

For ages 15+

AUDIENCE PLAY GUIDE

Thank you to ArtsFund, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, and Sage Foundation for their generous support of Book-It Repertory Theatre's 2021-2022 Season.

Gus Menary
Artistic Director

Kayti Barnett-O'Brien
Managing Director

Sponsored by
ArtsWA

Book-It Repertory Theatre presents

ZEN AND THE ART OF AN ANDROID BEATDOWN

By Tochi Onyebuchi

Adapted & Directed by Gin Hammond*

With
Mandy Rose Nichols
Cecile

Tim Gouran*
Boxer

Annette Toutonghi*
Brianne

Arlando Smith
Boxer #2/Bayou Android/Boxer #4

Jesse Calixto
Tom/Boxing Referee/Electrocuted Android/Boxer #3

Mia Morris
Pilot Android

Impossible Acoustic
Brendon J. Hogan
Paul Eric Miller
Sound Design

Rosemary Jones
Rehearsal Stage Manager

Benjamin Radin
Audio Engineer/Technical Director

Kyle Thompson
Audio Engineer

Leanna Keith
Audio Book-It Theme Music

Dan Schuy
Production Manager

Zenaida Smith
Company Manager/Casting Associate

**Member of SAG-AFTRA, the union of the Screen Actor's Guild and American Federation of Radio Artists. This production was made under working agreement with SAG-AFTRA, the union of the Screen Actor's Guild and American Federation of Radio Artists.*

SYNOPSIS

Contains Spoilers

By Torrie McDonald

Content Warning for This Play: suicide; suicidal ideation; self-harming; ableism; and graphic descriptions of medical procedures, violence, bodily injury, and blood

Our Content Warnings are applicable to our productions and are not necessarily inclusive of all subject matter that may be found in the books from which they are adapted.

We enter our story in a fragment of remembrance in Cecile's mind. A little jagged. A little scary. (An android self-destructing?) Her reverie is broken by her coworker, (her friend, if we can call her that) Brianne. Another patient is ready for them. This makes five mysterious android deaths (if we can call it that). Cecile responds as she should, she thinks.

When they get to their new patient, we see the disarticulated humanoid body on a metal slab table. A mix of mechanics and membranes, that is the android. And Cecile can't help herself, she feels drawn to it (no, to him). She needs to dig deeper. As she peers beneath his flesh, she sees a truth of him. He's a boxer, it's there in the body. Luckily, a body she can fix. It's just a "fusing of sinew and steel." As she connects his frayed wires, we are transported to fragments of memory in his system. The ring. The punches. That jab. But we are "the better puncher by half," and if we just keep moving and hitting with those combos... Suddenly it's over and we realized we lost ourselves. All we want is to hit. The other guy though—he's had a disconnect. He won't stop, he doesn't know how anymore. But neither do you. All you want to do is hit. And be hit.

Another android self-destructs.

Cecile finishes tending to the Boxer's body—making it whole, getting it clean. Maybe she did too good of a job, though. Now, he's too fast, too strong. He knows something's wrong, but he can't get at it. So, now what does he do, how can he enjoy his sport (His life? His purpose?) if he's too good at it? Someone's always better. And getting hit feels like home, feels like salvation, because finally "you're taking as good as you're giving."

Cecile keeps working. The "red-bloods" she interacts with are unknowable, and they chalk her reserve up to autism. Brianne is friendly—but maybe we can't say a friend. She doesn't know who Cecile really is, or why she's so comfortable working on the Boxer. He's back, and this time when he wakes they have time to talk.

Another android self-destructs.

Morning at work and Cecile is early. Early enough to sit at her desk, take a knife out of her drawer, and cut herself with it. She quickly staunches the bleeding when she hears people arriving outside.

Next time they meet, the Boxer talks to Cecile about the junk memories, memories he holds but aren't his. A childhood he never lived. A life he never lived. And this time, when he sleeps Cecile connects to his braincase to feel what he felt, know what he remembers. He needs to be hit like she needs to cut herself—something in the wiring, something she wants to stop. But she can't. That's how Brianne finds her, alone and bleeding—an android.

Another android self-destructs.

Now they know this truth of her, but they call it a virus. Malware during manufacturing. Cecile does not repair the Boxer anymore. His braincase was too damaged. He's dead, that's what we'd call it. And she sits in a cell, until they remove her virus, wondering what of her will be left. She sits and she thinks and she feels "delicious" "fulfilling" pain.

WHO'S WHO

THE CAST



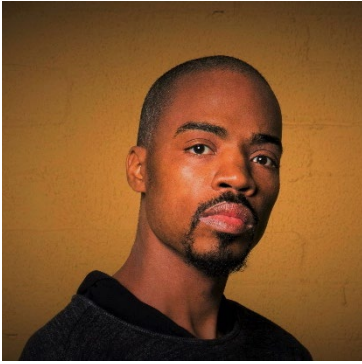
Mandy Rose Nichols (*Cecile*) is thrilled to be working with Book-It again! Last seen in *Flora & Ulysses*, Mandy loves to collaborate and tell meaningful stories any chance they get. A graduate of Arizona State University, they have been seen on stages with Book-It, Intiman, ACT, and Reboot Theatre Company. Local favorite roles include, *Sweeney Todd* (*Sweeney Todd*, 2019 Gregory Award Nominee), *Eponine* (*Les Miserables*), *Joanne* (*RENT*), and *John Dickinson* (*1776*). Regional Credits: *Rizzo* (*Grease*), *Frenchie* (*Cabaret*), and *Sister Amnesia* (*Nunsense*). When not on stage, Mandy works as a voice over actor, host, and puppeteer. Keep up with their shenanigans at mandyrose.com. Thanks and love to Bahb.



Tim Gouran (*Boxer*) couldn't be happier to be back with Book-It again! He has performed with many Seattle theatres, including ACT, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Seattle Rep, Intiman Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, New City Theater, Washington Ensemble Theatre, Theatre22, and Azeotrope Theatre. He got his start with The Guthrie Theatre, in Minneapolis. He has appeared in several movies and T.V. episodes, as well as many voice-overs for radio and video games.



Annette Toutonghi (*Brianne*) is delighted to return to Book-It with this production. Over the years she's worked with many of the theatres in the Seattle area, as well as in voice-over, film, and television. Some favorite productions include *Inflagrante Gothicto* at the Empty Space Theatre, *The Women* at ACT, *The Rich Grandeur of Boxing* at On the Boards, and *You Can't Take It With You* at Seattle Rep. More recently, she appeared in Bao Tran's film *The Paper Tigers*; Wes Hurley's film *Potato Dreams of America*; and Ahamfele Oluo, Charles Mudede, and Lindy West's film *Thin Skin*. Watch for her this winter in season 2 of *Three Busy Debras* on Adult Swim.



Arlando Smith (*Boxer #2/Bayou Android/Boxer #4*) was most recently heard playing Norbert Rillieux in Book-It's audio adaptation of N.K. Jemisin's *The Effluent Engine*, last season. Also for Book It, he played Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. He is happy to share these stories and more with you.



Jesse Calixto (*Android/Boxer #3*) is an actor and musician who graduated with a BFA in theatre performance from the University of Idaho. He spent spring 2018 touring Washington state with Seattle Shakespeare Company's Educational Tour of *Romeo & Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. He played Bear/Human in 2017's People's Choice Gregory Award-winning cast of *DEERS* at Annex. He was most recently seen as Puck in Greenstage's 2021 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



Mia Morris (*Pilot Android*) is a Seattle-based actor, director, and theatre arts teacher. After attending the Professional Theatre Training Program at the State University of New York at Purchase, she moved to Seattle to co-found Open Circle Theatre. For the last 11 years, she has been working for the Great Plains Theatre Conference as an instructor, panellist, actor, and director. Mia was last seen at Book-It in *Welcome to Braggville*. Other theatre credits include Irma in *The Balcony*, God in *Poona the F**ck Dog*, Nell in *Fen*, Frau Bergmann in *Spring Awakening*, Lou in *Year of the Rooster*, and Samantha in *The Feast*, a world premier with MAP Theatre.

The Artistic Team

Tochi Onyebuchi (*Author*) is the author of *Riot Baby*, a finalist for the Hugo, Nebula, Locus, and NAACP Image Awards and winner of the New England Book Award for Fiction; the *Beasts Made of Night* series; and the *War Girls* series. He has earned degrees from Yale University, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Columbia Law School, and Sciences Po. His short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Omenana Magazine*, *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young & Black in America*, and elsewhere. His nonfiction has appeared in *Tor.com* and the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, among other places. His most recent book is the non-fiction (*S*)*kinfolk*.

Gin Hammond (*Adapter/Director*) is thrilled to be working with this talented cast on such a remarkable story. She is a Harvard University/Moscow Art Theatre MFA graduate; a certified associate teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework™; and a grant recipient of Allied Arts, Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, Artist Trust, 4Culture, and NEA. Hammond has been a dialect and vocal coach for 60+ shows for ACT, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Rep, Book-It, Taproot, Seattle Children's Theatre, and Village Theatre, as well as for films. She was the director and dialect coach for the video game, "Post-Human W.A.R." You can hear her on commercials, audiobooks, radio plays, and a variety of video games, including "BattleTech," "DotA 2," "State of Decay 1 & 2," "Aion," and "Halo 3 ODST." Most recently, she directed *Childfinder*, and she was last seen by Book-It audiences in *Returning the Bones*, which received multiple Gregory Award nominations.

Sound Design: Impossible Acoustic is a team of award-winning sound designers here to serve the creative community. We partner with creative professionals to solve audio needs and make projects sound amazing. **Brendan J. Hogan** is an award-winning Seattle-based sound designer and owner of the audio post-production company Impossible Acoustic. His credits span multiple mediums and include feature films like *Prospect*, popular short films like *Uncanny Valley*, the Bafta Award winning PS4 game "Never Alone" and a Canne's nominated VR experience about climbing mount Everest. Brendan loves to collaborate with other artists and help make their projects feel and sound incredible. **Paul Eric Miller** is a Seattle-based freelance sound designer and works on a wide range of audio projects, from feature films to video games. His credits include sound design work on feature films like *Prospect* and *ECCO*; a daytime Emmy nomination for his work on *Biz Kid\$*; nationally aired TV work such as *Alaska State Troopers*; recording engineer on "Halo Infinite;" sound design work on the critically acclaimed web series "Dynamo Dream;" and many more. Paul's role as a sound designer is to bend, shape, and mold sound—giving it meaning and emotion to help tell stories through sound.

Rosemary Lisa Jones (*Rehearsal Stage Manager*) stumbled into stage managing two and half years ago and became enamored, stage managing more than a dozen productions in the Seattle area since. She's the production manager of Sound Theatre Company, a recent BA graduate from the University of Washington, and most recently production stage managed the Vashon Theatre Festival. Obsessed with speculative/science fiction of all kinds, working on this piece was a real treat for Rosemary, and she's grateful to the team for engaging with such enthusiasm.

Benjamin Radin (*Sound Engineer/Technical Director*) is a Journeyman stagehand with IATSE Local#15 and is starting his 6th season with Book-It. Previously, he worked for five years as a scenic carpenter at Seattle Rep, and has also had the pleasure of working on-and-off at nearly every Seattle theatre venue. In addition to managing Book-It's shop, he has recently been working as the Master

Sound Engineer for Book-It's audio productions and had the incredible opportunity to also serve as the sound designer for *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*.

Kyle Thompson (*Sound Engineer*) is thrilled to be back working on Book-It's exciting audio shows. He has worked with Book-It extensively in the past, having designed for *Childfinder*, *Returning the Bones* (Gregory Award Nominated for Outstanding Sound Design), *American Junkie*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *Treasure Island*. Outside of Book-It, Kyle has designed sound for over 50 productions in the greater Seattle area, including: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Love's Labor's Lost* (Wooden O/Seattle Shakespeare Company); *Our Country's Good*, *The Pavilion*, *Take Me Out* (Strawberry Theatre Workshop); *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, *Annapurna*, *Water By The Spoonful* (Theatre22); and *Mothers and Sons*, *4,000 Miles* (ArtsWest).

Zenaida Smith (*Company Manager/Casting Associate*) is a theatre advocate and artist, with a particular focus on new work. In addition to her work for Book-It, Zenaida is a producing director for MAP Theatre; producer for Pork Filled Productions; a staff member at 18th & Union: an artspace; a freelance actor; and an occasional director.

Leanna Keith (*Theme Composer and Performer*) is a freelance flutist, artist, improviser, and composer in the Seattle area. Leanna delights in creating sound experiences that make audiences laugh, cry, and say, "I didn't know the flute could do that!" Her performance artworks have focused on cultural connection and the breaking of audience/performer boundaries. Leanna is the professor of flute at Cornish College of the Arts. www.leannakeithflute.com



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

We all have a story to tell, the story of our life lived so far. If you were going to write your own brief bio (biographical statement) in 150 words or less, what would you include? Do you have an idea of what your best friend would include in theirs? Or your family members?

Audience Play Guide
produced by:
Torrie McDonald
Gillian Jorgensen
Jose "Jojo" Abaoag
Jordi Montes
Gus Menary

Season art by Jake Freund



Who Are You?

By Torrie McDonald

Identity is fundamental to lived experience. We are therefore we *are*. But the practicalities of living one's identity are not always so simple. Learning the truth of yourself isn't automatic or static, it can (will? should?) take a lifetime to examine and embody. Who you are at seven may have the same foundations of who you are at 47, but it may not. A person who enjoyed a good steak for over half their life may decide to become vegan one day. That piece of their identity has changed. Or maybe not. Maybe the compassion, empathy, and activism that allowed that switch was part of them all along (and certainly, there are plenty of non-vegans who are compassionate, empathetic, activists). Those traits are now manifesting in this new lived behaviour, this new piece of their identity. That's the complexity right there—*piece* of their identity.

None of us are monolithic in our sense of self. This vegan may also be a doctor, a grandmother, a skateboarder, a knitter, a lover of romance novels. They may not even list veganism as one of their identifiers. They are the sum of all those parts, as they chose to exhibit or embody or embrace them. Tochi Onyebuchi's use of androids and their amalgamation of sensory/memory input plays with this idea beautifully. He asks us to examine not only what makes a person a person but also what makes a person a specific person.

For me, this also highlights the aspect of self-identity that is created and occupied by memory. We are our lived experience, but as we age that experience also lives in our past, in our memory. Alzheimer's and dementia have deep roots in my family, as in so many others, and watching loved ones seem to lose that sense of self as they lose memory is always wrenching. But it was tricky to navigate that perception of them diminishing when they did maintain themselves, just younger versions who didn't know us. Certainly, that is still sad and tough to face, but does it mean they aren't themselves? If they live in their ten-year-old memory scape, is that less true to who they fundamentally are? And is that our place to judge?

Like the Boxer in Onyebuchi's story, who feels certain memories that he can't quite place or claim, we are left wondering if it feels right to think of those memories as his, as part of what makes him Him. And he's left feeling the same thing.

Of course, Cecile's struggle is with creating an identity—or hiding one—from the outside world. She denies that which we would deem intrinsic to her, yet she does that out of fear. She knows that if her identity were known, she would lose opportunity, freedom, and in fact her sense of self as she gets to define it. So, what society would demand she claim as her identity she perhaps doesn't feel as her truth. Again, we're left wondering who should get to decide which aspects of identity should be claimed.

As our society progresses, our understanding of what makes a person who they are—what identity actually means—expands and encompasses a broader scope of lived experience and behaviour. Let's hope that understanding is built on compassion.

ACTIVITIES

RESPONSE POEM

Our identities are created in response to our lived experience, nature and nurture. What we see, hear, taste, feel, and smell stack together as the building blocks of our selves. Read this poem about identity by Lucille Clifton. Write a response poem expressing who you are or how you feel about being you.

won't you celebrate with me

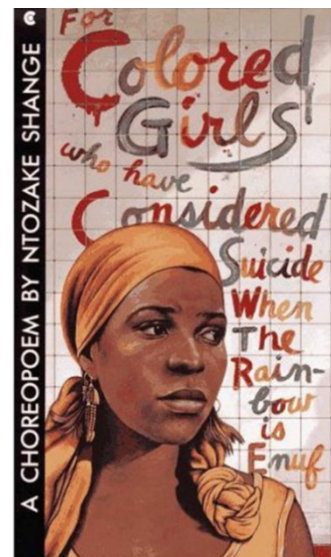
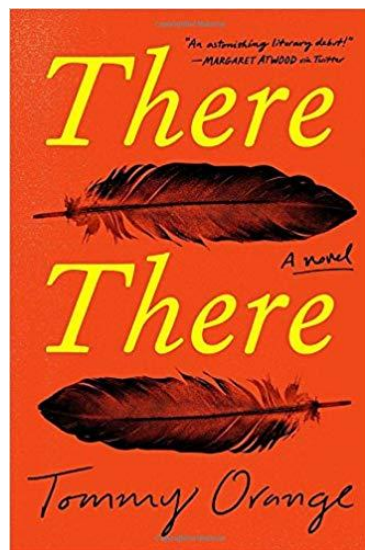
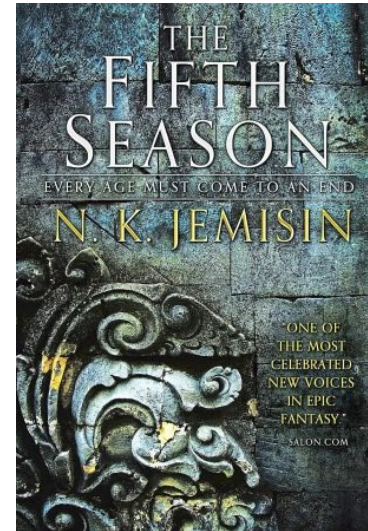
Lucille Clifton ©1993

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

COLLAGE

Our identity is not only what we embody but also what we exhibit; it's something we show to or hide from others as we feel able. Allowing people to see us as we truly believe ourselves to be can make us feel vulnerable, but there is also strength to be had from claiming your identity and walking in that truth. Make a collage, physical or digital, that shows who you are, your lived experience thus far.

To Read, To Watch, To Check Out



MOVIES/Series:

- *Raising Dion*: Netflix
- *Seconds*: Kanopy
- *Chappy*: Netflix
- *Ex Machina*: Kanopy
- *Her*: Kanopy

WEBSITES:

- [Black Science Fiction Society](#)
- [5 Reasons We Can't Get Enough Tochi Onyebuchi Books](#)
- [Tochi Onyebuchi's Blog](#)
- [Afrofuturism, Science Fiction and African Identity](#)