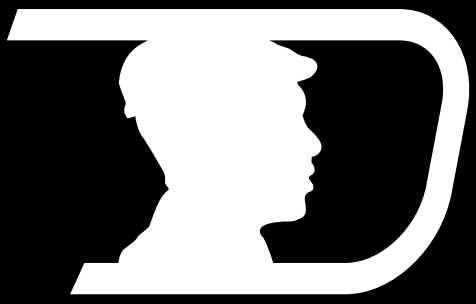

# TOO HEAVY FOR YOUR POCKET

ROUNDABOUT UNDERGROUND

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of EDUCATION AT ROUNDABOUT

# UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT

## TOO HEAVY FOR YOUR POCKET

**By Jiréh Breon Holder**
**Directed by Margot Bordelon**

The Freedom Riders are embarking on a courageous journey into the Deep South. When 20-year-old Bowzie Brandon gives up a life-changing college scholarship to join the movement, he'll have to convince his loved ones—and himself—that shaping his country's future might be worth jeopardizing his own.

## A NOTE FROM **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES**

This play may be a period piece, but it was written to be experienced by us today. With its combination of realism and poeticism, *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* beautifully drives home its themes of family, sacrifice, and the courage it takes, no matter which side you land on, to decide whether or not to make the political into the personal.

**WHEN** Summer of 1961

**WHERE** Nashville, Tennessee

**WHO**

**Bowzie Brandon:** A college-bound young man.
**Tony Carter:** Bowzie's best friend.
**Sally-Mae Carter:** Tony's pregnant wife, Evelyn's best friend.
**Evelyn Brandon:** Bowzie's wife. A singer.

Freedom Riders singing "We Shall Overcome" on their journey from Oxford, Ohio to Mississippi. Photo by Ted Polumbaum

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# INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT
# JIRÉH BREON HOLDER

**Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Playwright Jiréh Breon Holder about his play *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*.**

**Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you? When and how did you realize you wanted to become a playwright?**

**Jiréh Breon Holder:** I was born in Memphis, Tennessee. And it's funny—I grew up wanting to be a novelist. My mom was really strict about watching television, so I read a lot. I read every Toni Morrison book before I was even in middle school. I wanted to be Toni Morrison. And then I went to Morehouse College where, in my freshman year, I took a drama appreciation class that changed my life. It altered who I was and the course of my career. I realized I could write plays, and I never wrote fiction again.

As far as formative professors go, Dr. Alison Ligon was and is still a mentor for me. She comes to all of my plays, and she is the one who instilled discipline in me. She inspired me to care deeply about my politics and advocacy. After Morehouse, I went to Yale for an MFA in playwriting. I studied with Sarah Ruhl and Amy Herzog there and graduated in 2016.

**TS: What inspired you to write *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*? I read that some of your characters are based on people that your grandmother knew—is that true?**

**JBH:** The initial impulse for writing the play came when I was watching the films *Selma* and *The Butler* with my grandmother. She said she knew some of the Freedom Riders. I was inspired to write a piece about the people during the civil rights movement who participated in ways that we don't necessarily know about. We're always talking about Martin Luther King and the marchers and the boycotts. However, there were so many people who participated in this struggle in their own way. So this was an opportunity for me to pay homage to my grandmother. Even though she never marched, she made sure all of her children went to college. She made sure all of her children were well taken care of. She participated in her own way.

**TS: Would you say your play is putting a spotlight on the people who don't necessarily get talked about when the civil rights movement is discussed? What would you say your play is about?**

**JBH:** I am really tired of plays and movies about villains, about bad people. I wanted to create a narrative about people who are trying their best to be good. The characters are trying—in their individual ways—to stay true to their own moral compass. Right now, we live in a political environment where bullying and being aggressive is at the forefront. We see people going out for what they want no matter who it hurts, and I wanted to write about positive changes being made because people decided to be good and stay true to their values. I tried to write a play where everyone was just doing their best. I'm a part of a family that has made its share of mistakes. My parents are divorced because of infidelity and my grandfather was an alcoholic, but, at the end of the day, my family has so much love for one another. People within my community love each other so hard, and I wanted to figure out how to get inside of that. How do you continue to love people who have made such big mistakes? I think that is what the play's about. The four characters in my play stay together through thick and thin—they're growing up together, and they continually make sure they prioritize the love that they have for one another. Even if it becomes extremely hard to do that.


Jiréh Breon Holder

**TS: When I read the play, the characters felt like they were all extensions of one another—there was a deep connection among them. Do you believe that's true?**

**JBH:** Oh, absolutely. When I was developing the play, some people would ask, "Aren't these couples mismatched?" And my response was, "Bowzie and Sally wouldn't make a good couple because they're too similar." In fact, Sally completes Tony, and Evelyn completes Bowzie. They have found ways to create a family unit that makes everyone stronger. They bring out the best in each other. There's always a celebration when someone accomplishes something, and they encourage each other because that's how you grow as a human being. That's how you nurture a great support system. That kind of support system was modeled for me when I was growing up.

**TS: What insight can you give us about your process on this particular play?**

**JBH:** I wrote this play in two stages. It started as an assignment from Sarah Ruhl when I was at Yale. Sarah Ruhl and Dan LeFranc were both interested in their students digging into their personal history, their family mythology. I wrote the cake scene first. I thought the moment was going to be Bowzie's birthday. In the first stage, I wrote to learn who these four characters were and how they were living, and then I stopped writing. I decided not to write anymore, and I shared what I

had with Sarah. Then I went home and spent two weeks in Nashville with my grandmother. Going through every photo album she had. I asked her to take me to the house that she grew up in, and we drove past the house that she and her husband first moved into. I went to her sister's house, and I went through her sister's photos. I dug into my own family history extensively. I took a Freedom Rider tour. I met a couple of Freedom Riders who are still doing advocacy work in Nashville. I recorded all of the stories, and I found places for them in the play. There are moments in the play that are direct quotes from either Freedom Riders or my own relatives. A large chunk of this play is my own imagination, and the rest of it is me dramatizing stories that were shared with me that I'd like to share with the world.


Brandon Gill and Hampton Fluker

**TS: What work have you been doing on the play throughout your collaboration with director Margot Bordelon?**

**JBH:** It was definitely a collaboration. Working on the play at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta gave me an opportunity to see the way I imagined the play in my mind. Margot and the rest of the team did an incredible job of realizing the play I had written. And then I was able to take a couple of steps back and be really critical of my own work. I gave the play a totally new beginning and a totally new ending. Some of the changes were recommended by Margot and some of them were from notes that I had rejected a long time ago. This rewrite is an opportunity for me to be less precious and sentimental about the play.

**TS: How do you like to collaborate with a director on a new play of yours?**

**JBH:** This is my third show working with Margot as director. Margot asks so many questions, and some of them are questions that I hadn't even thought about. She is as invested in this play as I am. I know that sounds like it should be a given, but it actually isn't. Often directors are more invested in their production than they are in your play. But Margot is invested in my play, which means I can deeply trust her opinion.

**TS: Do you expect there to be any rewriting during the rehearsal and preview period here in New York?**

**JBH:** Absolutely. The rewriting process in New York will be driven by my collaborators in the room. I think of a play as a blueprint, and the actors, designers, and director will all be suggesting things. One of the more unique opportunities at Roundabout Underground is that we have several weeks of previews. During the day, we'll rehearse any changes I choose to make, and at night we'll have an audience. On some levels, another collaborator for this process is the audience. I do expect the play to change quite a bit during previews.

**TS: Do you anticipate that the New York audience will be very different from the Atlanta audience?**

**JBH:** One of the things I learned going to Yale is that Northerners think about the South in very different terms than Southerners do. I'm looking forward to what questions people have, so I can make the play as clear as possible to New York audiences.

**TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist, and do you have any advice for a young person who says they want to write for the theatre?**

**JBH:** I think of all the plays I write as presents to people. *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* is a present to my mom and my grandmother. My current commission for Roundabout is a present to my father. I have a Sloane commission that's a present to the residents of Flint, Michigan. That is what keeps me inspired to write.

As far as young people who might be interested in writing are concerned, my advice is twofold. The act of writing is the least important part of being a writer. I think living is much more important. I feel you need to make sure you are involved in politics and engaged in your community. You should be going on adventures. Good writers experience things that perhaps you haven't. That's what makes you want to read what they've written. I also think that you can't be a good writer without reading a lot. A big impulse among young American writers is to be original. They don't want to engage with other people's material, but that's a false notion. The way to get better at writing is to never stop experiencing what other people are working on in their chosen art form.•

# CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

**The Civil Rights Movement was an era of mass public protests and legal actions aimed at ending laws and customs that oppressed African-Americans. It took place primarily between 1940 and 1970, though the community organizing that ultimately led to the movement began around 1910. Ordinary citizens understood that their futures, and their children's futures, depended on their personal participation in marches, sit-ins, voter registration drives, freedom schools, and other forms of protest.**

### 1941
A. Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (an African-American labor union) threatens to lead a massive march on Washington if employment in war-related industries isn't desegregated. Roosevelt responds by creating the Fair Employment Practices Commission but does not desegregate war industries.

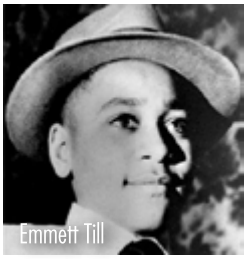
### 1942
Bayard Rustin and James Farmer found the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CORE, an integrated organization influenced by the teachings of Gandhi, develops the tactic of using nonviolent, direct action protests.

### 1945
African-American troops begin returning home from WWII. They fought for freedom in the name of the United States abroad and yet aren't afforded freedom or equality at home.

### 1947
W.E.B. DuBois delivers his "Appeal to the World" address to the United Nations about the problems faced by African-Americans.

### 1948
President Harry S. Truman orders the desegregation of the Armed Forces and asks Congress to pass federal civil rights legislation. Congress fails to act.

### 1954
The Supreme Court unanimously rules that public school segregation is unconstitutional in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. The case, brought by the NAACP, overturns an 1896 decision that "separate but equal" facilities for African-Americans are constitutional, and it provides the legal framework for desegregation of all public accommodations.


Emmett Till

### AUGUST 1955
Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, an African-American, is taken from his uncle's home by two white men in Mississippi. Till, who was from Chicago, was accused of flirting with a white woman. Three days later, Till's body, beaten and disfigured beyond recognition, is found in a river. His mother allows *Jet* magazine to publish a photo of her son's corpse, showing the nation the brutality of the Jim Crow south. Two weeks after Till's funeral, an all-white jury acquits Till's killers.

### DECEMBER 1955
Rosa Parks, a seamstress on her way home from work, refuses to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Parks's actions are part of the local NAACP chapter's plan to spark a bus boycott and force integration of the transit system. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, heads of two local churches, help organize the boycott.

### JANUARY 1957
The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is created by a coalition of African-American leaders including the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The SCLC connects community organizations across the south and is open to all regardless of race or religion.

### SEPTEMBER 1957
On the first day of school, the governor of Arkansas calls in the state National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering Central High School in Little Rock. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends federal troops to escort the students to school.

### FEBRUARY 1960
Four African-American college freshmen sit down at the all-white Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North


Civil rights activists arrested 1961

Carolina and refuse to get up. Their protest sparks a national movement of sit-ins in segregated spaces.

**APRIL 1960**
The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is founded at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. The SNCC provides an opportunity for young people to take leadership roles in the Civil Rights movement.

**MARCH 1961**
President John F. Kennedy signs an executive order banning discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin in federal jobs.

**MAY 1961**
The Freedom Rides begin *(see map on pages 10-11)*.

**1962**
James Meredith, an African-American, attempts to enroll at the University of Mississippi. The ensuing riots leave two dead. President John F. Kennedy sends over 30,000 troops and law enforcement officers to restore order.

**APRIL 1963**
The SCLC launches the Birmingham Campaign, several months of planned, peaceful protests. Birmingham law enforcement respond to these demonstrations by turning fire hoses and police dogs on protesters, including children. Television coverage of these events increases support for the Civil Rights movement.

**JUNE 1963**
President Kennedy calls for a federal civil rights law.

**AUGUST 1963**
The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech to a crowd of 250,000 gathered for the March on Washington.

**SEPTEMBER 1963**
Four African-American girls are killed in a bombing while attending Sunday school class at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

**NOVEMBER 1963**
President John F. Kennedy is assassinated.

**JUNE 1964**
The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project brings together CORE, the SNCC, and SCLC in an attempt to register


Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

African-American voters. More than 1000 volunteers, white and black, participate. Three volunteers, two white and one black, are murdered by the Klu Klux Klan.

**JULY 1964**
President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The law prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin.

**OCTOBER 1964**
The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

**FEBRUARY 1965**
Malcolm X is assassinated.

**MARCH 1965**
The SCLC and SNCC organize a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in support of voter registration. The peaceful marchers are driven back by state troopers using whips, clubs, and tear gas, in full view of the national media. The incident is known as Bloody Sunday. Two subsequent marches, and thousands of solidarity marches, follow.

**AUGUST 1965**
Congress passes the Voting Rights Act.

**1967**
The Supreme Court rules against laws prohibiting interracial marriage in Loving v. Virginia.

**1968**
The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

**1968**
CORE and the SNCC collapse. The Civil Rights movement suffers from internal conflict between older leadership and young leaders affiliated with the Black Power movement. National attention shifts to the Vietnam War.•

# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR **MARGOT BORDELON**

**Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with director Margot Bordelon about her work on *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*.**

**Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? Why did you want to become a theatre director? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?**

**Margot Bordelon:** I was born in Everett, Washington, a small city 25 miles north of Seattle. I got my BFA in Theater from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and then (many years later) an MFA in Directing from the Yale School of Drama. I first started directing when I was a junior in college. I was an acting major and auditioned to participate in the Original Works track offered by my program, which meant I took playwriting and directing courses in addition to my core acting classes. I was originally interested in being an actor/playwright, but I discovered directing and loved it. I liked having a hand in every aspect of a production. When you direct, you get to work in multiple mediums at once—acting, dance, music, design. I've found this deeply satisfying. My mentor at Cornish was a brilliant director named Sheila Daniels. She first introduced me to Viewpoints and techniques for devising original work. She opened my eyes to the power of expressive rather than literal staging. There are exercises she taught me that I still use in my rehearsal processes. Her impact on my development as an artist is immeasurable.

**TS: Why did you choose to direct Jiréh Breon Holder's play, *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*? What do you think this play is about?**

**MB:** In 2016 Jiréh and I collaborated on his Yale thesis production, *Some Bodies Travel*, and we had a blast together. When he sent me *Too Heavy*, I instantly fell in love with it. I find his voice, poetry, politics, and imagination incredibly compelling. He is truly the real deal—in addition to being a generous collaborator. For me, *Too Heavy* is a play about family, community, faith, struggle, and ultimately about personal responsibility. One of the most important questions I think this play asks is: where does our responsibility lie? When injustice thrives all around us, do we invest further in our friends and family? Or do we fight for change on a national scale? Do we have a bigger responsibility to our immediate community, or to society at large? And what does it mean to contribute when you're without a financial safety net? What is the personal cost of progress?

**TS: How are you collaborating with your design team—can you give us a sense of how your production will manifest visually? Do you see the play as written in the style of magic realism? Will there be original music?**

**MB:** One of the first stage directions in the play is "grass everywhere, even indoors." Our wonderful scenic designer Reid Thompson and I want to explore this idea fully by turning the Underground space into an installation of sorts. Grass throughout the entire space, with the images of trees and nature surrounding the audience. The script says that the audience should feel like guests, and that's what we're attempting to do—create a space that is fully inhabited by our characters that we invite the audience into. I think of the play as poetic naturalism. There are aspects of the piece that are fully naturalistic (like Sally cooking a meal), but the transitions and moments of song live in a more poetic realm. Ultimately, we're hoping to create a poetic space with the set design; costumes that realistically ground us in 1961 and


Margot Bordelon

lights and sound that function both realistically as well as poetically. And yes—some original music!

**TS: Will you give us some insight into your process as a director? What kind of research did you have to do in order to direct this play? How will you use rehearsal time on this particular show?**

**MB:** I've gotten such an education researching this show. Of course, I've done extensive reading about the Freedom Riders and about the Civil Rights movement as a whole, and it's rich, compelling, topical material. I've also gotten very specific about Nashville history, Fisk University, the role of the church, and life in the U.S. in the '50s and '60s. But the subject matter of the play extends well beyond all of this. This is a history piece written for a contemporary audience. Jiréh was as influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement as the Civil Rights Movement. We'll spend the first few days at the table naming the facts the play offers us both about time period and character. I like to begin from a place where we're all approaching the play objectively before we begin getting subjective. We'll share information about the world of the play culled from our individual research. With this piece, it's essential to ground ourselves historically in the place and time. Then the actors will create character biographies based on the facts of the play, their research, and their imaginations. We'll spend some time on our feet doing movement based ensemble-building exercises and character work. And then we'll dive into scene work.

**TS: How do you collaborate with a writer on a new work? Do you expect there to be any rewriting during the rehearsal and preview periods? How involved are you in the rewriting process on a new work?**
**MB:** Long before rehearsals begin, I read multiple drafts of the script and go back and forth with a writer offering questions and thoughts. *Too Heavy* has gone through a variety of drafts since Jiréh and I started working on it over a year ago, and it's been a joy to watch it grow and change. We worked on it at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta last winter, and that allowed us to see scenes and moments that really landed as well as those that could be further clarified. A new play is an ever-evolving organism, and I'm certain the play will undergo more changes once we're in the room with actors. They will bring experiences and perspectives to the piece that will most certainly affect it.

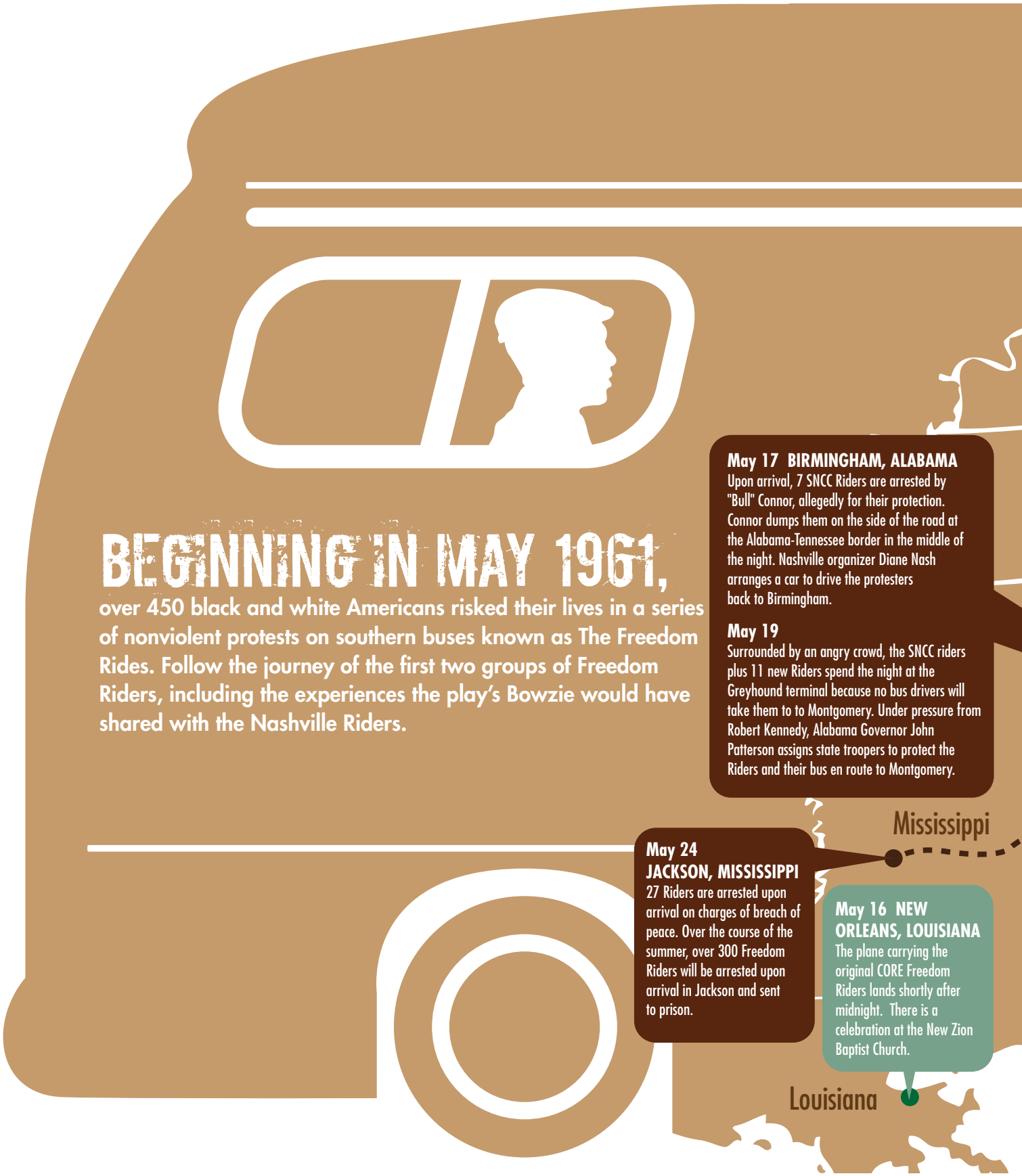
**TS: I'm curious how you understand the relationship of the two couples to each other and how the men and women relate to each other in this play? It seems to me both couples (Bowzie and Evelyn, and Tony and Sally) are symbiotic—would you agree?**
**MB:** Absolutely. The foursome in this play is incredibly tightknit. Bowzie and Sally have known each other since they were small children, and Bowzie and Tony have known each other since they were teenagers. They have grown up together—they are family. They are an interdependent community and (spoiler alert!) when Bowzie leaves, their ecosystem is thrown into a dangerous imbalance.

**TS: What traits did you need in casting the actors for the four roles in *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*?**
**MB:** With all four characters, we looked for actors who had incredible heart, wonderful senses of humor, and deep wells of emotional availability. It's a true ensemble show, and so it was essential that we find collaborators that are dedicated to team playing, while also being forces of nature in and of themselves.

**TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist? Do you have any advice for young people who say they want to direct?**
**MB:** I'm a firm believer in Stella Adler's philosophy that your growth as an artist is synonymous with your growth as a human being. I love going to see plays, but I also love reading, and watching films and television, going to museums, protesting, seeing live music, and spending time in nature. I've recently begun meditating, and that's been helping me stay inspired while finding balance. My advice to young directors is that, in addition to producing and directing your own work as much as possible, spend time acting and writing. It's invaluable to have experience being on the other side of the table. Try to learn on a visceral level about your own expectations and what you're asking of others.•


Nneka Okafor, Eboni Flowers, Brandon Gill and Hampton Fluker

# A MAP OF THE FREEDOM RIDES



## BEGINNING IN MAY 1961,

over 450 black and white Americans risked their lives in a series of nonviolent protests on southern buses known as The Freedom Rides. Follow the journey of the first two groups of Freedom Riders, including the experiences the play's Bowzie would have shared with the Nashville Riders.

**May 17 BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA**
Upon arrival, 7 SNCC Riders are arrested by "Bull" Connor, allegedly for their protection. Connor dumps them on the side of the road at the Alabama-Tennessee border in the middle of the night. Nashville organizer Diane Nash arranges a car to drive the protesters back to Birmingham.

**May 19**
Surrounded by an angry crowd, the SNCC riders plus 11 new Riders spend the night at the Greyhound terminal because no bus drivers will take them to to Montgomery. Under pressure from Robert Kennedy, Alabama Governor John Patterson assigns state troopers to protect the Riders and their bus en route to Montgomery.

Mississippi

**May 24 JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI**
27 Riders are arrested upon arrival on charges of breach of peace. Over the course of the summer, over 300 Freedom Riders will be arrested upon arrival in Jackson and sent to prison.

**May 16 NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**
The plane carrying the original CORE Freedom Riders lands shortly after midnight. There is a celebration at the New Zion Baptist Church.

Louisiana


May 4 WASHINGTON, DC
After 3 days training in nonviolent protest, 13 Freedom Riders (7 black, 6 white) organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) board Greyhound and Trailways buses toward New Orleans. Their aim is to bring attention to illegal segregation on interstate buses throughout the south.
START
Virginia
West Virginia
Kentucky
May 17 NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE
To continue where the CORE Riders left off, 10 riders (8 black and 2 white) from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) take a bus from Nashville to Birmingham. John Lewis from the original CORE Riders joins this group.
May 9 ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA
John Lewis, WWII veteran Al Bigelow, and Genevieve Hughes (one of 3 white women in the group) are attacked in a bus terminal for trying to enter a whites-only waiting area.
North Carolina
May 14 ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA
The Greyhound bus is attacked and firebombed by a mob of over 100 Klansmen, assisted by local police. After escaping the burning bus, the Riders are attacked by the mob. Meanwhile, the local police and citizens board the Trailways bus and force the riders to segregate before driving to Birmingham.
START
May 8 CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
At Charlotte's Union Station, Joseph Perkins, 27-year-old field secretary for CORE, becomes the first Freedom Rider to be arrested, at a whites-only shoe shine.
Tennessee
May 13 ATLANTA, GEORGIA
Martin Luther King, Jr. meets with the Riders and warns that the Klu Klux Klan will attack in Alabama. Despite his urging not to ride into the Deep South, the Riders continue.
South Carolina
May 14 BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
Public Safety Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor and the local police help a mob to assault the Freedom Riders on the Trailways bus, as well as media representatives, with lead pipes and baseball bats.
May 15
The Freedom Riders are told they cannot ride to Montgomery because no bus drivers can be found. Attorney General Robert Kennedy books the Riders on an airplane to New Orleans and sends his assistant, John Seigenthaler, to ensure their safety.
Alabama
MAY 4 RIDE
MAY 17 RIDE
Georgia
May 20 MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
State police abandon the buses at Montgomery's city limits. At the Greyhound terminal, Riders are attacked by a crowd of over 200, injuring more than 20 Riders. Robert Kennedy's assistant Seigenthaler is among the victims. When ambulances refuse to take them, local African-Americans help the wounded get to the hospital.
May 21
Martin Luther King, Jr., along with James Farmer, celebrates the Riders at Montgomery's Baptist Church. A mob of over 3000 surrounds the church, but under Kennedy's orders, the Alabama National Guard fends off the crowd.

# THE LEADERS OF THE FREEDOM RIDES

### JAMES L. FARMER, JR. (1920-1999)

Son of the first African-American to earn a doctorate in Texas, Farmer earned his divinity degree from Howard University, where he studied Gandhi's teachings on nonviolent protest. Farmer co-founded The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the early 1940s. In 1961 he became CORE's National Director, making him a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement.

Although segregation on interstate buses was declared illegal in 1946, the practice was widely enforced in the deep south. Farmer conceived of a way to bring national attention to this ongoing infringement. The initial plan was a single trip on 2 buses with 13 riders—male and female, black and white—beginning in Washington, D.C. and ending in New Orleans. Over the next six months, the Freedom Ride movement would grow to 60 rides by 450 people, with over 300 arrests. As events were televised nationwide, support for the movement grew. Farmer looked upon the Freedom Rides as his proudest achievement, noting that "Bobby Kennedy had the Interstate Commerce Commission issue an order, with teeth in it, that he could enforce."

Farmer later resigned from CORE leadership and distanced himself as the group became more militant. Under President Nixon, he accepted a position in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, but resigned in frustration. Farmer received a Presidential Medal of Freedom from Bill Clinton in 1998.

### DIANE NASH (B. 1938)

Raised in Chicago by a middle-class Catholic family, Nash transferred from Howard to Fisk University in 1959. The segregation she faced in Tennessee led her to co-found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in April 1960. Nash protested in Nashville's lunch counter sit-ins before becoming a leader of the Freedom Rides. After the CORE Freedom Ride was stopped in Alabama, Nash believed it was crucial that the rides continue, so she coordinated the Nashville Student Movement Ride with the goal of finishing the original CORE itinerary, from Birmingham to New Orleans. Nash recruited and trained the riders, ensuring that all the riders had made a will before getting onto the buses. She also coordinated with national figures and the press. Nash did not actually ride on the bus, but met the group in Montgomery. Here, she helped to bring Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak to the riders. After the Freedom Rides, Nash continued to work for desegregation and voting rights in Alabama. She returned to Chicago, where she works in education and fair housing advocacy.

### JOHN LEWIS (B.1940)

The son of tenant farmers from Pike County, Alabama, Lewis attended American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville. At 19, Lewis was arrested in protests with the Nashville Student Movement. Lewis joined the original CORE buses, and in Rock Hill, South Carolina, he was the first of the riders to be assaulted for entering a whites-only waiting room. Lewis then left the ride several days before crossing into Alabama to interview for a fellowship. Back in Nashville, he learned that the bus he had been on was firebombed in Anniston. He joined the Nashville riders and convinced friends and mentors to join. Lewis stayed with the Nashville group until Jackson, Mississippi, where he was arrested and imprisoned at Parchman Farm.

After the Freedom Rides, Lewis became the chairman of SNCC and became a key leaders of the Civil Rights movement, organizing the 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery March. In 1986, John Lewis was elected to represent Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he continues to serve today.•

**Click HERE to see James L. Farmer and other key figures discuss the impact of the Freedom Rides and nonviolent protest in the Civil Rights movement.**

# THE PRICE OF PROTEST

Given that protest is a fundamental aspect of the American experience, a key way for citizens to express displeasure with their government, communities, and society as a whole by right of the First Amendment, why are certain groups less represented at protests? As citizens of the land of the free, is it really "free" to protest? Or, is there a price to protest that potentially leaves certain groups, often those most marginalized, unable to participate and be heard?

Taking part in the Freedom Rides came with a significant economic cost. As such, it would be surprising that a young man like Bowzie would join their ranks. If employed, Riders would have to take off work, or even quit their jobs, because of the uncertain future that lay ahead of them. As in Bowzie's case, some had to take a leave from school, potentially jeopardizing their future earning potential. At any rate, these choices resulted in a loss of income for the Riders' families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the median yearly income for African American families was $3,230 in 1960, well below the national median income of $5,620 a year for all families. The loss of even a month's pay could be devastating. As such, the financial burden to protest was highest on African Americans, those most affected by the discriminatory policies being protested.

During the Freedom Rides, most Riders dealt with lack of protection from the police, or worse, were put in jail—actions with a significant economic cost. In February 1961, protesters conducting a sit-in at a lunch counter were fined $100 or told to work 30 days on a chain gang. With those the only choices, as punishment for simply sitting to eat lunch, Bowzie's entrance into the world of protest would be unusual, given the high potential economic cost that would be placed on his family.

Payment for the Rides fell not only on the riders, but on CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, who helped organize and sustain the Rides. In his book, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, Raymond Arsenault estimates that the cost per Freedom Rider to participate was "well over $1,000" once transportation, legal costs, housing and other miscellany were factored in.

Even today, the "price" of protest remains a major factor in protester turnout. In this January's Women's March on Washington, many white marchers drew criticism for the "safeness" of their activism. In one viral photograph, black activist Angela Peoples stands in front of three white women taking selfies at the Women's March and holds a sign saying, "Don't forget: White Women Voted for Trump." "[The photo] tells the story of white women in this moment wanting to just show up in a very superficial way and not wanting to do the hard work of…challenging their own privilege," Peoples said in The Root. Her photograph communicates her frustration with many of her white counterparts who, she claims, only show their support when the cost for them is low and their privilege goes unconfronted. The recent Charlottesville protests even further underscored this disparity in the "price" of protest for different groups. White supremacist demonstrators bragged about their large turnout as compared to that of the anti-fascist counterprotests. But since those marching in the name of white nationalism statistically face a much smaller threat of violent suppression by law enforcement than do protesters of color, the price of demonstration for a crowd of largely white males is lower. It's easy to stage an act of civil disruption when there is almost no fear of repercussion.

Yet, marginalized groups continue to fight for their rights, despite what some might see as an insurmountable price to protest. In 1961 the Freedom Riders paid that price, all in the name of bringing about a brighter future.•

## PARCHMAN PRISON

The Freedom Riders sent to Mississippi State Penitentiary (Parchman Farm) would likely have known of the difficult conditions ahead. Historian David Oshinsky states, "throughout the American South, Parchman Farm is synonymous with punishment and brutality." Established in 1901, Parchman occupied 28 square miles of delta valley land. Approximately 300 Freedom Riders were imprisoned in Parchman in 1961. Because the government and the media were watching the situation, they were spared the worst abuses of other prisoners; nevertheless, they were confined in isolation from each other, forbidden exercise, served inedible food, and harassed by the officials. When they sang freedom songs from their cells, the guards seized their mattresses in retaliation. Despite attempts by authorities to break the spirits of the Freedom Riders, it had a reverse effect of building their resolve and solidarity. The Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman currently operates with a maximum capacity of 3,543, including minimum, medium, close custody, and death row inmates.

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR **BRANDON GILL**

**Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor Brandon Gill about his work as Bowzie in *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*.**

**Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated, and what made you decide to become an actor? Did you have any teachers who profoundly influenced you on your journey?**
**Brandon Gill:** I was born in Winthrop Hospital in Garden City, New York, and I grew up on Long Island and in Queens. I wanted to be a singer because my mom sang. My mother was in a singing group called Triche. I would be doing my homework while her group rehearsed in their studio. I was about five years old when I told my mother I wanted to be "inside the television." So, my mother put me in these musical theatre classes on Long Island. It was a program called Way Off Broadway. At the end of the program, there was a showcase for agents and managers. And that's when I signed with my manager, whom I'm still with today. I was 11 years old. I went to LaGuardia High School, and I had an amazing experience there. After LaGuardia, I went to The Juilliard School. I was the first person in over 17 years to go straight from LaGuardia's drama program to Juilliard. A teacher at LaGuardia who had a profound effect on me was Harry Shifman. He directed me in *West Side Story*, and he was the one who encouraged and pushed me to audition for Juilliard. At LaGuardia, I also had the good fortune of being taught by James Moody, who was an acting teacher there as well as a graduate of Group 1—the first graduating class of Juilliard's drama division.

**TS: Why did you choose to play Bowzie Brandon in Jiréh Breon Holder's play *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*?**
**BG:** Jiréh wrote the character for me. I met him in 2014. I was doing a reading of one of his first plays at Yale, and about a year after that reading, he got in touch with me and said, "I wrote this play, and I wrote a character with you in mind. I would love if you did a reading of it." It's such a blessing that it's now being produced by the Roundabout in New York City and I get to be in it.

**TS: Rehearsals haven't begun yet, but will you tell us what you think the play is about?**
**BG:** I think the play is about family, it's about courage and forgiveness and understanding. Every one of the characters is coming into themselves. The two male characters are coming into their manhood. And the women are on a similar journey. I also think it's about the ever-evolving human spirit through various trials and tribulations. Jiréh writes with a tremendous amount of heart.

**TS: What kind of preparation do you have to do for a role like this? I'm curious how a native New Yorker prepares for a play that takes place in the South at a time when African-Americans were treated as second-class citizens.**
**BG:** This play is set in Nashville, Tennessee in 1961, a time where historical events were happening in the South during the civil rights movement. The play is dealing with the changes about to happen in America. For African-Americans, it was definitely a trying time. They had to find strength in God and their community and fight for their basic rights as an equal in society. My grandmother grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, and also Gadsden—my great-grandmother did as well. My grandmother marched with Martin Luther King and had dinner at his house. I have been very privileged to have her as a living resource not only for my family's history but for African-American history. She has told me stories about being chased down dark, dirt roads by the Ku Klux Klan while traveling home from a march. I'm definitely going to lean on my grandmother to hear the wisdom and stories she has to share.


Brandon Gill

**TS: How is the character of Bowzie relevant to you? I'm wondering what you find most challenging or exciting about the role?**
**BG:** Bowzie Brandon and Brandon Gill are two young black men who are trying to support their families while achieving their dreams in a world that tells them that they are less than equal. I think I can learn from Bowzie. His courage and determination to face adversity and continue forward are inspiring. We are both trying to achieve a level of success for the benefit of ourselves and for our loved ones as well. He's so headstrong. Being accepted to Fisk University in 1961 on full scholarship is such a great accomplishment for him. And he risks it all to fight for his rights, for the rights of his family and, most importantly, the rights of his children. I'm excited to explore his emotional depth and the thought process that takes him from the university to a penitentiary. So many African-American leaders have found themselves unjustifiably sitting in jail cells for days and weeks at a time while participating in the civil rights movement. Parchman Penitentiary was famously known for being the worst of them all. That's something that I also have to research—what life was like there.

**TS: How do you understand Bowzie's relationship to his wife Evelyn? How do you understand their dynamic?**
**BG:** I think Jiréh has given these characters the gift of humanity. Bowzie has been lucky enough to marry his best friend. Evelyn is his rock, his support system. At times she's stronger than him. I think all the relationships that Bowzie has in this play are beautiful. He's actually known Sally the longest. Sally's like his older sister. And then, of course, he has this wonderful relationship with Tony, which I think is very important as well, because it's important to show audiences the trust and camaraderie that black men, especially in that time period, had with one another. There is an unspoken code of support and respect.

**TS: Why do you think Evelyn gets so upset at Bowzie and some of his choices? Is she afraid of this movement that's happening?**
**BG:** I think it's a bittersweet situation. Evelyn is being a wife, and I think she's worried about her family. She's worried about her husband and the hateful things that will happen to him if he goes on this bus ride. She's less afraid of the movement because the movement is necessary. She stands behind the movement itself. She does not stand behind the possibility of losing her husband and the father to her unborn child. Her struggle is knowing that she has to let Bowzie be a man, but it comes with a big price—jeopardy of their family unit.

**TS: There is an idiosyncratic rhythm to the way Jiréh's characters speak. I'm curious how you view it?**
**BG:** I think the dialogue in the play speaks to the history of African-Americans and how we tell stories—how we use words. The characters are exuberant in their language. Sometimes the dexterity of Jiréh's language reminds me of the characters in August Wilson's plays. There is a cadence in their individual voices. And I love how they choose to impersonate people in their community. There's a scene where all four characters are reenacting things that happened at church. They imitate these glorious characters like the pastor and some of the elder sisters who worship there. I think Jiréh does a wonderful job speaking to the authenticity of African-American culture and the unique way we use language as storytellers.

**TS: What do you look for from a director when you're working on a play?**
**BG:** I want to work with a director who has a collaborative vision. I think it's important. I think it's important that a director knows what he or she wants the audience to come away with. Are we making a comment on the present times? What are the themes that we are discussing and interpreting? I've had the great pleasure to work with some awesome directors. They all had amazing imaginations and encouraged a collaborative spirit to make sure we're all on the same page so we can tell the best story possible.

**TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?**
**BG:** I surround myself with a community of friends who are also artists. I relish celebrating them and the work they do. When you surround yourself with artists who are hardworking and who have strong determination to change the world with their art, that is always inspiring and motivating. I also love teaching. I'm always inspired by my students and the classes that I teach or individuals that I coach—I try to use my art to entertain, educate and inspire.

**TS: I'm wondering what you would say to a young person who says they want to have a career in acting. What advice would you give?**
**BG:** The first thing I stress is training. I tell everyone I work with, "If you want to be an actor, you have to train. Hone your craft." Playwrights and Directors want to invest in someone who has invested in themselves. I also tell young people, "You have to believe it's going to happen. If you don't believe it's going to happen, then you're setting yourself up for failure. It only takes one audition to change your life. One random audition on a Tuesday at 3:15 can change your life forever." If you believe that that audition is coming or that project is coming and you're going to meet someone like Jiréh who is going to write a great role like Bowzie for you—then sooner or later—it's going to happen.•


Brandon Gill

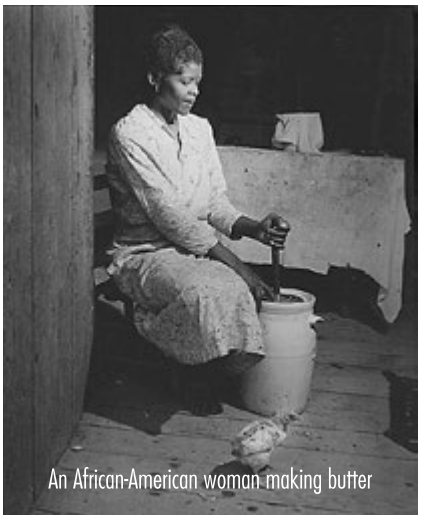
# AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE RURAL SOUTH

*Too Heavy for Your Pocket* is set in Nashville, Tennessee in 1961. As each character works to build a better future, they carry with them the culture of African-American rural southern life.

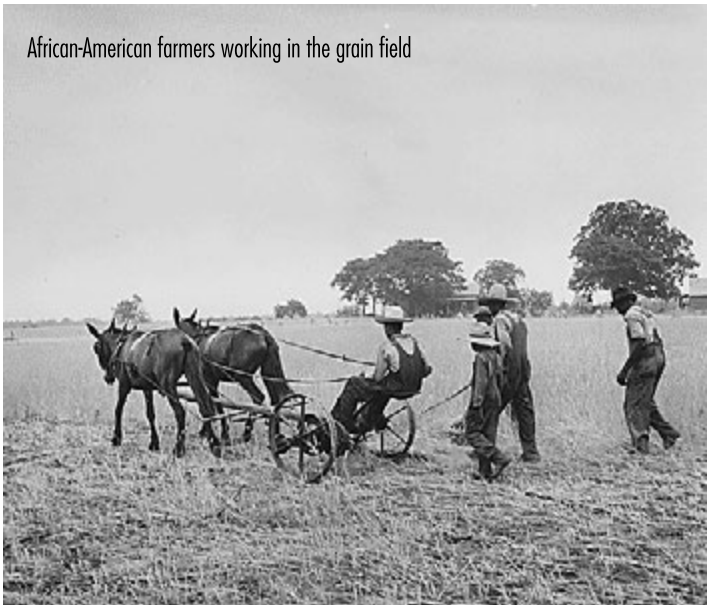
Culture is the language, folklore, art, and customs of a group of people in a particular place and time. For Evelyn, Bowzie, Sally, and Tony, their culture developed and flourished in the shadow of the institutional racism of the south. As you read, keep in mind that decisions that hurt African-American communities were made purposefully by whites in power.

Public education became available to all residents of Tennessee in 1867, though the state mandated separate education for white and black students. In the wake of Emancipation, African-American communities placed a high value on education and, despite a lack of funding, worked together to create educational institutions, from one-room schoolhouses to Fisk University. Fisk University, founded in 1866, is a historically black university located in Nashville. Today, it is a highly regarded liberal arts college.

Most of these schools implicitly reinforced students' Afrocentric culture, encouraging confidence, a sense of self, and commitment to the development of the African-American community. "We were taught by black teachers; we were able to sing and speak about Negro spirituals," one man, who attended a rural primary school in Kentucky in the 1940s and 1950s, recalled in an interview with a Clark Atlanta University graduate student. "We had time for songs; we had a time in the school year when we'd have little social events where we were introduced to certain culture that the African Negro had that we were able to be involved in."


An African-American woman making butter

Many rural African-American schoolchildren recall playing Hambone or Patting Juba, a rhythm game in which players use their own bodies as a drum set, making different sounds and complex rhythms. The practice was developed by slaves who were forbidden from using drums in North America. Songs and rhythms were passed down orally.


African-American farmers working in the grain field

Despite the importance of African-American schools to their communities, they had almost no funding or supplies, employed untrained teachers, and were difficult for students to physically reach without school buses or paved roads. It's not surprising that the character Tony in *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* appears functionally illiterate, a term indicating that he has less than a fifth grade education. Between 9% and 13% of African-American men in the south were illiterate in 1950.

The white-controlled agricultural economy was dependent on African-American farm labor, including the labor of children. Children in school weren't as immediately valuable as those working in the fields. This held true whether the family owned their farm, as 25% of African-Americans did, or if they were sharecroppers, renting land and equipment from a large landowner in exchange for a portion of their future crop. Sharecroppers were almost always in debt to the landowner, and the system purposefully kept the sharecroppers, white or black, in terrible poverty.

Farm ownership allowed African-American families to become self-sufficient and build capital that could be used to begin new businesses. Farm families and communities were close, and traditions with their roots in the African cultures of enslaved people continued. Folktales, dance styles and


African-Americans walking to a community church

rhythms, musical traditions, foodways, and handicrafts all retained African elements. The five-string banjo and the distinctive rhythms of banjo music, for example, descended from the banjar, an African instrument made from a gourd.

The south's rigid segregation also gave rise to a separate set of performance venues for African-American bands and comedians, sometimes called the Chitlin' Circuit. (Chitlins, or chitterlings, are hog intestines, a traditional southern food.) Performers on the circuit were crucial to the development of rhythm & blues and rock & roll music. In *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*, Evelyn has been a successful performer on the circuit.

Religion played an important role in the lives of rural African-Americans. During slavery, Christianity (though forced on some) took root in slave communities after missionary work by Methodist and Baptist organizations. Biblical narratives of freedom and salvation spoke to enslaved people, who soon developed their own interpretations and practices that borrowed from Baptist, Methodist, and African traditions. These communities became formal churches after Emancipation and served as both spiritual and political institutions. The physical, financial, and theological support of African-American churches was crucial to the Civil Rights movement.

These African-American churches had a distinctly emotional style of worship. They utilized call-and-response traditions in both preaching and music, and they kept the American tradition of revivals. Revivals, held in late summer or early fall when there is little farm work, are community gatherings focused on religious renewal. At revivals, or any service, congregants might "catch the Holy Ghost" and go into a frenzy of religious ecstasy. Some Pentecostal congregations (regardless of race) have similarly ecstatic worship styles.

By 1961, when *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* takes place, almost half of all rural, southern African-Americans had left the country life. Racism, technological changes in farming, and the availability of factory jobs in northern cities had caused a "Great Migration" from the rural south to northern cities, and later to western and southern urban areas. The Great Migration created a style of speech known today as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Prior to the Great Migration, African-American dialects closely resembled those of their white neighbors, with additions of words and patterns from African languages. As African-Americans from many small towns came together in cities, they lived in segregated communities and developed a dialect that brought together elements of many regional accents.

Bowzie, Tony, Sally, and Evelyn speak a dialect similar to AAVE, but one specific to the region where they grew up. The word "saddidy," which Bowzie calls Sally, is specific to AAVE and means "stuck up". Writing in AAVE, or the regional dialects that preceded it, can be controversial. For a white writer, past or present, to create a character who speaks in AAVE suggests that he or she is stereotyping African-American characters and calls to mind the painful history of minstrelsy. African-American writers, particularly those writing in the 1920s and 1930s who used AAVE, faced criticism from other African-Americans for depicting their race as uneducated. Today, use of AAVE by African-American writers can be seen as a reclamation of history and identity, and a way to bring forward the specific stories of their culture.•


Street scenes on a Saturday afternoon

# THEATRE AS PROTEST

Around 1890, the Lord Chamberlain of England banned Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghosts* from public performance due to its unconventional and offensive subject matter. When an illicit performance of the play went up anyway at the Royalty Theatre in 1891, audience members were appalled by the "indecency" of a story about venereal disease, incest, and euthanasia; critics went so far as to call the show "a dirty deed done in public." Just over 30 years later, the entire cast of the American production of Sholem Asch's *God of Vengeance* was arrested on obscenity charges after staging the first-ever kiss between two women on Broadway—a story recently brought into the spotlight by Paula Vogel's *Indecent*. In 1937, the cast of Marc Blitzstein's pro-union musical *The Cradle Will Rock*, defying a government command to cancel production, performed in the audience during the first preview rather than on the stage and, on this technicality, avoided shutdown. And in 1965, the Lord Chamberlain prosecuted the producers of Edward Bond's play *Saved* for staging the show after it had been refused its license for depictions of violence and barbarism.

A violent moment from *Saved* by Edward Bond

These are far from the only instances in recent history in which the performance of a play or musical has itself served as a form of political protest. Theatre might not normally have a reputation for transgression, yet some of our fiercest sociopolitical battles in fact play out on stages across the world, sometimes finding creators and producers at odds with the law. Our Constitution, of course, protects the right to free speech, but attempts at censorship take many forms, some of which have made national headlines as recently as this past summer.

When The Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park production of *Julius Caesar* opened this past June, a few major funders of The Public were displeased that the character of Julius Caesar in this production quite overtly resembled President Donald Trump. Unhappy that the show seemed to be depicting the assassination of the acting President, Delta Airlines and Bank of America—longtime sponsors of the New York Shakespeare Festival—pulled their support of the production, saying that The Public's interpretation of Shakespeare's play "crossed the line on the standards of good taste." Despite these setbacks, the show continued as scheduled.

*Julius Caesar* may only be the beginning of a season both on and off-Broadway marked by a theme of protest and political resistance. The stage adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* has been running on Broadway since May; it follows a duo who fights their authoritarian regime by daring to fall in love. Also running on Broadway is documentarian Michael Moore's solo show *The Terms of My Surrender*, which pushes audiences to confront political differences. And earlier this spring, Robert Schenkkan's off-Broadway play *Building the Wall* imagined an America in the midst of Trump-instituted martial law.

*Too Heavy for Your Pocket*, though set over fifty years in the past, finds good company in a season of New York theatre that draws on traditions of protest and social critique. If the current Broadway and Off-Broadway scene is any indication, the battles against censorship that were being waged a century ago are still being fought today—and there is much progress to be made. *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* reminds us of the value and power of political protest, and though we may feel distanced from the kind of pushback levied against *Ghosts* or *God of Vengeance*, it is a reminder worth heeding now more than ever.•

# DESIGNER STATEMENTS


Set Model for *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*

## REID THOMPSON—SET DESIGN

*Too Heavy for Your Pocket* is set on a place in between. It is in between the city and the country, between nature and civilization, modernity and the past. Sally and Tony's home is a refuge for our four characters, a safe and warm space of their own making where they can be themselves, hidden and protected from the outside world. Our characters draw strength from the earth and the natural world, and we wanted the set to be both Sally and Tony's home and Bowzie's field, simultaneously. The landscape is burned into the walls, and grass grows on top of the floorboards. We wanted a fully immersive environment that takes full advantage of every inch of the intimate Black Box Theatre, where the audience is literally invited into our quartet's world. The materials and props are inspired by meticulous historical research, but realized with an emphasis on the poetic feeling of the place over accurate historical recreation. As the play progresses, the ugliness of the outside world starts to intrude on our refuge, and we wanted the physical environment to reflect a shift as well.

## VALÉRIE THÉRÈSE BART—COSTUME DESIGN

I wanted to fully immerse myself in the period and culture, so I began looking at a lot of photographs of civil rights protests, freedom riders, school desegregation, but staying away from such recognizable figures as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X. I became aware of two photographers of the time, Gordon Parks and Bruce Davidson. While the latter focused more on actual protests, rallies, and clashes, Gordon Parks went to the South and captured how black families and people actually lived. There are collections of color photos that show the effects of segregation and systemic racism, and Parks frames it in such a beautifully heartbreaking way. These were the inspiration for the color palette of the costumes. My design process involves a quirky way of sketching. I like to do what I call "paperdoll-ing." Essentially, sketching all the clothes that will be layered on a base body, rather than spending the time sketching new poses and re-drawing faces for the same character, I would trace the clothes using a light box and cut the clothes out to layer on top. The varying looks would then be scanned and lightly photoshopped and printed out as complete sketches. It ultimately also became a great tool to discover how a character would wear clothes—layer up or down, buttoned or not, tucked/untucked, etc. It would also get me thinking about quick changes and the tracking of clothing. Edits and adjustments would be vastly easier and faster with just having to re-draw the clothes and not spend the time with faces/hands and poses.

A great example of this was with Bowzie. Even though he doesn't have many costume looks, he layers up and down his pieces throughout the show in some major character arcs. Margot Bordelon, the director, and I spoke at length about what it meant for him to be barefoot and shirtless, as well as in a full suit. And then to see the suit be taken off, the "stripping" of his humanity and the reveal of his human body when in nothing but underwear. To see the underwear eventually deteriorate over time along with his dignity, and the last image of the once immaculate suit that was supposed to mean so much now crumpled and dirty were important visual storytelling points, which we hope will heighten the experience for the audience

## JIYOUN CHANG—LIGHTING DESIGN

Although we haven't sat in the same room at the same time, I feel we have been in the same room from the beginning of this journey. We have all been open to new ideas and concepts even though some have joined the journey at different points in the life of this production. We honored what worked in the Alliance Theatre production in Atlanta,


Costume renderings and paper dolls for "Sally" in *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*

# DESIGNER STATEMENTS (CONT.)

focusing on how to transfer those ideas and reimagining how to make them work in a new space. Most of all, we all value the poetic nature of Jiréh Holder's play, although its domestic set-up is based on naturalism. That lyric naturalism anchored and guided our meetings and led us to a new visual landscape. The new ground plan is simpler and open —allowing light to perform at its best in poetic, abstract, and impressionistic ways. This new ground plan will heighten the nature of the play, and it also allows for exciting fluidity in staging. Margot Bordelon, the director, and Reid Thompson, the set designer, gave warm and open direction, and Jiréh's soft and supportive voice in the meetings was helpful for the entire design team to arrive at this crucial point in our journey together.

### IAN SCOT—SOUND DESIGN

On my initial read of the play, I responded immediately to Evelyn, considering how our social/political climate is behaving in its current condition. I felt this strong and radiating tension inside as I asked myself, "Could I leave my family behind to stand up for what I believed was right?" I don't know the answer to that question because, as a young and privileged man, I still don't know what my personal thresholds are just yet. That's been part of my personal journey while interacting with the play. Overall, I am a steadfast believer in the magic and imagination that Jiréh puts on the page. When I hear and read his stories, my imagination runs wild and my heart is moved. When I begin sound research for a show of this nature, I always start with a history lesson. I ask questions like, "What is common knowledge to an American citizen?" or "What is popular in my age group right now?" I create playlists of popular music and listen to the sounds of commonly used appliances or gadgets. In this way, I gain an understanding of what people would hear on a day-to-day basis and move forward from there, letting my heart lead the way. The challenge on any show for me is always finding the balance between responding with my heart and keeping moments honest in the sound design. I know that I am susceptible to having a sentimental response. Being in the rehearsal room is how I avoid this happening. I can respond to the director and actor as the crow flies during the process.•

Mother and children in Mobile, Alabama 1956
Photo: Gordon Parks

Malcom X Rally, Harlem 1963 Photo: Bruce Davidson

# PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR EDUCATORS

## PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

### HOW DOES A GROUP USE IMPROVISATION TO EXPLORE THE MOTIVATIONS AND RISKS OF THE FREEDOM RIDERS?

(Common Core Code: CCSS SL11-12.1)

To understand the conflicts and the social context of *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*, students will learn about the Freedom Rides and then improvise a debate exploring the goals and risks of participation in such protests.

**PREPARE** Watch this short film for an understanding of nonviolent protest and the risks taken by the Freedom Riders **HERE**.

Then read and discuss the Freedom Riders' Journey on page 10-11 of this UPSTAGE GUIDE.

**BRAINSTORM** Generate two lists with the class: 1) Reasons why a person should join the Freedom Rides in 1961. 2) Reasons why a person should NOT join the Freedom Rides.

**IMPROVISE** Arrange students into groups of 3 and assign each student as A, B, or C. Students are cast in roles of students their own age, in summer of 1961. "A" is deciding whether or not to join the Freedom Rides. "B" is a friend who supports the choice. "C" is another friend who believes it is a bad idea. B and C may use points on the lists to support their arguments. B and C try to persuade A, while A asks questions or expresses her/his own perspective. Allow all the groups to improvise a discussion on their own. Then, ask 2 or 3 groups to volunteer to replay their discussion in front of the class.

**DISCUSS** Ask all the "A"s the choice their character would make after this discussion. Then, out of character, ask all students what they think they would have done if they had the opportunity to join the Freedom Rides in '61. Are there any issues they would protest today? What are the risks of protest today?

## POST-SHOW ACTIVITY

### HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT IMAGINE A CHARACTER'S CHANGING PERSPECTIVE OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E)

To understand the risks and rewards of political engagement, and to connect the themes of the play with current events, students will write a letter from an elderly Bowzie to today's young people about how his choices influenced his life.

**DO THE MATH** Ask students to figure out how old each character in *Too Heavy for Your Pocket*, including the unborn children, would be today. Introduce figures from the Civil Rights movement, such as John Lewis, who are still active today.

**IMAGINE** Create a list of possibilities for what happened to Bowzie after the Freedom Rides, asking students to justify their ideas with events and statements from the play whenever possible. Did Bowzie return to school, or not? How did he and Evelyn support their family? What happened to their child? What was happening one year later? Ten years later? What might Bowzie be doing today? How would he feel about the current political situation in the United States?

**WRITE** Ask students to imagine that Bowzie has been asked for advice by a young person today who is worried about current issues. Have students write a letter from Bowzie to the young person, discussing his life and choice to get involved in the Freedom Rides, and offering advice to today's teenagers and young adults.

# GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

**REPOSSESSION MAN:** a person who reclaims items that have outstanding payments. Also known as a "repo man"
*Tony mentions that the Repossession Man might take the Pretty Green Chevy away one week.*

**UPPITY:** arrogant or snobbish
*Bowzie asks Tony not to let him become an uppity fool.*

**OFAYS:** an offensive term for a white person
*Bowzie calls the people at Woolworths "ofays."*

**PLUM FOOL:** someone who is unaware of their foolishness
*Evelyn calls Bowzie's mother a "plum fool."*

**BENEDICTION:** a prayer that asks for God's blessing
*Bowzie imitates Mother Scrivens giving the benediction.*

**CHIGGERS:** biting bugs that live in wet, grassy areas like fields and forests
*Tony scratches his leg because he got chiggers while working on a farm.*

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# ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO) is committed to producing the highest-quality theatre with the finest artists, sharing stories that endure and providing accessibility to all audiences. A not-for-profit company founded in 1965, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of classic plays and musicals; development and production of new works by established and emerging writers; educational initiatives that enrich the lives of children and adults; and a subscription model and audience outreach programs that cultivate and engage all audiences. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting **roundabouttheatre.org**.

## 2017-2018 SEASON









## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS NAVARRA, HOUSE MANAGER AT HAROLD AND MIRIAM STEINBERG CENTER FOR THEATRE

**Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the House Manager at the Steinberg Center?**

**Travis Navarra:** I am originally from the ever-glamorous metropolis called Fort Lee, NJ. I went to NYU, where I studied acting and writing. After working as an usher with Roundabout at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre for a number of years, I knew I wanted to be more involved with a company that felt more like family than work. This position became available in March, and I am glad to have proven to be the right fit.

**TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?**

**TN:** As House Manager, I am responsible for all Front of House operations. I work closely with our incredible security guards, maintenance team, and unbeatable usher staff, as well as the vendors who come in to keep the Steinberg Center in tip-top shape. My main responsibility is to make sure both the Laura Pels Theatre and the Roundabout Underground are equipped to provide memorable and enjoyable experiences for all patrons.

**TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?**

**TN:** I am so lucky to be surrounded by teams of people who genuinely care about the quality of their work. This is a rarity in most fields, and I recognize this. The best part of my job is being surrounded by people who make coming to work something to look forward to. I interact with hundreds of different people every single day, and each one of them comes with their own personality, as well as specific needs and expectations. The most challenging aspect that I have to be constantly conscious about is honoring each individual and switching gears with enough agility and efficiency in order to tend to the next.

**TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?**

**TN:** I started working with Roundabout as a survival job during college after working in a similar capacity with other theatre companies in New York. What immediately struck me as different here was the sense of community and communal passion to make good work happen. This is what made me realize that I wanted to grow in and with this company. I feel privileged to be immersed in an environment that challenges itself to push the envelope each and every time.•

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:

# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

## TICKET POLICY

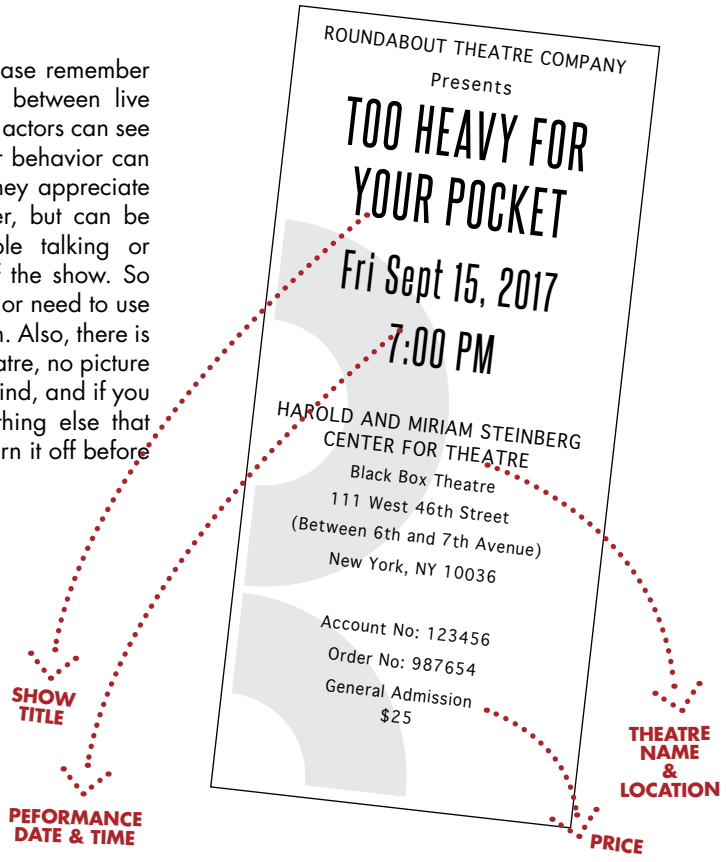
As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

## PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.





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