



## NEWS

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### **Penn Live Arts and the Negro Ensemble Company Announce Our Voices, Our Time: One-Act Play Festival**

***Three works selected from an international pool of submitted scripts—  
Clipper Cut Nation by Cris Eli Blak, What If by Cynthia Grace Robinson, and  
I Don't Do That by Mona R. Washington—will receive world premieres  
at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, October 8***

(Philadelphia – August 18, 2022) — [Penn Live Arts \(PLA\)](#) and the [Negro Ensemble Company \(NEC\)](#) announce **Our Voices, Our Time: One Act Play Festival**, the first collaboration in NEC's year-long residency with Penn Live Arts. The Festival seeks to amplify and celebrate Black voices, stories and perspectives. ***Clipper Cut Nation*** by **Cris Eli Blak**, ***What If*** by **Cynthia Grace Robinson**, and ***I Don't Do That*** by **Mona R. Washington** were selected from a pool of over 40 scripts, submitted by playwrights from across the U.S. as well as the UK, Morocco and Trinidad-Tobago. Penn Live Arts will host the world premiere performances at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia on **October 8** at **2 PM and 8 PM**. The plays will then go to New York for an extended off-Broadway run at the Cherry Lane Theatre. Visit [pennlivearts.org](http://pennlivearts.org) for information.

#### **About the Plays**

***Clipper Cut Nation***, by Cris Eli Blak, tells the story of a well-regarded local barbershop owned by Moe Truman. Everything seems like business as usual as Moe opens up shop with the help of his young apprentice. A rising politician, full of hometown pride, comes in, to great praise – that is, until another neighborhood resident enters the shop and accuses the politician of murdering his son, cultivating a conversation about forgiveness, redemption, loss, grief and survival, all through the perspectives of different generations of Black men. ***Clipper Cut Nation*** will be directed by **Ralph McCain**. The cast includes **Steven Peacock Jacoby** as Sandford, **Alton Ray** as Prentice Leroy, and **Abel Garcia** as Jackie Ruth. The role of Moe will be announced later. **Cris Eli Blak's** work has been performed off-Broadway, in London, Canada and Ireland. He's currently the recipient of the Emerging Playwrights Fellowship from The Scoundrel & Scamp Theatre and a selected participant of The Kennedy Center Playwrights Intensive. He strives to create work that reflects the world we live in.

***What If***, by Cynthia Grace Robinson, follows a college student's need to fight for justice, unleashing her mother's fears for her child's life. A story about love, loss and courage, this play pulls back the curtain on the relationship between a Black mother and her daughter as they experience the invisible personal cost of activism. ***What If*** is a meditation on our humanity, our healing and our hope. It will be directed by **Daniel Carlton**. The role of Mommy will be played by **Sandra Williams** and the role of Kiandra will be played by

**Alyssa Carter. Cynthia Grace Robinson** is an award-winning playwright, recently given the “Not a Moment, But a Movement” commission with Center Theater Group. Works include *Freedom Summer* (NCBlackRep); *Dancing on Eggshells* (Billie Holiday Theatre); *Passing* (New Perspectives Theatre); *Gold Star Mother* (EstroGenius); *Ascension* (NYCFringe); and *Thunder: A Musical Memoir* (NYCFringe).  
CynthiaGraceRobinson.com.

In *I Don't Do That*, by Mona R. Washington, newly engaged Norah (African-American) and Simon (Nigerian) are in love. As two of their friends look on and narrate, a thwarted romantic moment spirals Norah and Simon into an argument based on stereotypes and power. *I Don't Do That* will be directed by **Petronia Paley**. The cast is **Alyssa Carter** as Norah, **Khadija Bangoura** as Mary Catherine, **Bernard Scudder** as Ade, and **Alleyne Owen** as Simon. **Mona R. Washington** is an award-winning playwright, librettist and activist. A 2021 New Jersey Artist Individual Fellowship recipient, her plays have been performed in Italy and France, as well as the United States.

### **About the Directors**

**Ralph McCain** recently directed the play *Thurgood*, whose star, Doug Wade, won a 2020 AUDELCO Award for Best Solo Performance, as well as *The Chickens Come Home to Roost* by Laurence Holder for New Federal Theatre and *A Raisin in the Sun* at the American Theatre of Actors in New York City. His acting roles have included the role of Jim Bono and Gabe in *Fences*, Boyd Henry in *Sundown Names Night Gone Things* and Sunday in New Federal Theater's production of *The Most Dangerous Man in America*. Television credits include *One Life to Live*, *Another World* and *The Sopranos*; and independent film *Flowers* (SXSW Film Festival), and a soon-to-be-released short film, *un•bind*.

**Daniel Carlton** is an award-winning Harlem-based actor, storyteller, playwright, poet, director, and teaching artist who has appeared on New York, national, and international stages. His work has also been presented in schools, jails, homeless shelters, libraries, and every imaginable place there is to perform. Recent projects include writer/director of *March On* (Apollo Theater, National Black Theater Festival, York College, Playhouse Square Wilmington, Community Tour) and *Pigfoot Mary Says Goodbye To The Harlem Renaissance* (Metropolitan Playhouse, Negro Ensemble Company Tour Showing, Community Works School Tour, Kumble Theater, and more).

**Petronia Paley** is an award-winning actress, director, playwright and teacher. Some of her recent directing credits include *Henry IV, Part 1*, Purchase College 2022; *Three Mothers* (staged reading) Capital Reparatory Theatre 2022; and *Looking for Leroy*, New Federal Theatre 2021.

**Cast bios and photos are available upon request. Additional photos are available in the [PLA Pressroom](#).**

### **The Penn Live Arts/Negro Ensemble Company Residency**

The residency between **Penn Live Arts** and the Tony® and Obie Award-winning **Negro Ensemble Company**, NEC's first with a major institution, brings together one of the most important Black theatre producers in the United States and the University of Pennsylvania's nexus of the performing arts, two legacy organizations that share a mission of advancing innovative, contemporary theatre. The goal of this yearlong residency is to discover authentic, edgy stories of the Black experience and to inspire meaningful and thought-provoking conversations on the far-reaching role of Black artists in shaping art and culture in our country.

In addition to Our Voices, Our Time: One-Act Play Festival, the residency includes the world premiere of a multidisciplinary theatre work that merges live music, dance, civil rights era poetry and contemporary writings that reflect on our nation's recent racial reckoning, with additional inspiration from Ntozake Shange's acclaimed theatre piece, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*. It will receive its world premiere February 15, 2023, with performances running through February 18. The residency will be rounded out with collaborative community activities with NEC artists and Penn students and faculty, notably Penn Professor of English and Africana Studies **Herman Beavers**, who teaches, with instructor Suzana Berger, the arts-based community service course entitled "August Wilson and Beyond."

### **Penn Live Arts, Celebrating 50 Years**

Penn Live Arts (PLA), the leading presenter of innovative and transformative performing arts experiences in Philadelphia, celebrates the 50th anniversary of its home, the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, in the 2022-23 season. A vital resource for the performing arts at the University of Pennsylvania, PLA is an artistic crossroads joining Penn and the greater Philadelphia region through world-class music, dance, theatre, and film on campus and at venues throughout the city. Penn Live Arts emphasizes artistic and intellectual excellence and diversity in its offerings; prioritizes broad inclusiveness in the artists, audiences and groups it serves; and expands arts access by actively engaging a wide range of school audiences and inclusive communities from campus, the West Philadelphia neighborhood and the surrounding region.

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### **Calendar Listing**

#### **Our Voices, Our Time: One-Act Play Festival *An Evening of One-Act Plays***

Saturday, October 8, 2 PM and 8 PM

***Clipper Cut Nation*** by **Cris Eli Blak**  
Directed by **Ralph McCain**

***What If*** by **Cynthia Grace Robinson**  
Directed by **Daniel Carlton**

***I Don't Do That*** by **Mona R. Washington**  
Directed by **Petronia Paley**

Our Voices, Our Time: One-Act Play Festival, a collaboration with Penn Live Arts' 2022-23 season artist-in-residence, the Tony® and Obie Award-winning New York-based Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), seeks to amplify and celebrate Black voices, stories and perspectives, inspiring meaningful and thought-provoking conversations on the far-reaching role of Black artists in shaping art and culture in our country.

This project is funded in part by an ArtsForward grant from the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, made possible through support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Additional support has been provided through an Extended Artist Residency grant from The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation.

The Negro Ensemble Company Residency in the 22/23 season is made possible in part with support provided by the Penn Live Arts Accelerator Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

New York performances at the Cherry Lane Theatre are presented by NEC and co-commissioned by Penn Live Arts at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Negro Ensemble Company is the 22/23 season artist-in-residence of the Brownstein Residency for Artistic Innovation.

Visit [PennLiveArts.org](https://PennLiveArts.org) for more information.

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