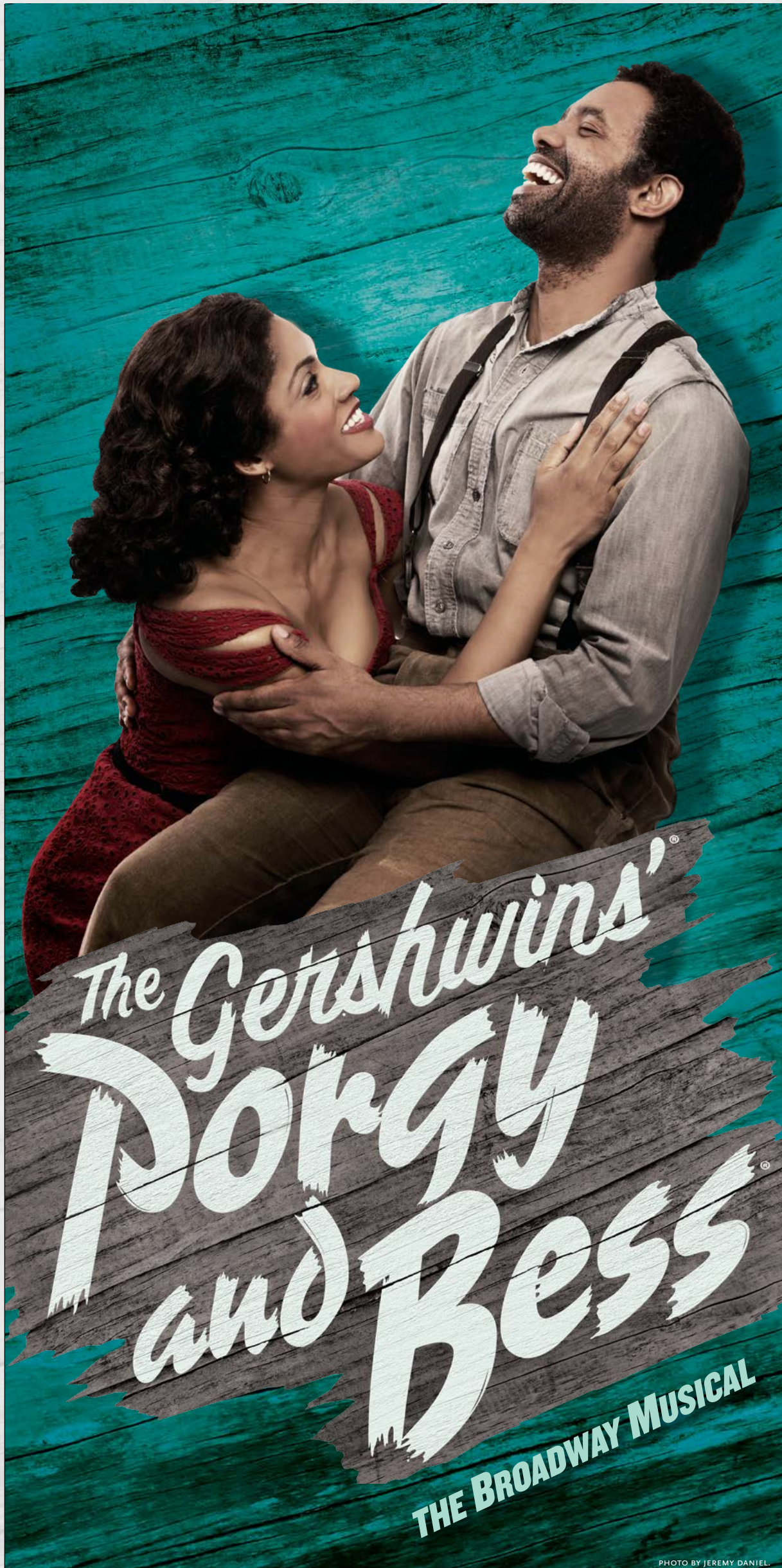


Discovery Guide



Welcome to Center Theatre Group and *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*,

a story about two people who, against unthinkable odds, find each other and find love. A story about love's ability to shelter, transform and make us whole. A story about second chances. Porgy and Bess's love story keeps getting told: as a book, a play, an opera, a film and now as musical theatre.

On the South Carolina coast in the late 30s, we meet the vibrant community of Catfish Row. In the face of poverty, drugs, hurricanes and violence, the community stands strong — joining together to protect, celebrate and support one another. To pray, dance and sing together.

The music of *Porgy and Bess* is performed all over the world. It is considered uniquely American, bringing together classical music, spirituals, jazz, gospel and the blues to create something totally new. Just as the love story is told and retold, this music is played, sung and reimaged by musicians everywhere.

The music has become such a part of our culture that you may even know some of the songs without realizing that they are from *Porgy and Bess*. Have you ever heard anyone sing "Summertime and the living is easy...?"

Why do you think artists keep telling this love story and sharing this music? What is the power of love and music in our lives? How does love provide shelter against the harshness of the world? How does music?

Turn the page to learn about the Gullah community that was the inspiration for the people we meet on Catfish Row; take a look at the many covers of "Summertime"; read an interview with musical score adapter Diedre L. Murray about the beauty of storytelling and expression.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers and perhaps, additional questions. See what questions this information raises for you and what discoveries the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

*You don't need to be afraid no more.
You picked
up happiness
and laid your
worries down.*

—The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*

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Summertime and the Living is Easy...?

LATE 30s, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA. In the courtyard of Catfish Row, a tenement near the harbor, the residents gather on a beautiful Saturday night. A friendly game of dice starts up. Porgy — a beggar with a bad leg — joins in. He is a valued member of the community even though his physical disability prevents him from working on the fishing boats like the other men in the neighborhood. As more men join the game, the stakes get higher. Crown, a dockworker with a hot temper and a weakness for drugs and alcohol, accuses Porgy of cheating. When the other men leap to Porgy's defense, a fight breaks out, and Crown, in a drunken rage, murders one of the other gamblers.

Crown flees, leaving his girlfriend Bess behind. Beautiful and defiant, Bess is an outsider. Shunned by the women of Catfish Row because of her partying and drug use, she has nowhere to turn — until Porgy opens his door and invites her into his home and his heart.

A hurricane threatens Catfish Row. Only after the wreckage has been cleared will we discover if Porgy and Bess's love is strong enough to survive.

The People of Catfish Row

Porgy Disabled from birth. Because he cannot do physical labor, he begs and gambles for a living. He believes that his disability is a sign that "God made [him] to be lonely." However, he is a respected and valued member of the community. At the start of the play he calls himself a lucky gambler, and by the end he is ready to gamble everything for love.

Bess Struggles with addiction and her abusive relationship with Crown. She is not welcomed by the women in the community at first. She is gossiped about for "drinking liquor like a man" and considered "fast." Through her efforts to better her life, she is eventually trusted to care for the youngest member of Catfish Row, Clara and Jake's baby.

Crown A violent temper and drinking makes the community keep him at a distance. He considers Bess "his" and mocks Porgy. He becomes more dangerous when he realizes that he could lose Bess to Porgy. But even Crown needs to belong to someone or something. He tells Bess "I'm almost dead of the lonesomes."

Sporting Life Originally from Catfish Row, now living the "high life" in New York City. He has come back home to profit from his community, peddling booze and drugs and tempting people with ideas of big city life.

Mariah The matriarch of the community, considered "the law of Catfish Row." Mariah owns her own business and provides wisdom, protection and justice. She stands up to Sporting Life to keep his drugs from harming her community.

Serena Deeply religious and at first judgmental of Bess. But when Bess becomes ill and Porgy is afraid to take her to the "white man's hospital," Serena reminds him that her prayers have always healed their community. As Serena prays, we realize that Bess, a former outcast, has truly been accepted into the heart of Catfish Row.

Clara & Jake Young parents. Jake is a fisherman and captain of his boat, the Sea Gull. He believes that he can best care for his son by providing for him, even if that involves facing danger. Clara doesn't agree, feeling that they can best shelter their baby by being present and careful.



The cast of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. PHOTO BY MICHAEL J. LUTCH.

"We just followed the glorious music."
 —Suzan-Lori Parks

"Gershwin fused blues tonalities, spirituals and other elements of African-American music into a full-length opera... It had never been done before. Some would say it's never been done since."

—Joe Nocera, New York Times, January 2012

The story of Porgy and Bess has been told over and over again: as a novel, a play, an opera, a film and as musical theatre. It is known for its powerful, original music and its composer: George Gershwin.

George Gershwin loved all forms of music. Whether he was composing for concert halls, vaudeville theatres, or jazz clubs, he found inspiration in every genre: classical, jazz, spirituals, gospel, blues, work songs, Jewish liturgical music, European folk songs, opera, musical theatre, ragtime and popular music. His genius came from his unique ability to combine these musical forms, truly reflecting the American cultural melting pot.

Like today's DJs, Gershwin sampled everything, splicing different elements together to create something totally new. His work often defied labels. Music writer Jeff Lunden points out, "He was an almost

mythic figure in American culture... a true American original. The son of Russian immigrants, he soaked up all the sounds he heard... and with his genius synthesized them into his own distinctive voice."

When Gershwin read DuBose Heyward's 1925 novel *Porgy*, he knew that the story had all the elements of a great opera. He also knew that the traditional opera sound could be pushed further, to include elements of spirituals, jazz, popular and folk music from the many cultures making up the American landscape.

Gershwin's opera was unlike any opera ever heard before. Since its premiere in 1935 and for most of its history, the sound of *Porgy and Bess* was so different from other operas, critics and audiences alike debated whether or not it should even be called an opera, often labeling it a "folk opera."

Opera & Musical Theatre

"Operas are not generally written about Goody Two-shoes. They're written about murderers, pimps, whores, spies, martyrs, and incidentally, lovers. You look at the great operas, and there are always villains in them."

—Record producer, Thomas Z. Shepard

Opera and musical theatre both combine music and acting to tell stories that deal with the most dramatic human emotions: love, lust, greed, revenge, jealousy, death. In both, characters burst into song when their emotions become too big for spoken words alone.

However, opera has some very distinctive qualities. All of an opera's dialogue is performed in a hybrid between singing and talking, called "recitatives." The vocals traditionally cover a wide range of notes, going from very high to very low. Opera singers are known for the power of their voices, holding challenging notes beyond what seems humanly possible.

While opera tends to focus mostly on the music, musical theatre tends to place more of an equal emphasis on music, storytelling, and movement. This production of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* was

created from the desire to share this masterpiece with people who might never go to the opera. The George and Ira Gershwin estates and Heyward estates wanted to make a version that would be emotional, human, and accessible to contemporary musical theatre audiences.

The creative team, made up of director Diane Paulus, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, and composer Diedre L. Murray, focused on "modernizing without disturbing." They replaced many of the recitatives with spoken dialogue, reduced the size of the orchestra, and toned down the heavy dialect of the original. They also added or adjusted some dialogue to strengthen certain characters, and to clarify their backstories and motivation.

Unlike characters in musical theatre and opera, we don't usually burst into song in real life to share our feelings. Yet, music often helps express how we are feeling better than words can. What music do you turn to when words are not enough? What does that music express about or for you?

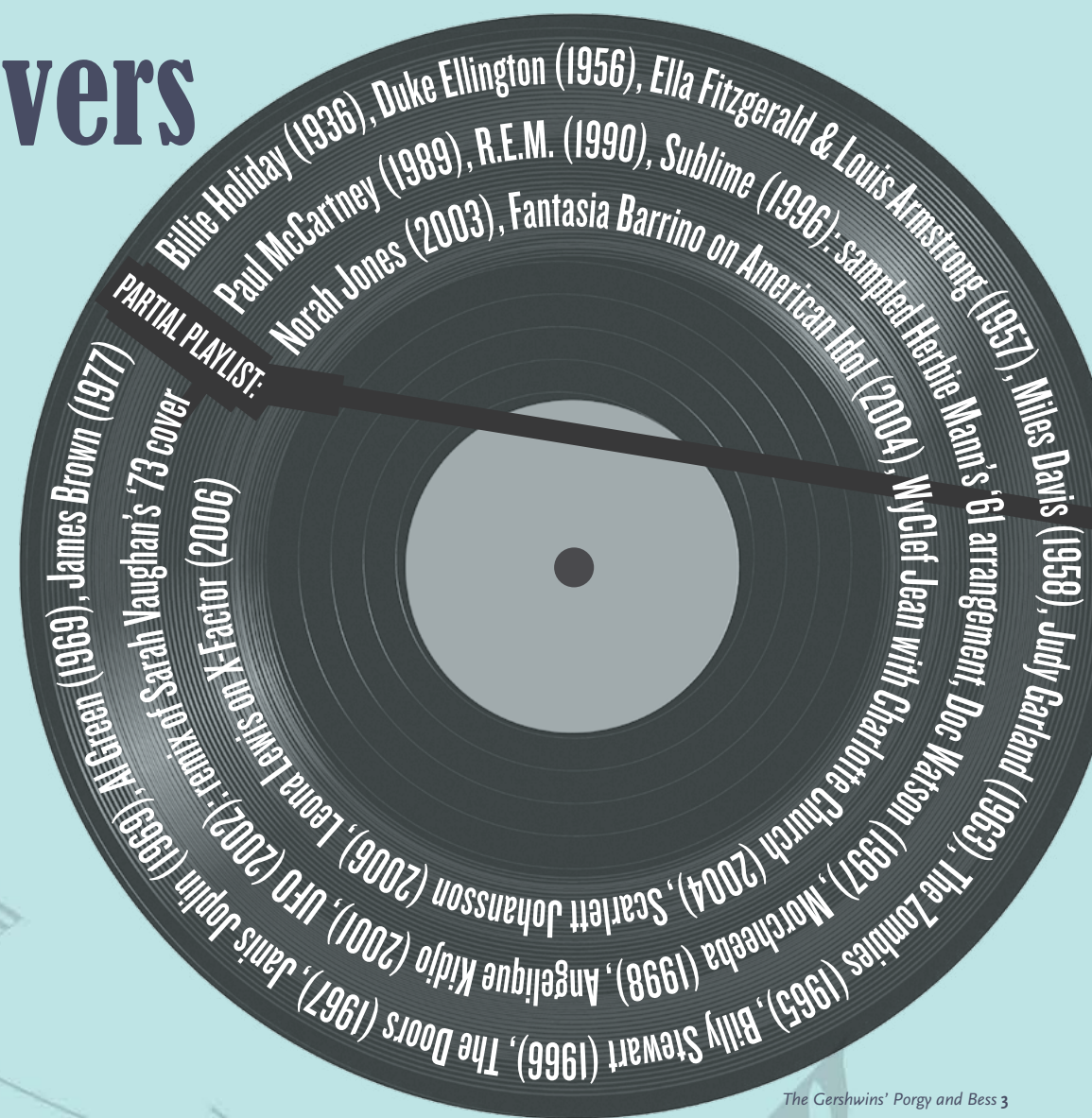
"Summertime" Covers

"The song says summer, and the magic of it is that it says so many different summers — the hot, urban summer or the lazy, rural summer — depending on who's doing it.... [It] consists of only six notes; that's part of its mystery."

—Sara Fishko, music reporter, NPR

"Summertime" is one of the most covered songs in history; it has been professionally recorded more than 33,000 times by artists of all genres, from all over the world, and in all decades. It even has an international website dedicated to collecting and documenting its covers.

Why do you think so many artists want to record "Summertime"? Why do audiences listen to it over and over again?



The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* 3



Center Theatre Group
 L.A.'s Theatre Company
 A non-profit arts organization

Ahmanson Theatre
 Mark Taper Forum
 Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Education and Community Partnerships
 CenterTheatreGroup.org/
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Audience Services
 213.628.2772
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Theatre Locations
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Sumayya Ali as Clara in *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*. PHOTO BY MICHAEL J. LUTCH.

Shelter

“There’s a-nothing can harm you.”

—The Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess*

AT THE CENTER of *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* is a violent storm, a hurricane that crashes across Catfish Row. The community we meet is also hit with metaphorical storms: addiction, violence, loneliness. We see the characters search for shelter in the arms of a loved one, through celebrating or mourning with their community, through prayer and hymns.

Love

“Porgy and Bess is a story of ... the redemptive and transformative power of love.”

—Kim McLarin, WGBH Arts

At its heart, *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* is a love story — a story of the desire to be made whole by love. To be given a second chance. To find someone who loves you for who you are, just as you are, flaws and all.

While some of the residents of Catfish Row laugh at the idea of “the fast gal marrying the cripple,” Porgy and Bess’s love helps them rise above these labels to see themselves and each other as complete and complex human beings.

Through meeting Porgy, Bess recognizes her chance for a different life, a “decent life.” Porgy helps her see past her mistakes to who she truly is: a woman who deserves to love and be loved.

This unconditional love goes both ways. Bess sees more than Porgy’s disability. She rejects the assumption that a “cripple” isn’t a real man. With her love, Porgy discovers the man he really is: strong, kind, protective, and willing to do whatever is needed to keep Bess safe.

As we watch Porgy and Bess’s love grow, we root for them. We want their love to conquer addiction and be stronger than any challenge. We hope that love will provide a shelter from the violence and harshness of the outside world and give them (and us) the courage to become our best selves.

Is there someone who sees beyond any labels you’ve been given or mistakes you’ve made to the person you really are? What does it take to see past a label?

How does love help us become the best version of ourselves?

Have you ever given someone a second chance? Have you ever been given a second chance? What’s the power of a second chance?



Alicia Hall Moran as Bess and Nathaniel Stampley as Porgy in *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*. PHOTO BY MICHAEL J. LUTCH.

The Community of Catfish Row

“They’re sticking together on that.”

—The Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess*

CATFISH ROW is a vibrant, hardworking, religious, passionate community; fiercely protective of its own but suspicious of outsiders and anyone who might do them harm. A community ready to do whatever it takes to keep each other safe. From past experience, they know they can’t rely on help or justice coming from the white world outside. If there is to be any justice, it will have to come from within the community itself.

What is the safety or protection of being part of a community? Why do humans need to belong to something larger than ourselves?

Mariah stands up for her community, telling *Sporting Life*, “Nobody ain’t gonna peddle that Happy Dust round my spot.” How do you rid a community of forces that are harmful and destructive? How do you stand up for your community?

Storm

“And where you gonna stand when the sky comes a tumbling down...”

—The Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess*

DESPITE THE SHELTER AND PROTECTION of the community, life on Catfish Row is not easy. From the threat of hurricanes, to the danger of human brutality triggered by alcohol or “happy dust,” violence is like a storm cloud, threatening to erupt at any time.

Hurricane

Hurricanes like the one in *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* are a real and present danger in South Carolina. One of the most violent occurred in 1893 when DuBose Heyward was eight years old. Called “The Sea Islands Hurricane,” its winds reached upwards of 120 mph and caused a tidal wave that completely submerged many of the islands. Over 2,000 people died — mostly by drowning — and approximately 25,000 were left homeless.

Inner Storm

Hurricanes are not the only danger. Bess struggles with her addiction to “happy dust” and to her violent lover, Crown. She knows that neither drugs nor Crown are good for her; they hurt her and, yet, it isn’t easy to resist them. *Sporting Life* tells her “nobody ever gave up happy dust.” A storm rages inside Bess as she battles to prove him wrong, for a second chance, for a new life.

We all have things or people that we know are not good for us and, yet, it isn’t always easy to resist them. What does it take to let go of something or someone that causes us harm?

Do you know someone battling an inner storm? Is it possible to support or shelter them while they struggle or do they need to face this challenge alone?



Kingsley Leggs as *Sporting Life* in *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*. PHOTO BY MICHAEL J. LUTCH.

The Gullah Community

“The Gullah culture... has a language, history, economic system, and artistic vision found nowhere else.”

—Bill Moyers, NOW with Bill Moyers, PBS

“Gullah to the bone... that’s exactly what Michelle Obama is. Gullah to the bone!”

—Vermelle Rodrigues, Gullah artist and director of the Gullah Ooman Museum

Catfish Row and the characters who live there are based on a real and completely unique American community — the Gullah people of South Carolina. Growing up in Charleston, South Carolina, novelist DuBose Heyward observed his Gullah neighbors every day and was inspired to write the novel *Porgy* as a way of documenting their language and traditions.

Catfish Row doesn’t really exist, but it is similar to Cabbage Row, a tenement in Charleston where neighbors sold vegetables (mostly cabbage) from their windows to passers-by on the street. The majority of residents were Gullah — the descendants of enslaved Africans from the local rice plantations.

“Gullah” refers to the people, the language, and their culture. This population has kept more of their African cultural heritage than any other group of African-Americans.

Gullah and Krio (the language spoken in western Africa and Sierra Leone) still have a lot in common. Even today, it is possible for native speakers of both languages to understand each other. This is because the Gullah language, also called “Sea Island Creole,” came into being at the very beginning of the slave trade, when Africans and Europeans needed a way to communicate. Made up of both English and African words, Gullah evolved into its own complex and complete language. Today, Gullah is spoken by approximately 250,000 people.

Many other elements of today’s Gullah culture — food, music, fables, tools, crafts, rituals, farming and fishing techniques — are identical to those in West Africa.

How is it possible that so many cultural elements survived intact despite being separated from Africa by the Atlantic Ocean and the passage of hundreds of years? Historians believe it is because of the conditions required to grow rice, the main crop of South Carolinian plantations.

Rice is a challenging crop, and Americans had very little experience with it. West Africans, however, had been farming rice successfully for thousands of years, so plantation owners bought slaves from that area in large numbers. The swampy conditions and subtropical climate ideal for rice was also ideal for malaria and yellow fever. Gullah slaves had inherited immunity that their white owners did not have. As a result, plantation owners often lived long distances from their plantations.

At the same time, the demand for skilled slave labor from West Africa increased. Because of this, there was a black population majority in South Carolina by 1708. This large West African population, essentially separated from the cultural influences of white Americans, made it possible for the Gullah community to retain its heritage.

Even after slavery ended, Gullah culture continued to survive. Bridges to the Sea Islands weren’t built until the 1920s, making travel to and from the South Carolina mainland challenging. Isolation became a way of life. Limited exposure to the outside world created meaningful and strong community bonds like those we see in *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*.

Ef oona ent kno whe oona da gwuine, oona should know weh oona kim from. If you don’t know where you’re going, you should know where you come from.

—Gullah saying



“That long, long road...”: Porgy, Bess, & America

PORGY AND BESS IS A STORY that is never separate from the racial climate of the time in which it is performed. Audiences bring their personal experiences of and feelings about race in America with them into the theatre. Each time the story is told, it causes strong reactions and impacts the world around it. It has always made people think, talk, feel, argue, question, and reflect.

1925: Novel

The characters Porgy and Bess first appeared in the novel *Porgy* by DuBois Heyward. A white man, writing based on his observations of the Gullah community he grew up with, Heyward's realism was a radical, even progressive, approach at a time when most Southern literature written by white authors either resorted to stereotypes or avoided the subject of African-Americans altogether.

The novel was a commercial and critical success. But many readers took issue with Heyward's choice to focus only on the poorest sector of Charleston's black community; and even positive reviews couldn't ignore the fact that he was writing about a community he didn't belong to. This question of authenticity — doubts that someone of one race could really understand and speak for someone of another race — would continue to follow the *Porgy and Bess* story in all of its incarnations.

Scholar and author W.E.B. DuBois praised the novel for its artistry, but called for a body of African-American literature “About us... By us... For us... and near us.”

1927: Play

Heyward's wife Dorothy, herself a playwright, felt the story belonged on the stage and collaborated with DuBois on the theatrical adaptation. The play opened on Broadway and was, like the novel, a commercial success. But reactions were complicated. Some audiences felt the play finally put African-American life front and center at a time when black artists were presented with very few opportunities to tell their own stories. However, the slice of life it depicted centered around poverty and crime and some worried it would simply reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate prejudice.

The play was radically progressive in its casting. The practice of white actors working in blackface makeup was widely accepted at the time. But the Heywards insisted on casting black actors to play black roles. This choice challenged the assumption common at the time that white actors were more skilled than their black counterparts and began a movement toward a more inclusive American theatre.

1935: Opera

George Gershwin had been commissioned to compose an original American opera by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. When he read Heyward's novel, he knew it was the story he wanted to tell, but he also knew it couldn't be done at the Met. The Met was segregated, and like the Heywards, he refused to let the piece be performed by white artists in blackface.

When the opera premiered at the Colonial Theater in Boston, reactions were strong — people either loved it or hated it and the debate about authenticity surfaced again. Critics continued to wonder “how well a white southerner and two Jewish men from New York could express the complexity of southern African-American life.” (Travis Jackson, ethnomusicologist)

1936: Tour

The U.S. tour's final stop was at Washington, D.C.'s National Theatre. Todd Duncan, who played Porgy and Anne Brown, who played Bess, refused to perform because the National was closed to non-white audiences. Despite threats of lawsuits, Duncan and Brown would not compromise; they led the rest of the cast in protesting the theatre's segregation. Management eventually gave into their demands. The tour made history with the National Theatre's first fully integrated audiences.

1959: Film

Movie producer Samuel Goldwyn assembled an all-star cast, including Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, Pearl Bailey and Sammy Davis, Jr. Filming was extremely challenging (at one point the entire set burned down), and much of the cast had deeply mixed feelings about the project.

The film version of *Porgy and Bess* provoked the most vocal criticism and public debate about the violence, drugs and other stereotypes depicted. In conversation with Otto Preminger, the film's director, Lorraine Hansberry, author of the Tony Award-winning play *A Raisin in the Sun*, said, “We cannot afford the luxuries of mistakes of other peoples... your mistakes can be painful, even those which come from excellent intentions. We've had great wounds from great intentions.”

2011: Musical

The production you will see, was created when the Gershwin and Heyward estates approached director Diane Paulus and asked her to produce a musical theatre version that would appeal to a new audience.

Paulus assembled a creative team that directly addressed the issue of authorship that had followed the *Porgy and Bess* story throughout its 86 years. This time, artists of color would be at the helm: Paulus reached out to MacArthur Genius and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, two-time Obie Award-winning composer Diedre L. Murray and choreographer Ronald K. Brown, founder and Artistic Director of Evidence Dance Company.

Continue the Conversation

What is it about *Porgy and Bess* that causes such strong reactions? Why does it resonate and provoke in every decade?

If the audience brings what is happening in the world outside with them, what new perspective does a 2014 audience bring to *Porgy and Bess*? What does this new version — *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* — have to say to an audience in 2014?

Do you think someone who isn't a member of a community can tell the story of that community? Should they?

Who tells the stories of your community? Do they tell the right stories? Do they tell the stories in the right way?

In all its versions, *Porgy and Bess* has provided employment and opportunity to African-American artists. It has broken barriers and placed artists of color center stage. And yet, some artists have refused to perform *Porgy and Bess*, considering the portrayal of the African-American community to be narrow, unrealistic, and even racist.

If the art is powerful and the music beautiful, but the character portrayals are problematic, what should an artist do? What would you do?

More opportunities exist for artists of color than there were in 1935, but many acting roles are still stereotypes. Would you play a role that was a negative depiction of your community? Are there any positive reasons to play those roles?

2014: A Conversation with Musical Score Adapter

Diedre L. Murray

and Center Theatre Group
Teaching Artist Marcos Nájera



PHOTO BY JAB BETHUNE.

Marcos Nájera: What inspired you to become a musician and composer?

Diedre L. Murray: The interesting thing when you ask that — is that I kind of flash back to when I was a kid in maybe high school or junior high school. I saw the great tenor Franco Corelli sing at Carnegie Hall, *The Girl from the Golden West*. It was the first time I had seen an opera. It was the first time I had ever been to Carnegie Hall. It was beyond, it was over the moon. It's probably one of the reasons I'm an artist today. It was quite magic.

I went to The High School of Music and Art in New York City. And we went to see shows. I was a music major, of course, and I didn't know who Franco Corelli was, but he was very famous, it was like saying “Pavarotti!” back then. I just remember being in the building. I had never been in the building. That's the first thing. Going to Carnegie Hall. Seeing sets. Seeing an orchestra. Like “Oh my God! What is this?” And *The Girl from the Golden West*? What does that mean? It's all in Italian. And you are saying “Wow! Oh my God. They're beautiful! Listen to that! Human beings make sounds like that?” That's what it was like. And remember, I was a music major. I was a cellist and so it's funny, I didn't go strictly over to the composing but to the power of storytelling and expression. What human beings can actually do. It is kind of magical when you see somebody and they open their mouths, and listen to the sound that comes out.

MN: What is your job as a composer?

DM: My job on *Porgy and Bess* was to adapt the music. So what does that mean? Adaptation means you do anything you can to change it for what the director and what the writer want. You write music. You create and make arrangements and you write them down. Or you put it on a computer. I do it the old-fashioned way. I write it by hand and then put it on computer. If you saw me working — I'm working on something now in my house — there's no difference between how I'm working and how they did [composing] two or three hundred years ago. In the 1700s. Multiple stacks of books. And I write it down. And I feel that you get the music into your body and you can see it three-dimensionally that way. And then I have my assistants come over and we put it on the Finale computer program and I turn it around. But by me physically writing it, I get it into my mind more. It's like a kinetic memory. That's what I find, personally. I think that younger people won't feel that way.

But the idea is that composing [music] comes essentially from the mind. You hear it, you write it. Right? I mean it's really that simple. You hear it, you write it. And then when you write it, you kind of gussy it up! And you put other things that go with it, like in a painting. And then you frame it. And then you ask yourself, well, what are you trying to say — where do you want the music to go? What story are you telling? I mean, that's what composing is all about.

And you are saying “Wow! Oh my God. They're beautiful! Listen to that! Human beings make sounds like that?”

We had a writer, Suzan-Lori Parks. And basically, we wanted to open [the show] up so a modern audience could more easily enter it. And so there were changes, a lot of changes to the script. So, when you make changes to the script on that level, you have a smaller orchestra and a smaller chorus [than the original opera]. So you have to make a lot of changes.

MN: Were you scared to make changes to such an American classic, music that is part of people's lives?

DM: No! You can't do that type of job if you are. You got to think that you can do it. The other thing is, *Porgy and Bess* is the musical landscape from when I grew up. I don't even think I knew it was originally an opera. It was the Nina Simone, the Miles Davis, Sammy Davis Jr., all those people doing *Porgy and Bess*. It was like what you would see on the Ed Sullivan Show, excerpts of [the original opera] all around. So for me, it was like popular music. I didn't go see it as an opera until I was an adult. I was probably 40 before I actually saw it as an opera.

MN: So you really only knew popular versions of the music from TV or radio?

DM: Yes, it's that ubiquitous. It was everywhere. There's the Ella Fitzgerald-Louis Armstrong. There are so many versions of this thing.

MN: So many versions. I imagine the most popular version of a *Porgy and Bess* song that students might know today is when Fantasia Barrino sang “Summertime” on American Idol.

DM: Exactly. The thing I associated it with when I was in my early twenties was John Coltrane's “Summertime.” I didn't associate the music with opera. I can tell you the first tune that I remember hearing was Nina Simone singing “I Love You Porgy.” That's the first version I remember hearing of it. People always associate it with opera, but I associated it with another sound.

Diane Paulus [the director] and I worked on a show together many years ago. And it was kind of like a jazz opera. And we were looking to cast some people and I said “Hey, I've never seen *Porgy and Bess*, so let's go see it!” So Diane and I went to go see it, I don't know, 15 years ago. That's the first time I saw it, and it blew my mind. Oh my God! Listen to this! I was actually stunned when I heard it.

MN: Where did you see it?

DM: City Opera in New York City at Lincoln Center. I had no idea. Of course we know the hits like “Summertime,” but there's all this other music that's so glorious. It was kind of shocking, that much beautiful music. It was shocking how beautiful it was. Wow! And the emotion and people going on and on. I just couldn't believe it. After I saw it I went and bought all kinds of copies of *Porgy and Bess* just so I could listen. It's like you're a professional musician and you can't believe you

stumbled on to this, like you can't believe you stumbled onto *The Messiah*. It was shocking how beautiful it was. What a journey to actually working on it!

MN: Which brings me to my last question, which is really about the beginning. What was the first thing you did to jump into this process of reimagining this music?

DM: The real first thing I did was listen to as many versions as I could. Because there are so many ways to this. That's why the Ellas, the Louis Armstrongs, the films, the Andre Previn, Sammy Davis Jr. I just listened to thing after thing after thing. And I knew we would also have a smaller orchestra. So I started thinking about the practical aspects. You know in opera, you don't sing every day. You might sing 3-4 performances in a month. This would be something that people would have to sing eight times a week! It's got to be singable.

The ranges [of opera] are more extreme. The highs and the lows. Everything in musical theatre is highly-miked. But in an opera house it's not, so you are pushing. You have to think about the physical and technical aspects of it. When Diane called and said “We are thinking of trying to do a version of *Porgy and Bess*, would you be interested?” And I just started singing Happy Birthday to myself. I sang “Happy birthday to me!...” [Laughs] I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it.

“One of these mornings you’re gonna rise up singing,
then you’ll spread your wings and you’ll take to the sky.”
—The Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess*

Center Theatre Group Education and Community Partnerships

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Center Theatre Group’s mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Community Partnerships

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group’s education and community partnership programs advance the organization’s mission in three key ways:

- Audiences:** Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;
- Artists:** Investing in the training, support and development of emerging young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and
- Arts Education Leadership:** Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.



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