

The Color Purple - The Musical

By Marsha Norman

Directed by Marcus Johnson

Assistant Directed by Lauren Alexandra

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Production History

Original Broadway Production:

- Where? - Broadway Theatre - New York, NY
- When? - Opened Dec. 1, 2005 - Closed Feb. 24, 2008
- Production Team:
 - Directed by: Gary Griffin
 - Choreographed by: Donald Byrd
 - Scenic design: John Lee Beatty
 - Costume design: Paul Tazewell
 - Hair design: Charles G. LaPointe
 - Lighting design: Brian MacDevitt
 - Sound Design: Jon Weston
 - Music Director: Linda Twine
 - Orchestrations: Jonathan Tunick
- Cast List:
 - Celie - LaChanze
 - Nettie - Renée Elise Goldsberry
 - Mister - Kingsley Leggs
 - Young Harpo, Young Adam - Leon G. Thomas III
 - Harpo - Brandon Victor Dixon
 - Sofia - Felicia P. Fields
 - Squeak - Krisha Marcano
 - Shug Avery - Elisabeth Withers-Mendes
 - Ol' Mister - Lou Myers
 - Pa - JC Montgomery
 - Buster, Chief - Nathaniel Stampley
 - Grady - JC Montgomery
 - Bobby - James Brown III
 - Older Olivia - Bahiyah Sayyed Gaines
 - Older Adam - Grasan Kingsberry

- Young Nettie, Mister Daughter, Chief's Daughter - Chantylla Johnson

Original Broadway Production cont.:

- Young Celie, Mister Daughter, Young Olivia, Henrietta - Zipporah G. Gatling
- Church Soloist - Carol Dennis
- Church Lady/Doris - Kimberly Ann Harris
- Church Lady/Darlene - Virginia Ann Woodruff
- Church Lady/Jarene, Daisy - Maia Nkenge Wilson
- Preacher, Prison Guard - Doug Eskew

Broadway Revival Production:

- Where? - Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre - New York, NY
- When? - Opened Dec. 10, 2015 - Closed Jan. 8, 2017
- Production Team:
 - Directed by: John Doyle
 - Musical staging: John Doyle
 - Scenic design: John Doyle
 - Lighting design: Jane Cox
 - Sound design: Gregory Clarke
 - Costume design: Ann Hould-Ward
 - Hair design: Charles G. LaPointe
 - Music Director: Jason Michael Webb
 - Orchestrations: Joseph Joubert
- Cast List:
 - Sofia - Danielle Brooks
 - Guard - Dwayne Clark
 - Preacher/Ol' Mister - Lawrence Clayton
 - Church Lady - Carrie Compere
 - Squeak - Patrice Covington

- Celie - Cynthia Erivo
- Shug Avery - Jennifer Hudson

Broadway Revival Production cont.:

- Church Lady - Bre Jackson
- Mister - Isaiah Johnson
- Nettie - Joaquina Kalukango
- Adam/Buster - Grasan Kingsberry
- Pa - Kevyn Morrow
- Harpo - Kyle Scatliffe
- Grady - Antoine L. Smith
- Olivia - Carla R. Stewart
- Bobby - Akron Watson
- Church Lady - Rema Webb

Filmography

- Release Date - December 18, 1985
- Distributed by - Warner Bros. Pictures
- Directed by - Steven Spielberg
- Cast List:
 - Celie – Whoopi Goldberg
 - Sofia – Oprah Winfrey
 - Mister/Albert – Danny Glover
 - Harpo – Willard Pugh
 - Pa – Leonard Jackson
 - Grady – Bennet Guillory
 - Old Mister – Adolph Caesar
 - Swain – Lawrence Fishburn
 - Reverend Samuel – Carl Anderson
 - Randy - Grand Bush

- Miss Millie – Dana Ivey
 - Buster – James Tillis
 - Shug Avery – Margaret Avery
 - Nettie – Akosua Busia
 - Squeak – Rae Dawn Chong
 - Young Celie – Desreta Jackson
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- Awards:
 - Golden Globe for Best Actress – Whoopi Goldberg (1986)
 - NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture – Whoopi Goldberg (1986)
 - NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Motion Picture (1986)
 - Blue Ribbon Award for Best Foreign Film – Steven Spielberg (1987)
 - Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing – Feature Film – Steven Spielberg (1986)

Information on Playwright

The Book - Alice Walker

- ❖ Writer, poet, and activist
- ❖ Won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1983 for *The Color Purple* (first African American woman)
- ❖ “The least I can do is be my full being and express this whole thing that I am.” - When asked about her openness in relation to her sexuality (2020)
- ❖ Describes *The Color Purple* as: “liberation from enforced, male dominant, religion and thought; also poses the question never asked by societies in which they occur: what becomes of the children whose parents are lynched/assassinated?”

The Playwright - Marsha Norman

- ❖ Playwright and activist
- ❖ Won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for her play *Night Mother*
- ❖ Norman’s shift in writing style was, she says, inevitable. “Actually I always loved musicals and leaned toward them even back in Kentucky,” she recalled. “I went to school on a music scholarship. For me it was natural. You can only get so far in text and then you need to sing.”
- ❖ “It was an exploration of the power of love and faith in hard times and it recognized as neither the book or the movie could the central role of music in this African American community,” she said.
- ❖ Almost every work Norman has helped turn into a musical has been a literary legend that also possesses commercial viability. Only her eclecticism seems to connect “Color Purple,” “The Secret Garden,” “Bridges of Madison County” and future musicals such as “Matewan” – yes that serious drama and 1980s film about a furious coal mining strike in the 1920s — and even “King Kong,” which is in development. (2014)

The Composers - Stephen Bray, Allee Willis, Brenda Russell

- ❖ Spent 5 years working on the music for the show
- ❖ The 3 composers spent over a year reading books on how to write a musical
- ❖ Also spent a lot of the writing process going over the book by Alice Walker (they wanted to base the songs of the musical heavily on the book)
- ❖ Brenda Russell stated that much of her inspiration for the show came from God
- ❖ All 3 composers were heavily influenced and inspired spiritually
- ❖ Heavily used the book, and somewhat used the film as a reference
- ❖ Alice was also a very helpful reference by providing guidance to the composers through

- ❖ The language of the Olinka tribe is Swahili (see Glossary of the unfamiliar for translations)

Glossary of the Unfamiliar

General

Page #	Word	Meaning
14	Chirren	Children
20	Homely	Unattractive in appearance
33	Tied	Tired
54	Tender-headed	Having a tender head means being sensitive to touch, brushing, pulling, or any other type of tension.
62	Southern Nobility	Refers to the rich landowners in the South during that time period.
92	Corn Liquor	A kind of liquor, similar to moonshine, usually clear or brown, and about 40% alcohol.

Line-Specific Translations

Page #	Line	Translation
6	PA: Come on, Celie, you slow as molasses.	Celie is moving very slowly.
8	SOLOIST: Don't waste your time tryin' to rassle with you worldly woes	Don't waste your time wrestling with your wordly issues.
9	CHURCH LADIES: When the devil start squakin' witcha god won't quitcha no he won't	When the devil starts talking to you, god won't quit you, no he won't
17	PA: Whyn't you quit comin' round here and just go marry yo Shug Avery?	Why don't you quit coming around here and just go marry your Shug Avery?
19	PA: You think you gon' git some fresh girl to marry you now? Celie!	You think you're going to get a fresh girl (i.e. a virgin) to marry you now? Celie!
19	MISTER: She worse than I thought. She don't even look kin to Nettie.	She worse than I thought. She doesn't even look related to Nettie.

APPENDIX A

AFRICA

Music and Lyrics by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis and Stephen Bray
Swahili Lyrics by Rowan Bakker (South Africa 2018)

NOTE: On the guide vocal recordings, you will hear slight deviations (vowel migrations) from the traditional Italian vowels as written, for the sole purpose of keeping the vowel sound more open.

AFRICA PART 1 A (m91-m118)

Watu wetu wapo kwenye **Our people are one**
Kwapo moja tunaimba na kusherekea **We sing and celebrate**
Furaha **Happiness**
Kwenye amani tupo **We are in peace**

AFRICA PART 1 B (m143A-m181)

Tuko hapa **We are here**

AFRICA PART 2 A (m1-m49)

Mmoja, mbili, tatu, nne, tano, sita, saba **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10**
nane, tisa, kumi
Moja, mbili, tatu, nne, tano, sita, saba, **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10**
nane, tisa, kumi
Naweza kuhesabu **I can count**

What's this mess you been preaching?
Why you trying to change us?
Girl ain't nothing with no man
Why you making a big fuss?
Need a husband and children
Or you're gonna be nothing

I am nobody's mother, but I am somebody
Girls don't need education
Sound like the white folks back home
Best be knowing your station
But not my Olivia, mmm

Mmm, Kimbia! **Run!**

AFRICA PART 2 B (m103-m130)

We walk away from this ravaged land
With courage deep in our hearts
To face the unknown together
We'll find a place where we can be
Where spirit rise and soul is free
Oh people, my people

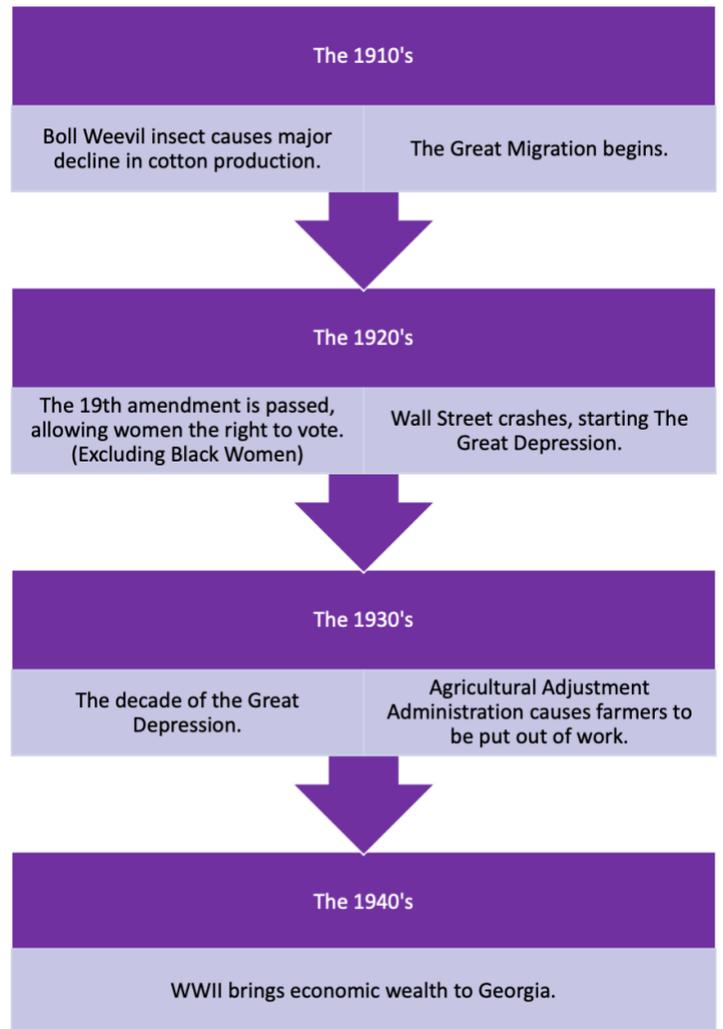
Tuna ondoka **We leave!**

Timeline

Timeline of the Show:



Timeline of the environment (world):



Themes/Symbols

The Letters and the Power of Communication:

Celie's letters throughout the show are symbolic in establishing the communication between herself, and the closest relationships in her life. Celie often writes to God, and in turn, Nettie continuously writes to Celie over the years. The letters help to establish the importance of these women's voices being heard. Over the years, when Celie doesn't receive Nettie's letters, she begins to lose her faith...believing that God is not hearing her pleads to him. In turn, Nettie feels sadness over the years when she doesn't receive any letters from Celie. When Celie finally does receive the letters, her faith begins to be restored. The letters help us to understand how important Celie's relationships with God and Nettie are to her. When she feels that she's lost these connections, she loses her faith. Only when these connections are restored is her faith.

Queer Black Women in the 20th Century:

Celie's attraction to Shug fuels her awakening, into discovering who she is throughout the show. As her feelings for Shug continue to develop, Celie transitions more and more into the woman she is meant to be. Her attraction for Shug pushes her to utilize her voice and begin to express herself. Celie's attraction and relationship with Shug is also the first time she feels comfortability and love with a partner. Celie's relationship with Shug causes a sexual awakening within her. She finally enjoys the act of intimacy with a partner.

Strong Female Relationships:

The female relationships at the center of this show, help to establish the amplification of the female voices within this show. Nettie allows her sister relationship with Celie to anchor her during their time apart. Celie's romantic relationship with Shug helps her to find herself and builds up her confidence. Even Sofia mentions the strength she has gained from her relationship with her sisters. The invaluable relationships between all of these women work to support them each individually, through the tumultuous experiences they go through.

Spirituality:

Spirituality is both evident and expressed throughout the entirety of this show. The importance of Celie's relationship with God is a clear driving force throughout the show. Shug helps Celie to see God as not just a physical being, but as a force that is present in all of the beautiful things in her life. Celie's reimagining of what her God looks like to her, ultimately empowers her to become the woman she was always meant to be.

Quilting and Sewing:

In many ways, the quilting that takes place throughout the show is a symbol of the unifying of all of these different individuals. The different patterns and patchworks of the quilt are representative of the different men and women in Celie's life. These men and women represent different gender roles, sexual orientations, and experiences. The idea of sewing is also symbolic in Miss Celie's pants. Rather than seeing sewing as just busy work for women of that time period, it is rather showcased as a lucrative way for a woman to make her own money, on her own terms.

Further Reading

Black Church References:

- [Praise Breaks That Make You Want To Get It In And Give God Praise!](#) Start @ 28:30 to 32:00
- ["I've Got The Victory" Summer Jam Praise Break 2018!](#) Whole video
- [Hand Clapping Foot Stomping 1 Hour Of Traditional Gospel Music!](#) Start @ 28:00 to 33:00

Church Phrases to be used during Opening Act I:

- God is good!
- Hallelujah!
- Amen
- Thank you, lord!
- Preach, pastor.
- Yes, lord!
- Glory!
- Come on now.
- That's right!
- Say it again!

The Mende Tribe during the Colonial Period:

- In the early 18th century, the Mende began migrating west of the Sewa River. They gained control of the southern half of modern Sierra Leone by the early 19th century.
- By 1896, however, they were conquered by the British. The Mende people were among the most active in the fight for independence from colonial rule. Sierra Leone became independent in 1961, with Milton Margai, a Mende, as head of state.
- During the civil war the Civil Defense Force (CDF), a militia group, was founded by Dr. Alpha Lavalie, a Mende himself, to fight the rebels along with government troops.
- In the Americas, especially the United States, researchers have discovered that elements of African culture had long persistence. In some areas where there were large groups of enslaved Africans, they kept much of their heritage. In the 1930s African American

linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner found a Gullah family in coastal Georgia that had preserved an ancient song in the Mende language ("A waka"), passing it down for 200 years.

African American Missionaries in the 20th Century:

- Pioneered by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), black America's oldest independent institution, several African American mission boards began to send their workers to colonies in West and South Africa.
- Their activities followed the turn-of-the-twentieth-century idea of the so-called "providential design" according to which African Americans inherited a special duty to uplift Africans based on their own experience of rising from slavery to freedom.
- During the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, most European-American missionaries despised the African American missionary presence in Africa, for it tended to draw large amounts of disciples from their congregations and facilitated the uncontrolled rise of independent African church movements.

Reference Videos for Push Da Button:

These videos are to give you an idea of what to expect with choreography for Push Da Button.

For the music videos, pay attention to the background dancers.

- [50 Cent - In Da Club \(Official Music Video\)](#) Start @ 3:16 - 3:55
- [Mary J. Blige - Family Affair \(Official Music Video\)](#) Start @ 2:05 - 2:48
- [Euphoria - Dance Scene](#) First 40 sec.
- [Jennifer Hudson Push Da Button The Color Purple](#) Full video!

Bibliography

Production History:

- To read more about the original production of The Color Purple: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about The Color Purple Revival: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about The Color Purple film: [Click Here](#)

Information on Playwright:

- To learn more about Alice Walker: [Click Here](#)
- To learn more about Alice Walker: [Click Here](#)
- To learn more about the composers: [Click Here](#)
- To learn more about Brenda Russell: [Click Here](#)
- To learn more about Marsha Norman: [Click Here](#)
- To learn more about Marsha Norman: [Click Here](#)

Glossary of the Unfamiliar:

- Refer to the Color Purple script:

Timeline:

- Refer to the Color Purple script.
- To learn more about Georgia during this time period: [Click Here](#)

Themes/Symbols:

- To read more about the letters: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about queer black women in the 20th century: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about quilting and sewing: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about spirituality: [Click Here](#)

Further Reading:

- To learn more about the Mende Tribe: [Click Here](#)
- To read more about African American Missionaries: [Click Here](#)