



Spotlight on Learning

a PTC Classroom Companion

Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, Salt Lake City Arts Council/Arts Learning Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund, The George Q. Morris Foundation, and The R. Harold Burton Foundation.

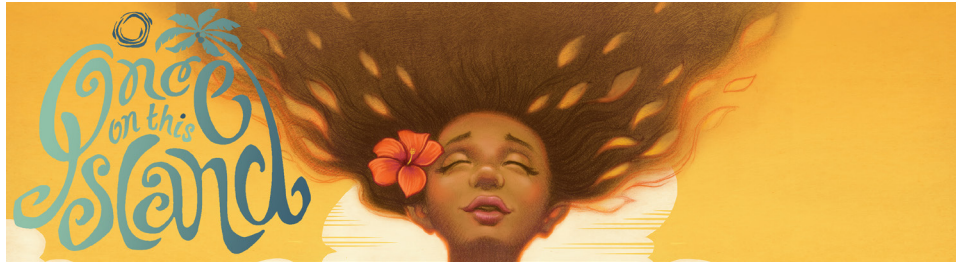


Approximate Running Time:

1 hr. 30 min., no intermission.

Student Talk-Back:

A Q & A session with the actors will directly follow the performance, lasting 20–30 minutes.



Book & Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

Music by Stephen Flaherty

Based Upon the Novel "My Love, My Love" by Rosa Guy

Directed by Gerry McIntyre

February 21 – March 7, 2020

Synopsis:

Ti Moune, a peasant girl, rescues a wealthy boy from the other side of the island, Daniel, with whom she falls in love. Unbeknownst to Ti Moune, the gods who preside over the island make a bet with one another over which is stronger, love or death, the stakes being Ti Moune's life. When she pursues Daniel, who has returned to his people, Ti Moune is shunned because of her lowly status. Her determination and capacity to love, though, is not enough to win Daniel's heart, and Ti Moune pays the ultimate price.

Director's Notes

by Gerry McIntyre

I can honestly say that *Once On This Island* changed my life. I was fortunate enough to be in the original Broadway company. And since that moment, it has always returned to me like a loyal friend. When on Broadway, the director asked me to be the dance captain—which means she entrusted me with teaching new company members, and keeping the show in good shape. I never had any desire to direct or choreograph, but being given that job opened many doors and I have been blessed to be working as a director/choreographer ever since.

Once On This Island returned again after Hurricane Katrina. I went to New Orleans to direct and choreograph teenagers who were displaced by the storm and trying to acclimate themselves back into a normal life. The show *healed* these kids. The power of this show brought them back to life, and they realized *they* had power. They taught me so much! I thought I was there to help them, but they taught me more than I could even imagine.

My father recently passed away and guess what? *Once On This Island* re-

turned. It is the best therapist I've ever had! Lynn Ahrens' lyrics in the show are resounding in my life:

So I hope that you will tell this tale tomorrow. / It will help your heart remember and relive. / It will help you feel the anger and the sorrow / and forgive.

My wish for you is simple. Just sit back and listen, and be open to every emotion which the show brings.

This is why I tell the story!



L: LaChanze, R: Gerry McIntyre. Martha Swope/©NYPL for the Performing Arts, from the original Broadway production.

Excerpts from an interview with the creators of *Once On This Island* for its 2018 Broadway revival

BROADWAY DIRECT

SAME ISLAND, NEW TERRITORY

May 8, 2018

Frank Dilella | Broadway Direct

FRANK DILELLA: Let's go back to the very beginning: Where did the idea of *Once On This Island* come from?

LYNN AHRENS: ...I was browsing around in an old Barnes & Noble, and I came across this little colorful novel that was on the shelf of used books, and I opened it to the first page and the words just leapt off the page at me. "There is an island where rivers run deep." It was this very evocative language. So I bought it for \$1.50. I read it in about an hour, got in a cab, and went over to Stephen's apartment and said, "We just found our next musical!"

FRANK: When did you know you had something special on your hands? When the show opened on Broadway back in 1990, it received eight Tony nominations.

LYNN: We started to feel that this show was special and unusual because, early on in rehearsals, watching [director and choreographer] Graciela Daniele with her brilliant



Cast of the Broadway revival of *Once On This Island* at the Circle in the Square Theatre, 2018.

vision, it suddenly began to emerge as this through-sung very emotional story that moved us and everyone in the room.

STEPHEN FLAHERTY: On the first day of rehearsal, there was something magical about the piece itself. And that original cast brought so much of themselves to the table. And after the first day of rehearsal, I said to Graciela, "This is really special — this doesn't happen every day." And she just smiled and said, "Yes." We all felt that. The process of creating the show improved all of our lives.

FRANK: Talk about crafting the sound for this show.

STEPHEN: I was fortunate, because during that period of time, I was listening to a lot of world music just for my own pleasure. And when Lynn found the book, it got me thinking: Using world music sounds and combining them in a theatrical way could be the basis for a theater score. The idea of the piece informed the content of the musical style.

LYNN: As for me, I was doing a lot of research into the customs, culture, and religion of the Caribbean, Haiti, Trinidad, that whole part of the world. And it just seemed to bring on this language that was very visual and almost simple, but

very poetic. That's how it came out.

FRANK: You both made your Broadway debuts with this musical. Take me back to the show's opening night.

LYNN: It was at the Marriott Marquis and it poured rain, and we said, "Oh, the gods are saying hello!" It was one of those joyous opening nights. The original company paraded in in all African garb; it was a line of kings and queens! It was one of those opening nights where we had already been reviewed glowingly Off-Broadway, so we assumed it would pretty much be the same, so there was not a lot of stress in the room.

FRANK: What does it mean to be [reviving] this story in 2018?

LYNN: In 2018 — what are the lessons we can learn? First, that people need to be helped after natural disasters. That communities can come together and help others through. That no matter what happens to us, to our possessions, to our families, that we can support each other and love one another. And one of the inherent things of the show is the division of classes and the division of races. And I think one of the things about our show that makes it so universal and resonant is that these are things that we can discuss together, and perhaps heal.

STEPHEN: This show is about community. Going through a dark time and finding a way to heal yourself individually and as a community.

Read the whole interview at: <https://broadwaydirect.com/island-new-territory/>

The Loas of *Once On This Island*

Anthony B. Pinn, Ph.D., is the Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities and Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University.



Merle Dandridge, Quentin Earl Darrington, Lea Salonga, and Alex Newell in the Broadway revival of *Once On This Island* at Circle in the Square Theatre, 2018. (Photos: Caitlin McNaney)

According to Anthony B. Pinn, author of *The African American Religious Experience in America*, the loas (pronounced “LOW-uhs”) are intermediaries between the Supreme Creator and humanity. The loas are similar to angels or saints, but in the Haitian religion they are not simply prayed to but honored through rituals of song and dance, etc. The loas represented in the musical *Once On This Island* are:

Papa Ge, whose special domain is death;

Erzulie, whose speciality is love;

Agwé, who controls the water;

Asaka, who controls the earth.

The loas can be likened to the gods of Greco-Roman mythology, who also oversee special domains like war (Mars) or sleep (Morpheus). Sometimes the loas are called gods.

More on the loas from Bob Corbett and Jan Chatland of Webster University:

Papa Ge, also known as Ghede, “is the eternal figure in black, controlling the eternal crossroads at which everyone must someday cross over. His symbol is the cross upon a tomb. Known as the spirit of death, other spirits fear him and try to avoid him.” “He is neither good nor evil, but he is amused by humans” and is known as a joker.

Erzulie “has several different roles: goddess of love, help, goodwill, health, beauty and fortune, as well as goddess of jealousy, vengeance, and discord.” She is known as the “loa of beauty, the loa who is...uniquely human since she is the differentiating force between [humanity] and all other creation. She is the ability to conceptualize, the ability to dream, the artistic ability to create. She is the loa of ideality.”

Agwé is the “sovereign of the sea. Under his jurisdiction come not only all the flora and fauna of the sea, but all ships which sail on the sea. His symbols are tiny boats, brightly painted oars and shells, and sometimes small metal fishes.”

Asaka or Zaka is “the loa of agriculture.” “[Asaka] is a gentle, simple peasant, but greatly respected by the peasants since he is a very hard worker. He is addressed as “cousin”. He is found wherever there is country. He is usually pictured as bare-foot. In *Once On This Island*, Asaka is depicted as female.

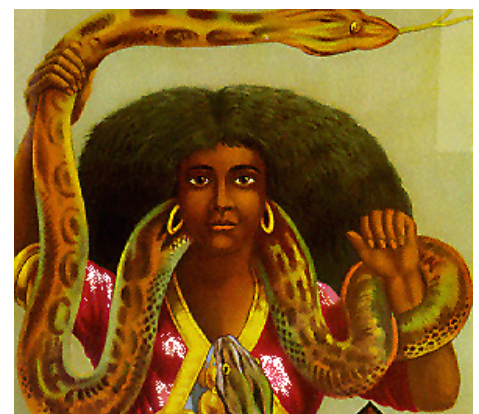
Colorism in *Once On This Island*

This story features a sociological concept called **colorism**. In *Shades of Brown: The Law of Skin Color*, Trina Jones defines colorism as a form of prejudice or discrimination, usually from members of the same race, in which people are treated differently based on cultural meanings attached to skin color.

Colorism overlaps with the problem of racism. Taylor W. Hargrove, writing for *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, writes that colorism “[originates] from slavery and European colonialism, [being] a system of stratification that derives from racism; it is inextricably linked to hegemonic beliefs in the social superiority of whites over all other racial groups.”

Colorism appears in many places: the United States, Europe, Asian countries like India and China, and in South American countries like Brazil.

The lovers in *Once On This Island* are both affected by the issue of colorism.



A common image of Mami Wata, a loa.

OUR EQUITY CAST & DIRECTOR



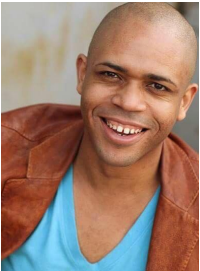
Jordan Alexander



Galyana Castillo



Marquell Edward Clayton



Derrick Cobey



Tyla Collier

GERRY McINTYRE (Director/Choreographer) As a performer, Gerry has been seen on Broadway in a number of shows including *Anything Goes*, *Once On This Island*, *Chicago*, *Uptown It's Hot*, and *Joseph...Dreamcoat*, a role for which he was one of three Americans chosen to be in the film starring Donny Osmond. Major theatres he has worked at throughout the US include the Lions Theatre, York Theatre (Off-Broadway), and Actors Theatre of Louisville. He's also worked on TV programs such as "The Rosie O'Donnell Show," and "Designing Women."

JORDAN ALEXANDER (Daniel Beauxhomme/Beauxhomme/Daniel's Son) Regional: *Peter Pan*, *Oklahoma!*, *Grease* (PCLC), *Tulsa in Gypsy* (Weathervane Playhouse), *West Side Story*, *Aldolpho* in *The Drowsy Chaperone*, and *A Raisin in the Sun* (Summer Rep Theatre).

GALYANA CASTILLO (Asaka) National Tours: *Elf the Musical* (Deb), *Fame* (Miss Sherman). Regional: *Little Shop of Horrors* (Fulton Theatre), *Seussical the Musical* (Sour Kangaroo, Stages St. Louis), *La Cage aux Folles* (PTC), and *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* (The Prizery).

MARQUELL EDWARD CLAYTON (Armand/Gatekeeper/Daniel's father) Select credits include: Pre-Broadway Tour of *Ain't Too Proud*, and performing at South Coast Rep, Celebration Theatre, Moonlight Amphitheater, Rockwell Table and Stage, and Lambs Players Theatre.

DERRICK COBEY (Tonton Julian) Broadway: *Kiss Me, Kate*, *Kander and Ebb's The Scottsboro Boys* (originated the role of Andy Wright); Off-Broadway: *The Scottsboro Boys* (Vineyard), *Tin Pan Alley Rag* (Roundabout); Tours: *Rent*, *Forever Swing*; Regional: *Parade* and *A Little Night Music*.

TYLA COLLIER (Ti Moune/Peasant Girl) A resident of NYC, she was last seen Off-Broadway in *Sistas the Musical* (Tamika/Dance Captian) and *Till* (Woman 2). She is a proud graduate of The Boston Conservatory and holds a BFA in Musical Theatre.

CICILY DANIELS (Mama Euralie) Her credits include Broadway: *Once on This Island* (Storyteller, Asaka u/s, Erzulie u/s, & Mama Euralie u/s), Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (Alana, Ursula u/s), *All Shook Up* (Ensemble, Sylvia u/s), *Rent* (Seasons of Love soloist, Joanne u/s).

KRISTIAN ESPIRITU (Erzulie/Peasant Girl) National Tour: *School of Rock* (u/s Patty/Sheinkopf). Other credits include *Here Lies Love* at The Public (Interviewer/ensemble), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Music Theater Connecticut), and *In the Boys Club*, an all-women's cabaret.

PAUL-JORDAN JANSEN (Papa Ge) Chicago Theatre: *Beauty and the Beast*; Paramount Theatre: *And Then There Were None*; Drury Lane: *Matilda*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *The Wizard of Oz*; Paramount Theatre, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

TERANCE REDDICK (Agwé) His gospel background has created, shaped, and bridged his unique connection to music and theater. Broadway debut: *Les Misérables*. He also toured with the International PopOpera group "Destino."

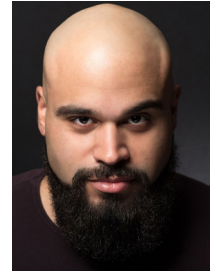
ALANNA SAUNDERS (Andrea/Madame Armand) Jessie in *Scotland, PA* at Roundabout Theatre Company. Other credits: *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Broadway), *Into the Woods* (National Tour), *Pirates of Penzance* (Barrington). She appeared on TV in *Peter Pan Live!* as Tiger Lily.



Cicily Daniels



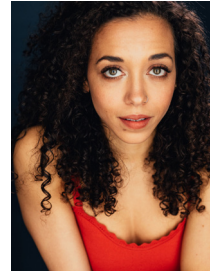
Kristian Espiritu



Paul-Jordan Jansen



Terance Reddick



Alanna Saunders