

OPEN FIST THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

BLOOD AT THE ROOT

written by Dominique Morisseau
directed by Michael A. Shepperd



SEPT 9 - OCT 28

TICKETS at OPENFIST.ORG

ATWATER VILLAGE THEATRE 3269 CASITAS AVE, LOS ANGELES, CA 90039



presents

Blood At The Root

by Dominique Morisseau

directed by Michael A. Shepperd

Featuring:

Malik Bailey • Deandra Bernardo • Emma Bruno • Nychelle Hawk • Nicholas Heard
• Jeremy Reiter II • Caroline Rose • Jack David Sharpe • Grace Soens • Amber Tiara
• Azeem Vecchio

Produced by

Amanda Weier, Martha Demson, James Fowler & The Open Fist Theatre Co.

Scenic Design & Technical Director

Joel Daavid

Costume Design

Mylette Nora

Lighting Design

Gavan Wyrick

Sound Design

Marc Antonio Pritchett

Choreography

Yusuf Nasir

Assistant Director

Debba Rofheart

Charge Scenic Artist

Marine Walton

Production Stage Manager

John Dimitri

Lead Carpenter

Jan Munroe

Assistant Scenic Design

Maya Gonzales

Publicist

Lucy Pollak

Assistant Lighting Design

Grace Berry



This production is made possible in part by a grant from the California Arts Council
This presentation is supported, in part, by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
through the LA County Dept of Arts & Culture Commission

Blood at the Root was commissioned by the Penn State School of Theatre, and was first produced by Penn State Centre Stage, Dan Carter, Producing Artistic Director.
The New York Premiere of Blood at the Root was produced by Penn State CentreStage and presented by HI-ARTS and the National Black Theatre, Inc.
Blood at the Root is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com



Mission

Open Fist Theatre Company is a self-governing community of theatre artists who believe in the transformative imperative of inclusive and collaborative theatre. Dedicated to expanding social awareness through art, we seek, through diverse voices and artistic visions, to celebrate difference, nurture empathy and advance social change.

Board of Directors

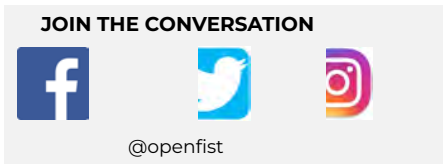
Martha Demson, Elizabeth Gerberg, Richard Michael Knolla, Christopher Lore, Schuyler Mastain, Charles Otte, Malhar Pagay, Katie May Porter, Ina Shumaker

Company Staff

Artistic Directors.....**Martha Demson, Amanda Weier & James Fowler**
Managing Director..... **Katie May Porter**
Production Manager**Amanda Weier**
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Associate**Carmella Jenkins**
Literary Manager.....**Barbara Schofield**
Marketing & Social Media Manager**Debba Rofheart**
Membership Manager.....**Beth Robbins**
Financial Director**Richard Michael Knolla**
Outreach Director **Dionna Veremis**

Our Members

Hetty Abbott, Lane Allison, Christine Avila, Bryan Bertone, Timothy Brown, Emma Bruno, Sandra Kate Burck, Rosie Byrne, Spencer Cantrell, Christopher Cappiello, Stephanie Crothers, Carolyn Crotty, Martha Demson, Bruce Dickinson, Elle Engelman, James Fowler, David Girona Jr., Syanne Green, Art Hall, Nychelle Hawk, Alex Hogy, Carmella Jenkins, Kassie Johnston, Richard Michael Knolla, Sherry Larson, Howard Leder, Dylan Maddalena, Ben Martin, Schuyler Mastain, Jan Munroe, Erica Mae McNeal, Rod Menzies, Heather Mitchell, Amy Moorman, Stevie-Jean Placek, Katie May Porter, Beth Robbins, Scott Roberts, Debba Rofheart, Judith Scarpone, Barbara Schofield, Jack Sharpe, Michael Sheppard, David Shofner, Ina Shumaker, Grace Soens, Tom Sys, Amber Tiara, Dionna Veremis, Amanda Weier, Alexander Wells, Jennifer Zorbalas, Sarah Zuk



Blood At The Root

Cast

Raylynn.....	Nychelle Hawk
Toria.....	Grace Soens
Asha.....	Caroline Rose
Justin	Azeem Vecchio
DeAndre.....	Nicholas Heard
Colin.....	Jeremy Reiter II
Chorus.....	Amber Tiara
Chorus.....	Malik Bailey
Chorus.....	Deandra Bernardo
Chorus/US Toria.....	Emma Bruno
Chorus.....	Jack David Sharpe

This story is inspired by a series of incidents, media reporting, and social action in Jena, Louisiana in 2007. I dedicate this work to the resilient young men who make up the Jena 6.

-- Dominique Morisseau, playwright

The Cast



Malik S. Bailey (he/him) - *Chorus* - is an Actor, writer and director from Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in acting from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and has continued his training with the 68 Cent Crew theater company. His directorial debut "Betrayal"

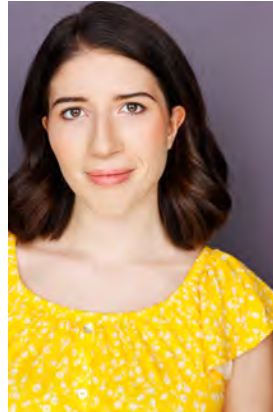
can be streamed on the 2ndteamentertainment app and on Roku. You'll also be able to see him light up the sky as Zeus in the web series "Olympic Proportions" later this year. Until then he can be found rewatching his favorite TV show *Bojack Horseman*. He considers it an honor to work with such a fine group of talented individuals and believes the Paper Cones are the future of America! Malik can be reached at maliksbailey3@gmail.com for business inquiries.



Deandra Bernardo (she/her) - *Chorus* - is overjoyed for 'Blood At The Root,' to be her LA acting debut. She studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts/NY. With a strong classical background, she has performed in over 40 musicals and plays in NYC

and Georgia. Her favorite credits include *Much Ado About Nothing/NY* (Beatrice), *The Fourth Alaafin of Oyo/NY* (Oshun/Summerfest WINNER), *Little Shop of Horrors/GA* (Chiffon), *Mighty Atoms/NY* (B.Buttrick), *A Chorus Line/GA* (Richie). When she isn't singing karaoke or roller skating on the beach,

you can find her studying improv at The Groundlings. She would like to thank her family, friends, and team for their constant support.



Emma Bruno (she/her) - *Chorus/US Toria, Asha* - is an LA based actor, writer and director. She got her BFA in acting from AMDA college and has recently starred in a number of short films and even a video game that is coming out later this year. She has been a member of The Open Fist Theatre company for 3 years and has participated in shows like "Never Swim Alone," "This is a

Chair," and the ongoing sketch comedy show "This Week, This Week!" She's thrilled to be a part of this important show and can't wait for everyone to see it.



Nychelle Hawk (she/her) - *Raylynn* - is a LA based actor originally from Texas. Her previous productions include "Permanent Collection" (Kanika Weaver) and "Overtones" (Maggie). She is excited about the short film "Blactinx" that premiered on YouTube. She received her BFA at AMDA College of the Performing Arts in Los

Angeles. Nychelle is finding her voice through acting, directing, and voice over. She wishes to inspire young POC artists on finding their voices as well. On a regular Tuesday night, you can find Nychelle inhaling a cheeseburger and reading a play that she's managed to get her hands on.

Nychelle is happy to be a part of this play as a new company member of the Openfist Theatre family. She is represented by Baron Entertainment and can be found on Instagram @shellyhawkk.

and serve others. He'd also like to thank his Mother and Father, Lisa and Jeremy Sr., for guiding him through his life's journey and for their unconditional love and support.



Nicholas Heard (he/him) - *DeAndre* - is an actor and skateboarder based in Los Angeles, CA. He has studied at the Howey Acting Studio in Gilbert, Arizona under the late Bill Howey. Since moving to LA in 2020, he has worked in films, television and live performances. Notable credits Moon Students (Film), Party From Hell

(TV Movie), A Daughter's Deceit (TV Movie). Nicholas dedicates his performances to his family, friends and supporters



Caroline Rose (she/her) - *Asha* - is an actor, artist, singer, photographer, and recent BFA Acting graduate of the American Music and Dramatic Academy (AMDA). She is excited to be revisiting *Asha* with this new cast and creative team after having performed the role

previously in AMDA's production last fall. Other favorite stage credits include *La Cage Aux Folles* (Anne), "[title of show]" (Susan), *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* (Mindy), *The Sound of Music* (Liesl), *Guys and Dolls*, as well as various new play readings and workshops. Thanks to Michael, Debba, Amanda, and the rest of the team at Open Fist for the opportunity to share this story. Instagram: @thecarolinerose.



Jeremy Reiter II (he/him) - *Colin* - is a 22 year old actor from Austin, Texas. Beginning his acting journey in 6th grade, it stuck and became his life's joy. He has since attended and graduated from AMDA, College of Performing Arts. During his time there, he has played Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*, Aster, in *Peter*

and the *Starcatcher*, and Eugene Morris Jerome, in *Biloxi Blues*. His hope from every performance is to learn from each and every character and take their perspective into his daily life to become a better person



Jack Sharpe (he/him) - *Chorus* - is an actor at the Open Fist. He is a graduate of UCB and Second City. He has performed at Open Fist in "*Musical Fools*," "*To The Bone*" and "*Starmites*," and performs most weeks in the sketch show "*This Week This Week*." Enjoy the show!



Grace Soens (she/her) - *Toria* - Heralding from a small town in Wisconsin, Grace moved to Los Angeles in 2017 to pursue professional acting training at AMDA College of the Performing Arts where she graduated with her Acting BFA in 2019. Since graduating, she's been involved in a variety of short films and theatre works and currently works as a scare

actor/host at The Basement: A Live Escape Room Experience in Sylmar. She wants to thank you for supporting live theatre and hopes you enjoy the show! Instagram: @grace.soens.



Azeem Vecchio (he/him) - *Justin* - is excited to be returning to the Open Fist Theatre! Most recently seen as Snug/Lion in the award winning production, *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bay Area Native. Azeem received a BFA in Acting from AMDA College and

Conservatory. In addition, Azeem has been a private barber since 2010. TV/Film: "Jurassic Domination", "Vengeance Turns", "Moon Crash", YouTube Series: Dhar Mann Studios. Thankful to all who are showing love and support, with extended gratitude towards Michael A. Sheppard for this opportunity to tell Justin's story! @azeemvecchio.



Amber Tiara (she/her) - *Chorus* - is a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Hollywood. Throughout her time in Los Angeles, she has worked on many projects and in the process of producing her first short film. Amber loves what she does and she's thrilled to be a part of this amazing story.

The Creatives

Dominique Morisseau (*Playwright*) is the author of *The Detroit Project* (A 3-Play Cycle) which includes the following plays: *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), *Paradise Blue* (Signature Theatre), and *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem and NBT). Additional plays include: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Sunset Baby* (LAByrinth Theatre); *Blood at the Root* (National Black Theatre) and *Follow Me To Nellie's* (Premiere Stages). She is also the TONY nominated book writer on the new Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations* (Imperial Theatre). Dominique is alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop and has developed work at Sundance Lab, Williamstown Theatre Festival and Eugene O'Neil Playwrights Conference. She most recently served as Co-Producer on the Showtime series "Shameless" (3 seasons). Additional awards include: Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award (2), Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18, and a recent MacArthur Genius Grant Fellow.

Michael A. Sheppard (*Director*) is very excited to be making his directorial debut with Open Fist Theatre. A few of his LA directing credits are: *The Boy From Oz* (Ovation Award, LADCC Award, Best Director), *Rotterdam* (LADCC Award Best Production, Stage Raw award for Best Production (win) and Best Director, nom *West Addams*, (LA Times Critics Choice), *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* (Director of the Year, Scenie Award, Broadway World nom, Best Director) *The View Upstairs* (Broadway World Award, Best Director) *Twelve O'clock Tales*, *Sucker Punch*, *Too Heavy*

for Your Pocket (LA Times Critics Choice), *The Next Fairy Tale*, [title of show], *Rent*. Acting roles include *Matilda* (Miss Trunchbull), *The Producers* (Roger DeBris; Ovation Award nominee), *Fences* (Troy; Ovation, LADCC Nominations), *BootyCandy* (LADCC nom, Ovation, Stage Raw Win), *The Color Purple* (Mister; Ovation award), *Steel* (Ovation Award), *Master Harold and the Boys* (NAACP theatre award nom), *The Producers* (Ovation Award nom), *Intimate Apparel* (NAACP Theatre Award), *Choir Boy* (NAACP nom), and *Shout Sister Shout*. Broadway/Regional credits include: *Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan*, *Clyde's*, *The Tempest*, *The Seafarer*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Caroline, or Change*, *Whipping Man*. TV: *Bosch*, *Why Women Kill*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Soul Man*, *Hot In Cleveland*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, *Monk*, *Criminal Minds*, *NCIS*.

Debba Rofheart (*Assistant Director*) is an LA based actor, born and raised in Long Island, New York, where her mom dragged her to shows in Manhattan, from early childhood. It was there, in Broadway that the magic of performing infused her. She earned her BFA in Theatre Performance from the University of Florida, but did not pursue acting professionally, until after a long indentured servitude as a corporate wage slave. Since her emancipation, she has returned to acting. Theatre is her great love and Shakespeare's works most especially. Favorite roles are, *King Cymbeline*, with *The Porters*; and *Peter Quince*, in Open Fist Theatre Company's acclaimed production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." She is a proud member of Open Fist, *The Vagrancy*, and *Playground-LA* theatre companies; and of SAG-AFTRA and Actors' Equity unions. This is her first time assistant directing. Thank you for supporting live theatre!

Joel Daavid (*Technical Director/Set Designer*) A Texan /LA resident since 1993. Joel has become an award-winning director/set designer since attending the American Film Institute for Cinematography. His career accomplishments also include cinematography for film and video projects. Joel's most notable awards include the Ovation, LA Weekly, NAACP and LADCC Theater Awards. He directed/designed the award winning production of "The Miracle Worker" at the Matrix and Edgemar Theatres and the new production of Tennessee Williams' "Baby Doll" at the Lillian Theatre. Joel directed/designed the multi-award winning "Frankenstein" for Theatre Tallahassee, the epic story of "Camille" (Caudel) at the Greenway Arts Alliance and most recently the world premiere musical "Caligari's Cabinet of Curiosities" written by Vanessa Stewart. www.joeldaavid-director.com

Yusuf Nasir (*Choreographer*) Yusuf's love for dance is infectious and can be felt far and wide. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Yusuf began dancing at age seven at Studio J, under the direction of Kris Bell where he received classes in tap and jazz. A graduate of the San Francisco School of the Arts, and attendee of the Ailey School in New York, his exposure and rigorous study of classical, modern, neo-classical, contemporary and street dance style techniques instilled the importance of versatility as a Creative Director, Dancer, Choreographer, and Instructor. It is also the driving force behind his credits, which span Film, Television, and Stage. Credits include: HBO's Euphoria, Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lopez, Miley Cyrus, Kylie Minogue, Raven Symone, Neil Patrick Harris, Zac Efron, Hugh Jackman, Zendaya, Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, James Cordon, Cee-lo Green, Wayne Brady, Betty White, Mark Feuerstein, Donny and Marie Osmond Live in Las Vegas, Ray Charles Live

(B'way Tryout), Lil Abner – Reprise: Broadway's Best, Derrick Mitchell's Thin Line: A Dance Drama (off B'way), Dancing with the Stars, MTV Video Music Awards, AFI Honors: Morgan Freeman, Spike TV, Video Game Awards, BET Awards, Dave Foster Presents: Rod Stewart PBS Special, Festival Di San Remo (Italy),) | NBC's The Good Place (Assistant Choreographer) | Fox's The Masked Singer (Assistant Choreographer) | American Horror Story: Season 7 Promo (Assistant), COMMERCIALS: FIAT | SENSEA | ALTOIDS.COM | SAMSUNG and many more !

Marc Antonio Pritchett (*Sound Design*) is a working Actor, Director, Fight Coordinator, and Session Singer in the Los Angeles area. He is also one of the Artistic Directors at Sacred Fools Theatre Company. Recent sound/music credits include *The Mousetrap* at Theatre Palisades, *The Latrell Show* at IAMA Theatre, *The Play You Want* at the Road Theatre, *Sweat and Cry It Out* at the Chance Theatre, *An Octoroon*, *The Children* and *Detained* at the Fountain Theatre. Nucleus Talent Management represents him. For additional info visit: www.marcantoniopritchett.com

Gavan Wyrick (*Lighting Design*) is a Los Angeles based lighting designer for plays, musicals, and everything in between. Open Fist credits include Starmites, Anatomy of Gray, To The Bone, A Midsummer Night's Dream. Other recent credits include: Accommodation, Remembering the Future, God of Carnage (The Odyssey); Let Me In, Driver's Seat (Theatre 68); Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Beauty and the Beast, South Pacific, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (Desert Theatricals); Mary Poppins (Performance Riverside); World Goes 'Round, Our Lady of the Tortilla, I'm Not Rappaport, Marry Me a Little (IVRT). IG:@gavanwyrickdesign gavanwyrickdesign.com

Jan Munroe (*Lead Carpenter*) has been a member of OPEN FIST for the last decade during which time he appeared as SHU-FU in GOOD WOMAN OF SZECHUAN, a vampire in MAD FOREST, and a ghost in John O'Keefe's GHOSTS. He also directed and designed O'Keefe's DON'T YOU EVER CALL ME ANYTHING BUT MOTHER and ALL NIGHT LONG for OPEN FIST as well as designing/building Playwrights'Arena's A HIT DOG WILL HOLLER at the Skylight. As an actor, he has appeared numerous times on TV (This Is Us, Criminal Minds, Brooklyn 99), in movies (A Few Good Men, Catch Me If You Can, Ford V Ferrari), and on stage. He is currently in the cast of DETAINED at the Fountain Theatre. His early childhood memoir THE DEMENTIA COOKBOOK: What I remember before I forget (available at LULU.COM.) was published in June 2021. He is a recipient of eleven L.A. Weekly and Drama-Logue awards, an Ovation Award, two NEA Theatre fellowships, a CAC "New Genre" fellowship, and a Rockefeller Playwright's fellowship.

Myllette Nora (*Costume Design*) NAACP Theatre Awards for best costumes, listed in the honors edition of The Cambridge Registry of Who's Who Among Executive and Professional Women, works world wide consists of television, film, and stage, and was seen nightly on "The Tonight Show" with Jay Leno and now weekly on "Jay Leno's Garage" and "You Bet Your Life". The famed artist Synthia St. James noted Mylette as being the inspiration for her world renowned painting "Ensemble" which graced the cover of the best selling novel "Waiting To Exhale" by Terry McMillan. Mylette's designer doggiewear, FromTheHeartDoggieWear.com, and heirloom dolls, "My Mind's Eye".

Amanda Weier (*Producer*) is a long-time member of The Open Fist. She studied Theatre & Creative Writing for the Media at Northwestern, where she was awarded a certificate for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. Amanda also holds a Certificate in Directing from The Royal Court and is a graduate of iO, iO West & The Second City's Conservatory program. Some favorite stage credits include *To The Bone*, *This Week*, *This Week*, *Second City This Week*, *Stage Door* (LA Weekly "Best Actress" nominee), *Room Service* (LA Weekly "Best Actress" nominee), *A Wolf Inside The Fence*, *The Normal Child* ("Best of Fringe" finalist), *The Gary Plays*, *Blue Night in the Heart of the West* (director), *Autobahn* (director) and *The :nv:s:ble Play* (director). Amanda's film/tv credits include *Scare Tactics* (recurring), *Alien Abduction*, *Hung Jury* and *Held* (writer/director). In addition to *Held*, Amanda also wrote the screenplay *STRAY* (2nd place Slamdance and Skyline Screenwriting competitions) and the stage-play *Goose-Stepping with Bound Feet*.

John Dimitri (*Stage Manager*) is thrilled to be a part of Blood At The Root! He has spent a lifetime in the Arts and has worn many different hats, including Stage Actor, Screen Actor, Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager, Tech Director, Assistant Tech Director, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer, Set Builder, Photographer, Videographer, and Running Crew. In addition to his work with Open Fist, John is an AMDA graduate, has spent years as an IATSE Local 33 Stagehand, and has lent his skills to various other theatre and event companies and programs, including Sierra Madre Playhouse, Downtown Rep, The Fountain, Vesper Theatre Company, Children's Theatre Experience, Story Tailors, Netflix, J-Fox Event Lighting, Pasadena City College, and Glendale Community College. He would like to thank his family and friends for their constant support over the years, no matter the hat worn!

Grace Berry (*Assistant Lighting Designer*)

Maya Gonzalez (*Assistant Set Designer/Scenic Artist*)

Kari Morales (*Assistant Scenic Artist*)

Eric Gonzales (*Assistant Scenic Artist*)

Company Scenic Crew — The Open Fist Theatre Company's Brigade of Volunteers.

Special thanks to: Bruce & his truck, Justin & Theatrical Education Group, Marc & LAVC Theatre & Music, Tom Sys, Derek Manson, Matt Richter, Tim Wright....