

# Signal Hill's Karole Foreman, a woman of the world for ICT's next play

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Karole Foreman is Woman of the World in the play “Blues in the Night” at the International City Theater starting Oct. 22. (Photo by Rob Mainord)

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Karole Foreman is a woman of the world.

And beginning Friday, Oct. 22, she is going to play a character aptly named the Woman of the World in the International City Theatre and Ebony Repertory Theatre production of “Blues in the Night.”

Foreman is an award-winning actor, singer and playwright who has performed in regional theaters like The Mark Taper Forum, Denver Center Theatre Company, Alliance Theatre in Atlanta and San Jose Rep. She also spent two seasons with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

She was born on a military base in Morocco, where her father was stationed while enlisted in the U.S. Navy. She has lived on both coasts. She teaches. She directs. She performs on the stage and screen and television and even finds time to do commercials and voice-over work.

Foreman, who lives in Signal Hill, said she is looking forward to returning to the ICT. Previously, she had the title role in “Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill,” channeling Billie Holliday, and she also starred in the theater company’s award-winning production of “Fences.”

“It is thrilling to be coming back to Long Beach. Performing during this time in our lives has its challenges because we are trying to do things safely,” she said while stuck in afternoon traffic after teaching musical theater at Chapman University in Orange. “Having the chance to dive into the music and the history of this art form has been wonderful. I love the show. I saw the show three times. Freda Payne played the role I am playing. It had that effect on me.”

The characters in “Blues in the Night” have no names, Foreman said, but the role she plays is of someone who has elegance, albeit a bit faded.

“In this play, people find themselves in a post-World War II hotel,” she said. “African Americans who have been abroad and performing in France, where they are treated like human beings, come home and are back being segregated and not making the type of money they made overseas.”

She said her character is inspired by actor/singer Lena Horne, a woman that Foreman said “found her way because she was attractive and taken care of by men.”

But she is also influenced by her mother, who was a model but also had to work for the telephone company in New York.

“When I approach a role, I ask myself, ‘How do you take the idea of the character and make them into flesh and blood?’” she said. “Because it is interesting how we as a people have turned pain and discrimination and devastating heartache into this art form known as the blues. We didn’t have medication for folks. You turned to substances, music or love relationships. If you were lucky, you turned to fragmented communities, like Harlem or Chicago. People tried to forge new identities.”

Foreman said she knew at an early age that she was hooked on theater.

“When I was living in Virginia, in maybe the sixth or seventh grade, I loved to write because I was shy and bullied a lot,” she said. “I remember I had a chance to stand in front of the class and read a story I wrote and I could see the kids leaning forward wanting to hear more. It was the first time I felt seen. I said something and people could see it and have that experience.”

She described her time in high school as being active in community service, student government and drama.

After graduation, Foreman joined a singing group, Up With People. After touring with them, she was awarded a dance scholarship at US International University in San Diego. But she dropped out and took off for L.A. with \$50 and her parents’ car. She enrolled in a musical theater program at the Music Center and at the end of the program, she auditioned — and earned — a role in “Little Shop of Horrors” at the La Mirada Theatre.

Unlike many in the entertainment industry, Foreman kept active during the coronavirus pandemic. She set up a home studio and stayed busy with voiceover work.

“Honestly, I was very fortunate,” she said. “I did more auditions than before because I set up my studio. I was prepared for that. I shot two commercials and four or five TV shows during the lockdown and tons of auditions and a podcast and I didn’t have to leave my house. I even directed a show at UC Irvine online.”

Foreman, who has a bachelor’s degree in theater and a master’s in theater with an emphasis in teaching acting modalities from Cal State Long Beach, said “Blues in the Night” is one of her favorite shows.

“I’m really excited about this production,” she said. “There is such a high level of talent in this show and it’s a great gift to this community. It’s nice to be doing it at home in my neighborhood. It’s great to come back to the theater. It will be a celebration.”