

**Presenter's Kit
2019**

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Bardavon production of

RHAPSODY IN BLACK

Written & Performed by LeLand Gantt
Directorial Consultant Estelle Parsons
Developed at Actors Studio

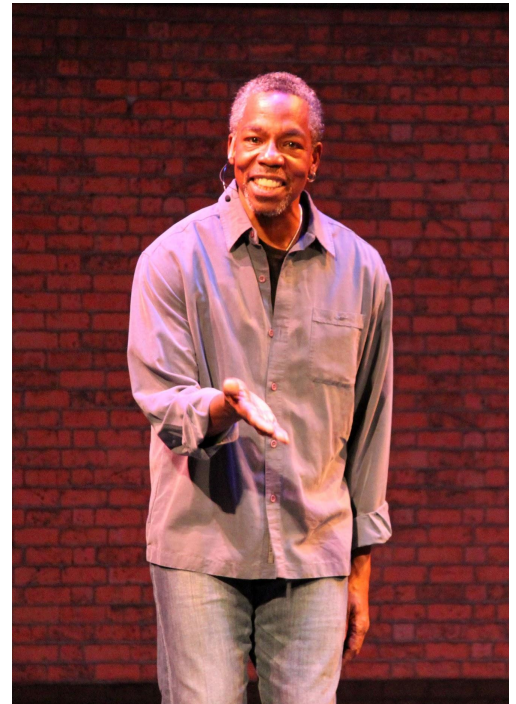
Set Design Consultants Court Watson and Peter Larkin
Sound Design ADI WORLDWIDE: Erich Bechtel and
Ian Ruben-Schnirman
Lighting Design Consultant Zack Jacobs
Production Stage Manager Laura Gomez

Produced by Chris Silva & Stephen LaMarca
Educational Consultant Kay Churchill

90 minutes running time
60 minutes running time for student shows
Rhapsody in Black is performed without an intermission

About RHAPSODY IN BLACK

Written and performed by LeLand Gantt and developed at NYC's Actors Studio by Estelle Parsons, *Rhapsody in Black* is a one-man show that explores LeLand's personal journey to understand and eventually transcend racism in America. We follow his life story -- from an underprivileged childhood in the ghettos of McKeesport, Pennsylvania to teenage experiments with crime and drugs to scholastic achievement and an acting career that land adult LeLand in situations where he is virtually the only African-American in the room. His efforts to cope with the various psychological effects of consistently being marked "The Other" is recounted in remarkable and exquisitely moving detail, guaranteed to leave lasting impressions. Multiple elements combine to give *Rhapsody* its super-powered emotional punch, many of them concentrated in the incredible persona of its star. Charming, self-deprecatingly funny, linguistically awesome, LeLand Gantt imbues every word that falls from his mouth with all the passion and poignancy of a preacher speaking the Gospel. This is partly because he's confronting heavy subjects, but mostly because he believes so firmly in his message that it's impossible for it to emerge any other way. In his own words, "Objective truth strikes a chord."



Rhapsody in Black is a powerful personal narrative on the subjects of racism, identity, and self-image. The dialogue that takes place in the talkback following the show between LeLand and the students underscores just how much the audience is looking for an outlet to have these often uncomfortable conversations about race and racism. There is a 60-minute student version as well which contains less adult content and is suitable for high school audiences.

About RHAPSODY IN BLACK continued...

LELAND GANTT first unveiled *Rhapsody in Black* at the WorkShop Theater Company's Sundays@Six reading series in March 2013. Subsequently it was developed at The Actors Studio and with Estelle Parsons as Directorial Consultant, *Rhapsody* garnered both Best Director and Best Storyteller awards at the United Solo Festival in 2014.

Leland's regional credits include: *Two Trains Running* and *Radio Golf* (Syracuse Stage); Walter Mosley's *The Fall of Heaven*, world premiere (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *Gem of the Ocean* (Arena Stage), *Jitney* (Pittsburgh Public Theater), and *In Walks Ed* (Longwharf Theater).

Off-Broadway/Broadway: *Slippery When Wet* (La Mama), *Another Man's Poison* (Peter Jay Sharpe Theater), *OyamO's Killa Dilla* and *Let Me Live* (Drama Desk and Audelco Award nominee for Featured Actor), and the revival of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (u/s Rock Dutton).

Film and television credits include: *Miracle at St. Anna*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *Malcolm X*, *Presumed Innocent*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order SVU*, *J.A.G.*, and HBO's *The Affair*.



Who's who

Estelle Parsons - Directorial Consultant: Ms. Parsons won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1967 for her role as Blanche Barrow in *Bonnie and Clyde*. Among her most noted television roles, she played Roseanne's mother on the award-winning sitcom *Roseanne*. She played the title role in *Miss Margarita's Way* on Broadway and the National tour, and *Violet Weston* in *August: Osage County* on Broadway and the national tour. Ms. Parsons' directing credits include: a multicultural *Anthony and Cleopatra* described as "the most exciting and innovative presentation in English since Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" at the Belasco Theater; *Flaubert's Madame Bovary* adapted by Adrienne Kennedy at the Signature Theater, NYC; *Oedipus the King* (Yeats adaptation) and *Salome: The Reading* (Oscar Wilde) with Al Pacino at the Bardavon, on Broadway, and the National tour. Nominated five times for the Tony Award, Ms. Parsons was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame in 2004.

The Actors Studio is a nonprofit organization for professional actors, directors, and playwrights founded in 1947 in New York City by Elia Kazan, Cheryl Crawford, and Robert Lewis. The Actors Studio was formed to provide a place where professional actors could work together between jobs or during long runs to continue to develop their craft and to experiment with new forms in creative theatre work. Lee Strasberg took the helm in 1951 until his death in 1982. It is currently run by Al Pacino, Ellen Burstyn, and Harvey Keitel. The Studio is best known for its work refining and teaching method acting. The approach was originally developed by the Group Theatre in the 1930s based on the innovations of Constantin Stanislavski. While at the Studio, actors work together to develop their skills in a private environment where they can take risks as performers without the pressure of commercial roles.

Bardavon 1869 Opera House, Inc. is a New York State nonprofit corporation that owns and operates two historic theaters—the 944-seat namesake theater in Poughkeepsie and 1510-seat Ulster Performing Arts Center (UPAC) in Kingston—and the region's premiere orchestra, the Hudson Valley Philharmonic (the HVP). It presents world-class music, dance, theater, and classic films for diverse audiences in both its venues; stages free annual outdoor events in local communities; and partners with area schools to offer unique arts-based learning experiences. The Bardavon also continues to restore and preserve its historic theaters for today's audiences and future generations to enjoy.

THE BLOG

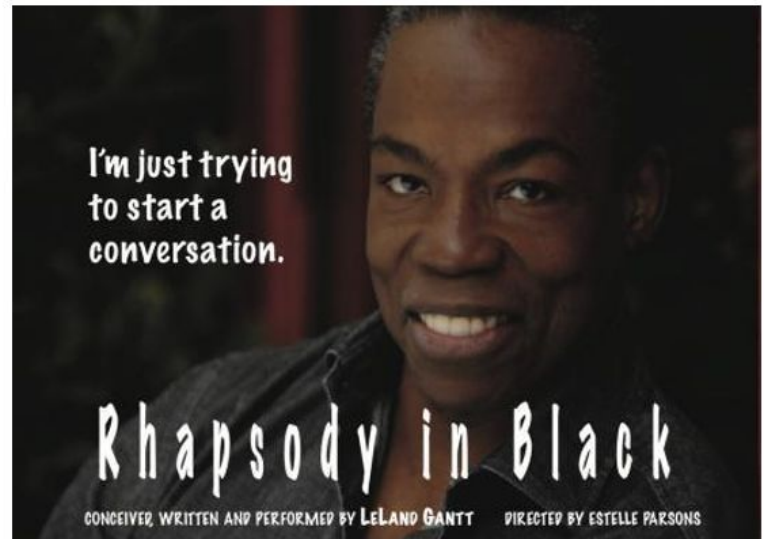
11/05/2013 02:30 pm ET Updated Dec 06, 2017

Discriminating Taste: Rhapsody in Black Puts Audiences on the Path to Transcending Racism

By [Jaime Lubin](#)

Can we rise above our prejudices with honest conversation? In his *tour de force* one-man show *Rhapsody in Black*, directed by Oscar winner and American Theater Hall-of-Famer Estelle Parsons, LeLand Gantt trumpets a resounding “YES.”

Currently running as a special workshop production at the Actors Studio, *Rhapsody in Black* explores LeLand's personal journey to understand and eventually transcend racism in America. For approximately an hour and a half we follow his spellbinding life story — from an underprivileged childhood in the ghettos of McKeesport, Pennsylvania to teenage experiments with crime and drugs to scholastic achievement and an acting career that land adult LeLand in situations where he is virtually the only African-American in the room. How he manages to cope with the various psychological effects of consistently being marked The Other is recounted in remarkable and exquisitely moving detail, guaranteed to leave lasting impressions on the hearts and minds of anyone who isn't a robot.



(Photo credit: Joe Henson)

Multiple elements combine to give *Rhapsody* its super-powered emotional punch, many of them concentrated in the incredible persona of its star. Charming, self-deprecatingly funny, linguistically awesome, LeLand Gantt imbues every word that falls from his mouth with all the passion and poignancy of a preacher speaking the Gospel. This is partly because he's confronting heavy subjects, but mostly because he believes so firmly in his message that it's impossible for it to emerge any other way. In his own words, “Objective truth strikes a chord.”

There is a spark of divinity on this planet, but there are things that we as a society are trained not to pay much attention to. As a black man in America, one of the preeminent forces that has worked on me is racism. Why should we look at the differences and be so blind to what connects us? This is a conversation we should be having.

The first third of the play examines racism in the '60s and '70s, those pivotal years of the Civil Rights movement when black leaders were, as LeLand notes, “dropping like autumn leaves. Medgar, Malcolm, Martin. The lesson? ‘You want to be a leader for your people? We'll take you out.’”

Surely society has moved past that, you say. But given fairly recent incidents like the Fruitvale Station or Trayvon Martin shootings — or even last week's retail discrimination cases — it's clear that as a country we remain a long distance from where we need to be. (LeLand's own brush with wrongful accusation, an anecdote from the mid-1990s, still rings eerily true for police behavior toward a suspect today and is one of the more harrowing moments of the show.)

“This piece is so original,” says director Estelle Parsons, “because people don't talk about these things. I think it's wonderful to have somebody get up and in their own words say, ‘Here's what I went through, here's the effect all these things had on me.’” She adds that renowned African-American director/producer Woodie King Jr., upon seeing *Rhapsody*, commented: “[The story] is true of so many black men, but nobody will stand up and say it.”

The Actors Studio, which focuses on the artist's internal psycho-emotional process, provides a perfect setting for the show's development. LeLand began jotting down notes for *Rhapsody* in 1995 while filming a movie in Los Angeles (back then he envisioned it with multiple characters), later reimagining the play as a solo piece while on his honeymoon in 2001. However, it wasn't until he started working in the Studio's weekly acting session — where actors perform scenes in various stages of rehearsal — that he was encouraged to flesh out the project.

Estelle, who frequently moderates the sessions and sits on the Studio's Board, recalls:

Everybody was extremely enthusiastic about it. It was just terrific! So then we wanted to put it in [the Studio's] Playwrights/Directors Unit, and it worked so well that he just needed the opportunity, as all actors do, to play it and get it really into his bones. So then we said, 'Let's give him three weekends with an audience and see how it goes.' Now we're trying to get in people from New York regional theatres and see if they would have some interest in it.

For a first-time playwright, LeLand couldn't have found a better collaborator than Estelle, whose experience with one-person shows (especially her critically acclaimed turn — twice! — as the title character in *Miss Margarida's Way*) made her the perfect choice to direct.

"I think Estelle's a genius," says LeLand. "She has incredible sight. She's passionate. She forces me to be more specific. She is a truly authentic personality without apology."

For her part, though Estelle had some initial concerns about her involvement — "I didn't think I was the right person for it because I'm not a 'concept' director. I'm much more interested in [helping] actors move forward in their artistic development" — she agrees that the creative partnership with LeLand has been exceptionally rewarding.

He's a born performer, and the material's very, very strong. It's growing all the time. So I guess we'll probably see it through together at this point because we're so excited about the progress we're making.

As a duo, LeLand and Estelle craft a gorgeous magic; she emphasizes physicality in her direction and he exercises enviable mastery over his body. Onstage LeLand is a tornado of motion. Watching him cavort, contort, twist and twirl around the stage to illustrate his stories, one discovers the real "rhapsody" of the title — a languid, expressive dance through time and place and the music of human behavior.

Beyond its unquestionably potent insights into the vagaries of racism, *Rhapsody* draws its real strength and universal resonance from investigating the impact of low self-esteem on our psyches. Who finds us attractive and capable, who rejects us (not merely in the sexual sense, though LeLand points out that that can be a huge part of it) — figures exceedingly into how we view and present ourselves to the world. It informs the choices we make and how much control we believe we have over our lives.

According to LeLand:

I focus on self-esteem in order to provide both sides of the paradigm, the deleterious aspect as well as the potential for change and ascension, transcendence. Because with the right poison you'll never feel that you're anything.

I've always felt I was special, but on the other hand all my life people have said, 'You're nothing.' So it's just the little man in the room in the subterranean basement under the bomb shelters whispering, and I've got the whole house on top of me saying, "You're nothing." Now I've shrugged the house off. The foundation has been excavated. The man is out of the little room, standing on level ground, screaming! And I find it difficult to believe.

Pain of being The Other is relative. If you have ever felt like a freak or second-class citizen, if you have ever been convinced you are worthless, if you have struggled with abandonment or poverty, if you have difficulty believing that you are capable of ever being loved, if you have turned to any sort of substance abuse to silence the hurt and rage that will not abate because "some things don't wash off" — whatever your background, if you have known loneliness, you will find truth and triumph in *Rhapsody in Black*.

Toward the end of the show LeLand discusses the two major attitudes toward discrimination, the realistic and the fantastic. He admits that the realistic adage of, "accept it and move on" doesn't work for him. "How can I accept the unacceptable?"

Instead he advocates a kind of spiritual origami, looking inward to address your own prejudices and then seeking to learn about those of your fellow men: "All these people we have predisposed ideas about are not the adversary. We can afford to have a conversation."

If we could all be as real with each other as LeLand Gantt is with himself, *that* would become a fantastic life-altering conversation indeed.

‘Rhapsody in Black’ confronts race relations in America

Staff report Published 11:19 a.m. ET Feb. 24, 2015

Leland Gantt to share one-man show at the Schorr Family Firehouse Stage on Friday



There's no doubt that Leland Gantt has led a remarkable, inspirational life — from an underprivileged childhood in the ghettos of McKeesport, Pa., to teenage experiments with crime and drugs to scholastic achievement and a successful acting career.

Gantt will share his one-man show telling his story, called “Rhapsody in Black,” at the Schorr Family Firehouse Stage on Friday.

As recent situations in Ferguson, Mo., and New York City have illustrated, race relations in the United States are still fraught with tension, making this conversation one that the public should engage in. Gantt has won critical praise for his charming, self-deprecatingly funny ways to confront heavy subjects with all the passion and poignancy of a preacher speaking the gospel.

Written and performed by Gantt and developed at NYC's Actors Studio by Estelle Parsons, “Rhapsody in Black” explores his personal journey to understand and eventually transcend racism in America.

Gantt's regional credits include: “Two Trains Running” and “Radio Golf” (Syracuse Stage); Walter Mosley's “The Fall of Heaven” (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); “Gem of the Ocean” (Arena Stage), “Jitney” (Pittsburgh Public Theater), and “In Walks Ed” (Longwharf Theater). Off-Broadway/Broadway: “Slippery When Wet” (La Mama), “Another Man's Poison” (Peter Jay Sharpe Theater), “Oyamo's Killa Dilla” and “Let Me Live” (Drama Desk and Audelco Award nominee for Featured Actor), and the revival of “Ma Rainey's Black Bottom” (understudy for Rock Dutton). Film and television credits include “Miracle at St. Anna,” “Requiem for a Dream,” “Malcolm X,” “Presumed Innocent,” “Law & Order,” “Law & Order SVU,” “J.A.G.” and HBO's “The Affair.”

Parsons won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1967 for her role as Blanche Barrow in “Bonnie and Clyde.” Among her most noted television roles, she played Roseanne's mother on the award-winning sitcom “Roseanne.” She played the title role in “Miss Margarita's Way” on Broadway and the national tour, and Violet Weston in “August: Osage County” on Broadway and the national tour. Parsons' directing credits include a multicultural “Anthony and Cleopatra” at the Belasco Theater and Flaubert's “Madame Bovary” at the Signature Theater, NYC. Nominated five times for the Tony Award, Parsons was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame in 2004.

Tickets for Friday's 7 p.m. show are \$10. The Firehouse offers a 20 percent discount to veterans and teachers. Purchase tickets online at www.goodwilltheatre.net or by calling the box office at 772-2404, ext. 301. The Schorr Family Firehouse Stage is located at 48 Willow St. in Johnson City.

“Rhapsody in Black” also will be presented at Johnson City High School on Friday during the school day to encourage a dialogue about race relations and overcoming personal struggles.

RHAPSODY IN BLACK gives special thanks to:

Michelle Ferrari, Jeff Paul, Howard Walker, Shawn Bavaresco, Meg Meyers, Emily Ballou, Cheryl Marcus, The WorkShop Theatre, United Solo Festival 2014, Malachy Silva, Allison Zajac-Batell, Bezachin Jifar, Tyler Kniep, George Maloian, Olivia Barton

