



—THE **UNMUTED** COMPANION—

SHEEPDOG

BY KEVIN ARTIGUE

A NEW PLAY

— SPONSORED BY C.M. & STEPHANIE PARTRIDGE —

UNMUTED COMPANION

for *Sheepdog* by Kevin Artigue

CREATED BY THERESA M. DAVIS, DRAMATURG

THE UNMUTED COMPANION is a dramaturgical component designed to enhance your **CATFUNMUTED** experience. We've designed the UC Volumes to act as counterparts to the six BOLD, NEW PLAYS, in this year's digital experience. You can sample, survey, or study these online offerings—with no fear of spoilers!

Each companion will give you—

- A sneak peek into the 2021 Season
- An introduction to the creative teams
- An exploration of the world of the plays
- A deep-dive into the new play process

Come and join us as we **thinktheater** and **talktheater**.

We promise not to “give you all the 2021 goodies” – just enough to make you eager for more.

A LETTER FROM ED HERENDEEN

Can you imagine a world without LIVE theater? The theater is an art form performed by living artists witnessed by a live audience in the very specific HERE and NOW. The artists and the spectators come together in communion and perfect harmony with each other in the same moment. Somewhere during this sacred moment, the spectator's consciousness is awakened and enlightened. Together this community of audience members becomes one with the artists on stage. Live theater is an awesome experience. Live theater is urgent and simply indispensable. The energy created in a live performance can change lives. The power emanating from a live work of art is SPELLBINDING!

So I ask you: Can you imagine a world without live theater?

It is impossible for me to imagine a world without live theater. I miss casting and callbacks. I miss face to face, in-person collaborations with designers. I miss the back and forth, lively discussions of production meetings. I miss finding creative solutions to the budget challenges. Most of all, I miss the rehearsal room and the rehearsal process: that first Company Read Thru, those inspirational "break-thru" and "AHA" moments, sitting next to the living playwright...listening to their every breath as they respond in the moment.

Yes, I miss rehearsal. And I miss the audience – our ultimate collaborator and partner in producing and developing new work.

I cannot imagine a world without live theater.

I would miss the risks, the challenges, the emotions, the thrill and excitement of transporting a living audience to those special places...sacred places that only exist in the imagination.

Live theater, live storytelling provokes philosophical and political ideas. Ever since the Greeks invented drama on stage, the theater has shaped, stimulated, provoked, and entertained humans.

Yes, I miss live theater. BUT - we want to connect with you NOW! We cannot wait. We want to share our creative process with you NOW! **We are CATFUNMUTED!**

This digital - **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** is an exciting prelude of what is to come in our 2021 Theater Festival. Our next season begins here! An innovative online experience that begins the process of creating the future of LIVE contemporary theater next summer in our beloved SHEPHERDSTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA.

I am honored to introduce you to six contemporary playwrights. Artists that have the extraordinary ability to converse with the voices of the past. Terence Anthony confronts oppression, incarceration, and human rights in his historical play *The House of the Negro Insane*. Jacqueline Goldfinger and Victor Lesniewski imagine the voices of the future in their plays *Babel* and *The Fifth Domain*. Their plays warn us about government control, abuse of power, and cybersecurity. Kevin Artigue, Chisa Hutchinson, and Caridad Svich imagine the pain and the horror of our fragile present in their plays: *Sheepdog*, *Whitelisted*, and *Ushuaia Blue*. Plays truly set in the present...in the here and now... that hold us accountable for racism, gentrification, greed, and climate grief.

Yes, this is a prelude of a new repertory of six new plays that listens to the past, examines the present, and imagines an uncertain future.

Yes, I can imagine sharing our **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** with you. This digital repertory invites you to escape and engage by surrounding yourself with new works that deserve your attention...new work that is **alive** and **dynamic**...the **heart** and **soul** of what makes the **Contemporary American Theater Festival** compelling and necessary - right now and forever.



Ed Herendeen
Founder & Producing Director

INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME

Towards a Greater **Ill**umination

Kevin Artigue's *Sheepdog* is regarded as a "New Play."

It has made the imaginative leap "from page to stage." When you drop the title into an online search engine, you can see articles about the play, including interviews, press releases, theater reviews, and more. You can even visit Dramatists Play Service to purchase a copy of the 2020 script. If you already have a copy, revisit the review excerpts on the back cover. The *Los Angeles Times* heralded *Sheepdog* as, "...a thought-provoking two-character drama...*Sheepdog* is both impressive and important as it thrusts the viewer into matters of his or her own conscience."¹

The play shines a light on the philosophy of police officers as the "sheepdogs" guarding the "sheep," against the "wolves." It forces us to question our attitudes and beliefs concerning love, duty, and trust. Kevin Artigue gives us a different take on an all too familiar, heartbreaking, and enraging story. A Black man is killed by the police. But, what do you do when you are a Black woman who wears the shield, in love with the White officer who has pulled the trigger? While traveling the path of dramaturgical due diligence, I came across a website, "SHEEPDOG RESPONSE: Empowering People to Protect & Preserve Life."² I was taken aback while watching the video clip. Feelings of "empowerment, protection, and preservation" did NOT come to mind as I viewed the group of knife-wielding, hand-to-hand combatting, and gun shooting trainees. Is this how society views the role of "sheepdogs?" This question has been made devastatingly real by the murder of George Floyd on May 29th. The themes expressed in *Sheepdog* have hit incredibly close to home, triggering a myriad of thoughts and emotions. The themes in this newly published play are unfortunately more relevant than ever, as we come to grips with our current situations.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF THE PLAY & THE PLAYWRIGHT

When audiences see *Sheepdog*, what areas in their own lives and society do you hope the play will illuminate?

KEVIN ARTIGUE (KA): I hope for two things. First, that the play will illuminate the many ways in which our system of policing - and the culture surrounding it - works to dehumanize Black and Brown people, in order to sanction violence against them in the interest of law and order. I also hope on a more personal level that if the play can reveal blind spots in the characters on stage - and force the characters to reckon with them, rather than run away - it can by extension encourage more honest conversations about race and class in our audience. It will force things to the surface and shine a truthful light on them, possibly ugly things, and get people talking.



What is the genesis of *Sheepdog*?

KA: It started from an emotional place, back in 2016. I was responding to what I was seeing and witnessing, and the cascade of videos of police shootings, and subsequent lack of indictments, and the lack of accountability and justice. Then I did a little more digging and reading and saw that the underlying causes and systemic issues were layered and complicated. I read a couple of pieces that were impactful early on. One of them was a *New Yorker* profile of [officer] Darren Wilson - the officer who killed Michael Brown. There was something powerful and disturbing about his inability to articulate what he had done. Partly it's because he's not a well-educated, articulate guy. He's working class. So, when he's forced to put words to his actions, he fails. He trips over himself and reveals an underlying racist bias that he's blind

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¹ [Dramatist Play Service](#)

² [Sheepdog Response](#)

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to that despite his good intentions, he can't overcome. That blindness is at the core of the character of Ryan in *Sheepdog*.³

I grew up in a very conservative environment in Southern California. What surrounded me was an incredible amount of white supremacy that I would have been almost completely blind to, yet absorbing and taking in. I was lucky enough to have parents who were liberal-minded but not in a way that forced me to see these things. My environment was so segregated and racist I think somebody needed to really shake me up to see.

The play would basically be impossible without the luck of having fallen in love with Rebecca [Naomi Jones], and then what we've navigated and the conversations we've had. It's just a necessary part of being an interracial relationship. From our experience - these conversations - but certainly me being a white man and her being a Black woman, you have to talk this stuff out. And that conversation never stops, never ends.

"I didn't know what I - a white male - had to say that would move the conversation around police violence forward or shed new light on it."

—Kevin Artigue

How was *Sheepdog* inspired by Nakia Jones' story?

KA: I'm very grateful to [Nakia Jones] for what she has been willing to share with me. She became very busy and very active after she posted on Facebook and then subsequently wrote a book *The Truth Divided*.⁸ The time she was able to give to me was really instructive...thinking back to that initial moment of watching the video, what struck me was how torn she was, that her heart seemed really stretched apart in these different directions. And if you step back, I wasn't sure that there was any way to reconcile those.

In 2016 I didn't watch the video immediately as a writer. I didn't file it away as like, "Oh, [Nakia Jones] would be an interesting character." I wasn't there yet. I was just engaged with her conflict on the human level. I think what lodged in my brain was more a question of, for officers of color particularly, how would they survive being a police officer under the Trump regime? Trump, going back to that moment of his election...you saw this conflict bubbling up. You saw in Cleveland, for example, the Black Police Union taking a public stand against Trump. They refused to endorse Trump while the main union did. And I haven't done a lot of digging back into the '60s, but I can say in a general sense, those sorts of frictions, you can look back to the '60s to see that. You can also look back to the '60s to see the birth of a Black Police Union movement.

So, it was going to get really hard for these officers of color to keep doing this job. And I think what we saw in Officer Nakia Jones was that eruption, and

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³To Write *Sheepdog*, I Had to Be Willing to Go to an Ugly Place, but Hopefully an Honest One: Playwright Kevin Artigue

⁴A Complete Guide to the Shooting of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson by Ryan Devereaux

⁵*Sheepdog* by Kevin Artigue - Contemporary American Theater Festival at Shepherd University

⁶U.S. Cop on Recent Shootings: 'How Dare You Stand next to Me in the Same Uniform and Murder Somebody'

⁷Officer Nakia Jones: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know

⁸*The Truth Divided*

BACKGROUND

MICHAEL BROWN was a African American teenager who lived in Ferguson, Missouri. Officer Darren Wilson "fatally shot Brown at least six times from a distance; Brown was unarmed; and his bleeding body lay in the hot summer sun for four hours, much of that time uncovered as the residents of Canfield looked upon his splayed-out corpse in horror."⁴

REBECCA NAOMI JONES is an actress known for Broadway and film roles including, *Oklahoma!*, *Significant Other*, *American Idiot*, *Passing Strange*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *The Big Sick*, *High Maintenance*, and *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*.⁵

ABOUT NAKIA JONES

On July 5, 2016, police officer Blane Salamoni shot and killed 37-year old Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Less than twenty-four hours later, Philando Castile was fatally shot by Jeronimo Yanez, a police officer from St. Anthony, Minnesota. "In the wake of these two deadly police shootings, Nakia Jones, a Black police officer in Warrensville Heights, Ohio, posted a powerful online video in which she calls out racist cops and those with a "god complex," but also urges her community to remember that "There's many of us who would give our life for anybody."⁶ Nakia Jones was later fired from the Warrensville Heights Police Office where she worked from 2002 to 2017. Jones said that officials fired her as retaliation for the seven-minute video she posted on Facebook. The video went viral, and #OfficerNakiaJones trended nationally in the U.S. on Twitter.⁷

we just hadn't seen a posting like that before because no officers would be so brave and so vulnerable to do it. I think she was saying a lot of stuff that a lot of people were feeling, and it cost her.

See page 7 for the excerpted transcript of Officer Jones' Facebook Live Video.

How did Naomi Wallace influence your writing?

KA: I would say [Naomi Wallace] did a lot for me. In my very first year of grad school, she came in and ran a month-long [playwriting] workshop...I was writing outside of my race to some degree, but it was through my point-of-view, a white male perspective. And what Naomi encouraged me to do, and she said from the get-go, "It's not going to be easy to do this, but I challenge you to look outside yourself for your stories. I challenge you to go as far as you can outside your own experience." I think there was an ethical mandate there - it was also what she felt the world needed and what theater needed. So, I think she saw a kernel of talent and then said, "Here's the syllabus, here's a bunch of books to read, let me take you further." And a lot of this work would require unpacking my white privilege. The message was: "You can do this work. You can look outside your own race, your own sexual orientation, your own class upbringing. There is a way to do this work, and let me give you the tools to do that."

Were the officers hesitant to speak with you? Or did they open up fairly quickly?

KA: I was surprised at how candid the officers were with me. I think I expected more general resistance to opening up, or maybe even legally that there would be things that they would be nervous about sharing, but I didn't find that to be the case at all. I think on a basic human level, police officers have so many stories. Their jobs are so extreme, and so they have stories for days, and if you're willing to listen, they have a lot to tell you.

When the officers opened up and spoke, what I heard was a lot of frustration, and stories of mistreatment and injustice - including acts of racism towards them from within departments, small and large. Things you might expect and things you might not expect. A Black officer outside Boston told me that several times after a shift, while driving home from the precinct, he had been profiled and pulled over by his fellow officers, which I guess is not surprising at all.

When you look at policing in general, when you're talking to officers, their experiences are very regional. So, one Black officer's experience in a suburb of Boston can be so different than another officer's in Cleveland, just based on the demographics of the police force, the diversity on the force, the size of the department, the community they are policing. That was a revelation initially. It was essential to get very specific in terms of setting.

One officer in Cleveland in particular, she's a sergeant, and she was by far the most candid with me. And I think that's by nature of her personality, she has a big, bubbly theatrical personality. She sat me right down in her office. She brought me up, sat me right down, and just said, what do you want to know? ■

BACKGROUND

NAOMI WALLACE is a playwright and screenwriter. She has received the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (twice), the Joseph Kesselring Prize, the Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, and an Obie Award.⁹

"You should know that the play was written with the huge assistance of several brave and forthright police officers, willing to speak candidly about their experience as officers of color. I share the play with them."

—Kevin Artigue

"As an African American, when I take off the uniform, I still have to abide by the same things I tell everybody else. I get nervous if I get stopped by a police officer. I think that's a natural reaction, like when your parents scold you. I think unfortunately the media sensationalized a lot of that to make it seem like it's more rampant than it is. [But] one time occurring is too many."

*—Dwayne Preston,
Bowie Police
Department¹⁰*

"So many of the women thought of themselves as police officers first, but they weren't treated that way."

*—On The Front Lines:
Police Stress and
Family Well-being¹¹*

⁹Naomi Wallace

¹⁰A Black Police Officers Perspective

¹¹Excerpt from On the Front Lines: Police Stress and Family Well-being

THE DIVIDED TRUTH OF OFFICER NAKIA JONES

“The look in my son’s eyes was that of fear and helplessness. I immediately sat up in the bed and he showed me the Alton Sterling video. While looking at the video I had my police mindset on. My son asked, “Mommy, is this going to happen to me?” I looked at my son and suddenly I saw the video through the eyes of a mother, sister, and wife of an African American male.” –Nakia Jones, *The Truth Divided*

Excerpt of transcript of “Police need to honor their oath” Ohio Police Officer Nakia Jones’ Facebook Live Video

My son came home from work today, and he showed me a disturbing video about a young man that was shot and killed by police in Louisiana, and it’s so funny because my son wanted to go to college there. And I kept saying, ‘ah, I ain’t feeling that,’ or whatever. What’s interesting to me is that the shooting involved a police officer. And I watched the video over and over and over and over and over again so that I wouldn’t become judgmental, because not only am I a mother of two African American sons and I have African American nephews and I have brothers – I’m also a person who wears the uniform with the blue. I am also the one that gives their life and puts their life in danger. I wear blue. So, I’m looking at it and I’m looking at it, and I became so furious—and so hurt...They put us in this negative category and I’m saying to myself, ‘I’m not that type of police officer,’ I know police officers that are like me that would give their lives for other people, so I’m looking at it, and it tore me up because I got to see, what you all see. If I wasn’t a police officer, and I wasn’t on the inside, I would be saying: ‘Look at this racist stuff. Look at this.’ And it hurt me.

First of all, I became an officer in 1996. I grew up in the hood. So, I ain’t grew up in the suburbs, I grew up on [audio interference]. We moved to East Cleveland. So, I know what it is. So, the reason I became a police officer was to make a difference in people’s lives. I knew what it was like to have a parent on drugs. I knew what it was like to watch people be picked on and bullied on, and all kinds of things, and I said, ‘I want to make a difference. I want to be that change.’ So, I became that change. So, in ‘96, I took an oath in East Cleveland sitting in front of (the chief) that I would serve and protect my community at all costs. Even if it meant I wouldn’t go home to my one-year-old daughter. And that’s what I did, and I did it with integrity and respect. The thing that hurt me most of all

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Ohio Laws and Rules

4501:2-6-07 Code of ethics and oath of office (Excerpt)¹²

(A) Code of Ethics

Members of the Ohio state highway patrol in recognizing their responsibilities as public servants, shall be particularly attentive to citizens seeking assistance and/or information...They shall regard their office as a public trust and in the discharge of their duties be mindful of their primary obligations to serve the public efficiently and effectively... They shall administer the law in a just, impartial manner, affording the same reasonable treatment in all cases...

(B) Oath of Office

Every member of the uniformed division of the Ohio state highway patrol shall make the following oath of office at the time of appointment as a trooper.

“I do solemnly swear/affirm that I will support the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Ohio, and that I will faithfully, honestly and impartially discharge the duties of the office of trooper in the Ohio state highway patrol to the best of my ability, during my continuance in that office.”

¹²[Code of ethics and oath of office](#)

was that a lot of people that I was arresting were the same color as me, that grew up in East Cleveland, like me. I couldn't understand that. Why would you want to destroy your community? I couldn't understand. So, I said 'OK, but they're not sworn to serve and protect either.' They didn't take that oath. This is what they do.

So, then I left there, and I came to another predominately Black community and became a police officer. I'm the first and only African American female officer and I can say with pride and respect, I stood in front of Marcia Fudge and took that oath to serve and protect my community. And I also moved into my community, and I raised my children in this community. I wear that blue uniform proudly. And I know for a fact I have five, six beautiful children that love me and a husband, I have a family that loves me, and I know there's times I may not come home from work. I have taken guns off 15-, 14-, 13-year-old children. I'm talking about real guns. I've had to go and tell a mother that they're 13-year-old son or daughter was not coming home. I've interviewed rape victims that's been raped by people who look just like me, the same color as me. We are running around, killing each other left and right. But what hurts me the most is the people who stood in front of a judge and stood in front of a mayor and said, 'I swear my oath that I will serve and protect this community' – and God, please forgive me, and you can delete me if you're getting mad at me – If you are white and you're working in a Black community, and you are racist, you need to be ashamed of yourself. You stood up there and took an oath. If this is not where you want to work, then you need to take your behind somewhere else.

... how dare you stand next to me in the same uniform and murder somebody. How dare you? You oughta be ashamed of yourself. So why don't we just keep it real: If you are that officer that knows good-and-well you've got a god complex; you are afraid of people who don't look like you – you have no business in that uniform. Take it off. If you are afraid to go and talk to an African American female, or a male, or a Mexican male or female because they're not white like you, take the uniform off. You have no business being a police officer. Because there's many of us who would give our life for anybody. And we took this oath, and we meant it. ■

AMINA: We took an oath.

That means something.

RYAN (reciting, raises his hand): "THAT I WILL BE FAITHFUL AND BEAR TRUE ALLEGIANCE"

AMINA: Exactly

[Sheepdog, March 21, 2020, page 14]

DEEP DIVE INTO THE SCENE

“Kevin Artigue writes a mystery that navigates the complexities of race and relationships.” –CATF

What was your initial reaction to reading the play?

MELISSA CRESPO, DIRECTOR (MC): *Sheepdog* follows the love story between two police officers. As we watch Amina and Ryan navigate their relationship, we also get a taste of the everyday trials and tribulations of what it's like to be a cop. *Sheepdog* led me on my own dramaturgical dive into police training, and I watched a really great documentary that takes place during the Ferguson riot in response to Michael Brown's death. Not only are police

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EXCERPT FROM THE SCRIPT

PLAY SETTING

Time: Summer, 2017
Place: A home in suburban
Cleveland

CAST OF CHARACTERS

AMINA

early 30's, African-American,
a ten-year vet of the Cleveland
Division of Police (CDP)

RYAN

early 30's, white, five-year
vet of the CDP

Origin of 'Amina': Derived from Arabic (amin) meaning “truthful,” or Aminah (amina) meaning “feel safe.” This was the name of the Prophet Muhammad's mother.¹⁶

Origin of 'Ryan': Meaning & History: From an Irish surname that was derived from Ó Riain meaning “descendant of Rían.” The given name Rían probably means “little king” (from Irish rí “king” combined with a diminutive suffix).¹⁷

AMINA:

You love the Ugly, you thrive in it
The Ugly is not your enemy
The Ugly is raw, unfiltered life
The Ugly is Fairfax, Central, Kinsman
It's Cleveland, east side baby, your home
Which you haven't been afraid of...until now

[*Sheepdog*, March 21, 2020, page 1]

(*Ryan appears. Amina takes her hand and adjusts his face in the light, examining it.*)

AMINA:

Everything you depend on...
Your uniform, duty belt, even your shoes with their special orthos for your fucked up feet
It all feels up for grabs
So you go full Nancy Drew and put it all on the line
Now here you are

[*Sheepdog*, March 21, 2020, page 1]

BACKGROUND

The documentary **DO NOT RESIST** is “an ominous journey into the rapid militarization of police forces across the United States. Over the last two decades, more than \$39 billion in advanced military equipment such as armored vehicles have flowed from the federal government to both big cities and small towns.”¹³

For additional background information, check out “On Sheep, Wolves, and Sheepdogs” By LTC (RET) Dave Grossman, author of *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*,¹⁴ and “The 3 Types of People—Sheep, Wolves & Sheepdogs.”¹⁵

¹³[Do Not Resist](#)

¹⁴[On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society](#)

¹⁵[Three Types of People - Sheep, Wolves & Sheepdogs](#)

¹⁶[Behind the Name - Amina](#) ¹⁷[Behind the Name - Ryan](#)

stations around the country militarized by our own government, but they are also required to read Lieutenant Dave Grossman's book that inspired the title of Kevin's play. Grossman theorizes that if civilians are sheep and predators are killers, sheepdogs are people who protect the sheep. But how are cops taught to identify wolves? Amina and Ryan are forced to negotiate their own backgrounds while also putting on a uniform every day. The intersection between bias and who we love isn't always an easy thing to face.

How does Amina negotiate that background? What is her journey?

MC: At the beginning of the play, Amina doesn't want what she thinks is happening to be true. She is working to be objective, to put the pieces together. But I don't know if she necessarily wants those answers because I think deep down, she does suspect a dangerous truth that will change everything.

Sheepdog flows in and out of time. Why tell this story this way?

KA: *Sheepdog* is a memory play that then becomes like a piece of footage that stops, starts, rewinds. It's hazy in moments, unclear what you're looking at. The play, [Amina's] memory, becomes like a piece of evidence, a vital piece of evidence that she's presenting to us – but she's afraid of it. So we see her run away from the truth in moments, actively avoiding what she knows is coming.

I think when I sit down to write any play, I'm looking to achieve what Suzan-Lori talks about, that perfect marriage of form and content. I think those are the masterworks, and by no means am I suggesting that *Sheepdog* has done that, but that is always the goal for me. I think a unity of form/content comes from a protagonist's need. A structure that is intrinsically tied to what she's looking for, her search - the form of *Sheepdog* is Amina's memory, this captured footage in her mind, the memory of her falling in love with Ryan, the traumatic memory of learning of the death of Brandon Mayfield - and it spirals out from there.

How does theater help us cope with our own reality?

MC: When you have a character going through significant psychological trauma, there's a lot of disassociating involved. Black people are going through mental health issues that are real. I was reading Elizabeth Alexander's beautiful essay in the *New Yorker*, and she calls this generation the 'Trayvon Generation.' She talks about how easy it is to see violence enacted on Black bodies ["They watched these violations up close and on their cell phones, so many times over"]. And that the only way to cope with that is to distance yourself. And with art, we can imagine different endings and also get to the truth.

What was your first interaction with this play?

MC: I came across the play way before CATF tapped me to direct it. I read it about a year and a half ago. And actually, I co-wrote a play [*Egress*, with

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¹⁸[Why You Should Start Talking to Yourself](#)

¹⁹[Elements of Style by Suzan-Lori Parks](#)

²⁰[Police brutality imagery on social media can cause lasting trauma, especially for black people](#)

BACKGROUND

Kevin Artigue **utilizes second-person pronouns as opposed to first-person pronouns** when Amina is speaking to the audience. Dr. Guy Winch says speaking in second-person creates psychological distance from an anxiety-producing or stressful event [and] allows us to manage our anxiety and distressing feelings more efficiently. It also, helps to reduce the detrimental impact of such feelings on our behavior. ¹⁸

"A playwright, as any other artist, should accept the bald fact that content determines form and form determines content; that form, and content are interdependent. Form should not be looked askance and held suspect - form is not something that "gets in the way of the story" but is an integral part of the story."

-Suzan-Lori Parks, Excerpted from "Possession" and "Elements of Style"¹⁹

"Even if a person has never experienced police brutality or gun violence themselves, seeing persistent images of those events can still lead to a trauma response."

-Burgandy Holiday, a Philadelphia-based psychotherapist²⁰

AMINA:

Not because you can't

Because you won't

Because the why of it overwhelms you

Puts you on your knees looking up for a God you stopped believing in years ago

The day in high school you wrote on the back page of your Harry Potter "I am an atheist"

Shit you could use that god now

[*Sheepdog*, March 21, 2020, page 1]

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CREATIVES

“A play is a painting that moves. Instead of it holding still, and you are looking at it, you hold still, and it scrolls by.” –Patricia Zipprodt

A CONVERSATION WITH DESIGNER **JOHNATHAN D. ALEXANDER** Journey Into the Lighting Design Process

John, did you choose “theater” or did “theater” choose you?

JOHN D. ALEXANDER (JDA): Yes, the theater chose me. You’ll find, a lot of designers start out on stage and then somewhere in our development, in our process, we might find that perhaps acting, or singing, or if we’re a triffecta doing the whole thing, it’s not necessarily for us. For me in particular, I was introduced to the theater in a nonprofessional sense when I was very young, say– five years old, or so, at the church I attended in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, Evangel Church. It’s a mega-church, the pastors are white, the congregation is mostly Black. We would have this celebration every Christmas where we would tell the story of the birth, the crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – that’s mostly the second half, which is all biblical. The first half begins in the 18th century, where we sing Christmas carols, then journey to the present day and end at a very spectacular high-energy A.M.E.* type church. Each year, there was a cast of about 200 community members, actual horses, and buggies, dogs, birds, camels, sheep, of course, the donkey and Jesus actually ascended at the very end with pyrotechnics. So, yea – theater. *an acronym for African Methodist Episcopal Church.

How did you move over from performing to designing?

JDA: So, I am in love with storytelling, I am in love with the communal aspect of telling a story, and very much in love with the production value put inside of it. When I was in high school, my drama teacher had us perform monologues of our choice. I did The Messenger from *Medea* by Euripides. When I finished, I thought I did great, but his response was, “That’s great! ...we also have opportunities in the tech department, where the technical director is looking for students to help him build sets and work backstage. Would you be interested in that?” From that moment, I knew, okay, I might have a little bit of talent in acting, but really, he’s saying, “Okay. Move over to tech and do that.”

Well, thank you for moving into the world of design, and thank you for [sharing] your initial research and design ideas [with me]. Will you talk a bit about your thoughts on our current situation and how it intersects with your work on *Sheepdog*?

JDA: Well, it’s layered, because we’re living in this moment right now and I’m a Black man. We’re living in a moment when people are beginning to become aware of what’s really going on. People are starting to see the issue of police brutality. I’ve been caught up in the system. Fortunately, not one where I would not be able to succeed or to continue moving forward, but as a

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BACKGROUND

KEVIN’S NOTE ON SOUND:

The world outside of Amina and Ryan should be created through sound design - this includes the off-stage characters:

- Dispatcher
- Husband
- Yvonne
- Sergeant
- Zaragoza
- Esteban
- Teenager
- Chief

The Creative Team

DIRECTOR

MELISSA CRESPO

SCENIC DESIGN

CLAIRE DELISO

LIGHTING DESIGN

**JOHNATHAN D.
ALEXANDER**

SOUND DESIGN

SHARATH PATEL

COSTUME DESIGN

SHANE BALLARD

“Ultimately, the lighting designer must be an artist! He must understand style, composition, balance, esthetics and human emotions. He must also understand the science of light, optics, vision, the psychology of perception and lighting technology. Using these tools the lighting designer must learn to think, feel and create with his heart.”

–Bill Williams, *Lighting Mechanics*

Black male, I've been pulled over and harassed by the police at a young age. I've been fortunate and blessed enough to have lived through it and survive. What resonates with me the most in terms of research [as an artist-activist] is collecting the names of people who have fallen victim to police brutality, like Amadou Diallo, reading their stories and realizing the police officers and the entire system, operate in immense fear. So, I feel it's important to use my voice, as a lighting designer, to speak on the issues in the play that are also mirroring events at this moment. I am drawn to shows that are very much centered around these issues. For example, there's *Anne and Emmett*, a play that's a discussion between Emmett Till and Anne Frank. They meet in a place called [Memory], where they talk about what happened to them or each of them.

Seeing the video of George Floyd being murdered in broad daylight made me angry. I was very much filled with rage. I was filled with disappointment. In my own little corner of the world as a lighting designer, I thought, how can I speak to this? I mean, I'm an activist in the sense that I do speak against or speak to social issues, but what can I do, really. So, I went onto Facebook, I have about 2300 friends, and I scrolled through each and every person to identify all of my white friends. I wrote down their names. I think it was about 710 people, and I was able to tag 500 of them in an article that included seventy-five things that white people can do to end or fight police brutality, and racial injustice. The list has populated to 97 things, the last time I checked.

I can see that you are a storyteller who loves a story. Can you talk to us about your process as an artist when you are first stepping into the world of the play? Do you like to read the script in one sitting?

JDA: Absolutely. Anytime I read a script, I always want to read it from start to finish. I never want to break the continuity because that's how the patron will experience it. The first read is for pure enjoyment. Do I connect with this? Does this resonate with me? Do I find anything absolutely interesting? During the second reading, I take notes on how the story is being told from a creative standpoint. Finding motifs, finding symbols, finding meanings within the script, and then asking questions to the director and playwright, if we're granted that luxury. And lastly, the third read is the fun part. What indications might inform the lighting in each scene? What time of day is it? Where are we – interior or exterior?

How about your process for *Sheepdog*?

JDA: *Sheepdog* connects with me because of the time that we're living in, and unfortunately, still living in. I was excited by it and felt like this story is right on time. But, when I read *Sheepdog* the first time, I did have questions, I'm not going to lie. When I read it for the first time, and without doing any research before reading the play the first time, I knew it was not written by a Black person. I sensed that. And I had questions. Melissa and I had conversations about the realities that we don't want the audience to ignore. People can look at this play and say, "It's a play about love, or it's a play about a relationship between two people, or it's a play that deals with race." And while that is all

Sarah Saltwick], that uses the second-person and has a similar structure.

Speaking of structure, why did you use the second-person format?

KA: When Amina says, "You," to an audience, addressing them in the second-person, my goal was to not let the audience escape, to not give a white audience an ability to escape Amina's perspective as a Black woman. Just being very real about the majority of our audiences in the American theater...who's going to show up to this play in most theaters? It's a white audience. I wanted the language itself not to let an audience off the hook and to force them to go along this journey with her. And the word, the 'you,' does this work. It does it. It forces that subjectivity – Amina's eyes become your eyes. ■

BACKGROUND

Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant with no criminal record, was 22 years old when he was killed by four New York Police Officers.²¹

Anne and Emmett is a play by Janet Langhart Cohen, "an imagined conversation between two figures from history - teenagers, who were the victims of institutional terrorism." Anne Frank was a Jewish girl killed in 1945 during the Holocaust, and Emmett Till, a young Black man, murdered while visiting family in Mississippi in 1955. They meet in a place called Memory, where they share their experiences with bigotry and injustice.²²

²¹[Years Before Black Lives Matter, 41 Shots Killed Him](#)

²²[DC Metro Theater Arts Review of "Anne and Emmett" at Metro Stage](#)

very true, I feel it's a play about honesty, about being able to trust someone, and know someone. Taking into account these two individuals; they're not married, they're in a relationship and decide to move in together. So, to a certain degree, a level of trust is being built, which is what we're seeing.

Speaking of Melissa, I had an opportunity to talk to her and she mentioned this idea of "connecting the dots."

JDA: Yes, it's an idea about connectivity. How can we connect the idea that technology plays an important role in our lives, and especially as it relates to police brutality, and how we as a people can learn, and acknowledge what is happening from that. We're exploring the idea of surveillance, and the idea that technology is really the only thing that is keeping us honest.

Let's talk about the configuration for the Studio 112 plays which are in the round.

JDA: To be completely honest, it's my least favorite. It really is. For a lighting designer, you take into account everyone's vantage point. You take into account the patron experience when they are watching something on stage – because, at the same time, they're seeing other patrons in the background, sitting opposite of them. I have no control over that. But it's a beautiful challenge. It's an excellent way for me to challenge myself to find ways to separate the audience members on the opposite side that are potentially in your periphery. Whereas, in a proscenium theater, I have control over what the background colors might be, or if there's a set wall that separates the actors from the background.

What do you think of playing in the round for *Sheepdog* in particular?

JDA: For *Sheepdog*, I love the intimacy and closeness that the black box or theater in the round settings offer. Given this spatial difference, when [Amina's] standing on stage, in one single light, alone, speaking this truth and in her thought, we have no choice to believe her. We have no choice but to be with her as she makes that journey.

What are your thoughts concerning the style of the play?

JDA: The play is very episodic. There are real-time moments within the play when the couple is in their living room, or on the street, but a lot of the play is inside Amina's head. At times she is isolated in light. Completely separated from her world around her, so that we can focus on her truth and sit with it.

In the script, Kevin uses the stage direction "shift," how do you plan to shift the atmosphere for the audience using color?

JDA: Amina, within herself as a police officer wearing a blue uniform, has to transition from feeling safe, warm, and cozy to feeling unsafe, confused, and cold in an instant. The light will travel just as quick as she thought – the contrast between the warmth of their environment, but also the stark truth that she has to sit with as a Black woman police officer.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS²³

Lamps: lighting term for light bulbs used in theatrical equipment.

Fixtures: the light fixture holding the bulbs; if it has no lens, it is called an 'open-face fixture.'

Cyclorama: a curved backdrop, sometimes made of cloth, used to create background scenery with colored light and images projected onto it.

Patterns: cut-out design slid into a frame called a 'pattern holder.' These project the pattern onto the stage to create various effects.

Gels: sheets of colored plastic put in front of a light to create a colorful lighting effect. These are placed into a metal holder on the front of a light called a 'color frame.'

Shutters: moveable attachments that cover part or all of a fixture to control the output and shape of the light beam. If shutters have a hinged panel, rather than a sliding track, they are called 'barn doors'.

Snoot: long cylinder attached to light fixtures to help focus the beam, also called a 'top hat.'

Lighting Plan: A scale drawing detailing the exact location of each lantern used in production and any other pertinent information (e.g., its dimmer number, focus position, and color number). Often drawn from the theater's ground plan.

Lighting Plot: The process of recording information about each lighting state either onto paper or into the memory of a computerized lighting board for subsequent playback.

Technical Rehearsal: (also known as the "Tech Run" or just "Tech"). Usually the first time the show is rehearsed in the venue, with lighting, scenery and sound. Costumes are sometimes used where they may cause technical problems (e.g. quick changes). Often a very lengthy process.

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²³Definitions from [Study.com: Theater Lighting Equipment & Terms](#) and [TheaterCraft.com: Digital Display Equipment and Dry Tech](#)

What are the challenges of designing in repertory?

JDA: That's a great question. In this case, it's the inventory. Thankfully, we're in a very small-scale space with an even smaller acting area. The lighting designer's first goal is to provide general illumination, which means, of course, just to give enough light on stage that everyone from every vantage point can see the actor. But then, the challenge is, we are combining two ideas in one space that each demands different effects, different looks, different ways to reveal the actors.

Looking at both plays, it's vital to determine how they might be different in a technical sense. So, for *Sheepdog*, I know automatically that I'm going to want to use sidelight, which is problematic for a black box. If I have a light, say a few feet away from a patron that is shooting across the stage, it can potentially shine in the eyes of the patron on the opposite side, which is uncomfortable and less desirable for this type of work. God help you if you attend a rock concert. So, given that challenge, I have to find other ways of revealing the actors in an exciting way that drives the story forward. For *The House of the Negro Insane*, we have large scale tree-like objects and windows that we want to breathe life into in a beautiful way.

For *Sheepdog*, how do we use wires, surveillance, connectivity, technology, and breathe life into that idea given the restraints of 18 Lekos? To get technical for a second, there are different beam angles for various lights. So, you take what we call a Leko, which is a light that, when turned on and projected, is a circle. You can adjust that circle with shutters and create a square or a rectangle. You can actually shutter the light in a way to create a new idea. Or you can add a template, think stencil, to change that circle to foliage, or in *Sheepdog's* case, maybe pin spots and little moments of isolation.

Given the unique nature and environments in both plays, considering the types and number of lights we have, how can I beautifully manipulate each light in the most effective way? That's 18 ideas spread across both plays. Then I might have a different type of light that creates a soft edge (wash) and not a hard circle (spot), that'll just splurge out this light. I can be limited by that because I might only have 18 of those, and if I want a warm and a cool for *The House of the Negro Insane*, I have nothing left for *Sheepdog*.

In 2021 what do you hope the production will illuminate of this present moment?

JDA: Wow. That's a good question. And I think initially being an artist that has been a part of this genre, I've conditioned myself not to really even want to truly pinpoint an idea that I want them to take away. I really just want for folks to see this, experience it, and take away what they find is their truth, and how they can take that back to their community. Now, that's just the initial idea. It is important to be conscious of the moment that we're living in and do the hard work. It really is to shed light on truth not just only in an entertaining way, but a truth that you could take home to your family, and then shed light on that. Because I really believe at this moment for us to move forward as a people, and I say this a lot, is that we really need to do our quote-unquote homework. Like I said before, we can protest in the streets until we're blue in the face, pass the laws, but until we can change the minds of those that we absolutely love, and I think that the ones that we love are the ones that are going to really hear us. In our own family units and circles, that's where the real work goes. It really is about having tough conversations with yourself and people that look like you, so that we can all find a more equitable world. And, until we do that, real change is not going to happen. For the CATF patron, I hope *Sheepdog* will shine a light on a situation that has existed in this country for many years. And now it's time for all of us to do the hard work. We must realize that what is happening now is not just an outside issue, but an issue within ourselves. There's still so much more to unpack. And, if we can't acknowledge that, there is no moving forward. ■

A "**Dry Tech**" is without actors to rehearse the integration of lighting, scenic changes etc. It follows that a "**Wet Tech**" is a full technical rehearsal with actors and all technical elements, although this term isn't used as often as "Dry Tech."

A "**Paper Tech**" is a session without the set or actors when the technical and design team talk through the show ensuring everything's going to work as planned. Stage Managers can use this session to ensure all is written correctly in the Prompt Book.

Ellipsoidal reflector spotlights (ERS) are more commonly called Lekos, or sometimes "Klieg" lights by the real old-timers. These nicknames are based on two manufacturers' brand names: Century Lighting's Joseph Levy and Edward Kook developed the Lekolite ERS fixture, while rival lighting business Universal Electric Stage Lighting Company Kliegl Bros. Props. developed the Klieg light. (The name Leko is now a trademark of Strand Lighting.)²⁴

For more information see [Lighting Design-The Process](#), [Lighting Design-Paperwork](#), and [SUNY Geneseo's Description of Light Design](#).

²⁴Holben, Jay. "Shape and Shadow with the Ellipsoidal Reflector Spotlight." *TVTechnology*, TV Technology, 30 Jan. 2013

LEARN MORE!

FROM KEVIN: Here are four reading references for the play. If [the audience has] time to read just one, I recommend "The Cop" by Jake Halpern.

- [THE COP](#) Jake Halpern | The New Yorker | August 3, 2015
Darren Wilson was not indicted for shooting Michael Brown. Many people question whether justice was done.
- [The Black Officer Who Detained George Floyd Had Pledged to Fix the Police](#)
Kim Barker | The New York Times | June 27, 2020
- [74 Seconds podcast: An officer Charged. The death of Philando Castile and the trial of Jeronimo Yanez](#) MPR News Staff | MPR News | May 23, 2017
- ["Are You Prepared to Kill Somebody?" A Day With One of America's Most Popular Police Trainers](#) Bryan Schatz | Mother Jones | Mar/Apr 2017

FROM MELISSA: I hope the audience take-away from *Sheepdog* is that you can't ever relax when it comes to racism. I know it's exhausting, but for people of color, it's exhausting for us every single day. And I think white people are experiencing that exhaustion for the very first time. And those engaged in allyship are seeing how difficult it is and are taking part in the work because it's every day, 24 hours, seven days a week endeavor. Just because you were raised a certain way doesn't mean you can't change. I think *Sheepdog* functions like a cautionary tale—a warning of the dangers of white supremacy. At first glance, it'd be easy to dismiss *Sheepdog* as a cautionary tale for police violence, but the disease is white supremacy.

- [On Making Black Lives Matter. Extreme violence has clarified one thing: Allies aren't enough anymore.](#) Roxane Gay | Marie Claire | July 11, 2016
- [Endless Grief: The Spectacle of 'Black Bodies in Pain.'](#) Salamishah Tillet | The New York Times | Published June 19, 2020 | Updated June 22, 2020
- [Does Diversifying Police Forces Reduce Brutality Against Minorities?](#) National Public Radio | June 22, 2020 | NPR's Noel King talks to sociologist Rashawn Ray of the Brookings Institution about why simply diversifying a police department does not decrease police actions of brutality toward people of color.
- [How to Be an Antiracist](#) Ibram X. Kendi | Published August 13, 2019

FROM JOHN:

- [97 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#) Corinne Shutack | August 13, 2017
- [This is what white people can do to end racism: Study what your forefathers did, then do the opposite](#) Brando Simeo Starkey | THE UNDEFEATED | July 2, 2020
- [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism](#) Dr. Robin DiAngelo | GOOD MEN PROJECT | April 9, 2015

ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

- [VIDEO: History Of Policing: How Did We Get Here?](#)
Rund Abdelfatah, Ramtin Arablouei, John Poole | NPR | July 8, 2020
- [A black police officer's perspective](#)
Clinton Yates, Rhiannon Walker, Lonnae O'Neal, Aaron Dodson | THE UNDEATED | July 8, 2016
- [Guide to Allyship: An open source starter guide to help you become a more thoughtful and effective ally](#)
A project created by [amélie lamont](#) and by [amélie.studio](#)
- [Between the World and Me](#)
Ta-Nehisi Coates. September 8, 2015
"His description of officers as an apparatus of state power resonated with me." –Kevin Artigue
- [To Write Sheepdog, I had to be willing to go to an ugly place, but hopefully an honest one](#)
Long Wharf Theatre
September 18, 2018
- [Years Before Black Lives Matter, 41 Shots Killed Him](#)
Christian Red | The New York Times
July 19, 2019
- [20 Years After the NYPD Killing of Amadou Diallo, His Mom Asks: What's Changed?](#)
Ese Olumhense | The City
February 1, 2019
- ['Me And White Supremacy' – A Personal Anti-Racism Tool](#)
Eric Deggans | NPR | July 9, 2020
- [James Baldwin Documentary I Am Not Your Negro Is the Product of a Specific Moment in History](#)
Arica L. Coleman
Time | February 24, 2017

KEEP THE CONVO GOING

- What changes to the world would you make if you could?
- Are you aware of your hidden bias?
- What should the qualifications be to become a police officer?
- Do you think we can build trust between police and the communities they serve?

AMINA:

Don't be sorry. You didn't create the world.

RYAN:

Yeah but...maybe I could do more to change it.

[*Sheepdog*, March 21, 2020, page 9]