



Brave Soul Collective

PRESENTS

#BLACKMENFEEL

A Three-Part Series
of Virtual Panel Discussions & Performances

ACT I - ROOTS:
Sunday Sept. 27th, 2020
7pm (EST)

Supported in part by: **CNP**

About Brave Soul Collective

Brave Soul Collective (BSC) is a Washington, DC-based multi-disciplinary arts, education, and HIV/AIDS outreach organization working to illuminate the lives of LGBTQIA people of color through the performing and healing arts. BSC aims to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, by serving as a platform for open and honest discussion about prevention, stigma, and personal responsibility. In addition to our stand-alone productions, community discussions, and artist features, BSC regularly performs and presents workshops at HIV/AIDS conferences, as well as various LGBTQIA Pride and community events. 2020 marks BSC's 14th anniversary as an arts organization & company. For more info visit: <http://wearebravesouls.com>

Brave Soul Collective

presents

#BlackMenFeel

Act I: ROOTS

Produced by Monte J. Wolfe

PANELISTS

Daddy Rod
Daniel J. Downer
Dr. David Malebranche

CAST

Reginald Richard
Rich Rocket
Rodderick Sheppard
Michael Ward
Monte J. Wolfe

PLAYWRIGHTS

Anthony Green
Rodderick Sheppard
Monte J. Wolfe

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

George-Raymond

PANELISTS /CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Daddy Rod is a native of San Jose, CA and currently lives in the Atlanta area. He has been a part of the Leather and BDSM/Kink Community for over 20 years with the last 18 years in the Atlanta area. He is currently the Treasurer of the ONYX National Council, Co-Founder of the Atlanta BDSM Workshops and Mr. Atlanta Eagle 2016. His involvement with the Atlanta Leather/BDSM and Kink community, and ONYX in particular, has helped Daddy Rod embrace Leather History, his kinks and become a more confident man with a passion for education and preserving Leather History! He truly enjoys educating individuals of all races, genders and sexual orientations about the Leather and BDSM history and culture, and fetish communities. Daddy Rod is an avid fitness and bodybuilding junkie, loves traveling, and exploring new cultures. He is a former Radio DJ at a jazz station and also enjoys game shows where he has appeared and won on both "The Price is Right" and "Let's Make a Deal".

Daniel J. Downer is an award-winning community advocate and organizer; and the Executive Director of The Bros in Convo Initiative, a grassroots community organization in Orlando promoting and protecting the health equity of Black gay, bisexual, queer, and same gender loving men. Daniel J. Downer has a long history of advocating for Black and Brown LGBTQ+ and social movements in Central Florida. Through his work with various community initiatives and organizations, he has led community conversations on and facilitated community education campaigns specifically addressing health equity, HIV, and LGBTQ+ issues. Daniel served as the Act Against AIDS Ambassador, under the direction of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, from 2018 -2019 specifically working to bring attention, awareness, and practical solutions to health disparities that directly impact HIV positive communities in the South. As Executive Director of The Bros in Convo Initiative, he has guided the organization to become one of Central Florida's leading organizations while providing vision, energy, and leadership in the fulfillment of the mission of the organization, to provide comprehensive health education, STI prevention linkage, and peer support to Black gay, bisexual, queer, and same gender loving men ages 18 - 35 in Central Florida communities that are affected or impacted by health disparities.



PANELISTS /CONTRIBUTING WRITERS (CONT)



Johnnie Ray Kornegay III is the Creative Director for Counter Narrative Project (CNP), and he's also the Founder & Artistic Director of Staticc Art & Life, LLC, an arts company with the mission "delivering beauty to the world." Johnnie spent more than 15 years working in corporations, and is a subject matter expert in Recruiting, Call Center Operations and Professional Networking. As an advocate, Johnnie has been involved in HIV and civil rights advocacy for as long as he can remember. In the late-1990s he trained with the American Red Cross in HIV education, and did outreach work for the Chester AIDS Coalition. Johnnie is passionate about blending his experiences into his non-profit work. For Counter Narrative Project he has written blogs, and he has produced and hosted the podcast Counter Point. In 2016, the two public bodies of photographic and video work he exhibited - #BeTheFlame and untitled - included themes dealing with the impact of HIV on Black gay men. In 2017, Johnnie co-curated, World AIDS Day Atlanta events and I AM... Arts, Activism and HIV, an exhibit at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, about the importance of an artistic response to HIV in the community. Johnnie currently serves as co-Chair of the Georgia HIV Justice Coalition, a broad-based coalition of both individuals and organizations working across movements to bring an end to the criminalization of people living with HIV.

David Malebranche, MD, MPH, is a board-certified Internal medicine and sexual health physician, public health official, activist, and educator who lives in Atlanta, Georgia. He appears in the YouTube series "Revolutionary Health" as part of The Counter Narrative Project and also on the #AskTheHIVDoc video series. His writings and research have been published in JAMA, the Annals of Internal Medicine, the American Journal of Public Health, and Lancet. Dr. Malebranche also penned a memoir entitled "Standing on His Shoulders," about his relationship with his father, which is available on Amazon.



CAST / PLAYWRIGHTS



Anthony Green is from Memphis, TN. He moved to DC to continue a career in sexual health as well as teach as an adjunct English professor. His debut book, *#BlackGayStoriesMatter* is still available on Amazon. He recently won the Comedy Competition of DC Black theater Festival's One Act battle and earned a Lambda Literary Fellowship for Emerging LGBTQ Voices. He's also the founder of *Caged Birds Productions* and debuted his first full length play 'When Boys Exhale' this year. He's currently working on a social horror film funded by the *DC Arts and Humanities Commission* which is titled "The Souls of Black Pebbles."

Reginald Richard began acting in 2010, making my debut onstage in Washington D.C.'s first annual *DC Black Theater Festival*. Soon after he enrolled at *National Conservatory Of Dramatic Arts* where, upon graduating from their three-year advanced program in professional acting, he now serves on the faculty board. He has worked with a number of theatre companies over the last few years, including *Arena Stage*, *Studio Theatre*, *4615 Theatre Company*, *Young Playwrights' Theater*, *Nextstop Theatre Company*, *WSC Avant Bard*, and a host of others. Through these opportunities he's also managed to become an Equity Membership Candidate. Reginald is a man that wears many hats, one in particular being a performance role which honors *Frank Lee*, an enslaved black man who once served as head butler to the Washington family. As a Character Interpreter at *George Washington's Mount Vernon* he's had the distinct honor of paying homage to his ancestors, educating patrons, and pursuing acting on a full-time basis which is a rarity. This past summer he made his directorial debut with a virtual performance of the new play, *WANNABE*, which will premiere as a stage production in 2021.

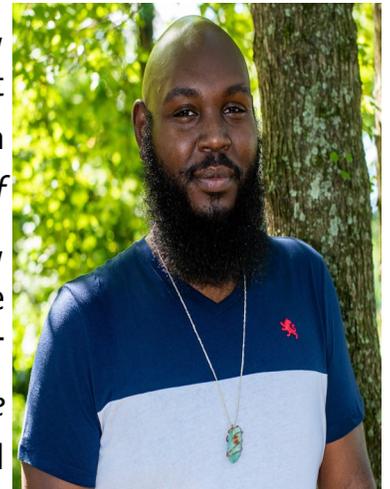


CAST / PLAYWRIGHTS (CONT)



Rich Rocket is creativity unleashed. Growing up with very humble beginnings, Rich learned at a very young age how to resourcefully make something from nothing. Originally out of necessity, Rich developed a love and passion for bringing visual concepts to life. After a bout with a former employer, Rich was thrust into entrepreneurship. After years of only admiring fashion, he decided to market his brand to the people, thus *Vintage Thrivals* was born. A clothing company that markets innovated, created, and vintage pieces while celebrating the coolness of today, the freshness of the go's and the uniqueness of the 80's! Through his photography, musing, and other creative endeavors, he wants to show the world that the limits you subscribe to are only enforced by you. Rich's charisma, style and wit has put him on some of the largest stages in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia area. His goal is to leave behind a legacy of creativity that will inspire the future generation to making lasting impressions, lasting impact, and a lasting imprint.

Rodderick Sheppard is a native of Southeast, Washington, DC, where he currently resides. He considers himself forever a student of the arts and never lost his passion for creating. He became a founding member of the 2015 *White House LGBTQ Champions of Change* award-winning program *Breaking Ground*. During this time, also watched the *African American Collective Theatre (ACT)* online content inspired by seeing stories like his. The connection to ACT started when he became an active member of *Brave Soul Collective* in 2018. Through his involvement with BSC, he has performed and showcased written pieces at the *John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Page to Stage Festival*. He felt a strong desire not only to be connected to his communities but to make an impact. His professional experience in public health encouraged his decision to return to school to obtain a Social Work degree at the *University of the District of Columbia*. His work continued at *AIDS Healthcare Foundation* as a Community Healthcare Worker where he was able to reconnect lost to care patients back into services successfully. Currently, he works for *Whitman-Walker Health* as a PrEP Specialist.

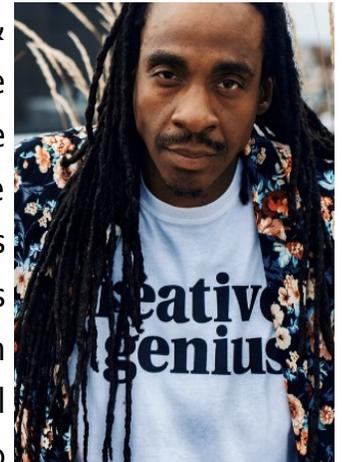


CAST / PLAYWRIGHTS (CONT)



Michael Ward is an actor, model, and writer. Onstage he's played in *One in Two* (Donja R. Love), *Nate in 2:30 Hookup* (Alan Sharpe), *Fences* (Stage Aurora), *Lines* world premiere at the Atlanta Black Theatre Festival (BJ Holmes), and Kyle in *Holiday Break* (Darrell Grant). He recently wrapped production on the film *Pulp Night Club* film (Steven L. Coard) and *The One Who Marched* (Sweet Tea Productions). He hosts *Counter Narrative Project's Revolutionary Health*, the show focused on Black gay men's health and wellness. In addition, he is one half of *BLACK, GAY, stuck at home*, an interactive movie night experience while in self-quarantine.

Monte J. Wolfe is an experienced producer, writer, director, musician & theatre professional with an extensive background in theatre performance, management, arts administration, and production. He has worked professionally in the DC metropolitan area since 1999. He is also a trained actor with various stage, film & television appearances to his credit. He is a graduate of the Howard University Theatre Arts Department, where he earned a BFA in Theatre Arts Administration in 1999. In his role as Artistic and Managing Director of Brave Soul Collective (BSC), Monte has devoted much of his time and energy to curating and producing intentional performances and community discussions which give voice to the identities, people and narratives that often still live in the margins of society and conventional theatre experiences. With BSC as his vehicle, Monte keeps his finger on the pulse of what's happening in the world at large, but most importantly to him, in the lives of Black LGBTQIA individuals. He lovingly dedicates this the entire #BlackMenFeel project in loving memory, to his friend and HU Theatre Arts brother, *Chadwick Boseman*.



NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

When I think about the ways in which patriarchy, misogyny and so many other toxic behaviors have been and continue to be carried out by men in society, it saddens me. As someone who is usually pretty obsessed with examining human behavior, I typically find myself fascinated as I witness situations play out in my life, the lives of those around me, in characters on television shows / films, and the world at large. As frustrated as I usually find myself when I see male fragility rear its ugly head, there's always a question in my mind that I cannot let go of thinking about which is - *WHY? Why are we like this? How did we get to this place where so much of what happens with men is shaped, informed, and colored by ego, sexual prowess, capitalism and a bunch of (what looks and feels to me like) pure immaturity and stupidity?*

Prior to March of this year, at any given point I was subject to feelings of sadness, despair, hopelessness, anger and depression pretty often. All of that has only increased and been magnified since the onset of COVID-19. After some pretty heavy mood swings and emotional ups and downs brought on by the financial strain of the pandemic in the four months time between March and July, I found myself in a frightening state of emotional fragility - more so than usual, which for me, is saying something. Looking back now, it makes perfect sense that on July 6th, 2020, I had a pretty serious suicide scare. While I'd had other run-ins with feeling like I wanted to end my life, this time felt markedly different and far more serious. The only way I know how to describe what I felt is to say here what I kept thinking that morning as I operated under a dark cloud that I could not seem to shake; *"I just don't have any more fight left in me"*. There's a lot more that I'm sure I'll write about and reflect upon at a later time but for sake of context, the valley that I found myself in that day was a definite catalyst for all of what we will talk about, write about and offer up artistically as part of this *#BlackMenFeel* virtual series.

If ever there was a time for the work of deconstructing black male emotions to happen, as far as I'm concerned, 2020 is that time. The severity of what we're facing right now, coupled with the weight and absence of what we knew as being "normal" before March 2020 means the stakes are beyond high.

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NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR (CONT)

So many of us as Black Men have been living, breathing, and operating as “the walking wounded” for far too long and for many of us particularly as Black Queer Men, the challenges we face feel even more insurmountable. It’s for that reason that I committed myself to seeing this project become a living and breathing thing. In doing so, I can only hope this will serve as an agent of change and healing for not only my Black Queer brethren, but for anyone who decides to take this journey with us as we begin the work of unpacking the wellspring of our individual and collective emotions.

Each writer, contributor, panelist and artist/performer who is part of this virtual series, I asked to participate because not only do I find myself inspired by each of them, but I also know that many of them share similar experiences with being challenged by the emotional weight of what happens when we fail to really truly deal with whatever it is that is hurting or harming us. That being said - talking about emotions and what’s underneath them - is anything but a straight line. It’s complicated and messy, like life. So as we kick off *ACT I*, we begin by paying specific attention to our “ROOTS” - which (to me) means getting to the core of what has happened in our lives, how we got here, why we got here, and how we get elsewhere in whatever ways we desire for things to be different.

So with that, all I can say is....buckle your seatbelts, it’s gonna be a bumpy - albeit rewarding ride!

- *Monte J. Wolfe*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

#BlackMenFeel would not be possible without the support of some key individuals.

We send our most heartfelt thanks to:

George-Raymond
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BLACK, GAY, stuck at home
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Rich Rocket
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Lemar Johnson
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We appreciate all of your support immensely!

