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coming Spring 15
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW
Auditions Jan 16+17
details online

VENUS
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the university of rochester international theatre program presents

VENUS
by suzan-lori parks

directed by nigel smith
set design by arnulfo maldonado
costume design by olivera gajic
lighting design by mike inwood
sound design & original music by erik t. lawson
fight choreography by steve vaughan
voice & acting coaching by alexa scott-flaherty
dance consulting by fana bangoura

production staff

kimberly roberts
elizabeth fox & richard munson
daniel barnett/props
nicholas frankiewicz/run crew
morena heyden/spot operator
talia jaffe/spot operator
dee dee krupkin/sound
lucinda liu/costumes
kat mckorkle/run crew
rachel sonnet/props
catherine ulivi/lights
jie jiong (jack) wu/run crew
keishla “kiki” zayas/costumes
melissa becker
andrew jones & emily ivey
kyle meyers
adam parker & christy brodeur
halle burns
theo lincoln
alberto carrillo casas

VENUS runs approximately 2 hour and 15 minutes with one 15 minute intermission

this production was made possible, in part, by the ellen miller ’55 endowment for theater productions

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Suzan-Lori Parks (b. 10 May 1963)

Suzan-Lori Parks is an African-American playwright and screenwriter. Born in Fort Knox, Kentucky, she went to school in six different states and spent part of her childhood in West Germany. When she was attending high school, her English teacher advised her to stop dreaming of becoming a writer because of her spelling. Ironically enough, Parks’ way of writing vernacular dialect has become one of the most notorious talking-point stylistic elements of her writing.

Parks graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1985 with a B.A. in English and German literature, later crediting the important impact that her education had on her writing career. At Mount Holyoke, Parks took a creative writing class taught by American novelist, essayist and poet, James Baldwin. Baldwin was the one who suggested to her that she try writing for the stage in 1983.

Early on, she was influenced by three works, Harriet the Spy, Hotel for Dogs, and Don Quixote. She also felt inspired by the work of Wendy Wasserstein, another Mount Holyoke alumna, who won the Pulitzer in 1981 for her play, The Heidi Chronicles.

Parks' innovative project, “Genius” Grant. Her critically acclaimed play, The Mothers’ Bliss, had a worldwide premiere in 2007. The UR international Theatre Program toured both off- and on-Broadway. Additionally, Parks wrote the screenplay for Spike Lee’s, She wrote the book for a new Broadway version of the classic American opera, Porgy and Bess. In 2011, Parks wrote the book and lyrics for the musical adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie.

As Gods my witness Kickin Kickin When I was down there in their hot home. Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." When I was down there in their hot home. Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat." Thuh kicks is native for them Hottentots. They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat."
SAARTJIE BAARTMAN

The things they noticed were quite various. But no one ever noticed that her face was streamed with tears. *Venus* (Sc. 24) The Negro Renaissanceist

The year was 1810. The abolition of slave-trade had been passed in Parliament and among protests and denials, horror and fascination, the Venus show went on the Venus show went on *Venus* (Sc. 24) The Negro Renaissanceist

She died in Paris in 1816 at age 26. The cause of her death is unknown, though she had succumbed to alcoholism a few years before. Just before her death, Napoleon's Surgeon General, Georges Cuvier, brought her corpse illegally into the Musée de l’homme, where his team of anatomists made casts of her body parts, and pickled her brain and genitalia. Her body was on display at the museum until 1973. In 2002, her body was finally returned to South Africa, where a funeral was held.
LIST OF SCENES

ACT I

Overture
Scene 31: May I Present to You “The African Dancing Princess”
Scene 32: “She’d Make a Splendid Freak
Scene 33: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act I, Scene 3
Scene 34: Counting Down/Counting the Take
Scene 35: “But No One Ever Noticed/Her Face Was Streamed with Tears
Scene 36: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act II, Scene 9
Scene 37: Footnote #2
Scene 38: A Scene of Love (?)
Scene 39: You Look Like You Need a Vacation
Scene 40: The Whirlwind Tour
Scene 41: The Venus Hottentot Before the Law
Scene 42: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act III, Scene 9
Scene 43: The Venus Hottentot Tells the Story of Her Life
Scene 44: A Brief History of Chocolate
Scene 45: Final Chorus

ACT II

Scene 46: Counting Down
Scene 47: In the Orbital Path of The Baron Docteur
Scene 48: Footnote #7
Scene 49: Love Iduhnt What/She Used to Be
Scene 50: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act II, Scene 12
Scene 51: Footnote #9
Scene 52: Her Charming Hands/An Anatomical Columbus
Scene 53: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act III, Scene 9
Scene 54: She’ll Make a Splendid Corpse
Scene 55: Some Years Later in Tübingen
Scene 56: Who Is She to Me?
Scene 57: “For the Love of The Venus.” (Conclusion)
Scene 58: “A Brief History of Chocolate”
Scene 59: The Venus Hottentot Tells the Story of Her Life

PHENOMENAL WOMEN
BY MAYA ANGELOU

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size. But when I start to tell them, They think I’m telling lies. I say, It’s in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips, The stride of my step, The curl of my lips. I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.

I walk into a room, Just as cool as you please, And to a man, The fellows stand or Fall down on their knees. Then they swarm around me. A hive of honey bees. I say, It’s the fire in my eyes, And the flash of my teeth, The swing in my waist, And the joy in my feet. I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.

Men themselves have wondered What they see in me. They try so much But they can’t touch My inner mystery. When I try to show them, They say they still can’t see. I say, It’s in the arch of my back, The sun of my smile, The ride of my breasts, The grace of my style. I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.

Now you understand Just why my head’s not bowed. I don’t shout or jump about Or have to talk real loud. When you see me passing, It ought to make you proud. I say, It’s in the click of my heels, The bend of my hair, the palm of my hand, The need for my care. ’Cause I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.
VENUS premiered in 1996, under the direction of the acclaimed avant-garde theatre artist, Richard Foreman. It was produced by the Joseph Papp Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival and the Yale Repertory Theatre. The production won two OBIE Awards. The cast included Adina Porter as Venus, Peter Francis James as the Baron Docteur, and Sandra Shipley as the Mother Showman. There have also been international productions in France and South Africa (amongst others). Parks herself defines the piece as "a very moving play that, ultimately, is about love."

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s despotic and hierarchical authority caused the disappearance of civil liberties in France, keeping only the Senate (appointed by the emperor) and the Council of State (that decreed ordinances) intact. The court, led by the Bonaparte clan, held political and social dominance, both in France and in his conquered European territories. The bourgeoisie benefited from implementation of economic liberalism and market expansion. The workers had no trouble finding employment, which prevented any social upheaval. Their working conditions, however, were very poor. Culturally, the Enlightenment (which preceded Napoleon’s reign) played an important role in the consolidation of artistic tendencies and philosophical ideas. Based on the ideological and cultural foundations of liberal revolutions, it introduced Reason as the only valid instrument of knowledge, as opposed to faith and religion. This movement also inspired free-thinkers to start writing the very first theories on social justice, human rights and constitutionalism.

We’ll set tongues wagging for the rest of the century.
The Doctor will introduce me to Napoleon himself: Oh, yes yr Royal Highness the Negro question does keep me awake at night oh yes it does

VENUS (Sc. 7) Venus

CAST

miss saartjie baartman, a.k.a. the girl, and later the venus hottentot ........
makia green
the negro resurrectionist ..........
christine wright
the man’s brother, later, the mother-showman, later the grade-school chum ........
danny mensel
the man, later the baron docteur ..........
devin goodman
the chorus ..........
marthe avissoudo
halle burns
murie gillett
angel Morales
shane r. saxton
alison schaefer
mike tamburrino &
ian von fange
the mother-showman’s goons ..........
edwin aguila & ignacio martinez

for the love of venus
the father .......... mike tamburrino
the mother .......... halle burns
the uncle .......... angel Morales
the young man .......... ian von fange
the bride-to-be .......... murie gillett
The exhibition of live human curiosities has been practiced since the 17th century, and reached its zenith in the Victorian era when it became one of the most popular forms of entertainment. These exhibitions included dwarfs, tall men, overweight ladies, joined twins and people with an exotic origin. Mentally and physically disabled people were often exploited in these exhibits. The managers of traveling fairs and circuses protected themselves from the judgment of others by claiming that, through their employment, they were able to give a proper home to these “social misfits.” Disability rights activists have referred to freak shows as “the pornography of disability.” During the 19th century, the ideas of colonialism and racial imperialism were at their peak, and Europeans felt the need to prove their “superiority” by exhibiting the exotic “other.” Freak shows became a way for people to sublimate their fears by gawking at a fascinating and bizarre reality externally removed from the normality of their daily existence.

Venus was the goddess of love and beauty in the ancient Roman cosmology. Considered one of the most important mythological figures in Western culture, she is typically portrayed naked or semi-naked (as in, what is probably her most famous visual representation, Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus). Her name is also associated with the small pre-historic figures found throughout Europe (example: the Venus of Willendorf). Archaeologists agree that the shape of these figures suggest that they were used as fertility amulets. Venus is a goddess charged with irresistible sexuality and, as such, inspired authors to use her as a motif of female dominance and power. A great example is the German erotic novel, Venus in Furs, by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

Body snatching is the secret disinterment of corpses from graveyards. During the 19th Century, bodies were illegally unearthed with the purpose of selling them to physicians who needed them for anatomy or dissection lectures at medical schools. The term “resurrectionist” or “resurrection-man” was the one given to those who practiced body snatching. Violation of graves could result in a year’s imprisonment. Race also played an important role in this matter. Resurrectionists tended to often unearth bodies from “negroe burying grounds”, where both free black men and slaves were buried. In France, the “resurrectionists” were known as “Les Corbeaux” (the crows). The illegal trade in corpses became such a social problem towards the 19th Century that various countries began to design systems to donate corpses for scientific research while staying within legal parameters.

Throughout the history of Western civilization, chocolate has had a well-established reputation as an aphrodisiac. The early versions of whorehouses in the Mayan empire used cacao beans as a way of paying for prostitutes. Further up north, in Mexico, legend has it that the King, Montezuma, ruler of the Aztec empire, used to drink up to fifty cups of chocolate before visiting his harem. The Spanish conquistadors introduced chocolate in Europe as a sweet, hot drink. It rapidly became a social phenomenon among the wealthy, and chocolate started being consumed exponentially. In the late 20th Century, Dr. Michael Liebowitz proved that the phenylethylamine (PEA) in chocolate releases the same hormone as sexual intercourse.
The Khoikhoi

The Khoikhoi people (literally “real people”) are an ethnic group native of Southern (and Southwestern) Africa, closely related to the “Bushmen” or San people. They were traditionally known to European colonialists as the Hottentots, a term considered offensive nowadays. The Khoi are a hunter and gatherer society and they practice an extensive pastoral agriculture. They are traditionally nomadic, but erect simple settlements for shelter. The Khoi are polygamous and they rely strongly on kinship bonds. Culturally, the Khoisan religious beliefs give special significance to the moon, seen as a symbol of heaven or the afterlife. The Khoi population dropped considerably throughout the 17th Century after the English and Dutch brought smallpox and other diseases with them to the continent. The currently remaining Khoisian groups live predominantly in Botswana and Namibia.

Anatomy in France

Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), a Belgian professor at the University of Padua, is considered the father of modern anatomy. His work marked the beginning of the discipline of physiology. During the 1800, France was considered the capital of modern medicine and anatomy. The passion of physicians like François Xavier Bichat (1771-1802), who is considered by many the father of descriptive anatomy, contributed to important advances in the treatment of anatomical pathologies. In the 19th Century, l’École de Médecine was the most important medical institution in Europe and received students from all over the world. Another historical institution that can be found in Paris is the Musée Depuytren. Founded in 1835, this museum showcases various human teratological waxes and specimens crammed into glass cases that date back to the 1600s. The museum has become a fascinating tourist attraction for those interested in anatomy and morbid curiosities.

The Chorus

In drama and music, the chorus may be defined as a group of players that perform jointly rather than singly. In classical Greek tragedy, the chorus was formed by a group of actors that commented upon the action of the play through recitation, song and dance. The chorus symbolized the verdict of history, and it also could represent a character’s conscience, his thoughts and regrets. Choruses frequently speak in unison, emphasizing the repetition of patterns. Nowadays, musical theatre tends to include a chorus that helps support the narrative structure and serves as a visual and musical complement to the action on stage.

Restoration Comedy

The term “Restoration comedy” refers to those comedies written in England during the late 17th Century and early 18th Century. Restoration comedy is well-known for its sexual explicitness, extreme wit, and bawdy humor (encouraged by the monarch at that time, Charles II, who was known for the aristocratic and libertine character of his court). The result was an artificial and very stylized type of theatre, though masters of the form, including William Wycherly (The Country Wife), George Etherege (The Man of Mode), and the first acknowledged female dramatist, Aphra Behn (The Rover), brought comedy to a new height. On the continent, the dramatists of the period largely followed the French neo-Classical tradition, hewing to the Aristotelian laws of drama. Though this limited tragedians (with some notable exceptions; Racine for one), comedy flourished in the hands of writers like the social satirist, Moliere.

My love for you, My Love, is artificial
Fabricated much like this epistle
Venus (Sc. 16) The Bride-to-Be

Im an everyday anatomist.
One in a crowd of millions.
A doctor cant just be himself
no one will pay a cent for that
Imagine me just being me.
Venus (Sc. 13) Baron Doctor
What made you become a professional director? 
I'd always had a lot to do with how I grew up. At five years old I wanted to be a preacher. I grew up in the southern Pentecostal tradition. We'd spend 4-5 hours on a Sunday in church and one to two more nights a week at church doing bible story or choir. I was heavily invested in the church as a center for community and pageantry. I loved the sharing of stories, the music, the performance (people shouting and speaking in tongues) and the idealism. I think, growing up in a black family, the idea that there was some ultimate divine intervention for societal wrongs provided us with a great deal of comfort.

So, as I began my maturation to being a secular humanist, I was looking for a space similar to the church, where community, pageantry and social critique lived simultaneously. Fortunately for me, my high school had a theater group, and during my Junior year of high school, after reading some Albee and performing in Anything Goes and reading Shakespeare and memorizing Chaucer - it struck me. I could make a career out of being an artist leader. So, I approached my drama teacher, Merrie-Gay Arault. She let me assistant direct Arsenic and Old Lace with her. I was hooked. In some way, I think the writing has always been written on the wall.

What was the inspiration behind this production? 
The head of the department, Nigel Maister, asked me to come up to campus last spring to give an artist talk and lead two workshops with students. One of the workshops I led was called "Staging Race: How and Why Do We Stage Color Politics." In that workshop I met Makia Green, the lead in Venus, and Edwin Aguila, one of the Mother Showman's Goons. In meeting and working with them, it became clear to me that they were questioning the roles student of color played in the department and whether adequate resources were being spent to support plays that might appeal to more ethnically diverse performers and audiences.

This conversation dovetailed with a lot of the thinking I had been doing around the value of the black body in America. Why have we inherited a social structure that seems to place less value on the black body? What are the actual economics of the body? And how do black folks wrest their stories back from the dominant culture? This play delves into that same line of questioning. Among the texts I was considering, it uniquely balanced difficult questions with a compelling and complicated theatrical style. I was sure there was a way to entertain our audience, while also pressing them to ask tough questions.

The Negro Ressurectionist, our guide, our narrator, our scholar in this play is a black person just like the director and playwright. The play insists that the point of view: the unearther, the self. What made you become a professional director? 
I'd always had a lot to do with how I grew up. At five years old I wanted to be a preacher. I grew up in the southern Pentecostal tradition. We'd spend 4-5 hours on a Sunday in church and one to two more nights a week at church doing bible story or choir. I was heavily invested in the church as a center for community and pageantry. I loved the sharing of stories, the music, the performance (people shouting and speaking in tongues) and the idealism. I think, growing up in a black family, the idea that there was some ultimate divine intervention for societal wrongs provided us with a great deal of comfort.

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