



Play showcases life of black superstar

Andrew Elkins
Associate Editor
@andrew_elkins_

As actress Tymisha Harris danced on stage topless with rubber bananas bound to her belt, the audience got a glimpse of what it must have been like to watch black cabaret sensation Josephine Baker.

"Josephine" is a one-woman play that debuted in 2016. Officials at the Faulkner Performing Arts Center presented the play Jan. 30 for one night only as part of the UofA's celebration of Black History Month.

The crew is touring the globe showcasing the life of Josephine Baker, a black burlesque and cabaret performer and actress from St. Louis who gained international fame in the early-to-mid 20th century.

The play explores the life of Josephine, starting from her beginnings in St. Louis before navigating her rise to stardom as a performer. Audience members witnessed her fall out of the spotlight, serve as a mother to 12 adopted children and speak in the civil rights march on Washington in 1963.

Every quote in the show is made of Josephine's actual words, ranging from things from her speeches to little notes she wrote, Harris said.

Harris, who previously worked as an assistant choreographer for N*SYNC, said she knew she was meant to be a performer from a young age growing up in El Paso, Texas.

"I think I've always been

a performer," Harris said. "I was always a dancer first and then singing kind of popped in there, then the acting just kind of fell into place."

Harris was looking for a chance to exercise her talents when she created "Josephine" in 2015 with the help of Michael Marinaccio, director and producer, and Tod Kimbro, playwright and musical director, as a platform to showcase her dancing, singing and acting.

"Josephine's was the perfect life to tell, especially in the climate that we were in," Harris said.

The play ended after a soulful performance of "La Vie en Rose," which was followed by a long standing ovation that brought tears to Harris's eyes.

"It is so crazy and cool to see the number of people who leave the show that are fulfilled and changed," Harris said.

The life of Josephine means freedom for people, Harris said. Josephine Baker found "freedom from

American oppression" when she moved to France.

Josephine embodies a lot of what people think of as a strong woman, Harris said. She thinks that without Josephine Baker's influence on the past, stars like Beyonce and Tina Turner would not be around.

The first public show at the Faulkner Performing Arts Center this season was "Martha Redbone" in November 2019, and the turnout was a bit lower than expected at around 200 while Josephine brought in around 400 attendees, said Emelia Barrick, operations manager for the Faulkner Performing Arts Center.

Denise Nemec, a UA alumna, and Cedar Middleton, a David W. Mullins Library librarian, attended the play because of the power of Josephine's story, Nemec said.

"We hear often these adages and one of them is 'Bloom where you're planted,'" Nemec said, "and Josephine of course was planted in St. Louis, Missouri, and she wasn't able... to bloom where she was planted."

Harris and the "Josephine" crew will perform in Adelaide, Australia, from Feb. 14 to March 1.

Andrew Elkins
Associate Editor

Tymisha Harris performs as Josephine Baker, a renowned black actress, singer and dancer, Jan. 30 at the Faulkner Performing Arts Center.

RSO celebrates, unites black women on campus

Abbi Ross
Staff Reporter
@AbbiRoss10

Since 2014, black women at the UofA have found mentorship and a space for open discussion through Students Advocating for Stronger Sisterhood, a registered student organization. Almost six years after the RSO's founding, SASS executive board members announced that the University of Memphis will soon establish its own chapter.

"What we're about is, bringing college women together and allowing them to have a safe place on campus to discuss what we go through as women," said Jakayla Storey, a UA senior and SASS President. "We really try to focus on relationships among minority women."

The UA chapter has 54 members, and women of all races may attend the organization's monthly meetings.

Addison Jones, a junior at the University of Memphis, reached out to Storey after she saw social media posts about SASS and wanted to do something similar on her own campus, she said.

"I loved how there was something there, how girls had an opportunity to have somewhere to go," Jones said. "I know that girls feel like they don't have anyone to talk to, or a safe environment to talk about anything and everything."

The first general body meeting for the University of Memphis chapter will be Feb. 10. Jones said she is excited to see the sisterhood that SASS will bring to her campus.

"You have all these girls surrounding you with good energy, positive energy," Jones said. "They just uplift you."

Storey joined SASS during her freshman year and said that SASS has given her a place to



Haydon King Staff Photographer
Patience Billingsly, a sophomore member of SASS, cuts out materials for a storyboard Jan. 29.

be herself and create an open dialogue with other black women.

The quick bond and relationships she formed with other girls helped her realize that SASS was the place for her, Storey said.

"If someone told me this is what I would be doing a couple of years ago, I would have been like 'that is insane, power to her,' but here I am now," Storey said. "It means the world to me and really is something that I will leave college truly missing, but also truly feeling like I left my legacy here."

SASS members have always had the dream of making the group larger but never thought it would happen so fast, Skkye Robinson, a junior and SASS outreach chair, said.

"For us as this small organization, to be able to spread out to another campus that's not even in our state, it is huge for us," Robinson said.

SASS gave Robinson the chance to connect with other black women on campus and make friends, she said.

"It's such a beautiful moment to share for ladies who are of like mind and who are my people," Robinson said. "They are my sisters, they are truly my sisters."

The first SASS week on the UA campus will be at the beginning of March. Members will work to share the purpose of the group, and attendees can participate in various activities, like karaoke and a paint and chat event, Storey said. SASS will collect feminine

products and toiletries to give to a women's shelter throughout the week.

At the end of the week, members will learn more about black women in dance and have a dance instructor come and teach, Storey said.

"It's really special I think to have an organization that plays such a big role in someone's life," Storey said. "It's how I met so many of my friends and I do see a lot of them as sisters."



Haydon King Staff Photographer
SASS President Jakayla Storey, a senior, makes a storyboard Jan. 29 to encourage her peers to find the beauty inside of themselves.



THE ARKANSAS TRAVELER

The Arkansas Traveler is a public forum, the University of Arkansas' independent student newspaper and all content decisions are those of the editors.

Contact

203 Kimpel Hall
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Main 479 575 3406
Fax 479 575 3306
traveler@uark.edu

facebook.com/uatrav
twitter.com/uatrav

Editorial Staff

Chase Reavis
Editor-in-Chief
dreavis@uark.edu

Kate Duby
News Editor
kmduby@uark.edu

Samantha Van Dyke
Managing Editor
snvandyk@uark.edu

Drew Watzke
Sports Editor
ajwatzke@uark.edu

Miranda Stith
News Editor
mvstith@uark.edu

Andrew Elkins
Associate Editor
atelkins@uark.edu

Elias Weiss
Opinion Editor
ecweiss@uark.edu

Elizabeth Green
Photo Editor
elg005@uark.edu

Nathanael Davis
Associate Editor
ncdavis@uark.edu

Design Staff

Julia Nall
Design Editor

Parker Lane
Staff Designer

Advertising

To advertise with The Arkansas Traveler,
email mhdur@uark.edu

Professional Staff, Advisers

Robyn Ledbetter**
Student Media Director
479.575.6420
rledbet@uark.edu

Cheri Freeland**
Business Manager
479.575.3408
freeland@uark.edu

Bret Schulte**
Faculty Adviser
479.575.6659
bjschulte@uark.edu

** All content decisions are those of the student editor and his or her staff. Professional staff and advisers serve to administer certain business operations and offer advice, guidance or technical assistance as requested by the student staff.

Letters

Letters should concentrate on issues, not personalities and must be fewer than 300 words, typed and signed by the author(s). Letters will be edited for accuracy, space and style. Students must list their majors and classification. To submit letters, e-mail travop@uark.edu.

Columnists' and cartoonists' opinions

Columnists' and cartoonists' opinions are their own and not necessarily the views or opinions of the editorial board.

Memberships

The Arkansas Traveler is a member either institutionally or through individual memberships of the Society of Professional Journalists, the Associated Collegiate Press, The Columbia Scholastic Press Association and the Arkansas College Media Association.

Corrections

The Arkansas Traveler strives for accuracy and clarity in its reporting and will correct all matters of fact. If you believe the paper has printed an error, please notify the editor at 479.575.8455 or e-mail the editor at traveler@uark.edu. All corrections will be printed in the space below each week.