

THE AVENUE

for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf

by ntozake shange

DIRECTED BY DAVID SHAKES

TECHNICAL DIRECTION, SET, SOUND & LIGHTING DESIGN BY REENAH GOLDEN, FOUNDER

Stage Manager, Robin Brown
Lighting & Sound Technician, Anderson Allen

NOVEMBER 6 - 21, 2026 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

CAST

(in order of appearance)

lady in brown / Kesha Hartzog

lady in yellow / Vanessa Ryland-Buntley

lady in purple / Dr. Deborah Washington

lady in red / Dede Gause

lady in green / Kat Davis

lady in blue / Shelia Rankin

lady in orange / Afi Beard

Note: There will be no Intermission. ***Please take a selfie, tag us @avenueblackbox, then silence your cellphones.***

A Word from the Founder/Artistic Director



Reenah Golden

"She who walks like a lion" **(meaning of Ntozake Shange's chosen name)**

Election Day 2026 brought mixed emotions for me, and I imagine for many of our beloved community members here on Joseph Avenue and beyond. What could it mean to begin to hope again? What could it mean to look boldly toward an uncertain future, carrying the weight of all we have survived while daring to believe there is still beauty ahead?

These are questions Black women have been answering with our bodies, our breath, our blood, and our becoming for generations. *Ntozake Shange understood this. She did not ask permission to tell our stories, nor did she soften their edges to make others comfortable. Her language is raw, rhythmic, sometimes profane, sometimes devastating, and always deliberate. There are words and truths in this work that may be unsettling today. We have not retreated from them. Shange did not write to be polite, she wrote to be heard. And we have chosen to honor the fullness of her voice rather than shy away from its fire. As a Black woman and poet, I recognize the sacred audacity of that choice and applaud our director and cast for their courage. There is something revolutionary about speaking the unspeakable, about allowing our stories to be messy, magnificent, and wholly our own.*

Working closely with Mr. Shakes, it has been a joy shaping much of the physical world you will encounter tonight—its sound, its scenery, its shadows and light. And perhaps it is the light that speaks most intimately to me in this world we've created. In Shange's world that these women so defiantly inhabit, color is more than visual. It is something we carry. Each hue holds a history, a heartbeat, a spirit becoming visible. Through light, I have sought not to soften the darkness, but to reveal the beauty and humanity that persist within it.

In our community, where so many stories have gone unheard, this work feels especially necessary. More than performance, it becomes witness. A place to name what hurts, celebrate what survives, and remember what is possible when we refuse to disappear. Shange offered no tidy resolutions, no neatly wrapped redemption. Instead, she entrusted us with the fierce, unfinished business of loving ourselves and one another. Perhaps hope is just that: the courage to stand in the fullness of our own color, even when the world seems determined to dim the light.

Tonight, I invite you to lean into the uncomfortable poetry in the truth. May we remember: even after the darkest storm, we are still worthy of the rainbow.

- Reenah Golden, Founder/Artistic Director

MEET THE DIRECTOR



David A. Shakes

David A. Shakes, born in Philadelphia, PA, was raised in Brooklyn, NY, where his interest in dramatic arts was nurtured as a young student in the schools of New York City. David continued his work as a young adult during the Black Arts Movement of the late 60's and early 70's and became one of the founding members of the Spirit House Movers and Players, a prominent theatre company that presented dramatic and poetic works around the country, under the direction of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). As a member of Spirit House Movers and Players, the group produced two performance albums, Nation Time and A Black Mass. During that time, he worked and studied with many dramatists and authors including Haki Mhadabuti, Woodie King, Jr. and Yusef Iman; he also studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. In addition, he shared the stage with theatrical icons including Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Samuel L. Jackson, Debbie Morgan, Lou Myers, Theresa Merritt, and Josh Brolin.

Mr. Shakes is a long-time resident of Rochester and has worked with numerous theater groups in the Rochester community as an actor, director, guest artist, and producer in performances and productions that have received critical as well as public acclaim. At GeVa Theatre Center, his roles included actor, director, teaching artist, and he acted in, as well as consulted in the mounting of August Wilson's Century. In 2022, GeVa Theatre Center presented David with the Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award. He also was a contributing artist at the JCC Centerstage, Shipping Dock, Blackfriars, RAPA, Downstairs Cabaret Theatre, Eastman Theater with Kathleen Battle and the Rochester Community Players. In addition, Mr. Shakes founded the Village Theatre, showcasing many budding, local actors and was director of Public Arts Services, bringing performing arts to hospitals, nursing homes, and correctional facilities. Currently, he is artistic director of the North Star Players, an artist-in-residence at The MuCCC and Director-in-Residence and collaborative producer at Avenue Blackbox Theatre.

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf is co-presented by

AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE & NORTHSTAR PLAYERS

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AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE

Reenah Golden is the Founder and Executive Artistic Director of the Avenue Blackbox Theatre, a New York state-based theatre company with its homebase in historic Joseph Avenue neighborhood of Rochester, NY. Our dynamic multigenerational company presents Black plays and multidisciplinary works with a particular interest in the nuances of Queer and Global Afro-culture from local, regional and published playwrights. Notable company members, residents, teaching artists and collaborators include David Shakes/North Star Players, Hettie Barnhill/Create a Space Now, Gary Dewitt Marshall, Rissa the Righter, Yves B. Golden, Anderson Allen, Nigel Lestat, She-God, Kahzmirh, Kristian Graham, Shay Herbert, Kadeem Blackman, Christopher “BakariPoet” Coles, Rapha Rebirth, DJ Spin Dr KO.

NORTHSTAR PLAYERS:

David Shakes is the founder and director of the North Star Players, a Rochester based theater company presenting works of authors that include August Wilson, James Baldwin, Charles Fuller and Ntozake Shange. In addition to drama and comedy of great African American authors the North Star Players explore and present programs about the lives of icons that include Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, William Wells Brown and others.

Northstar Players and Avenue Blackbox Theatre

have co-presented The Scavengers Daughter by Gary Earl Ross (2019), Felipe Luciano in Residence (2023), Bronze Collective Theatre Festival (2023, 2024), Sarah and Sally by Victoria Hampton (2023), Steal Away by Ramona King (2024), Steal Away (2024, 2025) and various community presentations of shows.

WE ARE HIRING!



Also hiring various production and front of house positions.

Contact us at hiring@avenuetheare.org to learn more about this and other opportunities to join our team!

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WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



KESHA SHAREE HARTZOG *{Lady in Brown}*

"Thank you David Shakes for giving me this opportunity to join this wonderful cast of brilliant women!"

Kesha Sharee Hartzog Rochester, NY native. School of the Arts graduate (1992). She began her acting career in 2009 with director/playwright Grace Flores. Her acting career continues today with plays written /produced / directed by Karen Culley, Reuben Tapp, Gary Dewitt Marshall, Karen Dieruf, The Rochester Players, Blackfriars, Laura Thomas, Delbra Brown, and David Shakes' North Star Players. Kesha can also be seen on stage annually at Rochester Fringe, Sankofa and Bronze Collective Theatre Festivals and also has a recurring character role (Sade) in Youtube webseries "In the Light" by Nikki Simone Backus and The Goddess, (Sharon Terry). Kesha recently co -starred in, *He and She in Sheep's Clothing* a film by Sharron Davis. Kesha is also an audiobook narrator under the name K.S. Hartz on Amazon Audible.

Kesha won the ROC Award in 2019 for Best Actress. Kesha won Best Female Actress in Ensemble of *The Vagina Monologues* (TANYS, 2023.)

Performance credits include; Rochester Bronze Collective Theatre Festival (2016-2023, No Bad News-2024), SANKOFA Festival (2017- 2022, Kinfolk-2024), *You Shouldn't Have Told* (Avenue Blackbox, 2019), Pandemic Play Reading Series (2020-2021), *Ghost Story* (Director, 2022), *Barbeque* (Blackfriars Theater, 2022) I*nner Loops* (Rochester Fringe, 2022), Prime Video documentary; *Look Where He Brought Me From* (2022-2023), The Goddess mini TV series (2022-2023), DVC Production; *More Than This* (2023), *Steal Away* (Avenue Blackbox, 2024) *POTUS* (Blackfriars Theater-2024), *The Odd Couple* (Female Version, 2026)

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



DEDE GAUSE *{Lady in Red}*

"I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our director, David Shakes, and his lovely wife for their unwavering hospitality, kindness, and love during this production. Thank you for always opening your home to us, welcoming us with open arms, and making us feel like family. Your generosity and support have meant so much to us, and I truly appreciate the love you have always shown from the very beginning."

Dede Gause is a native of Rochester, New York; a proud mother of DeAndre' Gause and Shalaia Edwards; and a devoted daughter of Mary and Hubert Gause. She is also a dedicated educator of more than 27 years, including seven years teaching in Las Vegas, where she also served as a behavior interventionist. Dede holds a bachelor's degree in theater from Alfred University, a master's degree in elementary and special education from Nazareth College, and is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

A passionate educator, entrepreneur, and performing artist, Dede received her initial theater training during her four years at Alfred University, where she studied under Renee Simmons. Her foundational training included theater, backstage work, stage management, and acting. She later trained under David Shakes and the late Arthur Brown at The Enterprise Zone.

Beyond education and theater, Dede is the proud owner of DDEggs & More Catering, a home-based business she has operated for seven years.

Theatrical credits include; *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf, The Colored Museum, Joe Turner's Come and Gone, Purlie Victorious, Ain't Misbehavin'*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*. She also appeared in MJS Productions' *Black Girls Anthem* (*"Celebrating August,"* series, Geva Theatre Nextstage, 2011*)*

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



Afi Beard* *{Lady in Orange}*

"I would like to dedicate this performance in honor and memory of my mom Cheryl Denise Moore, who shared her love of God theatre and musicals when I was little girl. Her rainbow guides me always."

Afi is a Mother, Poet, Actor, Spiritual Consultant, and Co founder of Ascension; The Names We Carry Peer Grief Support Group from Rochester NY. She made her theater debut in Grace Flores' production of Details in The Water as Sarah. A role & experience whose impact still echoes within today.

She was introduced to theatre and musicals by her Mother and Grandfather in early childhood, drawn to stories and characters that exemplify the beauty, and richness of the Black experience.
Although a Poet, & Author, at heart,she brings with her a deep respect for artists and artistry. She stands in the unyielding knowing that when she says yes to roles that she feels deeply aligned with, there is the gift of expansion awaiting.

Art is Divinity in motion.

Performance credits include *Incorrigible by Karen Culley (2024), Details In The Water by Grace Flores (2017)*

This is Afi's debut performance at The Avenue Blackbox Theatre!

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



VANESSA RYLAND-BUNTLEY *{Lady in Yellow}*

"I would like to thank all of the directors thus far who have taken a chance on me. I thank my husband. I give a special shout out to my children, I dare to dream because you are watching."

Vanessa "Tweety" Ryland-Buntley is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Broadcasting from SUNY Brockport with a minor in Theater. She made her acting debut during the Festival of Ten play series at SUNY Brockport in 2017 and joined the North Star Players in 2018. Vanessa is a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

When she is not working, doing community service, and being with family, she is looking for a New Edition, Janet Jackson, or old school hip hop concert to go to!

Performance credits include *Now and Then by Grace Flores (2017/2018), "For Colored Girls" by Ntozake Shange directed by David Shakes (2018), If Their World Were Ours by Rudolph Valentino (2019), The Scavenger's Daughter by Gary Earl Ross directed by David Shakes* (Avenue Blackbox, 2019) *and The Clarissa St. Monologues by Karen Culley (2020), Zooman and the Sign* by Charles Fuller (Avenue Blackbox, 2023), *Steal Away* (Avenue Blackbox, 2024).

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



KAT RINA DAVIS *{Lady in Green}*

"I would like to take this time to express her heartfelt gratitude to everyone in attendance for supporting For Colored Girls!"

Kat Rina Davis (Lady In Green) is an American actress, born and raised in Rochester, NY, and a multifaceted artist. She is a wife, mother, playwright, director, mentor, and the CEO of Kat Rina Productions. This is Kat's fifth production with The Avenue Blackbox Theatre. Kat first caught the acting bug in 2009 and has since appeared in numerous stage plays, short films, and web series as well as a regular contributor to Sankofa and Bronze Collective theatre festivals. Kat is delighted to be collaborating with such a talented ensemble of artists and crew. She extends special thanks to Director David A. Shakes and Founder/Artistic Director Reenah Golden for their professionalism and for always cultivating a safe and creative environment.

Stage credits include: 2010/2019 TANYS Award Recipient for: *The Sunshine Boys/You Shouldn't Have Told*, and 2015 Roc Awards Best Actress winner. Stage plays, short films, and web series which include: *The Renaissance of Nia: One Woman's Quest Toward Emotional Wellness* (Avenue Blackbox/Bronze Festival, 2024, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, *Detroit '67*, *the ripple, the wave that carried me home* (Director), *Unforgiving* (YouTube web series), and various promo videos.

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



SHELIA RANKIN *{Lady in Blue}*

Congratulations on 44 years with North Star Players, SHELIA!

Shelia Rankin is an actress who first debuted at the Village Theatre in *Beyond the Middle Passage (1984)* directed by David Shakes. She continued her acting passion from this point and she has performed in every production of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicied When the Rainbow is Enuf* with Shakes' North Star Players. After the move from Village Theatre, Shelia continued with Northstar Players on to RAPA theatre where she performed and reprised her role in *For Colored Girls* portraying the "Lady in Blue", *Flying West*, *Joe Turner Come and Gone*, and Beneatha in *A Raisin in the Sun* at SUNY Brockport. In 2019, North Star Players became residents at Avenue Blackbox Theatre where Shelia joined the cast of their premiere co-production, Scavenger's Daughter (2019) and later Steal Away (2024) both directed by David Shakes. Shelia can often be seen on stage annually at both Sankofa and Bronze Collective Theatre Festivals.

Stage Credits: A veteran on stage and backstage, Sheila has also stage-managed productions of *A Soldier's Story, Ladies in Waiting, Two Trains Running, Ashcakes, Jitney, and Black Girls' Anthem*, as well as other productions for North Star Players and for MJS Productions.

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



DR. DEBORAH WASHINGTON *[Lady in Purple]*

"I would like to give thanks and glory to God. And Special thanks to my husband, Robert, for his patience and love."

Dr. Deborah Washington is a Rochester native. She is thrilled and honored to perform as Lady in Purple in this iconic play. She has enchanted and captivated audiences on stage with over twenty years of experience of stage productions several directed by David Shakes. In 2026, her new play "When Harriet Met Sojourner" premiered at Sankofa Theatre Festival.

She is a proud member of "The North Star Playas!" Additionally, in 2010 she founded Beehive Business Enterprise, LLC in Rochester, focusing on theatrical performances, writing, acting, and K–6 academic tutoring.

Thanks, and glory to God. Special thanks to her husband, Robert, for his patience and love. Grateful to her family and friends for their continued encouragement and love.

Performance credits include: *The Scavenger's Daughter* by Gary Earl Ross (Avenue Blackbox, 2019), *The Story of Black Wall Street*, *Amen Corner*, *For Colored Girls Who have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enough*, and others.

WHO'S WHO BACKSTAGE

For Colored Girls...

November 6 - 21, 2026 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

WRITTEN BY: NTOZAKE SHANGE

DIRECTED BY: DAVID SHAKES (Artistic Director, Northstar Players)

TECHNICAL DIRECTION & SCENIC/SOUND/LIGHTING DESIGN BY: REENAH GOLDEN (Founder/Artistic Director, Avenue Blackbox Theatre)

STAGE MANAGER: Robin Brown
LIGHTING & SOUND TECH/OPERATOR: Anderson Allen
(Ave Artist-in-residence)

ADDITIONAL CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN SUPPORT:
Kenny Debot painter
Anderson Allen, painter
Chris Pinckney, carpentry
W. Michelle Harris, digital visual design (preshow)

Avenue Fellows various elements of construction, painting, design.

STAGEHANDS:
Shy Rodriguez (Ave Artist-in-residence)
Amari Muniz (Ave Fellow), Mykel Fletcher (Ave Fellow)

FRONT OF HOUSE:
Imani Rice & Talitha-Koumi Oluwafemi (House Managers)
Amari Muniz, Tayler D'Angelo, Lina Molina-Cruz, Mykel Fletcher
(Ave Fellows & Grad Fellows)
CONCESSIONS/MERCH ASSOCIATES: Lina Molina-Cruz & Tayler D'angelo
(Ave Interns/Apprentices)

Special Thanks to Bets Quackenbush/Hamilton AV, Dr. Gaya Shakes, Carlton Wilcox (Ave Resident Sound Engineer), Diamond Jones, Cocoa Rae Photography, and Something from Nothing Sweets!

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THANK YOU

A special thank you to the Avenue OWLs (Strategic Planning and Development Committee):

Fran Weisberg (CEO Emeritus, United Way, Former President and CEO of Lifespan of Greater Rochester), Kathleen Muscato (Retired Partner & Co-Owner, Brand Cool Marketing, Inc.), Judith Fonzi (University of Rochester, Emeritus), Daren Chentow (Retired IT executive, philanthropist), Dr. Eileen Ryan (Strong/University of Rochester, Emeritus/Philanthropist)

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR OUR MONTHLY CONTRIBUTORS:

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Tonya Thompson

MORE THANK YOUS

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Without the love and support of our village we would not be here. You have been reinforcing the importance of grassroot, community-based, Black-led arts and cultural programming for 8 years here in the northeast quadrant of our beloved city and community theatre family.

AVENUE BLACKBOX BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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If you would like to join our family of loving supporters please visit avenuetheatre.org/donate for tax-deductible options.

We also accept **cash donations, cashapp: $avenueblackbox and venmo: @avenueblackbox** especially for our healthy snack, hygiene and transportation fund for youth programs.

Much love and many thanks.

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