



Ancestra

By Holly Holsinger and Chris Szajbert

Directed by Anjanette Hall

February 8, 9, 10 7:30 PM
February 10, 11 2:00 PM
Irene and Alan Wurtzel Theater



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Press Kit

Ancestra will be performed as a sister production with Cleveland State University.

Marketing & Engagement Contact:
Hannah Dougall, hdougall@oberlin.edu

“There’s plenty of righteous anger in Ancestra, and that’s a damn fine thing.” Christine Howey, Rave and Pan



Ancestra by Holly Holsinger and Chris Szajbert
Oberlin College 2024
directed by Anjanette Hall
set design by Laura Carlson Tarantowski

Set design by Laura Carlson-Tarantowski

About the Production

Inspired by the 1853 National Women’s Rights Convention, Ancestra weaves a historical account of the pioneers for women’s rights with the intimate biography of a contemporary journalism student who writes about reproductive healthcare. When Cora’s methods take an unconventional turn, she is plunged into a crisis through which past and present begin to converge, illuminating a long history of silencing women through intimidation and violence. A sister production of Ancestra will perform at Cleveland State University in February/March 2024.

History of the Production

From Dramaturg, John Roesler

Ancestra was written by Holly Holsinger and Chris Szajbert with the historical and dramaturgical help of Renee Schilling and Sally Groth and was performed for the first time at the Gordon Square Theatre in Cleveland. Originally written in 2013, the play has since been performed at the Cleveland Public Theatre and at Pace University at the Vino theater in 2022. The play has evolved as new voices have given it shape, whether it be workshopping with new directors and theatremakers with different perspectives, incorporating new information about the lives of the historical characters, or the unprecedented changes to our current laws around women’s rights including the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022. Much like the voices in the show, Ancestra is shaped by women both in the past and present.

Important Themes & Messages

- *Women's Suffrage Movement*
- *Abolition*
- *Women's Rights to (education, voting, choice)*
- *Reproductive Justice*
- *Women's connection to ritual*
- *The Lifting of Women's Voices*
- *#metoo*
- *The Overturning of Roe v. Wade*

Historical Context

Ancestra takes place in three realms: the "then" (around the 1850s), the "now" (present day), and the "in between world" of the Voices. The characters in *Ancestra* from the "then" era are based on real figures fighting for women's rights at Oberlin college during the mid-19th century. Antoinette (Nettie) Brown, Lucy Stone, Lucy Ann Stanton, and Mary Jane Patterson were all Oberlin students and key members of the women's rights movement. Many of Antoinette Brown and Lucy Stone's conversations are based off of the letters they sent each other, which are found in the book *Friends and Sisters* by Carol Lasser (Oberlin Emerita Professor of History.) and Marlene Deahl Merrill. The conversations that take place during the convention scene in act 2 of the play are altered versions of conversations held at the 1853 National Woman's Rights Convention that took place in Cleveland, Ohio.



About the Playwrights

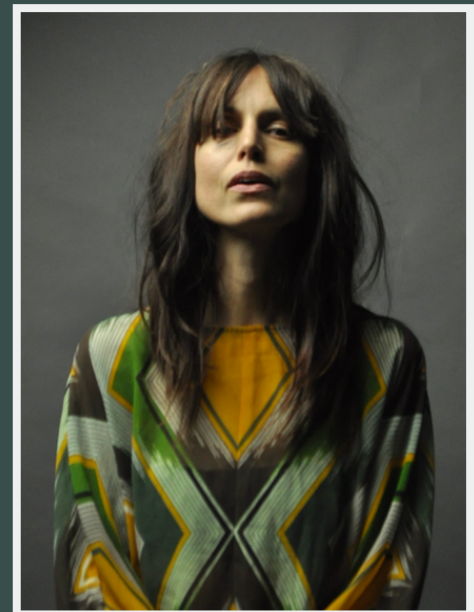
Holly Holsinger

*Holly Holsinger is a creator, director, and theatre performer, playwright, and educator, with specialization in devising new plays, and using theatre to engage, empower and educate. Holly recently remounted her solo performance *Frankenstein's Wake*, co-created with Raymond Bobgan, at the Freedom and Focus Conference in London and at Catapult in New Orleans. *Frankenstein's Wake* previously received critical raves and audience acclaim in New York, Cleveland, and Chicago, and was featured at the Grotowski at Irvine and Beyond Conference at UC Irvine. She co-wrote and directed *Ancestra* at CPT, a play about women's rights in Ohio, which grew from community explorations and historical research. Another recent work, *Insomnia: The Waking of Herselves*, co-devised and performed at CPT and North American Cultural Laboratory, examines concepts of female identity and wholeness. Holly is an Associate Professor at Cleveland State University where she teaches acting, voice, and movement. She received a Distinguished Faculty Award in 2017, the university's top honor for teaching. She received an MFA in Acting from the University of California, Irvine and is a certified Associate Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework.*



Chris Szajbert

*Chris Szajbert is a writer, director, performing artist, and filmmaker who creates original works in collaboration with professional and community artists. Chris serves as director in the development of two new performance works: *Marie Curie Horror Story* (BorderLight Fringe, Cleveland Public Theatre) created and performed by Holly Holsinger; and *The Poetry Psychic Project*, a suite of touring interactive performances by Denis Michael Griesmer. Since leaving her position of Director of Education and company member at Cleveland Public Theatre in 2016, Chris has appeared in *Sweat* at Cleveland Play House; contributed to new works by experimental filmmaker Robert Banks and painter John Carlson; and co-created/toured the dance theatre duet *Reckoning* (Chicago, New York, Mexico City) with choreographer Kora Radella. Chris is the co-creator of the plays *F*** Me Love Me Aphrodite*, *Ancestra*, *Insomnia: The Waking of Her Selves*, and the multi-media solo performance *Cut to Pieces*.*



Why this show?

From Director, Anjanette Hall

On Friday June 24th, 2022 the U.S. Supreme Court officially reversed Roe v. Wade and declared that the constitutional right to abortion, upheld for nearly a half century, would no longer exist.

"All I ever wanted was to have a voice. A voice. A voice. The right to have a say. To have my words mean something." -The Voices, Ancestra

It's May 28, 1851 in Akron, OH at The Ohio Women's Convention and the abolitionist and preacher, Sojourner Truth, has delivered one of the most famous speeches in American history.

"...I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon...If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!..."

Truth's speech, which did not have a title at the time, became known as the "Ain't I a Woman" speech, and would later inspire Frances Gage and others to speak their own experiences to power. Truth gives us so many answers to the question, "why this play". And as Lucy Stone would say, "We have to do this. We have no choice."

As women we continue to be silenced, our rights continue to be taken. We feel the impact of the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the impact of our systemically patriarchal society. There has never been a more urgent time than NOW, for our voices to be heard.

Lucy Stone, Lucy Ann Stanton, Antoinette Brown, Frances Gage, Ernestine Rose, Mary Jane Patterson, Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelly Foster, Frances Harper...
"And no one remembers your names" -Cora Wells, Ancestra



Cast List:



Ela Carola Shapiro-Alster '27



Mia Richardson '26



Annelies Schoolderman '27



Kate Heffernan '26



Valerie Clelland '26



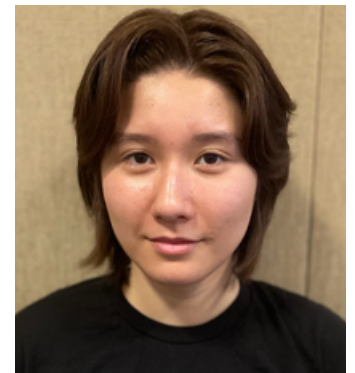
Isabella Poschman '27



India-Mae Fraser '27



Evyn Lundy '23



Wren DiCello '25



Claire Blandino '24



Reyna Berry '27



Seven Jacquay '27



Kaiya Noguera '26

“... a compelling new play [that] entertains as it pointedly probes and boldly crusades. Ancestra’s politics are largely relayed through well-honed and beautifully executed theatricality... The playwrights’ thoughtful prose is impeccably delivered by a highly skilled cast through beautifully drawn and very likable characters.” Bob Abelman, Cleveland Jewish News



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Irene and Alan Wurtzel Theater

Ticket Information:
\$10 general admission
\$8 staff, student, senior



Central Ticket Service
440-775-8169
cts@oberlin.edu

View of Entrance



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