

Geva Theatre begins the new year with *Nina Simone: Four Women* On Stage January 14 - February 9

Rochester, N.Y. — Geva continues its season with *Nina Simone: Four Women* by **Christina Ham**, Directed by **Charlotte Brathwaite**, with Music Direction by **Justin Hicks**. The original music in the production is collectively composed by **Justin Hicks**, **YATTA (aka. ricky sallay zoker)**, and **X'ene Sky**. On September 16, 1963, Nina Simone heard that four Black girls were murdered in Birmingham when the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed by the KKK. Harnessing her rage, she wrote the Civil Rights anthem “Mississippi Goddam.” *Nina Simone: Four Women* examines the seismic shift Simone took from artist to activist and revolutionary, and her fight to reflect the times through her consciousness rising music, “Four Women,” “Images,” and “Young, Gifted and Black,” among others. It questions what happens when artists dive into the darkness of society and self while striving to find the light of freedom in sound. This production runs on the Wilson Stage January 14 - February 9, 2025. Tickets are on sale now; visit GevaTheatre.org or call the Box Office at 585-232-GEVA(4382).

Director Charlotte Brathwaite shared, “Nina Simone refused to look away from the senseless violence aimed at the Black community. Speaking straight to the truth of what she saw and felt, she sang out loud what others were afraid to say. In this production we reimagine her sound through the lens of the American experience from 1963 until today. We honor Simone’s transformation from artist to activist and revolutionary through aural and visual storytelling carrying forth what she saw as her ‘duty as an artist to reflect the times’.”

The Cast:

Sojourner Brown (she/her) as Sephronia/Nina is currently in the cast of *Hadestown* on Broadway! Other credits include *Elsbeth* on CBS, an upcoming feature - *The Snare*, NBC’s “Scene in Color Series,” and Hollywood Bowl’s *Beauty and the Beast*. Sojourner worked as a recording artist for Walt Disney Records’ DCappella and premiered with the group on *American Idol*, Disney Channel, Freeform, and *The Incredibles 2* movie soundtrack. She is currently recording her debut folk album and continues to write and publish poetry. Her poetry was recently published in *Black Love Letters*, with a foreword by John Legend (available at Barnes & Noble and book stores nation-wide). NYU Tisch.

Hillary Jones (she/her) as Sweet Thing/Nina. Born and raised in chocolate city Washington D.C, Hillary started her journey as an artist at Duke Ellington School of the Arts and went on to graduate from the SUNY Purchase BFA acting conservatory. Since then she has trained her breath and body in Europe, worked on-camera and on-stage in projects ranging from national

commercials to her work at the National Theatre as the lead in *Imagine*. Her skill set is diverse in that she also works as a Movement choreographer, Fight coordinator, Writer, Creative director, and Activist. Her next strides will be in creating film and theatre with a focus on working with artists who can Disrupt, Change and heal our industry.

Kenita R. Miller (she/her) as Sarah/Nina. Broadway: *For Colored Girls* (Lady In Red/Tony Nomination, Drama Desk & Drama League), *Come From Away* (Hannah), *Once On This Island* (Mama Euralie/Grammy Nom.), *The Color Purple* (Celie), *Xanadu* (Erato/Kira understudy). Off-Broadway: *Dessa Rose* (Dessa Rose Standby), *Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* (Granny) (Encores!), *Bella: An American Tall Tale* (Miss Cabbagestalk/Mama), *Merrily We Roll Along* (Encores!), *Wild Party* (Encores!), *Langston In Harlem* (Zora Neale Hurston - Drama Desk Nom./Audelco Award), *Working* (Drama Desk Award), *Avenue Q*. Regional: *Parade* (Minnie McKnight, Angela/2014 Barrymore Award Outstanding Featured Actress), *Once On This Island* (Timoune/Mama Euralie), *Ragtime* (Sarah). Film/TV: *Tick Tick Boom*, *Sesame Street*, *Bull*, *Hostages*, *Blacklist*.

X'ene Sky (she/her) as Eunice/Pianist/Nina & Composition. X'ene is a classically trained pianist, vocalist and composer from Los Angeles, California. She has studied at the Highschool of Performing and Visual Arts and holds degrees in piano performance and musicology from The University of Texas at Austin. A descendant of the musical legacy of both Nina Simone and Beethoven, her teachers include Kana Mimaki, Betty Mallad, Nancy Garrett, Sophia Gilmsen, Tracy Satterfiled, Lindsay Kesselman, and Micaela Tobin. She has performed with the Houston Grand Opera, Walt Disney Concert Hall, and most recently was the titular performer in Justen LeRoy's opera, *X'ene's Witness*. X'ene's compositional work focuses on ritual, repetition, slavery and the environment. She is currently working on her own opera *GOAT* and a visual album, *Vengeance*, expected Fall 2025.

Garnet Williams (she/they) as Peaches/Nina. Garnet is an actor, writer, and singer originally from Atlanta, GA. Some favorite roles include Bombalurina in *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, City Weed in *Brooklyn*, Pythio in *Head Over Heels*, and a co-star on *American Horror Story NYC*.

The Creative Team:

Christina Ham's (Playwright) (she/her) plays have been developed and produced both nationally and internationally with the Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Center Theater Group, The Guthrie Theater, Ensemble Studio Theatre, The Goodman Theater, Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Tony Award winning producer Arielle Tepper Madover off-Broadway at Theater Row, South Africa's The Market Theatre, the Tokyo International Arts Festival among many others. Her theater for young audiences play *Four Little Girls: Birmingham: 1963* was directed by Tony Award-winning actress Phylicia Rashad and performed in front of a sold-out audience at the Kennedy Center to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. It was simultaneously presented in 47 states across the country and streamed worldwide to commemorate the bombing with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former Attorney General Eric Holder conducting the post-show discussion in Birmingham. Her

theater for young audiences musical *Ruby!: The Story of Ruby Bridges* was the best-selling show in the history of St. Paul's SteppingStone Theatre. To read Christna's full bio, visit her website [here](#).

This production is directed by **Charlotte Brathwaite** (she/her/we). Charlotte is a creator, director, and producer of original genre-defying works that illuminate the realities and dreams of those whose stories have been marginalized, silenced and ignored. Her trans-disciplinary inquiry manifests as immersive gatherings of color, music, and she has collaborated with noted artists such as Meshell Ndegeochello, Jacqueline Woodson, adrienne maree brown, Justin Hicks, Ayesha Jordan, Peter Sellars, Kyle Abraham, and Malick Welli amongst others. Recipient of major grants, awards and fellowships including Doris Duke, United States Artists, Art Matters, Creative Capital and the Princess Grace, her works have been presented across the globe in North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. Co-Founder of Forgotten Paradise Projects in Dakar, Senegal.

The rest of the creative team includes Musical Direction & Composition by **Justin Hicks** (he/him; Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, The Public Theater, Baryshnikov Art Center), Scenic & Light Design by **Kent Barrett** (he/him; The Park Avenue Armory, Harlem Stage, La MaMa, Signature, The Public, The Brooklyn Lyceum, and Lincoln Center), Costume Designer **Marsha Ginsberg** (she/her; *Primary Trust* at Roundabout, 2023 Obie Award for the Creative Team for Sanaz Toosi's *English*), Sound Design & Composition by **YATTA (aka. ricky sallay zoker)** (they/them; compositions have been featured in award-winning films like *Nanny* and *Seeking Mavis Beacon*), and Hair & Wig Design by **Cassie Williams** (*Arms and the Man* [Theatre Row], *Otherworld* [Delaware Theatre Company], Glimmerglass Opera Festival 2021 Summer Season; Broadway [Associate Design]: *Our Town*, *Purlie Victorious*, *Once Upon One More Time*, *Be More Chill*). The Production Stage Manager is **Kevin Gregory Dwyer** (he/him; Geva: *How I Learned What I Learned*, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*; Regional: *Bandstand*, *Jersey Boys*, *A Chorus Line*, *EVITA* (The REV Theatre Co); National Tours: *The Book of Mormon*) with Assistant Stage Manager **Kate Duprey** (she/her; Geva: *The Color Purple*, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*, *Constellations*). Casting Director **Erica Jensen, CSA**.

Geva's 52nd Season is sponsored by ESL Federal Credit Union with Honorary Season Producer Dr. Dawn Lipson. *Nina Simone: Four Women* is presented with support from Lead Producer Buckingham Properties and Media Sponsors Jazz 90.1 and WROC Channel 8.

TICKET AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

When: January 14 - February 9, 2025

Where: On the Wilson Stage, 75 Woodbury Boulevard, Rochester, New York 14607

To Purchase: Tickets may be purchased [online](#), by calling 585-232-GEVA(4382), or in-person from the Box Office. *All prices, dates, and times are subject to change.*

Accessibility: Learn about our accessibility options [here](#).

Connectivity at Geva: Learn more about these programs [here](#).

Geva Insights | Tuesday, Jan 21 | Following the Performance • FREE*

Geva is proud to be partnering with the University of Rochester's Black Studies Department on several post-show discussions this season. Department Chair Dr. Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr. will be joined by Dr. Jordan Ealey to discuss Nina Simone's legacy and her impact on music and activism. **Tickets to attend the performance are required.*

Mondays at Geva | Monday, Jan 27 | 6 - 8 p.m. • FREE

We invite you to be part of our Mondays at Geva series, where we will pay tribute to the timeless musical legacy of Nina Simone. This special event will take place on Monday, January 27th, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 p.m. in the welcoming lobby of Geva Theatre. Experience the captivating fusion of jazz standards and Nina Simone's iconic tunes, brought to life by the talented Mel Henderson Trio, featuring Quiana Joseph-Muhammad.

About Geva Theatre

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs, and services of a national standard.

Geva offers a wide variety of educational, engagement, and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Geva Theatre sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the O-non-dowa-gah, or "the people of the Great Hill." In English, they are known as the Seneca people, "the keeper of the western door." They have stewarded this land through generations, and Geva pays respect and gives thanks to their elders, past and present.

Geva is under the leadership of Artistic Director Elizabeth Williamson and Executive Director James Haskins.

Find out more about Geva Theatre at GevaTheatre.org or by connecting with us on social media. Facebook: facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter, Twitter: [@gevatheatre](https://twitter.com/gevatheatre), Instagram: [@gevatheatre](https://instagram.com/gevatheatre), LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center.

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