



**CONTENT GUIDE • AGES 8 AND UP**

Content Guide Information by Derek T. Pickens

Charleston Stage, now celebrating its 45th Anniversary Season, is in residence at the Historic Dock Street Theatre. Charleston Stage is South Carolina's largest resident professional theatre. More than a half million students have attended Charleston Stage's fully professional productions at the Historic Dock Street Theatre over the past 45 years. Charleston Stage school shows feature dazzling scenery, stunning costumes, and casts of professional actors.

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**Music by Stephen Flaherty  
Book and Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens  
Based on the Novel *My Love, My Love* by Rosa Guy**

## SYNOPSIS:

From the creative team that gave us *Ragtime*, comes this Olivier and Tony Award-winning, dazzling, calypso-flavored musical. *Once On This Island* tells the tale of the romance between a peasant girl named Ti Moune and Daniel, a rich city boy, whom she saves from death when his speeding convertible swerves and crashes. Set on a ravishing mythical Caribbean Island, *Once On This Island*, a feast for the eyes and ears, has delighted audiences around the world.

## CHARACTERS:

**Ti Moune** - A peasant girl who has been adopted, she is a dark skinned island girl with much curiosity and energy. Earnest and romantic about all creatures. Falls tragically in love with Daniel.

**Mama Euralie** - Ti Moune's adoptive mother. She is fearful of social status and greatly protective of her family.

**Tonton Julian** - Ti Moune's adoptive father. Filled with courage that is fueled by the love for his wife and daughter.

**Daniel** - A youthful man from the wealthy part of the island. He is pale skinned and inherently bound to fulfill the expectations of his higher social class. Struggles with his feelings for Ti Moune.

**Papa Ge** - The Demon of Death. He is proud and sly. His menacing ways are often a cause of distress, as he is in control of life and death.

**Asaka** - The Mother of Earth. She is very caring and nurturing. Her motherly disposition makes her well-suited to provide inhabitants with anything they need.

**Agwe** - The God of Water. He is strong, clever, and compassionate. Enjoys playing with the rain and ocean.

**Erzulie** - The Goddess of Love, beautiful and elegant with a strong belief in the power of love. She has a sympathetic heart.

**Armand** - Daniel's stern father.

**Andrea** - Daniel's betrothed.

**Ensemble** - Includes storytellers, gossips, peasants, and guests at the Ball.

## THEMES EXPLORED:

- Love at First Sight
- Family Ties
- Discrimination
- Socio-economic Struggles

## AGES 8 AND UP

## BACKGROUND INFO



### AUTHOR OF SOURCE MATERIAL

#### Rosa Guy

Rosa Guy was born September 1, 1922 in Trinidad, West Indies and died June 3, 2012, in New York, New York. She was an American writer who drew on her own experiences to create fiction for young adults that usually concerned individual choice, family conflicts, poverty, and the realities of life in urban America and the West Indies.

Guy lived in Trinidad until 1932, when she moved to the United States to join her parents, who had already immigrated. She grew up in New York City's Harlem. At age 14, after both of her parents died, she was compelled to go to work in a factory, and in 1941 she married Walter Guy. She eventually studied writing at New York University and became active in the American Negro Theatre. In the late 1940s, after the dissolution of her marriage, Guy co-founded the Harlem Writers Guild and focused on her fiction.

Guy's first novel, *Bird at My Window* (1966), is set in Harlem and examines the relationship between black mothers and their children, as well as the social forces that foster the demoralization of black men. *Children of Longing* (1970), which Guy edited, contains accounts of black teens' and young adults' firsthand experiences and aspirations. After the publication of these works, she traveled in the Caribbean and lived in Haiti and Trinidad. Guy became best known for a frank coming-of-age trilogy that featured *The Friends* (1973), *Ruby* (1976), and *Edith Jackson* (1978). She also wrote a number of books centring on Imam Jones, a young African American detective in Harlem; the series included *The Disappearance* (1979), *New Guys Around the Block* (1983), and *And I Heard a Bird Sing* (1987).

Among her other works are *A Measure of Time* (1983), *Paris, Pee Wee, and Big Dog* (1984), *My Love, My Love; or, The Peasant Girl* (1985, on which the successful 1990 Broadway musical *Once on This Island* was based), *The Ups and Downs of Carl David III* (1989), *Billy the Great* (1991), and *The Music of Summer* (1992). *The Sun, the Sea, a Touch of the Wind* (1995), a novel for adults, centers on an American artist living in Haiti who reexamines her troubled past.

## BACKGROUND INFO



### COMPOSER, BOOK AND LYRICIST

#### **Stephen Flaherty (Composer) and Lynn Ahrens (Book and Lyrics)**

Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty are considered the foremost theatrical writing team of their generation. They won Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for the Broadway hit *Ragtime*, and were nominated for two Academy Awards and two Golden Globes for Twentieth Century Fox's animated feature film *Anastasia*.

They also adapted *Anastasia* for the Broadway stage, which premiered in 2016. Their musical *Once on This Island* won London's Olivier Award and Broadway's 2018 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. Other theatre credits include *Seussical* (one of the most produced shows in America); *Rocky*; *My Favorite Year*; *Chita Rivera - The Dancer's Life*; *Dessa Rose*; *A Man of No Importance*; *The Glorious Ones*; *Lucky Stiff* and two upcoming shows: *Knoxville* and *Little Dancer*.

They serve on the Council for the Dramatists Guild of America and co-founded the DGF Fellows Program for Emerging Writers. They are four-time Grammy nominees, recipients of the Oscar Hammerstein Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2015 Ahrens and Flaherty were inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame.

Following their Off-Broadway debut with the musical farce, *Lucky Stiff*, Ahrens and Flaherty knew they wanted to tackle something with greater emotional depth. Browsing for ideas, Ahrens stumbled upon the novel, *My Love, My Love* by Rosa Guy, in a used bookstore. The book was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, and Ahrens responded instantly to the novel's poetic language and to the simple beauty of the story. Her writing partner and composer, Stephen Flaherty, was attracted to the novel's Caribbean setting, which would allow him to create a score that was theatrical, but inflected with the rhythms and sounds of the story's locale. Their long search was over.

In order to obtain the rights from Guy, the duo agreed to present the author with an outline and four song presentations that revealed their take on the material. It was a nerve-racking experience, especially since they intended to change the novel's ending completely. Thankfully, however, Guy loved it.

(Information provided by [AhrensandFlaherty.com](http://AhrensandFlaherty.com) and [MTIShows.com](http://MTIShows.com))

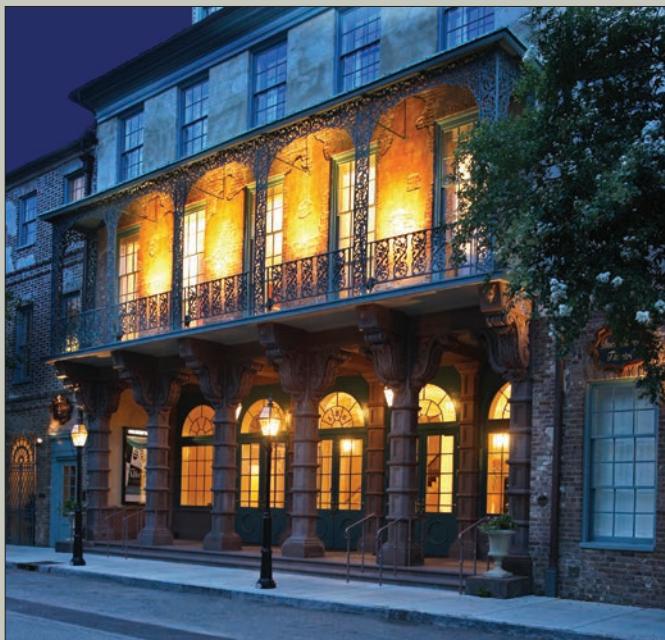
## FUN FACTS

- The musical *Once on This Island* is based on the Rosa Guy novel *My Love, My Love; or, The Peasant Girl*, which is also based on a very famous story - the Hans Christian Anderson classic *The Little Mermaid*.
- In addition to winning an Olivier Award for Best New Musical, *Once on This Island* was nominated for an additional 3 Olivier Awards, a Drama Desk Award and 8 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score.
- *Once on This Island* originally opened on Broadway on October 18, 1990 and played 469 performances before closing on December 1, 1991.
- There was a revival of the show on Broadway, which opened on December 3, 2017 and played 457 performances before closing on January 6, 2019.
- The revival was also nominated for 8 Tonys, and won for Best Revival of a Musical.

## CONTENT WARNINGS

*Once on This Island* is a family-friendly show with an uplifting story and is appropriate for all ages. Please be aware that the show revolves around social injustice, which some younger audience members may not understand.

## DOCK STREET THEATRE



For almost 300 years audiences have delighted in performances at the Historic Dock Street Theatre which stands on the site of the very first theatre building in America which opened its doors in 1736. The current building, originally The Planter's Hotel was built in 1803 and in 1937 was converted into the Dock Street Theatre know today. Charleston Stage presents over 150 performances at the Historic Dock Street Theatre playing to theatre goers from every state in the union and many foreign countries. The Dock Street Theatre, newly renovated in 2010, is currently owned and managed by the City of Charleston. Other

performing arts groups including Spoleto Festival USA perform here annually.

On February 12, 1736 the Dock Street Theatre opened with a performance of *The Recruiting Officer*. Built on the corner of Church Street and Dock Street (now known as Queen Street), the Historic Dock Street Theatre was the first building in America built exclusively to be used for theatrical performances. Flora, the first opera performance in America, took place at the Historic Dock Street Theatre.

The original Dock Street Theatre was probably destroyed by the Great Fire of 1740 which destroyed many of the buildings in Charleston's French Quarter. In 1809, the Planter's Hotel was built on this site and in 1835 the wrought iron balcony and sandstone columns of the Church Street facade were added. A number of notable persons worked and patronized the Planter's Hotel including the noted 19th Century actor Junius Brutus Booth (father of Edwin and John Wilkes Booth). Robert Smalls, an African-American Civil War hero, who stole a steamboat in the harbor and sailed it out past the Confederate-held Ft. Sumter and turned it over to the blockading Union Fleet, served as a waiter in the hotel's dining room prior to the war. Charleston's famed Planter's Punch was first introduced here.

After the Civil War, the Planter's Hotel fell into disrepair and was slated for demolition. But in 1935, after Milton Pearlstine made the property available to the City of Charleston and at the urging of Mayor Burnet Maybank and other notable citizens, the original building became a Depression Era WPA (Works Progress Administration) project. At that time, the present theatre was constructed within the shell of the

## DOCK STREET THEATRE



Planter's Hotel. The hotel's grand foyer became the grand foyer of the theatre and the hotel's dining room now serves as the box office lobby. The beautiful woodwork and mantels of the second floor drawing room were salvaged from the Radcliffe-King Mansion (circa 1799) which stood at the corner of George and Meeting Streets and was razed to build the College of Charleston gymnasium, another WPA project. Modeled on eighteenth century London playhouses by Charleston architect Albert Simons, the present Dock Street Theatre's new stage house and auditorium were built in the hotel's courtyard. The local carpenters who were put to work as a part of this Depression era relief effort utilized locally grown and milled native black cypress for the beautiful warm wooden interior. Following this \$350,000 renovation, The Historic Dock Street Theatre's second grand opening took place on November 26, 1937. Notables in the audience included author DuBose Heyward (*Porgy*) who was named writer-in-residence.

The Historic Dock Street Theatre reopened for the third time on March 18, 2010 after a three year, \$19 million dollar renovation by the City of Charleston. This extensive full-scale renovation brought the historic theatre into the 21st century with state-of-the-art lighting and sound, modern heating and air conditioning, and new restrooms and seating. In addition, the theatre was made seismically secure and fully handicapped accessible. Extensive sound-proofing was added to ensure that outside noises no longer intruded on performances inside.

## HAVE KIDS WHO'D LIKE TO TAKE THEATRE CLASSES?

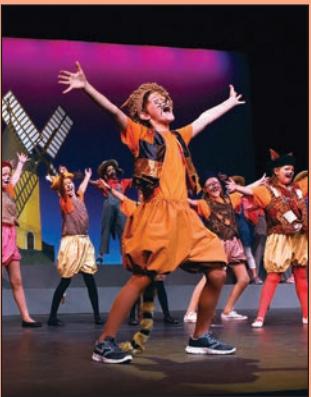


### **Acting Classes**

#### **200+ Students Attend Acting Classes After School**

Charleston Stage's TheatreSchool offers classes year round for students from kindergarten through high school at Charleston Stage's West Ashley Theatre Center. Acting classes for students of all ages and abilities are taught by members of Charleston Stage's Professional Resident Acting Company. Classes range from beginning classes to performance workshops and performance troupes. Classes culminate in mini-performances held at the West Ashley Theatre Center. Tuition scholarships are available for need-based students.

**Register online today at [CharlestonStage.com/Education!](http://CharlestonStage.com/Education)**



### **ArtReach In-School Workshops**

#### **Bringing Professional Actors Into the Classroom**

Charleston Stage's Resident Professional Actors provide dynamic workshops in area schools through a partnership with Engaging Creative Minds. Workshops use theatrical skills to teach academic subjects and can be combined with a school matinee performance experience. For information on booking ArtReach workshops, contact Rylee Coppel, Director of Education and Engagement, at (843) 225-3900 or [rcoppel@charlestonstage.com](mailto:rcoppel@charlestonstage.com).



### **TheatreWings High School Apprenticeships**

#### **A Tuition-Free Apprentice Program For Teens**

The TheatreWings High School Apprentice Program is designed to allow talented young people the opportunity to work directly with theatre professionals and gain first-hand experience in professional theatrical production. Students explore stage management, lighting and sound, as well as set and costume design and construction. Designed for highly dedicated students, TheatreWings requires more than 100+ hours of apprenticeship each season. For more information, email TheatreWings Co-Coordinators Ravyn Meador or Caleb Garner at [wings@charlestonstage.com](mailto:wings@charlestonstage.com).

**For more information on our programs, call the Education Office at (843) 225-3900 or visit [CharlestonStage.com/Education](http://CharlestonStage.com/Education).**