

Avenue Blackbox Theatre and Northstar Players Present

4 shows only

stealaway

A FOLKTALE BY RAMONA KING

Directed by David Shakes

ENCORE!

MARCH 13-16, 2025

THE AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE
780 JOSEPH AVENUE | ROCHESTER, NY 14621

avenuetheatre.org



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THE AVENUE

STEAL AWAY

BY RAMONA KING

DIRECTED BY DAVID SHAKES

TECHNICAL DIRECTION, SET & LIGHTING DESIGN BY
REENAH GOLDEN, FOUNDER

Stage Manager, Kathy Kristich
Sound Technician, Josiah Tapp
Light Board Operator, Anderson Allen

MARCH 13 - 16, 2025 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Mrs. Stella Margaret Kyzer.....Shelia Rankin
Tracy Ada Kyzer.....Kesha Sharee Hartzog
Miss Sudy Atkinson.....Deborah Washington
Mrs. Bluiah "Blu" Daniels.....Kat Rina Davis
Mrs. Renita "Redd" Ruth.....Javannah Davis
Mrs. Jade Long.....Vanessa Ryland-Buntley
News Voice.....Rick Staropoli

Note: Please silence your cellphones. There will be a 15 minute Intermission.

A Word from the Founder/Artistic Director



Reenah Golden

*Amidst challenging times and uncertainty in the world of socially impactful art making and advocacy for truth-telling in literary arts and education, I am particularly elated to bring back this hit play from our 5th anniversary season. At The Avenue we continue to uplift the voices, art, history and future possibilities from within marginalized communities unapologetically honoring our collective need for visibility, awareness and thoughtful accountability. Though we continue to experience the uncertainty of what is to come under the current administration, what we know for sure is that we are capable, we are activated, we are resilient – and we will remain so! Allow me to share a few words about the encore of *Steal Away* by Ramona King, directed by the brilliant David Shakes. This captivating folktale seamlessly weaves together elements of comedy, history, and the profound Black experience in America, resonating powerfully with audiences today.*

On a personal note, collaborating with Shakes on the technical design and artistic vision to mount these dynamic shows has been extremely fulfilling for me. Those that know me well know that it is hard for me to choose whether the nerd in me loves theatre more for what's happening on stage or back stage! So, providing the technical direction as well as scenic and lighting design for each of our very uniquely special shows is the challenge that my wildest dreams are made of! #GIRLTECH

*As Founder and Artistic Director, I was delighted beyond words to witness the overwhelming support and celebration from our community as we celebrated 5 years in 2024. From the inspiring *ACT V: A Celebration of Art and Activism* exhibit at City Hall to the heartfelt attendance at each play, directed by me (*Blood at the Root* and *The Brothers Size*) and David Shakes, our featured director (*Zooman and the Sign*, *The Past is the Past/ Sarah and Sally*, *Steal Away*). Your enthusiastic support fueled our artistic journey and will inspire an even more exciting Season 6!*

*To kick it off, *Steal Away* truly embodies the essence of our mission, serving as a beacon of cultural reflection and social commentary. Through laughter, tears, and introspection, this production invites us to explore the depths of our shared history and the enduring relevance of our collective narratives.*

May it serve as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling and the enduring spirit of community.

- Reenah Golden, Founder/Artistic Director

MEET THE DIRECTOR



David Shakes

David A. Shakes, born in Philadelphia, PA, was raised in Brooklyn, NY, where his interest in dramatic arts was nurtured as a young student in the schools of New York City. David continued his work as a young adult during the Black Arts Movement of the late 60's and early 70's and became one of the founding members of the Spirit House Movers and Players, a prominent theatre company that presented dramatic and poetic works around the country, under the direction of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). As a member of Spirit House Movers and Players, the group produced two performance albums, *Nation Time* and *A Black Mass*. During that time, he worked and studied with many dramatists and authors including Haki Mhadabuti, Woodie King, Jr. and Yusef Iman; he also studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. In addition, he shared the stage with theatrical icons including Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Samuel L. Jackson, Debbie Morgan, Lou Myers, Theresa Merritt, and Josh Brolin.

Mr. Shakes is a long-time resident of Rochester and has worked with numerous theater groups in the Rochester community as an actor, director, guest artist, and producer in performances and productions that have received critical as well as public acclaim. At GeVa Theatre Center, his roles included actor, director, teaching artist, and he acted in, as well as consulted in the mounting of *August Wilson's Century*. In 2022, GeVa Theatre Center presented David with the *Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award*. He also was a contributing artist at the JCC Centerstage, Shipping Dock, Blackfriars, RAPA, Downstairs Cabaret Theatre, Eastman Theater with Kathleen Battle and the Rochester Community Players. In addition, Mr. Shakes founded the Village Theatre, showcasing many budding, local actors and was director of Public Arts Services, bringing performing arts to hospitals, nursing homes, and correctional facilities. Currently, he is artistic director of the North Star Players, an artist-in-residence at The MuCCC and Director-in-Residence and collaborative producer at Avenue Blackbox Theatre.

STEAL AWAY IS CO-PRESENTED BY

AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE & NORTHSTAR PLAYERS

NORTHSTAR PLAYERS:

David Shakes is the founder and director of the North Star Players, a Rochester based theater company presenting works of authors that include August Wilson, James Baldwin, Charles Fuller and Ntozake Shange. In addition to drama and comedy of great African American authors the North Star Players explore and present programs about the lives of icons that include Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, William Wells Brown and others.

AVENUE BLACKBOX THEATRE

Reenah Golden is the Founder and Executive Artistic Director of the Avenue Blackbox Theatre, a New York state-based theatre company with its homebase in historic Joseph Avenue neighborhood of Rochester, NY. Our dynamic multigenerational company presents Black plays and multidisciplinary works with a particular interest in the nuances of Queer and Global Afro-culture from local, regional and published playwrights. Notable company members and collaborators include Hettie Barnhill, Gary Dewitt Marshall, Yves B. Golden, Anderson Allen, Nigel Lestat, Gatekeeper Adrian Elim, Tokeya C. Graham, Shaq AOR Payne, Ari Highsmith, Taryn Highsmith, Ty Burr, She Rise, Rapha Rebirth, DJ East Harmony.

Northstar Players and Avenue Blackbox Theatre
have co-presented *The Scavengers Daughter* by Gary Earl Ross (2019), *Felipe Luciano in Residence* (2023), *Bronze Collective Theatre Festival* (2023, 2024), *Sarah and Sally* by Victoria Hampton (2023), *Steal Away* by Ramona King (2024), *Sankofa Theatre and Music Festival* (2023, 2024) and community presentations of various shows.

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WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



SHELIA RANKIN (Stella)

🏆 **Congratulations on 40 years with NorthStar Players, SHELIA!**

Shelia Rankin is an actress who first debuted at the Village Theatre in *Beyond the Middle Passage* (1984) directed by David Shakes. She continued in this theatre where she performed *For Colored Girls* and *Steal Away* with Shakes' Northstar Players and continued with Northstar Players to RAPA theatre where she performed and reprised her role in *For Colored Girls* portraying the "Color Blue", *Flying West*, *Joe Turner Come and Gone*, and *Beneath* in *A Raisin in the Sun* at SUNY Brockport.

A veteran on stage and backstage, Sheila has also stage-managed productions of *A Soldier's Story*, *Ladies in Waiting*, *Two Trains Running*, *Ashcakes*, *Jitney*, and *Black Girls' Anthem*, as well as other productions for MJS Productions.

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



KESHA SHAREE HARTZOG (TracyAda)

"I would like to thank David Shakes and this wonderful cast, doing an Encore performance at the Avenue Blackbox Theater is a pleasure!"

Kesha Sharee Hartzog Rochester, NY native. SOTA graduate 1992. She began her acting career in 2009 with director/playright Grace Flores. Her acting career still continues with plays written /produced / directed by, Karen Culley, Reuben Tapp, Karen Dieruf, The Sav Sibs, Laura Thomas, David Shakes and has a recurring character role (Sade) in Youtube webseries "In the Light" by Nikki Simone Backus. Kesha is also an audiobook narrator under the name K.S. Hartz on Amazon Audible.

Kesha won the ROC Award in 2019 for Best Actress. In 2023 She and her production won awards at The TANYs Awards Festival for *The Vagina Monologues*. Kesha won Best Actress of TANYs in 2023.

Past credits include; Rochester Bronze Collective Theatre Festival (2016-2023, No Bad News-2024), SANKOFA Festival (2017- 2022, Kinfolk-2024), *You Shouldn't Have Told* (Avenue Blackbox, 2019), Pandemic Play Reading Series (2020-2021), *Ghost Story* (Director, 2022), *Barbeque* (Blackfriars Theater, 2022) *Inner Loops* (Rochester Fringe, 2022), Prime Video documentary; *Look Where He Brought Me From* (2022-2023), *The Goddess* mini TV series (2022-2023), DVC Production; *More Than This* (2023), *Steal Away* (Avenue Blackbox, 2024) *POTUS* (Blackfriars Theater-2024)

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



Deborah Washington (Sudy)

"I would like to give thanks and glory to God. And Special thanks to my husband, Robert, for his patience and love."

Dr. Deborah Washington is a Rochester native. She is thrilled and honored to perform as Sudy in this iconic play. She has enchanted and captivated audiences on stage with over twenty years of experience.

Professional credits include: *The Scavenger's Daughter* by Gary Earl Ross directed by David Shakes (Avenue Blackbox, 2019), *The Story of Black Wall Street*, *Amen Corner*, *For Colored Girls Who have Considered Suicide*, *When the Rainbow is Enough*, and others.

She is a proud member of The North Star Playas.

Thanks, and glory to God. Special thanks to her husband, Robert, for his patience and love. Grateful to her family and friends for their continued encouragement and love.

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



Kat Rina Davis (Bluah)

"I would like to take this time to thank the Director, cast, crew, and all of you!"

Kat Rina Davis (Blu), is elated to be joining the encore cast of *Steal Away*. Davis is an American actress born and raised in Rochester, NY and is a woman of multiple talents. Wife, mother, playwright, director, and CEO of Kat Rina Productions, she also advocates for autism awareness and is a published author of the children's book *'Have You Seen My Birthday?'*

The 2010/2019 TANYS Award Recipient for the stage plays: *The Sunshine Boys/You Shouldn't Have Told*, and 2015 Roc Awards Best Actress winner, was first bitten by the acting bug in 2009 and since she has performed in a host of stage plays, short films, and web series which include: *The Renaissance of Nia: One Woman's Quest Toward Emotional Wellness* (Avenue Blackbox/Bronze Festival, 2024), *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, *Detroit '67*, *the ripple*, *the wave that carried me home* (Director), *Unforgiving* (YouTube web series), and various promo videos.

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



JAVANNAH J. DAVIS (Redd)*

"Thank you to my community tribe who is always so supportive of me and my accomplishments."

Introducing Javannah J. Davis in the role of Miss Renita "Redd" Ruth. Javannah is the Founder and President of W.A.V.E Women INC.; the only black and brown trans led 501c3 not-for-profit organization in upstate New York, and CEO/Owner of Linjé Enterprises LLC. Ms. Is also a community health nurse, 4x self-published author, entrepreneur, actress, activist, advocate, ordained minister, and writer/columnist for Blaque/Out Magazine. Javannah's passion for writing allows her to share her knowledge, compassion, experience, and encouragement to those in the LGBTQIA+ and allied communities.

***Steal Away marked Ms. Davis' debut performance at The Avenue Blackbox Theatre and in a stage play! AND –we would like to wish her a very HAPPY BIRTHDAY which she is celebrating on stage with us for this run. We celebrate you officially on March 14th and every day in our hearts, beloved!**

WHO'S WHO ON STAGE



VANESSA RYLAND-BUNTLEY (Jade)

"I would like to thank all of the directors thus far who have taken a chance on me. I thank my husband. I give a special shout out to my children, I dare to dream because you are watching."

Vanessa "Tweety" Ryland-Buntley is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Broadcasting from SUNY Brockport with a minor in Theater. She made her acting debut during the Festival of Ten play series at SUNY Brockport in 2017 and joined the North Star Players in 2018. Vanessa is a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. When she is not working, doing community service, and being with family, she is looking for a New Edition, Janet Jackson, or old school hip hop concert to go to.

Performance credits include *Now and Then* by Grace Flores (2017/2018), *For Colored Girls* by Ntozake Shange directed by David Shakes (2018), *If Their World Were Ours* by Rudolph Valentino (2019), *The Scavenger's Daughter* by Gary Earl Ross directed by David Shakes (Avenue Blackbox, 2019) and *The Clarissa St. Monologues* by Karen Culley (2020), *Zooman and the Sign* by Charles Fuller (Avenue Blackbox, 2023), *Steal Away* (Avenue Blackbox, 2024).

WHO'S WHO BACKSTAGE

STEAL AWAY

MARCH 13 - 16, 2025 | AVENUE BLACKBOX

WRITTEN BY: RAMONA KING

DIRECTED BY: DAVID SHAKES (Artistic Director, Northstar Players)

SET/SCENIC/LIGHTING DESIGN BY: REENAH GOLDEN
(Founder/Artistic Director, Avenue Blackbox Theatre)

STAGE MANAGER: Kathy Kristich

SOUND TECHNICIAN/OPERATOR: Josiah Tapp, {theatre}+{nfasi}

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT/LIGHTING TECH/OPERATOR:
Anderson Allen (Ave Artist-in-residence)

PROP MASTER: Faith Lumly (Ave Fellow)

STAGEHANDS:

Mykel Fletcher (Special EFX), Kadeem Blackman (Ave
Photographer-in-residence), N'Dia Prout (Ave Grad Fellow), Kareem
Brooks (Ave Apprentice), Shyhiem Rodriguez (Ave Artist-in-residence)

FRONT OF HOUSE:

Kenya Malcolm (House Manager), N'dia Prout (Box office Associate)
CONCESSIONS/MERCH ASSOCIATES: Lina Molina-Cruz & Imani Rice

*Special Thanks to Kamille of Sugarmilles Sweet Studio for the
beautiful cake, The Spirit Room for the fiddle case,
and Reuben Tapp for SFX & software support*



THANK YOU

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volunteers and our sponsors:**

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City of Rochester | Mayor Malik Evans | ArtsBloom 2023

Without the love and support of our village we would not be here. You
have been reinforcing the importance of grassroots, community-based,
Black-led arts and cultural programming for 6 years here in the
northeast quadrant of our beloved city and community theatre family.

AVENUE BLACKBOX BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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@avenueblackbox** especially for our healthy snack, hygiene and transportation
fund for youth programs.

Much love and many thanks.



THANK YOU

A special thank you to the Avenue OWLs (Strategic Planning and Development Committee):

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