

BLACK LIKE ME

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MONTY COLE
VIRTUAL READING | SEPTEMBER 10, 2020

MAINSTAGE



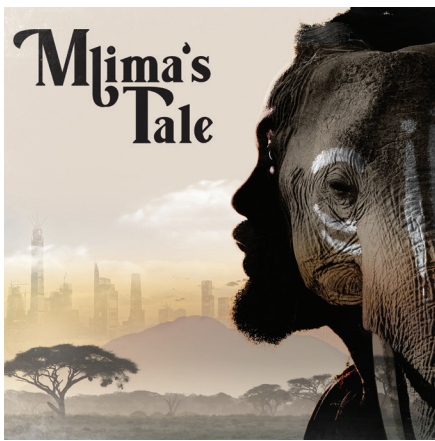
Little Shop of Horrors

Book and Lyrics by **Howard Ashman**
Music by **Alan Menken**

It's a classic tale, really: Girl meets boy.
Boy meets carnivorous alien plant.
Carnivorous alien plant develops an
insatiable taste for blood. This musical
comedy joy ride bursts with pop melodies,
soul ballads and girl group swagger.

March 5 – April 11

Performed at the Loretto-Hilton Center



Mlima's Tale

by **Lynn Nottage**

Mlima, a majestic and powerful African
elephant, is murdered for his tusks. From
beyond the veil of death, Mlima's spirit
follows the path of his tusks on a captivating
and haunting journey through the dark
world of the international ivory trade.

May 28 – July 11

Performed at the Catherine B. Berges Theatre at
COCA – Center of Creative Arts

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At The Rep, we value the creation of new work, so we are thrilled to bring you behind the scenes of the artistic process for this reading of Monty Cole's new play, *Black Like Me*. I am proud that our theatre has been able to maintain our commitment to investing in artists and developing new plays, despite the challenges of the unprecedented global pandemic. I especially applaud the team of artists in Chicago and New York, who have worked alongside our St. Louis team to be flexible and innovative as we translate the new play process to meet the realities of virtual technology.

Black Like Me is an adaptation of a book by the same name which received widespread attention when it was published in 1961. The true story of a white journalist who temporarily dyed his skin in an attempt to experience life as a Black man, the novel has been both applauded and abhorred. Now, 60 years later, Cole reexamines this work from the inside out, allowing both audience and performers to wrestle with the real events as well as their real responses.

In addition to tonight's reading, many of you have elected to participate in a unique affinity group talkback immediately following the performance, while others will receive a post-reading survey. Authentic and honest feedback from the audience is a critical piece in the new play development process and offers the playwright valuable information from different perspectives. We're grateful to all of you who are taking the time to join us for this one-of-a-kind experience.



A handwritten signature in blue ink.

Hana S. Sharif

AUGUSTIN FAMILY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

THE REPERTORY THEATRE OF ST. LOUIS

PRESENTS

BLACK LIKE ME

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
MONTY COLE

DRAMATURG Regina Victor
PROJECT MANAGER R. Christopher Maxwell
CAST Adia Alli
Breon Arzell
Brianna Buckley
McKenzie Chinn
Joe Dempsey
Eric Gerard
Daniel Kyri
Netta Walker

Developed at California Institute of the Arts, 2019.

This recording is made available through New Media Agreement with SAG-AFTRA.

“This May Not Be All of It.”

John Howard Griffin was a white Texan journalist who wanted to know what it was like to be Black... so he went to a dermatologist. He wanted to perform a science experiment to test how simply changing the color of one's skin might affect their ability to survive in America. He journeyed through the south as “a Black man” writing a journal entry every day. *Black Like Me* is a collection of those journal entries.

That's the little elevator pitch that I use to describe the book. I tell you this because it honestly doesn't contain any spoilers for the play. Sure, those things happen in the script, but the play has a deeper purpose to me than telling an interesting story. When I read the book, I had a deeply moving experience. On one end, I found myself being transported into the Twilight Zone with John, being moved by his experiences, being genuinely worried for his survival. On the other end, I found myself pushing away from the book saying, “Well, that's a generalization,” or more specifically, “that's only true through the eyes of a white man.” In one moment I would admire John's radical empathy and in another moment I would throw the book across the room, cursing John's arrogance. The play is a theatricalization of my reading experience. It is simultaneously an adaptation of the book and the strange quicksand that pulls at John's feet as well as a commentary on the book that embraces and pushes away from John's story.

If Griffin's book is an Idiot's Guide to Being an Ally in 1961, the play is attempting to be the same for 2020. The play is also attempting to ask BIPOC people what we expect of our allies and where is the line? What is the country that we want to live in? Who are the people we want to be? Where were we before? The play is intended to start discourse, create open lines of communication just like John Howard Griffin did. The play has a very practical purpose to me, and sometimes I can't feel where it's succeeding or failing that purpose. That's why you're here. I can't develop this play in a silo; I need your thoughts.

This is the first professional workshop of this play, and there will be many more. We had four wonderful rehearsals with seven talented actors, and we recorded all of them on Zoom. It was a strange experience translating the theatricality of this play to Zoom as it's not the intended medium for this story. You can obviously observe the reading and simply ride along, but I would suggest engaging in the chat feature if you feel up for it. Express yourself. We'll have moderators present to make sure it's a safe digital space. I can't thank Hana and the staff at The Rep enough for their willingness to offer this platform.

I've taken the thoughts, opinions of these actors and applied it to the script. Now it's time to hear from you. This is not the final product by any means. This is just the beginning, and you're a part of it. Thank you.

Monty Cole
Playwright / Director



MONTY COLE* (Playwright/Director) is a director based in Chicago and Los Angeles. He has workshopped and directed new plays and re-imaginings of classic text across the country. He has directed for Steppenwolf (*The Brothers Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney), Center Theatre Group (*Campaign* by Laura Jacqmin and *How to Raise a Freeman* by Zakiyyah Alexander at the LA Writers Workshop Fest), The Goodman Theatre (*Incendiary* by Dave Harris and *florissant & canfield* by Kristiana Rae Colon at the New Stages Festival), Victory Gardens Theater (*end of message*) by Laura Jacqmin and *Suspension* by Kristiana Rae Colon at the Ignition Festival of New Plays), Cape Cod Theatre Project and Alley Theatre All New Festival (*end of message*), American Theatre Company (*The Project(s)* and *Black Like Me* workshop), The House Theatre of Chicago (*Borealis*, *Ogalala* workshop and *Thatcher Woods* workshop), Haven (*Kiss* by Guillermo Calderon), the Chicago Theater Marathon (*That Unnamed Feeling* by Alysia and Monty Cole), California Institute of the Arts and others. Cole directed the Jeff Award-winning production of *The Hairy Ape* for Oracle Productions. He is currently working with collaborator and choreographer Breon Arzell on revitalizing *In Dahomey*, the first black written and performed Broadway musical. Up next, Cole will direct the west coast premiere of Young Jean Lee's *We're Gonna Die*, a workshop of his Goodman commission *American Adolescence*, followed by *Black Odyssey* by Marcus Gardley at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. He has a BFA in Theatre Studies from Emerson College and an MFA Directing degree from the California Institute of the Arts.

ABOUT THE REP

The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis is the St. Louis region's most honored live professional theatre company. Starting with the 2020-21 season, The Rep is expanding its footprint to include a new venue as well as site-specific and virtual programming. Visit our website at repstl.org for more information.

Browning Mainstage

The Loretto-Hilton Center for the Performing Arts | 130 Edgar Rd.

In use since 1966, the Virginia Jackson Browning Mainstage is The Rep's most familiar home. In this 763-seat auditorium, no seat is more than 20 rows from the stage.



The Catherine B. Berges Theatre at COCA

524 Trinity Ave.

The Rep's newest home is a state-of-the-art, 454-seat house with two tiers of seating. This modern marvel features the latest in stage technology and will bring Rep patrons an entirely new show-going experience. In addition, the Berges Theatre features a free parking garage directly across the street and easy access to the Delmar Loop.



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Pride and Prejudice, cast
Photo by Phillip Hamer



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