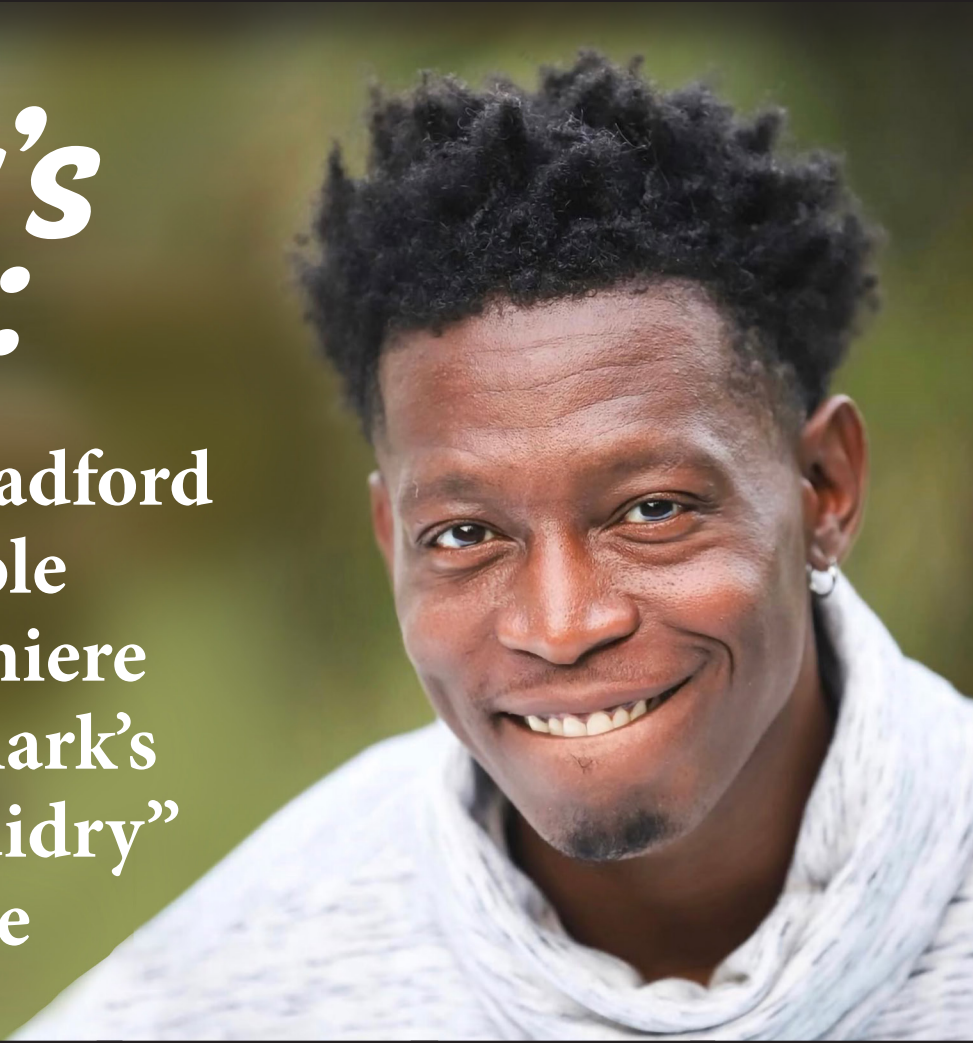


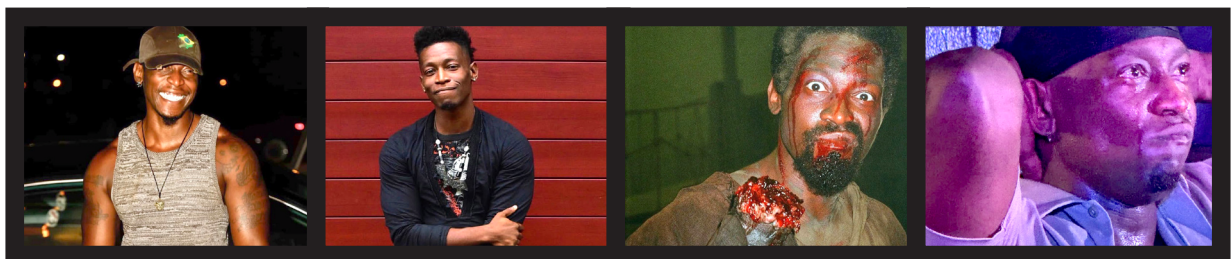
An Actor's Journey:

Martin “Bats” Bradford performs a key role in the world premiere of Harold Ellis Clark’s “Ganking Mr. Guidry” at Le Petit Theatre

By Anita Oubre



“It’s not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me”
is a quote from the comic book and film superhero we all
know and love as Batman.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTIN “BATS” BRADFORD

The same description could fit New Orleans-born-and-raised actor, writer, poet, filmmaker, podcaster and teaching artist Martin “Bats” Bradford. Throughout his acting career, he has appeared in more than 60 roles in films and television episodes.

Local audiences will have an opportunity to see Bats perform onstage in a key role at Le Petit Theatre in the world premiere of Harold Ellis Clark’s latest stage play, “Ganking Mr. Guidry.” Five performances of the play will be staged in the historic theatre at 616 St. Peter Street in the French Quarter between August 13-16.

The play is set in 1878 on the site of a sugar plantation where five workers set out to take a stand against injustice. Bats plays the character named Junie.

Explaining the origin of his nickname, Bats said, “It was given to me as a youngster who loved to perform at poetry slams under the ‘Batman’ moniker. Eventually it was shortened and adopted as a stage name for tv/film, because in a sea of names it would catch the eyes of casting directors. Storytelling is what has defined me for decades, and when someone reads the name ‘Bats,’ they look twice, ask questions, and want to know what that story is.”

Born and raised in the Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans, Bats attributes much of his professional success to his grandmother, the late Joyce Bradford. “My grandmother would always have me doing speeches or speaking in front of people,” he said. “She wanted to make sure she was raising an educated and articulate Black Man, a common saying she’d repeat to me.”

The first audience for Bats was the congregation at St. Mark’s 4th Baptist Church. He was involved in everything

from weekly Bible studies to children’s church and vacation Bible school. “If you want to cultivate an artist, do so in the church because one thing is for sure...the congregation will not boo you,” he advised with a laugh. “...that encouragement early on is priceless.”

Bats attended Bienville Elementary, where one year in particular he wrote and directed the school’s Christmas play. This memory stands out in his mind as he refers to it as “the battery put in my back.” He was encouraged by his teachers, as he wrote and performed skits, which helped him thrive as a young artist.

After attending Eleanor McMain, where Bats attended both middle and high school, he knew he was serious about acting. He started attending auditions in and out of school, which led to learning the fundamentals of being an actor, as well as the art of connecting with audiences.

“Before the legends influenced me, it was the kids on Nickelodeon and Disney. Being a kid and seeing other kids do it pushed me to know this was possible,” said Bats. “There were no other kids around me who dreamed of being an actor.”

Bats looked up to actors like Will Smith, Denzel Washington, Sam Jackson, Don Cheadle, Viola Davis, Angela Bassett and Regina King. His theatre teachers and directors all played crucial roles in his life and inspired him in his journey. And, of course, his greatest influences were his mother and grandmother. His mother, Shari Bradford Capers, in particular being his prime motivator. “Whatever you do baby, DON’T STOP, we have your back” she’d say.

Bats would go on to earn his Bachelor of Arts degree from Dillard University, where he thrived in the theatre department and held positions with WDUB radio as a personality and reporter for the Dillard Courtbouillon student newspaper.

It was during this time that Bats creative juices began to flow as he was acting as well as writing screenplays, poetry, and taking an interest in editing film. He was also one



Joyce Bradford and Martin Bats Bradford



Martin “Bats” Bradford with his mother Shari Bradford Capers

the creators of the GumboMonster504 YouTube page, as well as The FlyWithBats podcast.

The FlyWithBats show thrived for several years, well before the podcast movement became popular. “We were young Black guys talking about it all - social issues, TV and movies and more. It was therapeutic. A process of growth and learning,” Bats recalled.

After graduating, Bats was determined to act full-time. He went on as many auditions as possible. He was hungry for industry knowledge and eventually learned how to secure an agent. His big break came when he was cast in “American Horror Story: Coven.”

Bats worked alongside Oscar- and Emmy Award-winning actor Kathy Bates for the episode. He first met the actress when he was going over his lines, and she asked if he wanted to run lines together.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTIN “BATS” BRADFORD



"I remember that she was so giving," he recalled. "She told me she could tell I was a trained actor, and the kicker I will always remember is when she asked me if I had any ideas on how she could take me down for this particular scene. It was my first gig ever and she included me as if I were her colleague."

Another colleague came in the form of a childhood hero in Samuel L. Jackson, who he played alongside in the series *The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey*. "Working with Sam was a God send, and gaining him as a friend afterwards was the icing on the king cake." Commenting on his upcoming role in "Ganking Mr. Guidry," Bats said, "I had worked with Hal before as well as the director, John Grimsley. I read the play, fell in love with it, and with the character. My character is basically the crew's restless rebel. He has a mission on his mind at his plantation to claim something that he believes is his, and he's not letting anyone stop him from achieving this goal," said Bats.



To prepare for the role, as with any role, Bats says he studies the story itself, the background, and who the character is before the audience even meets them. "Acting isn't just memorizing some lines. It's story telling. A lot of it is bringing your own experiences, bringing your own imagination, bringing your own perspective to the character that you're portraying," Bats emphasized.

Having visited Whitney Plantation, Bats said the experience was eye-opening. "I am educated, thanks to my grandmother instilling history lessons in me. I'm 'woke,' as they say, so I knew a lot going into the grounds, but then you get there and realize there are so many things that we are not taught. There are so many things we do not know. These human beings were able to find joy even in the thick of dark," said Bats. He suggests that the play is another opportunity to tell a story we do not hear much about today.

"A play like this is a reminder that no matter how far we've gone, we still have more places to go. But just because we're better off today doesn't mean we've reached the finish line or the equity and quality that our communities deserve."

When not perfecting his craft, Bats enjoys roller blading, binging on TV/movies, and



going out with friends. His hobbies include writing, shooting short films, attending plays, and comedy shows. Bats enjoys the arts and supporting other artists. "Artists inspire me; it's a beautiful thing to see people living out their passion. I have such respect for other people's craft and our entire local arts community" said Bats.

Bats stresses that he is "just a regular guy looking for the next gig." He emphasized that folks might think he "has made it" because he is on TV and that he must be rich. "In reality, I'm just a regular guy going from gig to gig and looking for that next one."

And between gigs, this self-proclaimed "comic book head" continues to read and collect them, with Batman as his favorite.

For tickets to "Ganking Mr. Guidry" call (504) 522-2081 or visit the Le Petit Theatre box office at 616 St. Peter Street between 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. weekdays. The show runs from August 13-16. Bats Bradford can be reached online at @Misterbats and @thefwbnetwork



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