

Acknowledgements

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Alva Puppet Theater also wishes to acknowledge Cheryl Henson for her generous donation, without which our participation in this festival would not have been possible, and to Blair Thomas for his kind invitation to participate in this wonderful and magical festival.

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The Harlem Doll Palace production is made possible by a 2024 Production Grant from The Jim Henson Foundation



**Council on
the Arts**

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**FRACTURED
ATLAS**

**ALVA
PUPPET
THEATER**

THE HARLEM DOLL PALACE

Written by Alva Rogers

Directed by Ash Winkfield

Music, Lyrics, and Scoring by Bruce Monroe

www.AlvaPuppetTheater.com

www.AlvasWorld.com

Written by Alva Rogers

Directed by Ash Winkfield

Performed by Mecca Akbar, Thalya David, Charlotte Lily Gaspard, Marcella Murray, Alva Rogers, Ash Winkfield

Understudies Greer Morrison, William PK Carter

Music, Lyrics, and Scoring by Bruce Monroe

Sound Design Dave Pascal

Lighting Design Rob Lariviere

Costume Design Mark Ruffin

Production Design Jessica Simon & Ash Winkfield

Carpentry Chris Flanagan

Stage Manager Emily Grierson

Technical Director Ben Elling

Production Assistant, Sewist William PK Carter

Workshop Director Jessica Simon

Puppet Design

Amanda Card - Shadow Puppets

William PK Carter - Butterfly Puppets

Rosa Elling - Army Talking Doll

Charlotte Lily Gaspard - Army Talking Doll & Aunt Len Doll costumes

Dorothy James - Brown Nurse Doll, Grace Kelly Doll, Ninon French Fashion Doll (In collaboration with Rowan Magee), Hidden Shadows

Sono Kuwayama - Hannah, Early, Sarah, Topsy Turvies

Holly Laws - Original Aunt Len Doll

Leah Levine - The Missus

Rowan Magee - Brown Nurse Doll, Grace Kelly Doll, Ninon French Fashion Doll (In collaboration with Dorothy James)

Brenna Ross - Crochet Gobo

Esme Roszel - Izannah Walker Doll, Aunt Len Doll

Documentarian and Video Design Samira Gibson, ardd.tech | saga44



Lenon Holder Hoyte (July 4, 1905 - August 1, 1999)

Lenon Holder Hoyte, better known as Aunt Len, shared her dream of a doll museum with Harlem children and collectors from around the world for two decades. A public school art teacher, she founded Aunt Len's Doll and Toy Museum, one of the most extensive private collections of dolls and related toys in the United States, and long one of New York City's choice specialty museums. She closed the museum in the early 1990's when she was no longer able to care for it.

The museum had a modest entrance fee, never exceeding \$2 for adults and 50 cents for children. Visitors would encounter all manner of mannequins, ranging from thumb-size to two or three feet tall. To Ms. Hoyte, the dolls were her "babies," to be loved and shown off, whether they were the rarest antiques or battered castoffs. At one time the house was home to 6,000 dolls. There were a dozen versions of Shirley Temple; there was Barbie, and Betsy Wetsy, presidents and their wives, and refined French dolls with bodies and faces made of bisque, the unglazed ceramic ware used to make fine dolls in the 19th century and before. And always, her collection included black dolls, which are now highly sought by collectors, because so few were made before the 20th century. One rarity, described in the sale catalogue as "a black Bru pressed-bisque-head bebe doll," was valued at \$18,000. The collection also included accessories like doll houses, doll clothing and costumes, tin toys and stuffed animals.

Her passion for collecting dolls dated to 1962, when she was asked to organize a doll show to raise money for Harlem Hospital. After that, she began acquiring dolls from flea markets, garage sales and antiques shops that she visited throughout the United States, Europe and the Caribbean. Her collection was officially opened as a museum in 1974. Ms. Hoyte continued to produce doll shows, and donated the proceeds to St. Philip's Episcopal Church, where she had been a lifelong member. She spent many of her retirement years traveling to doll shows and picking up dolls and doll accouterments for her collection.

Ben Elling (*Technical Director*) is a puppeteer and theatrical technician. He has worked extensively as an audio/video engineer, and freelance technical director for several Off-Broadway productions. In addition to his technical work, Ben has puppeteered in Basil Twist's *Rite of Spring* at Lincoln Center, and *Symphonie Fantastique* at HERE Arts Center.

Emily Grierson (*Stage Manager*) is a Seattle-based stage manager originally from Western New York. As a stage manager, Emily has had the pleasure of working with artists on theater, dance, and puppetry productions across the country. Recent credits: Harlem Doll Palace (Alva Puppet Theater/Puppetopia Festival at HERE Arts NYC), Songs of the Moon (5th Avenue Educational Tour), Kayfabe (Josh Rice Projects/Chicago International Puppet Festival), Havana Hop (B-Fly Entertainment/Seattle Children's Theater), Henry V (Shake on the Lake).

William PK Carter (*Sewist, Production Assistant, Understudy*) is a quilter and puppet artist based in Central Valley, New York. She bridges the puppet and fine art worlds by fabricating wondrous creatures that exist at the intersection of queerness and blackness. She received her Bachelor of Science in Studio Art from Skidmore College in 2023, and is the recipient of Skidmore College's President's Racial Justice Award, the Van Dewater Memorial Award, and the John P. Heins Award: Outstanding Senior Thesis Exhibition. She is a part of the 2025 cohorts of Puppet Showplace's Creative Residency for Black Puppeteers and Ann Street Gallery's Emerging Artist Fellowship.

Alva Rogers (*Playwright, Aunt Len*) is the Artistic Director of ALVA PUPPET THEATER, a dramatist, puppeteer, and multidisciplinary artist. The company's most recent work, *Topsy-Turvy*, was presented at The 2024 Brooklyn Academy of Music's Gala at the request of Creative Trailblazer honoree, Solange Knowles and The Museum of Modern Art in 2023. Her work with Rodeo Caledonia High Fidelity Performance Theater ignited an early career as a performance artist and film actor (*School Daze*, *Daughters of the Dust*). Later, she concentrated more on writing, earning MFAs in Musical Theatre Writing (NYU/Tisch) and Playwriting (Brown); she also holds an MAT in History (Bard).

Ash Winkfield (*Director, Puppeteer: Ninon; xe/xem/xyr*) is a multi-disciplinary artist working primarily in theater and the puppetry arts. Winkfield specializes in new and devised work presented in New York City, and has toured domestically and internationally with Basil Twist (*Rite of Spring*, *Sister's Follies*, *Book of Mountains and Seas*), *The Walk with Little Amal* (NYC, Toronto, US Tour), and most recently Yaa Samar Dance Theater's world premiere of "Gathering". Winkfield is passionate about creating work that speaks to the emotional experience of humanity in the face of injustice. Learn more at www.AshleyWinkfield.com

Greer C. Morrison (*Understudy*) is an active member of the New York Entertainment community. As a Vocalist, Ms. Morrison has performed internationally; Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom. New York venues such as B.B. Kings, Arlene's Grocery and the Cutting Room among others have showcased Greer's vocal talents. As an Actress, Greer's credentials include principle roles in national commercials, print advertisements as well as riveting and compelling lead performances in Independent and Feature films, Off Broadway theater and numerous appearances in network and cable programs. Ms. Morrison is honored to be performing with this talented cast.

Bruce Monroe, (*Music, Lyrics, and Scoring*) a DGA member, has been writing with Alva Rogers since they first met at the Musical Theatre Writing Program at NYU (including the musicals *Sunday*, *Mermaid*, and *nightbathing*). A Seattle-based composer, lyricist, librettist, orchestrator, dance arranger, music director, and conductor, he has also scored independent films and audio/video series for Battleground Productions (credits on imdb.com). He is married to Seattle Times arts writer, and novelist, Moira Macdonald.

Dave Pascal (*Sound Design*) is a Seattle-based musician, producer, and sound designer. He performs as a bassist in theater orchestras, studios, music venues, and on tours. His work as a composer, producer, sound designer, and music director includes Emmy-winning TV projects, award-winning educational multi-media, and theatrical productions around the U.S.

Rob Lariviere (*Lighting Design*) Rob has been lighting Dixon Place performances since 2009. They are thrilled and honored to work with the entire cast and crew of The Harlem Doll Palace.

Definitions

Bisque doll: Unglazed tinted porcelain refers to an antique doll.

Bru: A French doll-making family of the second half of the nineteenth century. Although Bru dolls were made in various materials, the sought-after ones today are characterized by large, luminous glass eyes set into bisque heads of fine quality. Doll makers took out Bru doll patents as early as 1867.

Celebrity Dolls: They have been in production since the 19th century as paper dolls and in every material.

Fashion Dolls: Usually modeled after adult women or adolescent girls. Fashion dolls generally reflect fashion trends. Additionally, they can reflect the fashion trends of children and men.

Frozen Charlotte: Non-Jointed doll made of china or bisque.

Jointed Wooden Dolls: Wooden dolls with arms that bend at the shoulders, elbows, knees, and sometimes ankles. They are also known as Dutch dolls.

Izannah Walker Doll: Izannah Walker was one of the first female doll-makers to use their familiarity with textiles to make soft, huggable composition dolls. A composition doll is made partially or wholly out of a composite material composed of sawdust, glue, and other materials such as cornstarch, resin, and wood flour.

Thomas Alva Edison's Talking Doll: A mechanical doll with a metal torso, molded legs and arms, and a porcelain head with fixed eyes.

Topsy Turvy Doll: Two dolls in one; when turned over the skirt reveals another doll's head.

Director's Note:

This production challenges the bounds of both theater and puppetry. Converting a play for people into a play for puppets is no small feat. Kudos and gratitude to the cast for the immeasurable amount of work they have put into understanding and breathing life into the complex layers of The Harlem Doll Palace. I am very fortunate to have the trust and support of Alva in bringing her vision to fruition. Thank you to Cheryl and Heather Henson for their ongoing support as well as

Many thanks to the many hands that have built the many different puppets of this show. The diversity of the puppets is akin to the diversity of the many dolls housed in Aunt Len's Museum; and the diversity of their experiences speak to the expanse of human experiences that we all face.

This piece is 30 years in the making. Welcome to The Harlem Doll Palace.

Playwright's Note:

In resuscitating Aunt Len's museum's legacy, The Harlem Doll Palace foregrounds a woman-identified perspective. It challenges societal norms by acknowledging the scholarly significance of women's creative endeavors and home-based work. Hoyte's invaluable work is resurrected through this project, highlighting her dedication to transforming her museum from a perceived novelty to a seminal institution. While The Harlem Doll Palace is a tribute to Lenon Holder Hoyte, The production delves into diverse historical contexts, including the complex experiences of Colored and Caucasian females in the Antebellum South.

Alva gratefully acknowledges the vision, love, and unwavering support of Cheryl, Heather, and Jane Henson.. She extends heartfelt gratitude to The Jim Henson Foundation, The Jim Henson Carriage House, Brenna Ross, Jessica Simon, Priscilla Nickeson, Marcy Jellison, The Eugene O'Neill Puppetry Conference, El Covan and Dixon Place, Jean Marie Keevins, Claude Lapointe, Paulette Richards, Holly Laws, India B. Rogers-Shepp, and David Savage.

She further expresses deep appreciation for the exemplary work of the cast, puppet builders, and the entire creative team; Rob Laviere, Dave Pascal and her longtime collaborator and composer, Bruce Monroe; and her visionary and insightful director, Ash Winkfield.

Bios

Mecca Akbar (*Doll Collector, Puppeteer: Army Talking Doll, The Missus*) has starred in off-Broadway productions of PINOCCHIO with New York Children's Theatre, Sesame Street: The Musical with Rockefeller Productions and TREE HAUS with the New York Drama Company. Akbar also toured in PACKRAT with Concrete Temple Theatre. She trained at New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts in Chelsea Manhattan, as well as the British Academy for Dramatic Arts' Midsummer Shakespeare program at Oxford University. Mecca is a rotating marionettist at the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre in Central Park and freelances as a puppet builder. She is also a traveling Product Specialist with Toyota.

Thalya I. David (*Puppeteer: Brown Nurse Doll, Sarah; she/her*) is a Haitian-American actress from Florida with a BA in Fine Arts at Broward College. In 2017, she moved to New York to continue to pursue an acting career and received her BFA in Acting at Marymount Manhattan College(2020). She worked in Love and Information at the Live Arts (MMC off campus production) , Man-I-Festo (on campus and at Manhattan Repertory Theatre). Started puppeteer with Maria Camia's Healing Shipment (2022-2023). She has the pleasure to work with Alva Roger's Harlem Doll Palace (2023) IG: basiiiq

Charlotte Lily Gaspard (*Puppeteer: Grace Kelly Doll, Early*) is a shadow puppet artist, educator, entertainer, and "bona fide fairy princess" (DUMBO Living). Charlotte's mission is to activate imaginations and celebrate playfulness wherever she goes. Charlotte is the founder, artistic director and "fanciful mastermind" (Broadway World) behind Midnight Radio Show, a shadow puppet sci-fi fairytale theater company based in Brooklyn, NYC. Charlotte and her collective are known for devising innovative avant-garde enchantments, infused with puppets, poetry, music and dance, for the stage and beyond.

Marcella Murray (*Puppeteer: Izannah Walker Doll, Hannah*) is a New York-based theater artist from Augusta, Georgia. She is a playwright, performer, collaborator, and puppeteer. Murray's work is heavily inspired by the observed ways in which people tend to segregate and reconnect. Her work tends to focus on themes of identity within a community and (hopefully) forward momentum in the face of trauma. Along with David Neumann, Murray recently co-created Distances Smaller Than This Are Not Confirmed (Obie Special Citation for Creation and Performance) which opened at Abrons Arts Center in January of 2020, and Primer for an Impossible Conversation, a digital theater piece which premiered in 2021 at MCA Chicago. Murray is a co-curator of the Object Movement Puppetry Residency. In 2022, she was an Artist in Residence at LaMaMa ETC with her original piece Other Atlantas, as well as a participant in the Experiments in Opera Writer's Room. Murray is a guest professor of Theatre at Sarah Lawrence College.