BEYOND VERA STARK: HOLLYWOOD’S FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ACTRESSES

WHO WAS VERA STARK?

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT LYNN NOTTAGE
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Why *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*?

When you think of the great American screen actresses of the 1930s, who comes to mind? Bette Davis? Joan Crawford? Jean Harlow, perhaps, or Greta Garbo? Marie Dressler? How about Nina Mae McKinney? Fredi Washington? Or Alice B. Russell, Louise Beavers or the beautiful Dorothy Van Engle? Or perhaps the most enigmatic of them all, Vera Stark? If the images of those last six women don’t come readily to mind, it is likely because their careers were defined not by their beauty, their talent or their chemistry onscreen, but by their African American heritage. In a time when mainstream female screen stars could be blonde or brunette, sleek or full-figured, exotically foreign or all-American, there was one thing that they all had in common: they were white. For black actresses of that era, there were only a few choices. They could work in the relatively tiny world of all-black films, as did Russell, Van Engle and McKinney (reputedly one of that era’s great beauties). They could follow the example of dancer/singer Josephine Baker and seek fame in another country. Or they could toil in small roles in mainstream films, portraying maids, nannies or other types of domestics—the kinds of parts that brought minor fame (and steady employment) to Beavers, Ethel Waters and Hattie McDaniel, whose portrayal of Mammy in the iconic *Gone with the Wind* made her the first African American Oscar winner.

And what of Vera Stark? Her anonymity is actually the result of a different circumstance: she is the fictional creation of Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Lynn Nottage, the centerpiece of Nottage’s newest play *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. The story of Vera Stark mirrors that of dozens of ambitious, talented actresses of color in the 1930s: scoring unexpected success from a role as a maid in a ’30s historical blockbuster, she quickly disappears from the mainstream screen, leaving later generations of fans and critics to dissect her all-too-brief career and celebrate a presence that, in a different time, might have achieved greatness and lasting celebrity. By turns funny, poetic, smart and incisive, Vera’s saga becomes that of an entire generation of artists unknown to most of us, artists whose beauty and talent were lost in the racial marginalization of America in the mid-twentieth century. And, true to her reputation as one of our most inventive and eloquent writers, Lynn has created other platforms upon which to explore the story of Vera at greater length, particularly two websites (FindingVeraStark.com and MeetVeraStark.com) that flesh out in even greater detail the life and legend of Vera Stark. These websites, “created” by two fictional characters from the play, operate as though Vera were real—a storytelling method employed by the playwright as a commentary on the virtually anonymous treatment of African Americans in old Hollywood.

It is my great, great pleasure to welcome Lynn back to the Goodman and to pair her once again with Resident Director Chuck Smith, who directed Lynn’s *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* here in 2006. Together with a talented team of designers and actors, they will bring to the Goodman stage the truth behind the legend of one of Hollywood’s most elusive icons—and the society that created, then stifled, her.
Beyond Vera Stark: Hollywood’s Forgotten History of African American Actresses

By Jamila Woods

She wears a white apron tied around her plump frame, a kerchief knotted to her head, and sports a wide-toothed grin. James Baldwin once asked, “How many times have we seen her?” From twentieth-century minstrel show stages to pancake mix boxes to Hollywood screens, her name has changed but her characteristics have always remained about the same. The housemaid, servant or “Mammy” character has become one of the most iconic portrayals of African American women in US media to date. But while audiences know her character well, the names and faces of the actresses who portrayed her in Hollywood’s early years are often not recognized by the general public, instead lost in time and obscured by an industry that confined them to the background for decades.

Lynn Nottage’s *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* introduces contemporary theater audiences to one of these overlooked talents in a two-part tableau that examines the life and afterlife of little-known black actress Vera Stark*. The play begins in the days leading up to her Hollywood film debut in 1933, then jumps forward to a modern-day academic panel that pores over footage of her final television appearance in 1973 on *The Brad Donovan Show*—right before she disappeared without a trace—in an attempt to shine light on her life and unravel the mystery of her later years. Like most black Hollywood actresses of her time, many of the details of Vera’s story are still largely unknown. And though Nottage’s play focuses primarily on one actress’
The end of the silent film era led to the introduction of “talkies,” or films with sound. During this time was the introduction of “Mammy” figure became an ever-present “Mammy” figure became an integral part of this image. The second major development in film during this time was the introduction of “talkies,” or films with sound. The end of the silent film era led to a push for verisimilitude and authenticity in pictures, and audiences came to expect real black bodies and voices on screen. As a result, producers finally started seeking African American actors to play African American characters in their films. Gone were the days of minstrelsy and white actors silently mimicking “black” motions and facial expressions in blackface. But even with the increase in acting roles opening up for blacks in Tinseltown, the variety of roles available for African American actors was still severely limited.

As Ralph Ellison once noted, “Movies are not about blacks but what whites think about blacks.” In the 1930s and onward, African American actresses in mainstream Hollywood films had no choice but to portray stereotypes largely constructed by the white imagination. To achieve the supposedly authentic “Negro dialect,” many movie studios hired white dialect coaches to teach African American actresses to speak in an exaggerated Southern drawl. Black actresses were also often typecast to specific roles based on their skin tone and physical appearance. Darker skinned, heavier-set women were frequently cast as “Mammy” characters. Hattie McDaniel and Ethel Waters, two actresses best-known for their portrayal of maids in popular films, both had to force-feed themselves at several points in their careers in order to maintain the over-weight figure filmmakers desired for their characters. As film historian Ed Guerrero writes, “In almost every instance, the representation of black people on the commercial screen has amounted to one grand, multifaceted illusion.”

“I’d rather play a maid and make $700 a week than be a maid and make $7.”

—Hattie McDaniel

In the years leading up to the 1930s, two major developments in American society had critical effects on the role of African American women in Hollywood films. The first was the stock market crash in 1929. Hollywood’s pre-Depression era representation of blacks had been bluntly negative, often portraying slaves as evil insurgents threatening the white race—most notably in 1915’s The Birth of a Nation, a silent film set in Reconstruction era South that depicts an anarchistic black militia takeover of a South Carolina town. But the devastating effects of the Great Depression left the American economy in shambles and highlighted the growing tensions between racial groups. In response, American cinema began to provide much-needed escapism for the masses during a time of crisis and churned out a series of Southern epic films set on peaceful plantations, meant to remind viewers of the “good old days” of American prosperity. These films portrayed slavery in a gracious light, and often featured happy slaves who sang spirituals and all but worshipped their white masters. Commercial filmmakers of the time learned that larger audiences and profit margins came from depicting the ease, wealth and benign race relations of plantation life, and the ever-present “Mammy” figure became an integral part of this image.

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But these actresses often found their own ways of existing as artists within a restrictive industry; some embraced the available roles and tried to breathe a semblance of humanity into otherwise one-dimensional characters. Hattie McDaniel, most famous for her role as Mammy in Gone with the Wind (1939), became known for her portrayal of sassy, opinionated maids in motion pictures. “I loved Mammy,” McDaniel once said in an interview. “I think I understood her because my own grandmother worked on a plantation not unlike [Mammy’s].” McDaniel’s screen presence was a force to be reckoned with, often putting white film critics on edge with her energetic, witty performances, which some claimed threatened to

*Vera Stark, Gloria Mitchell, Herb Forrester and Carmen Levy-Green are fictional characters created by playwright Lynn Nottage as a commentary on the treatment of African American actors in early cinema.

FEATURED SPONSOR: ITW

“ITW is proud to support the Goodman’s production of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark. The Goodman is renowned for first-rate theater and this will be another great example. At ITW, we are thrilled with our partnership with Goodman Theatre.”

-Maria C. Green, Senior VP and General Counsel, Illinois Tool Works, Goodman Trustee
No matter how many films African American actresses appeared in, they were inevitably most remembered for their work in servile supporting roles.

upstage her white co-stars. Vera Stark is also said to be one of the actresses who deliberately breathed new life into an otherwise flat stereotypical role. Unlike McDaniel, her most famous film was made in pre-code Hollywood, before strict rules governing onscreen race relations were enacted in 1934. Vera was dubbed “cheesecake served in a brown paper bag: a leading lady in a maid’s uniform,” and her nuanced and genuine performance as Tilly in The Belle of New Orleans (1933) disrupted the traditional image of black maids as simple-minded subservient characters, imbuing her with a depth which suggested she was “at once in the role and commenting on it.” Still, these performances were not always valued as revolutionary or subversive by the wider black community.

Although McDaniel won an Academy Award for her performance in Gone with the Wind—the first black actor to ever do so—she faced heavy scrutiny from the NAACP and black audiences for what they saw as perpetuating negative and demeaning images of the race. McDaniel infamously responded to these critics by saying, “I’d rather play a maid and make $700 a week than be a maid and make $7.” Louise Beavers, known for her portrayal of maid Delilah in Imitation of Life (1934), faced similar criticism from the NAACP, to which she responded, “I am only playing the parts, I don’t live them.” But the distinction between the roles they played in pictures and their off-screen identities was unfortunately never that simple. No matter how many films African American actresses appeared in, they were inevitably most remembered for their work in servile supporting roles. Prominent black actresses of the 1930s and ‘40s interviewed later in their careers frequently fixated on their early work in maid roles, even if they moved on to star in all-black films or portrayed other types of characters. As Vera Stark stated in her 1973 interview with Brad Donovan, “It’s been the subject of my life for the past 40 years; yes I am trying to change the subject.”

This kind of treatment eventually drove some African American actresses to push back against Hollywood’s representation of black women. Butterfly McQueen, who acted alongside...
McDaniel as a maid in *Gone with the Wind*, was very outspoken in her rejection of the negative portrayal of blacks in the film. “I was suffering the whole time,” she said, “I didn’t know that I’d have to be just a stupid little slave. I wouldn’t let Vivien Leigh slap me, and I wouldn’t eat watermelon. I was very sensitive about that.” Others resisted the restrictions of their roles in subtler ways. Vera Stark recounts having to “fight tooth and nail” to utter the last line in *The Belle of New Orleans*, as the producers originally “didn’t want a Negrowoman to have the final word.”

In Lynn Nottage’s play we are reminded of an important set of histories that have long remained unspoken. Vera Stark’s character operates as a stand-in for all of the forgotten or uncredited African American actresses throughout Hollywood history who never had the chance to be properly introduced to the American public. *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* presents a story that refuses to be swept into a “dusty old trunk,” in hopes that today’s audiences might be inclined to look more critically at representations of African American women not only in early Hollywood, but on today’s screens and in films for years to come.
Who Was Vera Stark?

By Carmen Levy-Green*

Vera Lula Stark* (1910-1973?) was born in South Brooklyn to Hattie and Lewis Stark, popular performers on the black vaudeville circuit known as TOBA (Theater Owners Booking Association). Vera’s maternal grandmother was the legendary music hall singer and con-tortionist Ida “burnt pretzel” McCleary. When Vera was five years old she joined the family act on the road, where she competed for the spotlight with her cousin, a talented tap dance sensation. Vera was a standout performer, yet the Stark family was never able to achieve mainstream success. They lived from hand to mouth until Lewis Stark was banned from the circuit for pistol-whipping a notoriously corrupt white theater owner who owed him money.

In the mid-1920s, Vera fled to Hollywood along with a wave of talented African American vaudeville performers from around the country in search of work in the emerging talking pictures. For several years she appeared as an uncredited extra in numerous shorts, and found herself taking on odd jobs to make ends meet, including working as white actress Gloria Mitchell’s maid.

Vera’s big break came in 1933, when famed Hollywood director Maximillian Von Oster gambled his career on a film adaptation of a little-known Southern novel called The Belle of New Orleans, written by Bernard St. Simon in 1852. The novel, a classic melodrama, follows a year in the life of two slave sisters in New Orleans: Marie, the beautiful and whimsical octoroon prostitute who falls hopelessly in love with a white Southern planter; and steadfast Tilly, her devoted servant and companion. The novel was originally conceived as an indictment of slavery and the caste system in the deep South. It was even viewed by some during that period as a provocative anti-slavery narrative. Cited as vulgar and unseemly, The Belle of New Orleans was publicly burned in front of the state capital in Louisiana on June 16, 1853 and subsequently banned throughout the South by politicians threatened by its sexual and racial politics. Yet, inconceivably, the book went on to become an underground sensation, spawning popular theatrical spectacles that toured the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Gorgeous, self-possessed, immensely talented and hopelessly self-destructive, Vera continued to work on and off until 1973, but she would never match the success, promise or fame found in her first film, The Belle of New Orleans.

In her private life, Vera was plagued by misfortune. She had two unsuccessful marriages, the first to Leroy Barksdale, a popular trumpet player with the Pete Owens Orchestra. During an infamous performance at the Humming Bird Ballroom, a white heckler repeatedly shouted racial epithets at Barksdale. He snapped, and in his rage inadvertently beat the heckler to death with his trumpet. Vera stood by Barksdale throughout the highly publicized trial, but at the urging of her creative representatives she ended the relationship in order to save her flagging career. But the scandal was to follow her for many years. In 1952, Vera married middle-weight prize fighter Dortch Ross. It was a tumultuous and sometimes violent relationship, and during their short-lived marriage she began drinking heavily. Alcohol and prescription medications would become her constant companions, costing her roles and burning many bridges in Hollywood.

In the late 1960’s and early ‘70’s, legendary agent Scottie Hudson tried to revive Vera’s career. Finally, after a number of very lean and difficult years, he booked her an engagement at the Folies Bergere in Las Vegas. During the now infamous performance, Vera stripped naked in the middle of singing “Heat Wave” and was arrested for public indecency. A week later she disappeared without a trace.

A maid, a coat check girl, a down-and-out blues singer, Vera, like an entire generation of African American actresses, was a ubiquitous though often uncredited presence on the silver screen. Vera flew just under the radar, and her talent was squandered on mediocre roles in forgettable films. Racism in Hollywood robbed Vera of a career, but also robbed audiences throughout the world of access to her shining talent.

*See note on page 3.
An Interview with
Playwright Lynn Nottage

By Carmen Levy-Green*

On an exceptionally balmy summer night in 1947, a fire alarm pierced the midnight calm of a sleepy community in Burbank, California. An out-of-control fire raged in an enormous storage warehouse on the back lot of Celestial Pictures. Five engine companies heroically battled the blaze well past dawn. Unbeknownst to them, the warehouse contained hundreds of highly flammable nitrate film negatives, resulting in a blaze that spread dangerously fast. By the time the last flame was extinguished, nearly all of the original negatives and prints of films made by Celestial Pictures were destroyed. It was a monumental loss.

On that night in 1947 the film industry also lost something else: African American actress Vera Stark*. She spent nearly two decades on contract with Celestial Pictures, and the fire ruined much of the celluloid records of her early film career. Indeed, Vera’s cinematic legacy was destroyed in the fire; The Belle of New Orleans is one of the few surviving films that feature the unburnished and nascent talent of Vera Stark.

When I was eight years old I saw The Belle of New Orleans, and since that first encounter I have been hungry to know and understand Vera Stark as she was before she vanished from our collective memories. There was a time when Vera was one of the most promising African American actresses in Hollywood, commanding a salary unprecedented for a woman of color. In my book Hollywood Dreams (Robeson Press), I attempt to retrace Vera’s tragic life and career, and in doing so tell the story of a generation of African American performers whose contributions to early Hollywood were obscured by racism.

So I was initially leery and suspicious when I learned about the play By the Way, Meet Vera Stark. The Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Lynn Nottage claimed to shed some light on an actress in need of resurrection. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to sit down for an informal conversation with Ms. Nottage. I found her to be open, funny and quite passionate on the subject of Vera Stark. As a scholar and avid film buff, I entered the conversation skeptical, but I was quickly won over and eventually allowed her to include my voice in the play. Below is an excerpt from a longer interview, which can be found on my website FindingVeraStark.com.

Carmen Levy-Green: Why did you decide to write a play about Vera Stark?

Lynn Nottage: I’ve always had an incredible fascination with old black and white films from the 1930s. When I was young, I’d stay up late into the night watching them. It was like rummaging through your favorite antique shop looking for hidden treasures. I loved the old films, but I was always terribly embarrassed by the grotesque and stereotypical ways African Americans were portrayed. When black actors appeared on screen, I’d find myself temporarily taken out of the movie, and often had to recalibrate my emotions before jumping back into the narrative. But every once in a while I’d catch a glimpse of an actor in a film who seemed to be peeking out and commenting on the world beyond the mask of their character. So with Vera Stark, I wanted to explore the life of actors beyond the mask. I decided to use humor to uncover the painful and passionate journey that they (then and even now) are forced to take on in order to ply their trade. I also wanted to engage with the images of blackness on screen, and try to make sense of the difficult choices that actors had to make at times when their options were very limited.
“Every once in a while I’d catch a glimpse of an actor in a film who seemed to be peering out and commenting on the world beyond the mask of their character.”
—Lynn Nottage

CLG: A fire destroyed much of our record of Vera Stark’s career, so how did you learn about her?

LN: Like so many of us, I first came to love Vera in the movie The Belle of New Orleans. But I will be honest: it wasn’t easy to piece together the fragments of her life. Actresses like Vera Stark are elusive, and because of the limited information in circulation it’s hard to really get to know them. There are a number of well-documented iconic African American actresses from the 1930s and ’40s, however, we know most of them via the cringe-inducing roles they were relegated to playing. But interestingly enough, artists like Vera Stark who attempted to present more complicated and realistic portrayals of black women were overlooked, marginalized by the industry because they didn’t feed Hollywood’s warped notion of what it meant to be black. So trying to find film clips and articles about Vera proved nearly impossible. I was fortunate enough to encounter your website [FindingVeraStark.com] and that of Herb Forrester* [MeetVeraStark.com]. Herb proved to be a font of information and was invaluable to my process.

CLG: What was the most surprising thing you discovered while writing the play?

LN: I think the most surprising discovery I made while writing the play was how closely Vera’s struggles mirror those of African American actresses today. Has there been progress? Yes, of course. I don’t want to diminish that. But it’s shocking and frustrating how the film industry’s perspective on African American women remains so narrow and distorted. I am constantly pushing up against it with my own work.

CLG: What can you tell me about Gloria Mitchell, who starred in The Belle of New Orleans? I have my own thoughts, which you definitely touch upon in the play.

LN: Gloria Mitchell was a talented actress. Like Vera, much of her legacy was destroyed in that now infamous fire at Celestial Pictures. It was a real tragedy, because Gloria was one of the biggest stars in Hollywood, but unfortunately The Belle of New Orleans is one of the only complete films that captures her allure.

CLG: My mother came of age in the 1960s and was always very critical of my interest in black folk in early cinema. She was dismissive of many of the actors because she still lived very much in the shadow of the stereotypical characters they portrayed. She could be quite unforgiving.

LN: I understand, and it is easy to feel that way. I certainly have my moments.

BELOW: Gloria Mitchell as a young girl.

GOODMAN THEATRE WOMEN’S BOARD SPONSORS BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK

The Goodman Women’s Board continues a long tradition of support for exciting and challenging work with its sponsorship of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark. Since its formation in 1978, the Women’s Board has made part of its mission the sponsorship of a production every season, as well as providing crucial funding for the Goodman’s Education and Community Engagement programs.

Goodman Theatre gratefully salutes the Women’s Board as a Major Production Sponsor of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark, and thanks its members for their dedication and generosity to the theater.
However, the play is not an indictment of the actors but rather an exploration of their difficult journey. I recognize that the images on the screen are painful, but they are not the totality of who those actors were. And that is what I’m exploring: who were they?

CLG: How do you think Vera Stark would feel about the play?

LN: I hope that Vera would be flattered. I think that she might take issue with some of the truths that we expose, but I feel it is an accurate, though irreverent, take on old Hollywood. Like you, Vera is a fictional character I created to draw people into a dialogue about race and representation in early cinema.

Finding Vera Stark

The story of Vera Stark doesn’t end when the curtain goes down. Playwright Lynn Nottage has created an innovative multi-platform process for telling her character’s tale that jumps from the stage to the (computer) screen through two websites (FindingVeraStark.com and MeetVeraStark.com) devoted to unraveling the mystery behind her legacy—and creating an offstage forum for an honest examination of race. This experimentation with form isn’t new to the Pulitzer Prize winner, as she’s carved out a reputation over the years as a groundbreaking and chameleonic writer of (primarily) African American women’s stories. Though her protagonists are of similar ethnic backgrounds, each of her works are firmly rooted in a specific place and time, and take on a distinct tone—ranging from slapstick comedy to heart-wrenching drama. Her best-known plays include the arresting 2008 Ruined, which tells the tales of the inhabitants of a Congolese brothel amid a violent civil war; 2003’s Intimate Apparel, a carefully wrought character study set in 1905 Manhattan; and Fabulation or, The Re-Education of Undine, an irreverent satire dubbed “of the MTV generation” by its author that takes us to the projects of present-day New York.

But with the creation of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark’s accompanying websites, Nottage takes the next step into experimentation with form. The sites serve to flesh out the details of Vera’s legacy through photographs, telegrams, films and newspaper articles, all posted as clues into her elusive life and mysterious disappearance. By presenting this information in this format, Nottage is creating an offstage commentary on the state of race in the early days of Hollywood: after all, African American actresses of Vera’s era were so anonymous, the average person will likely buy into the myth that she actually existed.

Support Diverse Voices at the Goodman as a By the Way, Meet Vera Stark Community Engagement Partner

This spring, the Goodman is offering donors an opportunity to partner with us in celebration of our production of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark. Community Engagement Partnerships are a unique way to support the theater’s diversity initiatives with a tax-deductible gift of $500, which comes with an array of benefits—including, but not restricted to, VIP tickets for related Diversity Night and Women’s Night events.

To pledge your support as a Community Engagement Partner for By the Way, Meet Vera Stark—including an invitation Women’s Night on May 8—contact Molly McKenzie at 312.443.3811 ext. 597 or MollyMcKenzie@GoodmanTheatre.org.
Want to Learn More About What Inspires the Work on Our Stages?
Discover the *Insider Access* Series.

*Insider Access* is a series of public programs that provide insight into the Goodman’s artistic process. Take advantage of these events to enrich your Goodman experience.

**BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK**

**ARTIST ENCOUNTER: BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK**

A Discussion with Playwright Lynn Nottage and Director Chuck Smith

Sunday, May 5 | 5 – 6PM
Polk Rehearsal Room

Goodman Theatre Artist Encounters bring together audiences and the artists who create the work on our stages in an intimate environment, for a behind-the-scenes look at the plays and the playmaking process. Join us for an in-depth conversation on the creation of this sly new satire from Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage.

**FREE** for Subscribers, Donors and students with ID; $5 for the general public. Reservations are required. Call 312.443.3800 to reserve your seats.

**PLAYBACK: BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK**

Following each Wednesday and Thursday performance of *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, Albert Theatre audiences are invited to attend free PlayBacks, post-show discussions with members of the artistic team.

**FREE**

**BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK PRE-SHOW DISCUSSIONS**

Members of the Goodman’s artistic staff will host pre-show discussions before select performances of *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*.

Pre-show discussions begin at 7pm in the upper lobby on May 10, May 17, May 24 and May 31.

**FREE**

**THE JUNGLE BOOK**

**BEHIND THE SCENES: THE JUNGLE BOOK**

Thursday, May 16 | 6 – 7PM
The Art Institute of Chicago, Fullerton Hall

FREE with purchase of admission to museum

Goodman Associate Producer Steve Scott provides a backstage look at the upcoming world-premiere musical *The Jungle Book*, created and directed by Mary Zimmerman. Join Steve as he discusses the fascinating history of Rudyard Kipling’s beloved stories, illustrated with musical excerpts from the production.

**EYE ON INDIA**

June 7 – July 14, 2013

Experience Indian culture through a variety of interactive events highlighting Indian arts and cuisine. This year’s festival includes appearances by Bollywood actor Shabana Azmi, author Amish Tripathi and singer Shubha Mudgal, among others. The programs are presented in collaboration with local artists and organizations, including the Goodman, the Old Town School of Folk Music, Smart Museum of Art, Columbia College Chicago, MCA Chicago and the Chicago Park District. For more information, visit [EyeOnIndia.com](http://EyeOnIndia.com).

Celebrating Women’s Night on Wednesday, May 8

Join us for this highly anticipated event, attracting a diverse group of over 200 professional women from throughout the Chicago area for an evening of camaraderie and networking. Guests will gather at an elegant venue for a lively reception and compelling artistic presentation, followed by a performance of Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage’s sly satire *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*.

Women’s Night is a one-of-a-kind evening, celebrating the dynamic, energetic and distinguished women of Chicago!

Tickets are $85 each for the cocktail reception and performance, or $40 each for cocktails only. For more information or to purchase tickets contact Victoria Rodriguez at 312.443.3811 ext. 539 or [VictoriaRodriguez@GoodmanTheatre.org](mailto:VictoriaRodriguez@GoodmanTheatre.org).

**THE JUNGLE BOOK BRUNCH**

Sunday, June 30 | 11:30AM

Treat your cubs to a unique experience at the Goodman’s *The Jungle Book* Brunch on Sunday, June 30. Filled with games, food and fun—and including tickets to the 2pm matinee performance of the world premiere of Mary Zimmerman’s *The Jungle Book*—you and your family won’t want to miss this spectacular summer event. For tickets or more information, visit [GoodmanTheatre.org/JungleBookBrunch](http://GoodmanTheatre.org/JungleBookBrunch) or call 312.443.3811 ext. 597.

All proceeds will help underwrite Community Day, an opportunity for underserved students and families to attend a special performance of *The Jungle Book* free of charge.
Two New Resident Artists Join the Goodman

This season the Goodman has deepened our relationships with two outstanding Chicago-based theater artists by appointing them to our staff as official artists-in-residence: sound designer Richard Woodbury and playwright Seth Bockley. Each has created outstanding works in the past, and their new status will ensure that the unique artistry that each brings to his craft will be an integral part of future Goodman seasons and productions.

Resident Sound Designer Richard Woodbury has created soundscapes and musical scores for some of the Goodman’s most memorable productions, including Robert Falls’ productions of Measure for Measure, King Lear, Desire Under the Elms, A Life in the Theatre, Hughie and A True History of the Johnstown Flood; Other Desert Cities; Camino Real; Krapp’s Last Tape; God of Carnage; and the 2011 and 2012 productions of A Christmas Carol. His credits at Steppenwolf Theatre Company include The Seafarer, The Beauty Queen of Leenane, Up, Middletown and August: Osage County, which he also designed on Broadway and at the National Theatre in London. Other Broadway credits include Robert Falls’ production of Talk Radio, Long Day’s Journey into Night, Death of a Salesman and The Young Man from Atlanta. His work has been heard in regional theaters across the country and at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada, as well as in theaters in Paris and London. He has won Jeff, Helen Hayes and IRNE awards for his work, as well as nominations for Drama Desk (New York) and Ovation (Los Angeles) awards. Equally at home in the world of dance, Mr. Woodbury has composed numerous commissioned scores for a variety of dance companies, including The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Merce Cunningham Dance companies. He is also an associate professor and distinguished faculty fellow at Columbia College Chicago, where he serves as music director in the Dance Department.

An acclaimed playwright, director and performer, Seth Bockley joins the Goodman as playwright-in-residence, where he is currently working with Robert Falls on the stage adaptation of Roberto Bolaño’s novel 2666 (a draft of which was performed at last fall’s New Stages festival) and Ask Aunt Susan, a play he developed as part of the Goodman’s Playwrights Unit and which will receive its world premiere next season in the Owen Theatre. His other plays include February House, a musical collaboration with composer/lyricist Gabriel Kahane that premiered at The Public Theater last spring; The Elephant and The Whale for Redmoon Theater and Chicago Children’s Theatre; CommComm, adapted from stories by George Saunders and commissioned by the Goodman; Jon, for which he won the 2008 Jeff Citation for Best New Adaptation; The Twins Would Like to Say for Dog & Pony Theatre Co.; and Laika’s Coffin and Winter Pageant 2010 for Redmoon, where he spent two years as a directing apprentice under the auspices of Theatre Communications Group’s New Generations programs. His directing credits include productions for Victory Gardens Theater, Collaboraction and Redmoon, as well as the clown play Guerra developed with director Devon de Mayo and Mexico City-based troupe La Piara.

Goodman Theatre would like to thank all New Work Donors for their help in making our Artists-in-Residence programs possible.
Dark Eyes: Visions of Black Women, Coming this May

Goodman Theatre, in conjunction with Columbia College Chicago’s Film and Video Department, will host a series of film screenings and discussions during the run of the Goodman’s production of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark focusing on films by and about African American women. The series, Dark Eyes: Visions of Black Women, will feature the work of directors, producers and writers whose work should have wider visibility, in screenings that will take place at Columbia College and in community locations around the city throughout the month of May.

Lynn Nottage’s By the Way, Meet Vera Stark is a 70-year journey through Hollywood starting in the 1930s that chronicles the life of Vera Stark*, a headstrong African American maid and budding actress who wanted more than just the typical background roles that African American actresses were cast in during her time. The rediscovery of her legacy and filmography—which was mostly lost in a fire—in the twenty-first century may seem like a story tailor-made for the stage, but hundreds of black actresses and filmmakers have lived the history Nottage illuminates in this new play.

More than 30 years ago, director Julie Dash’s critically acclaimed short film Illusions presented the precarious role that black women specifically, and African Americans in general, play in the Hollywood film industry. Dash, whose films include Daughters of the Dust and The Rosa Parks Story, is one of the filmmakers the series will highlight. “When most people think of black directors, they name Spike Lee, Lee Daniels and Tyler Perry,” said Willa Taylor, co-curator of the series and the Goodman’s director of Education and Community Engagement. “But there are dozens of black women like Euzhan Palcy, Ruby Oliver and Liz White who have made beautiful poetic films about our lives that just aren’t well-known.”

The series will also showcase performances by African American actresses that deserve a second look. Co-curator Vaun Monroe, an associate professor of film at Columbia and the assistant director of the Goodman’s production of Vera Stark, agrees. “When you ask most young people to name African American actresses, you get the usual suspects—Halle Berry, Angela Bassett, Taraji P. Henson and Kerry Washington. These women are fantastic but there is a wealth of brilliant performances this generation should be introduced to, not to mention films that reflect the depth and range of the black experience in ways they have never seen.”

The series will include one of both Taylor and Monroe’s personal favorites, Eve’s Bayou. The directorial debut of Kasi Lemmons, the 1997 film starred Samuel L. Jackson (who was also a producer), Lynn Whitfield, Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Debbi Morgan and Meagan Good. Although shut out of all Oscar categories, the film was selected as the best film of 1997 by late Chicago Sun-Times critic Roger Ebert. The Watermelon Woman, I Will Follow and Mississippi Damned round out the series.

Films will be shown Thursdays, May 9, 16, 23 and 30. For more information on screening times and locations, visit GoodmanTheatre.org/DarkEyes

*See note on page 3.
Fame, Fantasy, Food, Adventure Auction a Success!

The annual Fame, Fantasy, Food, Adventure Auction, held on Monday, February 4, at The Peninsula Chicago, raised over $315,000 in support of Goodman productions and education programs. Auctioneers Leslie Hindman and Robert Clifford led the bidding on over 20 live auction items, including exotic trips, exclusive VIP experiences and dinners prepared by celebrity chefs. Thank you to Event Sponsor American Airlines and Contributing Sponsor The PrivateBank for generously underwriting the event. Congratulations to Auction Co-Chairs Linda W. Aylesworth and Frances K. Del Boca and Auction Trustee Chair Kristine R. Garrett for putting together a truly spectacular evening!

Teddy Ferrara Opening Night

On Monday, February 11, Goodman Theatre celebrated the opening of Christopher Shinn’s Teddy Ferrara. Attendees enjoyed cocktails and dinner in the Healy Rehearsal Room followed by the world premiere in the Owen Theatre.

Special thanks to Corporate Sponsor Partner Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP; Individual Principal and Leadership Sponsors (listed on page 4); New Work Season Sponsors Catherine Mouly and LeRoy T. Carlson, Jr., Shaw Family Supporting Organization and Orli and Bill Staley; and Director’s Society Sponsors Lynn Hauser and Neil Ross, Robert Kohl and Clark Pellett, Ryan Ruskin and Mike Andrews, Don and Rebecca Ford Terry and Susan and Bob Wislow.
Measure for Measure Opening Night

Sponsors and guests gathered on Monday, March 18, to celebrate the opening of Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, directed by Goodman Artistic Director Robert Falls. Guests were treated to cocktails and dinner at Petterino’s followed by the performance. Thank you to everyone who made this production possible—Individual, Principal, Leadership Sponsors; Artistic Collective Season Sponsors (listed on page 4); Director’s Society Sponsors Joan and Robert Clifford, Alice and John J. Sabl and Sara F. Szold; Education and Community Engagement Sponsors Linda and Mitchell Saranow and Classics Endowment Donor Marcia S. Cohn.

The Latino Theatre Festival Celebration featuring Pedro Páramo

Sponsors and guests gathered on Friday, March 22, to celebrate the kick off of the Goodman’s Latino Theatre Festival with the opening performance of Teatro Buendía’s new work, Pedro Páramo, presented by the Goodman in association with MCA Chicago. Guests were treated to cocktails and dinner, followed by the performance.

Goodman Theatre gratefully acknowledges each of the sponsors who have made this production and this event possible: Principal, Leadership and Artistic Collective Season Sponsors (listed on page 4); New Work Season Sponsors Catherine Mouly and LeRoy T. Carlson, Jr., Shaw Family Supporting Organization, Orli and Bill Staley; Latino Festival Sponsors Maria C. Bechily and Scott Hodes, Joe and Palma Calabrese, Gery and Sunny Chico, Patricia Cox, Shawn M. Donnelley and Christopher M. Kelly, Harry J. Harczak, Sr. Memorial Foundation, Eva Losacco, Amalia and William Mahoney, Shaw Family Supporting Organization; Festival Education and Community Engagement Sponsors Linda and Peter Knivkovich; Diversity Initiatives Sponsors (listed on page 15); Event Sponsor Baker & McKenzie; Festival Partner The Boeing Company; Consortium Sponsors AztecAmerica Bank, SPC Educational Solutions, State Farm; Print Media Sponsor Hoy, and Digital Media Sponsor Chicago Latino Network.

LEFT (clockwise from top to bottom): Teatro Buendía’s Flora Lauten and Raquel Camio, director and playwright of Pedro Páramo, with Latino Theatre Festival Curator and Resident Artistic Associate Henry Godinez. Mark Guess and Harold Garling from Diversity Initiatives Champion Charter One/RBS Citizens. Community Engagement Partners Matt Plens and Maria Torres. Community Engagement Partners Don and Zig Smith with their son and Goodman Women’s Board Member and Latino Theatre Festival Sponsor Amalia Mahoney.
Teddy Ferrara
Diversity Night

On February 20, Goodman Theatre held its first Diversity Night of the season, featuring Christopher Shinn’s gripping new work, Teddy Ferrara, directed by Evan Cabnet. This free event is a product of the Goodman’s ongoing commitment to reflecting the diversity of our community in all areas of our organization, and is designed to bring a new audience of culturally diverse individuals to the theater. Guests enjoyed cocktails and appetizers at Club Petterino’s, and were treated to an exclusive tasting of the newly launched Halsted Vodka, a unique spirit that gives 15 percent of its profits to the LGBTQ community. During the reception, guests learned about the integral role that diversity and inclusion play at the Goodman, and got an inside look at how this institutional commitment is applied in both the art on our stages and our many education and community engagement programs.

Goodman Theatre gratefully acknowledges each of the Diversity Night sponsors, including Diversity Initiatives Champion Charter One/RBS Citizens; Diversity Initiatives Partners Allstate, Exelon Corporation, Ernst & Young, Fifth Third Bank, Loop Capital, Macy’s, Mesirow Financial and Walgreens, as well as Event Sponsor Mayer Brown.

RIGHT (top to bottom): Goodman Chairman Ruth Ann M. Gillis with colleagues from Exelon Corporation, a Diversity Initiatives Partner. Representatives of Charter One/RBS Citizens, Diversity Initiatives Champion. From Ernst & Young LLP, a Diversity Initiatives Partner, Art and Colleen Kuesel with Goodman Trustee Kevin Cole and his wife Eliza. Photos by Violet Dominek.

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BRIAN HECKLER is a Transaction Services Partner in the KPMG Chicago office, leading a national practice focusing on providing accounting advisory services to various clients, as well as KPMG’s consulting services to Diversified Industrials. He currently serves as Treasurer, Finance Committee Chair and member of Boards of The Baker Demonstration School in Evanston and the Lambda Chi Alpha Educational Foundation in Indianapolis. Brian and his wife, Coley, have a daughter in college and three sons at home. The family moved to Evanston in 2000, having formerly lived in New York City, Washington, DC and Harrisburg, PA.

GIGI PRITZKER is an accomplished film and stage producer, businesswoman and active philanthropist, serving as co-founder and CEO of film production and financing company OddLot Entertainment. Ms. Pritzker is equally active in the realm of live theater—after owning and operating Los Angeles’ Coronet Theatre for a decade, she developed and produced the Tony Award-winning musical Million Dollar Quartet with longtime stage partner Ted Rawlins. Ms. Pritzker’s active philanthropy includes board seats with the Chicago Children’s Museum, the Children Affected by AIDS Foundation, Cure Violence and The Ellen Stone Belic Institute at Columbia College for the Study of Women, Gender in the Arts and Media, as well as Goodman Theatre. She is also a co-founder of the Chicago chapter of the Tibetan Resettlement Project.

KIMBRA WALTER has been a longtime Subscriber and supporter of Goodman Theatre. Mrs. Walter has a background in law, receiving a BA from Northwestern University and a JD from Southern Methodist University. She is married to Mark Walter, CEO and member of the Executive Committee of Guggenheim Capital, LLC, a private financial services firm. Mr. Walter is the controlling owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Mrs. Walter serves on the boards of the Lincoln Park Zoo and One Goal. Kimbra and Mark are active philanthropists in the community and are involved with the arts and educational programs in Chicago and Africa.

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RENEW BY MAY 10 TO KEEP YOUR SAME GREAT SEATS! VISIT GOODMANTHEATRE.ORG/RENEWALS, OR CALL 312.448.3810 TO RENEW NOW!
“My sisters—Ursula Anderson and Vernita Jones—and I first saw *A Christmas Carol* over 30 years ago when it was performed in the old Goodman Theatre, adjacent to the Art Institute. Since then, we have made it a family tradition: Christmas dinner under the Marshall Field’s/Macy’s Christmas tree, a visit to Santa, and then the show.

While our children are now in their forties and our grandchildren too old to sit on Santa’s lap, my sisters and I still continue our annual tradition of seeing *A Christmas Carol* not as patrons, but as volunteer ushers for the Goodman. Throughout the years, my favorite scene is still when the Ghost of Marley returns to visit Scrooge.

Goodman Theatre has done so much to enrich the culture of Chicago—supporting the *A Christmas Carol* Endowment fund is just our way of saying thank you.”

*BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2013*

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Embeya offers a retooled take on the Asian dining experience by showcasing refined cooking techniques and Asian ingredients in a chic and elegant space. Embeya, a collaboration between international hospitality veteran Attila Gyulai (Four Seasons Hotels, Elysian Hotels Chicago) and Michelin-star winner Chef Thai Dang, has quickly become a top dining destination in Chicago. With rave reviews from *Chicago Tribune*’s Phil Vettel, who hailed the eatery for its “artistry”; accolades for Chef Dang, who was nominated as The People’s Best New Chef by *Food & Wine* magazine and named one of Zagat’s “Top 30 Under 30,” Embeya is one of the city’s hottest new restaurants.

Goodman patrons can indulge in a three-course chef’s tasting menu for just $29 per person! Valet parking is available for $12 per car. Located at 564 West Randolph Street, the venue is open seven days a week. Visit Embeya.com or call 312.612.5640 for information.

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Goodman patrons who show their tickets for that evening’s performance receive a 25-percent discount on dinner in the main dining room. This offer is valid Monday through Saturday evenings; not valid with Bar Bites or any other promotion. For reservations call 312.575.9900 or visit N9NE.com. N9NE is located at 440 West Randolph Street.
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