

QUEEN BESS PRODUCTIONS

# PROGRAMME

WINTER 2023

## The Flight



theatre  
**GARGANTUA**

**b** current  
PERFORMING ARTS

Roseneath  
Theatre

# The Flight

*"My work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death..." - Audre Lorde*

## WELCOME

BY MARCEL STEWART

You could've been anywhere in the world, but you're here with us. On behalf of the company of The Flight, we thank you for being here to receive this story.

Our play, written by Beryl Bain, roots itself in the Roaring 20's while exploring the life of Bessie Coleman - a daring, creative, unshakeable, ambitious Black Indigenous woman who gave her life doing the thing she loved most. Bessie's journey toward acclaim and greatness gifted the world a glimpse into what it means to be an ordinary person with extraordinary resolution. The themes of maximizing the moment, defining yourself while disregarding the haters, recognizing the power of persistence, and letting your dreams carry

you toward your destiny reflect the world not only of the past but very much of today - here and in this moment.

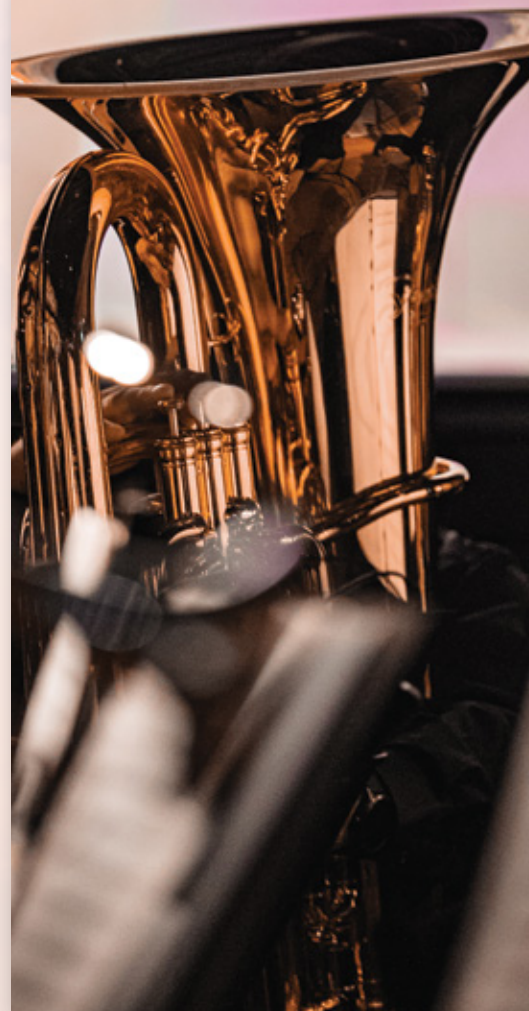
In the great storytelling traditions of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and the Attiwonderonk, we hope to rise to the occasion by serving the story, the ancestors, and you, our audience.

And with this I invite us all to bring our full selves. Welcome.

Rest in Peace Tyre Nichols  
Defund the Police

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Factory Theatre, which resides in West Toronto, is hosted on the lands of traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. We also acknowledge Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and covered by the Dish with One Spoon wampum belt covenant between Indigenous tribes, and all people that use the land for peaceful coexistence. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. We know a single land acknowledgement alone will not make up for the past, but is a promise to continue to dialogue, listen and connect with the people who have and continue to care for this land, to tell their stories and live with Mother Earth's best interests at heart.



# STROLLING THROUGH CHICAGO DURING THE ROARING 20's

The 1920s in Chicago were marked by great change and cultural transformation, especially in the Bronzeville neighborhood, also known as the Black Belt. This area was a long stretch of city blocks that paralleled the Illinois Central railway tracks on Chicago's South Side. Its most vibrant part, a strip of South State Street clubs, theatres, and businesses that ran through the heart of Bronzeville, was called The Stroll. The Stroll was so prominent a street that The Chicago Defender once described it as the Black cultural center in America and a "Mecca for Pleasure". Known for its lively nightlife, with jazz clubs, ballrooms, and theaters lining the streets as well as a noteworthy music scene that featured soon-to-be-legendary musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith, the Stroll quickly became a destination for people all over the city and all over the country. The neighborhood was also home to many influential African American writers, artists, and political figures, making it a hub of intellectual and artistic activity. Despite the difficulties of segregation and discrimination, Bronzeville flourished in the 1920s as a center of African American culture and creativity.



# Meet the COMPANY



## BERYL BAIN

### PLAYWRIGHT & PERFORMER

Beryl Bain is a first time playwright, long time actress, and a dilettante who loves to travel. Selected theatre credits: *Mother's Daughter* (Soulpepper), *Bronte: A World Without Paradise Lost, A Comedy of Errors* (Stratford Festival), *How Black Mothers Say I Love You* (Factory Theatre/Girls In Bow Ties), *The Mountaintop* (Grand Theatre), *A Christmas Carol* (Theatre Northwest), *The Living by Colleen Wagner* (Summerworks 2015), *Complex* (Summerworks, 2014), *The Mountaintop* (Theatre Calgary- Betty Mitchell Award Nomination, Calgary Critics Award Nomination 2014), *Dirty Butterfly*, (Bound To Create/Obsidian Theatre-Critic's Pick, NOW Magazine), *Nadia in Awake* (Expect Theatre), *Race*, (Theatre Yes), *The Women, Born Yesterday, The Stepmother, After The Dance* (Shaw Festival), *The Little Prince* (Grand Theatre). Film/TV: *Caught in the Act* (webseries), *Suits, Awake* (Best Actress Nomination, Miami Urban Film Festival), *Rogue, Warehouse 13*, Ubisoft: *Far Cry 5* B.F.A York University.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

BERYL BAIN - JANUARY 30, 2023

Finding Bessie's story was like discovering a diamond hidden on a busy street. Aviation is full of fascinating tales, but there's something special about Bessie Coleman's unique perspective. I loved her passion for flying, her courageous, risk-taking spirit, and her sense of community.

Bessie saw aviation as her highest potential, and she did everything she could to realize this dream for herself. Her self-assurance and self-belief inspire me every day.

Now, as I board a plane, instead of fussing about my itinerary and other details, I think of Bessie's delight and sense of adventure. I'm thrilled to present a version of her perspective, as it inspires me to tell it.

Special thanks to my family Maria, Sophia, Gabriel, Jermaine, Rachelle, Elliott, Quentin and the new babe. To friends new and old; Allison Edwards-Crewe, Martha Snyder, Melee Hutton, the fictional Brontes (you know who you are!), Alan Dilworth, Lisa Kwon, Amanda Bradley, VLP, LEAP, Andrew, Marco, Alan, Sergio, Ana-Lucia, and Gina. On this project; Lisa Codrington, Alec Harmer, Mollie Garrett, Jacquie Thomas, Andrew Lamb, Marcel Stewart, Barry Cook and Emerjade Simms. You kept me going, and I'm truly grateful.



## MARCEL STEWART

### DIRECTOR

Marcel Stewart is a father, artist, facilitator, dope wordsmith, and arts administrator who loves vacuuming the house while listening to the soundtrack to *Waiting to Exhale*. Marcel serves as Artistic Director of bcurrent Performing Arts and as an Artistic Associate for SpiderWebShow Performance. Marcel also sits on the Board of Directors for Essential Collective Theatre. He has worked with Soulpepper, Factory Theatre, Thousand Islands Playhouse, Obsidian Theatre, Suitcase in Point, The Theatre Centre, The Blyth Festival, Festival Players, Studio 180, The Grand Theatre, Persephone, Theatre Direct, Carousel Players, and Atlas Stage. He was the founding youth development coordinator for Shakespeare in the Ruff. When he is not creating theatre, Marcel is an arts educator who has facilitated programming to community youth groups, professional actors, students in university, high school, and elementary. He has taught theatre performance to students at Brock University and Carlton University. He was a member of the Soulpepper Academy and completed the Theatre Enhancement Program (as a Directing Foreman) through Factory Theatre. Marcel has directed the podcast play *Toronto Pigeons* (Factory Theatre); the digital play *Meet Chloe* (Carousel Players) and the live theatre production of *Serving Elizabeth* (Thousand Islands Playhouse). Currently, Marcel is developing an immersive audio theatrical series. Loosely based on his dad's life in Jamaica, the story weaves together themes of home, grief, family, and the influence of Caribbean mythology. Inspired by the teachings of d'bi young anitafrika, Marcel often returns to the questions: Who am I? How am I? How did I get here? Who have I lost? What is my purpose?



## EMERJADE SIMMS

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/ MOVEMENT CO-ORDINATOR

Emerjade Simms is a Jamaican-Canadian actor, storyteller and sometimes-director. She is a graduate of the Acting program at the University of Windsor and holds a BFA degree. Emerjade is also a 2016/17 graduate of the Mechanicals program at Factory Theatre. In her career as an actor so far, she has worked with many wonderful people and companies. Select theatre credits include *Redbone Coonhound* (Arts Club), *Calpurnia* (RMTC/NAC), *The Mountaintop* (Persephone Theatre), *1851: Spirit and Voice* (Soulpepper/Myseum), *21 Black Futures: Omega Child* (Obsidian/CBC), *Peter Pan* (Bad Hats/Soulpepper), *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play\** (Obsidian/Nightwood), *Wounded Soldiers* (4th Line), *The Bird Killer (Let Me In)*. Television credits include *Forbidden*, *Fear Thy Neighbor*, *See No Evil* and *Paranormal 911*. Emerjade enjoys napping in her downtime and thanks her mom for everything. Thank you to this wonderful team for their leadership and guidance.





## LISA CODRINGTON

### DRAMATURG

Lisa Codrington is an actor/writer based in Toronto. She has been nominated for the Governor General's Award for Drama and is a recipient of the K.M. Hunter Theater Award and the Carol Bolt Award for Playwrights. Recent playwriting credits include *The Prescription – 21 Black Futures* (Obsidian/CBC) *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (Shaw Festival, Karamu House); *Up the Garden Path* (Obsidian Theatre). Lisa is also a past facilitator of The A.M.Y Project and Nightwood Theatre's Write From the Hip program. Currently she facilitates Obsidian Theatre's Playwrights Unit.



## BARRY W. COOK

### STAGE MANAGER

Barry has worked across Canada - most recently *Shadows in the Cove* with Mulgrave Road in Nova Scotia. Others include *Mno Bimaadiziwin* (Theatre by the Bay); *John Ware Reimagined* (Workshop West); *Piaf* (Theatre Calgary); *farewel, Mary's Wedding, Marion Bridge, Possible Worlds* (Magnus Theatre); *Pal Joey, Darling of the Day, Gotcha* (Talk is Free Theatre); *Spider's Web* (Theatre Aquarius); *Walk Me to the Corner* (Harold Green Jewish Theatre); *Doubt* (TNB) and *The Fly Fisher's Companion* (Neptune Theatre). He toured for five years in the UK and was the Co-Founding Director to Theatresports London. He has also appeared on the Comedy Network's *The Jon Dore Show* and CBC's *This is Wonderland*.



## SHAWN HENRY

### LIGHTING DESIGNER

Shawn Henry is a Toronto based Production Manager and Lighting Designer; Her Theatre credits include; *Between a Wok and a Hotpot, Our Place, Three Ordinary Men, Bent Boy, La Forastera, Russel's World, Welcome we have been waiting, 21 Black Futures, Comedy is Art, Maman La Mer, Riot, Hybrid by design, rock.paper.sistahz., Cycle of a Sari, 30 people watching, Hiding words for you, Saltfish Girl, Wise Woman, Hook up, How to succeed in business without really trying, Lady of Spills, I Marcus Garvey and Love & Marriage*. She is the resident Lighting Designer for the Ismailova Theatre of Dance.



## MICHAEL GORDON SPENCE

### SET DESIGNER

Michael is an award-winning designer, performer and playwright and is Associate Artistic Director of Theatre Gargantua. He has also designed for Théâtre français de Toronto, theatrefront, CollabArts, CCOC and TFO. His work has been nominated for Dora Mavor Moore Awards in several categories including Outstanding New Play (*The Exit Room*), and he has brought home a total of seven Doras for Outstanding Set Design, Outstanding Music (with the company) and Outstanding Performance (ensemble). Michael is also a recipient of a Harold Award — a distinguished honour for members of the Toronto independent theatre community. He is an avid sailor and outdoorsman as well as an accomplished musician.



## FLOYDD RICKETTS

### SOUND DESIGNER

Floyd Ricketts regularly works as a music supervisor, and musical director in theatre and in concert throughout North America. He is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Choirs at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY; and the Artistic Director of Ensemble Noir, a Montreal chamber choir that specializes in the music of underrepresented communities. Floyd is also the associate chorumaster for L'orchestre Philharmonique et Choeur des Mélomanes, and he recently finished his tenure as Head of Music at the National Theatre School of Canada. He has been described by his peers as a highly skilled conductor and orchestrator, and has written several chamber works for choir and orchestra. He regularly leads workshops on African-American Spiritual performance practice and diversity practices.





## DES'REE GRAY

### COSTUME DESIGNER

Des'ree Gray is a Toronto based Costume Designer with experience in film and theatre. She is a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University's Production Design Program and takes pride in her abilities in all stages of the design process.

Work: Costume Designer for *The Flight* (Factory Theatre); Assistant Costume Designer for *Yerma* (Coal Mine Theatre); Assistant Costume Designer for *Da Kink in My Hair* (Canadian Stage); Costume Designer for *The First Stone* (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); Assistant Costume Designer for *Little Women* (Stratford Festival); Assistant Costume Designer for *1851: Spirit & Voice* (SoulPepper Theatre); Designer for Designing *The Revolution* (Theatre Passe Muraille);

Online: Instagram @desreegraysdesigns; Website [www.desreegraysdesigns.ca](http://www.desreegraysdesigns.ca)



## JASON J. BROWN

### PROJECTION DESIGNER

Jason's primary arts practice is in animation, virtual reality, video projections, green screen projection and creating digital interactive worlds. He collaborates with other artists from script to final product with an emphasis on story telling and experimenting with emerging technologies. [www.jasonjbrown.com](http://www.jasonjbrown.com)

## GABRIEL TOWNSEND

### PRODUCTION MANAGER

Gabriel Townsend is an Australian born theatre professional. Graduating for The University of Melbourne's Victorian Collage of the Arts 2009, before working in theatre and dance for some of Australia's premiere arts organization including Melbourne Theatre Company and the Australian Ballet before moving to Toronto in late 2015. He continues to develop his practice deigning for companies such as Opera York show including Don Giovanni, La Traviata and The Merry Widow as well as Alexander Mackenzie Performing Arts High School including, *Le Miserable*, *The Wizard Of Oz* and *Beauty and the Beast*. The use of images to convey the stories tolled thought performance is a strong element in his work.



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Playwright & Performer **BERYL BAIN**

Director **MARCEL STEWART**

Assistant Director/Movement Co-ordinator  
**EMERJADE SIMMS**

Dramaturg **LISA CODRINGTON**

Stage Manager **BARRY W. COOK**

Lighting Designer **SHAWN HENRY**

Projection Designer **JASON J. BROWN**

Set Designer **MICHAEL GORDON SPENCE**

Sound Designer **FLOYDD RICKETTS**

Costume Designer **DES'REE GRAY**

Production Manager **GABRIEL TOWNSEND**

House Technician **MAKIAH BAUTIS**

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