

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

# asolo rep

# MARIE AND ROSETTA



## MARIE AND ROSETTA

Written by **GEORGE BRANT**

Featuring the Music of **ROSETTA THARPE** and **MARIE KNIGHT**

Directed by **E. FAYE BUTLER**

Music Direction by **MAHMOUD KHAN**

**MAY 6 -  
MAY 31,  
2026**

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Scenic Design  
**JOHN CULBERT**

Costume Design  
**MCKINLEY JOHNSON**

Lighting Design  
**JARED GOODING**

Sound Design  
**RICK SIMS**

Hair, Makeup,  
and Wig Design  
**MICHELLE HART**

Stage Manager  
**KAITLIN KITZMILLER\***

Stage Manager  
**KEVIN JINGHONG ZHU\***

Production Assistant  
**LYDIA KONINGS**

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World Premiere presented by Atlantic Theatre Company, New York City, 2016

MARIE AND ROSETTA was developed at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley as part of their New Works Festival.  
Additional development at The Playwright's Center and The New Harmony Project.

## CAST IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

MAIESHA MCQUEEN\* ..... Sister Rosetta Tharpe  
ALEXIS J. ROSTON\* ..... Marie Knight

## MUSICIANS

LARRY BROWN ..... Guitar  
MAHMOUD KHAN ..... Keyboard

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# THE CAST

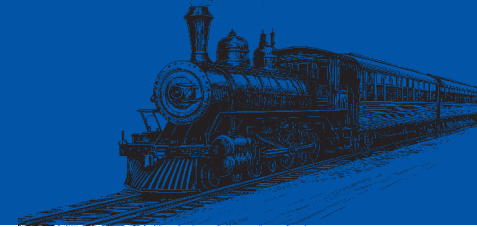


**MAIESHA MCQUEEN** (Sister Rosetta Tharpe) is an award-winning performer, director, and educator with over three decades of experience. Her Broadway and touring credits include *Waitress* (Becky/Nurse Norma). Regional highlights include *The Color Purple*, *Clyde's*, *Fela!*, *Come From Away*, and *Ain't Misbehavin'*. She is the founder of *A Bite Out of Broadway* and an experienced musical director and teaching artist dedicated to cultivating the next generation of artists. NYU Tisch/Fordham University. [www.maieshamcqueen.com](http://www.maieshamcqueen.com)/IG: @maieshamcqueen



**ALEXIS J. ROSTON** (Marie Knight) This is Mrs. Roston's Asolo Repertory Theatre debut. *Time Out Chicago* calls her "phenomenal," and *Showbiz Chicago* raves "Roston holds the audience in the palm of her hand." Actress, director, costumer, choreographer, and writer Alexis J. Roston earned acclaim for her mesmerizing portrayal of Billie Holiday in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*, including Chicago's Jeff, Black Theater Alliance, and Black Excellence Awards. She holds a BFA in musical theatre from Howard University. She is a proud member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA, AGMA, and is represented by Paonessa Talent Agency.

# THE MUSICIANS



**LARRY BROWN** (Guitar) As a guitarist, composer, singer-songwriter, producer, and educator, Larry Brown stands in a lane all his own. Born in Venice, Illinois, he began playing his father's guitar at age five, sparking a lifelong passion. He later pursued his musical ambitions, earning a Master's degree in Jazz Studies from Northern Illinois University in 2009. During his studies, he learned from renowned jazz artists including Russell Malone, Pat Martino, Bucky and John Pizzarelli, John Scofield, and Rick Haydon. Brown has performed nationally and internationally at major festivals such as the St. Louis Jazz Festival, JVC Jazz Festival in New York, and the Lima Jazz Festival in Peru. He also appeared with the Betty Carter Jazz Ahead Residency at The Kennedy Center. As a bandleader, he released two albums and contributed to a respected jazz education book.

**MAHMOUD KHAN** (Music Director/Keyboard) Chicago: *Windfall* (Steppenwolf), *Gospel at Colonus* (Court Theatre), *A Fool Such as I* (ETA Creative Arts), *Black Nativity* (Congo Square Theatre Company at Goodman Theatre), and *Living All Alone: Phyllis Hymn Story* (Theatre 47). Regional: *Dreamgirls* (Alhambra Dinner Theatre) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (William & Mary). Touring: *Crowns* (Arizona Theatre Company; Portland Center Stage; Actors Theatre of Louisville). Khan is the Music Director at Carter Temple C.M.E. Church and founder of Geniuskhan Music. @geniuskhan

# A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

## Welcome Family!

I am thrilled to share this incredible story with the audience and citizens of Sarasota! If you are unfamiliar with the musical legends Rosetta Tharpe and Marie Knight, I invite you to sit back and embark on a captivating journey. Discover valuable life lessons, hymns, spirituals, and footstomping gospel music!

Gospel music holds a special place in Black culture. It serves as a source of solace and comfort for individuals seeking peace in challenging times, particularly during the 1930s and 1950s. Gospel music continues to celebrate the love of God, who is portrayed as gracious, compassionate, and forgiving. It has evolved from the blues genre and has influenced various other musical styles.

Marie Knight and Rosetta Tharpe were trailblazers in the gospel/R&B sound, which had a profound impact on the development of rock and roll.

Both began their musical journey by singing and performing in churches at a young age. Marie grew up in New Jersey, while Rosetta was raised in Arkansas and Chicago.

In 1946 Mississippi, the duo met and began rehearsing together a few hours before their first performance. George Brant's script takes us on a magical and mystical journey, offering a glimpse into the lives of these two forgotten heroes. Their stories of life, loss, love, and the entertainment industry intertwine with the enchanting sounds of music that fill the air.

I encourage you to immerse yourself in the experience, lean in, clap, tap your feet, and sing along if you're on pitch.

Thank you to everyone at Asolo Rep for continuing the remarkable journey of these two extraordinary musical treasures.

*E. Faye Butler*  
Director



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# Fiddler ON THE ROOF

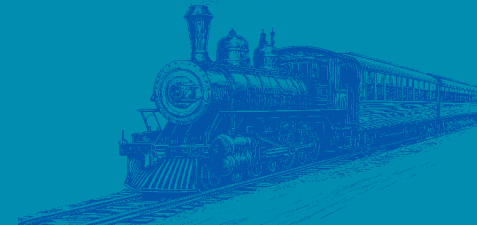


A Tale of Tradition  
On a Sea of Change

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## FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Based on **SHOLEM ALEICHEM'S** stories, by special permission of **ARNOLD PERL**  
Book by **JOSEPH STEIN** Music by **JERRY BOCK** Lyrics by **SHELDON HARNICK**  
Produced on the New York Stage by **HAROLD PRINCE**  
Original New York Stage Production Directed & Choreographed by **JEROME ROBBINS**  
Directed by **PETER ROTHSTEIN**  
Choreography by **DANNY PELZIG**  
Music Direction by **MATTHEW MECKES**



**GEORGE BRANT** (Playwright) Plays include: *Grounded, Marie and Rosetta, Into the Breeches!, The Prince of Providence, Elephant's Graveyard, The Land of Oz, Tender Age, The Mourners' Bench, Any Other Name, Salvage, and Grizzly Mama*. An Affiliate Writer at the Playwrights' Center, his scripts have been produced internationally by such companies as the Public Theater, the Atlantic Theater Company, Cleveland Play House, Trinity Repertory Company, the Studio Theatre, Alley Theatre, Asolo Repertory Theatre, London's Gate Theatre, Page 73, and the Traverse Theatre. His plays have received a Lucille Lortel Award, an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, the Smith Prize, a Fringe First Award, an Off-West End Theatre Award, an NNPN Rolling World Premiere, four OAC Individual Excellence Awards, and the Keene Prize for Literature. George received his MFA in Writing from the Michener Center at UT-Austin and is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

**E. FAYE BUTLER** (Director) Her career spans over 40 years performing and directing both musicals and plays nationally and internationally. Asolo credits include *Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* and *Showboat*. Other select credits: *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Marie and Rosetta* (Milwaukee Rep); *Marie and Rosetta* (Northlight Theatre); *Nunsense, Sister Act*, and *Ain't Misbehavin'* – Jeff Award (Drury Lane); *Footloose, The Color Purple* (BroadwayWorld), *Lettin' the Good Times Roll with Fe and Faye* (MSMT); *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Michigan Ensemble Theatre/Portland Stage); *Five Guys Named Moe* (BAC); *Beyond the Door* (TT Productions); *One Mo' Time* (Anacostia Playhouse); *The Wiz* (Fulton Theatre); *Goods* (Artemisia Theatre; BroadwayWorld); *Regions of Total Unlikeness* (Ten Chimneys). Recipient of eleven Jeff Awards, two Helen Hayes Awards, Sarah Siddons Leading Lady Award, four Black Theatre Alliance Awards, Excellence in the Arts, John Barrymore Award, Kathryn V. Lampkey Award, Rosetta LeNoire Award, The Guy Adkins Award for the Advancement of Music Theatre in Chicago, R.A.M.I Award, Heller & Hover, After Dark Award, Ovation Award, E.P.I.C. Award, Irma P. Hall Award, League of Chicago Theatres Lifetime Achievement Award, Lunt-Fontaine Fellow, 2021 Chicagoan of the Year, inducted into the RPS Fine Arts Hall of Fame and the Women in the Arts Museum, Newcity Stages 50 Players of 2025. [www.e-fayebutler.com](http://www.e-fayebutler.com)

**JOHN CULBERT** (Scenic Design) has been active in the Chicago theatre community for decades. He has had the honor of designing for many Chicago companies including Court Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Writers Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Recent productions include *Miss Julie* and *Berlin* (Court Theatre), *Heart Sellers* (Northlight), *Marie and Rosetta* (Milwaukee Rep), and *The Lehman Trilogy* (Timeline). He has also designed for Lyric Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Singapore Repertory, Opéra national du Rhin, Long Wharf Theatre, Berkeley Rep, McCarter Theatre, and Shakespeare Theatre Company. He served as the Dean of The Theatre School at DePaul University for over 20 years. This is his first production at Asolo Repertory Theatre.

**ROSS EGAN** (Managing Director) is the Managing Director of Asolo Repertory Theatre, one of the nation's premier regional theatres. He holds an MBA and a BFA in Acting, and has built a distinguished leadership career in the American theatre, including founding Refuge Theatre Project, a Jeff Award-winning company in Chicago celebrated for its groundbreaking productions. His prior roles include Managing Director of Barter Theatre, one of the longest-running professional theatres in the country, and Director of Operations at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. When not at work, he can be found on the ice hockey rink.

**JARED GOODING** (Lighting Design) is happy to make his return to Asolo Rep after designing lights for *Chicken & Biscuits* in 2022 and will be returning with Chicago's Goodman Theater to design *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in January. Some design credits include designs for Goodman Theater, Writers Theater, Court Theater, Chicago Children's Theater, American Blues Theater, TimeLine Theatre, MPAACT, The Lincoln Center, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Syracuse Stage, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Indiana Repertory Theater, and First Stage Milwaukee, and he was the lighting assistant for *The Wiz Live* on NBC. He is a company member with both MPAACT, and American Blues Theater in Chicago. He is also a Senior Architectural Lighting Designer with EXP. You can view his work at [goodingdesigns.com](http://goodingdesigns.com).

**MICHELLE HART** (Hair, Wig, and Makeup Design) designs for Asolo Repertory Theatre and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. Other credits: Sarasota Ballet, Palm Beach DramaWorks, freeFall Theatre, Urbanite Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, Banyan Theatre, Ruth Eckerd Hall, Venice Theatre,

Dorset Theatre, Barrington Stage, and Open Stage Theatre. She has also done hair and/or make-up for Joan Rivers, Doris Roberts, Martin Short, Jane Russell, Arlene Dahl, Soledad Villamil, Jane Pauley, Richard Dreyfuss, Castille Langdon, Christopher Higgins, Justin Long, and Paul Downs. Music videos "Second Chance" by Shinedown, "Reverse Cowgirl" by T-Pain. Film and television: *The Loyalists, Lady of the Manor, The Real Stephen Blatt*, and *Paradise, FL*.

**MCKINLEY JOHNSON** (Costume Design) has taught technical fashion courses and costume design for over twenty-five years at Dominican University and various institutions around Chicago, including Columbia College and The Art Institute of Chicago. His craftsmanship as a master-tailor/cutter, in the Chicagoland theatre community and especially the Goodman Theatre, has spanned over three decades. He has built costumes for such legendary Broadway designers as Paul Tazewell (*Hamilton*), Susan Hilferty (*Wicked*), and Catherine Zuber (*Moulin Rouge*). In 2016, as the production manager and cutter for local Chicago fashion designer Michael Alan Stein's Spring Collection, his skills were on full display during New York's Fashion Week where his handiwork was noted by critics for its fit and cut. Currently, he is researching and developing a musical, with a local playwright, that focuses on 1930's Zoot Suits and the political upheaval garnered by those first garments of protest to be seen in American culture. He holds a BFA from Howard University and MA from University of Illinois at Chicago. He is excited to remount *Marie and Rosetta* with director E. Faye Butler.

**KAITLIN KITZMILLER** (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be returning to Asolo Repertory Theatre. Previous regional credits include: Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Resident Ensemble Players, Theatre Silco and Peninsula Players. Kaitlin is a proud member of Actor's Equity Association.

**LYDIA KONINGS** (Production Assistant) is thrilled to return to Asolo Repertory Theatre! Previously at Asolo Repertory Theatre: *The Unfriend, Primary Trust, Come From Away, Jesus Christ Superstar, Anna in the Tropics*, and *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*. Regional: The Santa Fe Opera and Saugatuck Center for the Arts. She studied Mathematics and Theatre at Hope College and has done apprenticeships at both The Santa Fe Opera and here at Asolo Rep.

**PETER ROTHSTEIN** (Producing Artistic Director) directed *The Unfriend, Come from Away, Ken Ludwig's Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (World Premiere), *Twelve Angry Men: A New Musical, Inherit the Wind, Man of La Mancha, Sweeney Todd*, and *Ragtime* at Asolo Repertory Theatre. He works extensively as a director of theatre, musicals, opera, and new work development. For 25 years, Rothstein served as the founding Artistic Director of Theater Latté Da, a Minneapolis-based company dedicated to new and adventurous music-theater. Other collaborations include: the Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Ten Thousand Things, and Seattle's 5th Avenue, as well as the Minnesota Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Florida Grand Opera, and Chicago Opera Theater. Rothstein is the creator of *All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914*, which had its off-Broadway debut in 2018, receiving the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. Rothstein served on the board of directors for the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, Alive and Kickin', and the Twin Cities' Ivey Awards. He holds degrees in Music and Theater from St. John's University and an MFA in Directing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**RICK SIMS** (Sound Design) Steppenwolf: *The Thanksgiving Play, Domesticated, The Qualms, The Fundamentals*. Chicago: *Frankenstein* (Jeff Award), *Moby Dick* (Jeff Award; St. Louis Circle Award) (Lookingglass Theatre Co.); *Brothers of the Dust* (BTA Award) (Congo Square). Regional: Roundhouse Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Boston Playwrights, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Arden Theatre Company, Portland Playhouse, Actors Theatre of Louisville, McCarter Theatre Center. Broadway: *The Thanksgiving Play* (2nd Stage). Off-Broadway: *The Qualms* (Playwrights Horizons). Rick is an Artistic Associate at Lookingglass Theatre Co., and Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theatre Co.

**KEVIN JINGHONG ZHU** (Stage Manager as of May 22, 2026) is thrilled to make his Asolo Repertory Theatre debut with *Marie and Rosetta*. He is a New York-based stage manager whose Broadway credits include *To Kill a Mockingbird*. His selected Off-Broadway credits include work with Ma-Yi, Classic Stage, Transport Group, NAATCO, Yangtze Rep, Heartbeat Opera, PAC NYC, MTC, Soho Rep, and Pan Asian. His selected regional credits include Arizona Theatre Company, Westport Country Playhouse, the O'Neill, Seattle Rep, McCarter, Yale Rep, Long Wharf, Signature (DC), and WAM. He holds an MFA from Yale School of Drama. [bit.ly/kevinjzhu](http://bit.ly/kevinjzhu)

Asolo Rep's Summer Children's Musical Returns!

# THE WIZARD of OZ

YOUTH EDITION

CLICK YOUR HEELS,  
ADVENTURE AWAITS!

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## THE WIZARD OF OZ: YOUTH EDITION

By **L. FRANK BAUM**

With Music and Lyrics by

**HAROLD ARLEN** and **E. Y. HARBURG**

Background Music by **HERBERT STOTHART**

Dance and Vocal Arrangements by **PETER HOWARD**

Orchestration by **LARRY WILCOX**

Adapted by **JOHN KANE** for the Royal Shakespeare Company

Based upon the Classic Motion-Picture owned by Turner Entertainment Co. and distributed in all media by Warner Bros.

Directed and Choreographed by **CAT BRINDISI**

Music Direction by **CARL HAAN**

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Asolo Rep operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and the United Scenic Artists Local USA-829, IATSE Local 412 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Pictures Machine Operators of the United States and Canada.



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# HOW DO YOU BECOME THE GODMOTHER OF ROCK & ROLL?

BY JAMES MONAGHAN

**Rosetta Nubin—that's Sister Rosetta Tharpe to you**—was born in 1915 and inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame over 100 years later in 2018. Considering her groundbreaking career and that she died in 1973, this was a welcome but long overdue honor. Besides Sister Rosetta Tharpe, she is also known to many as the Godmother of Rock & Roll, but no one knows quite where the title came from. While I won't attempt to get to the bottom of who coined the phrase, I will endeavor to scratch the surface of why she can rightly claim that title.

## Her Vocal Performance

Sister Rosetta grew up deeply involved in the Church of God in Christ—that's where the "Sister" honorific comes from. It was there that her musical talents first showed themselves and in those sacred spaces where she found her first audience. Her bright soprano seemed naturally suited for gospel, but as her life conspired to pull her further from the church—a manipulative first husband who was a preacher and the allure of decidedly irreligious venues like the Cotton Club and the Savoy—she discovered her voice sounded just as good with a little bit of secular soul.

Perhaps the most iconic example blurring the line between Saturday nights and Sunday mornings came in her first Decca recording (1938) in which the traditional hymn "Hide Me in Thy Bosom," was recorded as "Rock Me." In addition to making several more secular lyrical choices—"Loving kindness fill me" instead of "holy spirit fill me," and "While the world of love is around me / Evil

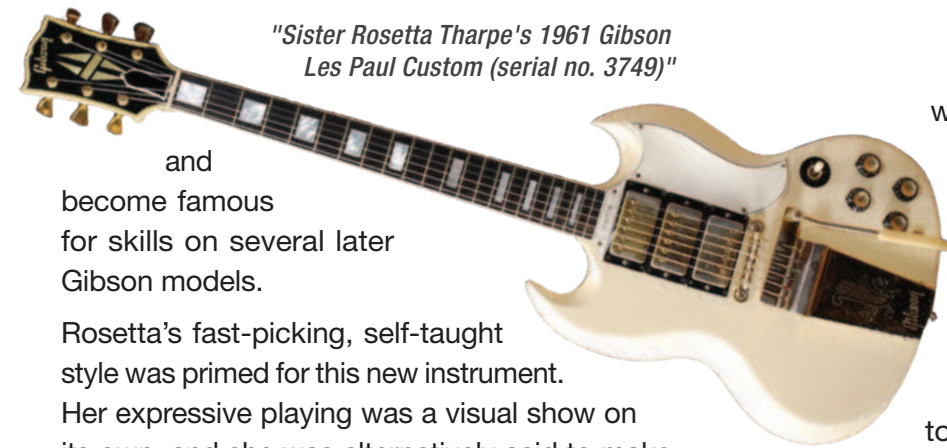
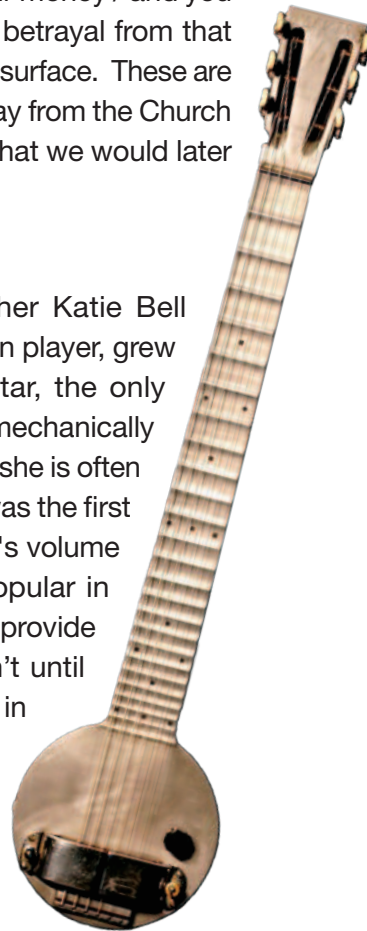
thoughts do bind me," instead of "In a world of sin around me / No evil thoughts can bound me"—she extends the "r" sound of the "Rock Me" chorus with a gravelly growl. The effect shocked and alienated the believers familiar with the hymn and thrilled the wider world.

On the same smash-hit album "My Lord and I" became "My Man and I," and while the other tracks hewed much closer to their traditional lyrics, they were performed with more than a little earthy flavor. In "That's All," a traditional hymn warning against superficial piety, she sings about preachers who only "want your money / and you can go to hell." The sense of betrayal from that first marriage feels close to the surface. These are small but noticeable steps away from the Church of God towards the spirit of what we would later call Rock & Roll.

## Her Instrument

Sister Rosetta, whose mother Katie Bell Nubin was a talented mandolin player, grew up playing the acoustic guitar, the only style then in existence. The mechanically amplified resonator guitar that she is often pictured with in early photos was the first attempt to increase the guitar's volume up against the big bands popular in that era. But even this did not provide sufficient sound, and it wasn't until the Rickenbacker 'frying pan' in 1932 that the electric guitar as we know it was born. Rosetta would be an early adopter

"Frying Pan"



"Sister Rosetta Tharpe's 1961 Gibson Les Paul Custom (serial no. 3749)"

and become famous for skills on several later Gibson models.

Rosetta's fast-picking, self-taught style was primed for this new instrument. Her expressive playing was a visual show on its own, and she was alternatively said to make the instrument "talk" or to be "attacking" the strings. While her roots in the acoustic style were always betrayed by her use of the thumb pick so associated with that 'school,' she was nevertheless an electric innovator. She was one of the first to intentionally use distortion, pioneering the thick, gritty sound that would become so closely associated with what made Rock & Roll, rock.

In the article accompanying her 2018 induction to the Rock & Roll hall of fame, Gayle Wald—author of the Rosetta biography: *Shout, Sister, Shout*—writes, "Without Tharpe, a woman who thrived on thrilling audiences with her guitar pyrotechnics, it's open for debate whether rock's archetypal instrument would have become so indelibly associated with the sensual, the sensational, and the sublime."

## Her Personality

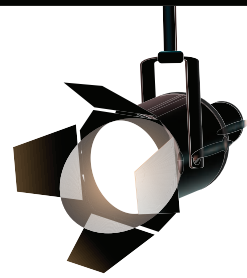
And then there is that intangible, rebellious quality that is as central to the Rock ethos as the music itself. Married three times in an era when divorce was highly unusual, especially in Rosetta's religious community (the third marriage ceremony in front of a stadium of 20,000 people), she also refused to let the racism of the country slow her down, traversing the south in a tour bus equipped

with sleeping quarters. To do so with Marie Knight, a fellow Black, female gospel singer amidst clouds of suspicion about the nature of their relationship, was an even greater risk. This only seemed to fuel Rosetta. Her willingness to break new ground with her instrument and build an audience somewhere between church and mainstream music all recommend her as the progenitor of the Rock & Roll movement. Wald continues in her article, "Without the sort of emotional expressiveness that she and others brought from black churches into the musical mainstream, it's doubtful that Rock & Roll would have attained the affective force of a secular religion."



Publicity photo for Decca Records featuring Rosetta with her Resonator guitar c. 1938  
Photo By: James Kriegsmann

# Donor Spotlight



## Mary Braxton Joseph and Enid Marshall



pursuing a career in film and television while continuing to seek out live performances. Enid, who raised her children in Washington, made arts experiences a central part of family life from theatre and ballet to concerts and cultural events.

When Enid eventually chose Sarasota as her home, the region's vibrant arts community was a major draw.

"One of the reasons I came to Sarasota was because I knew this area was so supportive of the arts," she says.

Both women found a home at Asolo Rep. For Mary, the experience began when she was invited to her first performance on the Mertz stage, *Josephine*. She quickly became a devoted audience member, particularly drawn to the theatre's musicals, including *Man of La Mancha* and *The Sound of Music*.

"Live theatre transports and transforms you," Mary says. "No matter how you feel on a given day, it brings you to a different time and place."

Their decision to co-produce *Marie and Rosetta* was driven by both artistic admiration and cultural pride. They were especially drawn to the story of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a pioneering musician whose influence helped shape Rock & Roll and inspired artists from Elvis Presley to Ray Charles and Johnny Cash.

"African American culture is rich with meaningful contributions in medicine, science, and the arts," Enid says. "I want our culture's contributions to the arts to be highlighted, and I appreciate Asolo doing that through *Marie and Rosetta*."

Through their support, Mary and Enid are helping amplify the legacy of a musical trailblazer and ensuring her voice continues to resonate with new audiences.

Longtime supporters of Asolo Rep, Mary Braxton Joseph and Enid Marshall share more than a deep love of theatre—they also share roots in Washington, DC. This season, their passion for the arts has led them to a new role as co-producers of *Marie and Rosetta*, their first experience supporting a production in this way.

For both women, their connection to the stage began early. When Enid was just five years old, she was cast as the lead in her school play, *Peter Rabbit*.

"That did it for me," she recalls. "It wasn't just being onstage, it was being backstage and the excitement of everything happening around it."

Mary's introduction came a few years later when she attended her first musical, *Oliver!*, as a junior high student in Plainfield, New Jersey. Living just 45 minutes from New York City meant regular opportunities to see theatre, opera, and dance including her first glimpse of the Rockettes.

"I became a fan of live theatre early on," Mary says.

Their love for the performing arts followed them throughout their lives. Mary later lived in Washington, D.C., and South Africa,



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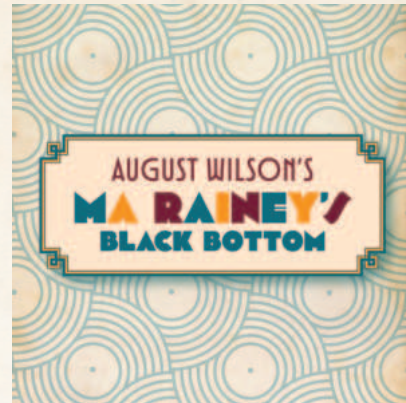
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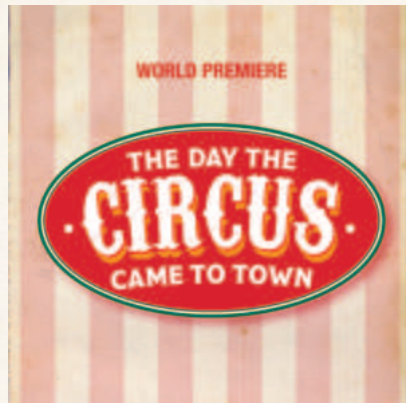
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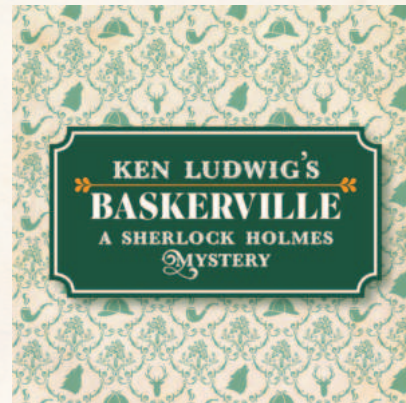
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