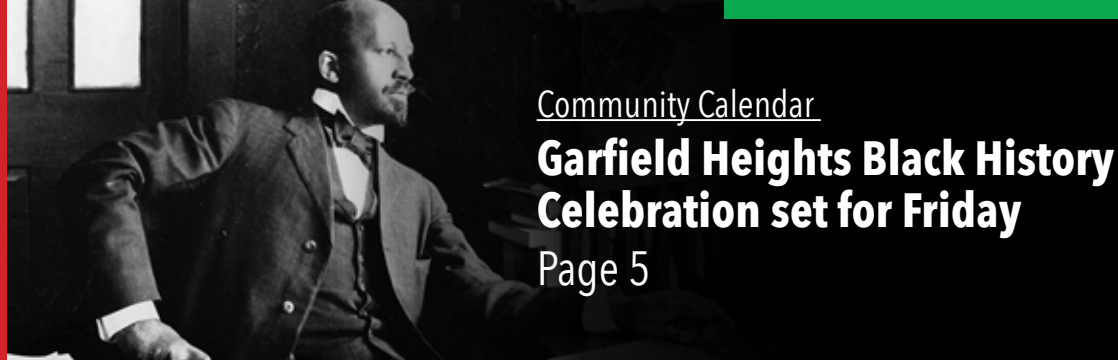


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THE REAL DEAL PRESS

Volume 4 / Issue 16 / February 10, 2019

Blake & Sissle *Sizzle* at Karamu!

By R. T. Andrews
EDITOR

Karamu House certainly lived up to its Swahili name — a place of joyful gathering — this past Thursday night with the world premiere of a unique production that honors an enduring pioneer moment in American musical history.

The Impact of 'Shuffle Along' is a musical concert version of the 1920s musical *Shuffle Along* that marked the emergence of Black musical theater. Written and performed entirely by African Americans, the show brought the Harlem Renaissance to Broadway and paved the way for the integration of audiences in New York City. The stupendous talent on stage included the likes of Paul Robeson and Josephine Baker, luminaries whose

stars still shine in the pantheon of American culture.

The multi-media version on stage at Karamu was written by Bill Rudman, executive director of The Musical Theatre Project [TMTP], and co-produced by him and Karamu CEO Tony Sias, along with their respective organizations in their first collaborative effort as a vehicle for social justice, awareness and change.

It may indeed have that effect. But what it was on Thursday was a rollicking good time that featured the enormous talents of a marvelous cast that featured the singing and dancing of Treva Offutt and Justin C. Woody, the Joe Hunter Trio + George Foley, and the incomparable jazz and blues singer Evelyn Wright, who had a couple of solo

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Treva Offutt and Justin C. Woody jump, jive, and wail in "The Impact of Shuffle Along" at Karamu House. Photo credit: Vince Robinson

Profile in the Arts

Robert Barry Fleming personifies versatility in Play House roles

By Nathan Paige
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

William Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage..." but Robert Barry Fleming is focusing his diverse talents on a specific stage right here in Cleveland — home to the sec-

ond largest theater district in the country.

Fleming has served as the Associate Artistic Director at Cleveland Play House since 2015. He's part of a three-person leadership team, led by Artistic Director Laura Kepley, along with Managing Director Kevin Moore.

"We lead all artistic initiatives

of Cleveland Play House, which includes show selection for our regular season plays. Laura and I teach in the MFA Program, in our partnership with Case Western Reserve University's MFA Program for Acting, and we do a good deal of work in making sure that the artistic work actually works in tandem

with our educational works."

Fleming also works closely with Education Director Pamela DiPasquale, making sure that the Play House's mission and vision initiatives are fulfilled while being of service to the Northeast Ohio community.

"The Education department

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Community Bulletin Board

BPACF calls for Black Professional of Year Nominations

The Black Professionals Association Charitable Foundation is accepting nominations for the 2019 Black Professional of the Year (BPOY) through February 20.

“The BPOY award is a source of great pride and respect amongst African Americans in Northeast Ohio. We are encouraging community members from all walks of life to submit nominations,” said Marcella J. Brown, BPACF executive director, in a statement.

The honoree is expected to be a community member with a stellar career trajectory, significant civic engagement experience and a track record of investing in youth.

Past honorees have included Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, Margot James Copeland, Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr., Leon Bibb, and Robyn Minter Smyers [2018].

“Our past honorees are a distinguished group of professionals who we can all look to for inspiration, mentorship and leadership. They give us all something to aspire to, in hopes of leading with a commitment to excellence,” said Ronald V. Johnson, Jr., BPACF President.

This year’s recipient will receive the award at the group’s 39th Anniversary Scholarship and Awards Gala & BPOY Salute on November 2.

To submit a nomination, click [here](#) or call the office at 216.229.7110.

Last February the blockbuster film “Black Panther” from Dis-

ney and Marvel Studios was released in theaters. Its earnings reached \$1.3 billion globally and the film was nominated for 63 awards, winning 29.

But the story of Wakanda began far before the film as a series of comics that debuted in 1961 in the midst the civil rights movement, bringing representation into the world of mainstream comics which often lacked racial diversity, both in the characters and the writers who create them.

The Black Panther story



continues off-screen through Marvel’s comics. *Rise of the Black Panther*, was released a month before the film and is co-written by Evan Narcisse Ta-Nehisi Coates. The graphic novel details the first year of the Black Panther, T’Challa, as King of Wakanda.

Journalist, critic, and author Evan Narcisse will appear at the City Club Tuesday, February 26 at noon to talk about the Black Panther and the representation of black life in pop culture. High school students will be admitted free. Ticket sales for non-students are limited. Call/visit 216.621.6260/cityclub.org for more information.



Rev C. J. Harkness, pastor of People’s Community Church, chief diversity



officer of Baldwin Wallace University, and president of the Ohio Diversity Officers Collaboration, will be the featured speaker at the March 29 quarterly Faith & Finance breakfast of the Christian Business League. Call 216.71.5760 for more

information.

The National Council of Negro Women, Cleveland Section will be celebrating the Cleveland arts community at its 2019 Legacy Luncheon on Saturday, June 8. Karamu House CEO and President Tony Sias will be honored. The event venue is the Hilton Garden Inn on Beta Drive in Mayfield Village. Call luncheon co-chair Sherldean Davis at 216.640.0612 for more information.

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Robert Barry Fleming personifies versatility in Play House roles

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has a suite of 12 programs; primarily these initiatives are in the schools, with our teaching artists working every day to help young people with their literacy arts competencies, and their social and emotional learning to ensure they can excel in their schoolwork and have all their basic needs met.”

Fleming is also an accomplished actor, having landed roles throughout his career on TV (“Family Matters”); the silver screen (“L.A. Confidential”), and onstage (“Stand Up Tragedy,” “Ragtime” and “Jelly’s Last Jam”). Most recently, he was in the 2018 Cleveland Play House production of “Sweat.” He serves as choreographer for one of Cleveland Play House’s current productions, “Ken Ludwig’s Sherwood: The Adventures of Robin Hood,” and he will direct Karen Zacarias’ “Native Gardens” which opens for a three-week run beginning April 27.

“Native Gardens” will be Fleming’s fourth directing effort at CPH, and he sees his growth in the arts as a natural progression.

“I fully committed to each path of my career, in terms of being a triple threat (acting, singing, dancing), but I felt there was a more global sense of wanting to contribute to individual productions, and being in the field. That turned into a natural progression where all my skill



sets — being an educator and artist and interpreter of work — all seemed to be the best fit in the kind of role that I have now, where I get to do all of those things.”

Fleming isn’t new to Cleveland, per se. He has familial roots here: it’s his father’s birthplace. “I do have a lot a family here and in Washington, D.C. I came here as an adult for the first time in 2015 for a conference. Being here was one of those revelatory moments of ‘wow, this city is really engaged, and much more vibrant than the national reputation.’

“I think Cleveland is the quintessential American community,” Fleming continued. “For me, it’s been of great interest to practice my art as a theater artist in this setting. While there is an incredible renaissance here, there’s also the opportunity to be incredibly inclusive, and not just for a small, wealthy segment of the community. I wasn’t

necessarily finding that in Washington, D.C.”

Looking back on his three-pronged career, Fleming found it difficult to pinpoint a favorite role or piece of choreography; however, directing “The Royale” stands out as special.

“Every project I’ve been involved in have been very special processes, and they all offered me the opportunity to reflect on things that I think are worthy of time and energy. I got to direct “The Royale,” based on the Jack Johnson story, and that felt really relevant because we were producing it right around the same time that the President pardoned Jack Johnson, and it was also on the heels of the NFL ruling regarding the National Anthem policy. With those events happening within days of each other, I thought was thematically something that that play captured. It feels important to have that conversation about something that feels so immediate.”

THE REAL DEAL PRESS

Reporting on the interplay of race, class and power in the civic, business and cultural spaces of Northeast Ohio and beyond.

Our mission is to attract, articulate and amplify civic intelligence and community engagement for a healthier, stronger community.

We welcome letters to the editor. Please include your name, address, and best phone number. [Address and phone will not be published.] We may edit for clarity and space.

Submit letters, press releases, notices, calendar items, and corrections via email at rta@TheRealDealPress.com or fax 216.672.4304.

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Every Sunday

Community Calendar

Wednesday, Feb. 13, 11:45a

Fairfax Healthcare Legacy Lunches continue with Yvonne Lucas

Fairfax Healthcare, 9014 Cedar Ave. [44106], continues its weekly legacy lunch and soul buffet series with speaker Yvonne H. Lucas of Lucas Funeral Homes this week. Other speakers in the Black History Month series include Dr. Julian Earls, retired NASA-Glenn chief, on Feb. 20, and Rev. C Todd Davidson of Antioch Baptist Church on Feb. 27. 216.795.1363.

Friday, Feb. 15, 6:30p

Garfield Heights Black History Celebration set for Friday

Former TV news anchor Eleanor Hayes will be the special guest speaker at a Black History Month observance at the Garfield Performing Arts Center, 4900 Turney Rd. The first and current Garfield HS valedictorians will be honored. Call Councilman Mike Dudley 216.324.7661 for more info.

Saturday, Feb. 16, 10:30a

Second Justice for Our Sisters forum set for Saturday

This session, aimed at devising solutions to the problems of domestic violence and abusive relationships, will cover the legal system, resources and assistance, and community engagement. It starts at 10:30a at the Cleveland Hts.-University Hts. Main Library, 2345 Lee Rd. [44118]. www.conversationandleadership.org/events

Sunday, Feb. 17, 3p

Jewish-Black Relations In Cleveland's Urban Neighborhoods: 1920-1960

Black and Jewish interactions in mid-20th century neighborhoods like Glenville and Mt. Pleasant left a lasting legacy to their intergroup relations. The Cleveland story has been masterfully told by area native Todd Michney, now an assistant professor of history at Georgia Tech, in his book, *Surrogate Suburbs: Black Upward Mobility and Neighborhood Change in Cleveland, 1900-1980* (2017).

Michney will talk about trepidation, tolerance and turnover in these and other Cleveland neighborhoods next Sunday at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2929 Richmond Rd., Beachwood. Admission will be \$10.

Blake & Sissle Sizzle at Karamu!

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(left to right) Bill Rudman of The Musical Theater Project and Tony F. Sias of Karamu House host "The Impact of Shuffle Along" at Karamu. Evelyn Wright, backed by The Joe Hunter Trio + George Foley croons in "The Impact of Shuffle Along" at Karamu House, a co-production with The Musical Theater Project. Photo credits: Vince Robinson

numbers that nearly brought down the house, and which surely stirred the spirit of Langston Hughes that on this occasion, surely infused the newly expanded Jelliffe Theatre.

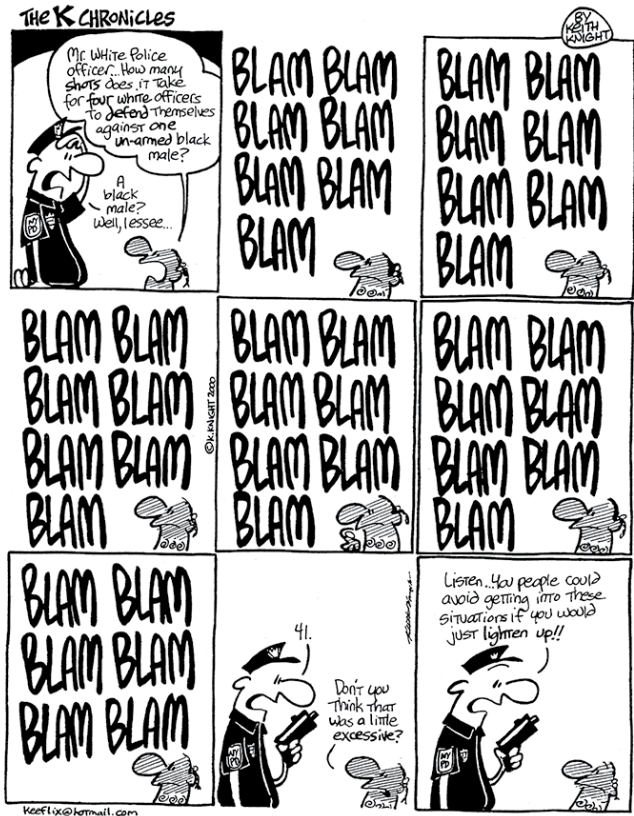
And it was educational to boot, told principally through the script and narration of Rudman and Sias, who also demonstrated some of the performance chops that have been somewhat mothballed as he leads Karamu's own renaissance.

The original *Shuffle Along* is known for the music and lyrics of Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle that informed a thin plot line about a mayoral race written by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles. The collaboration of these four black men to conceive and produce a production and take it from the outskirts of Broadway and transform American theater is a Black History Month lesson in itself. It is a reminder of the days when the black community drew strength from its own considerable resources, even as it struggled to find footholds in a larger society where slavery was still a personal memory for millions and blackface was still common in vaudeville

and the marketplace.

For those of you preparing to go online and grab ducats for the show, we have sad news: today's 3p matinee is the final performance and it is sold out. But you may still take heart in knowing that Karamu's season is ongoing, with two one-act plays by Tennessee Williams opening on this Thursday on Valentine's Day, and numerous other attractions in its portfolio.

Karamu, the country's oldest African American theater, is one of this city's precious few truly integrated cultural venues. Less than a decade ago, there were whispers about folding its iconic theater into the Cleveland Play House family, a move that would essentially have meant the demise of its unique cultural heritage and role. It took the collaborative efforts of many people on several levels to prevent that development and then initiate the renaissance that is occurring today. At its heart, the *Impact of Shuffle Along* celebrates that can-do spirit. Karamu, with its cultural heritage and resonance, remains a place with the potential to manufacture more of that sorely needed spirit for our community.



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