

# “Marassa” a Ritual Movement Opera

By Diovanna Frazier & Carlton V Bell II

Apple Music Playlist:

<https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/marassa/pl.u-9N9LzKLux216ME8>

# Synopsis

“Marassa” is a ritual and performed artwork, consisting of a choreographic trio, spoken text, and sculptural art which functions as set/prop design. It is inspired by the Haitian/Dominican set of loa, the Marassa Jumeaux, who spiritually govern over and represent, play/innocence/youth, procreation, fertility, and the full spectrum of human gender and sexuality. The Marassa are thought of as twins, male and female, with an invisible third, who presents that mystical in-between. The trio of dancer-performers represents this double meaning of “2 and also 3”. Calling upon the spiritual symbolism of the Marassa, this piece will ritualistically create a vignette, in which these spirits can inhabit the bodies of the performers and the performance space, while exploring themes of ritual, ancestry, sex, gender, and the meaningful play that can be conjured between these forces.

This piece requires ritualistic elements, such as altars and spiritual-religious artwork to be created as the set design, which can also be photographed and displayed (in-person/virtually) as sculpture and visual art. This piece requires the composition of music and musical elements, that are to be set to the timing and flow of the ritual that is created. Scripted dialogue also needs to be written to support the ritual in the form of spoken word/prayer/call-and-response song/etc. Character specific costuming will also be required. If

The cast will consist of an all-Black and trans/queer trio of dancer-performers.

# Diovanna Frazier (she/her) Writer, Choreographer

Diovanna LaBeija is a transfemme, afrolatina choreographer, artist, poet, and spiritualist. She is an alumni of Marymount Manhattan College and holds a B.A. in Dance Studies. Her choreographic, written, and visual work center themes of Blackness, afro-spirituality, gender, sexuality, and queer thought. Her on-screen debut was in the music video, "Altar" for Grammy-nominated recording artist, Kehlani, she has self-directed multiple dance films, and given lectures on Black LGBTQ Ballroom history and culture for workshops and symposiums, nationally and internationally. She is originally from Virginia Beach, VA, now based in Brooklyn and also owns and operates *La Botanica Muñequita*, an online spiritual boutique.

## Work Samples:

Kehlani, "Altar" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsbJvA\\_ag3c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsbJvA_ag3c).

ENERGY: Freeform Vogue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpBcEQV4FhU>



# Carlton V Bell II (they/them), “c.j” – Writer, Director

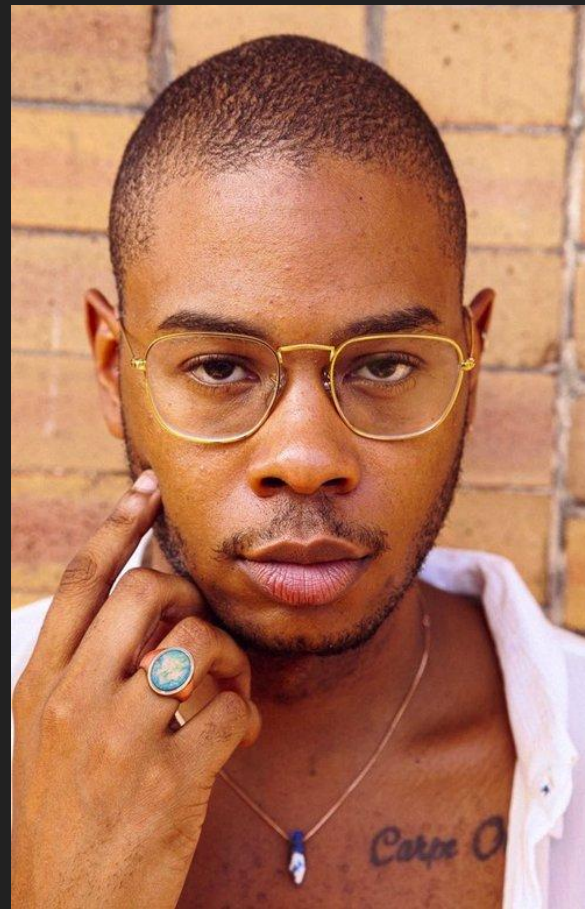
A non-binary HIV+ Black overall curator & facilitator of artistic expression through multiple disciplines, primarily through theatre & film. As an artist, my praxis is to consistently interrogate the word around me, and expressing what I learn by modes of performance based art by craft & by conjure. I am an advocate & agent for representation through change in the way Art is landscaped globally. I hope to continue to inspire, make space, & take space for other performers across the African Diaspora. In addition to my work as an artist, I am also a community farmer, & cultural worker --as the founder & Key Artistic Partner of The Birmingham Black Repertory Theatre Collective & the several organizations I serve locally & nationally. Seen most recently in **CNN's Docuseries "Blind Angels"**. Named *AL.com's #2 Entertainer of the Year of 2019*, *Birmingham Black Pride's Entertainer of the Year*, *Director of the Decade for 2020 by Broadway World* ("**CHOIR BOY**", by **Tarell Alvin McCraney**). *Sipp Culture "Next Up Artist" 2021/2022*, *Center for Cultural Power's 2021 "Artist Disruptor"*, *2021 Southern Healer w/ the Campaign for Southern Equality*

## Work Samples:

“Choir Boy” by Tarell Alvin McCraney– <https://youtu.be/haboTAh1Kcs>

“... is anybody out there.” – <https://youtu.be/3TP2wukxzeo>

TIME STAMP: 31:58–35:34



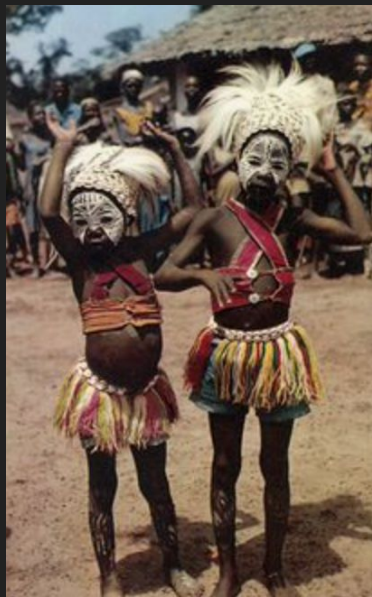
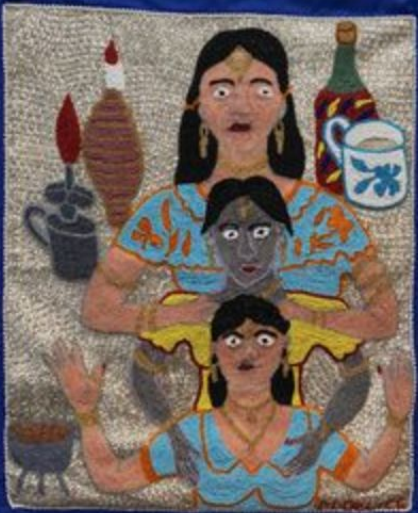
# About the Company

About BBRTC: The Award winning Birmingham Black Repertory Theatre Collective (formely Company) is a not for profit, grassroots theatre incubator, that operates as a collective of individuals invested in perserving a culture of Black theatre in the city of Birmingham. Our main goal is to produce bodies of performance art by & for people across the African Diaspora in order to showcase & introduce Black works to Birmingham through: Staged readings, main-stage & black-box performances, as well workshops w/ industry professionals. BBRTC has a continued laser focus of telling stories of people across the African diaspora that live within in the margins, & we are committed to hiring within those groups as well. Including, but not limited to Black women, Black queer people, Black diasabled people. #theatreforthepeople. As of 2022 BBRTC currently celebrating it's 4th year continues to be a staple community & cultural bearers in the city of Bimingham.

# Tone, Style, Thematic Influences & Devices

- Ballroom
- Dirty Computer
- Religious Iconography & Symbology
- Haitian Loa
- Cycles
- The Elements (**Air, Fire, Water, Earth**)- Literally (*Practical Design*), & Metaphorically (*Language*)
- Call & Response (*In Movement & Text*)
- Prayer
- Song
- Challenging Audience Engagement
- Sacred Geometry
- Diasporic Ritual Parallels in Black Culture (Hand Clapping Games, Stepping, Ring Shout)
- Misas
- Gender Exploration
- Baptisms
- Organic Practical Sound
- Greek Tragedy (Specific Elements)
- West African Griots
- Alvin Ailey's "Revelations"









1. Do you identify as Black, African American, African, and/or as part of the African Diaspora? Yes, we are an organization of people across the African Diaspora including Afro-Latinx, Gullah Geechee, & Kreyol heritage.

2. Do you identify as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or pansexual? Yes. Our Membership is made up of 100 %queer indentifying individuals.

3. Do you identify as trans? Yes,

4. How would you describe yourself as an artist? What kind of art do you want to make? What kind of art do you want to see that doesn't exist?

*D. I am a multimedia dance artist. My primary language of creation is the choreographic exploration of the spiritually-motivated body within music and space, and I create visual art and poetry to further describe the world that dancing body lives in. I want to make staged dance performances and films that use my language of movement and choreographic thought process to tell stories that come from the intersection of spirituality, Blackness, the trans experience, and queered thought.*

*C. I am a cultural activist (intersecting art & activism) as a producer, director, and writer uplifting the voice of my community is my programmatic thrust. As an artist, I am interest in collaborative works with Black Queer Artists– Dynamic Storytelling w/ elements from the Griots of West Africa combined with traditional storytelling. In regards to style & from I like exploring hyper realism in naturalistic settings.*

5. How are your identities (any and all of your identities) expressed through your artwork?

*D. As a dancer and choreographer, my medium is my body, and my body is that of a Black woman of trans and queer experience. My movement is often inspired by the ease, power, and beauty I know transfemme bodies possess. I also intentionally fuse transfemme-originated dance forms like Vogue Femme and Oldway with other aspects of my classical/modern dance training, as a way of politically closing the socio-political gap that keeps Black dance from being perceived in the same light as these "academic" dance styles. I also write specifically around transfemme themes and make art specifically inspired by my inherited Afrolatina spirituality.*

*C. The Majority of my work is about very specifically about Black Queer People, more specificaly Black queer people living with HIV.*

6. What are you curious about?

*Black art, as it naturally is born out of and exists within black communities, is always spiritual, ephemeral, and born out of something ancestral.*

*We are curious about how to invite that element into both the creative and performative processes. How do I help facilitate performers to tap into that spiritual place of being taken over by a force other than yourself and allowing it to move you? How can I make every performance feel like a ritual or a prayer? What elements do these things share, we've discussed alot about our spiritual practices (Diovanna is CJ's Madrina in Lucumi) alot of the inspiration for the building Blocks of this piece stems from that*

7. What are you haunted by?

*Black trans women deal with the possibility of violence and death as a consequence of our very existence, on a daily basis. We are constantly reminded that we might be living on borrowed time, because we have evidence of our sisters being taken from this world before their brilliance is properly celebrated. I am haunted by the legacy of art and performance that specifically precedes me as a Black trans woman and by the urgency of expression that comes with living as a marginalized, yet highly politicized, identity. Death as a threat and death as an ancestral presence are ever-present.*

8. How would you like to be supported as an artist AND as a human? (For example, as an artist you might want the support of a dramaturg, or tickets to a virtual show. As a human, you might need ASL interpretation, image descriptions, or a flexible schedule to

*accommodate childcare.) As an artist, I want support with lighting and sound design/composition as well as resources to execute specific visions I have for set design. Artists are often in the position of having to create work, without financial support, that has to immediately make money because it was made by a person without any expendable income. As a human, I need monetary resources to financially support me, so that my work can be produced with ease and without the immediate need of being "profitable".*

9. How do you feel your work incorporates immersion and connects with and/or leaves audiences more connected? *I am very interested in the idea of ritualistic performance. Ritual effaces the the border between performer and audience, by emphasizing presence and sensory play. By making this performance a ritual, every color, scent, sound, and step becomes symbolic. This challenges the audience to pay close attention and investigate the symbolism or allow themselves to be swept into the magic of the ritual itself. I want audiences to feel blessed, challenged, and reborn by my performances, because they witnessed something magical/spiritual. We also want to partner with local Black trans led organizations to insure that communities that this show reflects have access to see this show in a digital capacity as well as live. Organizations like TAKE Resource Center, Sex Worker Giving Circle, Magic City Acceptance Center, and many other organizations.*

# Prologue/Overture

Who are these beings? What are the Rules of this world? What is the thesis of this piece shown through beautiful movement? Music Happening for sure.

# Act One: Preparation Altar Call (Naturalism)

Drawing of the spacial awareness of the world (Chalk, Salt, Brick Dust)

Inviting Spirit, Feeding Spirit

Altar Set Up

Prayer

Divination

invocation

# Act Two: The Ritual (Heightened Realism)

Visceral

Engages Multiple Senses

Toys w/ perception

Illusion

Actual Bruja happening on stage.

Possession

Spirit Arrives

# Act Three: Celebration, Confirmation, Curtain Call (Surrealism)

Heavily Produced, but not to break form.

Color, Sound, Life.

What does Birth Feel like?

Divination

Spirit Departs



## Epilogue/Post Credit Scene

???? idk but sounds cute. Could be almost Meta & Hyper political statement given through Monologue. Could be something Jarring to comment on Black Trans Violence. Could be literally the clean up process of the ritual.