

Nina

A Story about Me and Nina Simone

A Performance by
Josette Bushell-Mingo

Wednesday, January 15, 2020, at 7:30 p.m.
Bing Theatre



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Singer and songwriter Nina Simone (1933–2003) was a powerful force in American music and the movement for Black liberation in the mid-twentieth century.
- This is the U.S. premiere of a theatrical production about Simone's life and music by Josette Bushell-Mingo.
- Bushell-Mingo is an acclaimed London-born, Sweden-based theatre actor and director.

NINA SIMONE

Nina Simone, the “High Priestess of Soul,” was an icon of twentieth-century music. Her music can be heard on more than 40 albums spanning the years 1959 to 1993.

Nina Simone was born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in North Carolina in 1933. She started playing piano at the age of three and trained in classical piano. Despite her prodigious talent, and because of systemic racism, she was denied entrance to the Curtis Institute of Music. Her dreams of becoming a classical pianist dashed, she became a music teacher and performed in jazz clubs to earn a living. In these settings, she began to sing, and to weave classical, jazz, and blues musical traditions together in highly distinctive piano arrangements of standards.

Her first hit was “I Loves You, Porgy,” in 1959. In the 1960s, Simone offered her music as an instrument to advance the civil rights movement, performing at demonstrations and releasing political songs like “Mississippi Goddam,” “Four Women,” and “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black.”

Simone left the United States in 1973 to get away from American racism. She spent the rest of her life in Barbados, Africa, and Europe.

JOSETTE BUSHELL-MINGO

Josette Bushell-Mingo is an esteemed theatre actor who was nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actress for her role as Rafiki in the London production of *The Lion King* (2000). Other notable credits include *Peer Gynt* (Solveig) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cleopatra) at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester.

She founded the Black-led arts festival PUSH at the Young Vic and is currently the artistic director for the Swedish National Touring Theatre. She also serves on the board of the Swedish Film Institute.

Bushell-Mingo was born in London in 1965 to Guyanese parents. She is an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.



Photo: Andrew Ness

Josette Bushell-Mingo created *Me and Nina Simone* in 2015, “a year with so many deaths of black people in the USA.” She told the *Guardian*, “What tipped me over was Sandra Bland. Sandra Bland broke my heart ... [the deaths] raised a deep question about what I was doing as an artist.”



FROM “FEELING GOOD,” LYRICS BY NINA SIMONE

Stars when you shine?
 You know how I feel
 Scent of the pine
 You know how I feel
 Oh, freedom is mine
 And I know how I feel
 It’s a new dawn
 It’s a new day
 It’s a new life

... For me
 And I’m feeling good

FROM “MISSISSIPPI GODDAM” (1964), LYRICS BY NINA SIMONE

Don’t tell me
 I tell you
 Me and my people just about due
 I’ve been there so I know
 They keep on saying ‘Go slow!’

But that’s just the trouble
 ‘Do it slow’
 Washing the windows
 ‘Do it slow’
 Picking the cotton
 ‘Do it slow’
 You’re just plain rotten
 ‘Do it slow’
 You’re too damn lazy
 ‘Do it slow’
 The thinking’s crazy
 ‘Do it slow’
 Where am I going
 What am I doing
 I don’t know
 I don’t know

Just try to do your very best
 Stand up be counted with all the rest
 For everybody knows about Mississippi goddam

Picket lines
 School boy cots
 They try to say it’s a communist plot
 All I want is equality
 For my sister my brother my people and me

Yes you lied to me all these years
 You told me to wash and clean my ears
 And talk real fine just like a lady
 And you’d stop calling me Sister Sadie

Oh but this whole country is full of lies
 You’re all gonna die and die like flies
 I don’t trust you any more
 You keep on saying ‘Go slow!’

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

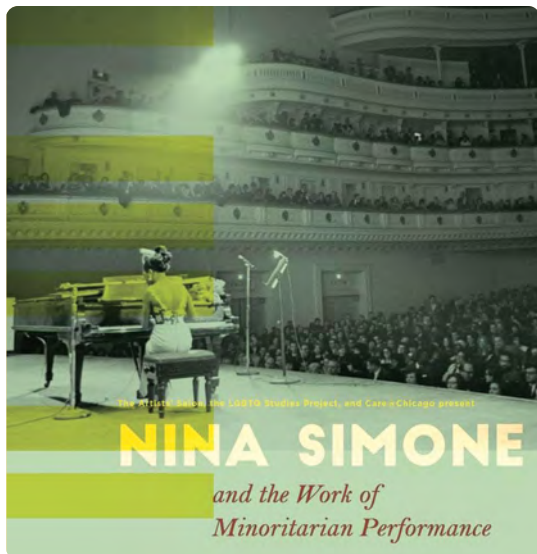
- ☉ Josette Bushell-Mingo has said this production is about “our relationship to each other, through the prism of blackness.” How do you understand the “prism of blackness”? What did you see through that prism in this performance?
- ☉ Are there musical artists today that you think are working in the tradition of Nina Simone?
- ☉ What does music contribute to activism?



Photo: Andrew Ness

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- ☉ *Power to the People!*: Herbie Hancock, Gustavo Dudamel, and the LA Phil An Experience L.A. Event, March 9, 2020 bit.ly/VVPowerPeople
- ☉ The movie *What Happened, Miss Simone?* www.netflix.com/title/70308063
- ☉ The World Stage theworldstage.org



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BOOKS

Chambers-Letson, Joshua Takano. "Nina Simone and the Work of Minoritarian Performance" in *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*. New York University Press, 2018.

ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: HQ76.25.C425 2018

ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN E-BOOK

Cohodas, Nadine. *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone*. University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Elliott, Richard. *Nina Simone*. Equinox Publishing, 2013.

MUSIC LIBRARY: ML420.S5635 E45 2013

Feldstein, Ruth. *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: E185.86.F4342 2013

Gaines, Malik. *Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left: A History of the Impossible*. New York University Press, 2017.

ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: PN1590.B53 G35 2017

ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN E-BOOK

Simone, Nina and Stephen Cleary. *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*. Da Capo Press, 1991/2003.

MUSIC LIBRARY: ML420.S5635 A3 2003

RECORDINGS

Klein, William, et al. *Festival Culturel Panafricain*. Arte Éditions, 2014.

LEAVEY LIBRARY: DVD 11385

Lieberman, Jeff L. *The Amazing Nina Simone*. Re-Emerging Films, 2015.

AVAILABLE THROUGH ALEXANDER STREET ACADEMIC VIDEO ONLINE

Simone, Nina. *High Priestess of Soul*. Verve Records, 1966/2006.

AVAILABLE THROUGH ALEXANDER STREET MUSIC AND DANCE ONLINE

-----, *To Be Free: The Nina Simone Story*. RCA/Legacy, 2008.

MUSIC LIBRARY: CD 15075

