



Audio Description Notes for *Blues for an Alabama Sky*

WELCOME

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's production of *Blues for an Alabama Sky*. My name is Laura Wiebers, and I will be your audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes, including one 20-minute intermission.

Blues for an Alabama Sky is a bold character drama written by Pearl Cleage and directed by Nicole A. Watson. The play takes place in a Depression-era Harlem apartment building in the summer of 1930 and centers on a close-knit group of friends who has become a chosen family. New roommates Angel and Guy — a recently fired blues singer and a promising costume designer with Paris in his sights — live across the hall from Delia, a social worker who sparks a relationship with the hardworking doctor Sam. Their lives are upturned when Southern newcomer Leland arrives and falls hard for Angel, who is torn between a stable life in Manhattan and an exhilarating overseas adventure with Guy. Angel chooses her path, but the decision leads to devastating consequences that shift the trajectory of everyone's futures and long-held dreams.

This production contains mature content and themes.

STAGING AND PROPS

The stage is framed by a golden arch. Within the arch is a green curtain that is closed at the start of the show. When it opens, it reveals more of the set. Two neon signs hang overhead — one for the Savoy Ballroom and one for the Cotton Club, two popular, real-life New York City nightclubs that were musical and cultural hot spots during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Several footlights are evenly spaced around the edge of the stage.

At the beginning of the play, Angel, a nightclub singer, is singing and dancing alone on a bare stage. The living room furniture in her friend Guy's apartment rises to the level of the stage via a trap door in the stage floor. The furniture includes an upholstered armchair and a small side table with an assortment of items, including a framed photograph of Josephine Baker, a popular Paris performer. Behind the side table is a valet stand with a wooden frame for clothing and a wooden coat hanger. Next to the side table is a sofa with curved arms, a small table with a record player and a sewing basket on the floor containing needles and thread. Behind it is another small table with an ice bucket containing a bottle of champagne. In front of the sofa is a coffee table.

Behind the living room (which is further away from the audience) and up one step from the main stage floor is a working area with several mannequins draped in various clothing pieces. These are Guy's fashion design works-in-progress. Also in this area is a cabinet containing a sewing machine and compartments for various sewing materials. Some of the other items he works with are on a platform that slides onstage from the right and back offstage when not needed.



STAGING AND PROPS (continued)

Hanging from the ceiling of Guy's apartment is a large, nearly life-sized photograph of Josephine Baker wearing a slinky dress. She was a glamorous and famous nightclub singer, and at the time of this play, she was enjoying great success in Paris.

Delia's apartment is across the hall from Guy's, and part of it is visible on the upper left side of the stage. Characters enter and leave her apartment through a door which is represented by a door frame and a door that opens and closes within the frame. The door has a hook on the inside, and clothing can be hung from this hook. To the left of the door is a coat rack, and in the middle of her apartment are a dining room table and chairs. She often sits and works at the table. Along the back wall of the room is a side table with various objects on it.

When characters walk along the narrow space between the stage and the audience (called the "moat"), the staging convention is that they're outside. When Angel sits on the steps on the right edge of the stage, close the audience, the staging convention is that she's sitting near the window and can see out the window. When characters enter from the outside and walk across the stage toward Guy's living room, they're entering Guy's apartment. When they walk across the stage to the upper level by Delia's door, they're entering Delia's apartment.

Sometimes action happens in both apartments at once. For example, Delia may be working at her dining room table in her apartment while another scene is taking place in Guy's apartment.

CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

All actors and characters in the play are African American.

Angel Allen, a former backup singer at the Cotton Club, is played by Broadway actor **Kimberly Marable**. She is tall and slender, and she first appears onstage wearing a bright-yellow satin blouse, deep-purple satin skirt and a long, soft scarf that she waves through the air as she sings and sways around the stage. Her clothes are often made of smooth fabrics in bright colors that show off her slender figure.

Her roommate and closest friend is **Guy Jacobs**, a costume designer at the Cotton Club, who is played by **Lamar Jefferson**. Guy is establishing himself as a costume designer. He is tall and graceful. His moves are often flamboyant, his gestures are expansive and he glides dance-like around the stage throughout the play. His suits are tailored and colorful. He wears overcoats, hats and shined shoes.

Delia Patterson, their neighbor across the hall, is played by **Brittany Bellizeare**. Delia is a social worker at a Margaret Sanger Family Planning Clinic. When she first appears, she is wearing a scarf wrapped around her head and a bathrobe. She wears simpler clothes than Angel, including suits and dresses made of plainer fabrics and more muted colors.



CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES (continued)

A close friend of this group and a frequent visitor to the apartments is **Sam Thomas**, played by **Stephen Conrad Moore**. Sam is a doctor at a Harlem hospital. He wears dapper suits and hats, but in one scene, he wears a cardigan sweater over his shirt and pants instead of a suitcoat. When he visits Delia, they leave the apartment door open a few inches for the sake of propriety.

Into their midst comes **Leland Cunningham**, played by **Darius Jordan Lee**, who has only been in Harlem for six weeks, having recently arrived from Alabama. He wears a tailored suit, an overcoat and a hat.

At the end of the play, a **New Gentleman**, played by **Kevis Hillocks**, makes a brief appearance onstage.

THREE THINGS TO KNOW

- *Blues for an Alabama Sky* was originally commissioned by Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, and had its world premiere at Alliance in 1995.
- Pearl Cleage's play presents a Depression-era Harlem on the rise as people from across the country find new life and new inspiration in the community. Full of resilient, smart and talented characters, *Blues for an Alabama Sky* addresses the topics of abortion, birth control, Prohibition and homosexuality without being weighed down as an issue play. Even disappointed characters remain hopeful and carry on as they pursue their dreams and live the lives they choose to lead.
- Cleage's play connects theatrical forebears, including Anton Chekhov, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, with a picture of the African American diaspora, where offstage characters like Langston Hughes, Adam Powell, Sr. and Bruce Nugent place the story firmly in a Harlem undergoing its historical renaissance.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Director Nicole A. Watson is keen to note that while the drama is set against the backdrop of history, including the Great Migration, these characters are highly contemporary. Further, the play should not have the expectations of "a sepia-toned Ken Burns documentary."

"I don't want all plays that have a time period to feel like they have to be historical documents or museum pieces," Watson said. "Sometimes we have to explode all of that."

Watson's approach to the script, while not experimental, abstracts some of the design elements for a more poetic interpretation of the blues. "The apartments are there but not in any realistic way," Watson said. "It's a more open gesture."