

Crowns — Director's Notes

Welcome to the Omaha Community Playhouse production of *Crowns*, an adaptation of the coffee table book *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats* by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry. The book's stunning black-and-white portraiture and riveting oral histories, spiked with a generous dose of "hattitude," inspired the playwright Regina Taylor to adapt the material to the stage.

"When I first looked at the photographs and read the stories," she recalled, "I felt a deep sense of recognition - a sense of where I came from, a sense of the women who helped raise me, a sense of the community that was provided by aunts and neighbors and by the women who worshipped in the church I grew up in. There was very much a feeling of knowing all of these women at different points in my life. That was very exciting to me."

"I envisioned a Gospel music-driven piece," Taylor continued, "a crazy-quilt of music, movement and storytelling that takes us through the rituals of a Sunday in the South, with characters breaking out of the framework to deliver 'arias,' direct addresses to the audience that may start in the Sunday church service but jump off into memories of life experiences in different times and different places."

Crowns is full of hilarious "hat queen" testimonials, but for every hat queen turn, there's an intimate story of a childhood memory, a personal turning-point or a private grief. In giving voice to such experiences, *Crowns* never loses sight of two essentials. The first is that for African American women, hats are more than a fashion statement: they are outward

expressions of faith, symbols of cultural continuity and badges of honor. "Our crowns have already been bought and paid for," James Baldwin wrote. "All we have to do is wear them."

Crowns is an entertaining salute to a proud African American tradition, but as its stories, shapes and sounds remind us, that tradition evolved out of a long legacy of pain, pride, self-reliance and survival.

The second core value in Taylor's approach to the material is that *Crowns*, for all its culture-specific detail, *is not a private party!* "What I hope audiences will take away from *Crowns*," Taylor noted, "is the experience of people from different backgrounds coming into the theater as a community and being touched by their own recollections. I hope the piece will open up other doors of experience, doors people don't expect to walk through."

Whatever door brings you into this theatre, please feel free to laugh, cry, rejoice or reflect as your own spirit moves you. The gifted individuals, whose love and understanding of this material help bring its universal truths to the stage, have decidedly moved my spirit. They have my heartfelt thanks, each and every one.



Susan Baer Collins

*Regina Taylor quotations from the
McCarter Theatre Crowns Study Guide, 2002*



OMAHA COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE
presents

CROWNS

AUGUST 24 – SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

By
REGINA TAYLOR

Adapted from the book by
**MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM
& CRAIG MARBERRY**

Directed by
SUSAN BAER COLLINS

Setting Designed by
KEITH HART

Musical Direction by
JANET ASHLEY

Lighting Designed by
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ALEX McDONALD

Sound Designed by
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Choreographer/Staging Consultant
SONDRA McSWAIN

Stage Manager
JEANNE SHELTON

Assistant Choreographers
**MIA McSWAIN
MONICA McSWAIN**

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"Crowns" is presented through special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York, NY

Crowns = *Cast*

CHARACTER

ACTOR

Jeanette.....	LEILONI BREWER
Mabel.....	DEBORAH CONLEY
Velma.....	MILLICENT CRAWFORD
Yolanda.....	KEONNA CRAWFORD
Mother Shaw	LANETTE METOYER MOORE
Wanda	FAYE STEVENS
The Man	D. KEVIN WILLIAMS

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Arrangements by Linda Twine, Carl MaultsBy, DFA, and D. Pleasant

PROLOGUE

Rap – Where I Belong (Lyrics by Regina Taylor)

In the Morning (traditional; arranged by Linda Twine)

MORNING

Ain't that Good News (traditional)

PROCESSION

When the Saints Go Marching In
(Traditional; arranged by Carl MaultsBy, DFA, and Linda Twine)

Marching to Zion (Traditional)

MORNING SERVICE

Oh Lord I'm Waitin' on You (Traditional)

On the Battlefield for My Lord (Traditional)

That's All Right (Traditional; arranged by Linda Twine)

One of Them (Lyrics by Regina Taylor, Music by Daryl Waters)

Touch the Hem of His Garment (written by Sam Cooke, published by ABKCO Music, Inc. BMI)

His Eye Is On the Sparrow (Traditional)

None But the Righteous (Traditional)

FUNERAL

When I've Done the Best I Can I Want My Crown (Traditional; arranged by Carl MaultsBy, DFA)

I'm Gonna Roll On a Few Days Longer
(Traditional)

Mary Don't You Weep (by Inez Andrews by permission from Screen Gems, EMI Music, Inc.)

BAPTISM

Wade In The Water (Traditional)

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around
(Traditional)

Ole Ship of Zion (Traditional)

Take Me To the Water (Traditional)

Yonder Come Day (Traditional Gullah/
Geechee shout; percussion arranged by David Pleasant)

I've Got Joy Like A Fountain (Traditional)

This Joy (Traditional)

Amen (Traditional)

RECESSIONAL

I Gotta Crown (Traditional)

Keyboard/Conductor..... JANET ASHLEY

Percussion..... MIKE POLLOCK

Crowns = Bios

Leiloni Brewer *Jeanette*

Leiloni returns to the Playhouse stage since appearing in *You Can't Take It With You* as Rheba, the Harlem ensemble of *Ragtime*, a tribe member in *Hair*; *Little Shop of Horrors* as Ronnette, *Sweet Charity* as a Fandago Girl and *The Wiz* as multiple characters. Her other credits include the role of Sour Kangaroo in *Seussical the Musical*, the Fortune Teller in *Side Show* and several characters in *Bat Boy*. She would like to dedicate her performance to “my daughter, Raven, who inspires me to continue acting always and forever.”



Deborah Conley *Mabel*

Deborah returns to the Playhouse since playing in the Harlem ensemble of *Ragtime* and her Bill Bailey Debut Award winning performance as Viney in *The Miracle Worker*. Her other credits include the role of Ms. Mae, Honeypot, and ensemble of *A... My Name is Alice*, Clemma in *Proposals* at the Chanticleer (TAG nominee – Best Leading Actress) and Asaka in *Once on this Island* at the Center Stage. Deborah has an MPA from UNO and is a Program Director for Family Housing Advisory Services. In her free time she enjoys landscape



projects, playing with her pets and sharing life's joys with friends and family.

Keonna Crawford *Yolanda*

Keonna is welcomed to the Playhouse family as she makes her debut in *Crowns*. Recently, she played Risa in *Two Training Running* at the John Beasley Theatre. Keonna works in property management at Seldin. In her free time, she loves to dance, read, and travel.



Millicent Crawford *Velma*

Millicent dons the role of Velma at the Playhouse after playing the role of Mother Shaw in the John Beasley Theatre production of *Crowns*. She is a staff assistant at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. When not working she enjoys swimming, bike riding, and reading.



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Lanette Metoyer Moore

Mother Shaw

Lanette last appeared in the Playhouse's production of *The Women* as the Countess. Her other Playhouse credits include the role of Grace in *Grace and Glorie* (Fonda McGuire Award, TAG – Best Actress), Mama Euralie in *Once on this Island*, and Bernice in *Member of the Wedding*. Around Omaha, Lanette played the iconic role of SoJourney Truth in *A Woman Called Truth* at the Emmy Gifford Children's Theatre, Mama Bird in *Are You My Mother*, at the Emmy Gifford, and Lady in *Black in For Colored Girls* at Center Stage. Lanette is a mother of three and blessed to be "Nandi" to six grandchildren. She is a member of One Way Ministry Church, where she participates in the praise and worship team.



Faye Stevens

Wanda

Faye comes to the Playhouse with a strong theatrical background. In 1971 she was honored to receive an acting certificate as a participant in the Carnegie Hall Dramatic Workshop where she performed the role of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*. Her other theatrical credits include Rosalie



in *West Side Story* at Montclair State College, a potpourri of black women in *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* at Phillips University and woman of Troy in *Helen of Troy* at Phillips University. Faye earned her BA in Music Education K-12 and currently serves as a private piano, voice and drama teacher.

D. Kevin Williams

The Man

Kevin returns to the Playhouse stage since appearing as PaPa Ge in *Once on this Island*. His other Playhouse credits include Proteus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and Gabriel in *Shenandoah*. Most recently, Kevin appeared in VLA Productions' *Five to Ten* as Carl Jackson. His other credits include Frank-N-Furter in the *Rocky Horror Show* at the Millennium Theatre, Othello in *Othello* for UNO Fine Arts, and the King in *The King and I* at Chanticleer Theatre. Kevin is a voiceover artist for DIC Animation as well as a drama instructor and a member of the Salem Baptist Church gospel choir.



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Crowns = Bios

Janet Ashley

Music Director / Velma Understudy

Crowns marks Janet's first show at the Playhouse. She recently played the role of Velma in *Crowns* at the John Beasley Theatre. She earned her BA in Music Education from Bethel College and currently serves as a music teacher at St. Richards School. Janet is married to Rev. Gregory C. Ashley and is a mother of three.

Sondra Clifton McSwain

Choreographer

Sondra McSwain, a graduate of San Francisco State University, has studied and taught dance for over thirty years in the United States, Nigeria, New Zealand, Jamaica, and Switzerland

Sondra is a teacher, choreographer, dancer, actress, singer, storyteller, fitness expert, playwright, wife and mother. She was employed by the Omaha Junior / Gifford Theatre for many years as a core performer and choreographer. Her first appearance at the Omaha Community Playhouse was in *The Kid*.

Sondra performed with Dance Theatre '76, the Heritage Performers and ACAIR (African Culture and its Realities). She is co-founder of OMDC (Omaha Modern Dance Collective; Nebraska's voice for modern dance), Jubilee



Enterprises and the Black Repertory Ensemble (both performing arts groups). At Center Stage Theatre she staged and choreographed *Godspell*, *Raisin'*, and performed in *Crossroads*, *For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enough* and *Tell Me Another Story Sing Me Another Song*.

Sondra teaches dance for the Omaha Public and private school districts and is currently teaching at Dushesne Academy. As a Master Artist with the Nebraska Arts Council she has enjoyed working with many colleges and community groups including the Solomon Girls Center, Aksarben (pageant) and the Omaha Links (cotillion).

Crowns reminds Sondra of her hat wearing days and the ladies at Mingleton Temple and New Bethel Church.

Monica McSwain

*Assistant
Choreographer*

Born in the theaters of Nebraska, Monica McSwain danced her way to NY upon receiving a full scholarship to the Alvin Ailey Am. Dance Theater, and was invited to dance with the main company. Broadway and the Lincoln Center quickly followed and now Hollywood, where Monica is seen guest starring and leading in films such as *What About our Friends* and



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Crowns = Bios

Red Eye as well as several television shows and over 50 national commercials, all while fulfilling her gift as fashion designer and owner of the MAKEDA boutique in Los Angeles.

Mia McSwain

*Assistant
Choreographer*

Mia McSwain a native of Omaha, studied and performed with Dance Theater '76 and Omaha Ballet. In New York she performed with Dance Theatre of Harlem, Hudson Repertory Dance Theater, The Metropolitan Opera in *Porgy and Bess* and *Rebecca Kelley Dance*. Ms. McSwain has taught all levels of dance in the New York tri-state area and at universities across the country. Ms. McSwain joined Parsons Dance in 1993 and has performed in theaters around the world including the Opera House in Sydney, Australia, Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Japan, England, Korea, Italy, France, Holland, and Brazil. Ms. McSwain has staged works by Mr. Parsons at the New Arts Festival, Kansas City Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theater, George Mason University, and The Milwaukee Ballet. Ms. McSwain has designed costumes for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Introdance, Battleworks, Koresh Dance Company, and Parsons Dance.



Jeanne Shelton

Stage Manager

Jeanne has been active in the Omaha theatre scene for well over twenty years. At the Playhouse, she stage-managed *The Full Monty* (2006), *The Underpants* (2006), *Das Barbecue* (2006), *Sugar Babies* (2001), *Our Country's Good* (2001), *The Women* (2000), *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* (2000), *Moon Over Buffalo* (1999) *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Noises Off*, *The Bad Seed* and *Broadway Bound*. Her Playhouse acting credits include roles as Hunyak in *Chicago* and Tintinabula in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1991). Jeanne has worked 23 seasons backstage for *A Christmas Carol*, and in 1997, she received the Top Production Award at the Playhouse for outstanding backstage work. Jeanne works in customer service for HDM Corp. She is a Pheresis Donor for the Red Cross and enjoys spending her free time with her daughters, Nora and Rachel, and her husband, Michael.



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CROWNS

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Stephen G. Olson

Anne Rismiller

BACKSTAGE CREW

Dressers LAURAN ADKINS
MARY APPEGATE
MARILYN CAROL
JOANN GOODHEW

Cutter DONNA HIMMLEBERGER

Stitchers.....KIM DUTIEL
NADINE NOKER
CONNIE CRAMER
PAT TURNER
PAULA CLOWERS
LINDA STUART
RYAN HANSON

LightboardKRISANNE WEIMER
GARRETT SCHNATHORST

Soundboard STEVE PRIESMAN

Lobby display sponsored by
OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

Executive Director's Notes

As we begin our 83rd consecutive season of Omaha Community Playhouse productions, the enthusiasm is as great as ever. I'd like to think that it is the same level of enthusiasm that our founders displayed way back in 1924 when their dream of a community theatre became a reality.

This season begins with a little different twist as we open with a production in the Howard Drew Theatre. The cast and crew for "Crowns" have been hard at it since auditions began in early June. We are very proud to lead off our season with this fine production.

Thanks to the Omaha World-Herald for its sponsorship of our colorful lobby display of photos taken by the very-talented Rudy Smith. Thanks also to The Producers Club for sponsorship of the hats you will see in this production. In addition, we received a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council for our great choreographer.

Just a couple of reminders as a new season begins. The Playhouse, like all arts organizations, relies on contributions to make everything work financially. Please consider many a contribution to the Playhouse. Purchase a brick for \$200 and you will have your name on a brick in our lobby. Or purchase a star at our entrance – there's only one star left! – and your contribution will greatly aid the Playhouse.



We'd love to hear from you. Just call Alena Furlong (553-4890, Ext. 127) or me (Ext. 130) and we'll discuss these two options along with many others. Your support is vital to our organization.

Now, on with the show!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Tim Schmad
Executive Director

2007-2008 Board of Trustees

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VOLUNTEER

For over 80 years the citizens and businesses of Omaha have lent their time and talent to make this Playhouse what it is.

From on-stage performers to those specializing in specific backstage trades, the Omaha Community Playhouse needs YOU!

Please share your creative gifts with this community.
Call our volunteer coordinator at (402) 553-4890, ext. 114

ARTISTIC		OCP STAFF	ADMINISTRATIVE	
Carl Beck Artistic Director			Tim Schmad Executive Director	
James Boggess Music Director	Jim Othuse Scenic & Lighting Designer	Matthew Bross House Manager/Marketing Associate	Jim Martin Director of Audience Services	
Michael Bristol Scenic Artist	Georgiann Regan Costume Designer	Steve Bross Apprenticeship Director	Lara Marsh NTC Artistic Coordinator/ Apprentice Coordinator	
Paula Clowers Costume Shop Supervisor	Amy Reiner Properties Master	Mitch Fuller Asst. Box Office Manager	Robert McCurry Facility Manager	
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Darrin Golden Scene Shop Foreman	Greg Scheer NTC Managing Director & OCP Production Coordinator	Michelle Garrity Staff Accountant	Betsye Paragas Director of Marketing & Public Relations	
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		Roxanne Nielsen Choreographer/Education/ Outreach Director		