

## Personal Statement for Anthony Horne:

My research, teaching, and service are rooted in my strong belief in theatre's ability to affect great change and in my deep passion for provoking, educating, and entertaining by giving voice to minority populations, which are often oppressed and marginalized.

My professional desire to create change through art is a direct result of my experiences growing up in Memphis, Tennessee. In my youth, Memphis was in the throes of change brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. The stress and tension already present there was inflamed by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For most of my life, the city has been defined by a deep divisiveness driven by fear and hatred. As a young student of theatre and dance, I thought that the only way I could create art was to escape the oppressive climate of Memphis and move on to places where I could thrive -- places where my "differences" might not be considered so different. Later in life, when I became more comfortable with my own identity as a gay African-American man, I came to understand that by sharing my talents in my hometown I could be part of the solution. I have made it my life's work to be an agent of change through the making and teaching of theatre in the academy and in Memphis.

As a professional stage director and producer, my mission is to create experiences that bring diverse populations together in the hopes of chipping away at the barriers between people of different races, colors, ethnicities, religions, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

Through my creative work at UW-Milwaukee, as well as through the plays/scenes I ask students to perform, direct, analyze, and critique, I strive to make a way for people to examine their own belief systems and feelings. I encourage individuals to investigate their own humanity and to recognize the humanity in others, so that similarities can be acknowledged and differences celebrated.

### **I. Research**

My research is creative in nature and, while it covers many areas of the theatre profession, it is primarily focused on the areas of directing and producing. As I strive to bring about change in Memphis, I have focused my research on the Black Theatre Canon.

#### **I. A. Stage Direction**

I consider two Memphis-based companies to be my artistic homes: Playhouse on the Square (a professional powerhouse with multiple stages, including Circuit Playhouse) and Hattiloo Theatre (the pre-eminent African-American arts institution in the Mid-South that is quickly gaining national prominence).

As an artist, one particularly powerful experience for me was directing the musical *The Color Purple* (a tale of overcoming hardships, including rape, to find the god within) at Playhouse on the Square in 2013. The experience reminded me that the lives of the actors working on a show could be changed as much as the lives of the audience members who see it. Rehearsals must be safe spaces where actors can dare to be vulnerable so that deep exploration and risk taking can occur. I always work diligently to create such a space for every production. In this case, however, the safety of the process I created allowed the actors to move beyond being a collection of individual artists working collaboratively, to being a true artistic ensemble that was completely focused on being vessels for the material. The actors soared and the resulting show was both a critical and popular success, selling out its entire sixteen-show run. Jon W. Sparks of *The Commercial Appeal* wrote, "*The Color Purple* at Playhouse on the Square is a rousing success on nearly every level. Director Tony Horne's inspired work on the regional premiere of the musical — evolved from Alice Walker's book and Steven Spielberg's film — has resulted in a spellbinding production that pulses with energy and talent."<sup>1</sup> The production went on to win eight

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<sup>1</sup> Jon W. Sparks, "Exuberant, heartfelt 'The Color Purple' scores triumph at Playhouse on the Square," *The Commercial Appeal*, June 26, 2013 ([http://www.commercialappeal.com/go-memphis/no-headline-color\\_purple](http://www.commercialappeal.com/go-memphis/no-headline-color_purple)).

Ostrander Awards (given for excellence in Memphis-area theatre productions) including Best Direction of a Musical and Best Musical Production.

I had another meaningful experience at Playhouse on the Square in 2011 when I directed the regional premiere of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* (a story of confronting one's past, with essential help from the ancestors, to be born anew). Wilson's theatrical legacy of writing an epic decade-by-decade dramatization of the African-American experience in the twentieth century through ten plays (known as the Century Cycle) secured his place in history as one of the greatest American playwrights of all time. I was honored to have the opportunity to begin work on the cycle by directing the first play in the chronology. *Gem of the Ocean* is a complex and multi-layered play steeped in history, spirituality, and music. In my experience, I have found many professional productions of Wilson's plays to be static because they become mired in the wordiness and weightiness of the text. My challenge was to honor the text and enliven the storytelling in such a way that audience members would readily connect with the characters and remain engaged in the story. I wanted the characters of this play, set in 1904, to feel both familiar and familial. It was gratifying to see audience members paying close attention to the characters and their stories at every performance I attended.

Hattiloo Theatre is my other theatrical home in Memphis. I strongly support Hattiloo Theatre's goal of "producing plays by Black playwrights, and/or showcasing the talents of Black performers in non-Black works" to increase multicultural understanding.<sup>2</sup> Hattiloo began as a community theatre and is in the process of transitioning into a professional theatre that pays its actors. Hattiloo also recently made a major physical transition by moving from a converted storefront to a new, \$3.3 million dollar theatre facility, becoming the first Memphis-based, African-American arts organization to build its own facility from the ground up. The last two plays that I directed at Hattiloo fall into the professional category: *Once On This Island* and *The Mountaintop*.

For the inaugural production in the new facility, I directed the musical fairy tale *Once on This Island* (a testament to the enduring power of love, even in death). Though not written by black artists, I consider *Once on This Island* a part of the Black Theatre Canon because it musicalizes the Afro-Haitian experience with grace and sensitivity. My goal was to raise and set a new artistic bar for the company befitting its new home. Even though *Once on This Island* is a fairy tale, I strove to ground the play as authentically as possible in the Haitian culture. This historic production, which opened in July 2014, was extremely well received and played at, or over capacity, for every performance.

In 2013, I directed the regional premiere of *The Mountaintop* (a look at a man struggling to accept his mortality and a woman struggling to accept her worth) as a professional co-production between Hattiloo Theatre and Circuit Playhouse. Written by internationally celebrated, Memphis-born playwright Katori Hall, *The Mountaintop* was a hit on Broadway and on London's West End where it won the prestigious Olivier Award for Best New Play. The fictionalized account of Dr. Martin Luther King's last night on earth spoke to me deeply because it is an intimate look at King as a man, not a martyr. It was exciting and challenging for me to direct the play in Memphis, the birthplace of Hall and the "deathplace" of Dr. King. No group of people wants to see its heroes tarnished or denigrated in any way. Therefore, my challenge was to meaningfully engage theatregoers who might be resistant to, and offended by, the characterization of Dr. King as an ordinary, imperfect man. To meet the challenge, I strove to tell the story with sensitivity and honesty. The play was well received by audiences and garnered positive critical notice. Writing for ArtsMemphis, the largest arts funding organization in the region, reviewer Glenda Mace said, "Director, Tony Horne, has thoughtfully and adeptly shaped this production . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hattiloo Theatre, *Your Hattiloo*, <http://www.hattiloo.org> (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Glenda Mace, *A Review of the Mountaintop*, ArtsMemphis Rants and Raves, <http://www.artsmemphis.org/blog/rants--raves---a-review-of-the-mountaintop/> (Jan. 23, 2013).

## **I. B. Producing**

I became a producer in 1997 before I began directing because there were no professional caliber, subscription-based theatres in the entire Mid-South region dedicated to offering plays that illuminated the African-American experience. As Founding Administrative Director of the Memphis Black Repertory Theatre, I produced fourteen plays over three seasons (and planned a fourth season) that brought a new level of artistic excellence to African-American theatre in the region and brought audiences members of all colors together. Today, as an independent theatrical producer, I continue to bring underrepresented voices to the stages of Memphis through my production company, Mosaic Group. For example, in 2010, I collaborated with the then newly formed Uprooted Theatre of Milwaukee to bring their inaugural production of Dael Orlandersmith's *Beauty's Daughter* to Memphis. Uprooted Theatre's commitment "to affirm, exhibit, and inspire Milwaukee's growing African-American population"<sup>4</sup> was a perfect match for my focus as a producer. In 2013, I produced the rarely seen *The Play About the Baby*, by the legendary American playwright (and openly gay man) Edward Albee.

On the UW-Milwaukee campus, I have brought underrepresented voices to the stage for the campus community. For three consecutive academic years, in partnership with the UW-Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center, I co-produced and curated a solo performance series that showcased LGBT performers/writers/scholars of color who address meaningful issues in their work. In the series, one show examined the lives of black gay men in the South, another looked at gender-based violence against African-American women, while another explored the experience of being a queer, South Asian man. With inclusivity and bridge building in mind, all three shows were followed by post-show discussions and were presented in conjunction with campus and community partners.

## **II. Teaching**

I was drawn to the theatre early in life because I loved the powerful manner in which it can inform, challenge and stimulate through an examination of the human condition. Consequently, I became a teacher of theatre because I wanted to help students make the same discovery that I made: theatre has the power to positively impact one's life and one's community. I believe theatre is a vital component of a well-rounded academic experience and my goal as a teacher is to help each student grow as a human being. Whether they are interested in becoming theatre artists or informed audience members, I welcome all students interested in learning, regardless of background or prior training.

As a teacher and a director, I believe that a good environment is as essential for the classroom as it is for the rehearsal studio. So, in both situations I lay the groundwork for strong working relationships built on trust and mutual respect. On the first day of every class, I clearly outline my expectations, let the students know that I am available to them outside of class, and emphasize that I am invested in helping them succeed. From that point forward, I encourage students to fully participate by affirming that all comments and questions are valid. This relationship fosters a safe, stimulating learning environment that encourages students to be themselves so that they can freely question, discover and explore. While my teaching philosophy is not unique, it is firmly rooted in my desire to break down barriers and empower students. My goal is to create the best possible setting for every student to strive to reach his or her own potential, especially those from communities that are underrepresented on the UW-Milwaukee campus.

In every class that I teach, I seek to explore the diversity of the UW-Milwaukee student body through the pieces studied or performed. For example, when I teach directing I begin the semester by having students analyze a play, typically by an African-American playwright. Later, when students choose a scene from a play to direct for class, I encourage them to look for plays that they are passionate about, but I challenge them to fearlessly consider plays by playwrights who are different from them. Also, when student directors are casting actors for scenes, I insist they maintain a policy of color-blind casting and that they explore the possibilities of gender-blind casting. In Acting for Non-Majors, I encourage students to

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<sup>4</sup> Uprooted Theatre, *About Uprooted Theatre: History and Mission*, <http://uprootedmke.com> (2014).

choose plays for performance that capture their imaginations, without regard to race, gender, or sexual orientation. In non-performance courses, such as Introduction to the Theatre and Play Analysis, I require students to read a mix of plays by playwrights from various periods, including plays by LGBT writers and writers of color. Ultimately the diversity of the students in my classes is reflected in the plays we study, opening the door for more meaningful exploration and discussion.

Since I possess the training and experience to teach a variety of theatre courses, I support the Theatre Department's Core Curriculum, as well as our course offerings for non-majors. Additionally, I teach three upper-level courses (described below) that are directly linked to the creative research I engage in as professional director of plays and musicals.

### **Theatre 408 - Acting in Musical Theatre**

As a director with extensive musical theatre credits, I have honed my skills as an acting coach for singing actors over many years. In 2010, I used my knowledge to collaborate with then Music Department faculty member, Jamie Johns, to reimagine Acting in Musical Theatre as a team-taught course. In its new incarnation, the class focuses on deepening character development without sacrificing vocal technique. Students come to this course with strong foundations in both acting and singing techniques. So, I teach them to integrate and synthesize their previous training to become stronger singing actors. Through rigorous character analysis and focused coaching, we work on audition techniques, songs as monologues (using classic ballads that pre-date the advent of the musical drama), and songs as scenes (using contemporary musical theatre duets).

### **Theatre 410 - Stage Directing**

As the primary teacher of directing for undergraduates, I call upon my practical knowledge and artistic expertise gained from years of directing. I designed the course to provide students with a series of progressive experiences that simulate some of the elements of my professional directing process and culminate in the presentation of two-person, ten-minute cuttings from full-length plays. The students experience script selection, script analysis, concept creation, ground plan creation, auditioning, casting, blocking, and rehearsing. Individual mentoring of students is central to the way I teach this course, as are peer feedback, self-assessment, and critiques of the work of professional directors. Each semester, I bring in a faculty designer and (when available) a professional director as guest lecturers for the class.

### **Theatre 475 - Rehearsal and Performance**

#### **Fine Arts 489/589 - Musical Theatre Workshop I & II**

Though listed under different names and numbers, these courses are designed to give students the opportunity to put their classroom training into practice by performing onstage. I consider my work as a director in the university setting to fall in the categories of both research and teaching. In accordance with the values I instill in my classes and the values of the Theatre Department, I maintain a strict color-blind casting policy for my shows (unless race is germane to the themes of a show). When appropriate, I also explore sexual orientation, gender, and gender roles within the context a show. For example, when I directed *Urinetown* in 2014 I cast the role of Senator Fipp (usually played by a male) with a female. This allowed the actor to create a more complex character, while still supporting the tone and spirit of the show. The female Fipp had a clear romantic interest in women, though she referenced past relationships with men. The change created a nice balance in the show with the character of Officer Barrel, who surprises the audience by revealing his romantic interest in his male patrol partner.

## **III. Service**

### **III. A. Department**

Within the Theatre Department, I serve on a variety of committees. The two committees that align closely with my personal mission as an artist and teacher are the New Directions and Musical Theatre committees.

New Directions is a student centered performance series focused on supporting fledgling directors and playwrights. As one of the faculty advisors for the series, I have advocated for, mentored, and supported young theatre artists as they refine their artistic voices and hone their theatrical skills. Mentoring students is also an integral part of my work as the Theatre Representative on the Musical Theatre Committee that manages the Inter-Arts Musical Theatre BFA program (a collaboration between the Departments of Theatre, Dance, and Music). I work closely with all musical theatre majors as a coach, mentor, and advisor, while coordinating guest artists for Musical Theatre master classes and co-administrating all activities related to running the program.

### **III. B. University**

As an openly gay member of the campus community, it is important for me to participate in efforts to make UW-Milwaukee a more welcoming, affirming, and supportive environment for members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender communities. To that end, I serve on the Chancellor's Advisory Committee for LGBT+ Advocacy, which is charged with "making recommendations related to current and proposed policies and practices that affect LGBT+ employees and students" in order to improve climate and diversity on campus.<sup>5</sup>

My work in breaking down barriers and bringing people together on campus (through my research, teaching and service) was recognized in May 2014 when I received the Dr. Jeff Merrick Leadership Award from the UW-Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center at Lavender Graduation (a ceremony that celebrates the achievement and identity of LGBT students). The award is named for the UWM History Professor Emeritus who presented the keynote address at the first Lavender Graduation in 2010. The graduation program states "this award is "presented to a member of the faculty or staff at UWM who has shown dedication & support for LGBTQIA people through taking initiative in order to stand up and speak out against issues of homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, and cisgenderism."<sup>6</sup> I was deeply honored to receive this award because students nominated me. As I walked to the podium to receive the award, quotes from student nominators were shared anonymously, including this one, "Tony...has inspired many of his own students to be comfortable being who they are." I was touched and humbled upon hearing this.

### **III. C. Outreach**

One of my greatest joys as a university professor is teaching and mentoring others who are passionate about making art. I am fortunate that I get to do this not only through my work at UW-Milwaukee, but also through my outreach to other populations, specifically young artists and artists with disabilities. To connect with young artists, I give workshops or serve on the creative teams for productions whenever possible. During the 2012-13 school year, I had the opportunity to mentor theatre students at three different public schools in the Memphis area. As Director for *The Wiz* (Houston High School), Co-choreographer for *The Wiz* (Germantown High School), and Consultant for *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Arlington High School), I was able to provide meaningful guidance and support to a diverse group of aspiring thespians. Though I had previously worked with artists with disabilities, I began this work in earnest in 2007. That is when I started a fruitful relationship with Company d, a nationally recognized dance company in Memphis, TN for young adults with Down syndrome. In addition to teaching theatre for the Company d Workshop for four summers, I also directed their narrative dance show, *Let It Be a Dance*, for two seasons.

### **III. D. Professional Service**

Over the years, I have provided service to the profession by offering expertise and leadership to a variety of organizations, including regional arts groups like Playhouse on the Square (Memphis, TN) and Wild Space Dance Company (Milwaukee, WI), and national organizations like Black Theatre Network. In this section I will focus on my work with Hattiloo Theatre (Memphis, TN).

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<sup>5</sup> Chancellor's Advisory Committee for LGBT+ Advocacy, *Mission Statement*, <http://uwm.edu/lgbtadvisory/> (2014).

<sup>6</sup> UW-Milwaukee Lavender Graduation program (2014).

The majority of the population of Memphis is African-American. However, the arts organizations there do not reflect the racial make-up of the city. Hattiloo was founded by Ekundayo Bandele to remedy that situation. Since 2006, I have used my training in arts management and my experience as the co-founder of the Memphis Black Repertory Theatre to advise Mr. Bandele on a variety of subjects, including season selection, daily operations, outreach programs, sponsorship proposals, board relations, and selection of directors and choreographers. As previously mentioned, Hattiloo Theatre is doing so well that it recently moved into a brand new, state of the art theatre building. More importantly, that building stands alongside other important arts institutions in the heart of Memphis' theatre and entertainment district. Hattiloo's meteoric rise is particularly noteworthy because so many African-American theatres have shut their doors in recent years.

### **III. E. Consultation**

In 2008, I served as one of several paid creative consultants in the initial developmental process for the play *Sweet Tea*. The play is based on the staged reading *Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales* and the ground-breaking book *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, both by Dr. E. Patrick Johnson of Northwestern University. The development process took place when Dr. Johnson was an Institute Fellow at the Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media at Columbia College, Chicago, IL. *Sweet Tea* has since gone on to be produced by About Face Theatre (Chicago, IL), University of Texas-Austin, Signature Theatre (Arlington, VA), and the Durham Arts Council (Durham, NC).

### **IV. The Future**

My goal is to continue bringing plays to the stage that give voice to underrepresented communities. In the short term, I will be directing Lee Breuer's *The Gospel at Colonus* in the summer of 2015. The show is Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* retold through Black gospel music. The production will be staged in Memphis at Playhouse on the Square. The original production premiered in 1983 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and later went on to Broadway. I am committed to continuing my exploration of August Wilson's plays, so I am currently in talks with both Hattiloo Theatre and Rhodes College about the possibility of directing a co-production of *Radio Golf* (the last play in Wilson's Century Cycle) for an upcoming theatre season. Within the next couple of years, I plan to independently produce *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot*, by noted Latino playwright Jose Rivera, in Memphis.

Looking even further into the future, I plan to engage in something that I have previously found very rewarding: adapting and directing literary works for the stage. My deepest desire is to write an episodic play based on historical fiction about the important role played by Memphis' African-American citizens during the city's largest Yellow Fever epidemic in 1878. I am currently gathering resource material for this project.

As a teacher, it is my desire to continually strengthen the courses I already teach and to create new ones. I am currently engaged in revising the Stage Directing class to make it even more experiential. As for new courses, I am interested in creating a second level of Acting in Musical Theatre (and consequently revising the first level). I envision that the second level of song study would focus solely on two- or three-person song/scenes from the Golden Age of Musical Theatre<sup>7</sup> and from contemporary musicals. I am also very interested in creating a new course in African-American theatre history. I envision this course serving as an elective for Theatre majors and fulfilling a general education arts requirement for non-Theatre majors. Perhaps it could even be cross-listed with the UW-Milwaukee Department of Africology.

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<sup>7</sup> The Golden Age of Musical Theatre, considered by some to be from 1943 to 1960, refers to a period in history, beginning with Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, when book musicals that seamlessly integrated song, dance, and dramatic action were at their peak.