



www.ncarts.org

This project was supported by the
N.C. Arts Council, a division of the Department of
Cultural Resources, with funding from the
National Endowment for the Arts

SOULWORKS/ANDREA E. WOODS & DANCERS
20TH ANNIVERSARY 2014 SEASON



*The
Amazing
Adventures
of*

Grace May B. Brown

A musical spirit dance/folk performance
Written, Choreographed and Directed by
Andrea E. Woods Valdés

MAY 2, 3, 4
2014

DURHAM ARTS COUNCIL'S PSI THEATER
120 MORRIS STREET

COMMEMORATIVE PROGRAM & LIBRETTO

**SOULWORKS/ANDREA E. WOODS & DANCERS
20TH ANNIVERSARY 2014 SEASON**



The Amazing Adventures of Grace May B. Brown

A musical spirit dance/folk performance

Written, Choreographed and Directed by Andrea E. Woods Valdés

Featuring

Dancers: Jessica Burroughs, Chanelle Croxton,
Aya Shabu, Kara M. Simpson and Andrea E. Woods

Narrator: Dorothy N. Clark

Music composed by Shana Tucker

Lyrics by Andrea E. Woods Valdés

Additional compositions/arrangements: Julia Price

Costumes: Pamela Bond inspired by the quilts of Heather A. Williams

Additional music - Drums: Stephen Coffman

Bass and Sound Editing: Peter Kimosh

Video Production: A.E. Woods Valdés

Lighting Design: Kathy Perkins

Stage Manager: Tony Johnson

Publicity/Program Design: Jennifer Prather

Photos: Alec Himwich

Friday & Saturday

May 2 & 3, 7PM

Sunday, May 4th, 3:30PM

Durham Arts Council's PSI Theater

The Amazing Adventures of Grace May B. Brown is a soulful, spirit-filled, dancing, musical folk performance. Represented by her cousin sidekicks, **Mercy**, **Indeed**, **Um Hm** and **Well**, Grace retells history and folklore through dance, music and song, whispers and shouts. Her stories are also told through **Nanadwoa** and **Sister Seychelles**, the storyteller wimmin to whom Grace entrusts with her memories and her magic. Her adventures time travel in and out of generations of folk who direct her toward a sense of belonging. Grace May's story is one of praise and laughter, kin and dust. The world opens to her lovely, sassy wings:

"Who are you and where do you belong?"

"I am Grace and I belong everywhere."

Dancers

Jessica Burroughs as *Um-Hm*

Chanelle Croxton as *Indeed*

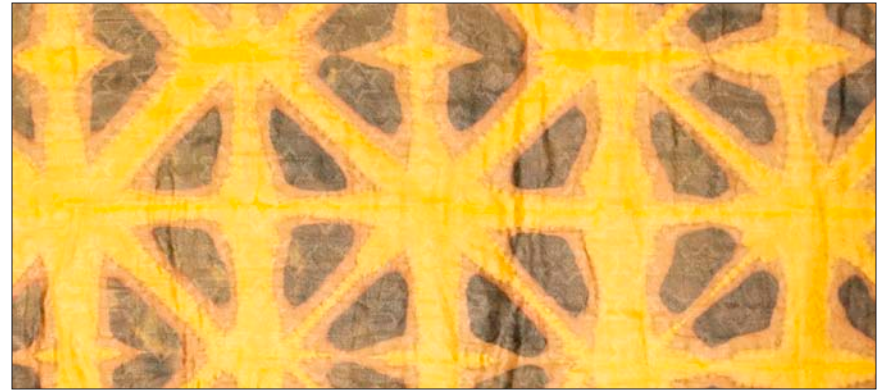
Aya Shabu as *Well*

Kara M. Simpson as *Mercy*

and

Andrea E. Woods Valdés as *Nanadwoa*, a storyteller woman

Dorothy N. Clark as *Sister Seychelles*, narrator



Scenes

- i. **Openin'**
- ii. **The Biginnin'**
- iii. **The Book & The Cell**
- iv. **The Cloak - The Gift of Love**
- v. **Ancestors – The Gift of Steppin' Ahead**
- vi. **Birthday Party/Soweto Uprising -The Gift of Flight**
Interlude - Li'l Gracie May
- vii. **"Mum, tangerine"- The Gift of Protecting Yourself**
- viii. **Champions and Sheroes – The Gift of Confidence**
- ix. **Food Song – The Gift of Health**
- x. **Hunting Season is Ova-The Gift of Black Boys & Men**
- xi. **Solid and Soft – The Gift of Love Memories**
- xii. **Finale/Already Here**



Note from the choreographer/writer

The primary components of the work are dance, song, music and narration. Each scene is written to move into and out of a dance sequence. I call the work a contemporary praise dance/folk performance because it uses dance, song, spirituality, music, and narration as multilayered story telling.

Grace and her supporting cast/family have learned to laugh, to imagine, to cry and to shout life into being what they want it to be and the legacy of their ancestral lessons is what they take into the future as a way of making the world around us a better place to be/long.

Grace May B. Brown is an idea more than a person. She is the irrepressible light inside of anyone who has ever asked, “Who am I? Where did I come from? How are we important to one another and where do I belong now?” This dance wants us all to know, “You are Grace and you belong everywhere.” Grace is always present and we have all earned it just by living life. Even for just a moment, living life is believing and believing knows Grace unbound.

As Grace May journeys through history and contemporary life, her ancestors, friends and sheroes lead her to places and stories that are part of our shared history. Her generous worldview is shaped by her curiosity about and affection for life and people. She was raised as a loved and valued child, nurtured and sent on her way to share her sense of justice and humility. With a dash of thought provoking salt and vinegar, humor and deep sincerity Grace remembers herself and others as treasures in a world that reciprocates with confusion and sometimes with hostility. And yes, through it all, she and companions manage to remains, Grace-full.



About the Artists

Artistic Director **Andrea E. Woods Valdés** is an associate professor of dance at Duke University teaching modern dance and dance for the camera. She currently directs the Duke In Ghana summer study and teaches fieldworks and ethnographic research methods. Previous resident of Brooklyn, NY, and native of Philadelphia, Woods has danced with Clive Thompson, Mafata, Saeko Ichinohe and Leni Wylliams dance companies. She is a former dancer/rehearsal director of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Co. and has a BFA in dance from Adelphi University and an MFA in dance from Ohio State, and an MAH in Caribbean Cultural Studies from SUNY Buffalo. Woods is a staff writer for *Attitude: The Dancers' Magazine*. Her work has taken her to: Cannes, Taiwan, Russia, Senegal, Morocco, Korea, Poland, Singapore, Belize, Yucatán, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic, Ghana, Trinidad, Cuba and throughout the U.S. She has been guest artist at: Medgar Evers College, Howard University, Ohio University, Rhode Island College, California State University Long Beach, North Carolina School of the Arts, Hollins University, Sarah Lawrence, Goucher College, NYU Tisch School of the Arts (faculty) and Spelman College. Woods is a recipient of the NC Arts Council 2012 Fellowship. She calls her dances SOULOWORKS because they are works from the heart, works from the Soul.



Jessica Burroughs has been dancing for over 21 years. While in elementary school, she began African dance with Wesley Williams. She attended Durham School of the Arts and Hillside High School, where she studied Dunham, Graham and ballet techniques under Lisa Wilder and Nicole Oxindine. In 2001 was apart of the Hillside High School Dance Company and in 2003 was awarded Dancer of the Year by her peers. She has taken master class with the Dallas Black Dance Theater, Chuck Davis and the Af-

frican American Dance Ensemble, and in 2003 she performed with Ballethic Dance Company in their production of *The Leopard Tale*. Jessica attend North Carolina A&T and was a member of the band as a dancer. Throughout college she always found a way to keep dancing and to continue teaching to kids that had a passion for the performing arts. Jessica has volunteered at numerous schools within Guilford and Durham County. She is currently a teacher's assistant here at Hillside and plans to return to school for Dance Education.



Aya Shabu is a professional dancer, choreographer, and teaching artist living in Durham, North Carolina. A 2012-2013 Emerging Artist Grant recipient, Aya has choreographed for some of the Triangle's best theatrical productions, most notably "The Parchman Hour," "I Love My Hair" and "The Brothers Size." An alum of the nationally and internationally recognized African American Dance Ensemble, Aya is currently a dancer and drummer with *The Magic of African Rhythm*. Passionate about preserving African diaspora history and traditions, Aya is the co-creator of the Historic Hayti Walking Tour.



Chanelle 'C.C.' Croxton is a Washington, D.C., native and current Durham transplant, graduating from Duke University in 2012. While in Durham, C.C. has studied an array of dance techniques including forms of the African Diaspora under the direction of Ava L. Vinesett, and has had the opportunity to perform numerous works with the Duke African Repertory Ensemble. She has also studied modern dance techniques under Andrea E. Woods Valdés in the Duke Dance Program, as well as Marjani Forté and Rodger Belman during a season at the American Dance

Festival. C.C. is excited, Indeed, to collaborate with her former teacher and hopes to bring much sass, curiosity, verve, and humility (amongst other things) to the production as we tell ourstory.



Kara Simpson is from Gastonia, N.C. She's a 2013 alumna of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She began training at the Carolina School of Dance in Gastonia, NC. Kara began her formal training at the age of nine at Gaston Dance Theatre, where she trained in classical ballet, pointe, modern, tap, and jazz under the direction of Pat Wall, Tawny Rose Wall and Ed Campbell. Kara has performed in *The Nutcracker* and other ballets such as *Firebird*, *Don Quixote* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Upon entering

college, Kara continued to dance with MiscONception Hip-Hop Dance Company at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also studied with Duke University's Dance Program for three semesters under the direction of Andrea Woods Valdés and guest choreographer, Nathan Trice.

Dorothy Clark is a seasoned performer, playwright, director, and arts administrator. She has presented her unique brand of humor to audiences across the country. For over twenty-five years, Dorothy has acted and sung, creating some memorable characters that have evolved along with her. She has written and produced three full-length plays. A firm believer in the power of live theatre, Dorothy has been a founding member of Rites & Reason Theatre in Providence, RI., Renaissance Revival Theatre in Bingham, N.Y., and Front Porch Entertainment in Durham, N.C. She was the artistic director for the last two theatre companies.



Shana Tucker is a singer/songwriter and cellist whose self-described Chamber-Soul style of music is an eclectic blend of soulful, jazz-influenced acoustic pop and contemporary folk. Splitting her time between Durham, N.C. and Las Vegas, where she sings and plays cello for the show, “KÀ” by Cirque du Soleil, Shana’s performances also include songwriting workshops and artist residencies. Her composition credits include two commissions for The Washington Ballet (Washington, D.C.) and the soundtrack to “I Love My Hair” by Durham playwright Chaunesti Webb. Shana is thrilled and also honored to be a part of the Grace May B. Jones creative team. WWW.SHANATUCKER.COM



Additional compositions/Arrangements/
Flute — **Julia Price**

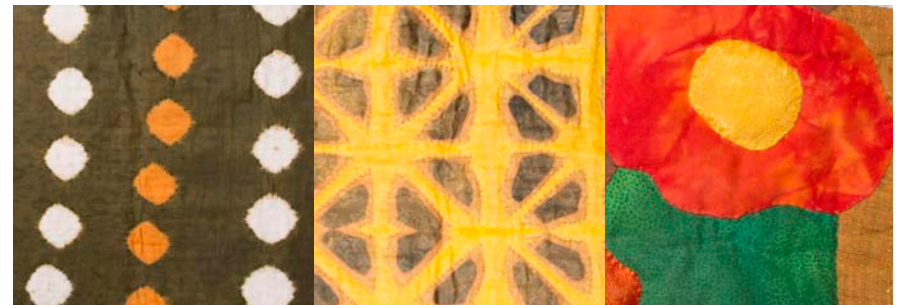
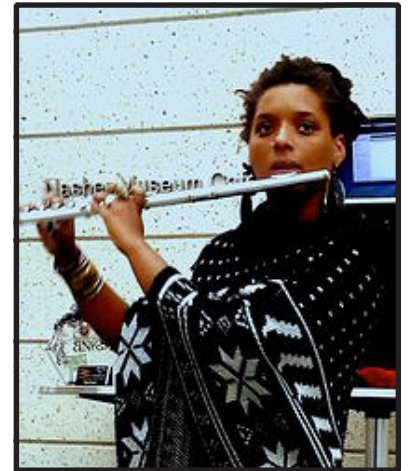
Sound is my entirety. It is my symbol. It is my body. It is my vision. It is the world. I started playing flute on August 10, 2004. From that point, nothing else took up my time other than discovering the anatomy of music through my instrument.

Flute became my body. My ears. My thoughts.

I was inspired by classical music – listening to well known flute concertos, sonatas and compositions that moved me. I had dreams as a teenager to perform the Mozart Concerto in G major as a soloist, and to perform a good chunk of the great flute repertoire.

Within a year or two, I was accepted into UNC school of the Arts as a sophomore in high school.

I expanded. Became attuned to new frequencies of music. Fell in love, with not only classical but with improvisation...jazz... Now above all, I envision myself as a creator. A thinker. One who views the world inside-out and creates parallel to this idiom. I’m an explorer. I want to hatch open the world through my ears – then apply all the senses afterwards. I’m constantly searching for (new) ingredients. Ingredients that are served through the fruits of physics, motion, cosmology, philosophy, art, and of course, music.





Costume designer and actress **Pamela A. Bond** is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She received a B.A. in Theatre, a B.S. in Textiles & Apparel and a M.A. in Textiles & Apparel from North Carolina Central University.

Her theatrical credits include lighting and scenery design for “Home” and “Raisin in the Sun.” Her debut performance was “Fascination Man,” which led to competition for the Irene Ryan Award, for which she won best actress in the Southeastern Region. She also performed in “Images” at National Black Theatre Festival, played

the roles of Katherine James in “Stealing Clouds,” Ruth Jackson in Howard Craft’s “The Wise Ones,” winner of the 2003 New Play Project, and Vonnice in “Heart To Heart” (all NCCU productions).

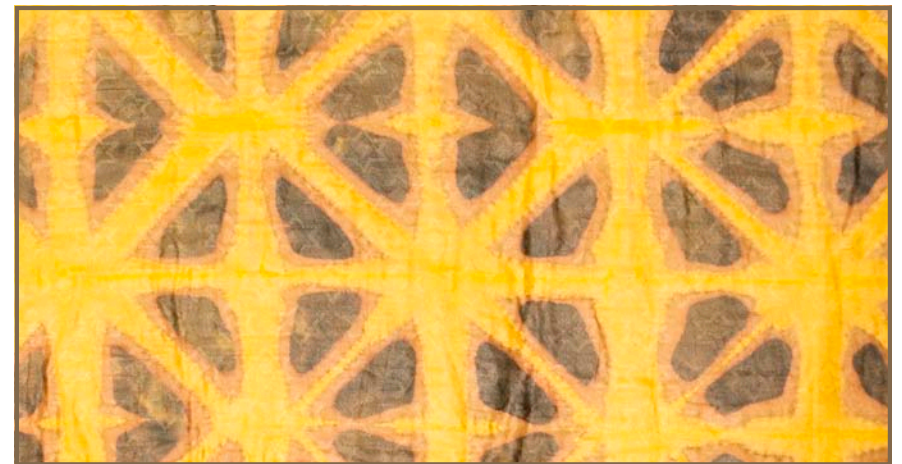
Her costume design credits include the educational video “Crafting Freedom” with the The Apprend Foundation, “Jackie O” with Long Leaf Opera and “For Colored Girls and Black Boys” at the National Black Theatre Festival. Mrs. Bond recently costumed “The Color Purple” with North Carolina Central University, and “Dreamgirls” with ANFO productions. She has conducted Workforce Wear Workshops across the state aiding Welfare to Work participants. Mrs. Bond is a member of Alpha Psi Omega Honor Society and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Among her other attributes, Mrs. Bond has clothing designs in local boutiques in the Research Triangle area.

Mrs. Bond serves as costume designer for Throne Life Media’s annual production of “Black Nativity,” and the costume designer for the Department of Theatre at North Carolina Central University. She resides in Durham with her husband, Alex, and four sons, Ronald, Stephen, Keenan, and Alex Jr.

Quilts by **Heather Andrea Williams** have been exhibited in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. In North Carolina she has had exhibitions at the Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery at UNC Chapel Hill, the National Humanities Center, and the Cary Arts Center. Her commissioned quilts are in collections in the American Studies Department at Yale University; the Kahn Institute at Smith College; the School of Social Work at Smith College; and the Stone Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Williams is a professor in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale University in 2002. Before that, she practiced law in Washington, D.C. and New York City. Through all of it, she has quilted. Her historical research has become a part of her quilts and the quilts have become part of the scholarship. Her quilts are featured on the covers of her books, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), and *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (UNC Press, June 2012).



The Amazing Adventures of Grace May B. Brown

*A musical praise dance/folk performance
in several acts w/ dance, song, music, video,
and narration*

By Andrea E. Woods Valdés ©2013-2014

1. Openin'

DANCE 4 Dancers and Nana burst onto the stage doing a stomping, slapping, clapping, panting, huffing and puffing dance. They wear themselves out! Finish in a position with their backs arched, arms wrapped around their breasts, chests lifted high; caught, like the crazy tickle moment before a sneeze when you are not sure if the sneeze is going to happen. Caught! In a tight grouping, they breathe audibly and they pant. A warm spotlight frames them. Cello only, blues melody. Coro will sway with the music. Continues while Sister Seychelles enters and speaks.

Sister Sey steps to center stage. Blues music begins

Sister Sey (SS) – Welcome. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Sister Seychelles also known as Sister Sey and I am a storyteller's storyteller. While he's telling his-story, she's telling her-story and they are telling their story, what we eventually get at is you telling your-story. But really we are all living it as part of our-story. So maybe I am *ourstory* teller for the course of this adventure.

Coro (*lifts arms like willows*) whispers - "Tell the story, tell the story."
(*They all swoop over to the box stage right. She has instruments: mbira, banjo, tambourine.*)

SS – Nanadwoa. Now she is the storytellerwomin. She makes her own folklore. She knows Grace. She has known Grace May for a very, very long time; through ups and downs, through riot and dead silence.

Nana (NA) – Yes, I am Nanadwoa. Adwoa because I was Monday born and Nana because I am an auntie and a queen. (*Laughs*) Yes, Queen. But when people call me Queen, they refer to one who walks softly, one who becomes, each day, more humble, one who knows fear, one who knows flaws, one who knows Grace best of all... Yes, I know Grace, but I am sure you know her too.

TRANSITION

ii. The Biginnin' (live spoken test w/Video #1)

SS – So, this is how we will begin... *(coro dances/gestures the narration)*
Underneath the canopy of tall, tall, trees is a little, yellow house.

NA – Not a shack,

SS – but a house.

SS/NA (together) – A little yellow house.

SS – In that house live a family and all of the children there know Grace May. The children are loved and loving. They know how to shake off trouble and they are learning to stay close to Grace. *(sings then hums)*...
“All day all night angels been watchin’ over me...” *(continues humming through coro chanting “I pity...”)* Angel Music plays in the background through “I Pity the River...”

Coro – *sing/short stomp dance* – “I pity the river, I pity the brook. I pity the one who messes in my book!” *(They dance with and oversized photo/scrapbook album. NA weaves in and out trying to get the book. Finally they freeze.)*

NA – *(challenging them)*. I Pity the River I pity the brook. I pity the one who messes in my book!

Coro – *(repeats a few times in a whisper, canon of voices)* “Nana, tell the story. Tell the story, Nana, tell the Story.” *(Dancer humbly hands over the book to Nana.)*

TRANSITION

iii. The Book & The Cell

SS – *(Brings back a sense of order. Each girl repeats her name after SS calls her)*

Well *(Well repeats to her name, sits near NA and SS)*

Um-Hm *(Um-Hm repeats to her name, sits near NA and SS)*

Mercy *(Mercy repeats to her name, sits near NA and SS)*

Indeed *(Indeed repeats to her name, sits near NA and SS)*

They are four angels, cousins, and as bad as the day is long. One might call them storytellers in training.

Coro – *(mocking and a bit challenging)* “I pity the river, I pity the brook. I pity the one who messes in my book”

NA – Oh, you are so bad! **The Book!** Yes the book. The Book has almost everything we need to know. Grace May has gifts. One of her greatest gifts is memory. She can remember anybody and everything. Not me, I am lost without my notes, lists, stories, photos, recipes, Oo peach cobbler. Mom says, “a good peach cobbler can keep a marriage together.”... scraps, my cell, songs *(sheet music)*, Everyone bursts into “Baba Fu-ru-ru, e-re-re-o!” *(Obatala father of the white cloth)*. The book can tell us almost anything.

(Cell phone rings/ “Pick up the phone Lady, pick up the phone” 2x)

NA – Who can be calling me now? Excuse me... *(Answers the phone moves downstage to talk)* “Hey!” *(with excitement at hearing Grace’s voice;*

Dancers strain to hear. They touch and hug. Grace’s voice is never heard.)

SS – It’s Grace calling to say she’s running late.

NA – Honey, where are you?!

SS – So much work to do! But everybody, even the audience, should carry on in her name.

NA – The people are waiting and looking for you. They are expecting

you. We are getting ready to tell them stories all about you. Oh... see, oh, I see...Iraq, the Congo, Uganda, Miami, Syria, Somalia, the Indian Ocean. I see...

SS – Grace trusts Nana, the dancers and the dance to tell the story...

NA – ...Yes, of course we can handle it ‘til you get here.

SS – *(directed to the audience)* Well, as usual, Grace is multi tasking. But lucky for you we are here to fill in. Don’t worry, she will call back and check on us and, we have the book!

Indeed and Mercy – The Book, Nana, the book!

Well and Um-Hm – Can the book tell us about love?

NA – Um-Hm, for that we can go right to Grace May’s stories. For Grace is cloaked in love.

SS – As a matter of fact, love is her cloaking device.

And so our adventure beings...

TRANSITION

iv. The Love Cloak – The Gift of Love

Projected Video #2 w/narration (SS live) and live mbira by NA, Coro – slow circle dance near center stage

SS – Now these are Grace May’s words...My mother and father taught me, Gran and Pop taught me, the ancestors taught me the thing you must always remember above all is, that your name is Grace and you belong everywhere.

(Um-Hm solo dance) A giant, shiny, crystal ball shattered, splintered, and pieces flew everywhere!! Far, far, so far they flew until you wouldn’t even know one piece was originally part of the others. A whole. The pieces were once a whole. Yes, the shattering was painful; so much hurt and fear. Yes, the shattering was unjust, ugly and unjust. Yes, truths un-told, lies retold. All of those pieces every which a way. How could anyone, anything put it back together again? Oh the sunder. Seemed like that crystal was put a sunder. Then, came the whisper, “just look for the love, Grace, cloak yourself in that love. Get down close to the earth, get down, open your eyes, open your heart and look for the love wherever you go. You will encounter many other things. Don’t be distracted; don’t be fooled. Insist on the love and know that it exists. Find the treasure inside of you and insist that you can find the same in others or help them find it within themselves.” As Max would say or play, “We Insist.” This time we insist on the love. Don’t be distracted; don’t be fooled. You will come across many things. You cannot put all those little pieces back together again. Cloak yourself in love and grow something new. Be part of the evolution of something grand that remembers and loves.

End the day as the happiest person in the world because you walk in light, you live in truth. Don’t be distracted; don’t be fooled. Get down close to the earth. Insist on the love and know that it exists. Even in the darkest moment, we are cloaked in love. Even as evil and apathy fly in the in the wind, we know of another kind of wind, the

winds of change. Oh, Grace May, ride the winds of change and let them take you everywhere for you are cloaked in love. Love is your cloaking device.

Wind Dance/music - Dancers use cloaks w/quilt patterns

TRANSITION

v. Ancestors – The Gift of Stepping Ahead

Nana & SS sing NA plays banjo: “Old Joe Clark” (2 choruses /1 verse)

NA w/ SS

Fare thee well, Old Joe Clark, Fare the well I say.
Fare thee well Old Joe Clark, I’m a goin’ away.” (2x)

I would not marry Old Joe Clark. Tell you the reason why.
Blows his nose in old cornbread, calls it chicken pie.

Old Joe Clark he had a house, fifteen stories high.
Every story in that house, filled with chicken pie.

Fare thee well, Old Joe Clark, Fare the well I say.
Fare thee well Old Joe Clark, I’m a goin’ away.” (2x)
...I’m a goin’ away. But I’m not goin’ away, no. I’m not goin’ away. (repeat and fade last line)

Well – Nana, why you singing those old timey songs?

Um-hm – Old Timey

SS – You like those old timey songs.

Mercy – How old are you anyway, Nana?

NA - I am 50, plus 50, minus 50, minus 50, plus 50.

Coro/SS – *(After some quick calculation/contemplation)*

Why Nana, that’s still 50!

NA – Yes, same age as the Civil Rights Act! Good for me, good for all of us! But you know why I say it like that? ‘Cause sometimes I feel like I live in the future, sometimes in the past. But come what may, Grace has shown me that this moment is all we really have. What ever goes right and what-ever goes wrong, it’s from today forward. You certainly can’t skip over any parts...*(NA & Coro use gestures)*

SS – ...and you certainly can’t live in reverse. *(Nana nods at her like they are a team)*

NA – Now why Joe Clark? Just for the fun of it. But I did some research and legend has it that Old Joe Clark was one of the first men to sign up for the Civil War. Nothing about the song is really true, just generations of exaggerations but they do say he was one mean man. I just figured a white southerner automatically fought Confederate. But supposedly, his side of Kentucky actually fought with the Union. So thank you, Old Joe Clark, for fighting in that war.

SS – That was the war that would have liked to keep most of us from knowing Grace.

NA – Well, when I finish laughing and singing my old timey songs, I think about my own kin. Even if the songs get twisted, good old time music makes me feel closer to my own people. This banjo’s ancestors are from West Africa and it has memories too. Go ahead, touch it! (Indeed strikes a cord with glee and pride) The oldest man I know of in my family is John William O’Bryan. That’s my... *(video/slide of grandfather young and old projected)*

NA/SS – ...mother’s, mother’s, mother’s father.

NA – That’s my blood, my kin.

SS – Born 1827, passed away in 1929 in Pennsylvania at the age of one hundred and two.

Coro – One hundred and two.

NA – Now **he** had a reputation for being a mean man. Had three boys and the rest all girl children.

SS – James, Joseph, William, Rachel, Carrie, Mary, Margie, Emma, Rachel and Annie ...

NA – ...and every single one got married or moved away as soon as they could. 102 years. Grandfather O’Bryan seen a lot of living in that century.

SS – Seen a lot of Grace.

NA – Of course I never knew him, but I have been to the cemetery and touched his stone. Solid and low to the ground, kind of hidden under a bush. But I found it. So I can say, “Thank you, John O’Bryan *(singing; Coro joins on second verse)*

(coro – “Thank you John O’Bryan. Thank you great great grandfather” softly in background until dance)

SS – Whew, thank you great, great, grandfather! Company F, 20 Regiment, Colored Infantry. *(Video #3 – still photo of grandfather young and old, tombstone projected, civil war quilt)* Infantry, that’s foot soldiers! Tired, heavy, hurting feet. Say he saw blood running in the rivers and horses reins draggin’ in the blood. Just think, if the South had won that war...

NA – ...I’d be Ms. Scarlett’s great, great granddaughter’s wet nurse. What a waste of my power and intelligence. That’s not that what John O’Bryan would have wanted. That’s not that what all the fighting was for.

SS/NA – *(singing)* “I’m not goin’ away, no. I’m not goin away.”

SS – If the South had won, now, in 2014, this country might be something like one, big Apartheid state.

NA – I’d be carrying a passbook instead of a passport.

SS – I’d be speaking substandard English instead of publishing new works.

Well – I would be a house servant instead of a homeowner.

All – And we would all be living waaaay outside of town. *(singing/stomping/feisty)* “I’m not going a way, no. I’m not going’ away!”

SS – OK girls, inhale. And exhale. Because that’s not how we would have it to be. Nanadwoa, inhale, and exhale. Because that’s not how we would have it to be. *(to the audience)* Can we get a little help with this one? Everybody... inhale and exhale. Because that’s not how we would have it to be.

SS – No, we’re not going anywhere. Our task is to make things more:
(*Coro & Nana chime simultaneously*) better, beautiful, fierce, significant,
meaningful, etc.

Your right was earned for you long ago.
Our job is to improve and progress.
You may not always step forward but you must move ahead.
Bitter, slows you down. Tired, slows you down.
You may not always step forward but you must move ahead.

Ancestors Dance/music – NA solo w/group

(*after dance*) **NA** – We are not bitter, we delight in thanking one of our
own. A little Grace...

All – ...goes a looong way. (*coro scrambles to big pillow downstage right*)

TRANSITION

SS – So, back to Grace. Grace May is the reason we are all here. The
adventures of Grace May B. Brown. She’s always off on some mission.
There is an awful lot of work to be done.

Coro – Tell the story Nana, tell the Story. (*look at NA who is seated on a
cloak, with the book in hand*)

NA – Yes, Grace tells me lots of stories. Children’s memories are so im-
portant; how they are thinking, how they are feeling, and how they even
learn to fly.
(*fly gesture*)

Coro/NA – A little Grace goes a looong way. (*Indeed stands, moves cen-
ter for solo dance*)

SS – Don’t say a word.

TRANSITION

vi. Birthday Party/Soweto Uprising-The Gift of Flight
*Indeed solo dance w/Video #4 quilt stills; “Birthday Song” underneath
narration*

(**NA & SS** represent 2 voices, telling one story)

SS – Now this is a story we have to tell.

NA – Today is my birthday. I am 12 years old and I just love my birthday.

Thank you mommy, thank you daddy, because I was born! June 16th comes
up in the history books as a day to remember, but it’s not because of me.
My happy day was known for sadness and also for the fight to learn and to
speak free.

SS – Soweto, South Africa. June 16, 1976. Dead bodies. I am so frightened

of those dead bodies I have seen in my head. They are all brown bodies.
Slaughtered bodies, hurt and wounded bodies; red is so horrible when it’s
splattered on small brown bodies. Even in black in white photos, you see
the red and the brown.

(*Coro dances/w Indeed intermittently*) Grace says, “I’ll play the scene
backwards and shield them with my words. You say no, we say yes. You
say go, we say no. You say small, we say big, bigger, big enough to eat
you, swallow you up and take down this whole town. Our march was for
intelligence and for peace. You tried to take us down but what we did will
be known in history as an up rising.” (*emphasis on “up”*) (*Indeed jumps
horizontally into her angel-cousins*) **NA** – It’s my birthday and I don’t want
to be massacred. I don’t want anybody to be massacred on my birthday
anymore. I speak, we speak the highest language.

A tongue and a mind that no one can degrade. I speak.

When I remember my birthday party, I see myself wearing white painter’s
pants or blue overalls. It is just play. I do not paint and my family doesn’t
live on a farm.

SS – Blue skirts, white blouses, knee socks, sneakers, brown skin, then
blood on those pretty, running, screaming, jump-roping bodies.

NA – June 16, 1976. I was 12 and knew nothing of bullets, bottles, dogs
and stones. But I would learn that not everyone is free to be free.

SS – There were stones against bullets, sticks against dogs, children against police,

SS/NA – the living against the lost. Sister Antoinette, what did you see? What did you feel when you saw your brother fall? Tell the story Sister Antoinette; tell it all. You children forced the struggle inside the nation that wanted to keep you down low. You rose up! Uprising! And you will continue to rise. You shook something loose, made it unstable and weak. You shook the lie that said you are not worthy and not free. Shook it loose from its hinges and left it to dangle like flesh, unfinished and open on a wound that can only be healed from the inside out. 1994 awaits you.

Healing from the inside to be free. *(Repeat 2x)*

SS *(continues)* – June 16, 1976. The day was supposed to be about peace.

Grace was there; before and Grace was there after. Her memory, her spirit flew to Soweto and she remembers how hope was changed into the scent of fear and confusion. You could smell it in the dirt, in the air and over the sea. Grace wanted to give the children wings.

Give them double wings like dragonflies. Flying dragons with translucent

wings, whizzing safely through a labyrinth of bullets. We are fast and free. Dragonflies with tails that light in the night like fireflies, fires that burn wild and free. Grace was there to see the children into their next mission, fast, wild and free. You may still see their fire light the night from time to time. Quick, small fires that blink in the night because they are not afraid. They speak, they think and they rise free.

TRANSITION

All sing 2nd line parade, audience engagement, into aisles etc. Nana plays banjo.

Li'l Gracie May – sung live by cast

SS – I know a girl in Baltimore,

Coro – Li'l Gracie May. (LGM)

SS – She's as fly as the one next door

Coro – Li'l Gracie May. (LGM)

I know a gal in New Delhi,

LGM

Just as fly as the one in Philly,

LGM.

All – Oh, Lil Gracie, Li'l Gracie May, Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May
(2x)

I know a girl from Cote d'Ivoire,

LGM

Seen in Congo and Utah,

LGM

I know a girl who rocks Singapore,

LGM,

She's at home on the Cuban shore,

LGM

All – Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May, Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May
(2x)

I met a gal in New Orleans

LGM

Building houses, planting trees

LGM

Seen her in Trini and Panama

LGM

In Ghana, France and the D.R.

LGM

All – Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May, Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May
(2x)

Live your life with all of your might,

LGM

Be prepared to love and fight,

LGM

Dig your well right where you are,

LGM

You're the treasure and the star,

LGM

All – Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May, Oh, Li'l Gracie, Li'l Gracie May
(fade out)

(Cell phone rings.)

NA – Hey. Oh yes, girl everything's alright. But it would be better if you talk to Sister Sey. (Passes the phone to SS, embarrassed at joining and even instigating the fun)

SS – (Breathless and laughing, catching her breath, trying to bring things back to order with looks and nods) Yes Grace. Indeed, back to work! Mercy, back to work! Um-Hm back to work! Well, back to work! Grace, they are working it, telling it like it is, baby. OK, 2 guidelines, have fun, protect yourself...ok, ok (Coro runs around tidying up pillows and cloaks)

NA – (Regaining a respectable tone) There are still more stories to tell...

SS – Don't say a word!

TRANSITION

vii. "Mmm, Tangerine" The Gift of Protecting Yourself Dance/Music "Tangerine" – Well solo dance w/cello music

SS – My favorite person in the whole wide world was my cousin Rita. She's not here today. Something happened with her lungs and she just couldn't breathe no more; any more. In some ways I'm special because Rita is like my magical girlfriend who is always with me, even when other people get on my nerves or don't see who I am. Rita is there and she understands.

Rita was the type of person who could eat a slice of tangerine and say...

Coro - 'Mmm, tastes like bar-b-q potato chips!'

SS - Or we'd walk down the street and she reach over a neighbor's fence and pull a big, peach colored rose to her face, sniff it and say...

Coro - "Mmm, tangerine."

SS - She just had that way about her. She could always make me laugh, and she could always make me sing.

Coro – (Break out into song confusion) "Hey sister soul sister, soul sister, soul sister... Hey sister soul sister, soul sister, soul sister soul... (keep repeating like a scratched record. They don't know there is more to the song.)

"Down in old New Orleans"

"Hello Hey Joe. You wanna give it a go?"

"Moca choca la ka ya ya."

(They don't dare insert the French verse "gichi, gichi, ya, ya, ya, ya")

Um-Hm – "That's not how it goes!" (They continue laughing/singing and totally ignoring her.) "He met Marmalade down in Old New Orleans!"

SS – You know you'll get in trouble if mommy hears you singing like that! (They sing/laugh a little bit more and a little bit softer.)

TRANSITION (transition in mood)

SS – (Tells a story) Sometimes little angels have their own stories to tell... (Well Solo Dance w/cello. Video #5) Who is Rita? When everything freezes, Rita still hears me. When everyone walks away, Rita stands still in peace. When my body froze with fear, Rita said, "No, this is not who you are." Rita breathes

softly then wipes my brow with a wrinkled handkerchief that she keeps tucked up her sleeve. Those shopping days when everyone left me in the room with uncle... the smoky strawberry incense burning and the loud ballgame on TV... when my hand was held down and I knew something wasn't right, Rita assured me that the frozen chill would protect me. That I would someday learn to protect myself. My body was left like a skull in the desert. My self slipped out through the eye sockets and left behind the sweating, the tremble, the confusion in my veins. My hand was free, my eyes were open and Rita was there to catch me as I soared upward like the incense smoke that was gagging me. I slipped out and I was not damaged even though I had to endure that touch time and time again. How could I be saved?

Grace comes as a knock on the door. The shopping trip ends early. Uncle falls asleep in his buzz drunkenness and forgets about me. I slip out and on my way, into the sunshine with my hanky and my song intact. Rita lets me keep the hanky so the next time there is sweat on my brow, I know I have something to protect me.

(Vibrating sound – text alert)

TRANSITION

NA – (looks at phone and reads a text from Grace) A text came in. She must be getting closer. It says, “You are protected and you are confident. Why? Because there is an army of wimmin who have laid down the legacy of confidence for you. Pick it up and carry on. Show the world how it’s done. – Grace May B. Brown”

viii. Champions and Sheroes – The Gift of Confidence

Stepping DANCE in a line moving down stage. No music.

SS – Bessie

NA – Coleman (call and response type roll call)

SS – Sarah

NA – Vaughn

SS – Wilma

NA – Rudolph

SS – Sadie

NA – Tanner Mossell Alexander

SS – Judith

NA – Jamison

SS – Biddy

NA – Mason

SS – I was born in Atlanta, Texas, Saint Bethlehem, Tennessee, Newark, New Jersey, Philadelphia, The Germantown section of Philadelphia, Mississippi. I always wanted to ...

SS/Coro & NA – *(repeat)* ...fly, sing, run, be educated, dance, be free.

SS (continues) –

- **Bessie Coleman.** I was the first black woman to receive an international pilot's license. Had to do it in France, no one in the U.S. would teach me. I flew as a dare devil, but my dream was to teach black children to fly!
- **Sarah Vaughn.** I can sing soprano through baritone. At age 64 I was inducted into the Jazz Hall of Fame and there is a star for me on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.
- **Wilma Rudolph.** As a child I had polio, then contracted scarlet fever and double pneumonia. I won my first Olympic medal at age 16 and went on to break three world records in track and field. In the 1960s, I was considered the fastest woman on Earth.
- **Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander.** (1898-1989), I was the first black woman in the United States of America to earn a PhD! I was also the first woman to hold office in the National Bar Association.

• **Judith Jamison.** I have been a modern dancer, a choreographer and a director. I was listed amongst the *TIME* Magazine 100: as one of The World's Most Influential People, and I have been honored by two Presidents of the United States (1999/2013).

• **Biddy Mason.** Born a slave in Mississippi then sold to Mormons. I walked next to their stagecoach most of the way from Utah to San Bernardino, California where I became legally free. Eventually I became a wealthy Los Angeles landowner and philanthropist.

SS – My name is: (Coro repeats each) Bessie Coleman, Sarah Vaughn, Wilma Rudolph, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, Judith Jamison, Biddy Mason.

NA – There are sooo many more.

Coro – Don't forget me!

SS – I learned to be my own champion. I learned to be my own hero. I wear the love cloak. Love is my cloaking device. And what prayer did Dr. Alexander leave for me?

NA/Coro (repeat) – “Teach me to be ready to walk alone/ but to never be lonely.”

(Song/music/dance – Electric Slide w/ solos)

“I may be exceptional but I am not an exception. This wisdom is everywhere my beauty has always been here. I may be exceptional but I am not an exception. Our kinship is everywhere, my sister and my brother, we all share.

You may be exceptional but you are not an exception. Your wisdom is everywhere, open your eyes until you get there.

I may be exceptional, open your eyes and see me everywhere.”
(All continue a cappella 2 verses. Hook elbows together... “share”)

TRANSITION

viii. Food Song –The Gift of Good Health

Well – I sure am hungry

Indeed – And thirsty too

Mercy – I hope when Grace gets here she brings me a pack of *Watermelon Now & Later!*

Well and **Um-Hm** – and a box of *Lemon Heads!*

Indeed – and a pack of *Bubblicious*

Mercy – a *Hawaiian Punch* and a bag of *Funyuns* too!

NA - Whoa, that is waaay too much sugar and salt!

SS –You'll never make the Sheroes list with that as your nourishment.

SS – *(spoken wordy song Coro & NA snap, gesture and insert their names)*
Whatever I eat is natural because I've got to be naturally me. If its sweet it comes from the sun, if it's salty, it comes from the sea. Whatever I eat is natural because I've got to be naturally me; my skin, my hair, my teeth, and of course my energy. *Food Song. SS comes center and dances. Coro & NA circle around and give her her props.*

SS – Tangelos, pine apple, flax seed, red delicious apples, Brussels sprouts, coconut milk, fruta de bomba, akee, turnips, sweet plantain, kale, snow peas, and of course broccoli. *(Everyone cheers and the thoughts of broccoli)*
Ok, Ok tell the truth, and an occasional bag of **(w/NA)** bar-b-q chips!!!

TRANSITION

(Mood changes, reflexive and happy)

Well – Oh Nana, sometimes the love is just so clear.

Mercy -We just know it without words or names. Like it exists in the wind.
(wind dance movements)

Indeed -When Grace comes I am going to tell her all about this day.

Um-Hm - I want to invite some of my other cousins over to meet Grace May.

TRANSITION

ix. Hunting Season Is OVA –The Gift of Black Boys and Men

SS – ...Well, you tell the fellas to be mighty careful. This is hunting season you know?

All – Hunting season for what?

NA – (stands and steps low) Treasure...hunt...

Coro –“Treasure/Hunt” (*Coro joins chant in low, whisper voices. Low dance, chest patting.*)

SS – (*bang, bang, bang/gong sound*) Order in the court! The galaxy court, where BS holds no weight. Here the law, is the Mystic Law and it holds life to be precious, sacred and true.

(Coro & NA)

– I shot him because of what he was wearing. Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– I shot him because of those Skittles. Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– I shot him because of what he was drinking, Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– Shot him because of that music he listens to. Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– I shot him because of the color of his jacket, his sneakers, that hoodie! Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– he reached for his wallet, his cell. Shot him dead. I’m justified!

– Shot him because of the neighborhood he lives in,

– doesn’t live in

– should go back to.

– I thought I pulled out my taser to taze him. It was my gun, so I shot him dead.

All – But I’m justified! Shot him dead, I’m justified! Why do you care?! (*to SS, super bold*)

SS – Why do you care? (Turns the question back on to the cast with seriousness)

NA – (softer, more authentic voice) I care because he could have been my son.

Mercy – He could have been my brother or my friend

Um-Hm – When my nephew goes to the store, I want him to come back.

Indeed – The color of his skin should not make him a target.

Well – Because I want my son to live.

SS – (*Softer at first*) I do care that his right to live is systematically violated

and violence on him is systematically excused. The galaxy values her treasures. Spread the word, spread the word. Hunting season is ova’. O-V-A. Spread the word, spread the word. Don’t stop until it is heard.

(*Coro and NA move up stage, clasp hands and raise them high. Music begins and dancer do bow and arrow gesture – Oshosi, the hunter.*)

Hunting Season Dance/Music - percussion, group dance

TRANSITION

x. Solid and Soft –The Gift of Memories

Dance/Music/video #6 – Begin with Mercy solo dance then SS narrates seated center.

SS – How does a little boy know love?) He knows it when he leans into Grammy and feels her there, really there, solid and soft at the same time. Just like love, solid and soft. Even without his mom and dad, he was given knickers and he was given love. Sadness lifts like a cloud and love rains down. Love until he grew and grew and grew like a pine. His own little children did not fall far from the tree. They learn to draw and paint and to master math and science. They are curious about the wonders of the world and learn to love jazz. They lean on their daddy and they know love solid and soft like the leaves and the tree.

(Phone vibrates – Nana and Grace converse down stage right while group finishes dance and rearranges pillows and chair stage left.)

NA – Oh I see...so we shouldn't wait on you, shouldn't look for you. Yes, I will explain it. *(Um-Hm joins NA in a swaying dance center stage until she speaks her line.)*

TRANSITION

xi. The Finale / Already Here!

Coro and SS gather around as if to console NA

Um-Hm – Nana, we need to tell you something.

Well – After all this dancing and music and...

Indeed – hoping...

Mercy – Well...

Well – we don't want you to be sad because...

NA – ...I know. You are not sure Grace is really coming.

Coro – Yes, Nana. Where is Grace! Is she coming? *(etc.) (with the exasperation and impatience of children)*

NA – Um-Hm, Well, Mercy, Indeed, this is what we have shown each other. We're not really here waiting for Grace. We're not here to look for Grace. We make Grace visible by the way we live our lives. The cosmos are cloaked in Grace but it's impossible to see that far away, your own eyebrows are the closets things to you and you cannot see them either. Your love calls Grace, your struggle calls Grace. The life you lead makes Grace visible in infinite form. *(group does dance gestures during the narration)*

SS – Well then, we all already know Grace and...

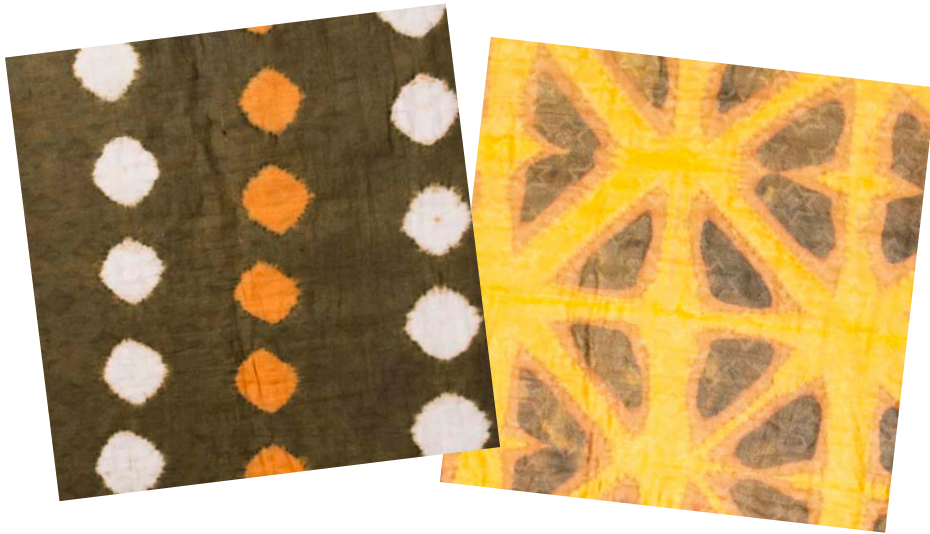
All – ... and she's already here.

Coro's Blues reprise with vocals - *Dance finale, combines movements and scraps from solo dance sections with "galaxy" gesture. Lights fade/curtain.*

The END

©A.E. Woods Valdés 2014

Dedicated to Mom & Dad



www.SOULOWORKS.com

Special Thanks

To the cast and collaborators! Banu Valladares, Alec Himwich, Jennifer Prather, Adrienne Brandon, Allonsus J. Marrow, Purnima Shah, Tria Smothers, Gloria Baynes-Bennett, Zelda Lockhart, my sister Patrice, my treasure, Joan Francisco, and mostly, to Mom and Dad.

