

4.03. IT S. Epatha Merkerson



Whoopi Goldberg, Billy Porter, and Daphne Rubin-Vega Honorary Co-Chairs and the Gala Committee and the A.R.T./New York Board of Directors Welcome You to the

A.R.T./New York

spring GALA

Honoring

Emmy, Golden Globe, and Obie Award-winner, two-time Tony nominee, Actor, Director, and Producer

S. Epatha Merkerson

Award Presenter Fran Lebowitz

Lyricists
Timothy Huang & Sara Wordsworth

Music Director / Pianist Josh Kight

Line Producer Amanda Kate Joshi Production Stage Manager Cristina Madero

Director / Choreographer Laura Brandel

April 3, 2017 / Tribeca Rooftop 2 Desbrosses Street

6:00 PM Cocktails 7:00 PM Dinner & Program

Dear friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Gala Committee, and our Honorary Co-Chairs Whoopi Goldberg, Billy Porter, and Daphne Rubin-Vega, I am delighted to welcome you to the A.R.T./New York 2017 Spring Gala! We are beyond thrilled to award television, stage, and film actor S. Epatha Merkerson with The Abe L. Blinder Award, which will be presented by Fran Lebowitz.

Epatha got her start Off Off Broadway. In the 1980s she landed the role of Reba the Mail Lady on "Pee–wee's Playhouse." By 1990 she was starring on Broadway in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. But it was in 1993 when "Law & Order" producer Dick Wolf cast Epatha as Lieutenant Anita Van Buren that her life began to change. Van Buren was an African American professional woman working in New York City's white, male-dominated police force. It was a role Epatha would play with integrity and distinction for 17 years, making her the longest appearing Black character on a prime time drama in U.S. history.

During that time, she returned Off Broadway for Suzan-Lori Park's *Fucking A* at The Public Theater; Cheryl L. West's *Birdie Blue* at Second Stage; in Billy Porter's play *While I Yet Live* at Primary Stages; and on Broadway in William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba* at Manhattan Theatre Club, for which she received a Tony Nomination. And in 2005 she won Emmy, SAG, and Golden Globe Awards for her portrayal of Nanny in Ruben Santiago-Hudson's *Lackawanna Blues* on HBO.

For these impressive contributions to the field and for the ways she gives back to the communities in which she lives and works, we are proud to honor S. Epatha Merkerson tonight. This evening we are also celebrating A.R.T./New York's two incredible milestones: the completion of the beautiful new A.R.T./New York Theatres on West 53rd Street and 10th Avenue and our 45th Anniversary! We've come a long way from a volunteer association of 49 Off Off Broadway theatres to a well-respected thought leader with 360 members. A.R.T./New York is dedicated to providing these companies with vital services: from affordable theatres, offices, and rehearsal studios to grant, loans, workshops, advocacy, and more.

Tonight you are in for a real treat! The award-winning lyricists Timothy Huang and Sara Wordsworth, along with director/choreographer Laura Brandel, have created mini-musicals to celebrate Epatha and A.R.T./New York. And a special THANK YOU to our Board of Directors and supporters like you, who have made tonight and our last 45 years so memorable.

Enjoy!

Warmly,

Virginia P. Louloudes Executive Director

Program

Act One

Scene 1: We Are A.R.T./New York

Scene 2: Welcoming Remarks

Scene 3: Wish Upon Our Stars

/ Entr'acte: Entrees /

Act Two

Scene 1: Then & Now: A Musical Tribute to the History of A.R.T./New York and Our Sparkling Future

Scene 2: Raise the Roof/Your Hands

Scene 3: Isn't She Lovely: A Whimsical Tribute to S. Epatha Merkerson

Scene 4: Presentation of The Abe L. Blinder Award to S. Epatha Merkerson by Fran Lebowitz

Scene 5: Finale

Cast

Elijah Caldwell / Tamrin Goldberg / Lisa Livesay Jon-Michael Reese / Hansel Tan / EJ Zimmerman

Musicians

Piano: Josh Kight / Drums: Zach Simao / Bass: Joe Wallace

We wish to express our gratitude to the Performers' Unions, ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS, AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS, SAG-AFTRA, through Theatre Authority, Inc., for their cooperation in permitting the Artists to appear in this program.



THE ABE L. BLINDER AWARD is presented to an artist who has made a significant impact on A.R.T./New York and the theatre community. The 2017 Abe L. Blinder Award will be presented to award-winning actor, director, and producer S. Epatha Merkerson for her use of both art and advocacy to give voice to critical stories and causes. In addition to the indelible mark she has made on television history through her role on "Law & Order," Ms. Merkerson is a powerful force onstage, continually returning to the nonprofit theatre with dynamic performances in A.R.T./New York member productions. She is also a phenomenal advocate, partnering with America's Diabetes Challenge and hosting "Find Our Missing," a docu-drama series spotlighting stories of missing Black Americans that have not received national media attention.

Ms. Merkerson has won critical acclaim for her work in theatre, television, and film. She is best known for her portraval of Lieutenant Anita Van Buren on NBC's "Law & Order" (2006/2010/2011 Image Award) and currently plays hospital administrator Sharon Goodwin on the NBC series "Chicago Med." Her credits include the HBO film *Lackawanna Blues* (Emmy, Golden Globe, SAG, Gracie Allen, 2006 Image Awards, and an IFP Spirit Award nomination), *Radio* (Cammie Award), *Black* Snake Moan, Terminator II: Judgement Day, Random Hearts, Navy SEALS, Mother and Child directed by Rodrigo Garcia, The Six Wives of Henry Lefay, Peeples, Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, the independent film *The Challenger* with Michael Clark Duncan, and A Year by the Sea with Karen Allen.

Ms. Merkerson's extensive theatre work includes the 2008 Broadway revival of *Come Back, Little Sheba* directed by Michael Pressman (Tony Award nomination), August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (Tony, Drama Desk, and Helen Hayes Award nominations), *Birdie Blue* (Obie Award), *I'm Not Stupid* (Obie Award), *The Old Settler* (Helen Hayes Award), *F*cking A* by Suzan-Lori Parks (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), and *While I Yet Live* by Billy Porter (Lucille Lortel nomination). On television Ms. Merkerson was a series regular on "Pee-wee's Playhouse," "The Cosby Show"

spin-off "Here and Now," and Dick Wolf's "Mann and Machine." TV pilots include: "Moe's World," "Equal Justice," "Elysian Fields," and "Babylon." TV movies: A Mother's Prayer with Linda Hamilton, A Place for Annie with Sissy Spacek, Breaking Free with Jobeth Williams, and NBC's Exiled with Chris Noth. She was the host of TVOne's "Find Our Missing."

In 2012 Ms. Merkerson completed her first feature documentary as producer/director. *The Contradictions of Fair Hope* received numerous awards including the 2012 Best Documentary Award from the San Diego Black Film Festival, the DIKALO Award from the Festival International Du Film PanAfricain (Cannes), the Best Documentary Award at the Philadelphia Independent Film Festival, the Roxbury International Film Festival's Henry Hampton Award, and the Paul Robeson Award for Best Documentary from the Newark Black Film Festival. The film had its television premiere on STARZ.

A native of Detroit, Michigan, Ms. Merkerson holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Wayne State University and holds three Honorary Doctorates, from her alma mater in 2009, University of Maryland Eastern Shore in 2012, and Montclair State University, 2013.

She lives in New York City.

Creative Team

LAURA BRANDEL (Director/Choreographer):

Laura is a New York City based director and choreographer of new musicals, plays, and devised work. Directing: Mackenzie & The Missing Boy (NYTB and MTF). The Good Girl and Body and Soul (Manhattan Musical Theater Lab), Deux Femme (Dramatists Guild, The Lark), Missing Karma (Samuel French Festival), A Relative Relationship (Winner of Soundbites Best Musical), The Ballad of Andy Pickets (NAAP). Director of Dramatists Guild Fellows Presentation (Playwrights Horizons). Movement Director for Cry Eden (Access Theater Company), Hit the Wall (Barrow Street Theatre), a cautionary tail (The Flea Theater), Life After (HERE Art Center). Choreography consultant to Larry Keigwin on Rent Off Broadway, collaborator on Vogue's Fashion's Night Out at Lincoln Center, and Bolero NYC at The Joyce and Central Park Summerstage. Assistant director to Andrei Belgrader on Doctor Faustus (CSC). Artistic Producer of NYTB's New Works Series (2008-2016). SDC Associate Member, member of Lincoln Center Directors Lab, DNA's Choreolab, and BA in Dance and Dance Education from Hunter College.

TIMOTHY HUANG (Lyricist): Tim is a composer. lyricist, librettist, and a recipient of the 2013 Jerry Harrington Award, the 2015 New American Musical Award (B-Side Productions), and a 2015 Richard Rodgers Award for his musical Costs of Living (Official selection of the 2015 NAMT Festival of New Musicals, the 2011 ASCAP Musical Theater Workshop, and the BMI 2012 Master Class hosted by Stephen Sondheim). Finalist: Fred Ebb Award (2012) and Jonathan Larson Award (2005, 2015). Other works include And the Earth Moved (NYMF), Death and Lucky (MacDowell), the song cycle LINES (NYMF), and A Relative Relationship (Winner, Best Musical, 2013 SoundBites Festival). He is the creator of the one person musical The View From Here (cast album available wherever digital music is sold) and a 2012 Dramatists Guild Fellow. His song Everything I Do, You Do (with co-lyricist Sara Wordsworth) was recorded by Sutton Foster for the charity album Over the Moon: The Broadway Lullaby Project. Current projects include Peter and the Wall (2013 Rhinebeck Writers Retreat, Blue Mountain Center) and Koinobori.

AMANDA KATE JOSHI (Line Producer): Amanda is a New York City based director and producer. Producing credits include: A Beautiful Day... Great Lakes (New Georges, OBIE Award – Outstanding Collaboration), Empire of the Trees (I.T. Award Nom. – Outstanding Original Script), Lights Up – A Festival of New Dramatists Playwrights, and Robert Brustein's The Last Will (Dir. Austin Pendleton in NYC and

Wuzhen International Theatre Festival, China). Directing credits include *Inch by Inch* (Producers Club), *Welcome Home Steve* (Backstage Top Pick, Players Loft), *Sofity Sara Falls* (Lookinglass Theatre). As Associate to Tony Walton: *Equus, Gift of the Gorgon* (Guild Hall). As Assistant to Don Stephenson: *The Producers* (Paper Mill), *Guys & Dolls, Roar of the Greasepaint...* (Goodspeed), *The Attack of the Elvis Impersonators* (Theatre Row). Amanda was the Coordinator for the Johnny Mercer Foundation's Writers Colony in 2016/7. She has sat on The Lark's Literary Wing and been reader for the Princess Grace Awards. She is an Associate Member of SDC and also an AEA Stage Manager.

JOSH KIGHT (Musical Director): Josh Kight is a writer and musician working out of New York City. He has written four musicals, including *Chairs*, which won a 2015 Anna Sosenko Grant. His work has been heard at Symphony Space, 54 Below, The Metropolitan Room, The New Harmony Project, and Weston Playhouse. In addition to writing, Josh has worked as a music director and pianist at various theaters around the country. Josh is a proud member of ASCAP, the Local 802, the BMI Lehman Engel Workshop, and the Dramatists Guild of America.

CRISTINA MADERO (Production Stage Manager):

Off Broadway: 9 Circles at the Sheen Center, ACTivate: Troy at The Public Theater, The Odyssey at the Delacorte, Daphnis & Chloe and Kafka Fragments at the Sheen Center. Off Off Broadway: Danny and the Deep Blue Sea at Conbody Studios, Folk Tales at Alchemical Theatre Lab, Boogie Nights! at the Elektra.

SARA WORDSWORTH (Lyricist): Sara is the cowriter/creator of In Transit, Broadway's first a cappella musical (Broadway, Off Broadway at Primary Stages, O'Neill NMTC, NYMF, NYC Fringe). Other writing credits include Frozen, A Musical Spectacular and Beauty and the Beast (Disney Cruise Line), Dear Albert Einstein (Off Broadway, NYCCT). and HS Confidential (Dramatic Publishing). She's won the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award and the BMI Harrington Award; nominations include Drama Desk, Drama League, Outer Critics Circle, Off Broadway Alliance, and Lucille Lortel. She sits on the Steering Committee for the Tony-Honored BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Writing Workshop and is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association and The Dramatists Guild of America, Inc. Sara lives in New York City with her husband and young daughter. www.SaraWordsworth.com.



New York Musical Festival is proud to support A.R.T./New York.

CONGRATULATIONS

to S. Epatha Merkerson and thank you for your contributions to the theatrical community.

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> > Thank you!

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With great admiration, Kathleen Chalfant

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TAKE A FRONT ROW SEAT to the Future of American Theatre

In January 2017, the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York opened the doors of our most ambitious project ever: the A.R.T./New York Theatres, two state-ofthe-art performance spaces of 87 and 149 seats, respectively, on West 53rd Street and 10th Avenue in Manhattan.

Designed in response to the loss of more than 80 small performance venues over the last decade, the A.R.T./New York Theatres are fully accessible, equipped with flexible seating to accommodate all genres of production, and include free access to topline technical equipment. Thanks to a covenant with the City of New York, they will also be reserved over the next nine decades for the field's smallest theatre companies with annual budgets below \$1 million (80% of our membership).

PLAY A LEADING ROLE

A special multi-million dollar Rental Subsidy Fund will hold rents below market rate for A.R.T./New York members and help to address the urgent need for affordable performance space.

A \$2,500 seat sponsorship will aid us in ensuring that a generation of theatre artists and audiences can access low cost, high end spaces.

The companies we represent use their talent and vision to strengthen communities and celebrate the varied voices of our city. Writers like Lin-Manuel Miranda, Tony Kushner, Lynn Nottage, Jonathan Larson, David Henry Hwang, Annie Baker, Rajiv Joseph, and dozens of others got their start at A.R.T./New York's Off and Off Off Broadway companies.

FURNISH THE FUTURE

The A.R.T./New York Theatres are a long-term, affordable home where artists give life to diverse stories and audiences experience perspectives that differ from their own. Your support of our work is a commitment to empathy that could not be happening at a more important time.

If you're interested in joining our mission to empower and preserve nonprofit theatre, please contact us about donating to our seating campaign or to learn about the new spaces' numerous naming opportunities, including our larger Mezzanine Theatre:

Katherine Heberling Director of Development (212) 244-6667 ext. 233 kheberling@art-newyork.org www.art-newyork.org/theatres

Due to the nature of the flexible seating at the A.R.T./New York Theatres, seat sponsors will be recognized on a special donor wall.

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Love and Thanks to Ginny and All at A.R.T./New York

You make great work, humane people, and vibrant organizations

Sarah, Moe, David and everyone at Target Margin Theater Congrats to A.R.T./NEW YORK and to Virginia P. Louloudes on her 25th Anniversary at the helm.

And thank you for honoring **S. Epatha Merkerson!**

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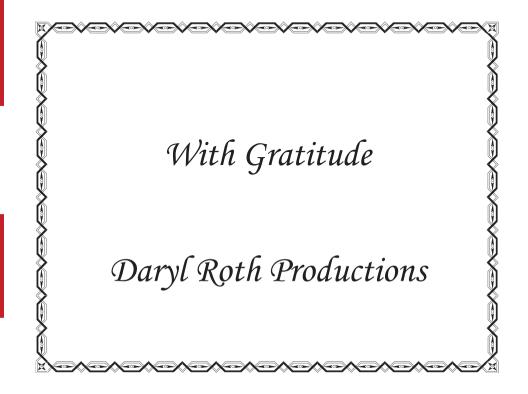
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From shared office, rehearsal, and performance spaces to the nation's only capital loan fund specifically for theatres to technical assistance and leadership training initiatives, A.R.T./New York has earned a reputation as a leader in providing progressive services to the industry. Among our achievements over the years, A.R.T./New York has received a Tony Honor for Excellence in the Theatre and a Mayor's Award for Arts and Culture.

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