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.

*Crowns* – Director’s Notes

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

Lighting Designed by
STEVEN L. WILLIAMS

Sound Designed by
JOHN GIBILISCO

Stage Manager
JEANNE SHELTON

Technical Director
DON HOOK

Production Coordinator
GREG SCHEER

Musical Direction by
JANET ASHLEY

Associate Music Director
ALEX McDONALD

Choreographer/Staging Consultant
SONDRA McSWAIN

Assistant Choreographers
MIA McSWAIN
MONICA McSWAIN

Costumes Designed by
GEORGIANN REGAN

Millinery Designed by
LYNNE RIDGE

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OMAHA METROPOLITAN CHAPTER

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<td>D. KEVIN WILLIAMS</td>
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**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
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 Univeristy 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 Sojourner 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.
Discuss the Productions
Have you ever seen a show and wished you could discuss the production with the cast? Well now you can. Please consider attending one of our FOUR Talk Backs this season!

You can ask questions about the story, audition process, rehearsals, how a production all comes together, etc.

Talk Backs begin five minutes after the performance on the evenings indicated below. There is no additional cost for the discussion. For more information please call (402) 553-4890 ext. 110.

CROWNS
Friday, September 7, 2007

MATT AND BEN
Friday, November 2, 2007

COMPANY
Friday, February 22, 2008

THE CRUCIBLE
Friday, May 16, 2008

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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 Duschesne 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. McSwian has designed costumes for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Introdance, Battleworks, Koresh Dance Company, and Parsons Dance.

Jeanne Shelton
Stage Manager

The Playhouse Producers is an educational support organization comprised of active and retired businesspeople drawn together by a shared interest in the Omaha Community Playhouse. As a member, you will learn some of the behind-the-scene elements which make our productions so spectacular.

Playhouse Producers play an important role in our continued success. Your knowledge of and familiarity with the Playhouse will make you a virtual ambassador.

The Producers Club host four luncheons a season – each of which will educate and entertain members about backstage elements of an upcoming production.

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- Discounts on classes
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- Help spread culture within the Omaha metro

Playhouse Producers 2007-2008 Season

**CROWNS**
Luncheon – August 16, 2007
Gospel music and dance underscore this celebratory musical play which explores African American history as seen through the eyes of a young black woman and the “hat queens” she encounters. (Hats are sponsored by The Playhouse Producers)

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Luncheon – May 15, 2008
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The Omaha Community Playhouse greatly appreciates your gift and desires to recognize you appropriately. We appreciate your patience as we transition to a new donation tracking system. You may notice some changes in our Prompter listings; for example, in-kind donors are now listed within the normal donation levels. Please feel free to contact the Development Department at 553-4890x127 with any corrections or omissions. We'd love to recognize your gift of $100 or more.
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Lobby display sponsored by
OMAHA WORLD-HERALD
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!

Tim Schmad
Executive Director
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

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Scenic Artist

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Scene Shop Foreman

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