

DISCOVERING AUNT ESTER IN *GEM OF THE OCEAN*
BY AUGUST WILSON

By
ANEDRA D. JOHNSON

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

CHRISTINA (TIZA) GARLAND
DAVID YOUNG

A PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2011

© 2010 Anedra D. Johnson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Merciful Father, thank you for seeing me through. For every moment I contemplated giving up, you stepped right in and provided me with even more strength to keep pushing. To my mother, I am so blessed to call you my angel. Thank you for your encouraging words, your unconditional love, your sternness, your prayers, and your blessings. Thank you for your never ending support and all of your sacrifices. Thank you for sharing this experience with me and guiding me every step of the way. I'm eternally grateful. To my siblings, Anthony and Adrian, thank you for supporting me and believing in me, even when I found it hard to believe in myself. I love you guys a million times and more. To Larry, thank you for your love and kindness, especially when I was under high stress. I am so grateful to have you in my life. Thank you for sharing this journey with me and I look forward to what lies ahead. I love you with all my heart. To Ms. Marie, thank you for being my mother away from home and a great support system, I can not thank you enough. To the faculty and staff of the University of Florida, I appreciate your criticism, direction, and guidance. Finally, I give special thanks to Dr. Mikell Pinkney and the Florida A&M University Essential Theatre faculty. Words can not express my sincere gratitude. Thank you for all of your guidance, leadership, wisdom, and inspiration.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Who is Aunt Ester?.....	1
August Wilson: “Taking Spectators to the City of Bones ”.....	2
Aunt Ester’s Emergence in the Ten-Play Cycle.....	6
Discovering Aunt Ester: “You got it in your hands, now what to do with it?”.....	11
Textual Analysis.....	11
Observations.....	13
Incorporating Observations of Movement.....	14
Incorporating Vocal Training.....	15
The Rehearsal Process.....	16
Spirituality in <i>Gem of the Ocean</i>	20
Spirituality and Aunt Ester: “He can take you if you believe he can take you!”.....	24
Conclusion: "She made me Right with Myself”.....	26
Appendix A	
Rehearsal and Production Photos.....	28
Program.....	31
Appendix B	
An Actor’s Score.....	30
Appendix C	
Vocal Scoring.....	36
Bibliography.....	37
Biographical Sketch.....	38

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

DISCOVERING AUNT ESTER IN *GEM OF THE OCEAN*
BY AUGUST WILSON

By

Anedra D. Johnson

May 2011

Chair: Christina (Tiza) Garland
Major: Theatre

This document catalogues my creative process in developing the role of Aunt Ester Tyler in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. *Gem* was performed by the School of Theatre and Dance at the University of Florida in the Constans Theatre from September 17th through the 28th of 2010. The story takes place in the home of Ester Tyler (also known as Aunt Ester), at 1839 Wylie Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The plays revolves around a young man by the name of Citizen Barlow, who is seeking guidance from Aunt Ester Tyler because he is being haunted by his past. After learning that Aunt Ester has the power to cleanse souls, the anxious Citizen Barlow pursues Aunt Ester hoping that she will free him of his guilty conscience.

This paper is an exploration of my process in playing the role Aunt Ester. This document analyzes Aunt Ester's emergence in August Wilson's ten-play cycle and specifically her role in *Gem of the Ocean*. This report thoroughly describes the manifestation of Aunt Ester through observation, movement, voice, the rehearsal process, and performance. With a great deal of focus on character development, this document recounts my journey with discovering Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean* both literally, figuratively, and spiritually.

Who is Aunt Ester?

In August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, the oldest matriarch character, Aunt Ester, represents the root of African History and the site of the African American Legacy. Filled with "memories that go way back" (I.V) from over 200 years of living, community members seek her out to cleanse the soul, and she does so by taking them on a journey that links the past history of native Africans to contemporary American culture, helping them to understand that they have a "duty to life" (II.II); they must actively promote cultural change for the betterment of the African American community. Aunt Ester is a wise spiritual leader. She is a mother, a soul cleanser, and the resurrection of history. Aunt Ester is legacy.

When I learned that my thesis role was Aunt Ester in the University of Florida's School of Theatre and Dance fall production of *Gem of the Ocean*, I was apprehensive about approaching such a role. I was afraid of developing a stereotypical elder woman of 285 years of age. A great responsibility seemed to be attached to playing this role. I was intimidated by the text; the proverbs, the lessons, the mysticism, and the history that lies within the pages of the script. They were all sensitive subjects that could not be dealt with in a careless manner. This role required one to understand the African culture and the history of African Americans; as well as biblical and spiritual stories.

This role required more than technical training in voice, movement, and acting techniques for the actor. In order to capture the essence of Aunt Ester, I needed to tap into the sensibilities that exist within the human race: wisdom, understanding, patience, and my own spirituality. This was certainly no easy task. However, before one could even start character work on this role in *Gem of the Ocean*, it was critical to understand the text, historical references, and Aunt Ester's role in what is referred to as Wilson's "ten-play cycle."

August Wilson: “Taking Spectators to the City of Bones”

Known as “a man of many words,” African American playwright, August Wilson, is one of the most notable playwrights in America. Wilson’s collection of plays, often referred to as the “ten-play cycle,” reflects over 700 years of African and African American history. However, *Gem of the Ocean* beautifully sets the foundation in which spectators are able to gain knowledge about the African American past. In *Gem*, spectators are provided with more insight into the history of African Americans than is usually learned from history books. Through humor, drama, spirituality, and mysticism, the truth about the history of African American’s is exposed in *Gem of the Ocean*.

Gem of the Ocean is set in 1904 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at 1839 Wylie Avenue. Eli, the gatekeeper, looks after Aunt Ester and her protégé, Black Mary. Eli and Black Mary reside at Aunt Ester’s home, 1839 Wylie Avenue. This home is a “house of sanctuary,” filled with years of history, belonging to the 285 year old matriarch and former slave, Ester Tyler. Known as a spiritual healer, or soul cleanser, members of the community seek her out in order to receive healing.

As Eli prepares to retire for the night, the tranquility at 1839 Wylie Avenue is unexpectedly interrupted by the anxious Citizen Barlow, who barges through the front door, desperately searching for Aunt Ester in dire need of getting his soul washed. Eli warns him that he will have to return on Tuesday, “she don’t see nobody til Tuesday” (Prologue). As Citizen and Eli engage in a scuffle, silence and fright immediately fills the air when Aunt Ester swings her door open and steps forward, examining the distressed Citizen Barlow. After noticing Citizen’s hat on the floor, she calmly picks it up and hands it to him advising him she will see him on Tuesday.

A day passes, and Eli and Black Mary notice that Citizen is still standing across the street waiting for Aunt Ester. They then receive a visit from Selig (a peddler) and Solly Two Kings, Aunt Ester's long time friend who is an Underground Railroad conductor who helped slaves escape to the north. They come bearing the latest news about the town being in utter chaos because of the death of Garret Brown. Brown was a young mill worker who was accused of stealing a bucket of nails. Refusing to surrender to Caesar Wilkes, Black Mary's brother who is a black capitalist and police officer, Brown drowns himself in the river because he refused to admit to a crime he did not commit. Solly then asks Black Mary to read a letter he received from his sister, Eliza Jackson. After learning his sister needed him to rescue her from Alabama as soon as possible, Solly leaves the house, telling them that he must prepare to go get Eliza.

Hours later, after accepting that Citizen would probably be standing outside of Aunt Ester's home until Tuesday, Eli and Black Mary leave the house to attend to some business. Determined to see Aunt Ester, Citizen, realizing the house was unattended, resorts to breaking in and entering. He climbs through the upstairs window. Having not eaten for days, Citizen searches the kitchen for something to eat before pursuing Aunt Ester. Aunt Ester emerges from her room. She is almost glad to see him and observes him for a while before making her presence known. When she playfully slams the door shut, Citizen is startled and declares that he is not a robber; he just needs his soul washed. As Aunt Ester continues to assess Citizen Barlow, observing his stature, she comments on similarities between him and her deceased youngest child, Junebug. Once making this special connection, she welcomes Citizen into her home without question.

Gaining Aunt Ester's reassurance, Citizen sits at her feet, pouring his heart out, pleading for her assistance. Plagued with guilt, he admits to her that he committed a crime that led to

someone's death, which is why he needs his soul washed so desperately. Black Mary enters and finds Citizen sleeping at Aunt Ester's feet. Aunt Ester tells Black Mary to get things ready in the spare bedroom because Citizen is going to stay and help Eli build a wall on the property. In utter confusion, Eli and Black Mary are left with no choice but to accept the new living arrangements and adjust to them.

Days later, Citizen confesses to Aunt Ester that he is responsible for Garret Brown's death. Aunt Ester responds by telling him that when the truth comes to stand in the light, then he will be able to seek forgiveness and move forward in life. Aunt Ester then tells Citizen that she's willing to help him, but first she has to give him a few instructions. Once those instructions have been tended to, he is to return and prepare to go to the City of Bones, a place where he can gain his redemption.

Expecting that the tasks given to him would take a few days, Aunt Ester and the others are surprised when Citizen returns the next day. Ready to get his soul washed, Aunt Ester realizes Citizen's desperate need for forgiveness and spiritual sustenance. With assistance from Eli, Black Mary, and Solly Two Kings, Aunt Ester takes Citizen Barlow on a symbolic and eerie spiritual journey to the City of Bones. The journey is one in which Citizen travels back in time and symbolically experiences the middle passage in order to go to the "City of Bones". Historically, the middle passage was part of the slave trade in which thousands of slaves were transported from Africa to America on a slave ship. In *Gem*, symbolically and spiritually, the "City of Bones" is a place where thousands of slaves chose to reside in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and build "a kingdom made of pearly white bones." In order to gain entrance into the "City of Bones," he must face Garret Brown who is the gatekeeper of the city, and admit to Garret that he stole the bucket of nails, which led to Garret's death. Citizen makes that

confession and Garret Brown lets him into the “City of Bones”. Once inside the “City of Bones”, Citizen gains an understanding of the struggle his ancestors went through and why. Citizen then realizes he has a “duty to life (II.68).” Through this psychic and spiritual cleansing process, in which he confronts his past and Garret Brown, Citizen is able to live life without guilt.

Shortly after Citizen returns from his symbolic journey to the “City of Bones,” the celebration of his rebirth is unexpectedly interrupted by a visit from Caesar Wilkes. Caesar comes to Aunt Ester’s home to confront Solly about burning down the mill. When Caesar attempts to arrest Solly, Solly strikes Caesar in the knee and escapes. Shortly after, Aunt Ester instructs Citizen to find Selig and ask him to come to her home immediately. When Selig arrives, Aunt Ester tells him that Caesar is looking for Solly because he burnt down the mill, so she needs Selig to help Solly escape to Alabama. Meanwhile, Caesar returns. Completely unaware of Aunt Ester’s plan, Caesar advises Selig to take a different route in order to leave town and avoid the road blocks. Caesar then tells Aunt Ester that he has come to arrest her for interfering with the arrest of Solly Two Kings. When Caesar exits with Aunt Ester, Black Mary sits in Aunt Ester’s chair. From this gesture, it is assumed that Black Mary will begin taking on the role of Aunt Ester, as everyone is unaware of when Aunt Ester will return.

After spending a night in jail, Aunt Ester returns home only to find out that her close friend, Solly, has been shot by Caesar. While Selig, Eli, and Citizen struggle to get Solly into the house so that Aunt Ester can try to save him, Citizen explains to Aunt Ester that on their way to Alabama, Caesar caught up with them and shot Solly in the chest. Aunt Ester, Eli, Black Mary, Citizen, and Selig struggle to keep Solly alive. Solly passes away and his final words are “so live.” After Citizen pays his final respects to Solly, Citizen begins to leave. As he prepares to put on Solly’s hat, he discovers the letter from Solly’s sister. *Gem of the Ocean* ends with Eli

raising his cup declaring to Citizen Barlow, “so live,” a final petition of hope declaring that he live in truth and with integrity and Citizen exits.

Aunt Ester’s Emergence in the Ten-Play Cycle

In August Wilson’s ten-play cycle, each of the ten plays portrays the plight of African Americans in a different decade of the 20th century. A theme that constantly reappears in all of his plays is the need to acknowledge ones past in order to understand the present, so that one can be the change for the future. The themes of the plays address how the African American community developed and questions how the community and culture will thrive and move forward acknowledging a very rich legacy. Below is Wilson’s ten-play cycle. The plays are listed by historical setting and parenthetically state the year in which they were first produced. All of the plays examine the reoccurring themes of progression and redemption in the African American Community.

1900s: *Gem of the Ocean* (2003)

1910s: *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (1986)

1920s: *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (1984)

1930s: *The Piano Lesson* (1987)

1940s: *Seven Guitars* (1995)

1950s *Fences* (1985)

1960s: *Two Trains Running* (1990)

1970s: *Jitney* (1982)

1980s: *King Hedley II* (1999)

1990s: *Radio Golf* (2005)

Although *Gem of the Ocean* is historically the first play of the cycle, it was the penultimate play to be written by Wilson. In his final two works, *Gem* and *Radio Golf*, Wilson brilliantly aims to marry the African American past to the present. In *Radio Golf*, Wilson presents his audience with a possible crisis: What happens when our unique African American History and cultural values dissipate because those in leadership positions fail to assume the responsibility of continuance (Booker 192)? In an article written by Suzan Lori Parks, “The Light in August,” Wilson explains his purpose for writing *Radio Golf*. He states that:

My idea was that the black middle class seems to be divorcing themselves from that community, making their fortune on their own without recognizing or acknowledging their connection to the larger community. And I thought: We have gained a lot of sophistication and expertise and resources, and we should be helping that community, which is completely devastated by drugs and crime and the social practices of the past hundred years of the country... If you don't recognize you have a duty and a responsibility, then obviously you won't do that. Some people don't feel that responsibility, but I do, so I thought I would express that in the work (Parks 22, 24).

When analyzing these two plays, it is very clear to me why he chose to complete his cycle with *Gem* and *Radio Golf*. *Gem of the Ocean* encourages the new generation to go back and confront the past gaining an understanding of the social oppression from whence they came in order to promote social transformation. Whereas *Radio Golf* helps African Americans to understand that if the community fails to acknowledge the past because they think they have mastered success as an individual, African Americans will continue to live in oppression because we have no knowledge of our history nor a need to assist each other in this journey we call life. If we continue to neglect our past, all we'll know of our history is whatever society says it is

which will soon vanish if the next generation of Aunt Ester's children fails to take responsibility (Bigsby 192).

In The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson, Christopher Bigsby states that Wilson's characters:

...[s]till place their faith in America's willingness to live up to the meaning of her creed so as not to make a mockery of her ideals. It is this belief in America's honor that allows them to pursue the American Dream even as it remains elusive. The conflicts with the larger society are cultural conflicts...in what has been a difficult and sometimes bitter relationship with a system of laws and practices that deny us access to the tools necessary for productive and industrious life (192).

Aunt Ester offers Wilson's characters wisdom (most often dispensed in parables), spirituality, and valuable tools that help them to cope in an ever changing society. Through a reconstructive journey of the self in which individuals are faced with the hardships of the African American ancestral past, she leads them to a redemptive path that helps them to understand that they have a higher purpose in life that is selfless. They have a responsibility to the African American community in which they are called to be the keepers of cultural values.

First introduced as an unseen figure in *Two Trains Running*, which takes place in the 1960s, spectators become acquainted with the possibilities of Aunt Ester's existence. Referencing a 322-year-old conjure woman who "make you right with yourself (I.24)" the character Holloway challenges Sterling (a young man who was recently released from prison) to pay her a visit. He tells him to tell the gatekeeper:

"...Just say you come to see Aunt Ester. You ain't got to tell them what you want to see her about. Just say, 'I come to see Aunt Ester.' You got

to pay her, though. She won't take no money herself. She tell you to go down and throw it the river. Say it'll come to her. She must be telling the truth, 'cause she don't want for nothing (I.24)."

Memphis, a restaurant owner in *Two Trains Running*, also speaks of Aunt Ester's morals and reminds spectators of her ever-present connection to the past. After paying Aunt Ester a visit, Memphis states that she told him, "If you drop the ball you got to go back and pick it up. Ain't no need in keeping running, 'cause if you get to the end zone it ain't gonna be a touchdown" (II.40). In other words, if you forget the past, the future has no meaning.

King Hedley II takes place in the 1980s. The Pittsburgh community struggles with death of their spiritual advisor, Aunt Ester. Tired of the desperate conditions of the African American existence, Aunt Ester dies from grief. In an article written by Harry J. Elam Jr., he poses the following question: What happens when the spirit of a people passes away, when Aunt Ester, the living symbol of the past, the 'ancestor', or Aunt Ester of all African America, dies (Biggsby 78)? Left with no more living legacy or "An-cESTR-y", African Americans struggle to find the answers to their existence as a community.

After her death in *King Hedley II*, Wilson cleverly resurrects Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean* offering the new generation, represented by Citizen Barlow, wisdom and spiritual sustenance in order to cope with his guilt so that he is able to function in society. In his final play, *Radio Golf*, depicting the lives of blacks in the 1990s, Wilson challenges the Pittsburgh community to recognize and respect the role and history of African Americans. The character Harmond Wilkes is put to the test when he is pressured to make a choice that will affect his community: In order to conceal his fraudulent activity, he must ensure that the redevelopment of the Hill's District comes to fruition or pull out from the corrupted scheme in order to save his

career and keep Aunt Ester's house from being demolished. Faced with this ultimatum, Harmond Wilkes is the determinant for keeping the blood history and memories of our past alive.

August Wilson's contribution to American theatre and the African American society is certainly undeniable. Identifying and acknowledging his purpose for the ten-play cycle, it is clear that it is absolutely critical for characters such as Aunt Ester to be ever-present in contemporary theatre. These types of characters preserve the truth of history. Aunt Ester serves as the liaison between African American ancestors and generations to come. However, if the opportunity to be educated about African American lineage is not present in the school system and within the African American culture, what is the fate of this important and unique culture? We have a duty as artists, through theatre we must continue to educate others about all cultures and ethnicities and keep history alive.

Discovering Aunt Ester:

“You got it in your hands now, now what to do with it?”

After gathering a deeper understanding of *Gem of the Ocean* and Aunt Ester’s role in the ten-play cycle, I was prepared to face my fear, character development. Up until this point, my time at the University of Florida was centered around portraying naïve characters, such as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Lane in the *Clean House*, Henriette in *The Learned Ladies*, and so on. So this was truly something refreshing and exciting, yet terrifying at the same time. The one thing that continuously lurked in my mind was “How can I, a 24-year-old woman, possibly incorporate all of my training into this role and sell the fact that this woman, Aunt Ester, is nearly 300-years-old? Impossible,” I thought to myself. However, after realizing I was unable to run away from this role, I had no choice but to just do it!

For as long as I can remember, characters have always been referred to as “objects” and it is the actor’s job to bring this object to life. Part of that statement for me meant that in order for me to take ownership of Aunt Ester, I needed to stop referring to her as though she were a separate entity from Anedra. I needed to become Aunt Ester. So something as simple as declaring that “I AM Aunt Ester” instead proclaiming that “I’ll be playing the role of Aunt Ester,” was the first step in overcoming my fear. This is when I truly discovered the power of words.

Textual Analysis

In order to understand Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean*, I had to analyze the text. I started with reading the play repeatedly and highlighting the people, quotes, biblical, spiritual, and historical references that necessitated further research. After examining the references and gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of the literal and mythical stories, I read the

play to decipher the deeper meaning of the text. In doing so, I gained a greater understanding of the correlation between the mysticism and the story. While reading the play, I made note of the given circumstances: Who the characters are in relation to one another, the basic plot, the time of day and season, and where the action takes place. Thereafter, I completed a play analysis that strictly focused on the play, including the aforementioned given circumstances. I also noted the themes of the play, the central conflict, the key events in the rising action, and the climax and resolution. Then I attempted to score the script.

Scoring the script means breaking the script down into small units or scenes in order to discover the character's objectives (a goal or want). The traditional way for scoring a script requires the actor to list the objectives, tactics (how they go about achieving their goal), obstacles (what's standing in the way), and beats (a motivational unit that tends to a mini objective). A traditionally scored script is often organized in the following manner: The character objectives are placed in the left margin and tactics are placed in the right margin. Beats, which are indicated in the text as a forward slash, identify a change in tactics. Keeping in mind that tactics are action verbs executed by the actor to help the character achieve an objective, anytime a tactic does not work a new tactic should be implemented. At the end of a unit, one must note the obstacle of the unit in the right margin. An example of scoring is found in Appendix B. As I attempted to score my script, the objectives and tactics were becoming repetitive thus causing me to execute the lines in a less diverse and authentic manner. Considering *Gem* is a language driven play, I felt the need to focus on telling the story by using the language. Therefore, I decided to disregard scoring the script and focus on playing the language.

Before attending to the specifics of the language, I needed to gain more information about Aunt Ester which I did via completing a character analysis. A character analysis can

include the characters age, physical appearance, clothing, gestures, walks, etc. It can also include the character's emotional profile; habits and moods that the character experiences within the scene as well as the history of the character's relationship with others and the character's past. In a brief paragraph, I stated the most important information about Aunt Ester's history.

I discovered that Aunt Ester was born in 1619. Based on the research I had acquired, I decided that my back-story would be this: Aunt was one of the first slaves to be illegally transported from West Africa to the America's on the La Amistad Ship in 1839. She witnessed first hand the brutality of the middle passage and the Atlantic Slave Trade system in which millions of Africans were transported on ships to America to serve as slaves for the New World, with no regard to human rights. Two-hundred-plus years later, Aunt Ester's memories of lost loved ones who chose to die rather than to live at the submission of others, vividly resides in her mind. By leading members of the community on a mystical journey to the "City of Bones," Aunt Ester uses her experiences and memories of the middle passage as a means of healing for others to seek their redemption; for if she doesn't, her grievous memories will "eat her up" (I.V) or be the cause of her death.

Textual analysis allowed me to understand the given circumstances and identify with Aunt Ester intellectually. The next step in my process was to take the information from the script and give her a body and a voice.

Observations

Video observations were a very important aspect in my developmental process. Prior to starting rehearsals, I spent a great deal of time watching recordings of my grandmother and older aunts to observe their physicality and their voice. However, I was most drawn to one recording of my Aunt Bea who died at 116 years of age. In this specific video, she was 114-years-old, she

said nothing at all. She was just lying in her bed sleeping like an angel. However, her silence, and light breath said so much. I was staring at history; history since 1898. I vividly remember sitting at Aunt Bea's tiny feet when I was teenager listening to her tell vibrant stories about her past; some joyous, some painful, but she told them all with pride and a sense of ownership.

While I recall witnessing this four foot tall, extremely petite, and vibrant woman in action, this video simply reminded me of her exhaustion. In spite of her lively stories, anytime silence would grip hold of the air, she would respond with "I'm just tired." I figured this was certainly something I needed to keep in mind and bring to this role, for Aunt Ester is 285 years of age and there might be times when she is "just tired."

Incorporating Observations of Movement

In addition to observing videos of elderly women in my family as I developed the movement qualities of Aunt Ester, I spent a great deal of the summer visiting Baptist churches, aside from my own, on Sundays in Gainesville, Florida to observe how the elder women of the church interacted. This was extremely useful. In fact, my first Sunday attending Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, turned out to be a happy accident. It was Elders Appreciation Day!

As I sat in the pew of the church, in the center aisle, I observed many elderly women with all kinds of ailments, but I realized if I took that route (developing a physical ailment), I may fall into the trap of creating a stereotypical character. At that very moment, an elder woman of the church walked to the altar to do announcements. She was THE woman. She had to be 80-years-old or older. She was very tall and slender and dressed in a pumpernickel suit with pearl earrings, and plum lipstick. Her demeanor was that of Cecily Tyson. Her low vibrato, yet mellow, and raspy voice reminded me of Maya Angelou. Slicked back in two French Twists, her silver hair was formed into a perfect bun, resembling a historical photo of an elegant African American

woman in the 1930s. This was how I envisioned Aunt Ester. As this woman trailed back to her seat, I noticed her rhythm. Although the pacing of her walk was slow, there was a very subtle waddle that occurred between her steps. However, she moved with such ease and matter-of-factness. This was my first step to birthing Aunt Ester's physicality.

As an activist in the community of Gainesville, I used my resources to their greatest potential as I prepared the role of Aunt Ester. I began to interact more frequently with the elders of organizations I served in the Gainesville Community. Most of these elder women were also part of a social organization for senior citizens, known as the Red Hat Divas. All of these women reminded me of my grandmother and great aunts. They were amazing and filled with stories. The more time I spent with them, the more I picked up on their mannerisms. There was one Red Hat Diva who was in her 70s that was particularly striking to me. I observed that any time she would begin to stroke her left hand with her right fingers she was about to say something profound. It was a very subtle mannerism. It appeared that anytime she was deep in thought she'd take her fingers and begin massaging her opposite hand. After noticing this was a habit, I decided that this would be an interesting habit for me to incorporate in rehearsals as Aunt Ester.

Incorporating Vocal Training

In addition to observation and incorporating physicality, another major aspect of my process was vocal development. I wanted to explore the vocal instrument in every possible manner, allowing for more openness and liveliness vocally. I decided to type the entire script; not only to become familiar with the lines, but I wanted the language to be in my body before starting rehearsal. After typing the script, I began scoring the text vocally using the Arthur Lessac Technique in conjunction with the Yanci Technique. Scoring the script vocally requires the actor to highlight the operative words (words that are essential to telling the story), underline

sustainable consonants, and mark the open vowels. An example of vocal scoring can be found in Appendix C.

My greatest challenge approaching the vocal work, however, was filtering what techniques I learned over the past two years worked for me and what did not. I understood the importance of finding the rhythm, tone, stressing operatives, and indulging in the structure (articulation); however, I never grasped hold of the significance of stressing open vowels. Therefore, I decided to approach this script using what I found to be most beneficial: finding the rhythm through use of structure and operatives, and finding the tone of Aunt Ester's voice. I was determined to resist old habits such as tapping into my upper register when expressing excitement (or any emotion for that matter) or "punching" certain words in order to emphasize a point. As a result of that, I began to investigate how the text would be affected if I focused on coloring my operatives and slowing down. For example, for exploration purposes, I would emphasize a word in each sentence. This allowed me to discover a different meaning of line. As I investigated the text with a focus on vocal cues in relation to rhythm, I discovered that most of Aunt Ester's text was written in iambic pentameter, which is a line comprised of five "feet", each foot is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. This was important because when speaking text aloud that is written in iambic pentameter; one notices a set rhythm. In developing Aunt Ester, this discovery helped me find the rhythmic pattern of Aunt Ester.

The Rehearsal Process

By the time rehearsals began, I had accumulated a great deal of information through play analysis, textual analysis, character analysis, observations, experimenting with physicality, and applying what I've learned in vocal training. During the first week of rehearsal, my energy was geared towards playing the language; mechanically indulging in the iambic pentameter, the

consonants, and over-stressing operatives. In order to obtain my objective of releasing into the language with ease, I used the aforementioned technical aspects of vocal training.

After about two weeks of trying to find Aunt Ester's voice, the technical work that I spent a great deal of time on began to hinder my natural capabilities as an African American; the vocal work was too evident. I was failing to make the language my own because I was so focused on getting the mechanics of a European technique "right." It wasn't until I was reminded that we, as African Americans, have a natural rhythm in which we speak. That's when I was propelled to make this character my own. I pulled back from focusing on the mechanics of the Lessac Technique, trusted my vocal training, and began to focus on emulating my grandmother's voice observed in the videos. In doing so, I explored the pacing, tempo, and low vibrato in which she spoke and transferred that to Aunt Ester. Aunt Ester became my Grandma Edith. I found that it was acceptable to find comfort in the language and marry it with the Lessac technique. After discovering the rhythm, instead of sustaining every sustainable consonant, I would sustain consonants in words that became my operatives. I noticed that structure and articulation HAD to be my anchor in order to deliver the news, gossip, and lessons delivered to those around me, for it was essential for the other characters and the audience to understand Aunt Ester's parables and instructions.

Although I was constantly discovering Aunt Ester's voice, even through the run of the production, the same is also true for her physically. A week into the rehearsal process, actors were required to be off book. Once I was no longer allowed to depend on my script, focusing on the physical nuances of Aunt Ester became my primary focus.

I was once told that "amateurs borrow but a great actor steals." Those were the words on which my physical choices for Aunt Ester stood. I stole physical habits of the Red Hat Diva who

massaged her left hand with her fingers anytime she was trying to hear God's voice clearly. I stole the posture of a slight curve in her back from my Aunt Bea. I stole the waddling between her steps from the elder woman from Mount Moriah Baptist church. The more I began to explore these gestures and mannerisms, the more I found myself consistently exploring the mobility of my joints. I was always moving in space, thus discovering flow. Due to age, Aunt Ester slowly began to lose control over her extremities. By the end of the process, I had developed a unique set of habits, mannerism, nuances, and gestures that embodied nearly every elderly woman I consciously observed this past summer.

After the third week of rehearsal, I developed a reoccurring pain in the bottom of my spine, or lower back. I found myself crunching each vertebra in order to give the illusion of this petite woman, instead of releasing in the hips and directing energy up and forward through the spine. So, this problem was addressed in my Alexander Technique course on numerous occasions. I was reminded of the power of the mind. Anytime I found myself locking my hips, and tensing up my abdomen and neck, I began to think of releasing in my knees using double direction to release up and forward. I discovered that when I begin to "send directions" (mental instructions given in order to execute and action to bring about change once noticing habits of misuse) and encourage primary control (the innate relationship of the head, neck, and spine that allows balance and support of the body), the tension immediately released itself in my lower back. I also noticed less pressure was placed on my knees. Up until this point, I had been engaging in a downward pull, pulling all of my weight down and forward, which was the ultimate cause of pain in my lower back and knees. Once, I got this concept of "sending directions" under my belt, I discovered a sense of ease; vocally and physically.

Discovering Aunt Ester was certainly no easy task; however, I was determined to develop a process that worked for me and allowed me to explore all that I have mastered in acting in the last two years. For almost six months, I spent a great deal of time evolving into Aunt Ester. Compiling research, analyzing the script, making observations, as well as vocal and physical exploration; all were very important tasks in discovering Aunt Ester. Although it was certainly far from being effortless and at times it was extremely draining, I was committed to this very challenging role. However, my process did not end here. I relied heavily on my spirituality and the spirituality within the text.

Spirituality in *Gem of the Ocean*

In an interview with Samuel Freedman, August Wilson recalls one of his influences, Amiri Baraka, stating that "...when you look in the mirror you should see your God" (Elam 166). He continues his interview with Freedman posing the problem associated with African American spiritual beliefs:

All over the world, nobody has a God who doesn't resemble them. Except Black Americans. They can't even see they're worshipping someone else's God, because they want so badly to assimilate, to get the fruits of society. The message of America is "Leave your Africanness outside the door." My message is "Claim what is yours" (Elam 166).

In order to examine spirituality as it pertains to Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean* and the above statement, it is important that we understand the term spirituality, for Aunt Ester is deeply rooted in it. In an article written by contributing author Jolinda Cary she states that:

Spirituality is, in the most basic sense, matters pertaining to the spirit and is based on the idea that there exists something, be it in the state of mind, a being, or a place that is outside the experience of our five limited senses. Spirituality is the personal relationship of the individual to this state of mind, being or place and often emphasizes the notion of a path, that spirituality is a goal in achieving understanding, or an improved relationship with the sacred (Cary).

The manifestation of this experience is most recognizable in Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. This play explores spirituality in a very mystical manner, in which the individual undertakes an intense ancestral journey through the middle passage to "The City of Bones"; a place where

thousands of African slaves reside in a specific area of the Atlantic Ocean. In *Gem of the Ocean*, Citizen Barlow experiences the horrid conditions of the middle passage; this journey sparks an inner awareness that causes metamorphosis to occur, both psychologically and physically. During this intense transformation, Citizen is forced to rely upon the spirit within himself in order to survive and trust that there is something greater than the now; there is a greater being that exist within that is worth more than what society deems.

Spearheading this spiritual journey to redemption, Aunt Ester is the “critical figure mediating between the African past and the African American present” (Elam 184) in *Gem of the Ocean*. Wilson cleverly uses Aunt Ester to represent the blood memory that connects Africa to the American culture. Through Aunt Ester, he seeks to infuse a spirit that speaks to the African American culture; a spirituality that represents and connects African Americans to one another. Wilson’s tactic is revealed via the parables Aunt Ester tells prior to dispensing advice, and in the ritualistic manner in which she leads others to their redemption. These two things connect Africa’s Yoruban practices to that of Christianity.

Yoruba Spirituality is best described as a religious practice of West Africa that relies heavily on calling upon ancestors and the use of natural forces to promote a better life. Too complex to delve into, the basics of this spiritual system call believers to place their beliefs in a multitude of deities (supreme power). However, in *Gem*, Wilson places a lot of emphasis on the Orishas, or ‘ancestors (now gods) whose great deeds earned them divinity’ (“Yoruba Spirituality” 1). Supposing Aunt Ester is the blood memory, or personification of a collective memory, of the middle passage, she can be considered the goddess or Orisha of fresh water, Oshun. According to Yoruba Religion, Oshun:

...[r]epresents the intensity of the feelings and the spirituality, the human sensuality, the gentleness, the refinement, the love and all related to women... she represents the religious rigor and symbolizes the implacable punishment. She is the only one capable... to beg for human beings. In nature she is symbolized by the rivers... followers take offerings to the river and request her favors (“Yoruba Religion”).

There is an immediate correlation between Oshun and Aunt Ester. Both Aunt Ester and Oshun possess years of wisdom and knowledge that causes each of them to be a respected figure within the communities. They are also spiritual figures who aid in the redemption process for troubled human beings.

Aunt Ester’s personal past is continually alluded to in the script. She associates Citizen Barlow with her Junebug and the stars with her children, all of whom are now dead. Through her memories and reflections of them we learn the importance of holding on to memories, or more importantly, remembering our ancestors. In fact, the more I began to hear her name, the more I realized that Aunt Ester is a homonym of ancestor. Like Oshun, Aunt Ester is a goddess of water. She has the power to lead members of the community to the mystical “City of Bones” or the middle passage. She is the living goddess of the Pittsburgh River to which many are led in order to wash away their troubles. The parallels to Christianity are obvious in Wilson’s work as he incorporates several proverbs and biblical rituals such as Baptisms, the washing away of sins, and forgiveness of sin that are often practiced in Baptist churches.

The most sacred ritual that continues to take place in African American churches is baptisms. In Christianity, this ritual signifies the rebirth of life; a new life as a Christian with a renewal in the spirit, freeing you from all of your sins. In *Gem*, when Citizen Barlow is taken to

the City of Bones, he is led to the water heavily laden, racked with guilt because of a crime he has committed that led to Garret Brown's death. It isn't until he faces Garret Brown and confesses his wrong doings that Citizen experiences a cleansing within his spirit. In that moment, Citizen notices the gates opening to the City of Bones. He has been redeemed. Wilson writes in his stage directions, "*Overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of the city and the people with their tongues on fire. Citizen Barlow, now reborn as a man of the people...*" (II.II.70). It is at this moment that Citizen experiences a rebirth, a climactic moment within himself that led him to the City of Bones. In Christianity, the City of Bones would be considered Heaven, and in Yoruban religion, it represents total connectedness to the deities.

Like most of Wilson's works, *Gem of the Ocean* helps African Americans to remember their ancestors without shame. In remembering ones ancestors, we are able to elevate as individuals who are able to uplift others in the midst of a problem. Wilson's combination of West African spiritual practices and American Christianity in *Gem* allows spectators to join this ancestral journey led by Aunt Ester to the City of Bones, allowing them to experience the power of spirituality that exists within the African American culture.

Spirituality and Aunt Ester

“He can take you if you believe he can take you!”

Approaching the role of Aunt Ester from a spiritual stand point during rehearsals and performances was extremely organic and always effective. As a spiritual being, I relied heavily on my divinity for guidance because I truly believe that theatre is a ministry in which lives are saved and souls are healed. So it was understood that I had no control over the spirit. As a third year MFA student, my colleagues and I would always lead warm-ups prior to rehearsing. However, our warm-ups were not the usual body isolations, vocal warm-ups, etc. Cast warm-ups consisted of “juba”, and/or call and response. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, juba is ‘a dance of Southern plantation blacks accompanied by complexly rhythmic hand clapping and slapping of the knees and thighs.’ We would gather in a circle and whenever the spirit moved, we would follow. Rhythm was always the key, however. Our juba, a celebratory act, may start with someone stomping their feet. Another actor may chime in humming a tune. Someone else would contribute by clapping, or delivering a line, etc. This was done before EVERY SINGLE REHEARSAL and we wouldn’t stop until we were led by the spirit to stop or by an authority and move into the rehearsal tasks of the day. In a sense, we gave praise before every rehearsal. We would also evoke the spirit by calling random lines from the script and responding with the appropriate scripted line. Preparation for rehearsal was never the same and our juba always varied in rhythm and mood.

Transforming into Aunt Ester was a very intense task that required me to be focused at all times, even when I didn’t have the energy to do so. By participating in this production, I developed a spiritual habit. I used prayer as a foundation for refocusing my energy. I was always compelled to devote 5 to 10 minutes to the God who I serve and my ancestors, praying for their

presence to fill the room. Another interesting aspect that became essential during the performance was the use of sage. Before every performance, I would spend some time in the theatre getting acquainted with my ancestors. One of my colleagues would invite our ancestors into the theatre by walking around with sage and a candle, humming a spiritual. This became a ritual for our cast, and a powerful one at that. The entire theatrical space was transformed into a sanctuary, a house of worship. Through preparation, divinity, the incorporation of sage, and my own spirituality, by show time, I had emerged into Aunt Ester.

Conclusion

“She made me Right with Myself”

The first step in my creative process for *Gem of the Ocean* was to get a clear understanding of the text. This included researching the historical references mentioned in the play and the biblical stories mentioned in the script. Once I understood the text, I then began to research Aunt Ester’s emergence in August Wilson’s ten-play cycle. After gaining an understanding of Aunt Ester’s role in *Gem* and Wilson’s ten-play cycle, I was able to delve into character development and employ acting techniques I had learned throughout the course of my studies at the University of Florida in the MFA Acting Program. In doing so, I discovered which acting techniques worked for me. In order for me to reach an authenticity for Aunt Ester, I realized I had trust all that I had learned and add to my own sensibilities as an African American. However, there were many challenges I faced along the way. From overly engaging in the Lessac vocal technique to improper use of the body, discovering Aunt Ester was not simple. However, by consistently working towards telling the story with clarity and employing specific habits of elderly women I had observed, Aunt Ester became more believable.

In act two, scene one, Aunt Ester declares that “power is something. It’s hard to control but it’s hard to stand in the way of it.” I truly believe this line sums up my approach to this role. Prior to earning the role of Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean*, I never experienced a production or role that called for me to rely on my African American ancestors and my spirituality, which is probably why I hold this thesis project so close to my heart. This experience was truly something special. This role provided the academic challenge of researching August Wilson’s ten-play cycle in order to understand the greater meaning of Aunt Ester and her role in Wilson’s grand opus. This role also provided the creative challenge of believably and cleverly portraying a 285-

year-old woman and spiritual leader. This role was heavily influenced by spiritual intervention that occurred during rehearsals and throughout the run of the production. Although this process was emotionally draining and sometimes laborious, it was absolutely necessary, for the results of this very tedious process were extremely successful. This role allowed me to trust my knowledge and develop a process that was truly masterly, yet unique. For the first time at the University of Florida, I was able to indulge in fine African American dramatic literature in a challenging manner. As an African American artist, Wilson's lessons and proverbs in *Gem*, often spoken by Aunt Ester, made me "right with myself" (II.IV). For every night I had an opportunity to perform in this role, spiritually, Aunt Ester spoke life into me as an artist and for every being.

Appendix A

Rehearsal and Production Photos

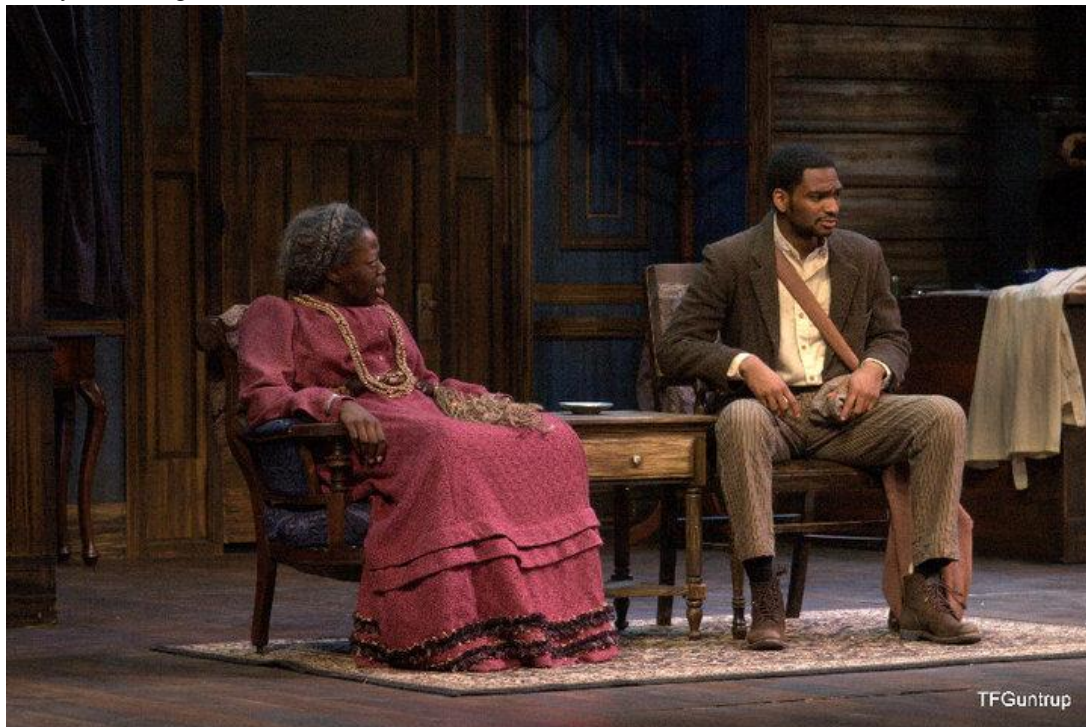


Top: Black Mary (Teniece D. Johnson) and Aunt Ester (Anedra D. Johnson)

Bottom: Aunt Ester and Citizen Barlow (Troy McCray)



Top left: Doug Milliron (Selig), Teniece D. Johnson (Black Mary), Carlos Alejandro (Caesar Wilkes), Ryan Johnson-Travis (Eli) **Bottom Left:** Anedra D. Johnson (Aunt Ester), Troy McCray (Citizen Barlow), and Reginald Wilson (Solly Two Kings)



Aunt Ester and Citizen (Troy McCray)

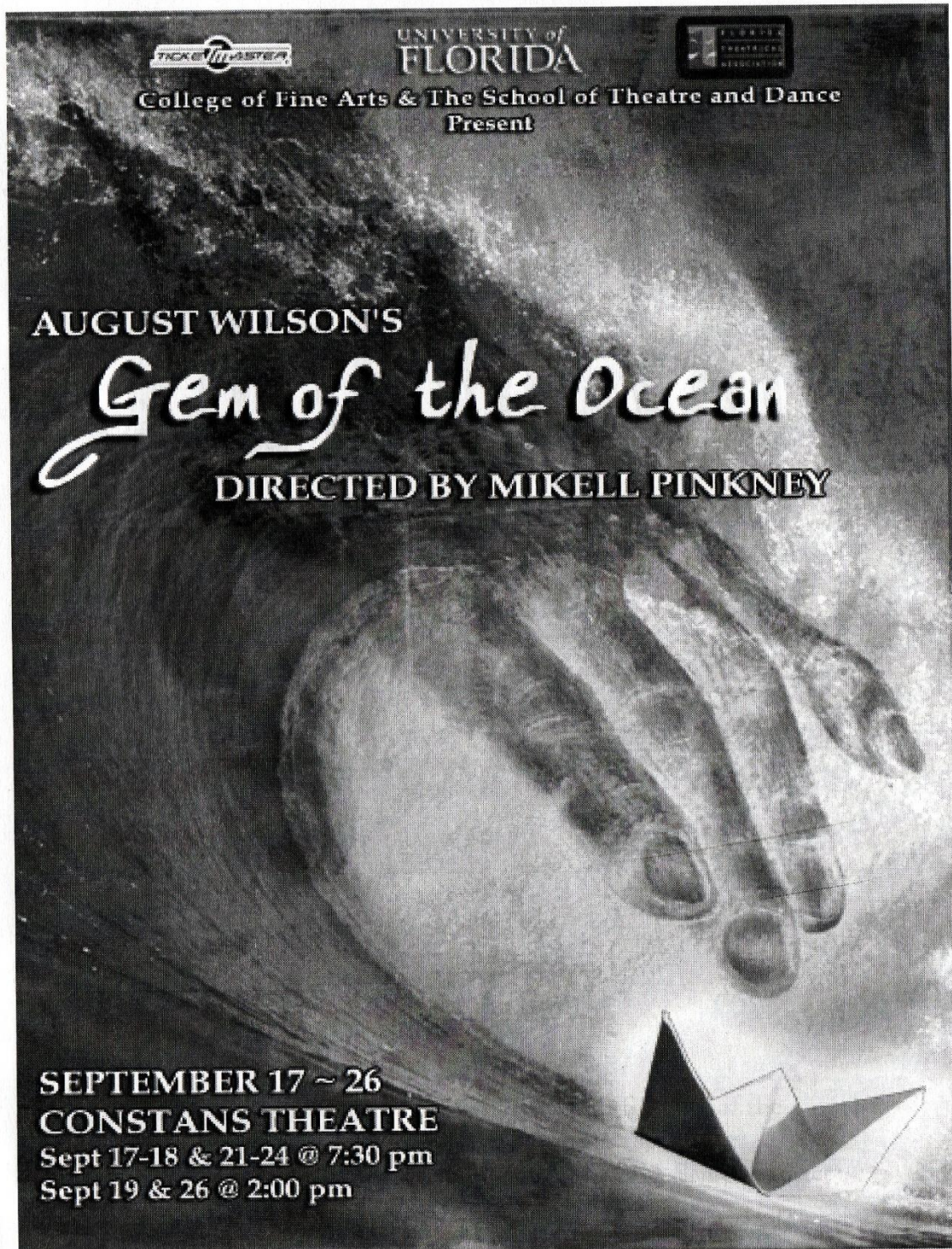


Aunt Ester and Solly Two Kings (Reginald Wilson)



Black Mary (Teniece D. Johnson) and Aunt Ester

Program



TICKETMASTER UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA **FLORIDA THEATRICAL ASSOCIATION**
College of Fine Arts & The School of Theatre and Dance
Present

AUGUST WILSON'S
Gem of the Ocean
DIRECTED BY MIKELL PINKNEY

SEPTEMBER 17 ~ 26
CONSTANS THEATRE
Sept 17-18 & 21-24 @ 7:30 pm
Sept 19 & 26 @ 2:00 pm

August Wilson's

Gem of the Ocean

Directed by

Mikell Pinkney

Scenic Design

Jovon Eberhardt

Costume Design

Susan Bucciero*

Lighting Design

Martha Carter #

Sound Design

Michael McShane

Stage Manager

Michael A. Sperber

*Project in lieu of thesis in partial fulfillment of the
Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre.

Denotes work in partial fulfillment of BFA Senior Project

The use of photography or video is strictly prohibited.
Cell phones and text messaging are not permitted.

About the Artists

Carlos Alejandro (Caesar Wilks) was born and raised in New York City. He started acting in church and fell in love. Ten years later having had received a BA in Theater from the City College of New York he is a second year Master in Fine Arts candidate at UF. Carlos is very excited to be a part of this incredibly powerful production. Special thanks to Mom, Dad, Maia, UF Faculty, fellow cast and crew, Dr. Pinkney, and our ancestors who made it possible for August Wilson to write this play and us to perform in it.

Aneadra D. Johnson* (Aunt Ester Tyler), hailing from the beautiful city of Miami, FL, is a 3rd-year MFA candidate. Her most recent credits at UF include *The Women (Crystal)*, *The Clean House (Lane)*, *Where Can We Run? Use Your Words!* (Aneadra), and more. She has also performed in The Hippodrome State Theatre's *A Christmas Carol* as the Ghost of Christmas Present. As she continues to move forward, she refuses to forget about those who have been an amazing support system: Thank you Merciful Father, my angel on earth (Mommy), my "night and shining armor" (Larry), Godi-ma (Marie D. Small), and family. Blessings!

Teniece Divya [D'VEE-ah] Johnson* (Black Mary) pays tribute to those that have braved the way so that she could find her voice. Humbled by the responsibility and gift of being a theatre artist, *GEM* marks her 15th production in Gainesville. Teniece is an activist, playwright, dreamer, poet, and forever a student of life. A Lehigh University two-time alum (Marketing/Africana Studies, Masters Sociology), this summer marked her international debut with UF's Streetcar Named Desire (Stella) performing in Hamburg, Brno and Prague. In January, she will be with the Forum Theatre in D.C. under the artistic direction of Michael Dove. To radiating light inspired by life: So FLY.

Ryan Johnson-Travis (Eli), a 2nd-year MFA candidate at UF, is a graduate of Syracuse University and Fort Valley State University. UF credits include: *The Faculty Room* (Carver), *Harmony (Man)*, *In The Blood* (Reverend D), *Machinal* (Chorus), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Businessman). "With supreme love and gratitude to my Ancestors and Chelsea."

Troy McCray (Citizen Barlow), a BFA candidate, is honored to participate in this great story about redemption and self-identity. We all can relate to being lost. Credits include *To Kill a Mockingbird* at GCP and UF's *Screamers*. He thanks his family, friends, cast/crew, and August Wilson for his contribution to African-American Theatre.

Douglas Rory Milliron* (Rutherford Selig) is a 3rd-year MFA. Being a part of this show has been a spiritual journey, and not in his wildest dreams could he have imagined a show that was so uplifting to his soul. Working with this collection of people has been a fun, energy filled, driven, and connected ride; this is a great way to start off my final semester at UF. After finishing his career at UF, Doug will move to LA to complete his internship and start his career in film. He thanks all of his UF family for their endless support and trust.

Reginald "Reggie Lee" Wilson* (Solly Two Kings) is a 3rd-year MFA acting candidate. He received a BA in theatre performance from Florida A&M University with a minor in Spanish. Performance credits at UF include *George Washington's Boy*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Screamers*, and two bids with Signs of Life Hip-Hop Theatre. Film credits at UF include *The Mega Spiker*, *Crazy*, *Space Has No Idea*, and *Queen of Hearts*. He is delighted to tell another one of August Wilson's stories. He thanks his family for their continual support and Luther Wells for not giving up on him. To his mom, "I love you and I'm on my way."

Helen Ammon (Assistant Scenic Designer) is a second year BFA Scenic Designer, is working on her first assistant design on the main stage. She would like to thank Jovon for the opportunity. She can't wait to become more active in UF shows.

Ryan Bible (Assistant Lighting Designer) is thrilled to join UF in pursuit of an MFA in Lighting Design. Ryan holds a BFA in Lighting Design and Technology from the College -Conservatory of Music at UC. Design credits include: *Postcard from Morocco*, *On the Verge*, CCM Drama's 25th Anniversary Gala, *Regional Premier of Tan Dun's Water Passion after St. Matthew*; Associate Design Credits include: *Altar Boyz*, *Drood*, *Spelling Rec*, *Sinokoy*, *Joe's Café*, *On the Town*.

Susan Bucciero* (Costume Designer) is a 3rd-year MFA costume design candidate. *GEM* marks her 3rd production at UF. She holds a BA from Rollins College and has spent more than ten years in various costuming roles in and around Orlando. This spring Susan was a finalist for the Marian A. Smith Award in costume design at SETC. Design credits include *Dance 2010* (UF), *Godspell*, *How I Learned to Drive* (UF), and *Biloxi Blues*, and the film *Hope for a Thorn*, which won the Audience Award at the Gasparilla International Film Festival. She thanks everyone who worked on this wonderful production, most of all her Asst. Costume Designer, Hailey Haynes.

Martha Carter # (Lighting Designer) is a senior BFA lighting design candidate. She has worked on countless productions here at the School of Theatre and Dance. She spent this past summer at Williamstown Theatre Festival where she worked with Broadway lighting designers as Second Assistant LD, Assistant Master Electrician, and designed a show. Martha also works closely with Florida Players and will design two of their productions this semester: *Art*, and *True Genius*. Previous credits include *Pride and Prejudice*, *Pillowman*, *Machinal*, *Jewdy's Show*, *Pullman Washington*. Martha thanks her friends, roommates, and family for all of their love and support. :)

Lexi DuFries (Assistant Stage Manager) is a 3rd-year student pursuing a BA in theatre. She is excited that her 1st production as Assistant Stage Manager is with the incredible cast and crew of *Gem of the Ocean*. Many thanks to the cast, crew, creative team, family, and friends.

Jovon Eberhart (Scenic Designer) is a 2nd-year scenic design MFA. She hails from the Quad-Cities, and completed her BA in theatre and marketing from Saint Ambrose University. Previous designs at UF include *Oedipus the King*, *Susannah*, *Fool for Love*, and *Marry Me a Little*.

Hailey Haynes (Assistant Costume Designer) is a 3rd-year BFA costume design student. Originally from St. Petersburg, Hailey is excited work on this production, her 1st time assisting. She looks forward to more shows here at UF and is grateful to be part of this wonderful program. Hailey thanks everyone in the costume shop for guidance and encouragement.

Mike McShane (Sound Designer) is an MFA lighting design student. Sound design: *Oedipus the King*, *Born Yesterday*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Mousetrap*, and *Noises Off*. He will design lights for *Dark Play* in October and *Romeo and Juliet* in April. He has directed two films: *You Are Not Frank Sinatra* and *The Votive Pic*. www.sonoofisham.com

Mikell Pinkney (Director) is currently Head of Performance & Graduate Actor Training in the School of Theatre and Dance. He earned a BA in theatre directing from Hampton Institute in Virginia, did graduate professional theatre studies at the University of Michigan-Arbor, film & television directing studies at NYU and earned MA and PhD degrees from The Ohio State University in dramatic theory. He has acted and directed for Broadway, Off and Off-Off Broadway and was an associate artist in the acting company of the Utah Shakespearean Festival. He has also served as artistic director for professional resident theatres in New York City and Detroit, MI. He is a past president and current Executive Board Consultant for the Black Theatre Network. His other UF directing credits include a wide range of production styles including: world premieres of *The Tune Traveler's Ball*, *Layla's Dream*, *The Cornbread Man* and *Where Can We Run*; *George Washington's Boy* by Ted Lange, Euripides' *Orestes*; Moliere's *Tartuffe*; Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Hamlet*; Feydeau's *A Flea in Her Ear*; August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*; Adrienne Kennedy's *The Ohio State Murders*; George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*; Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*; David Rabe's *Streamers*; Claire Luce's *The Women* and Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* and Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*.

Michael A. Sperber (Production Stage Manager), a 4th-year BFA lighting design candidate, has worked as a lighting designer, programmer, electrician, and stage manager for productions by UF, Florida Players, Hippodrome State Theatre, and American Dance Festival. Thanks to Sarah, Todd, Stan, and Mikell for their mentorship. Love to his "Gem of the Ocean."

Anne Tully (Properties) is a 1st-year MFA in scenic design student. She graduated from UF with a BA in theatre and a BS in journalism. Previous credits include *Where Can We Run?* in Summer 2009 and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in Fall 2009 with Florida Players.

Shatavia Woodie (Assistant Stage Manager) is a senior majoring in telecommunication and minoring in theatre. She thanks Dr. Pinkney for all that she's learned and will learn from him. She thanks the people in her circle for their love and support. Above all others, GOD deserves most thanks and appreciation from her. Hope and Pray.

Production Team

Alexander Technique Coach	Kathy Sarra
Fight Choreography	Tiza Garland
Vocal Coaching	Yanci Bukovec
Assistant Scenic Designer	Helen Ammon
Assistant Costume Designer	Hailey Haynes
Assistant Lighting Designer	Ryan Bible
Assistant Stage Managers	Lexi DuFries & Shatavia Woodie
Costume Advisor	Stacey Galloway
Costume Studio Manager	Lisa Davis
Asst. Costume Studio Manager	Kate Glennon
Costume Studio Assistants	Susan Bucciero, Lee Martin, Erica Bascom, & Jaime Samson
Sound Advisor	Jeremy Simicki
Master Electrician	Todd Bedell
Light Shop Assistants	Ryan Bible, B. Lussier, Mike McShane, & Tim Reed
Technical Director	Zak Herring
Master Carpenter	Tony Berry
Scenic Studio Assistants	Jovon Eberhart, Molly Ilten, Anne Tully & Tim Watson
Properties	Anne Tully
Director of Operations	Sarah White
Light Board Op	Jeanette Josaphat
Sound Board Op	Rachael Jones
Fight Captains	Teniece Johnson, Douglas Milliron
Stage Crews	Felipe Bombonato, Daniel Fineberg, Pete King, Kaitlin Lawrence
Deck Electrician	Eric Vanveelen
Wardrobe Supervisor	Adriana Fernandez
Wardrobe Crew	Gabriela Barrios, Caitlin Callahan, Cassie Perez, Nia Phillips

Acknowledgements

P&P Projects-For the Arts and Humanities; manicho,
 Patrick Pagano and the Digital Worlds Institute, Douglas Milliron,
 Mrs. Mary Byrd, Ryan J. Travis, UF Honors Program,
 The Friends of Theatre and Dance; Dean Lucinda Lavelli; Prof. Kathy Sarra;
 Prof. Yanci Bukovec, Prof. Tiza Garland, Visit Gainesville, Sarah White,
 Jeremy Simicki, African American Studies Program

**Appendix B:
An Actor's Score**

Objective

I want to advise
Black Mary

Tactics

Searching

AUNT ESTER: ...I don't know what done
got in that child. Seem like she don't want to
learn nothing. /

SOLLY: Black Mary stubborn. Her and
Caesar just alike. Only she ain't got his
evilness. But she got everything else. They
say the apple don't fall too far from the tree.
But sometime it fall far enough. That's the
difference between her and Caesar. The
apple fell and then it rolled a little bit.

(Black Mary enters carrying her purse.)

BLACK MARY: I'm going shopping. /

AUNT ESTER: It ain't like it's gonna do
itself. You got to plan better. I told you the
key is to plan. / You plan right you can
unlock any door. You got to run down on
Logan Street *and* do the laundry. You got to
do both.

BLACK MARY: I ain't say I wasn't gonna
do it. I said I'm going out now.

(Black Mary exits)

AUNT ESTER: She running down there to
see Percy Saunders. I know where she
going. She used to go see Percy Saunders
and Robert Smiley. I done told her the

Reprimanding

Teaching

Gossiping

- Obstacle: Black Mary will not listen

* / indicates tactics

Appendix C: Vocal Scoring

AUNT ESTER: ...I don't know what done got in that child. Seem like she don't want to learn nothing.

SOLLY: Black Mary stubborn. Her and Caesar just alike. Only she ain't got his evilness. But she got everything else. They say the apple don't fall too far from the tree. But sometime it fall far enough. That's the difference between her and Caesar. The apple fell and then it rolled a little bit.

(Black Mary enters carrying her purse.)

BLACK MARY: I'm going shopping.

AUNT ESTER: It ain't like it's gonna do itself. You got to plan better. I told you the key is to plan. You plan right you can unlock any door. You got to run down on Logan Street and do the laundry. You got to do both.

BLACK MARY: I ain't say I wasn't gonna do it. I said I'm going out now.

(Black Mary exits)

AUNT ESTER: She running down there to see Percy Saunders. I know where she going. She used to go see Percy Saunders and Robert Smiley. I done told her the people gonna throw stones at her.

Operatives: Emphasis placed on words that are essential to telling the story.

Consonants: Sustainable consonants that are not followed by a voiced vowel.

Structure: The enunciation of a word (aid in articulation)

Punctuation

Bibliography

- Bigsby, Christopher, ed. The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Cary, Jolinda. "What is Spirituality?" Suite101.com. 29 Apr. 2006
<<http://www.suite101.com/content/whatisspirituality-a1500>>.
- Elam Jr., Harry J. The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Elkins, Marilyn, ed. August Wilson: A Casebook. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994.
- "Oshun: Who is Oshun?" Yoruba Religion: The Santeria or Osha-Ifa Rule. 13 Oct. 2010
<<http://cubanyoruba.blogspot.com/2007/04/oshun.html>>.
- Parks, Suzan-Lori . "The Light in August". *American Theatre*. 22 Nov. 2005.
- Shannon, Sandra D. The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1995.
- Wilson, August. *Gem of the Ocean*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006.
- Wilson, August. *King Hedley*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005.
- Wilson, August. *Two Trains Running*. New York: Plume/Dutton, 1993.

Biographical Sketch

The youngest of three children, Anedra D. Johnson was born on August 1, 1986 in Miami, Florida to Rose M. Scarlett and Joe Johnson. Although she attended a plethora of secondary schools, she discovered her love for theatre at Charles R. Drew Middle School. Noticing the potential Anedra possessed, her mother also enrolled her at the African Heritage Cultural Art Center (AHCAC), a performing arts youth center that focuses on training young artists in all facets of the art. Anedra graduated from the Star Academy in Theatre at Dr. Michael M. Krop High School. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in theatre, with a minor in education, from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU) in 2008.

During her undergraduate years, Anedra was very active in the theatre department. She was the president of the Essential Theatre Union, a student organization that serves as the liaison between faculty and students, encourage higher learning, and provide students with mentors and sources necessary for pursuing theatre as a career. Anedra performed in many theatre productions at FAMU and in her home town, Miami, during the summers.

In the fall of 2008, Anedra began her studies at the University of Florida in pursuit of a Masters of Fine Arts degree in acting. Her performances at UF include roles in *Macbeth*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Clean House*, *Where Can We Run: Use Your Words!*, *The Women*, and *Gem of the Ocean*. She has also performed in The Hippodrome State Theatre's *A Christmas Carol* as the Ghost of Christmas Present.

Upon graduation, Anedra plans to fully engulf herself in the world of theatre while pursuing her dream of becoming a successful actress and opening a performing arts boarding school for underprivileged youth. With faith and perseverance, she is reaching for the stars!

"Success in life is a matter not so much of talent or opportunity as of concentration and perseverance!"

-C.W. Wendte-