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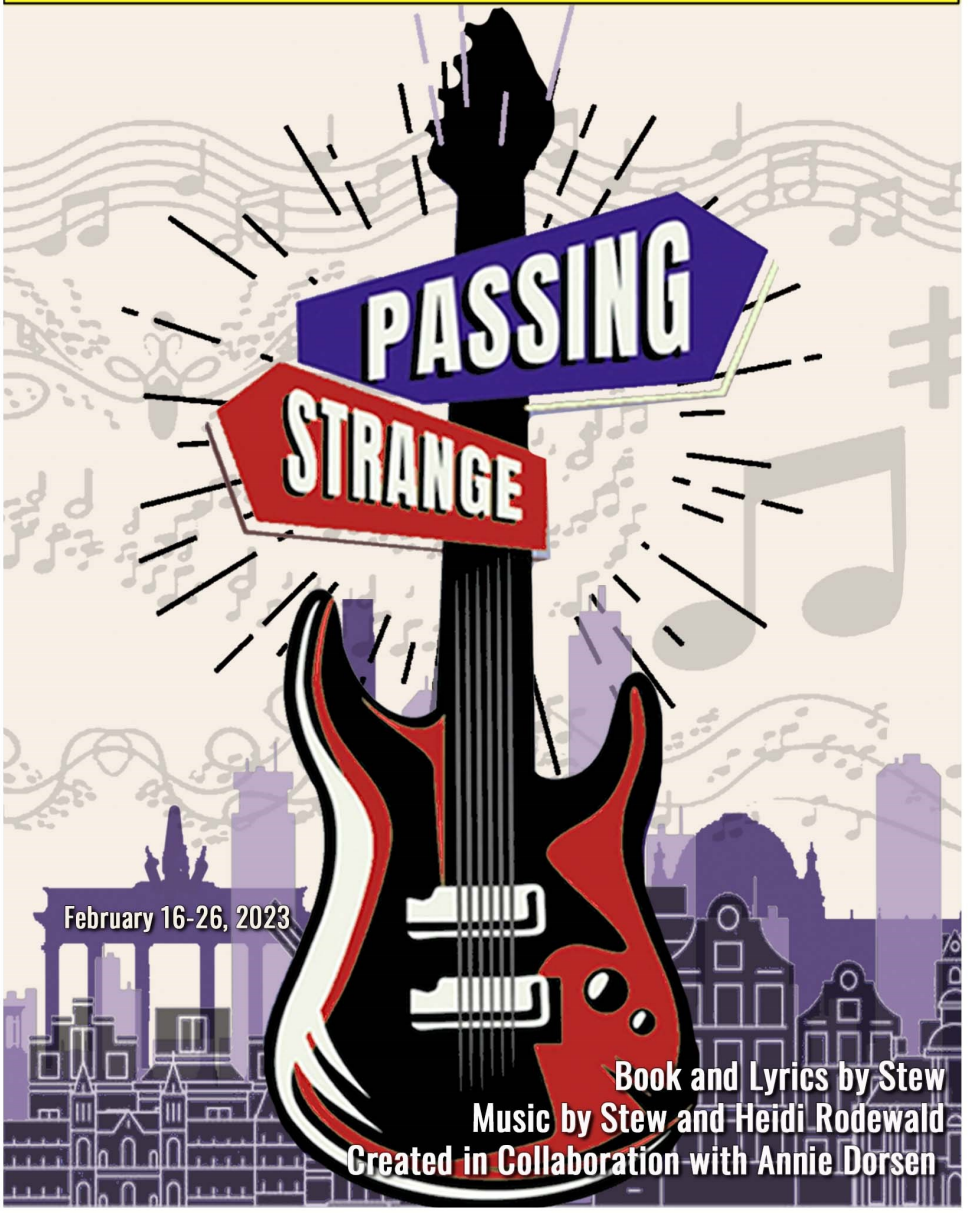

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VANGUARD THEATER COMPANY

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Passing Strange is a coming of age story that follows our hero, Youth, on his quest to find "The Real." A loose autobiographical musical based on the life of Punk rock artist, Stew, "Youth" stands in for not only the writer as a young man, but also that period in everyone's life when choices are made and life's puzzles are teased out. We learn early on that Youth comes from "a big two-story Black middle class dream" (which is a nice departure from more common stories told about Black people). He is constantly being asked by members of his community to conform to a mold of "Blackness" that feels foreign and inauthentic to him. This struggle goes on throughout his teenage years, and sends him on a journey to Europe in his early 20's in search of his true identity. Once there, he discovers that many of the tropes and stereotypes that he was trying to escape in America follow him wherever he goes.

In his 1903 publication, "The Souls of Black Folk," W.E.B. Dubois coined the phrase *Double Consciousness:* the individual's sensation of feeling like their identity is divided into several parts. Black people in America see themselves through their own eyes, but also through the eyes of White America. It's this constant feeling of "Twoness" - An African and an American - that makes it difficult or virtually impossible for Black people to have one unified identity.

This is the struggle at the heart of *Passing Strange*. Around Black people, our protagonist feels like he's not Black enough and around White people he's not "Black"enough. He desires to be released from the conventions that tell him who he's *supposed* to be - so he can be free to become who he's *destined* to be.

I was drawn to this piece because I, and so many others I know, can relate to Youth's journey on so many levels. I remember being called "Oreo" time and time again in my childhood (black on the outside - white on the inside). At a time in one's life when we are trying to figure out how we fit into the world - insults like this can be incredibly damaging (even when you don't realize it at the time).

One of many quotes from this play that strike me every time I hear it, is Youth's commentary on how he sees himself as a "Black (man) passing for Black." In other words - *Passing Strange.*

Janeece Freeman Clark
Founding Artistic Director,
Vanguard Theater Company

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www.VanguardTheaterCompany.org

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Production Manager	
Music Supervisor	Terri Gorgone
Technical Director	Joseph Fils-Aime
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VANGUARD THEATER PRESENTS

PASSING STRANGE

Book and Lyrics by Stew
Music By Stew and Heidi Rodewald
Created in collaboration with Annie Dorsen

STARRING

Dwayne Clark*

Brandi Chavonne Massey* | **Lawrence Dandridge*** | **A'ja Desormeau** | **Amanda Rose Gross** | **J'royce Jata**

WITH

Jason Tyler Smith

*Actors Equity Association

Scenic Design JANEECE FREEMAN CLARK	Lighting Design DAVID HEGUY	Sound Design MOISE LAPORTE JOSEPH FILS-AIME
Costume Design TERRELL JORDAN JENKINS	Set Construction ERIC ZOBACK PAULINO ORTEGA	Choreography LAWRENCE DANDRIDGE
Production Stage Manager PEGGY R. SAMUELS*	Music Director MITCH SAMU	Assistant Director MIKE AMAZAN
Company Manager MELISSA McHUGH	Production Manager/ Music Supervisor TERRI GORGONE	Dialect Coach NATALIE JONES
Founding Artistic Director JANEECE FREEMAN CLARK	Managing Director Graphic Design JESSICA SPORN	Playbill/Registrar MERYL BUDNICK

Directed by

JANEECE FREEMAN CLARK

Passing Strange was originally produced on Broadway in February 2008 by The Shubert Organization, Elizabeth Ireland McCann, Bill Kenwright, Chase Mishkin, Barbara & Buddy Freitag, Broadway Across America, Emily Fisher Landau, Peter May, Boyett Ostar, Elie Hirshfield/Jed Bernstein, ,Wendy Federman/Jackie Barlia Florin, Spring Sirkin/RUth Hendel, Val Laurence/Pat Flicker Adiss, Joey Parnes In association with The Public Theater and The Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Produced by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing (www.broadwaylicensing.com)

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MUSICAL NUMBERS

Act 1

Prelude (We Might Play All Night)
Baptist Fashion Show
Church Blues Revelations / Freight Train
After Church
Edwina
Arlington Hill
Sole Brother
Must Have Been High
Mom Song / Philistine
Antonioni Movie
Merci Beaucoup, M. Godard
Welcome to Amsterdam
Keys
We Just Had Sex
Act 1 Finale (Paradise / Stoned)

Act 2

May Day
Surface
Damage
Identify
The Black One
Come Down Now
Home For Christmas
Work The Wound
The Eulogy / Passing Phase
Love and Understanding
Love Like That

CAST

NARRATOR……Dwayne Clark

YOUTH……Jason Tyler Smith

MOTHER……Brandi Chavonne Massey

MR. FRANKLIN, JOOP, MR. VENUS……Lawrence Dandridge

TERRY, CHRISTOPHE, HUGO……J'royce Jata

SHERRY, RENATA, DESI……Amanda Rose Gross

EDWINA, MARIANNA, SUDABEY ……A'ja Desormeau

BAND

PIANO……Mitch Samu

GUITAR……Ryan Liatsis

BASS……Jasmine Bloch-Krempels

DRUMS……Amanda Lee Morrill

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Dwayne Clark*

Brandi Chavonne Massey*

Jason Tyler Smith

Lawrence Dandridge*

A'ja Desormeau

Amanda Rose Gross

J'royce Jata

WHO'S WHO

A'ja Desormeau (Edwina, Marianna, Sudabey) is elated to be performing in *Passing Strange* at Vanguard Theater Company. She recently worked with Carnival Cruise Line as a Playlist Performer. A'ja studied Musical Theater at AMDA, where she received a BFA. For fun, she loves to model, skateboard, and tour museums. A'ja wants to thank God, her manager Gregory, and friends and family for their endless support. Insta: @itsaja_lynn

Amanda Ross Gross (Sherry/Renata/Desi) is so thankful to have joined Vanguard Theater Company's production of *Passing Strange*. Amanda just graduated from the University of Michigan where she received a BFA in musical theatre. Favorite recent credits include Zuzu in *Dance Nation*, "Day by Day" in *Godspell*, and Lorraine in *Hair*, all at UMich. Previously, she performed in *Ragtime* as Sarah, choreographed UofM's MUSKET production of *Funny Girl*, and assistant directed *Matilda the Musical* at Pioneer Theater Guild. She's studied with the ArtsBridge Summer Intensive and was selected as one of 21 theatre finalists of the National Young Arts Week in Miami, subsequently being named by Broadway World as one of the 2018 Young Actors to Watch. In her free time, Amanda practices yoga, cross-stitches, and studies American Sign Language. Thank you to her new friends in the cast, her old friends over in NYC, and her family in Pittsburgh. <3 @amanda.rose.gross

Brandi Chavonne Massey (Mother) is so thrilled to be a part of this brilliant piece. An instructor at New York's American Musical and Dramatic Academy and a resident of Montclair, her credits include; London's West End: "Nala" in *Disney's The Lion King*. Broadway roles performed: "Nettie/Celie" in *The Color Purple*; "Elphaba" in *Wicked*; "The Radio" in *Caroline or Change* and "Lucy" in *Jekyll and Hyde*. New York projects include *Ghetto Superstar*; "Kira" in *Bare*; "Pam" in *Baby*; "Dionne" in *Hair* and "Myrt" in *Carmen Jones*. Favorite Regional credits include "Lorrell" in *Dream Girls* starring Jennifer Holiday; "Asaka" in *Once On This Island* with George Faison; "Ronette" in *Little Shop of Horrors*, "Amount" in *Jasper in Deadland* and "Woman 1" in *Ain't Misbehavin'*. With God All things are possible. Love you Lj! @brandicmassey

Dwayne Clark (Narrator) is a celebrated actor, singer, educator, performance coach and motivational speaker. Dwayne has also had an extensive Broadway career. Most recently, Dwayne appeared in *Paradise Square* on Broadway. Dwayne has also appeared in the Tony and Grammy Award winning revival of *The Color Purple,* as well as in *Spiderman Turn Off The Dark* directed by Julie Taymor at the Foxwoods Theater in NYC. He was in the Tony award winning Broadway cast of *In The Heights* where he portrayed the character of "Benny" many times, and *Cry Baby The Musical,* in the role of "Dupree." Other Broadway credits include: *Urinetown The Musical*, directed by John Rando; *Smokey Joe's Café* under the direction of Jerry Zacks;, and *Tarzan The Musical* where he played "Terk", and also performed with Phil Collins on a promotional tour. For close to three decades he has graced Broadway, off-broadway, film, television, national and international stages to critical acclaim. His passion for people and the arts have made him a versatile person and performer. Clark made his NY Opera Debut as 'Sportin Life' with New York City Opera in 2000. Shortly after, he portrayed the character in the Emmy Nominated Live at Lincoln Center broadcast of *Porgy and Bess* - the New York Times called him "a limber Tenor with athleticism and grace". This coming spring Dwayne will perform in the new Broadway Musical *"Shucked"* at the Nederlander Theater. Podcast: Inspirations by Dwayne. www.youth-motivator.com. Much Love to Vanguard for the opportunity to share this amazing work of art.

WHO'S WHO

J'royce Jata (Terry/Christophe/Hugo) (Them/Him) is humbled to be a part of such a beautiful story and stunning team. Selected credits include: Print: Vogue (with Billy Porter), Ugg (LadyGunn Magazine) TV/Film: *Gossip Girl, And Just Like That, Succession, Random Acts of Flyness, Killer Unicorn* (Collin) Off-Broadway: *Endangered* (Snoop the Snunk) National Tours: *Dirty Dancing* (Tito Suarez u/s), *FAME* (Tyrone Jackson), *Memphis* (Swing/Black DJ u/s) Regional: *The View Upstairs* (Wes) Speakeasy Stage Company, *Hair* (Hud) Seacoast Repertory, *The Little Mermaid* (King Triton u/s) White Plains Performing Arts Center, *The Wiz* (Scarecrow u/s) Alhambra Theatre Dance Company: Garth Fagan Dance (Company Dancer), Surati Dance Company (Company Dancer) New York City: BroadwayCon, Baryshikov Arts Center, The Kitchen NYC, La Mama, Symphony Space Jata studied Contemporary Ballet at Joffrey Ballet School. Thank you for supporting live art. @jroycejata

Jason Tyler Smith (Youth) Born and raised in Montclair NJ, Jason is so excited to be back "home" at Vanguard! Credits include HAIR (Hud), RENT 20th Anniversary National Tour, and Harlem (Amazon Prime). He would like to thank his supportive friends and family.

Lawrence Dandridge (Mr. Franklin/Joop/Mr. Venus; Choreographer) is a Newark-based multi-faceted artist. A performer first, Lawrence has a long list of professional credits headlined by his role as Smokey Robinson/ Damon Harris in the first National Broadway Tour of *Ain't Too Proud : The Life And Times of The Temptations*. He has produced and directed concerts, workshops, readings, and full productions of his original musicals and arrangements throughout New Jersey, New York and California. As a teaching artist, Lawrence is a professional vocal coach for students and young professional artists, as well as one of the resident choreographers for Vanguard Theater Company, having choreographed VTC's: *Heathers, Little Shop of Horrors, The Wiz of Oz, Shrek, Zombie Prom, Little Women, Next To Normal* and *Spring Awakening*. Lawrence is most excited to continue his pursuit of playwriting and composing his own original work while also performing full-time. As the Co-Founder/Artistic Creative Director of Aurway Repertory Theatre, Lawrence continues to create spaces to highlight the experiences of people of color with a growing repertoire. His award winning musical *Something Like A Fairytale* is among many that have been featured at the New York Summer Theater Festival as well as the National Black Theater Festival, with a full theatrical soundtrack streaming on all listening platforms. Other productions include *RED! - A new Musical*, *What Comes Next?*, *Coming Home*, and *Life Through My Eyes* which is currently touring through select Newark Public Schools as a part of Aurway's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Initiative, *The Dear Life Project*. Lawrence is grateful to finally step onto the VTC stage as an actor. "I've helped create a lot of beauty on that stage. I'm excited to be a piece of it this time". To God, Mama, and my angels. #ChooseLight
@that_musicman

Janeece Freeman Clark (Artistic Director/ Director) is a Producer, Director, Actor & Artist Educator, who hails from Lansing, Michigan. A 2022 Tony nominee for excellence in Arts Education, she serves on the Musical Theater Faculty at Manhattan School of Music and is also a Professor of Theater at Seton Hall University. As a Theater Director, her New York productions of *Everything is Fine Until It's Not*, and *A Portrait of Ray,* have won numerous awards and critical acclaim. Her production of *Showtime with Shakespeare* premiered at George Street Playhouse and NJPAC, followed by two successful national tours.

WHO'S WHO

Janeece is the founding Artistic Director of Vanguard Theater Company, based in Montclair, NJ. Under Janeece's direction Vanguard has presented NYC productions of: *Runaways, Spring Awakening, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Children's Letters to God, A Little Princess* and NJ productions of *Memphis, Hairspray, Heathers, Carrie, The Music Man, Songs For A New World (film), Next to Normal, Walk In My Gravity,* and *Into the Woods.* In addition to VTC's theatrical season offerings, their robust educational programming equips the younger generation with the tools to be professional performers as well as gatekeepers within the industry. Signature programs such as: *Broadway Buddy* pairs Broadway artists with mentees who are aspiring to a professional career in the industry; *VTC Next* trains and mentors a diverse group of up-and-coming "theater-gatekeepers" (writers, producers, directors, choreographers, stage managers, etc.); and *DreamVTC* teaches the importance of artist activism alongside performance skills. Janeece has cultivated and produced video media revolving around the "Origins of Blackface Minstrelsy"; she has presented TEDx talks centered on Social Justice, Diversity and Inclusion; and has created theatrical curriculum for institutions such as New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Young Audiences Arts for Learning.

Janeece received her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and her master's from Rider University. She serves on the board of directors for the NJ Theater Alliance and is the special advisor for Seton Hall University's Arts Council.

As an actor, Janeece has appeared on Broadway, off-Broadway, national tours, television, film, commercials, and voiceovers. Janeece resides in South Orange, NJ and is married to Broadway Actor, Dwayne Clark, with whom she shares two children: Jada & DJ.

Jessica Sporn (Managing Director) is proud to support Vanguard's mission. Jessica joined Vanguard after seeing the impact it had on her younger daughter, who participated in Vanguard's first Broadway Buddy program in 2016. Jessica's theater background includes being a drama student at the "Fame" school, Performing Arts High School (class of '76). After several years of performing with the *Frank Hatchett Dancers* under the direction of Frank Hatchett and Maurice Hines, teaching jazz at *Broadway Dance Center*, and performing in industrials and cabarets, in 1980, Jessica became passionate about pro-choice politics, and joined, and became the co-chair of New York's social justice group *CARASA* (Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse). Deciding to fuse her love of performing with the practice of law, she graduated magna cum laude from Rutgers School of Law (class of '85), where she was on the Editorial Boards of the Computer & Technology Law Journal, and Women's Rights Law Reporter. She practiced law for six years at Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton, where she litigated and won a case that became a basis for the landmark decision, *Braschi v. Stahl Assocs. Co.* (the surviving partner of a same-sex relationship counted as "family" under New York law and was thus able to continue living in a rent controlled apartment belonging to the deceased partner). After her first daughter was born, Jessica stopped practicing law full-time and rediscovered a childhood passion for painting and art. She became an accomplished visual artist, designing greeting cards for Hallmark and Recycled Paper Greetings, and Judaica products, some of which were featured in the Jewish Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1991, she joined Gas Lamp Players in Glen Ridge, NJ, which she incorporated as a not for profit in 2007, and helped grow to a robust, year-round theater company. Jessica has devel-

oped a strong reputation as an artist-activist, creating a legacy of excellence and community involvement through theater, developing educational and scholarship programs, and creating community partnerships around many social issues. She is proud to have designed the artwork for Lin-Manuel Miranda's "Love is Love" campaign for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights Aids after the Orlando shooting in June 2016, and for Miranda's campaign to assist Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria devastated the island. She and husband Fred Cordero (the wind beneath her wings) have invested in several Broadway or Broadway-bound shows, and believe in the importance of telling untold stories and supporting unheard voices. *Shoot for the moon; you might land among the stars.*

Terri Gorgone (Production Manager) (VTC Music Supervisor) is a freelance musician and musical director in theatres and venues throughout New York and New Jersey. She has been a music educator for over 30 years, presently teaching musical theatre at Cicely L. Tyson School of Performing Arts, where she is the director and music director of several shows produced throughout the school year. One of the founding board members of Vanguard Theater Company, Terri has been instrumental in creating and developing shows and educational content for the company. She has been the musical director for the Encore Youth Theatre at the New Jersey School of Dramatic Arts and worked as music director and accompanist at NJPAC. She is a graduate of the Crane School of Music with Piano Performance concentration and has a Masters degree from NYU in theater. Some of her most recent musical directing credits include: *Dreamgirls, The Addams Family, A Little Princess, Runaways, We Will Rock You, Working, Children's Letters To God, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Heathers, Memphis, Carrie, Sister Act, James And The Giant Peach, The Wiz, Nania, Rent, The Frogs, Hairspray, Shrek, Little Women, Tommy, The 25 th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Seussical, Honk, 13, Once Upon A Mattress, Into The Woods, The Color Purple, Pippin, Songs For A New World, Most Likely To... Senior Superlative, Once On This Island, Joseph, Guys and Dolls, Sleeping Beauty, Gypsy.*

Peggy R. Samuels (Production Stage Manager) is thrilled to be a part of *Passing Strange* at Vanguard Theater Company. Recent credits include *Dear Elizabeth*, at Women's Project Theatre; Tape *with Naked Angels*; *Raised in Captivity* and *America Dreaming* at the Vineyard Theatre; *Bermuda Avenue Triangle* at the Promenade Theater; *An Epidog* with Mabou Mines; *12th Night* and *Antony & Cleopatra* with Hip to Hip Theatre Company. In addition to theatrical Stage Management, Peggy has worked in concert venues at Arts at St. Anns and Lincoln Center Out Of Doors Festival. Corporate events include Gala benefits with The Audubon Society, Museo del Barrio, The New Museum, The Bronx Museum, Callen Lorde, Sage, Maestro Cares, The Center, as well as Stage Managing the Drama League of New York Award Ceremony for 5 years. Peggy would like to thank, as always, Kit and Buddy for their love and support.

Mitch Samu (Music Director) is blessed and grateful to be a part of Passing Strange at Vanguard Theater Company. His Broadway and National Tour credits include: *The Lion King*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Saturday Night Fever*. Original Musicals include: *Motherhood: The Agony & The Ecstasy*, *A Kiss For My Daughter A Kiss for My Father*, and *Jesus A Life*. He is currently the Music Director at Hunterdon Hills Playhouse and FUMC Freehold. Mitch wants to thank his wife Kristen, and children, Willow and Orion for their unending support.

WHO'S WHO

Mike Amazan (Assistant Director) is beyond thrilled to have had the pleasure and opportunity to serve as Assistant Director to such a beautiful and impactful musical and cast. Having been with the Vanguard family since its inauguration in 2015, Mike looks forward to the magic created in Vanguard productions. Thank you to Janeece and the rest of the Vanguard team for fostering an environment rich with creativity, exploration, and experimentation. Mike's past Vanguard credits include *Hairspray* (2015), *Memphis* (2017), *Walk In My Gravity* (2021).

David Heguy (Lighting Designer) is a fourth year BFA Theatre Design & Technology major at Penn State University. At Penn State he has designed *The Alexa Project*, an interactive experience and *The Wild Party*, both of which were award winning designs, as well as *Metamorphoses* this past Fall. For the past 8 years David has freelanced for various theater companies all over the NJ and NY area. Some credits include: *Spamalot, Pippin, Big Fish, 13, Spelling Bee, Urinetown, Once Upon A Mattress, 9 to 5, Something Rotten!, Addams Family, Legally Blonde, Hair, Snow Queen*. New works include: *The Ice Queen, Color These Walls, Snowed In!, Talent Show, Stage Fright, and Glamping*. This is David's tenth production with Vanguard Theater Company. Some credits include, *Rent, Bring It On, Into the Woods, Little Women, Zombie Prom*, and he is thrilled to be working with such a wonderful creative team and cast like this again. He would like to thank Janeece for all her help along the way. www.dhlighting.org

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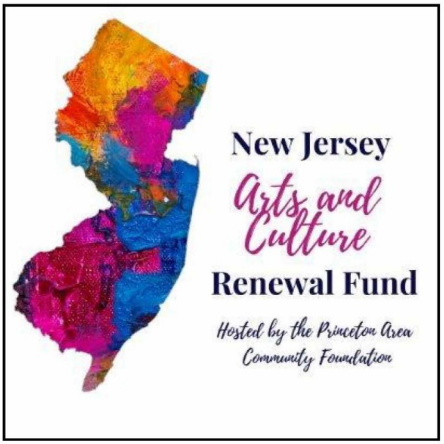

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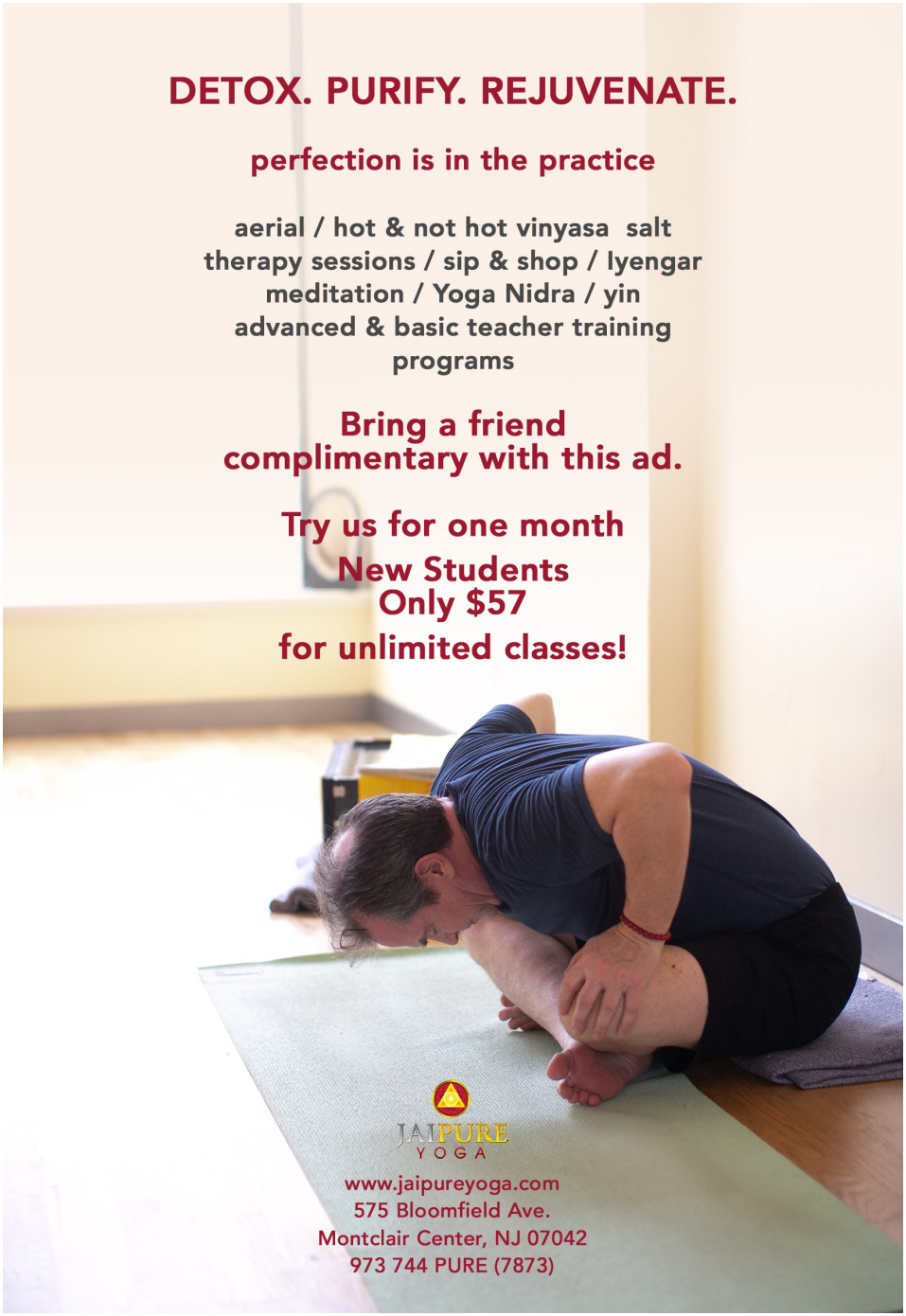
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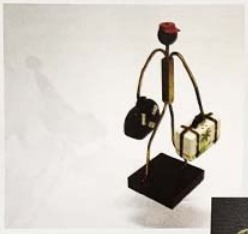

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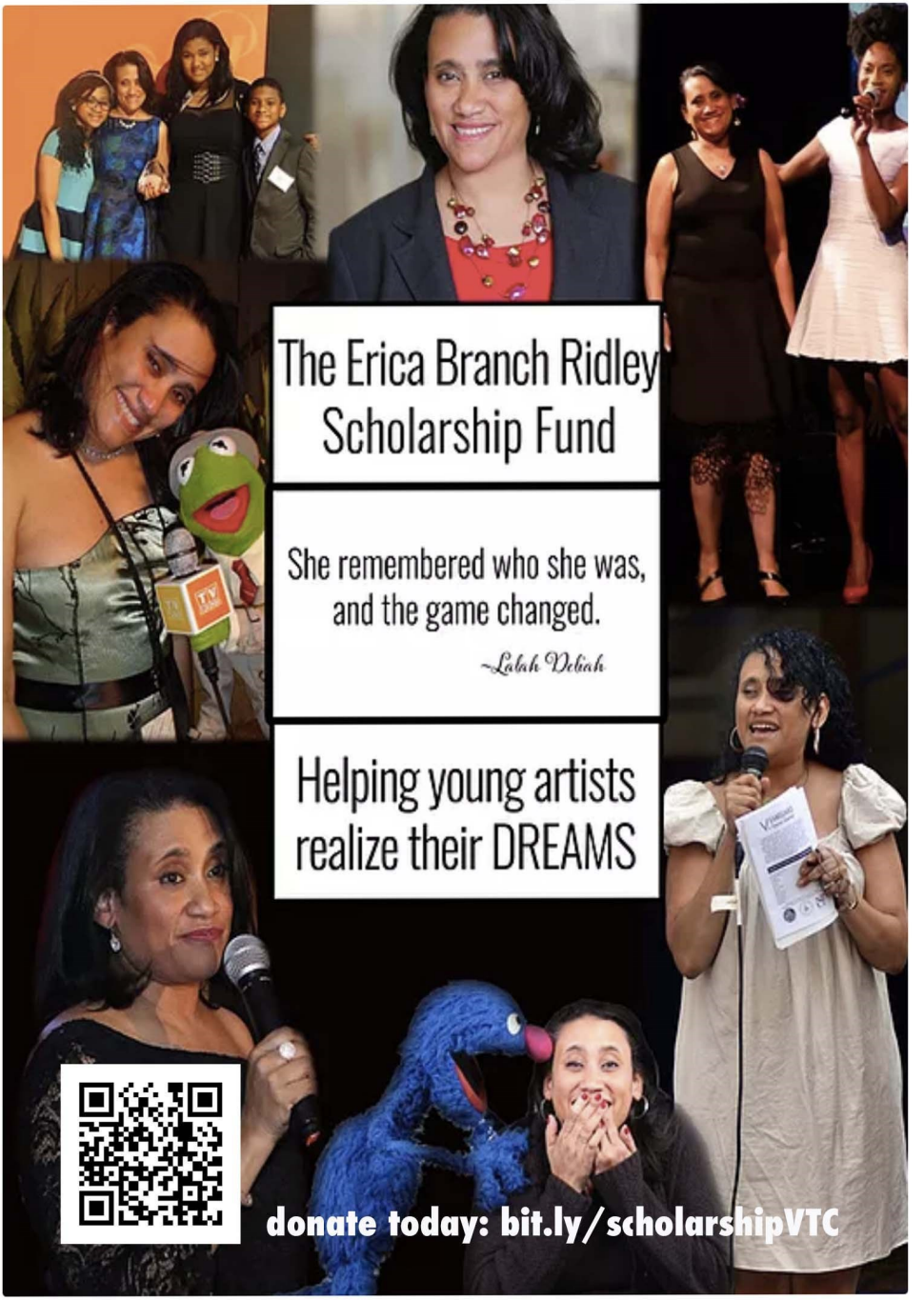

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