

# NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2020

HAPPY BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

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## EVENTS THIS MONTH!

- MTC Cabaret: Love & Loss- Feb 14 -Heymann
- Play Discussion w/USITT - TBA
- Redeye- February 28-29
- Submissions for the New Works Festival - due Feb 14

## THINGS TO SEE!

At Pitt!

- Oblivion-February 5-9
- The Verge- February 6-16
- Appropriate - February 20-March 1

Around Pittsburgh!

- *Little Shop of Horrors* - Public Theatre - Now through Feb 23 (Nick DePinto worked on this show!)
- *A Midsummer's Night Dream* - PICT Classic Theatre - Feb 13-29

## YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!

### WHY PITT?

JOSEE

I'm asked this question a lot. Why did I go to Pitt? Why study theatre here?

Here's what I have to say: I came to Pitt because it was one of the few options for me that allowed theatre for non-majors. I had many offers to many schools, but I wanted a place where I could study psychology and get involved in theatre. When I visited Pitt, I fell in love with the campus and the people. There was no doubt in my mind that it was the place for me. During "O" Week of my freshman year, I went to an event held by the theatre department. I met so many members of the faculty and student groups and I realized these people would accept me despite my inexperience. I have never felt so loved - I was home. Over my years at Pitt, those home-like aspects have shifted and changed but very rarely wavered. The people in the department have taught me so much from theatrical skills to life skills, and we've put them into practice as we suffer through many of the changes to the department in the last few years.

First, I realized we spent all our time in the basement of buildings. It was as if Pitt didn't want anyone to see the beautiful work of my peers and myself. But we rose up. Instead of getting lost in the depths of Cathy, we found ways to draw people down to us. People came to see us perform and design and manage, despite the roadblocks they faced. Then, they took away our workspace. Where could I stay until midnight (because rehearsal goes until 10) working on my homework or design work?

Thankfully, the faculty graciously opened their arms to us and allowed us to use their administrative floor as a workspace. Now, any day of the week you will see 20+ kids on one office floor doing work, eating lunch, and learning from one another. Now, we as a theatre department are facing not only neglect of issues that need addressing but intentional destruction of things that make our department special. Our theaters leak. Facilities' only solution was to keep the water off our sets and lights by placing buckets under the leaks. There is no way for students who cannot use stairs to get onto the stage in the Charity Randall Theatre. Our theatres flood and for weeks, the Heymann (again, in a basement) was dealing with water in the lobby and audience banks.

The mentorship room we worked to get approval for is a year behind schedule. We have rats, bees, mice, creaking pipes, steaming radiators, and a million things we have begged to have fixed but get turned down at every step with a "we are working on it." The department lost a historian faculty member two years ago and Pitt refuses to even allow us to search for another.

In a crushing blow this year, Pitt decided to cut the MFA program in Theatre Pedagogy. Graduate students run shows, perform, teach classes, and connect to the undergraduates in a way that comes from the shared experience of school. They are an integral part of our community and are critical to the success of our department. Without them, our faculty will have to spread themselves further than ever. They will have less time to do outside work to support themselves. They will have less time to mentor. They will be less helpful to us because they will just be trying to survive. Any time they have will be spent in class or fighting the university for whatever basic rights they are denying us that week. I know it seems as if I have gotten off-topic, but it all comes back to the question. People ask me "Why Pitt?" I used to know the answer. Now I find myself asking a similar question, "Why, Pitt?"

*Use your voice! The Provost Ann E. Cudd has office hours on Tuesday February 11 from 10:30-12 in 801 Cathy. You can also email: [provost@pitt.edu](mailto:provost@pitt.edu)*

ITS NOT POSSIBLE TO CONDENSE BLACK EXCELLENCE IN THEATRE INTO JUST A FEW PARAGRAPHS.

BUT HERE'S JUST A TASTE.

## BLACK PANTHER + COSTUME DESIGN KJ GILMER

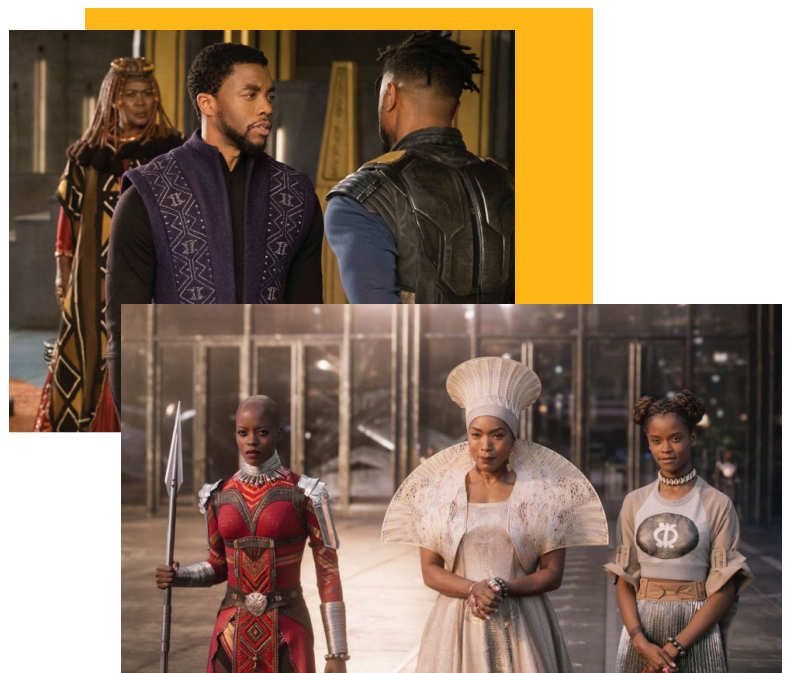
On the evening of February 24, 2019, Ruth E. Carter (April 10, 1960) was the first African American woman to win the Oscar for Best Achievement in Costume Design for the Black Panther. The shock waves were visual as the audience at Dolby Theatre in Hollywood registered and stood for the win. Ms. Carter has two previous Oscar nominations for Malcolm X and Amistad.

As an African American costume designer, I vicariously shared in the victory of the achievement. The moment was especially poignant because a costume designer of color has been recognized in an area that has been dominated by white, European men and women. The number of African American film costume designers is small and the honor of an Oscar nod is smaller.

Black Panther is a ground-breaking movie that showed black people can be superheroes and inhabit a world where African ethnicity is thriving vibrantly, celebrated and revered. Carter's costumes did just that with the savvy and innovation that costume designers can bring to their work. The lushness of fabric, ornament and style is a testament to hard work, an understanding of design and a love for the art of costume design and creation.

Carter's costume designs are a plethora of color, texture, silhouette and pattern of various African nations that make up the imaginary country of Black Panther's Wakanda. Her extensive research on the various African countries and 3 D printing that she used to create the designs and patterns for the Wakandans, may have tipped the Oscar win in her favor.

Carter says in her acceptance speech that "Marvel may have created the first African American superhero but thorough costume design we made him a King".



## BEYOND THE FEBRUARY SLOT

### KAMI

I don't know if some theatres know this ... but!... you can produce Black works outside of February! And you can do more than one a year! Watching a story told by an all Black cast makes me cry of happiness.

The moment I remember falling in love with theatre is when I saw *The Color Purple*. It was the first time I got to see someone that looked like me on stage. I heard gospel music that I grew up listening to. I saw Cynthia Erivo onstage, and was screaming from the back of the balcony during bows, hyping her all the way up although she would never hear me. I saw *One Night In Miami* (shoutout to Brenden!) - the perfectly picked out afros, every embrace, the delivery of every joke was so warmly familiar. Seeing hair being braided on stage in *Flyin' West* made me smile immediately - just seeing someone with the same 4c hair as me onstage! Back then, I forgot it was possible.

From Alvin Ailey to *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* to *Choir Boy* - I get so happy to find an all Black production to tell my mom about for us to see. I call her everytime. (I love my mom, fun fact, my mom had me and my lil sister watch MLK's I Have A Dream speech every MLK day. ) We are literally rooting for any Black person we see onstage. And Black playwrights are really producing such wonderful work.

The designers and technicians need to reflect what we see onstage too. You have to DIG to find information about Black designers. They're there! But they can be hard to find. I had to go to NYC and dig through archives to find out that Perry Watkins was the first Black scenic designer on Broadway. And as of now (although a Tony is not the only measure of success), no Black person has been nominated for a Tony design category outside of costumes. (There have been directors, choreographers, and orchestrations!)

Here are just a few of all of the wonderful people doing wonderful work.



Martine Key Green-Rogers

Dramaturg

[martinekeigreenrogers.com](http://martinekeigreenrogers.com)



1969: *The Second Man*

Stacey Derosier

Lighting Designer

[staceyderosier.com](http://staceyderosier.com)



Lorde



Elton Bradman  
Sound Designer,  
Composer, Musician  
[eltonsounds.com](http://eltonsounds.com)



Nataki Garret  
Director,  
Artistic Director at  
Oregon Shakes  
[natakigarrett.com](http://natakigarrett.com)

## PLAY OF THE MONTH - FUCKING A



FUCKING A - Urban Theater Company

We will have a discussion of *FUCKING A* written by Suzan-Lori Parks later in the month! Get excited! More information will be sent out soon!

## SONG OF THE MONTH!

Someone gotta take the aux in the shop!

Ain't nothing wrong with a lil jazz!

Try: **Let The Good Times Roll** - Quincy Jones



JOSEE



Pictures from Alvin Ailey Dance Company

As theatre attempts to move forward out of toxic thought and implicit racism, performers of color are slowly becoming more common on stage. Our job, as lighting designers, is to highlight those performers in the best way possible. This is our way of supporting them while also telling a story in an aesthetically beautiful way. The bottom line is that lighting people of color is different than lighting white people. It all comes from the concept of the reflection of light. When a light has color in it, it means that the light is modified to only throw certain spans of light waves at an object. The light then hits an object and reflects that span of waves back to our eyes. So for example, shining a red light at a green pepper will make it look red, because we are only shining red at it. It only has the option to reflect red light waves. With this in mind, lighting actors of color can come into play. With a white actor, most waves are reflected, resulting in fairly white light, making it difficult to make dramatic choices in lighting design. Meanwhile, darker tones of skin reflect fewer spans of light waves, allowing saturated light to have more of an impact. This creates a whole new style of lighting that can encourage dramatic and creative choices. With more reflection, color becomes more prevalent, contrast and shadow become more intense, and angle can be even more specific to a story. That being said, this means that mistakes are also more noticeable. For this reason, I like to choose colors that bring out the bright tones of people of color like purples or cool tones. It makes the performers look stunning and can transform a light design.

## DEREK'S DRAMA REVIEWS

Season two of USA Network's *Temptation Island* brought with it as much drama if not more than season one. With four couples striving for the recommitted love of Javen and Shari, or perhaps secretly hoping to discover a new passion, the pressure placed on the singles to compete was higher than ever.

The couples and singles of season two did not disappoint. With "the handcuffs off", the island quickly descended into mistakes, double crosses, and overall poor decisions. With that said, we saw incredible change from several of the people on the island. The personal growth and self-discovery that host Mark L. Walberg professes to aim for was seen in a striking way that was absent in season one. Of course, this also meant that we saw a lot of people's less savory sides, including a case study in the stages of grief (sans acceptance).

My only concern going forward is that (spoilers to come) no one left the show happy. Relationships formed through passion quickly crumbled, and those that appeared to last, didn't. Bar one exception, everyone who went on the show to find or reaffirm love failed. After the fateful Final Bonfire, the last episode "The Reunion" saw most of the cast return to a talk-show style recap of the season, which devolved into heated arguments and unconfirmed accusations. I would say that Casey, who decided not to appear to the dramatic recap and gossip session, made the most sensible choice of all of them by not showing up, which might be his own version of personal growth. All told, I'm excited for season three and to see the direction of this show going forward.

## SOPHIA'S TECH TIPS!

Scenic flats are the strongest when they are stood up on edge, and the weakest when they are held like a table. Because of these relative strengths and weaknesses, it is important to carry flats on edge, and to minimize the amount of time they are in a "table" position. When a flat is lying on the ground and needs to be picked up and carried, lift the flat from the "table" position on the ground to the edge position as quickly as possible. This is accomplished by lifting from one side and keeping the other stationary, so that the flat hinges up. Once the flat is in its edge position, it is no longer in danger of breaking. The larger a flat is, the more important this edge vs. table principle is. Happy lifting!

## KAMI'S SPICY DESIGN CORNER

Me and my exacto knife are good friends. I got a couple spread across my house and studio, wrapped in masking tape to make them 10% more comfortable, found next to a box of a minimum of 40 replacement blades. I replace blades every 10 cuts like I got money to spend \$15 on a box (I used at least 120 last semester). But, nothing compares to the beauty of a laser cutter. Two hours of intricate cutting (intricate windows or any elements with a high level of detail) done in 3 minutes and 38 seconds? I could cry tears of happiness.

Once you've drafted your show, you can use your Vectorworks or CAD files as the template to print from. No extra work needed - just an import to an svg file, and making sure it's at the scale you want your model to be! It's the end of a beautiful workflow. BUT! It is important not to turn this into an obstacle for your design process.

A cool laser cut model shouldn't be your end goal - it's an amazing design and that just so happens to be accompanied by a cool model. It's important to still start your white model with bristol paper to get general shapes before anything. That being said, it can be a tool in the process tool! The intricacy of a laser cutter is probably the most accurate rendering you'll see of your set before it's built. So if you don't like something, or something doesn't seem to be fitting together right, change it while you can!

Other things laser cutters can help you with? Stencils for scenic painting. Testing possible gobo designs before they're ordered somewhere else (do not put metal in any of the laser cutters we have access to! It will reflect back into the laser and destroy it!). Also making puzzles for friends and family.

*Wanna try out a laser cutter? Find them in: The Open Lab in Alumni or The Center for Creativity.*

Look out for a possible laser cutting workshop!

## PRODUCTION POSITIONS!

### *The Verge*

Directed by Andrea Gunoe  
Stage Manager: Kayla Bradley  
Set Design: Kami Beckford  
Sound Design: Nick DePinto  
Lighting Design: Michael Russo  
Costume Design: Ricky Campell  
(His first design here at Pitt!)  
ME: Tyler Lentz

### *Oblivion*

Directed by Sean Cook  
Stage Manager: Melina Yelovich  
Set Design: Alex Dolinger  
Sound Design: Lauren Stanick  
Projection Design: Jenna Teplitsky  
Lighting Design: TJ Hays  
Costume Design: Frances Russo  
Film Director: Delaney Greenberg

### *Appropriate*

Directed by Ricardo Vila Roger  
Stage Manager: Xiao Han  
Set Design: MK Hughes  
Sound Design: Gianni Downs  
Lighting Design: Thomas Bednarz  
Costume Design: KJ Gilmer  
TD: Sophia Kosowsky



Photo by Michael Russo

## HAVE A WONDERFUL FEBRUARY!

a special thanks to Karen and Bria for helping out with this issue!