



“THE HOUSE THAT WILL NOT STAND”

Troi Bechet Stars in Le Petit Production About Free Women of Color

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

Troi Bechet has a resume that stretches out over three pages in small type. And that’s only her acting, directing and singing credits! Add in her accomplishments as the founder and CEO of a beneficial community service organization and the number jumps to five pages!!

A multi-talented, award-winning, community-dedicated New Orleans native, Troi is currently adding to her already-impressive resume by taking on

the lead role in “The House That Will Not Stand,” a stage play about the ups and downs of the *plaçage* system that prevailed in antebellum New Orleans in the early years of the 1800s. Written by Marcus Gardley, the 2019 Obie Award-winning play is currently running at Le Petit Theater in the French Quarter through March 20.

For those unfamiliar with the term, “*plaçage*” refers to “a recognized extralegal

system in French and Spanish slave colonies of North America by which ethnic European men entered into civil unions with non-Europeans of African, Native American and mixed-race descent,” according to Wikipedia.

“It’s an interesting piece,” said Troi who plays Beartrice, the matriarch of a *plaçage* family of three unwed daughters. “I like period pieces that tell stories that are seldom told. It’s a story of free people

of color and the impact of the *plaçage* system.” The eight-member cast consists of entirely African American women, including herself, Troi added.

A serious drama liberally sprinkled with bursts of humor, the plot line centers around how Beartrice and her daughters react to the recent death of Beartrice’s common-law husband of 30 years and what will be their fate.

“She is caught in a serious dilemma and my job is to portray her character in that way,” Troi said. “It hasn’t been a happy relationship for her but she has been able to live in what would be considered luxury, particularly for an African American woman. She wants to have enough wealth to be able to care for her daughters in a way that allows them to maintain some semblance of freedom. So when her husband dies she is not sure what her financial security will be moving forward.”

Troi continues, “Her daughters see *plaçage* as a way to live in the same style they’ve been accustomed to. They see it as a way out and she sees it as slavery. The gruffness in her interactions with them comes from a place of love and I have to make the audience see that.”

Tommye Myrick, Tameka Bob, Jarrell Hamilton, Elexis Selmon, Grace Gibson, Laurita Marie and Eden James are the other cast members. abigail jean-baptiste directs.

Fresh from her triumphant directorial

role in “FLY,” a play about the Tuskegee Airmen staged in February at the Jefferson Performing Arts Center in Metairie, Myrick played a key role in Troi’s acting career. Troi proudly noted that it began to take flight under Myrick’s direction in the 1990s with a play titled “Voices in the Dark,”

which became the name of Myrick’s still-ongoing production company.

“She was my first director,” Troi said. “I didn’t seriously get into acting until I was about 30. When Tommye founded Voices in the Dark I auditioned for that ensemble and that was where I really cut my teeth and started acting. She was and still is a great mentor.”

A short time prior to taking on this role, Troi wrote and starred in a two-person stage production about the late, world-renowned, New Orleans-born gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Titled “Flowers for Halie,” she received rave reviews for her singing of some of Jackson’s standards and relating Jackson’s story in a staged interview with a young student reporter. “Flowers for Halie” was nominated for two



Big Easy Awards: Best Original Play and Best Actress in a Musical.

Troi received a Big Easy Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her portrayal of Caroline in the Jefferson Performing Arts Society production of Tony Kushner’s “Caroline, or Change.” From the Tennessee Williams canon she has performed in “A Streetcar Named Desire” and “The Night of the Iguana.”

In addition to more than 20 other stage productions, three of which she wrote, Troi has filmed half a dozen television commercials, appeared in several feature films and has performed at JazzFest, French Quarter Fest, the House of Blues and several recent conventions. She was also an opening act for Stevie Wonder.

And Troi’s busy life doesn’t stop there.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TROI BECHET

When she is not singing, acting or directing she is happily working at her full time “day job” as the founder and executive director of Center for Restorative Approaches, a non-profit organization aimed at peacefully and productively resolving issues of conflict and crime.

“I started the CRA in 2008 when we had children who had been traumatized by Katrina and the impact of having to leave their homes and not having a home to come back to for long periods of time,” Troi explained. “The work that I do is about changing that. Looking at the impact of one’s actions and repairing any harm that was done, even if that harm was unintentional.”

Her background in the performing arts comes in handy when dealing with some of these issues that affect young people. “We use poetry, music and dance to help get people motivated to see the subject matter we might be discussing,” she explained. “It’s often a way that allows you to have a break from the tension. When we don’t have that break it can be very hard for us to move forward.”

Relying heavily on a staff of volunteers, the CRA’s unique approach to airing out and solving young people’s problems involves seating them and their family members or mentors and people they have harmed in a circle and talking the problems out and coming to resolutions together. “We have a 95 percent success rate helping these young people to understand the impact of their actions and to repair

the harm they have caused,” she proudly noted.

Citing what she termed “a dearth of accessible social services in the city,” Troi noted that millions of dollars are spent incarcerating young people who might need those types of services.

“You can send a child to Harvard for the amount of money it takes to incarcerate a child for a year,” she said. “So we can spend a fourth of that money and invest it in education, healthcare and mental health care or we can wait until the young person gets into trouble when it will cost more. That’s a backwards way of navigating life for people who have challenges,” she added.

She continued by stating, “I love doing what I do with the young people, helping them to have stronger relationships that are healthier and more productive.”

So, with all these activities and projects going on or in the works, how does Troi Bechet do it? “I don’t sleep,” she laughs. In truth she admits to getting three to five hours of rest but once she gets going, it’s nonstop.

“When you’re doing something that you love you just find the energy to make it work,” she proudly states. “So I do it with my day job and my night job. It fills the bill and there I go.”



PHOTO BY JEN PAGAN



PHOTO BY JOHN BARROIS



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Remaining performances of “The House That Will Not Stand” run through March 20. Show times are 7:30 p.m. and 3:00 pm Sundays. Order tickets online at www.lepetittheatre.com or by calling 504-522-2081. Le Petit Theatre is located at 616 St. Peter Street in the heart of the French Quarter.