PHILLIS WHEATLEY 250

FACES OF PHILLIS

BY ADE SOLANKE

DECEMBER 4TH 2023 @ 6 PM
RABB HALL, BPL

A staged reading and panel discussion about
Phillis Wheatley Peters

HOSTED BY THE ASSOCIATES OF THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
A Note from Ade Solanke

There are so many aspects of the life of Phillis Wheatley I wonder about.

Who were her parents? How was she stolen from them? How did she survive the horrors of the hold and the arduous Middle Passage? How did she first start to write in English? What did she remember of her home? When did she decide to stay in the colonies? Who were collaborators as an artist and an abolitionist? When did she fall in love?

Who was she?

Enslaved people were subjected to the worst violence, depravity, exploitation and torture imaginable. Many were crushed and destroyed, physically and mentally. Yet some, like Phillis, found a way to develop their talents, to express their genius, to resist and defy the attempt to make them into commodities; into non-human things.

June Jordan called her a miracle. As Toni Morrison put it, “a literate slave was supposed to be a contradiction in terms.” Phillis is a global figure, her story touching all points of the Black Atlantic. Her story is universally moving. She shows what humans can achieve in spite of terror and oppression.

Thank you to all in Boston who’ve so generously shared their insights into her story with me, and for allowing me to help celebrate this precious daughter of Africa, and daughter of Boston.

Ade Solanke

Special Thanks to

With Special Thanks to
Angela Peri and Boston Casting,
Tufts Department of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

and our Boston Public Library colleagues, including
David Leonard, Jay Hamilton, Erica Husting, Beth Prindle, Jay Moschella, Angela Veizaga,
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THE ASSOCIATES OF THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
PRESENTS

Faces of Phillis
A staged reading and panel discussion celebrating Phillis Wheatley Peters

PART 1: FACES OF PHILLIS, A STAGED READING

Playwright
Adeola Solanke

Director
Regge Life

Producer
Lisa Rafferty

Associate Producer
Kimberly Mae Waller

With
Adreyanua Jean-Louis, Serenity S'rae, Joshua Lee, Junior Cius, Regine Vital

Costume Design
M Stranski

Stage Manager
Michael Eckenreiter

LIVE EVENT
Boston Public Library
Rabb Hall
December 4, 2023 at 6:00 PM
The video and/or audio recording of this performance is strictly prohibited.

VIRTUAL ACCESS
We are recording tonight’s show. Sign up to receive the recording link and password via bit.ly/PhillisVirtual. The video will be available for viewing for one week following the performance on Vimeo (December 6th - December 13th)
Scene 1: Reflection is set in the garden of Reverend John Moorhead's house, near the Liberty Tree, South End of Boston, 1773.

Scene 2: Rebirth is set in the front room of the Wilkins farm in Middleton, Massachusetts, 1781.

CHARACTERS

Phillis Wheatley Peters
Obour Tanner
John Peters
Scipio Moorhead
Mumbet/Elizabeth Freeman

CAST

Adreyanua Jean-Louis
Serenity S'rae
Joshua Lee
Junior Cius
Regine Vital

ADREYANUA JEAN-LOUIS she/her (Phillis Wheatley) Recent roles include Phillis Wheatley in *Phillis in Boston* at Revolutionary Spaces, Khadia in *Joumou* at Fuse Theatre and Sister James in *Doubt* at New England Repertory Company. Adreyanua received training from the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, The Lucid Body, and The Open Program of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards.

SERENITY S'RAE she/her (Obour Tanner) Stage credits include the world premiere production *Phillis in Boston* this fall, and the world premiere of *DIASPORA!* at the New Repertory Theatre. Other recent credits include *Private Lives* at Gloucester Stage Company. Serenity recently earned her BFA from Boston University this May, where she studied Theatre Arts.

JOSHUA LEE ROBINSON he/him (John Peters) is a Black actor with a Masters from Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance. He was last seen as Claudio in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Warren in *Albatross* by Isley Lynn, Tramarion in *Black Superhero Magic Mama* and Gyaibo in *The Wolf Prince* by June Jiang.
JUNIOR CIUS he/him (Scipio Moorhead) is a SAG-AFTRA actor from Boston. He majored in Theatre Arts at UMass Boston, transitioning from stage to screen post-graduation. He's appeared in Showtime's "SMILF", HBO's “Fredrick Douglass: In Five Speeches" and Lifetime's "A Show-Stopping Christmas" this holiday season.

REGINE VITAL she/her/hers (Mumbet/Elizabeth Freeman) is a theatre artist, producer, educator, and scholar from Somerville, MA. With a rich theater background, she's collaborated with some of Boston's top theatre companies. Passionate about Shakespeare and interactive theater, she enjoys books, shows, dancing, and chats with friends, and holds degrees from Boston University and UMass Boston. Merde, folks!

PRODUCTION TEAM

REGGE LIFE (Director), recently directed Phillis in Boston for Revolutionary Spaces and Cross That River off-Broadway at 50E59th Street. He has directed several productions at Shakespeare & Company including Hymn by Lolita Chakrabarti, Debbie Tucker Green's hang, and the 2019 multiple Berkie Award winning production of Topdog/Underdog. Regge is the Senior Distinguished Director in Residence at Emerson College.

KIMBERLY MAE WALLER she/her (Associate Producer), a Boston-area artist, excelled in stage and production management, notably for the Elliot Norton Awards. She held roles as Artistic Assistant with Boston Theater Company and Associate Producer for "SHE DID ALL THAT: Betty Ford." Additionally, she managed social media for arts promotions, including the Norton Awards.

MICHAEL ECKENREITER (Production Stage Manager) is a stage manager, actor, and musician based in MA and RI. He stage managed the Pierce Performance Series production of ONWARD: Votes for Women, a documentary play created by Lisa Rafferty/Birch Tree Productions. More at michaeleckenreiter.com and @mecksmix everywhere else.

M STRANKSI they/them (Costume Design) M is a queer, non-binary theatre artist with 20+ years in costume design, technical work, crafting, and scenic artistry. They hold a BFA from Cornish College of the Arts and an MFA from Illinois State University, where they found a passion for teaching. In their free time, they create art from nature's treasures. Contact: mstranski7@gmail.com.
PART 2: MODERATED PANEL DISCUSSION

A moderated panel discussion will follow the reading.

PANELISTS

ADE SOLANKE (Playwright) is an award-winning writer, lecturer and founder of Spora Stories. Her plays include her acclaimed debut, Pandora’s Box, which won a Best New Play nomination in London’s Off-West End Theatre Awards, and was shortlisted for the $100,000 Nigeria Prize for Literature, Africa’s biggest literary award. Her play, The Court Must Have a Queen, was performed in the Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace. A double Fulbrighter, she was a Phi Beta Kappa International Scholar and Association of American University Scholar at USC School of Cinematic Arts. In LA, she was twice an Academy Nicholls Screenwriting Fellowship semi-finalist. She has a BA Hons in English Literature from the University of Sheffield, winning its Distinguished Alumni Award in 2016. She’s written for the BBC, The Guardian, The Times Literary Supplement, The Voice, West Africa Magazine and others. She lectures in dramatic writing internationally. More info on her Phillis Wheatley 250 project at https://www.phillis-wheatleys-london-adventure.com/

MEREDITH BERGMANN’s public sculpture commissions include the 2023 Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the 2020 Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument, the 2009 Labor in Massachusetts, and the 2003 Boston Women’s Memorial on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston’s Back Bay. She is currently creating Something Is Being Done, the first women’s memorial in the historic center of Lexington, MA. Her poems, reviews and essays have appeared in many journals and anthologies. She was poetry editor of American Arts Quarterly from 2006-2017. Her chapbook A Special Education was published in 2014 by EXOT Books, which will publish The Dying Flush next year. Meredith lives in Massachusetts with her husband, a writer and director, and their son. Images of her work may be seen at www.meredithbergmann.com.
KYERA SINGLETON is the Executive Director of the Royall House and Slave Quarters. She is a PhD Candidate at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in the Department of American Culture. She is a Postdoctoral Fellow for the Slavery, Colonialism, and The Legacies Project at Tufts University. As a public history scholar, Kyera is a co-curator of the Boston Slavery Exhibit in Faneuil Hall. She was a member of the Table of Voices Cohort at the Museum of Fine Arts-Boston for the *Hear Me Now Exhibit*. She has been appointed to serve on the City of Boston’s Commemoration Commission and the Special Commission on the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution for Massachusetts. She is a board member for Mass Humanities and serves on the advisory team for JustFlix, in Medford, MA.

LISA RAFFERTY (Moderator and Producer) Playwright, director and producer Lisa Rafferty creates documentary plays which celebrate heroic women and men, and writes comedies about motherhood seen around the world. She is the producing director of the Elliot Norton Awards, theater faculty at Bridgewater State University and proud member of the Dramatists Guild and Stage Directors and Choreographers. Find out more at: www.birchtreeproductions.company.
PART 3: DRAMATIC POETRY READING

The evening will conclude with a dramatic poetry reading by the City of Boston’s Poet Laureate and BPL Trustee, Porsha Olayiwola. Porsha will read one of Phillis’s poems, as well as her own work inspired by Phillis.

POET

PORSHA OLAYIWOLA is a native of Chicago who writes, lives and loves in Boston. Olayiwola is a writer, performer, educator and curator who uses afro-futurism and surrealism to examine historical and current issues in the Black, woman, and queer diasporas. She is a BPL Trustee, an Individual World Poetry Slam Champion and the founder of the Roxbury Poetry Festival. Olayiwola is Brown University’s 2019 Heimark Artist-In-Residence as well as the 2021 Artist-in-Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. She is a 2020 poet laureate fellow with the Academy of American poets. Olayiwola earned her MFA in poetry from Emerson College and is the author of *i shimmer sometimes, too*. Olayiwola is the current poet laureate for the city of Boston. Her work can be found in or forthcoming from with TriQuarterly Magazine, Black Warrior Review, The Boston Globe, Essence Magazine, Redivider, The Academy of American Poets, Netflix, Wildness Press, The Museum of Fine Arts and elsewhere.
The Boston Public Library’s Rare Books Department houses significant documents on Phillis's life and literary work, including colonial newspapers, manuscript letters, and a signed first edition of her 1773 book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*.

The Associates is proud to have underwritten the conservation of this rare book in 2015 as part of our commitment to preserve and promote the BPL’s Special Collections.

Associates of the Boston Public Library
The Associates is an independent non-profit that raises funds to preserve, digitize, and promote the Boston Public Library’s Special Collections of historic, literary, and artistic treasures. Since its inception in 1972, the Associates has been the driving force and sponsor behind an extensive range of programs, including Literary Lights— an annual black-tie dinner that honors exceptional New England authors, the Writer-in-Residence Program — which provides an emerging writer with the financial support and office space within the Boston Public Library to complete a literary manuscript for children or young adults, the Hundred-Year Retroactive Book Award competition, and other programs.

For more information, please visit www.AssociatesBPL.org

Pierce Performance Series
The Associates' Pierce Performance Series seeks to raise the visibility of the Boston Public Library's Special Collections through free public performances and lectures. Thanks to the generosity of the Harold Whitworth Pierce Charitable Trust, this series has commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the Peace Jubilee, explored abolitionists' vital messages, celebrated women's suffrage, and examined the life of Thomas Paine. Learn more at AssociatesBPL.org/Pierce
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