Last September, _for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf_ by Ntozake Shange (pronounced EN-to-ZAH-kee SHAHNG-gay) celebrated the 40th anniversary of its Broadway production. The play was unlike anything that had come before. Shange called it a choreopoem, a term she coined to describe the kind of groundbreaking work she was creating for the stage. Shange refers to herself as a “poet in the theater,” in that her verse is crafted to be spoken aloud. But she is also a dancer, a choreographer, a dramaturg, a novelist, as well as a playwright, and her work explores the unmistakable fluidity between these disciplines. _for colored girls_ sculpts the English language in order for the text to leap off the page in a manner that reflects the author’s experience of the world. Shange invites us to set aside our understanding of genre, and our understanding of Black womanhood, so that we may follow her characters as they explore questions that still plague us four decades later.

In 1976, _for colored girls_ was only the second play by a Black woman playwright to be produced on Broadway. The first was _A Raisin in the Sun_ by Lorraine Hansberry. At 17, _A Raisin in the Sun_ was the first book by a Black author that I had ever read, and I used a monologue from Hansberry’s play to audition for theatre school. The following year, I would travel to NYC as an 18-year-old, first-year theatre student, to see Shange’s production.

I can recall very few specific details about the production itself. However, what remains vivid are the incredible thoughts and feelings that accompanied me out of the Booth Theatre after the show that night. I was already committed to a life as a theatre practitioner, but it was at that moment that I understood why.
CREATIVE TEAM FOR COLORED GIRLS

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Tamara Brown  
Lady in Brown

Karen Glave  
Lady in Yellow

Ordena Stephens-Thompson  
Lady in Purple

d’bi.young anitafrika  
Lady in Red

Akosua Amo-Adem  
Lady in Green

SATE  
Lady in Blue

Evangelia Kambites  
Lady in Orange

PRODUCTION

Djanet Sears  
Director

Astrid Janson  
Set & Costume Designer

Michelle Ramsay  
Lighting Designer

Jasmyn Fyffe  
Vivine Scarlett  
Choreographers

Suba Sankaran  
Composer, Arranger & Sound Designer

Darragh Parsons  
Stage Manager

Kate Sandeson  
Assistant Stage Manager

Robert Harding  
Production Stage Manager

Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu  
Assistant Director

Alexandra Lord  
Assistant Set & Costume Designer

Ketrice Anderson  
Apprentice Designer

Kelly McEvenue  
Alexander Coach

SOLUPPEPPER PRODUCTION

Evan Bonnah-Hawkes  
Technical Director

Jacqueline Robertson Cull  
Head of Hair & Makeup

Philip Atfield  
Susan Dicks  
Geoff Hughes  
Cutters

Barbara Nowakowski  
First Hand

Natalie Swiercz  
Dresser

Andres Castillo-Smith  
Sound Designer

Greg Chambers  
Props Builder

Bill Stahl  
Carpenter

SOLUPPEPPER ACKNOWLEDGES THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF TERESE SEARS

THANK YOU: Oz Weaver, Liesl Low, The Onyx Building, Pam Winter, Maria Meindl, Weiny Mengesha, Kate Lushington, Quisbert Sears, Winnie Sears, Rosemarie Sears, Terese Sears, Celia Sears, Qwyn Charter Maclachlan, Kyla Charter, Alec Maclachlan, Vanessaeh Sears Duru, Djustice Duru, Alejandra Nunez, Ngozi Paul.

for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.
For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf began with a vision. In 1974, Ntozake Shange, emerging from a series of personal struggles, saw a double rainbow arcing over the highway. That rainbow triggered an outpouring of words, which became a solo poem she performed with a dancer. The mid-’70s saw a ground swell of “women poets, women’s readings, and a multilingual woman presence...” so by the time a collective of seven women – representing every colour of the rainbow, and brown – came together in New York, the solo had become a multi-voice “choreopoem” a wholly original fusion of words, music and movement.

It premiered at the Public Theatre in 1976 with Shange playing the lady in orange. Audiences instantly embraced its energized, truth-telling brilliance. It was an overnight sensation and the show transferred to Broadway, but Shange soon found herself unable to cope with the demands of celebrity. It was all “too big for my Off-Broadway taste, or too little for my exaggerated sense of freedom.”

That freedom pulses in her juicy, uncompromising language. She believes letters dance. Capitals are banished, all part of her determination to “attack, deform and maim the language I was taught to hate myself in.” Autocorrect may try to corral her unique syntax and force it into “proper” English, but thank God, Ntozake Shange gave up being proper decades ago. Her language pays tribute to her literary ancestors, in particular novelist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston and poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, both of whom celebrated the vivid vernacular they heard around them. By immersing herself in multiple points of view, Shange fearlessly articulates the very personal struggle Black women face to this day because of racism and sexism. There are more female playwrights of colour now – Suzan-Lori Parks, Djanet Sears and Trey Anthony among them – but Shange was an early visionary pioneer.

We’ve assembled a remarkable cast to inhabit the dancing words of this ground-breaking piece. Let them, let Shange, take you “from random order to the rainbow.”

Playwright Biography

Born Paulette Williams in 1948, the writer grew up in St. Louis. She was bussed to an all-white school where she endured harassment and attacks, later calling herself “...a smart child tryin to be dumb.” Her Xhosa name came from a couple of South African exiles during her graduate studies at USC. “Ntozake” (En-toh-ZAH-ki – She who comes with her own things) “Shange” (Shahn-gay – She who walks like a lion”). Her rich creation embraces poetry, theatre, essays, novels & children’s books. She suffered a stroke in 2004, but continues to write, most recently a “choreoessay”, Lost in Language and Sound: Or How I Found My Way to the Arts, in 2013. Shange is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Pushcart Prize. She lives in Brooklyn.
Thank you for attending!

Soulpepper is an active member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT), the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) and Theatre Ontario, and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of Canadian Actors’ Equity Association. Scenic Artists and Set Decorators employed by Soulpepper are represented by Local 828 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

Soulpepper merchandise now on sale!

Visit: soulpepper-shop.myshopify.com