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VENUS
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A NOTE ABOUT THE PROGRAM
Program content is compiled by the production's Assistant Director, Alberto Carrillo Casas, and edited by Nigel Maister. For a complete list of sources and works cited, please contact the Theatre Program.
**Venus**

by suzan-lori parks

directed by nigel smith

set design by arnulfo maldonado

 costume design by olivera gajic

 lighting design by mike inwood

 sound design & original music by erik t. lawson

 fight choreography by steve vaughan

 voice & acting coaching by alexa scott-flaherty

 dance consulting by fana bangoura

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**Production Staff**

production stage manager ................................................................. kimberly roberts

assistant psm’s .......................................................... elizabeth fox & richard munson

assistant stage managers ............................................................ daniel barnett/props

morena heyden/spot operator

deece krupkin/sound

lucinda liu/costumes

kat mckorkle/run crew

rachel sonnet/props

catherine ulivi/lights

jei (jack) wu/run crew

keishla "kiki" zayas/costumes

melissa becker

assistant master electricians .......................................................... andrew jones & emily ivery

audiovisual engineer ........................................................................ kyle meyers

assistant audiovisual engineers .................................................. adam parker & christy brondeur

fight captain .................................................................................. halle burns

production assistant ................................................................. alberto carrillo casas

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venus runs approximately 2 hour and 15 minutes with one 15 minute intermission

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SUZAN-LORI PARKS  (b. 10 MAY 1963)

Suzan-Lori Parks is an African-American playwright and screenwriter. Born in Fort Knox, Kentucky, she went to school in six different states and spent part of her childhood in West Germany. When she was attending high school, her English teacher advised her to stop dreaming of becoming a writer because of her spelling. Ironically enough, Parks’ way of writing vernacular dialect has become one of the most notorious and talked-about stylistic elements of her writing.

Parks graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1985 with a B.A. in English and German literature, later crediting the important impact that her education had on her writing career. At Mount Holyoke, Parks took a creative writing class taught by American novelist, essayist and poet, James Baldwin. Baldwin was the one who suggested to her that she try writing for the stage. Parks, who had never taken a theatre class, decided to move to London after graduating and take acting classes at the Drama Studio to better her overall understanding of stagecraft.

Early on, she was influenced by three works, Harriet the Spy, Hotel for Dogs, and Don Quixote. She also felt inspired by the work of Wendy Wasserstein, another Mount Holyoke alumna, who won the Pulitzer in 1981 for her play, The Heidi Chronicles. In 2000, she received the PEN/Laura Pels Foundation Award for the Theatre, and (in 2001) a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant. Her critically acclaimed play, Topdog/Underdog, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2002 and had a successful run both off- and on-Broadway. Additionally, Parks wrote the screenplay for Spike Lee’s, Girl 6. Parks’ innovative project, 365 days/365 plays, had a worldwide premiere in more than 700 venues across the globe on 2007. The UR international Theatre Program also took part in this initiative, presenting 24 of her 365 plays for a period of two weeks. In 2011, Parks wrote the book for a new musical adaptation of Don Quixote. The production won the Tony Award for Best Musical Revival.

Thub kicks are native for them Hottentots. When I was down there in their hot home.

As Gods my witness Kickin Kickin all day Kickin at eachother shits just their way.

They do one kick for our "move uhbout." 2 kicks mean uh well "pass thuh meat."

Source: The Mother-Showman

Olivette Gaic (Costume Design) Credits include Jedermann (Salzburg Festival, Austria); God’s Ear (Vineyard Theatre); Americans, The Greeks (The Juilliard School/drama); A Midsummer Night’s Dream; Le Comte Ory (The Juilliard School (opera); Terrible Thing (PS.122, NY); Red Fly/Blue Bottle (Here); Chekhov Lizardbrain, Twelfth Night (Pig Iron); Ivanov, Uncle Vanya; Platovon (Lake Lucille); The Necklace, New Island Archipelagos, The peripherals (Talking Band Production); Wonderland (The Flying Machine). Olivera designs extensively for the Berkshire Theatre Festival, Trinity Repertory Company and the Juilliard School. Olivera is recipient of the 2004 NEA/TCG CDP for Designers; the 2010 IT Award for Outstanding Costume Design; the 2010 TDF/Irene Sharaff Young Master Award; and the 2012 Barrymore Award for Outstanding Costume Design.

Mike Inwood (Lighting Design) is glad to be debuting at the University of Rochester. Recent credits include: HR (Magic Theatre, San Francisco); La Traviata (Boston Lyric Opera); God of Carnage (Perseverance Theatre); The Essential Straight & Narrow (Mad Ones/New York); A Disappearance in Two Parts (HERE); Ronaldo (Portland Opera); Dialogues des Carmelites (Opera Philadelphia), I Capuleti e i Montecchi (Curtis Opera, Philadelphia), Out Cold/Zippo Songs (BAM, NYC); Samuel and Aladair (The Mad Ones, NYC); Treer (Lesser America, NYC); Pierced (Vancouver Playhouse, Canada). Mr. Inwood was the lighting designer for the 2013 Macy’s Holiday Windows at their flagship store in Herald Square, and the winner of a 2010 Emmy Award (NBC Sports, Vancouver Winter Olympic Games). Upcoming: ANDY: A Popera (The Bearded Ladies/Opera Philadelphia). www.mikeinwood.com

Erik T. Lawson (Sound Design) is a theatre sound designer, sound artist, and composer. His recent designs in the New York area include Shuffling the Bagymen (New World Stages), Sotto Voce (Theatre for the New City), Nont (Brave New World Repertory Theatre), Nomads (Incubator Arts), Saxohornes and The Diamond Eater (HERE Arts), Marivol (Luna Stage), Fading (New Ohio), and Candy Tastes Nice (Madame X). Internationally, his designs and original scores have been exhibited in the Czech Republic at the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, and at World Stage Design 2013 in Cardiff, UK. Erik is a Lincoln Center Directors Lab Alumni, and received the 2013 USITT Sound Design Achievement Award. MFA: Carnegie Mellon University, School of Drama. www.eriktlawson.com

Steve Vaughan (Fight Choreographer) is a certified stage combat teacher and certified fight director for the Society of American Fight Directors. He stages fights, stunts, and theatrical movement, across the country, for stage, TV, film, and opera. Mr. Vaughan is also an accomplished stage director, having theatre and opera directing credits in Buffalo and Rochester. He teaches acting, directing, and stage combat at SUNY Buffalo State and SUNY Fredonia.
ARTIST BIOS

NIEGEL SMITH (Director) is a theater director and performance artist who sculpts social spaces into unique communal environments where we make new rituals, excavate our pasts, and imagine future narratives. His theater work has been produced by The Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Magic Theatre, HERE Arts Center, Hip Hop Theatre Festival, Summer Play Festival, New York Fringe Festival and the Phoenix Theatre Ensemble, and his walks have been produced by Elastic City, American Realness, the Prelude Festival, Abrons Arts Center, Visual AIDS, the Van Alen Institute and PS 122. He often collaborates with artist Todd Shalom. Together, they conceive and stage interactive performances in public and private environments. He is a ringleader of Willing Participant (www.willingparticipant.org) an artistic activist organization that whips up urgent poetic responses to crazy shit that happens. Smith was the associate director of the Tony Award-winning musical FELA!—restaging that production in London, Lagos and its world tour; and assistant directed the off-Broadway production of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee and both the Broadway and off-Broadway productions of Tony Kushner’s CAROLINE, OR CHANGE. He has worked on the artistic staffs of The Public Theater, Trinity Repertory Company, and Providence Black Rep. He is a 35th Anniversary Artist-in-Residence at Second Stage Theatre and the Associate Artistic Director of Elastic City. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Smith has received grants and fellowships from Theater Communications Group, the Van Lier Fund and the Tuckerman Foundation. Before surviving high school in Detroit, he grew up in the North Carolina piedmont, fishing with his dad, shopping with his mom and inventing tall-tale fantasies with his two younger brothers. www.niegelsmith.com

ARNULFO MALDONADO (Scenic Design) is a New York City-based set and costume designer. Previous UR design credits include: Sets/Costumes for The Colonel Bird and The History Boys, costumes for The Illusion and Hello Again. Additional design credits include the American premiere of debbie tucker green’s seven homeless mammoths wandering New England (Two River Theater); The Colonel Bird (Juilliard School); Il Barbiere di Siviglia (Amherst College); The Threepenny Opera (Bennington College); Scenography for the 73rd, Not What Happened (BAM Next Wave Festival); Ethan Lipton’s Luther (Clubbed Thumb); Madeleine George’s Seven Homeless Mammoths Wandering New England (Two River Theater); For ree in Pits & Needles (Foundry Theatre); Buried Child (Juilliard School); Il Barbiere di Siviglia (Central City Opera). Selected theaters include San Francisco Ballet, Opera Theatre of St Louis, Westport Country Playhouse, and Studio Arena, among others. He has exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial, an international exhibition of scenography and theatre architecture. Maldonado is a recipient of a Princess Grace Theatre Fellowship (Faberge Theatre Award) and a graduate of NYU Tisch’s Department of Design for Stage and Film. Upcoming: Winners and Losers (Soho Rep) and the world premiere of Jenny Schwartz/Todd Almond’s IOWA (Playwrights Horizons). www.arnulfomaldonado.com

SAARTJIE BAARTMAN

The things they noticed were quite various. But no one ever noticed that her face was streaked with tears.

Venus (Sc. 24) The Negro Resurrectionist

The year was 1840. The abolition of slave trade had been passed in Parliament and among protests and denials, horror and fascination, the Venus show went on the Venus show went on.

Venus (Sc. 24) The Negro Resurrectionist

S

aartjie (‘Little Sarah’ in Afrikaans) Baartman was born in 1789, the year of the French Revolution. She had unusually large buttocks and genitalia, and this caught the attention of an English ship’s surgeon, William Dunlop, who persuaded her to travel to London to be exhibited as a “freak.” Some historians think Baartman watched as she did her physique in a side show. In the early nineteenth century, Europeans were obsessed with the idea of physical and racial superiority, so these types of shows were very popular.

Baartman agreed to the terms of her own subjugation and arrived to London in 1810, hoping for wealth and a triumphant return home to her family in Cape Town. Her stage name, the Hottentot Venus, was an ironically cruel reference to the Roman goddess of beauty. It is a common misconception that Baartman was a slave, and it is important to point out that she exhibited herself out of her own free will. Even after a group of abolitionists brought a case on her behalf to court, she decided to stay in England and in show business. The ensuing controversy brought more full houses and increasing requests for private performances by the Venus Hottentot.

Saartjie’s scandalous shows did not need much publicity, and she had already become a well-established star when she moved to Paris in 1814. Such was her notoriety that in Les Misérables, Victor Hugo writes: “Paris is amiable. It accepts everything, royalty, it is not particular about its subjects. It accepts everything royally; it is not particular about its entrance and exit; its attention and its smiles are everywhere.”

Hans Baartman, professor of Art History at University College London and a native of South Africa who has spent a substantial amount of her career studying Baartman writes that “She spoke many languages—Dutch, English, some French, and her maternal tongue. She was very literate and sophisticated. The show she put on was very much a performance, even if the role she was required to play was that of a ‘savage’ femininity.”

Baartman was never naked when performing. She wore a skin-colored body stocking that, from where audiences stood, looked like her real skin. She also played a variety of instruments and was a talented dancer and folk singer.

She died in Paris in 1816 at age 26. The cause of her death is unknown, though she had succumbed to alcoholism a few years before. Just before her death, Napoleon’s surgeon general, Georges Cuvier, brought her corpse illegally into the Musée de l’homme, where his team of anatomists made casts of her body parts, and pickled her brain and genitals. Her body was on display at the museum until 1973. In 2002, her body was finally returned to South Africa, where a funeral was held.
LIST OF SCENES

ACT I

Overture
Scene 31: May I Present to You “The African Dancing Princess”
   / She’d Make a Splendid Freak
Scene 30: She Looks Like She’s Fresh Off the Boat
Scene 29: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act I, Scene 3
Scene 28: Footnote #2
Scene 27: Presenting The Mother-Showman and Her Great Chain of Being
Scene 26: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act II, Scene 9
Scene 25: Counting Down/Counting the Take
Scene 24: “But No One Ever Noticed/Her Face Was Streamed with Tears
Scene 23: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act II, Scene 10
Scene 22: Counting the Take/The Deal That Was
Scene 21: The Whirlwind Tour
Scene 20-A: The Venus Hottentot Before the Law
Scene 19: A Scene of Love (?)
Scene 18: She Always Was My Favorite Child
Scene 17: You Look Like You Need a Vacation
Scene 16: Intermission

ACT II

Scene 15: Counting Down
Scene 14: In the Orbital Path of The Baron Docteur
Scene 13: Footnote #7
Scene 12: Love Iduhnt What/She Used to Be
Scene 11: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act II, Scene 12
Scene 10: Footnote #9
Scene 9: Her Charming Hands/An Anatomical Columbus
Scene 8: “For the Love of The Venus.” Act III, Scene 9
Scene 7: She’ll Make a Splendid Corpse
Scene 6: Some Years Later in Tübingen
Scene 5: Who Is She to Me?
Scene 4: “For the Love of The Venus.” (Conclusion)
Scene 3: “A Brief History of Chocolate”
Scene 2: The Venus Hottentot Tells the Story of Her Life
Scene 1: Final Chorus

PHENOMENAL WOMEN
BY MAYA ANGELOU

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size. But when I start to tell them, They think I’m telling lies. I say, It’s in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips, The stride of my step, The curl of my lips. I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.

I walk into a room, Just as cool as you please, And to a man, The fellows stand or Fall down on their knees. Then they swarm around me, A hive of honey bees. I say, It’s the fire in my eyes, And the flash of my teeth, The swing in my waist, And the joy in my feet. I’m a woman Phenomenally.

Men themselves have wondered What they see in me. They try so much But they can’t touch My inner mystery. When I try to show them, They say they still can’t see. I say, It’s in the arch of my back, The sun of my smile, The ride of my breasts, The grace of my style. I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.

Now you understand Just why my head’s not bowed. I don’t shout or jump about Or have to talk real loud. When you see me passing, It ought to make you proud. I say, It’s in the click of my heels, The bend of my hair, the palm of my hand, The need for my care. ’Cause I’m a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That’s me.
VENUS premiered in 1996, under the direction of the acclaimed avant-garde theatre artist, Richard Foreman. It was produced by the Joseph Papp Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival and the Yale Repertory Theatre. The production won two OBIE Awards. The cast included Adina Porter as Venus, Peter Francis James as the Baron Docteur, and Sandra Shipley as the Mother Showman. There have also been international productions in France and South Africa (among others). Parks herself defines the piece as “a very moving play that, ultimately, is about love.”

For the love of Venus

The Doctor will introduce me to Napoleon himself: Oh, yes, Your Highness the Negro question does keep me awake at night, oh yes it does.

THE NAPOLEONIC EMPIRE (1804-1815)

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s despotic and hierarchical authority caused the disappearance of civil liberties in France, keeping only the Senate (appointed by the emperor) and the Council of State (that decreed ordinances) intact. The court, led by the Bonaparte clan, held political and social dominance, both in France and in his conquered European territories. The bourgeoisie benefited from implementation of economic liberalism and market expansion. The workers had no trouble finding employment, which prevented any social upheaval. Their working conditions, however, were very poor. Culturally, the Enlightenment (which preceded Napoleon’s reign) played an important role in the consolidation of artistic tendencies and philosophical ideas. Based on the ideological and cultural foundations of liberal revolutions, it introduced Reason as the only valid instrument of knowledge, as opposed to faith and religion. This movement also inspired free-thinkers to start writing the very first theories on social justice, human rights and constitutionalism.
The exhibition of live human curiosities has been practiced since the 17th century, and reached its zenith in the Victorian era when it became one of the most popular forms of entertainment. These exhibitions included dwarfs, tall men, overweight ladies, conjoined twins and people with an exotic origin. Mentally and physically disabled people were often exploited in these exhibits. The managers of traveling fairs and circuses protected themselves from the judgment of others by claiming that, through their employment, they were able to give a proper home to these “social misfits”. Disability rights activists have referred to freak shows as “the pornography of disability”. During the 19th century, the ideas of colonialism and racial imperialism were at their peak, and Europeans felt the need to prove their “superiority” by exhibiting the exotic “other.” Freak shows became a way for people to sublimate their fears by gawking at a fascinating and bizarre reality externally removed from the normality of their daily existence.

Venus was the goddess of love and beauty in the ancient Roman cosmology. Considered one of the most important mythical figures in Western culture, she is typically portrayed naked or semi-naked (as in, what is probably her most famous visual representation, Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus). Her name is also associated with the small pre-historic figures found throughout Europe (example: the Venus of Willendorf). Archaeologists agree that the shape of these figures suggest that they were used as fertility amulets. Venus is a goddess charged with irresistible sexuality and, as such, inspired authors to user her as a motif of female dominance and power. A great example is the German erotic novel, Venus in Furs, by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

Body snatching is the secret disinterment of corpses from graveyards. During the 19th Century, bodies were illegally unearthed with the purpose of selling them to physicians who needed them for anatomy or dissection lectures at medical schools. The term “resurrectionist” or “resurrection-man” was the one given to those who practiced body snatching. Violation of graves could result in a year’s imprisonment. Race also played an important role in this matter. Resurrectionists tended to often unearth bodies from “negro burying grounds”, where both free black men and slaves were buried. In France, the “resurrectionists” were known as “Les Corbeaux” (the crows). The illegal trade in corpses became such a social problem towards the 19th Century that various countries began to design systems to donate corpses for scientific research while staying within legal parameters.

Throughout the history of Western civilization, chocolate has had a well-established reputation as an aphrodisiac. The early versions of whorehouses in the Mayan empire used cacao beans as a way of paying for prostitutes. Further up north, in Mexico, legend has it that the King, Montezuma, ruler of the Aztec empire, used to drink up to fifty cups of chocolate before visiting his harem. The Spanish conquistadors introduced chocolate in Europe as a sweet, hot drink. It rapidly became a social phenomenon among the wealthy, and chocolate started being consumed exponentially. In the late 20th Century, Dr. Michael Liebowitz proved that the phenylethylamine (PEA) in chocolate releases the same hormone as sexual intercourse.
John La.hr

The Khoikhoi people (literally “real people”) are an ethnic group native of Southern (and Southwest) Africa, closely related to the “Bushmen” or San people. They were traditionally known to Europe-an colonialists as the Hottentots, a term considered offensive nowadays. The Khoi are a hunter and gatherer society and they practice an extensive pastoral agriculture. They are traditionally nomadic, but erect simple settlements for shelter. The Khoi are polygamous and they rely strongly on kinship bonds. Culturally, the Khoisian religious beliefs give special significance to the moon, seen as a symbol of heaven or the afterlife. The Khoi population dropped considerably through-out the 17th Century after the English and Dutch brought smallpox and other diseases with them to the continent. The currently remaining Khoisian groups live predominantly in Botswana and Namibia.

Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), a Belgian professor at the University of Padua, is considered the father of modern anatomy. His work marked the beginning of the discipline of physiology. During the 1800, France was considered the capital of modern medicine and anatomy. The passion of physicians like Francois Xavier Bichat (1771-1802), who is considered by many the father of descriptive anatomy, contributed to important advances in the treatment of anatomical pathologies. In the 19th Century, l’École de Médecine was the most important medical institution in Europe and received students from all over the world. Another historical institution that can be found in Paris is the Musée Depuytren. Founded in 1835, this museum showcases various human teratological waxes and specimens crammed into glass cases that date back to the 1600’s. The museum has become a fascinating tourist attraction for those interested in anatomy and morbid curiosities.

The term “Restoration comedy” refers to those comedies written in England during the late 17th Century and early 18th Century. Restoration comedy is well-known for its sexual explicitness, extreme wit, and bawdy humor (encouraged by the monarch at that time, Charles II, who was known for the aristocratic and libertine character of his court). The result was an artificial and very stylized type of theatre, though masters of the form, including William Wycherly (The Country Wife), George Etherege (The Man of Mode), and the first acknowledged female dramatist, Aphra Behn (The Rover), brought comedy to a new height. On the continent, the dramatists of the period largely followed the French neo-Classical tradition, hewing to the Aristotelian laws of drama. Though this limited tragedians (with some notable exceptions; Racine for one), comedy flourished in the hands of writers like the social satirist, Moliere.

In drama and music, the chorus may be defined as a group of players that perform jointly rather than singly. In classical Greek tragedy, the chorus was formed by a group of actors that commented upon the action of the play through recitation, song and dance. The chorus symbolized the verdict of history, and it also could represent a character’s conscience, his thoughts and regrets. Choruses frequently speak in unison, emphasizing the repetition of patterns. Nowadays, musical theatre tends to include a chorus that helps support the narrative structure and serves as a visual and musical complement to the action on stage.

Im an everyday anatomist. One in a crowd of millions. A doctor can’t just be himself no one pays a cent for that. Imagine me just being me.

Venus (Sc. 13) Baron Docteur

My love for you, My Love, is artificial
Fabricated much like this epistle
Venus (Sc. 16) The Bride-to-Be

THE KHOIKHOI

THE CHORUS

ANATOMY IN FRANCE

RESTORATION COMEDY
What made you become a professional director?

I think it has a lot to do with how I grew up. At five years old I wanted to be a preacher. I grew up in the southern Pentecostal tradition. We’d spend 4-5 hours on a Sunday in church and one to two more nights a week at church doing bible story or choir. I was heavily invested in the church as a center for community and pageantry. I loved the sharing of stories, the music, the performance (people shouting and speaking in tongues) and the idealism. I think, growing up in a black family, the idea that there was some ultimate divine intervention for societal wrongs provided us with a great deal of comfort.

So, as I began my maturation to being a secular humanist, I was looking for a space similar to the church, where community, pageantry and social critique lived simultaneously. Fortunately for me, my high school had a theater group, and during my Junior year of high school, after reading some Albee and performing in Anything Goes and reading Shakespeare and memorizing Chaucer—it struck me. I could make a career out of being an artist leader. So, I approached my drama teacher, Merrie-Gay Arault. She let me assistant direct Arsenic and Old Lace with her. I was hooked. In some way, I think the writing has always been written on the wall.

What was the inspiration behind this production?

The head of the department, Nigel Maister, asked me to come up to campus last spring to give an artist talk and lead two workshops with students. One of the workshops I led was “Staging Race: How and Why Do We Stage Color Politics.” In that workshop I met Makia Green, the lead in Venus, and Edwin Aguila, one of the Mother Showman’s Goons. In meeting and working with them, it became clear to me that they were questioning the roles student of color played in the department and whether adequate resources were being spent to support plays that might appeal to more ethnically diverse performers and audiences.

This conversation dovetailed with a lot of the thinking I had been doing around the value of the black body in America. Why have we inherited a social structure that seems to place less value on the black body? What are the actual economics of the body? How do black folks wrest their stories back from the dominant culture? This play delves into that same line of questioning. Among the texts I was considering, it uniquely balanced difficult questions with a compelling and complicated theatrical style. I was sure there was a way to entertain our audience, while also pressing them to ask tough questions.

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