

**PHOTOS: CAST & CREATIVE HEADSHOTS**



Joniece Abbott-Pratt



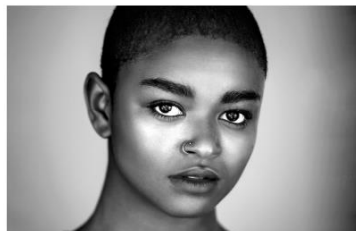
Lynnette R. Freeman



Perri Gaffney



Lizan Mitchell



Christine Shepard



Joy-Marie Thompson

**COMPLETE CASTING ANNOUNCED FOR STAGED WORLD PREMIERE OF *shadow/land***

**Written by Erika Dickerson-Despenza**  
**Directed by Candis C. Jones**

**Complete Cast Includes Joniece Abbott-Pratt, Lynnette R. Freeman, Perri Gaffney, Lizan Mitchell, Christine Shepard, and Joy-Marie Thompson**

**Performances Begin with a Joseph Papp Free Performance on Thursday, April 20 and Run Through Sunday, May 21; Official Press Opening on Thursday, May 4**

February 14, 2023 – The Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director and Patrick Willingham, Executive Director) announced complete casting today for the staged world premiere play **shadow/land** written by The Public, Barnard College, and Ntozake Shange Literary Trust's inaugural Ntozake Shange Social Justice Theater Playwright-in-Residence **Erika Dickerson-Despenza** and directed by **Candis C. Jones**. Previously premiering as an audio play at The Public in 2021 as a part of virtual programming during the pandemic, **shadow/land** will make its live debut this spring. The stage production marks Dickerson-Despenza and Jones' return following the successful production of *cullud wattah* presented at The Public last season. The production begins performances in the LuEsther Hall with a Joseph Papp Free Performance on Thursday, April 20 and runs through Sunday, May 21. **shadow/land** officially opens on Thursday, May 4.

The complete cast of **shadow/land** includes **Joniece Abbott-Pratt** (*Ruth*), **Lynnette R. Freeman** (*Ruth Understudy*), **Perri Gaffney** (*Magalee Understudy*), **Lizan Mitchell** (*Magalee*), **Christine Shepard** (*Grand Marshal*), and **Joy-Marie Thompson** (*Grand Marshall Understudy*).

2021 Susan Blackburn Prize winner **Erika Dickerson-Despenza's shadow/land** returns this April with a stunning live production. As Hurricane Katrina begins her ruin, tensions between duty and desire surface, a levee is brought to its knees, and Ruth must wrestle with all that she's ready to let go. **shadow/land** is a lyrical meditation on legacy, erotic fugitivity, and self-determination. Directed by Lilly Award winner **Candis C. Jones**, **shadow/land** is the first installment of a 10-play cycle traversing the Katrina diaspora in an examination of the ongoing effects of disaster, evacuation, displacement, and urban renewal rippling in and beyond New Orleans.

The production features scenic design by Jason Ardizzone-West; costume design by Azalea Fairley; lighting design by Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew; sound design by Palmer Hefferan; hair, wig, and makeup design by Earon Chew Nealey; music composition by Delfeayo Marsalis; and intimacy direction by Ann James. Janelle Caso serves as production stage manager.

In addition to **shadow/land**, The Public's 55th anniversary season at Astor Place continues with the world premiere of **THE HARDER THEY COME**, a musical adaptation of the classic Jamaican film produced and directed by Perry Henzell and co-written with Trevor Rhone. Beginning Thursday, February 16, the musical features a book and additional new songs by Pulitzer Prize winner Suzan-Lori Parks, songs by legendary musician Jimmy Cliff, music supervision, orchestrations, and arrangements by Kenny Seymour, choreography by Edgar Godineaux, co-direction by Tony Award winner Sergio Trujillo, and direction by Tony Award nominee Tony Taccone. Acclaimed writer and performer Ryan J. Haddad makes his Off-Broadway playwriting debut with the hilarious and audacious **DARK DISABLED STORIES**, a world premiere play in the Shiva Theater about the encounters he has while navigating a city (and world) not built for his walker and cerebral palsy. Produced by The Bushwick Starr and presented at The Public, Haddad and director Jordan Fein center the narratives of disabled individuals, who have too frequently been left out of the American theater canon. In April, Suzan-Lori Parks' theatrical concert **PLAYS FOR THE PLAGUE YEAR** returns to Joe's Pub after the production was halted last fall due to COVID-19. Working in collaboration with Niegel Smith as director, Parks' groundbreaking new work is brimming with humanity, bears witness to what we've experienced, and offers inspiration as we look ahead. At the end of spring, The Public's Mobile Unit embarks on a new tour of the five boroughs with a bilingual musical adaptation of Shakespeare's **THE COMEDY OF ERRORS**, conceived by director Rebecca Martinez and composer Julián Mesri, that embraces music from all over Latin America in this tale of separation and joyous reunion.

In keeping with guidance from city, state, and federal officials, proof of vaccination against COVID-19 and the use of face masks are no longer mandated for entry into The Public's theaters, restaurant, or the facility. The use of face masks is encouraged at all performances, but will only be required at Saturday and Sunday matinee performances, Tuesday evening performances, as well as Joseph Papp Free Performances. These mask required performances are to accommodate those who are immunocompromised or uncomfortable in an unmasked environment. Learn more at [Safe At The Public](#).

The Library at The Public serves food and drink Tuesday through Sunday, beginning at 5:00 p.m. and closing at midnight. The Library is closed on Mondays. For more information, visit [publictheater.org](#).

## **BIOS:**

**ERIKA DICKERSON-DESPENZA** (*Playwright*) is a New Orleans-based Blk radical leftist poet-playwright and ecowomanist cultural memory worker. She is the creator and inaugural resident of the Ntozake Shange Social Justice Playwriting Residency. Her awards include Edgerton Foundation New Play Award (2022, 2019); Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (2021); Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award (2020); Thom Thomas Award (2020); Lilly Award (2020); Barrie and Bernice Stavis Award (2020); Grist 50 Fixer (2020); and Princess Grace Playwriting Award (2019). Dickerson-Despenza has been the Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater (2019-2020); U.S. Water Alliance National Arts & Culture Delegate (2019); New York Stage and Film Fellow-in-Residence (2019); New Harmony Project Writer-in-Residence (2019); Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow (2018-2019); and The Lark Van Lier New Voices Fellow

(2018). Productions include *shadow/land* (The Public Theater, 2023), *cullud wattah* (The Public Theater, 2021), and *[hieroglyph]* (San Francisco Playhouse/Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, 2021).

**CANDIS C. JONES** (*Director*)'s selected credits include: *Clyde's* (Studio Theater); *cullud wattah* (The Public Theater); *Unf\*kwitable* (The Old Globe); *School Girls, Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Cincinnati Playhouse); *My Name is Beatrice* (Atlantic Theater Mixfest); *Detroit '67* (DC Signature Theater); *The Black Radical Imagination* (Williamstown Theater Festival); *shadow/land* audio play (The Public Theater); *53% Of* (The Alliance Theater); *B\*tch* (Page 73); *Everybody* (NYU Tisch); *Trapt* (Joe's Pub); *House of the Negro Insane* (Bay Area Playwrights Festival); *Pipeline* (Detroit Public Theater); *Nike* (A.C.T. New Strands Festival); *The Wolves* (American Academy); *Brother Rabbit* (New Black Fest); *Name Calling* (Kennedy Center); *Morning in America* (Primary Stages); and *TEMBO!* (Zanzibar International Film Fest). Upcoming productions include *Blues For an Alabama Sky* (Barrington Stage). Jones received the 2016 Lilly Award, was a member of the WP Theater's 2018-2020 Lab, and is a Drama League Alumni.

**JONIECE ABBOTT-PRATT** (*Ruth*)'s theater credits include *The Good Negro* (The Public Theater), *The House That Will Not Stand* (NYTW), *Where Storms Are Born* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *Seven Guitars* (Actors Theater of Louisville), *The Mountaintop* (Geva Theatre), *The House That Will Not Stand* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Yale Repertory), *Gem of the Ocean* (Hartford Stage), and *False Creeds* (Alliance). Television credits include "Dynasty," "Evil," "FBI: Most Wanted," "Blindspot," "Law & Order: SVU," and "Luke Cage." Audiobooks include *Nightcrawling* by Leila Mottley, *The Legendborn Cycle* by Tracy Deon, and *Raybearer* by Jordan Ifueko. Abbott-Pratt is a graduate of Clark Atlanta University and holds an MFA from the University of Iowa.

**LYNNETTE R. FREEMAN** (*Ruth Understudy*) is a Jamaican/Black-American actor, narrator/voice-over artist, full spectrum birth doula, teaching artist, and dialect coach. Some notable credits include Jodi in *People, Places & Things*; Cynthia in *Sweat*; Charlotte in *The White Card*; Vera Stark in *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*; Fortune Teller in *The Skin of Our Teeth*; Camae in *The Mountaintop*; Ida Green in *Into The Breeches*; God in *An Act of God*; Georgia Dawson in *Travisville*; Amy Williams in *Kentucky*; and Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Freeman is a member of Actors Equity Association, SAG/AFTRA, Ensemble Studio Theatre, The Actors Center, Professional Audiobook Narrators Association, Audio Publishers Association, and The League of Professional Theatre Women. Brown/Trinity Rep MFA. Her voice can be heard narrating Charmaine Wilkerson's bestselling book *Black Cake*.

**PERRI GAFFNEY** (*Magalee Understudy*) was last seen at The Public earlier this season as Mrs. Johnson in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Other credits include: *Skeleton Crew*, *Familiar*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *Having Our Say*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Macbeth*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Resurrection of Alice*, *East New York*, *BRAINWORKS*, "As The World Turns," "Law & Order," "Law & Order: SVU," and "So Close." Books credits include *The Resurrection of Alice* (debut novel), *Managing Artists in Pop Music*, and *The Business of Broadway* (textbooks written with Mitch Weiss).

**LIZAN MITCHELL** (*Magalee*) has appeared on Broadway in *Ohio State Murders*, *Electra*, *Having Our Say*, and *So Long on Lonely Street*. Off-Broadway credits include *On Sugarland*, *cullud wattah*, *Passage*, *Brownsville Song*, *Cell*, *Trojan Women*, and *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death*. Regional credits include *Our Daughters*, *Like Pillars*, *Skeleton Crew*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The House That Will Not Stand*, *Richard III*, *The Tempest*, and *The Gem of the Ocean*. Film/TV credits include *Detroit*, "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," "The Good Wife," *The Preacher's Wife*, "The Wire," *The Human Stain*, and "Law & Order."

**CHRISTINE SHEPARD** (*Grand Marshall*) graduated from Pace University's BFA Commercial Dance program in 2019, but not before joining two Broadway casts (*Head Over Heels* and *Mean Girls*). She also has on-camera experience, including work with "Saturday Night Live" and Adidas. Shepard is passionate about authenticity and humanism in her work.

**JOY-MARIE THOMPSON** (*Grand Marshall Understudy*) is a dancer, performing artist, writer, and educator from Pittsburgh, PA, making her Public Theater debut. After receiving a BFA in Dance at The Conservatory of Dance at the State University of New York at Purchase College, Thompson performed

work by Sidra Bell, Shamel Pitts, Staycee Pearl, and Maxine Doyle and Damini Pompey. Thompson's writing has been published by *Imagining: A Gibney Journal* and *Thinking Dance*. Based in New York, NY, Thompson was a resident at the McKittrick Hotel performing in *Sleep No More*. Teaching credits include Purchase College's Conservatory of Dance.

### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:**

**THE PUBLIC** continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Forum, Under the Radar, Public Lab, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 60 Tony Awards, 184 Obie Awards, 56 Drama Desk Awards, 59 Lortel Awards, 34 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 58 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org)

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

**The LuEsther T. Mertz Legacy Trust** provides leadership support for The Public Theater's year-round activities.

Season Support provided by **The Blavatnik Family Foundation**.

**shadow/land** is supported by an **Edgerton Foundation New Play Award**.

### **TICKET INFORMATION**

**shadow/land** begins performances in The Public's LuEsther Hall on Thursday, April 20 and will run through Sunday, May 21, with an official press opening on Thursday, May 4.

Public Theater Partner, Supporter, and full-price single tickets can be accessed by visiting [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org), calling **212.967.7555**, or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street.

The Public's Joseph Papp Free Performance initiative will offer free tickets to the performance on Tuesday, April 20 through TodayTix. The Lottery will open for entries on Thursday, April 13 and will close at 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 19. Winners will be notified by email and push notification anytime from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and if selected, winners will have one hour to claim their tickets.

The performance schedule is Tuesday through Sunday at 7:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 1:00 p.m. (*There will be no 1:00 p.m. performance on Saturday, April 22 and Sunday, April 23.*)

The **Open Captioned** performance will be at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 6. The **Audio Described** performance will be at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 13. The **American Sign Language Interpreted** performance will be at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 20.

The full performance calendar can be found at [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org).

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