

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

## 360° SERIES

VIEWFINDER: FACTS AND PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE PLAY, PLAYWRIGHT, AND PRODUCTION



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### **Notes**

Front Cover Art: Dion Boucicault, photo courtesy of Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University; and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, photo by Imogen Heath; designed by Milton Glaser, Inc.

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### **Credits**

Eliza Bent's interview with Branden Jacobs-Jenkins originally published as "Feel That Thought" in *American Theatre* magazine, May 2014. Excerpts used by permission of Theatre Communications Group.

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# THE PLAY DIRECTOR'S NOTE

SARAH BENSON

In my late teens as I was falling in love with theatre, I began to read, voraciously, anything I could lay my hands on about the theatre. I was not at all discerning or informed, and as a result devoured absolutely everything I found. After clearing out the local library I turned to thrift stores and it was in a beat-up theatre history source book that I first read Boucicault's *The Octoroon*. I remember at the time being both fascinated and repelled by it, and most interested in the art of melodrama—generating feelings or “sensations” within an audience—that is laid to bare in the play.

I first met Branden when he was in the Writer/Director Lab at Soho Rep in 2008/9 and was immediately compelled by his fierce and endlessly inventive writing. A couple of years later we invited him to be our Strelsin Fellow, where a writer spends a year developing a project. I knew he had been exploring *The Octoroon* but was surprised when he cited this project as the one he wanted to spend more time with. I felt like this play probably belonged in that old book I had found, as a strange and upsetting theatrical relic, of interest to a young theatre nerd but basically impossible to animate in a contemporary setting.

Of course my feelings changed when I got to know Branden's text. I found he was asking questions primarily about us here and now through Boucicault's text, and in turn unsettling our own contemporary assumptions. We began workshopping the play and in turn I found literally layers of questions—about labor and who gets to do what work, how we can create an environment to re-examine everything we see around us—and of course the impossibility of even trying to make this story. The text began to crack open the ugly and ecstatic feelings or “sensations” that I find can only happen in the theatre.

I have admired TFANA's epic ambition since I moved to New York City in 2002, and Jeffrey and I have talked about collaborating for years. We have shared scripts and ideas and talked about radical adaptation and mostly what it really means to collide the contemporary and the classical. So, after our run at Soho Rep last season, I couldn't be happier to be doing just that and sharing *An Octoroon* with you at TFANA's wonderful new Brooklyn home. Thanks for coming to see the play.



Haynes Thigpen, Austin Smith, and Amber Gray in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's *AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



# DIALOGUES *AN OCTOROON: THE OCTOROON*

JAMES LEVERETT

The Octoroon, Act IV, 1859, Special Collections, Templeman Library, University of Kent.



**A**n *Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins has an important ancestor entitled *The Octoroon*. Its author is Dionysius Lardner Boursiquot, better known by his theater name, Dion Boucicault. *The New York Times* called him, “the most conspicuous English dramatist of the 19th century.” He was in fact born in Ireland in 1820 and, by the time he was buried not far from New York City in Hastings-on-Hudson, his name was on over 140 plays staged in this country, Great Britain and on the Continent. He was also a significant actor in an age of significant actors, a theater manager and producer.

Although *An Octoroon* (2014) is not exactly an adaptation of *The Octoroon* (1859), the two plays share some characters, dialogue, and scenes. Some but not all. The elements coexist like ancestors and progeny in a family history. They share culture, history and, yes, biology. *An Octoroon* is an artifact created in our time and place. You should experience that as you see it, read it, recollect it. Knowing something about its ancestor, *The Octoroon*, might also enhance that experience. The place of its birth, at least, is closer than you think.

The first Winter Garden Theatre opened in 1850 at Broadway and Bond Street in what has now been labeled Noho, and its place in American cultural history is significant. Among many important events involving many major performers, it was here on November 25, 1864 that the Booth Brothers played in *Julius Caesar* – Edwin (as Brutus), Junius (Cassius) and John Wilkes (Marc Antony). This was the only time the brothers ever played together.

That very night a fire broke out in the adjacent Lafarge House Hotel. Confederate sympathizers set it to protest the reelection of Abraham Lincoln earlier that month. Edwin stepped forward to calm the full house and the play continued. He went on the next night to begin what became known as the “100 Nights *Hamlet*” – a performance record not broken for more than a half century. Some five months later, on April 9th, Lee surrendered at Appomattox. Five days later, on April 14th, John Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln in Ford’s Theatre, Washington, D.C. That night, the theater’s playbill announced Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* to be presented for 12 performances, beginning April 15th. Those performances never happened.

In 1867, a fire ignited under the stage of The Winter Garden and it burned down, *Hamlet*’s tights and all. Booth moved to the up-and-coming Chelsea neighborhood and opened the new Edwin Booth Theatre on Sixth Avenue and 23rd Street.



I started my account with an odd, seemingly off-topic finale in order to give background—and foreground—to my actual subject, Dion Boucicault’s melodrama, *The Octoroon*. If my beginning may be regarded as a closing historical parenthesis—the cancellation of a performance after the assassination of President Lincoln—here’s the opening one: Boucicault’s *Octoroon* premiered at The Winter Garden Theatre on December 5, 1859. Two days before, on December 2nd, John Brown was hanged at Harpers Ferry, Virginia—one of the beginnings of the beginning of the Civil War. History has many ways to measure time, and art certainly does just that.

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Between the death in 1816 of Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (best known for the comedy of manners, *The School for Scandal*) and the birth in 1854 of another Irish playwright Oscar Wilde (best known for, well, Oscar Wilde) comes a period frequently considered a dead zone for English drama. That's wrong. There were many worthwhile, effectively playable works during that time, though probably none equal to *School for Scandal* or certainly *The Importance for Being Earnest*. What anthologists often miss in their search for drama is theater. What's defined above was a grand age of acting (Kean, Macready and Booth; Siddons, Cushman and Keene) and scenery (eye-boggling spectacle, the kind that ultimately begged for the birth of cinema). 19th century melodrama was not drama, it was theater.

At the center of that vital period stood yet another Irishman, the Dubliner, Dion Boucicault. His works were seldom original and often coauthored--adaptations from English and foreign sources, plays, novels, operas, ballets, and sometimes re-workings of Boucicault himself but under different titles. He wrote farces, comedies, serious dramas, character studies, regional plays (Irish, of course), and melodramas. He was also a starring actor and a pioneering manager and producer.



Dion Boucicault, circa 1860

Frederick Hill Meserve Collection, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



Everything performed can contain elements of the melodramatic. Certainly theater has, since its ancient beginnings. Limiting ourselves just to Western written drama, we find nightmares, ghosts, and monsters that provide the fundamental emotional energy for profound tragic content. The stormy weather in the works of the Roman Seneca blows down through Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans and Jacobean all the way into the bedrooms of our latest teenage vampires. So goes the abiding power of the melodramatic.

Melodrama, the genre, is a much more recent phenomenon. The first play designated by its author as a melodrama is *Pygmalion* by Rousseau. Yes, **that** Rousseau. He wrote it in 1762, the same year as *The Social Contract*. It is a monologue with musical interludes. Several composers contributed scores over the years. His innovation stayed in repertory at the Comedie-Française until 1775. Its historical importance is as a new dramatic genre, combining text and music, but not in the form of an opera.

*Pygmalion* begins the first chapter of what is known as melodrama. The second doesn't arrive until the 19th century when it becomes what we usually lift our eyebrows at as **MELODRAMA!** But there is an important intervening event in that history: the French Revolution and its aftermath. The upheaval, terror, and royal executions resulted throughout Europe in political and moral panic and reaction. In England it manifested itself artistically as the Gothic – Gothic prose, Gothic poetry, and Gothic plays. The dramatic movement, for all its lingering, delicious thrills, was retrogressive and repressive– no more *Égalité, Fraternité, Liberté*.

Theaters demanded a sure, stable, above all aristocratic moral order, clearly legible to the most distant underclass balcony. That meant a virtuous, innocent, utterly helpless heroine, a satanically powerful, lascivious villain (often really the central character), and a hero of varying complexity and interest. The locale—and this is an enduring legacy from the Gothic—was most memorably a castle with impregnable towers and labyrinthine, imprisoning cellars. It embodied the ancient, crumbling but stubbornly enduring feudal order.

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The best of the Gothic works—*The Vampyre*, a novella begun in 1816 by John Polidori, George Lord Byron’s physician and traveling companion; *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley’s novel conceived on the very same June night beside Lake Geneva—survive today in spite of, or perhaps because of, their clichés. They have journeyed from page to stage to film, and continue into the newest technological beyond. On stage, before copyright laws, they were adapted quickly after publication, often by numerous greedy hacks. Seen through a very dark glass, if *The Vampyre* can be regarded as a Gothic *Don Juan*, then *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, as it is known in one stage version, becomes a Gothic Faust. It shows science, the drive to know, gone awry and turned into an anti-Enlightenment cautionary tale.

Although there were credible examples written earlier, the golden age of 19th century British melodrama went into high gear with the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837. The basic character types, unambiguously moralistic acting semiotics, and standardized, sensationalist plots, all continued from Gothic drama. What changed radiated from the optimism of a growing global empire, a moral code still strict but originating from a much more stable society, and a new range of spectacular stage possibilities just then developing from an advancing technology.

Possibly the most important change of all is melodrama’s representational shift into the here-and-now. Even when the genre depicts history, at its best it connects the past to the present with contemporary directness. *The Vampyre* and *Frankenstein* presumably happen in the present, but it is a time haunted by fear and longing for stability in an imagined feudalistic past—before that dreadful French Revolution. In contrast, Victorian melodrama often feels like the day’s news, filled with inventive changes, most particularly those of urban modernity. To an audience of the 19th century, seeing those changes represented on stage was both entertaining and immediately relevant, even—perhaps especially—when they showed societal problems and anxieties. Everything almost always turned out for the best in this reliably optimistic form. Good was rewarded and evil punished, although life outside the theater showed otherwise.

Here is the clear relationship and shared function of melodrama and the fairy tale. Here we can count on a happy resolution no matter how dire the circumstances. Here we are children, not adults.



After *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel of 1852, together with its immediate procession of stage versions), *The Octoroon* is the most prominent contemporary fiction about American slavery. In many ways, Boucicault’s play fits the pattern of Victorian melodrama. Zoë, the Octoroon, is the suffering heroine, although much more strongly drawn than her Gothic predecessors. Originally played by Agnes Robertson, at the time Boucicault’s wife, she chooses her own destiny, even though it is the fate of a victim. The unmistakable villain is Jacob M’Closky, undoubtedly modeled after Stowe’s lustful, murderous Simon Legree. Both characters are from the North, both end up in Louisiana, both are in the market for slaves. George Peyton, the romantic lead, is brave and central to the plot but recedes somewhat in the presence of the others.

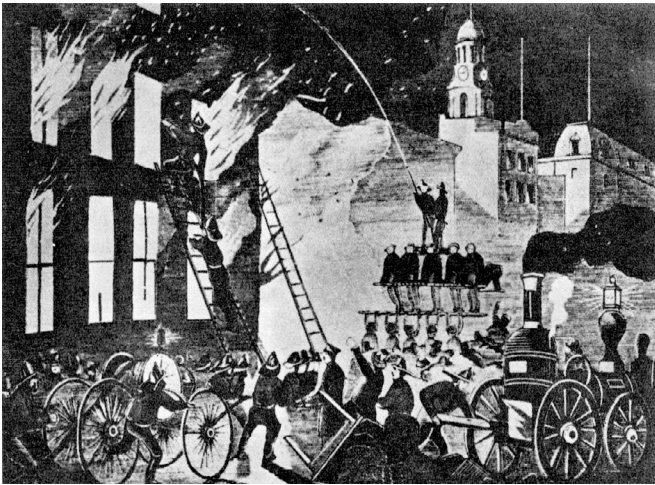
As with most Victorian melodramas, *The Octoroon*, has a large supporting cast. Most of them are there not only to help along the plot, but also to add variety to a popular entertainment. They are part of the newspaper aspect of the genre and create a range of social classes, ages, occupations, localities and nationalities.

Most pertinent to this play are those of African descent and they are represented with unprecedented specificity. In addition to the octoroon (one eighth black), there are in the cast list a quadroon (one fourth) and a yellow (mixed race). Of central importance is Whanotee, an Indian chief of the “Lepan” tribe (probably a misspelling of the Lipan Apache). Boucicault himself played the chief. His well known mimetic ability surely helped him to negotiate the character who, when not altogether silent, speaks a “mashup” of French, Mexican and what is supposedly his native dialect, which includes “ugh.” Most of the supporting characters also have some comic function, which is fundamental in most melodrama. Scholars consider the genre to exist between tragedy and comedy, but leaning toward the latter, especially because of the almost inevitable happy endings.



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Another factor that firmly links *The Octoroon* to Victorian melodrama is spectacle, the orchestrated scenic effects of which Boucicault was an acclaimed master. They appeared in his “sensation scenes,” as he called them. In *Arrah-na-Pogue* (London, 1865) a character escapes from prison by climbing a tower, which sinks into the stage as he seems to ascend ever higher. In *The Flying Scud* (London, 1866) the Epsom Derby gallops on stage with cardboard horses, except for a real one which is paraded as winner; the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race “rowed” onto the stage during the climax of *Formosa; or, The Railroad to Ruin* (London, 1869); in *The Poor of New York* (New York, 1857) a house burns down.



*The Poor of New York*, by Dion Boucicault, 1857. Act V, Sc. 2  
Harvard University Theatre Collection

In *Pauvrette* (New York, 1858) there is an avalanche in which, according to the stage directions,

*Large blocks of hardened snow and masses of rock fall... [a] bridge is broken and falls into the abyss... [snow] in an immense sheet, rushes down from the Right [and] entirely buries the whole scene to the height of twelve or fifteen feet, swallowing up the cabin... silence and peace return – the figure of the Virgin is unharmed – the light before it still burns.*

Queen Victoria herself saw *The Corsican Brothers* in 1852. She wrote in her journal:

*The effect of the ghost... with its wonderful management and entire noiselessness was quite alarming, the tableau of the Duel... almost immediately after the vanishing of the Ghost,*

*was beautifully grouped and quite touching. The whole lit by blue light and dimmed by gauze, had an unearthly effect and was most impressive and creepy [sic]... We both and indeed everybody was in admiration at the whole performance.*

These scenes are at the very least equaled in *The Octoroon*, first by a slave auction in the Louisiana plantation Terrebonne, then Wahnotee swimming in pursuit of the villain M'Closky as the burning steamboat *Magnolia* floats by on the alligator-infested bayou.

*The Octoroon* is likely the first play in which a camera has a decisive role in the plot. As in so many subsequent dramas from all media, it solves a murder mystery and allows the good to go free and the evil to be punished. This is not a spectacular piece of technology in comparison, for example, with the train locomotive in *After Dark* (London, 1868), but it is a novelty object at that very moment imprinting itself in the public's imagination.

Is this famous—in fact, notorious—play a Victorian melodrama? Yes but also decidedly no. An Irishman conceived it, but it is American through and through. It lacks the sturdy moral certainty of contemporary British culture. Instead, not at all concealed under the surface, are the tensions of a divided society. Boucicault traveled to Louisiana and visited plantations in its most southern regions. There his sharp ears heard and recorded with some accuracy the intermixing dialects and actual place names. He also observed both its still-wild bayous and the classical architecture of human habitation, and he lived among slaves and their owners. Here is an excerpt of his own account of the latter from a piece he wrote after the less than successful opening of the play in London in 1861:

*A long residence in the Southern States of America [by the time he wrote the piece, it had become the Confederate States of America] had convinced me that the delineations in Uncle Tom's Cabin of the condition of the slaves, their lives, and feelings were not faithful. I found the slaves, as a race, a happy, gentle, kindly treated population, and the restraints upon their liberty so slight as to be rarely perceptible. A visitor to Louisiana who might expect to find his vulgar sympathies aroused by the exhibition of corporal punishment and physical torture, would be much disappointed. For my part, with every facility for observation, I never witnessed any ill-treatment whatever*

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*of the servile class; on the contrary, the slaves are in general warmly attached to their masters and to their homes, and this condition of things I have faithfully depicted. But behind this there are features in slavery that are far more objectionable than any hitherto held up to human execration, by the side of which physical suffering appears as a vulgar detail.*

This statement, so troubling in our troubled times, may be an honest account of what he saw or was allowed to see. He depicted that idyllic existence at the opening of his play. However, afterwards comes the ambiguous, harrowing final sentence, which reclassifies the murderously overt torture of slavery below some other unnamed “feature.” Almost certainly he is referring to Zoë’s sexual harassment and general hopelessness as a mixed-race woman. The entirety of *The Octoroon* vibrates with the anxiety of cross-purposes. With his statement together with his melodrama, Boucicault seems to be playing many sides of many issues. He had opened at the Winter Garden in New York, a city in a country divided over slavery, divided over race, and moving towards war. It is specifically race itself, even more than the institution of slavery, that traumatizes the play. It is miscegenation, with all of its forbidden eroticism and lurking violence. I’ll rest my case with this piece of dialogue from Act II:

Zoë (to George Peyton): ... you must learn what I thought you already knew, George, you cannot marry me, the laws forbid it!

George: Forbid it?

Zoë: There is a gulf between us, as wide as your love – as deep as my despair; but, oh, tell me, say you will pity me! that you will pity me! that you will not throw me from you like some poisoned thing!

George: Zoë, explain yourself – your language fills me with shapeless fears.

Zoë: And what shall I say? I – my mother was – no, no, not her! Why should I refer the blame to her?

George, do you see that hand you hold; look at these fingers, do you see the nails are of a blueish tinge?

George: Yes, near the quick there is a faint blue mark.

Zoë: Look into my eyes; is the same color in the white?

George: It is their beauty.

Zoë: Could you see the roots of my hair you would see the same dark fatal mark. Do you know what that is?

George: No.

Zoë: That is – that is the ineffaceable curse of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black – bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the flood. Those seven bright drops give me love like yours, hope like yours – ambition like yours – life hung with passions like dew-drops on the morning flowers; but the one black drop gives me despair, for I’m an unclean thing – forbidden by the laws – I am an Octoroon!

George: Zoë, I love you nonetheless; this knowledge brings no revolt to my heart, and I can overcome the obstacle.

Zoë: But I cannot.

The following is the issue that finally in our time trumps all of the others mixed into Boucicault’s confusing statement on slavery. *The Octoroon* was a hit. In spite of an initial bumpy reception in London, it played and played in Great Britain, the Continent, and the Union side of the United States of America. For all the moral minefields that lie in wait within his sensational melodrama and undoubtedly sold tickets for him, the author’s canny eye fixed on the box office gave a startling blink.

The London audience objected when Zoë, as played again by the adored Agnes Robertson, poisoned herself – just as she had done in New York and everywhere else – in order to free her beloved from what she knew the world had in store. The Londoners demanded another ending and the ever-mercantile author gave them one. It hasn’t survived but a contemporary review describes his (or someone’s) revision: “... the piece concludes with a declaration that in another land Zoë and [George] Peyton will solemnize a lawful union, and live for the happiness of each other.”

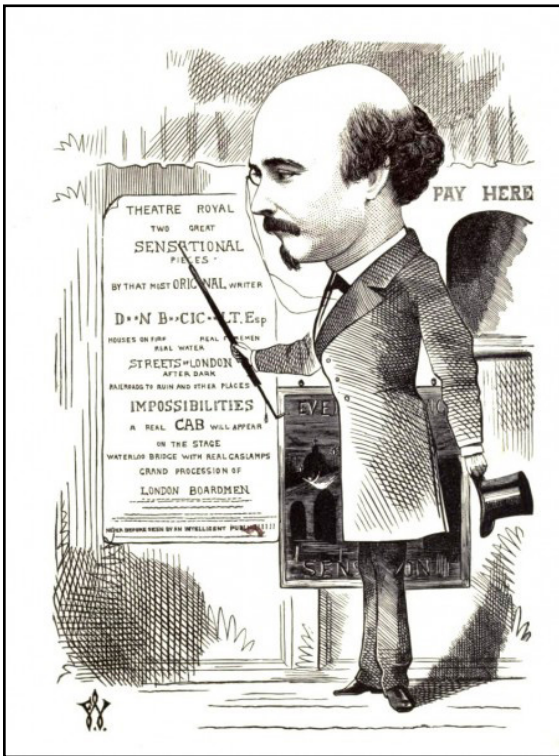
Intermarriage became legal throughout the United States in 1967. •

**JAMES LEVERETT** is a writer, dramaturg and professor of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama.



# BIOGRAPHY DION BOUCICAULT

Illustration of Dion Boucicault by cartoonist Frederick Waddy, from "Cartoon Portraits and Biographical Sketches of Men of the Day", 1873.



Heralded by the *New York Times* as “the most conspicuous English dramatist of the 19th century,” Dion Boucicault was born Dionysus Lardner Bourisquot on December 26, 1820, in Dublin, Ireland.

Boucicault enjoyed tremendous success as a playwright, actor and theater manager. He opened his first play *London Assurance*, a six-act comedy, at the age of 21 at Covent Garden in 1841. It was extremely well-received, and in the next four years Boucicault would produce twenty two plays on the London stage. In 1859 he took over management of the Winter Garden Theatre in New York City, where his play *The Octoroon* premiered to immense success and quickly became one of the most popular melodramas of its time, second only to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

On December 15th, 1859, shortly after the play's premiere, *The New York Times* called *The Octoroon* “the great dramatic sensation of the season”:

*“Everybody talks about the Octoroon, [sic] wonders about the Octoroon, goes to see the Octoroon; and the ‘Octoroon’ thus becomes, in point of fact, the work of the public mind... the public having insisted on rewriting the piece according to its own notions, interprets every word and incident in wholly unexpected lights; and, for aught we know, therefore, the ‘Octoroon’ may prove after all to be a political treatise of great emphasis and significance, very much to the author’s amazement.”*

Boucicault’s work is considered the quintessential example of sensation drama, itself a branch of Victorian melodrama. Sensation drama was characterized by the depiction of some overwhelming (sensational) experience, usually some kind of grand disaster – a fire, an earthquake, an avalanche, a shipwreck – and there was always a murder of some kind.

About 150 plays are credited to Boucicault, who, as both writer and actor, raised the stage Irishman from caricature to character. To the American drama he brought not only a careful construction that would define popular theater for years to come, but also a keen observation and eye for detail. His willingness to address social themes within meticulously structured drama would be his lasting legacy, and would prefigure the development of drama in both Europe and America.

*Compiled by Soho Rep.’s Literary Department for the original production.*

Dion Boucicault, photographer unknown, 1878.



# THE PLAYWRIGHT BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS

ELIZA BENT



Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, photo by Imogen Heath

*This interview was originally published in American Theatre magazine, May 2014. It has been condensed and edited. Used by permission of Theatre Communications Group.*

**B**randen Jacobs-Jenkins is a pop vocalist, a mimic and a rollicking raconteur. He's also an accomplished playwright pushing the boundaries of subject matter and form—a fact that has been noted in U.S. and international theatrical circles. A native of Washington, D.C., who now lives in Brooklyn, Jacobs-Jenkins has won numerous accolades ranging from the Princess Grace Award and the Dorothy Streslin Playwriting Fellowship to the Paula Vogel Award, and productions of his plays have made waves at theatres across the country.

His multifaceted plays ricochet between genres and from hilarity to heartache. *N(E)IG(H)G(BO)ERS* (or *Neighbors*), which premiered at the Public Theater in 2010, is billed as “a play with c(art)oons.” Its titular typography is a clue to its explosive content: When a family of traveling minstrel performers moves in next door to an interracial family, trouble starts—and the play's biting use of blackface upends any and all notions of racial identity and decorum.

Jacobs-Jenkins's critically lauded *Appropriate*, on the other hand, appears on the surface to be a naturalistic family drama: When the estranged members of the Lafayette clan convene after the death of a patriarch in the family's crumbling plantation home, they uncover a number of horrific relics from the past—including an album of lynching photographs. *Appropriate* has received productions at Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival, Chicago's Victory Gardens, D.C.'s Woolly Mammoth and New York City's Signature Theatre.

*An Octoroon*, Jacobs-Jenkins's riff on Boucicault's 1859 classic *The Octoroon*, which had a 2010 workshop at PS122, bows this month at Soho Rep in a production directed by Sarah Benson. “Branden is like a performer whose material is text,” Benson observes. “He has a holistic sense of what works in the theatre and uncanny insights into technical issues.” Though his plays reference history, they aren't necessarily about history. “He's taking ideas that are huge and complex and naughty and weird, and finding a way of literally theatricalizing them. People aren't sitting around talking about history in his plays—he's embedding these ideas in the actual form, and finding ways to make the idea promote the form and the form promote the idea.”

Christie Evangelisto, literary director at the Signature, where Jacobs-Jenkins is a Residency Five playwright, sounds a similar note. “Branden said to me recently that ‘form is always character’ when he writes a play, and that's one of the reasons why his plays feel so rich, so full—they operate on many different levels at once, and shift beneath our feet, and we love keeping up with them.”

## AN INTERVIEW WITH BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS by ELIZA BENT

**ELIZA BENT:** How, and why, did you become a playwright?

**BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS:** There are two versions of this story. One is like *The Lion King*. My grandmother was a playwright. But she only wrote for her church in Arkansas. I spent the summers with her and part of the year, and I have memories of falling asleep to her typewriter in the kitchen and being in these things she was rehearsing. They were adaptations of Bible stories but like really dark and very gothic. And I'd play like a bunny or something.

There's another version in which I really wanted to write fiction. Then I went to college and took too many creative writing classes and they were like, "You've taken them all. You can't take anymore." So I took a playwriting class. And then all this happened.

Mary Wiseman and Austin Smith in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's AN OCTOBER by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



**BENT:** So you started in fiction?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Yeah. I was very serious about storytelling. But I was also really into anthropology and was always writing about historical performances for some reason, which is how I became interested in performance studies, which I eventually went to grad school for. My "junior thesis" was on Alan Lomax and his prison recordings and how they basically shaped American popular music—so I was weirdly already thinking about blackness and American-ness and appropriation and popular culture. And then my senior year I wanted to write about the concept of "black drama." My thesis was a play, like, trying to be a response to August Wilson and Tyler Perry, and it was traumatic. It was so bad.

**BENT:** Tell me about the thesis play.

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** It's the play that every 22-year-old writes. Somebody had a heart problem and it's mildly surreal. His little sister has an unnamed disease. At some point her hair comes back to her in the form of a person and then there's this ballet and she dies. And her family deals with her death. It was so bad. [*Repeats "It was so bad" five times quickly with great flourish.*] The main character collected prisms. The idea of sustaining someone's attention for more than fifteen minutes was like trying to climb a mountain for me.

I'd go to my advisor's office every week and just sob. I didn't know what I was doing or how to try doing it. I think, having taught now, I recognize I was like trying to break myself open creatively. I sobbed and sobbed.

**BENT:** I read in the New York Times that you were inspired to write [*Neighbors*] after learning that a professor thought you had difficulty directly addressing race in your work. I'm curious how true that is.

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** This was the thesis advisor whose office I'd cried in every week. And I found out about a year or so after the fact that he'd believed I had a very difficult time with my thesis because it was the first time I had ever had to deal with questions of race in my work.

**BENT:** Did that play deal directly with race?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Yes and no. Now, in retrospect, I realize that all my work leading up to that point had cleverly skirted the question, either through some sort of formal construct or setting it in a workplace or like a "neutral" space. For my thesis I was inadvertently writing something that was ostensibly more or less family drama, and you can't avoid questions of identity when you're writing about family because there's obviously a number of things that the people in the room share, e.g. a last name, a genetic makeup, etc.

So at the time I felt really betrayed by what my professor wrote. Like, "Why didn't you effing tell me this when I was crying on your couch every week?" Those words



## AN INTERVIEW WITH BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS by ELIZA BENT

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never once came out of his mouth—but maybe he didn't feel like that was his role? Or something? So I decided, "I'm going to write the last play I ever have to about this subject. I am going to cram every single thing I can possibly know, think, or feel about it into this one play." I was so annoyed. And, on my end, I'm sure there was some Oedipal stuff going on.

But then, as I started writing *Neighbors* I was like, "Oh, right. This is a big topic. This is a deep room, there are a lot of layers and big philosophical questions at the heart of race and it's really profound and I'm not going to solve this problem in one play."

I think any questions about the nature of identity and identification are pretty classic dramatic waters: What part of me is myself? How much of me gets ascribed to me by society? The idea of wholeness? Those are profound questions about life and time. How do you know yourself at any moment in your life? So much of it you spend unaware of yourself. Or it's spent sleeping.

**BENT:** Another quote from the same *New York Times* article. You said, "Everyone keeps telling me that *Neighbors* is a provocative piece, but no one can actually tell me what's provocative about it." Do you find it provocative?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** I feel like "provocative" is a marketing term. And I feel like people apply "provocative" to anything that involves a person of color onstage. Anything! I just find that a weirdly false word. It's like, provocative to provoke what? I'm not making agitprop. I'm not asking you to go out into the street and burn down buildings. But if its provoking you to think—isn't that what—

**BENT:** All theatre should be doing?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Right! But, I mean, maybe not? I never know.

**BENT:** Let's talk about *An Octoroon*.

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** *Neighbors*, *An Octoroon* and *Appropriate* are all studies in genre. They are all engaged in the act of looking how the theatre interacts with questions of identity—I hate that word, but I think the question always transforms and that has to do with being alive. Why do we think of a social issue as something that can be solved? Is there such thing as "the last play about anything ever"? Maybe it's actually like nothing we're living with is that new. Except for iPhones. We're still idiots, we're still human idiots. And we always have been. So there's that.

**BENT:** What's your relationship to melodrama?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Melodrama is actually what the majority of our American theatrical heritage was until Eugene O'Neill came along and popped us in the face with modernism. But, in addition to the Greeks, he was super influenced by melodrama—Boucicault being kind of the reigning kind of the form in the 19th century. And I think melodrama is an amazing thing—it's like the science part of what we do. A generation of French guys literally just kept doing things to an audience and refined a codified formula for making an audience feel the way that these French guys thought they should feel at any given moment. This idea that we're just these animals that are easily manipulated by certain steps or moves or gestures is so profound to me and made me wonder: What is it that we're doing? Is it ethical? Or are ethics somehow besides the point.



Meechi Abaramwa, Danielle Davenport in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *Solo Rep's AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Garry Goodstein.

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I became really obsessed with Boucicault. He's actually like our first American dramatist, because he's this Anglo-Irish guy that came over here and wrote one of the first, most important plays about American life. It was this huge sensation and a direct response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which is this hugely important flag in the history of American theatre. I was interested in how Boucicault would rewrite his plays depending on his audiences—like for *The Octoroon*, he had two different endings: one in which the heroine died (for American audiences) and another where she didn't (for the British audiences). To me, that did not square up against the idea of an "responsible artist." An artist had to make an artistic choice and stand by it. The idea that he would be commercially reworking his work just to make money was just... I don't know.

But as I dug deeper, I realized that's not actually how it shook down. He tried his original ending in London and the audiences wouldn't deal with it. He wrote like all these pamphlets and editorials defending his ending

as "truthful" but in the end, perhaps a little out of spite, he rewrote the ending. I think a lot of people see this as some sort of... weakness on his part, but I think it's telling that he burned that draft—that it's not even in the public domain anymore. Then he made a cut version for the printing, which was never actually produced and I thought, "This is so amazing."

I did all this crazy archival research at the New York Public Library and I found this insane unfinished essay he wrote on the art of dramatic writing. One thing I've always lamented is that playwrights never really write down what they think in a real way. I love Arthur Miller's theatre essays—this is me being academic and ridiculous. So I find this Boucicault essay and it says how the whole enterprise for us is creating the dramatic illusion. We're just trying to create the most perfect illusion, because that is where catharsis begins with audiences. And the way we get that illusion is that we create the most believable illusion of someone suffering. And I was, like, obsessed with this essay and that kind of



Austin Smith and Amber Gray in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep.'s *AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



became the guide for *Octoroon*. I wanted to talk about the illusion of suffering versus actual suffering and ask, Is there a relationship between the two?

In terms of meta-melodrama, I just like the idea that this isn't a new idea. This is like Brecht, but the idea that you could feel something and then be aware that you're feeling it is really profound to me. That somehow we possess these two faculties, one which is intellectual and gets us through the world, but the one that's always working is the subconscious feeling place, and that's what we care about, that's what the theatre is obligated to.

Austin Smith in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's *AN OCTOROON* by Brenden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



**BENT:** To make people feel?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Yeah. It's about feeling and building emotional experiences for people. That's a very tall order, and I think it requires thought and care. When you talk about feelings, we're talking about things we were doing since we were babies. I was with someone the other day and she was like, "Oh, watching theatre is one of the first things you learn how to do. When you're a baby one of the first things you do is learn to sit and look at everything." Is that why it's so familiar to us? This is what I am obsessed with: feelings and that they're mysterious and that we constantly try and fail and sometimes succeed put language on them.

**BENT:** And yet you're not interested in telling people how to feel?

**JACOBS-JENKINS:** Well, no, not how to feel about their feelings. I think my work has annoyed some people because I believe that ugly feelings have a place in the theatre! If you cannot feel angry or upset or, like, scandalized or grossed out or bored in the theatre, where else are you supposed to feel safe to do that?

There were all these crazy talk backs for *Neighbors* where someone would be like, "I walked out!" I would be like, "That's amazing! That's okay. I think you took charge of your life and made a choice." I want the right to walk out of anything.

There's a slight paradox at the heart of what we do, and this is when we get to the idea of American theatre. We're a democracy. A democratic nation is at the heart of the American idea of itself. But audiences are not democratic. Audiences are about consensus. The successful audience is laughing at the same time and gasping at the same time. Well, a democratic audience is actually kind of weird. Sometimes people are laughing and something they aren't. That feels real to me. I love that. I love it when an audience can howl together, but I'm excited by people who titter or cackle at the wrong time. I love people who walk out! And how everyone looks at the person who walks out. Being in groups is weird! [Laughter.] We don't know what we're doing. •

**ELIZA BENT** is a performer, playwright and arts journalist. Her plays include: *The Beyonce* (Breaking String Theatre, 2014 Payne Award for Outstanding Theatrical Event), *Blue Wizard / Black Wizard* (Incubator Arts Project / Other Forces 2014 festival), *The Hotel Colors* (Bushwick Starr, L magazine's 25 best stage shows of 2013), *Karma Kharms (or yarns by Kharms)* (Target Margin Lab at Bushwick Starr). Her performance pieces include: *Fire the Hire* (New George's Jam Festival), *Trumped!* (Solo Nova Ones at Eleven) and *Pen Pals Meet* (Iranian Theatre Festival at the Brick). Bent is a MacDowell Colony fellow, a Bay Area Playwrights Finalist, a New Georges affiliated artist and an alum of Project Y Playwright's Group. Bent is a senior editor at *American Theatre* magazine, a founding company member of the Obie-award winning company Half Straddle, and lives in Brooklyn. MFA in playwriting Brooklyn College.



# THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

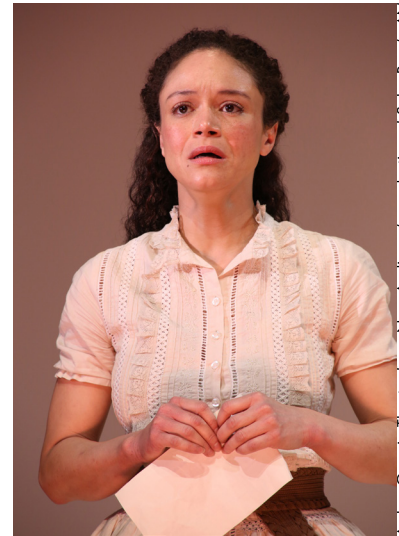
**MAECHI AHARANWA** (Minnie) OFF BROADWAY: *Night Vision, No More Monsters Here* (NBT); *Mother Courage, Macbeth, The Blacks, Trojan Women* (Classical Theatre of Harlem); *The Beyonce Effect* (TFTTF). REGIONAL: *Seven Guitars, Antigone, Miss Julie, A Women Called Truth*. WORKSHOPS/READINGS: Sundance Theatre Lab, Playwrights Realm, The Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Soho Rep, The Lark, Atlantic Stage 2. TELEVISION/FILM: “Show me a Hero” (HBO); “Person Of Interest” (CBS); “30 Rock”, “Mercy”, (NBC); “Maybe There’s A Tree”, “Police State”, “Silver Sling”. 2013-2014 Princess Grace Award. TRAINING: Julliard

**PASCAL ARMAND** (Dido) TFANA debut. BROADWAY: *The Trip to Bountiful* with Ms. Cicely Tyson. OFF-BROADWAY: *Belleville* by Amy Herzog, *Breath, Boom* by Kia Corthron. REGIONAL: *Love/Sick, The Convert, Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira, *Ruined, Hamlet, As You Like It, A Raisin in the Sun, The Piano Lesson, Jitney, Gem of the Ocean*, etc. FILM/TV: “Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.”, “Law & Order: Criminal Intent”, “Strangers with Candy”. NYU Graduate Acting Program alumna. Quick Silver Theater Company.

**DANIELLE DAVENPORT** (Grace) NEW YORK: *Neighbors, All’s Well That Ends Well* (Public Theater), *Adoration of the Old Woman* (INTAR), *Be the Death of Me* (The Civilians), *Aristophanes’ Birds* (Target Margin). WORKSHOPS/READINGS: Playwrights Horizons, New York Theater Workshop, The Lark, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, The Amoralists, and others. TELEVISION: HBO’s “Boardwalk Empire”. EDUCATION/TRAINING: Public Theater Shakespeare Lab; B.A. Barnard College, Columbia University.

**AMBER GRAY** (Zoe) *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep, P.S.122), *Natasha Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812* (Kazino, Ars Nova), The TEAM’s *Mission Drift* (London’s National, Hong Kong, Perth, NYC COIL, Salzburg, Edinburgh’s Traverse, Coimbra, Lisbon, ArtsEmerson), *The World is Round* (Ripe Time), *We Play for the Gods* (Women’s Project), *All Hands* (Hoi Polloi), *Eager to Lose* (Ars Nova), *Banished Children of Eve* (Irish Rep), and ongoing with Reverend Billy and The Church of Stop Shopping. MFA: NYU Graduate Acting

**IAN LASSITER** (Assistant/Pete/Paul) BROADWAY: *War Horse* (Lincoln Center); OFF-BROADWAY: *Antony and Cleopatra* (Public Theater, RSC Swan Theatre), *Natasha Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (Kazino), *Mission Drift* (co-writer/performer, National Theatre/Connelly Theater, NY). NEW YORK/REGIONAL: *The Iliad: Guerrillas at Troy* (Continuum Company), *Henry V* (Two River Theater); *Ash Girl* (Connelly Theater), *Martian Chronicles* (Fordham Alumni Co); *Land O’Fire* (Wings Theater); *September 12th* (Nuyorican Poets’ Café); *Fitz and Walloughs Get it in the End* (NYC Fringe). TV/FILM: *Mixed up* (mixedupfilm.com), *Queen of Glory, Time After, King Theo Live!* MFA, NYU Tisch Graduate Acting.



Amber Gray in Theatre for a New Audience’s production of Soho Rep’s *AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Haynes Thigpen and Ian Lassiter in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



**AUSTIN SMITH** (BJJ/George/M'Closky) hails from Chicago and is a recent graduate of The Juilliard School. Recent Juilliard credits include: *Master Harold... and the Boys*, *The Great God Pan*, *War*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*. He is thrilled to be making his professional New York stage debut here at Theatre for a New Audience. Thanks always to the big man upstairs, Mom & Dad, Amber, Avery, & Amaris.

**HAYNES THIGPEN** (Playwright/Wahnotee/Lafouche) BROADWAY: *Dead Accounts* by Theresa Rebeck, *Misalliance* (Roundabout). OFF-BROADWAY/REGIONAL: *The Patron Saint of Sea Monsters*, *Our House* (Playwrights Horizons), *To the Bone* (The Cherry Lane), *The Revenger's Tragedy* (Red Bull Theater Co.), *Hamlet* (The McCarter), *The Aliens* (San Francisco Playhouse), *Dead Accounts* (Cincinnati Playhouse), *Our House* (Denver Center), *August; Osage County* (The Old Globe), and more. FILM/T.V.: "Law & Order", "Law & Order: Criminal Intent", "The Good Wife", "Dance till Dawn".

**MARY WISEMAN** (Dora) is a 4th year student at Juilliard. At Juilliard you may or may not have seen her in *Our Town*; *As You Like It*; *By the Way*, *Meet Vera Stark*. New York credits include: *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep) and *The Octoroon* (P.S. 122) Regional credits include: *Clybourne Park*, *Comedy of Errors* (Chautauqua Theatre Company); *Appropriate* (Vineyard Arts). Mary gives heartfelt thanks and love to Richard Feldman, Jim Houghton, Kathy Hood, and her brothers and sisters in Group 44.

**LESTER ST. LOUIS** (Cellist) New York City born and based composer and multi-instrumentalist specializing in contemporary classical, improvised, experimental, and electronic music. Studied under Brian Ferneyhough, Sam Newsome, Carlo De Rosa, Greg Heffernan, and Georg Friedrich Haas, among others. Lester is also a composer who's music focuses on combining densely notated music with improvisation. Lester performs with various musicians in the United States and Europe.

**SARAH BENSON** (Director) has been the Artistic Director of the OBIE-award winning Soho Rep since 2007. Recent New York credits include: Branden Jacobs-Jenkins *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep); Lucas Hnath's *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney* (Soho Rep); David Adjmi's *Elective Affinities* (site-specific); Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (Soho Rep) OBIE award and Drama Desk nomination; The Lips' musical *Futurity* (A.R.T. & Walker Arts Center). Other credits include Gregory S. Moss' *House of Gold* (Woolly Mammoth) and *Ajax* (A.R.T.). Upcoming: The Lips' *Futurity* and Richard Maxwell's *Samara*.

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

**BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS** (Playwright) Branden's plays include: *Appropriate* (Obie Award; Outer Critics Circle Nomination; Signature Theatre), *Neighbors* (The Public Theater), *War* (Yale Rep) and *An Octoroon* (Obie Award; Soho Rep). He is currently a Residency Five playwright at the Signature Theater and a former Lila Acheson Wallace fellow at the Juilliard School. His work has been seen at Yale Rep, Actor's Theater of Louisville, Victory Gardens Theater, Woolly Mammoth Theater, The Vineyard Theater, The Matrix Theater in LA, Mixed Blood Theater in Minneapolis, CompanyOne in Boston, and the HighTide Festival in the UK. He is under commissions from Lincoln Center/LCT3 and MTC. His honors include a Paula Vogel Award, a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the inaugural Tennessee Williams award.

**DAVID NEUMANN** (Choreographer) Featured dancer: Adrienne Truscott, Susan Marshall, Jane Comfort, Big Dance Theater, Doug Varone, Doug Elkins. Created and performed duets with Mikhail Baryshnikov. As Artistic Director, Advanced Beginner Group: New York Live Arts, The Kitchen, PS 122 and Central Park Summerstage, and more. Choreography for Hal Hartley, Laurie Anderson, JoAnn Akalaitis, Mark Wing-Davey, Jonathon Demme, Daniel Sullivan, Molly Smith and Sarah Benson. Recipient: two New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Awards, Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award. Upcoming: NYC premier of his new work *I Understand Everything Better* (Abrons Arts Center). Teacher: Sarah Lawrence College.

**MIMI LIEN** (Scenic Designer) is a designer of sets and environments for theater, dance, and opera. She is artistic associate with Pig Iron Theatre Company and the Civilians, and co-founder of JACK, an art/performance space in Brooklyn. Recent work includes *Black Mountain Songs* (BAM), *The Oldest Boy* (Lincoln Center), *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812*. Awards: Lucille Lortel Award, Hewes Design Award, Barrymore Award, NEA/TCG Career Development Program, OBIE Award for Sustained Excellence.

**WADE LABOISSONNIERE** (Costume Designer) BROADWAY: *The Story of My Life*. TOURS: Disney's *High School Musical* (US, Australia, Spain, West End); *White Christmas*. OFF-BROADWAY: *The Outgoing Tide*; *Side Effects*; *Zanna, Don't!*; *Shakespeare's RéJ*. Regional Productions: Ford's (Associate Artist); Shakespeare Theatre; The Kennedy Center; Cincinnati Playhouse; Baltimore CenterStage, Portland Center Stage; Goodspeed; Berkshire Theatre Festival; Delaware Theatre; Hangar: Dallas Theater Center; Alliance Theatre; Papermill Playhouse; Westport Country Playhouse. Published Work: *Blueprints of Fashion* book series. Yale School of Drama.



Pascale Armand in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's *AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Maechi Aborunwa and Pascale Armond in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's AN OCTOROON by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



**MATT FREY** (Lighting Designer) Recent work includes Debbie Tucker Green's *Generations* (Soho Rep); Heidi Schreck's *Grand Concourse* (Playwright's Horizons); Naomi Iizuka's *At the Vanishing Point* (Actor's Theatre of Louisville). Some companies he has collaborated with include Manhattan Theatre Club, Naked Angels, The New Group, Manhattan Class Company, New York Theatre Workshop, and Second Stage as well as Brooklyn Academy of Music, Corn Exchange (Dublin), Spoleto Festival USA, Peak Performances, as well as many other theaters, regional and abroad.

**MATT TIERNEY** (Sound Designer) TFANA: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. BROADWAY: *Machinal* (Roundabout: 2014 Tony Award nomination, Drama Desk Award). OFF-BROADWAY: *Our Lady of Kibeho* (Signature); *Pocattello*, *Detroit*, *Kin*, *This* (Playwrights Horizons); *Generations*, *An Octoroon*, *Uncle Vanya*, and more (Soho Rep.); *Arguendo* (The Public); *Luck of the Irish* (LCT3); *The Sound and the Fury (April Seventh, 1928)* (2009 Lortel nom.) and *The Select (The Sun Also Rises)* (2012 Lortel, Obie Awards); *That Face* (MTC). REGIONAL: McCarter Theatre Center, ART, BAM, and more. Young Jean Lee's Theater Company: *Lear*, *The Shipment*, *Church*.

**JEFF SUGG** (Projections Designer) is a Brooklyn-based designer and multi-award winner. Broadway: *Macbeth* (LCT), *A Time To Kill*, *Bring It On*, *Magic! Bird*, *33 Variations*. Off-Broadway: *Fortress of Solitude*, *An Octoroon*, *Last Five Years*, *This Clement World*, *Tribes*, *Slug Bearers of Kayrol Island*, *The Accidental Trilogy*. Dozens of credits in regional theaters including Berkeley Rep, Ahmanson, Goodman, Arena Stage, Shakespeare Theatre, and La Jolla Playhouse. Awards: a Lortel, an Obie, a Bessie, and two Hewes Awards.

**COOKIE JORDAN** (Hair/Make-Up Designer) Broadway: *After Midnight*, *Fela*, *A View From the Bridge*, *South Pacific*. Off-Broadway: *The Library*, *King Lear*, *Neighbors* (Public Theatre); *Hurt Village* (Signature Theatre). Regional: *Side Show* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Side Show* (John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts); Westport County Playhouse; Ford's Theatre; Arena Stage; Shakespeare Theatre Company (Washington, D.C.); Huntington Theatre Company. Tours: *Fela* (National and European); *Dirty Dancing*, *Flash Dance* (National), *The Rocky Horror Show*; *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*; *The Wiz* (DTC).

**CÉSAR ALVAREZ** (Songs and Score/Musical Director) is a New York-based composer, lyricist and writer. Recent composition credits: *FUTURITY* (A.R.T., Walker Art Center, Mass MoCA, Upcoming at Soho Rep); Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep, TFANA); The Foundry Theater's *Good Person of Szechwan* - Drama Desk Nomination (LaMaMa, Public Theater); Mac Wellman's *3 2's; or AFAR* (Dixon Place). In development: *The Universe is a Small Hat*, a multi-player immersive musical (Babycastles, Berkeley Rep Ground Floor, Civilians R&D Group, PRELUDE, LMCC) and *The Elementary Spacetime Show* (Ars Nova Uncharted, EST/Sloan Commission) [www.musicisfreenow.org](http://www.musicisfreenow.org)

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

**J. DAVID BRIMMER** (Fight Director), Fight Master, SAFD, has choreographed some stuff (Broadway: *Spring Awakening*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, NY Premieres: *An Octoroon*, *Punk Rock*, *Bethany*, *Mr. Burns*, *Blasted*, *The Whipping Man*, *Bug*, *Killer Joe.*), and with some great folks (David Mamet, Sam Shepard, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Ethan Coen, Conor McPherson, Martin McDonough, Tracy Letts, Kenneth Lonergan, Neil LaBute, Ken Russell, Franco Zeffirelli). “Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.” G. Fox

**NOAH MEASE** (Properties Supervisor) Recent props work includes *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep.); *The Nether* (MCC); *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* (Kazino); The Debate Society’s *Jacuzzi* (Ars Nova) and *Blood Play* (Bushwick Starr, The Public/UTR); *Small Mouth Sounds*, *Charlatan* and *Eager to Lose* (Ars Nova); *Women or Nothing* (Atlantic Theater Company). Television: “Billy & Billie” (DirecTV); “Billy on the Street” (fuse). Playwriting: *Republic* (Hoi Polloi/Jack). BA: Middlebury College, Spanish & Theater.

**AMANDA SPOONER** (Production Stage Manager), Recent stage management credits include *An Octoroon* and *Marie Antoinette* at SoHo Rep, *Luck of the Irish* and *Mr. Joy* at Lincoln Center, *While I Yet Live* and *Harbor* at Primary Stages, and *The Universe is a Small Hat* with Cesar Alvarez and Sarah Benson. Amanda is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and also serves as the Producing and Development Associate at Transport Group Theatre Company.

**RACHEL GROSS** (Assistant Stage Manager) Off-Broadway: *An Octoroon*, *Marie Antoinette* (Soho Rep.) *While I Yet Live*, *Harbor*, *All In The Timing* (Primary Stages); Regional: *Cloudlands*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Borrowers*, and *Jane of the Jungle* (South Coast Repertory); Additional Credits: *Shiner*, *Do Like The Kids Do* (IAMA). Rachel is thrilled to be a part of *An Octoroon* once again and would like to thank her fellow Pineapple for the constant love and support.

**JACK DOULIN+SHARKY** (Casting) Casting Director at New York Theatre Workshop since 2000. Other New York projects include: Andre Gregory’s *Uncle Vanya*, Annie Baker’s *Uncle Vanya*, *Blasted*, *Disney*, *Marie Antoinette*, *An Octoroon*. Various regional theatre and film work including Jonathan Demme’s *A Master Builder*. Sharky (Taylor Williams) is the Casting Associate at New York Theatre Workshop. Together they recently cast: *Scenes from a Marriage* (NYTW), *You Got Older* (Page 73) and Beth Henley’s new play *Laugh* (Studio Theatre).



Mary Wiseman in Theatre for a New Audience’s production of SoHo Rep.’s *AN OCTOROON* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, directed by Sarah Benson. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## ABOUT THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE



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### About Theatre for a New Audience

Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

### Theatre for a New Audience Education Programs

Theatre for a New Audience is an award-winning company recognized for artistic excellence. Our education programs introduce students to Shakespeare and other classics with the same artistic integrity that we apply to our productions. Through our unique and exciting methodology, students engage in hands-on learning that involves all aspects of literacy set in the context of theatre education. Our residencies are structured to address City and State Learning Standards both in English Language Arts and the Arts, the New York City DOE's Curriculum Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, and the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. Begun in 1984, our programs have served more than 126,000 students, ages 9 through 18, in New York City Public Schools city-wide.

### A New Home in Brooklyn: Theatre for a New Audience's Polonsky Shakespeare Center

After 34 seasons of award-winning and internationally-acclaimed productions, Theatre for a New Audience's Polonsky Shakespeare Center is a centerpiece of the Brooklyn Cultural District.

Designed by celebrated architect Hugh Hardy, the Theatre's Polonsky Shakespeare Center is the first theatre in New York designed and built expressly for classic drama since Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont in the 1960s. The 27,500 square-foot facility is a unique performance space in New York. The 299-seat Samuel H. Scripps Mainstage, inspired by the Cottesloe at London's National Theatre, combines an Elizabethan courtyard theatre with modern theatre technology that allows the stage and seating to be arranged in seven configurations. The new facility also includes the Theodore C. Rogers Studio (a 50-seat rehearsal/performance studio), and theatrical support spaces. The City of New York-developed Arts Plaza, designed by landscape architect Ken Smith, creates a natural gathering place around the building. In addition, Polonsky Shakespeare Center is also one of the few sustainable (green) theatres in the country, with an anticipated LEED-NC Silver rating from the United States Green Building Council.

Now with a home of its own, Theatre for a New Audience is contributing to the continued renaissance of Downtown Brooklyn. In addition to its season of plays, the Theatre is expanding its education and humanities offerings to include lectures and activities for families, as well as seminars, workshops, and other activities for artists, scholars, and families. When not in use by the Theatre, its new facility is available for rental, bringing much needed affordable performing and rehearsal space to the community.

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*Even with capacity audiences, ticket sales account for a small portion of our operating costs. The Theatre expresses its deepest thanks to the following Foundations, Corporations Government Agencies and Individuals for their generous support of the Theatre's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs.*

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Theatre for a New Audience's productions and education programs receive support from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Major support for Theatre for a New Audience's education programs has been provided by the Elayne P. Bernstein Education Fund and the Sidney E. Frank Foundation.

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