

The National Center of Afro-American Artists  
presents the 54th season of  
Langston Hughes'

# *Black Nativity*



Seeing Black Nativity  
in a New Light

December  
2024

# A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## EDMUND BARRY GAITHER

National Center of Afro-American Artists

See Black Nativity in a new light.

Light is the window on all that we know. It makes possible our perceptions of the physical and spiritual worlds around us. Through its unending favor we are cast forever as seekers searching for the lighted path that will lead us both forward and retrospectively back to earth's origination. As light illuminates evolving truths both philosophical and scientific, it makes possible ephemeral but beautiful rainbows as well as delicate blossoms on fragile flowers that break through pavement cracks. We want Black Nativity to be part of such a grand revelation helping us see each other as fully and empathetically as possible. With light, we can banish falsehoods and injustices by lighting obscure corners and recesses that threaten to smother the human spirit and extinguish hope. just as the sun bathes all of us all with it life-bestowing daily glow, may the new light of Black Nativity 2024 brighten our lives and those of all families no matter the circumstances.



*-Edmund Barry Gaither*

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Board of Directors and staff of the National Center of Afro-American Artists appreciate the invaluable contribution made to Black Nativity by the many supporters who served on committees and contributed to its success.

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## A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR ASSOCIATES

We are very grateful for the generous support of ArtsEmerson, Emerson College, and especially the Office of the Arts.

Thank you Saint Katherine Drexel Parrish, especially Reverend Oscar Pratt, Pastor, and Eliot Congregational Church, Rev. Dr. Evan C. Hines, Pastor.

We also deeply appreciate the guidance and support that was so warmly given by Frank Jordan, Valeria Lowe-Barehmi and all others who assisted our endeavor.

# THE NATIONAL CENTER OF AFRO-AMERICAN ARTISTS

Edmund Barry Gaither, Executive Director

# *Black Nativity*



## • 54TH SEASON •

A gospel song-play with Voices of Black Persuasion and Children of Black Persuasion

• DECEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 22, 2024 •

Paramount Center • 559 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts

## • PRODUCTION •

**Executive Producer and Director:** Voncille Ross

**Composer and Arranger:** John Andrew Ross

**Choreographer:** George Howard

**Ballet Mistress:** Desiree A Springer

**Choral Director for Children:** Marilyn Andry

**Music Director for Adults:** Honorable Milton L. Wright

**Orchestra Master:** Stephen Hunter, Sr.

**African Percussion:** Stephen P. O'Neal

**Stage Manager:** Brion-Michael Rock

[www.blacknativity.org](http://www.blacknativity.org) / [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)

*With deep gratitude and appreciation, the National Center of Afro-American Artists acknowledges the generous and committed leadership of Sandi Bagley, chairperson of the Black Nativity Celebrate Committee.*

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Violators may be ejected and violations may render the offender liable for monetary damages.

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

### **VONCILLE ROSS**

Executive Producer/Director

Ms. Ross has been an exemplary Theater Arts teacher for 30 years with the Boston Public Schools. Her innovation and exceptional creative contributions to the field of theater education has helped guide her to become the Executive Producer and Director of NCAAA Black Nativity. Ms. Ross has been involved in NCAAA Black Nativity for 48 years.

The production has deeply influenced her life and help develop her into the woman that she is today.



Elma Lewis, Founder and Artistic Director of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, taught that the arts enhance our potential for greatness while giving back to our community. She dedicated her life to uplifting thousands of children and adults and inspiring them to let their glorious light shine where ever they go. This is evident in the Black Nativity community which gives light to that glorious story of the birth of Christ.

After 48 years with the production I can truly say that Black Nativity has deeply influenced the lives of the cast members and production team. The legacy of Black Nativity embodies the dedication of the cast and production team that works effortlessly to continue the shining the light for all to see. We would like to say thank you to the greater Boston area and beyond, for your support over the years.

I would like to say thank you to the cast, the wealth of love and talent that you bring makes this production forever bright and spectacular. Thank you for your support.

## SENIOR PRODUCTION TEAM



**MARILYN  
ANDRY**

is an accomplished opera singer as well as a sought-after voice teacher and performance coach. She is one-half of the locally based Butterfly Project that trains young, aspiring artists.



**DESRIEE  
SPRINGER**

is a dancer and teacher of dance. She studied at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts with George Howard. Presently she teaches at the Roxbury Center for the Performing Arts.



**STEPHEN  
HUNTER, SR.**

plays keyboard/piano, conducts and orchestrates the instrumental music section that drives the musical dynamics for Black Nativity. He studied with John A. Ross.



**HONORABLE  
MILTON L. WRIGHT**

comes from a noted Florida musical family. Though he is a lawyer and was a Roxbury judge he is internationally known as a singer, composer and arranger of music.



*Yawkey Foundation  
is honored to support  
Black Nativity  
and the  
National Center of  
Afro-American Artists*

*We are deeply grateful for this  
generous gift of hope and rebirth,  
shared with Greater Boston through  
the magnificent voices and artistry of  
generations of talented performers*

# THE PROGRAM

## **The Prologue: Stable Down the Road**

Dwayne Burgess, Vivian Cooley-Collier, Victoria Dandridge, Kamala Harrington, Tracy Joseph, Tierra Lyons, Serenity Pope-Bullock



## **Fanfare: Go Tell It on the Mountain**

Shelia Adams, Robert Brayboy, Rose Brayboy, Dwight Burgess, Victoria Dandridge, Jennifer DuBose, Eric Eversley, Kamala Harrington, Buddy Hughes, Tracy Joseph, Victor Owens, Sr., Jumaada Smith.

## **Processional: Go Tell It on the Mountain**

Dwayne Burgess, Vivian Cooley- Collier, Jermaine Tulloch, Ashley Villard, Darius Ware, Milton L. Wright, Mildred E. Walker, Kamala Harrington.

## **A Gospel Aubade**

Gia Denis Fils, Zoey Junior, Serenity Pope-Bullock, Jael Young.

## **My Way Is Cloudy**

**Adults:** Dwayne Burgess, Dwight Burgess, Jermaine Tulloch,  
**Young Teens:** Jasiri Kuliyaa Cash, Serenity Pope-Bullock, Kamayah Ingram, Sarah-Alyse Williams, Zoey Junior, Zorah Junior, Hans Denis.

## **No Room**

Dwayne Burgess, Vivian Cooley- Collier, Jermaine Tulloch, Mildred E. Walker, Ashley Villard.

## **Mary's On the Road**

Pelaiah Yisrael, Serenity Pope Bullock.

## **Joseph's On the Road**

Jennifer F. DuBose, Mildred Walker, Kamala Harrington.

## **Oh, Jerusalem in the Morning Poor Little Jesus**

Dwayne Burgess, Vivian Cooley- Collier, Hanifa Kamau-Nelson, Bianca Rameau-Sullivan, Jermaine Tulloch, Mildred E. Walker.

## **Mary, Mary, What You Gonna' Name Your Baby**

Penelope O'Neal-Bradshaw, Haniel Denis, Gia Denis Fils, Valerio Denis Fils, Haniel Denis, Jakobi Givens, Quincey Smith, Elaina Williams, Rodney Elias Williams, Micah Williams, Jael Young, Zion Young.

# THE PROGRAM

## **A Mighty Day**

Dwayne Burgess, Jermaine Tulloch, Darius Ware, Milton L. Wright.



## **Joy To the World**

Tierra Lyons, Mildred E. Walker, Darius Ware, Sr.

## **Christ Is Born**

Serenity Pope-Bullock, Dwayne Burgess, Victoria Dandridge, Kamala Harrington, Jermaine Tulloch, Mildred E. Walker, Milton L. Wright, Darius Ware.

## **Go Tell It on the Mountain**

Dwayne Burgess, Buddy Hughes, Milton L. Wright, Darius Ware.

## **Rise Up Shepherd and Follow**

Dwayne Burgess, Buddy Hughes, Supreme Nkosi Newton, Jermaine Tulloch, Darius Ware, Milton L. Wright, Kamala Harrington, Victoria Dandridge, Serenity Pope Bullock.

## **When Was Jesus Born?**

Serenity Pope-Bullock, Jasiri Kulyaa Cash, Hans Denis, Kamayah Ingram, Zoey Junior, Zorah Junior, Sarah-Alysse Williams.

## **What Child Is This?**

Vivian Cooley-Collier, Victoria Dandridge, Kamala Harrington, Tierra Lyons, Jermaine Tulloch, Mildred E. Walker, Ashley Villard, Hanifa Kamau-Nelson.

## **O Come All Ye Faithful**

Vivian Cooley-Collier, Ashley Villard, Mildred E. Walker, Hanifa Kamau-Nelson, Kamala Harrington, Bianca Doman

## **Gospel Recessional: Away In a Manger:** Arranged by Billy Taylor

## **Conclusion**

Rodney Elias-Williams, Micah Williams, Quincey Smith, Haniel Denis, Gia Denis Fils, Valerio Denis Fils, Elaina Williams, Jael Young, Zion Young.

## **American Sign Language Interpreters:**

Charlotte "Dee Spinkston, Mia P. Williams, Chantel Haga, Inda Pamer, Omar Hornes, Jessenia Kolako.

Through a special and unique collaboration, students of The Boston Arts Academy and the National Center of Afro-American Artists are engaged in ongoing exploration of how to create opportunities for students and staff to work with us in the production of Black Nativity. We offer students formal and informal platforms that support their development in performance and technical theater.

# VOICES OF BLACK PERSUASION

**VOICES:** Jon Adams, Shelia Adama, Marilyn Andry, Lenny Bradford, Robert Brayboy, Rose Brayboy, Dwayne Burgess, Dwight Burgess, Rochelle Chance, Wilma Clouden, Ronald Collier, Vivian Cooley-Collier, Jeffrey Dandridge, Jonathan Dandridge, Victorian Dandridge, Bianca Doman, Jennifer DuBose, Eric Eversley, Idly Galette, Charles Gilcrest II, Taleah Goodridge-Gilliard, Joe Gonzalez, William Graves, Leslie Guity, Kamala Harrington, Betty Hillmon, Ruby Hudson, Buddy Hughes, David Hunter, Stephen Hunter.Sr., Fantasia James, Shirley Jones, Tracy Joseph, Jessenia Kolaco, Jonathan Lovemore, Brianna Lucas, Tierra Lyons, Kaya Manselle, Lovette McCoy, Kaleisha Nance, Hanifa Kamau-Nelson, Stephen O'Neal, Stephen K. O'Neal, Supreme Nkosi Newton, Victor Nite, Victor Owens, Sr., Tennyson Palmer, Tyrone Kevin Perry, Beverly-Love Rock, Brion- Michael Rock, Vонcille Ross, Bianca Rameau-Sullivan, Jumaada Abdal Khallaq H. Smith, Charlotte Spinkston, Desiree A. Springer, Jermaine Tulloch, Ashley Villard, Mildred E. Walker, Darius Ware, Monica Wilds, Mia Williams, Milton L. Wright, PelaiahYisrael

**CHILDREN OF BLACK PERSUASION:** Serenity Pope -Bullock, Jasiri Kuliyyaa Cash, Samantha Dandridge, Haniel Denis, Hans Denis, Gia Denis Fils, Valerio Denis Fils, Jakobi Givens, Kamayah Ingram, Zoey Junior, Zorah Junior, Sharie Bella O'Neal, Penelope O'Neal-Bradshaw, Quincey Smith, Nariyah White, Elaina Williams, Micah Williams, Rodney Elias Williams, Sarah-Alysse Williams, Jael Young, Zion Young

## CAST AND MUSICIANS:

**Narrators:** Honorable Milton L. Wright, Vонcille Ross, Ashley Villard

**Shepherd's Speech:** Jasiri Cash, Beverly-Love Rock, Ashley Villard

**Mary:** Desiree A. Springer, Kaleisha Chance, Taleah Goodridge-Gilliard

**Joseph:** Joe Gonzalez, Tyrone Kevin Perry, Tennyson Palmer, Williams Graves

**Organ and piano:** Stephen Hunter, Sr., David Hunter, Darius Ware, Mildred E. Walker

**Electric Bass:** John (Lennie) Bradford, Chris Sublette

**African Percussion:** Stephen P. O'Neal I, Stephen Kortiss O'Neal II, Kaya Manselle, Tyler Maye, Ashley Villard, Darius Ware, Nariyah White

## PRODUCTION STAFF:

**Executive Producer and Director:** Vонcille Ross

**Director for Music:** Stephen Hunter, Sr.

**Choral Director for Children:** Marilyn Andry

**Choral Director for Adults:** Honorable Milton L. Wright

**Ballet Mistress:** Desiree A. Springer

**Production Consultant and Registrar:** Betty Hillmon

**Assistant to Registrar:** Sheila Adama, Ruby Hudson

**Assistant to the Director:** Sandra Taylor

**Sound Company:** Terry Hanley

**Audio Sound A-1:** Jim Dimatolopus

**Lighting Designer:** Vонcille Ross

**Marketing/Media Relations:**

**Production Management:** Arts Emerson

**Stage Manager:** Brion-Michael Rock

## BACKSTAGE CREW:

Diondre Hudson, Jonathan Lovemore, Jon Adams, Brion-Michael Rock, Beverly Love Rock, Jeffery Dandridge, Jonathan Dandridge, Ronald Collier, Brianna-Love Lucas, Irea Blue.

**Costumes:** Rochelle Chance, Wilma Clouden, Betty Hillmon, Ruby Hudson

**Wardrobe and Make-up Assistants:** Sheila Adams, Betty Hillmon, Ruby Hudson, Sandra Taylor, Mia P. Williams

**House Managers:** Arts Emerson

# ON LANGSTON HUGHES

## LANGSTON HUGHES (1902-1967)

Poet, Novelist, Essayist and Playwright

Notably prolific, Hughes was a poet, novelist, essayist and playwright. In the early 1960s, he wrote *Black Nativity* which was originally titled *O Mighty Day*. In it, he casts the people of Bethlehem as if they were Harlem hotel maids and butlers, and the inn was a New York hotel. He unified the story bridging from the New Testament text to the present through the use of animated gospel music. After opening in New York as a song-play, *Black Nativity* toured Europe and the United States.



John Andrew Ross, Director of Music for the National Center of Afro-American Artists saw it when it stopped in Boston. In 1970 with the support of Elma Lewis and his many associates at the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Ross premiered our version of *Black Nativity* in the fabled Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts.

## OUR FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## ELMA LEWIS (1921-2004)

Founder Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts

A major force in Boston, in 1950 Elma Lewis founded the school that bore her name and in 1968 its successor—the National Center of Afro-American Artists. Her impact was international, and her work influenced generations of students, scholars and aspiring artists. She kept company with presidents, ambassadors, intellectual and artistic greats from Jonas Salk to Duke Ellington, often bringing them to her students. She wanted those she touched to know they could be empowered by knowledge of their history.

Over her life, she received many honorary doctorates and was in the first group of John D and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellows. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts honored her as a national arts visionary.



Dr Lewis founded the Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park, and was mentor to enumerable young professionals in many disciplines. She inspired generations by the majesty of her thought, purposefulness of her actions, as well as her singular commitment to fostering black genius globally. Our production of *Black Nativity* is part of her legacy and honors her belief in the power of the arts to mold young lives by teaching self-confidence and discipline, respecting cross-generational engagement.

# THANK YOU!

## ANNETTE BROWN (1947-2024)

At the mention of her name, the image of a lithe and graceful dancer of extraordinary presence evokes the memory of Annette dancing. Like poetry in motion, she stood out in the Dance Company of the National Center of Afro-American Artists which, under the artistic direction of Billy Wilson of Bubbling Brown Sugar (Broadway) fame, performed widely throughout New England and beyond in the 1970s. In addition to performing, Annette Brown taught at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts where her students received a thorough grounding in fundamentals of dance. Later, working with Elma Lewis and Vernon Blackman, she assisted with dance and movement design and instruction for our production of Black Nativity. Even after relocating from Boston, she continued to commute for several years to help prepare and preserve the beauty and integrity of the show. Her special focus was on the children with whom she excelled. We remember Annette with great fondness and respect, even as we appreciate anew the richness of her contribution to the legacy of Black Nativity.



## SARAH-ANN SHAW (1933-2024)

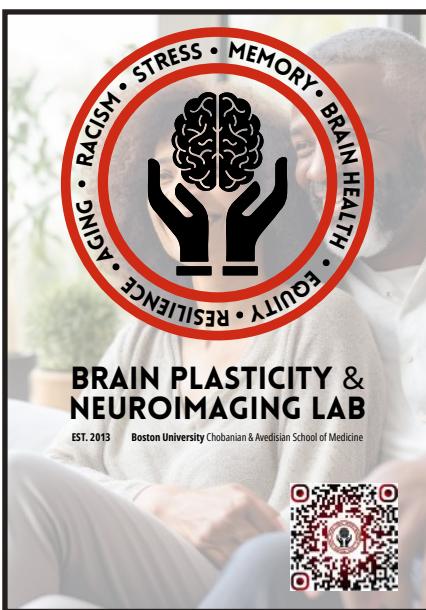
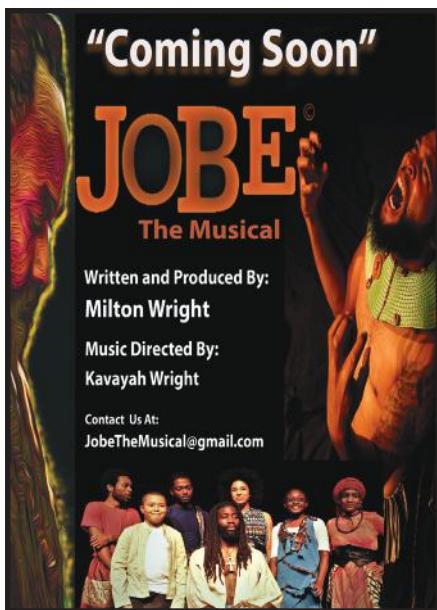
Sarah-Ann Shaw was the model of a civic-minded activist interested in and engaged over the full spectrum of activities central to the life of her community. Hers was a life of service as evinced by the many organizations—political and social—in which she was active. Professionally, she reported on and excited interest in relevant news throughout Boston, but especially news radiating from or impacting black people. Over her career, she drew national recognition for her pioneering contribution to black presence in broadcast news. In 1993, the National Association of Black Journalists awarded her a Lifetime Achievement Award. Despite the endless demands and expectations that garlanded her, she found time to support the work of her friend and mentor Dr. Elma I. Lewis, including the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts, National Center of Afro-American Artists and of course Black Nativity. We remember and honor her for the breadth and influence of her long life and career, and for her singular commitment to a life of service elevating and advancing the progress of black people—especially youth—across generations.



## GLORIA L. FOX (1942-2024)

Longest-serving African-American woman in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Fox was a fierce advocate for her 7th Suffolk District and all its people. She was especially concerned with issues of child welfare and foster care having herself been a foster child. Fox championed reform in the criminal justice system including CORI, and equally she defended the rights of women and families living in public housing and attending, as she did, public schools. Fox chaired key committees in the legislature and garnered national attention ultimately winning for her a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. She and her family were great supporters of Black Nativity with her sons having served many times as wisemen in the cast. We honor her life and memory, and rejoice that we were able to so abundantly enjoy her benefaction over many years.





Eastern Bank is committed to recognizing the good in our communities and celebrating the work of the

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AFRO-AMERICAN ARTISTS**

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