

## 'For Colored Girls' cast, director, on the historic Broadway revival

Director Camille A. Brown and members of the cast talked to theGrio about the latest production of Ntozake Shange's famous choreo-poem.



Matthew Allen | Mar 29, 2022



Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* has captivated audiences for nearly 50 years. Since its Broadway debut in 1976, the late Shange's 'choreo-poem' chronicling the stories of seven Black women has been a source of empowerment for generations of viewers and actresses alike.

The work has been adapted for film twice — first in 1982, starring Alfre Woodard and Lynn Whitfield — and again in 2010, starring Janet Jackson, directed by Tyler Perry. This April, *for colored girls* makes its return to Broadway. Directed and choreographed by Tony Award-nominee Camille A. Brown, the latest revival comes at a time when Black theater productions on Broadway have increased.

The latest production of *for colored girls* is at the Booth Theater, the same venue where the original played in 1976. This current version finds Brown stepping into historic territory marking her Broadway directorial debut.



Director/Choreographer Camille A. Brown during rehearsals for the revival of "for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf" at The Collective Paper Factory Hotel on March 11, 2022 in New York City. (Photo by Bruce Glikas/Getty Images)

"It's the first time in over 65 years that a Black woman has directed and choreographed on Broadway. The last woman to do that was Katherine Dunham," Brown told *theGrio*. "So, there's a lot of responsibility and honor that I have, holding that space of Ntozake's legacy, but also holding the space of Katherine Dunham, too. It's just really a tremendous honor."

*for colored girls* has always been part of Camille's life in some way. As a child, she first saw the book's cover in her aunt and uncle's Brooklyn apartment, but it was her mom who planted the words of the play into her psyche.

"My mother would always tell me, and she still tells me today, 'Don't ever let anyone take your stuff away.' And it wasn't until a couple of years ago that I realized that it was from this play that she had seen on Broadway," Brown said. "'Somebody almost walked off with all of my stuff' is the poem that she references from that. So this piece has been a part of the fabric of my being since I can remember."

*for colored girls* was part of many of the cast members' lives for many years as well. Both Amara Granderson and D. Woods, playing Lady in Orange and Lady in Yellow, respectively, called the work a "rite of passage" for young women. Okwui Okpokwasili, who plays Lady in Green, says that the piece blew her mind when she first read it.

"I loved the piece because I recognized the voices. I could hear women I knew, girls I knew, in the poetry," Okpokwasili said.

Each member of the ensemble feels the importance of bringing Shange's piece to life for a new audience. "All of the people in our cast are so determined and so glad to be in the experience that we're very much at all in this together, all with the same trajectory. So it's really, really humbling and really great," Granderson said.

"Being a part of such a legendary piece on Broadway, I feel a huge amount of responsibility," said Stacey Sargeant, who plays Lady in Blue. "But at the same time, there's a freedom in knowing that as long as we make it personal and stay honest, then I think we will all do our jobs well."



Stacey Sargeant and Amara Granderson during rehearsals for the revival of the Broadway play "for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf" on March 11, 2022 in New York City. (Photo by Bruce Glikas/Getty Images)

One aspect that separates *for colored girls* from other stage productions is its format as a 'choreo-poem,' a term coined by Shange to reflect its singular combination of music, movement, and poetry.

"I think inherent in Black culture there is a musicality for who we are. There's a demonstratively physical aspect to us when we speak," Sargeant stated. "It's full-bodied. And so I think this piece being a choreo-poem is in alignment with that. And so to make it anything else, so it would be like the antithesis of who we are as a people."

For Brown, choreographing and directing *for colored girls* presented a distinct challenge. It was particularly hard after choreographing last fall's historic production of the New York Metropolitan Opera, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, written by director Kasi Lemmons with music by Terence Blanchard based on *New York Times* columnist Charles M. Blow's memoir.

"It feels like an exhale to me as a choreographer to lead with movement and text," Brown explained. "That space that [Shange] made for me and for other choreographers and directors who have come before me with this text, I think is something that's wonderful and it's really is a true gift to dive into."

The cast is thrilled to have Brown lead the production as director and choreographer. "It's a joy to be with Camille in this space," Okpokwasili said. "She really knows how to hold and protect community, to protect exploration. She brings a clarity of purpose and vision, but also an enormous generosity."

Previews of *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* [begin on April 1](#). From there, the show will run for a limited 20-week engagement, starting on April 20.