little Lake Theatre, Red Masquers Theatre & Apple Hill Playhouse. Susie was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2014 by Pittsburgh New Works Festival.



ESSIE | AALIYAH SANDERS is in the 10th grade at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. She has been acting in school since she was 3 years old and is still counting. This is her second year of high school; she's looking forward to graduating. She performed in a Christmas play last month called *Noelle Saves Christmas* that her classmate wrote! In 2010 she performed *Brown Reindeer, Brown Reindeer, What Do You See?* which included poetry, storytelling and songs. Most recently, she acted in a holiday commercial for WPSD, and everyone loved it!

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*Actor appears courtesy of Actor's Equity

BIOGRAPHIES

STAGE MANAGER | SHANITA BIVINS has stage managed three August Wilson plays (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II*) and is happy to be back, working on this world premiere. Shanita is Pittsburgh born and raised, and grew up on the Northside. After spending the last 3 years on and behind the stage, she has learned so much and gained much-appreciated experience. Following this production, she will be continuing her passions of acting, producing, and stage managing.

COSTUME DESIGN | KIM BROWN holds MFA and BS degrees from Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. She is the founder and president of Spotlight Costumes in Pittsburgh's West End Village. Kim is pleased to be working with director Monteze Freeland and the fine cast of *Savior Samuel*. Kim is the resident costume designer for Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center in Midland where she teaches costume design and theatrical makeup for the charter school. Her work has been seen nationally (replacement costumes for Disney's *The Lion King Gazelle Tour* as well as numerous professional and amateur theaters and opera companies) and locally with Prime Stage, Kinetic Theatre, Front Porch Theatricals, Pittsburgh Musical Theater, Duquesne University's Red Masquers, Throughline Theatre Company, City Theatre, Pittsburgh Children's Museum, the Gateway Clipper and Kennywood Park. Thank you for supporting live theater and enjoy the show!

MASTER ELECTRICIAN | PIPER CLEMENT is a recent graduate of Point Park University's Conservatory of Performing Arts. Select credits include: *The Scottsboro Boys* (The REP), Point Park Connections (The Conservatory Dance Company), *In The Heat Of The Night* and The Ray Werner Theatre Festival (Pittsburgh Playwrights), *Shrek Jr.*, *Annie Jr.* (JCC of Greater Pittsburgh), *The Missing Piece* (Shana Simmons Dance Co.), and *The Forest of Everywhere*, *Midnight Radio: Frankenstein* (Bricolage).

COMPOSER & MUSICIAN | DWAYNE FULTON has over 30 years experience in theatre and musical performance. He is the founder and Chief Executive of Kingdom People Productions (1999) and the Soulyfe Cafe (2003). He has produced and co-produced over seven musical projects moving well over 10,000 units to date in genres from Country to Hip Hop to Pop. He is also an accomplished pianist, and has had the honor of accompanying such great musicians as Grover Washington, Jr., Roger Humphries, Sean Jones, and Nathan Davis. In 2011 he was hired as the Musical Director for the opera *Gospel at Colonus* (Opera Theatre of Pittsburgh), and in 2012 he composed his first short opera for their Summer Festival, entitled *Bridal Suite*. In 2017, Fulton composed his first full-length opera, *A Gathering of Sons*, which met with such success that it was filmed to be aired nationally on PPS.

LIGHTING DESIGN | LATRICE LOVETT is a native of Washington, DC who currently resides in High Point, NC. She has done lighting in several different genres of the performing arts including dance, theatre, musical theatre, live concerts and opera. She completed her bachelor's degree at North Carolina Central University in Technical Theatre. She has also received her MFA in Design & Technology from University of Missouri-Kansas City where she studied Lighting Design. She is currently creating lighting designs and working on other lighting projects under her company Lovett Lighting LLC.

BIOGRAPHIES

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, SET CONSTRUCTION, SCENIC PAINTER | DIANE MELCHITZKY has designed and built Pittsburgh Playwrights sets since our 2003 debut. She worked as a carpenter on the movie *Fences* directed by Denzel Washington. Notable projects include set design for Gateway High School and various exhibits at the Clemente Museum and the August Wilson Center.

LIGHTING TECHNICIAN/D.I.A.P & Essie (understudy) | ASHLEY SOUTHERS is a D.I.A.P. (Do-it-all-person) in training at the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. She has worked in the box office, as a lighting tech, costume assistant, house manager, stage manager, assistant stage manager as well as directed for the Theatre Festival in Black & White. She is currently a Senior at Point Park University majoring in creative writing.

LIGHTING INSTALLATION | BOB STEINECK is currently resident lighting designer for Texture Contemporary Ballet, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Mercyhurst Univ. Dance Dept., Rennie Harris' PureMovement and RHAW, Pittsburgh Festival Opera and Raphael Xavier Company. Mr. Steineck has toured throughout the US and abroad with both Rennie Harris companies, Reed Dance, Squonk Opera, the Lyon Opera Ballet, Sankai Juku, Phoenix Dance Company, Kirov Ballet Academy and the "America Tour" for Stars on Ice. Television/Video/DVD credits include *A Gathering of Sons* (Pittsburgh Festival Opera), the Dizzy Gillespie All Star Big Band (A&E Cable), the Spyro Gyra concert (PBS), and Johnny A Trio (Warner Bros. Publications). His most recent lighting designs include two world premieres – *Alice* (Cleveland Ballet), and *Funkedified* (New Victory Theatre, NYC, for Rennie Harris). Other designs include *In the Company of Ghosts* (Wehr/Ferraro), *La Boheme Warhola & Rhinegold* (Pittsburgh Festival Opera).

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 recently portrayed Sturdyvant in August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* as well as designing sound for the show. His directing credits include *4-H Club*, *Insignificance*, *Comfort Zone*, *The Revenants*, *Cry Havoc*, *Taking Sides*, and *Fool for Love*. Mark has served as Resident Sound Designer for The Unseam'd Shakespeare Company, The Jewish Theatre of Pittsburgh and currently PPTCO. Mark's sound traveled to the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe in PPTCO's production of *Miss Julie*, *Clarissa and John*. Mark was a founding producer of The Dark Night Cabaret performance series and has produced and directed music videos for several local bands.

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