

Avenue Blackbox Theatre and Northstar Players Present



A FOLKTALE BY RAMONA KING  
Directed by David Shakes

**APRIL 12-14 | APRIL 19-21**

THE AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE  
780 JOSEPH AVENUE | ROCHESTER, NY 14621

[avenuetheatre.org](http://avenuetheatre.org)



ADAM J. BELLO  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Council on  
the Arts



City of Rochester, NY  
Malik D. Evans, Mayor  
Rochester City Council



## STEAL AWAY

BY RAMONA KING  
DIRECTED BY DAVID SHAKES

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

Stage Manager, Kathy Kristich  
Sound Technician, Josiah Tapp  
Light Board Operator, Anderson Allen

APRIL 12 - 21, 2024 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

### CAST

*(in order of appearance)*

Mrs. Stella Margaret Kyzer.....Shelia Rankin  
Tracy Ada Kyzer.....Kesha Sharee Hartzog  
Miss Sudy Atkinson.....Samyria Blythers  
Mrs. Bluiyah "Blu" Daniels.....Jacquelyn Dobson  
Mrs. Renita "Redd" Ruth.....Javannah Davis  
Mrs. Jade Long.....Vanessa Ryland-Buntley  
News Voice.....Rick Staropoli

*Note: Please silence your cellphones. There will be a 15 minute Intermission.*

## A Word from the Founder/Artistic Director



**Reenah Golden**

*As we embark on the final journey of our 5th anniversary season, I am thrilled to share a few words about our concluding play, *Steal Away* by Ramona King, directed by the brilliant David Shakes. This captivating folktale seamlessly weaves together elements of comedy, history, and the profound Black experience in America, resonating powerfully with audiences today.*

*As Founder and Artistic Director, I am delighted beyond words to witness the overwhelming support and celebration from our community. From the inspiring ACT V: A Celebration of Art and Activism exhibit at City Hall to the heartfelt attendance at each play, directed by me (*Blood at the Root* and *The Brothers Size*) and David Shakes, our featured director (*Zooman and the Sign*, *The Past is the Past/ Sarah and Sally*, *Steal Away*). Your enthusiasm has fueled our artistic journey and will inspire an even more exciting Season 6!*

*On a personal note, collaborating with Shakes on the technical design and artistic vision mount these dynamic shows has been extremely fulfilling for me. Those that know me well know that it is hard for me to choose whether the nerd in me loves theatre more for what's happening on stage or back stage! So, providing the set and lighting design for each of these very uniquely special shows was a welcomed challenge that my wildest dreams are made of! #GIRLTECH*

*This final show *Steal Away* embodies the essence of our mission, serving as a beacon of cultural reflection and social commentary. Through laughter, tears, and introspection, this production invites us to explore the depths of our shared history and the enduring relevance of our collective narratives.*

*Thank you for joining us on this remarkable milestone, and may *Steal Away* serve as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling and the enduring spirit of community.*

- Reenah Golden, Founder/Artistic Director

## MEET THE DIRECTOR



**David 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 collaborative producer at Avenue Blackbox Theatre.

**STEAL AWAY IS CO-PRESENTED BY**

**AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE  
& NORTHSTAR PLAYERS**

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**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.

**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 and collaborators include Hettie Barnhill, Gary Dewitt Marshall, Yves B. Golden, Anderson Allen, Nigel Lestat, Gatekeeper Adrian Elim, Tokeya C. Graham, Shaq AOR Payne, Ari Highsmith, Taryn Highsmith, Ty Burr, She Rise, Rapha Rebirth, DJ East Harmony.

**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). Additionally, they will present *Sarah and Sally* by Victoria Hampton (Dec 2023) and *Steal Away* by Ramona King (April 2024), in the 5th Avenue Anniversary Season.

**2023** **ACT V** **2024**  
**THE AVENUE**  
5 Years of Community, Creativity, Change!

**LINE-UP OF PLAYS**

**AUG 18-19**  
**Blood at the Root** by **Dominique Morisseau**  
Directed by **Reenah Golden**

**SEP 15-24**  
**Zooman & the Sign** by **Charles Fuller**  
Directed by **David Shakes**

**DEC 1-10**  
**Sarah & Sally** by **Vickie Hampton**  
Directed by **David Shakes**

**JAN 25-FEB 4**  
**The Brothers Size** by **Tarrell Alvin McCraney**  
Directed by **Reenah Golden**

**APRIL 12-21**  
**Steal Away** by **Ramona King**  
Directed by **David Shakes**

✦

**avenuetheatre.org**

## WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



**SHEILA RANKIN (Stella)**

*Congratulations on 40 years, NorthStar Players!*

Shelia Rankin is an actress who first debuted at the Village Theatre in *Beyond the Middle Passage* (1984) directed by David Shakes. She continued in this theatre where she performed *For Colored Girls* and *Steal Away* with Shakes' Northstar Players and continued with Northstar Players to RAPA theatre where she performed reprised her role in *For Colored Girls* portraying the "Color Blue", *Flying West*, *Joe Turner Come and Gone*, and *Beneatha* in *A Raisin in the Sun* at SUNY Brockport.

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 MJS Productions.

## WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



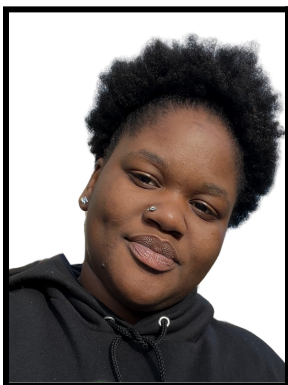
**KESHA SHAREE HARTZOG (TracyAda)**

*"Shout Out to David Shakes! Thank you for this great opportunity to work with this special group of women!! Y'all know you're all my mommas!!"*

Kesha has been performing since 2009. In numerous local stage productions. She won the ROC Award in 2019 for Best Actress. She's participated in a few miniseries and webseries on YouTube. In 2022 she participated in the Fringe Festival performing at Geva on their Fielding Stage in *Inner Loops*. In 2022 she had her debut performance at BlackFriars Theater in the play *Barbecue*. In 2023 She and her production won awards at The TANYS Awards Festival for *The Vagina Monologues*. Kesha won Best Actress of TANYS in 2023. Kesha is also an audiobook narrator under the name K.S. Hartz on Amazon Audible.

Past credits include; Rochester Bronze Collective Theatre Festival (2016-2023), SANKOFA Festival (2017- 2022), *You Shouldn't Have Told* (Avenue Blackbox, 2019), Pandemic Play Reading Series (2020-2021), *Ghost Story* (Director, 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)

## WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



**SAMYRIA BLYTHERS (Sudy)**

*"I would like to thank God, my parents, my Nana & my siblings for always being in me!"*

Samyria is a 2022 School Of The Arts graduate who has been involved with the avenue since 15 years old, and loved every minute of it! She's so excited to be a part of this amazing production, surrounded by so many wise & talented actors. As the youngest, and a latecomer to the cast, she hopes to learn from them and continue to make them proud. She would like to thank God for the gift of acting & her parents for their never ending support!

Samyria is excited to be ending the Avenue's 5th season strong after being featured in the first production of the season, *Blood at the Root* by Dominique Morisseau (Avenue Blackbox, 2023).

## WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



**JACQUELYN DOBSON (Bluiah)**

*"I would like to thank My Mother, my original Influencer and Creative Director and Critic. My performance is dedicated to her and her Olympian spirit and oh so sweet soul. She now watches me perform from her new Heavenly home. I love and miss you Mommy"*

Jacquelyn Dobson is thrilled to return to the stage as Bluiah Daniels in *Steal Away*, one of her favorite plays of all time. She reprising the role of Bluiah Daniels having been in the original production directed by David Shakes in 1982.

Jacquelyn has delighted audiences throughout the country. Jacquelyn has brought her wit and brightness to many stages. Geva Theatre Center, Westside Theater, Blackfriar's Theatre, JCC, Rochester Fringe Festival and others including schools, colleges, churches, temples and outdoor venues.

In addition to her own performance career, Jacquelyn has coached dozens of RCSD students to success in local oratory contests. Jacquelyn loves her work as a school social worker and inspires her students, staff administrators and children's families on a daily basis.

## WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



**VANESSA RYLAND-BUNTLEY (Jade)**

*"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).

## WHO'S WHO BACKSTAGE

# STEAL AWAY

APRIL 12 - 21, 2024 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

WRITTEN BY: RAMONA KING

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

SET/SCENIC/LIGHTING DESIGN BY: REENAH GOLDEN  
(Founder/Artistic Director, Avenue Blackbox Theatre)

STAGE MANAGER: Kathy Kristich

SOUND TECHNICIAN/OPERATOR: Josiah Tapp, {theatre}+{nfasi}

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT/LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR:

Anderson Allen (Ave Artist-in-residence)

STAGEHANDS: Kadeem Blackman (Ave Photographer-in-residence),

N'Dia Prout (Ave Grad Fellow), Steven Tejada (Ave Grad Fellow)

with support from additional community volunteers.

House Managers: Kenya Malcolm, Ja'Miah Smith

*Special Thanks to Deborah Lewis for the beautiful cake and  
Reuben Tapp for SFX & software support*

## WE ARE HIRING!

A hiring poster for Avenue Theatre. The top part features three photos of staff members: a man in a grey jacket, a woman in a black t-shirt, and a woman in a white dress. Below the photos, the text reads "JOIN OUR DREAM TEAM" in large blue letters, followed by "AVENUE" in a small box, "APPLY TO BECOME OUR OPERATIONS MANAGER" in white, and "Together we're creating inspiring legacies for generations to come." in a smaller font. At the bottom, it says "Apply Today!" with a hashtag "#HIRING" and the website "avenuetheatre.org". A purple speech bubble on the right says "WE'RE HIRING".

**JOIN OUR DREAM TEAM**  
AVENUE  
APPLY TO BECOME OUR  
**OPERATIONS MANAGER**  
*Together we're creating inspiring legacies for generations to come.*  
Apply Today!  
#HIRING  
avenuetheatre.org



## THANK YOU

**A heartfelt thank you to this amazing cast, crew, creative team, volunteers and our sponsors:**

Leah Lozano Memorial Fund for Avenue Children’s Theatre Project  
County of Monroe | County Executive Adam Bello  
City of Rochester | Mayor Malik Evans | ArtsBloom 2023

Without the love and support of our village we would not be here. For 5 years you have been reinforcing the importance of grassroot, community-based, Black-led arts and cultural programming here in the northeast quadrant of our beloved city and community theatre family.

### AVENUE BLACKBOX BOARD OF DIRECTORS

TOKEYA C. GRAHAM (Co-Chair)  
LUIS BURGOS-BONILLA (Secretary)  
CHAD E. FRANKLIN (Treasurer)

**If you would like to join our family of loving supporters please visit [avenuetheatre.org/donate](http://avenuetheatre.org/donate) for tax-deductible options.**

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

**Much love and many thanks.**

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## THANK YOU

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

Fran Weisberg (COMMITTEE CHAIR, 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:**

- John Beitter
- Deanna Cartenuto
- Nikki Cherry
- Crafting Links
- Elizabeth Chiang
- Julie Damerell
- Jennie Dixon
- Mary Beth Elko
- Eric Evans
- Julie Fiske
- Wyllona Homan
- Krista Khan
- Adam Rubinstein
- Ritti Singh
- Shirley Thompson
- Almeta Whitis
- Samuel Waters