

JAG Productions Celebrates Black History Month

In celebration of Black History Month, the Upper Valley's newest theater company, JAG Productions, is offering a gift to the community: a free theater festival celebrating new and recent works by African American playwrights.

JAG Productions, the latest project of Jarvis Antonio Green, launched in the fall of 2016 with a production of MacArthur "Genius" Award winner Tarell Alvin McCraney's "Choir Boy." The reception of this show inspired Green to present more works by black playwrights, and the new festival, JAGfest, will offer free readings of 4 works, as well as speakers on the topic of African Americans in the theatre.

The company's mission is to present "bold theater that reflects the times".... to present new stories," and for the "patrons to move through the world with more love, greater kindness, and greater compassion for one another after seeing a production." In the current

political climate, when race is a hot-button and challenging issue, Green hopes that presenting these works will encourage thoughtful conversation.

Readings of four plays, and speakers are being presented from Friday, Feb. 24 through Monday, Feb. 27. Harrison River's "Sweet," will be read at ArtisTree Community Arts Center in South Pomfret on Friday, Feb. 24 at 7:30 p.m. The play is a coming of age story set in an all-black rural Kansas town. Lydia Diamond's "Smart People," will be presented at the Norman Williams public Library on Saturday, Feb. 25 at 7:30 p.m. The play follows a conversation among four Cambridge residents as they talk through issues of race, and identity. Sunday evening, Lillias White will present her one-woman play, "The Lillias White Effect," at ArtisTree. The play tells stories and vignettes from White's personal and professional life. A

seasoned Broadway actor, White won an Emmy for her appearances on Sesame Street.

While most plays deal with direct themes of black identity, one play, "Polka Dots: The Cool Kids Musical" deals with general themes of bullying, diversity, and acceptance. When Lily moves to a new school where she is the only Polka-dotted person in a community of Squares Only. The play is written by Melvin Tunstall III with music by Greg Borowsky and Douglas Lyons. The show will be presented for local youth at a daytime production at Pentangle's Town Hall Theater on Monday Feb. 27 at 10 a.m.

Saturday, Feb. 25, there will be a fundraiser luncheon at Saint James Episcopal Church in Woodstock, and speakers will be presented at the Norman Williams Library. Beginning at 10 a.m., the speaker will be Andrew Shade, the editor and founder of Broadway Black,

a publication devoted to the achievements and successes of African American theater artists. At 11 a.m. Taylor Reynolds will speak about the Movement Theater Company, which presents works by artists of color. Following a luncheon, there will be a panel discussion featuring the casts of "Sweet" and "Smart People."

Green's hope is that this event becomes an annual event, and that one play among them will be selected to be presented in a fully staged production in the coming fall. Readings are offered for free, however reservations are encouraged as space is limited, and donations are gladly accepted. In order to fund productions, JAG Productions is taking memberships to help support the growth of the company and help bring productions to local youth. For more information, go to www.jagproductionsvt.com/jagfest and email info@jagproductionsvt.com.



These playwrights are part of a series of events by JAG Productions. Top left is Lillias White and top right is Harrison Rivers. Bottom left are Greg Borowsky, Douglas Lyons and Melvin Tunstall III. Bottom right is Lydia Diamond. Images Provided