

arvada  center
BLACK BOX THEATRE

LADY DAY

AT
— EMERSON'S —
BAR AND GRILL





A NOTE FROM PHILIP C. SNEED

PRESIDENT AND CEO



Famous People, Brought to Life

You're here today to see a recreation of one of Billie Holiday's final concerts. To portray Billie Holiday, we've invited a very talented actor – Essence Anisa Tyler – and I think you'll be astonished at her performance in the role. In choosing to produce a musical play that requires an actor to assume the voice and persona of a famous singer, we're carrying on a popular theatrical tradition.

Many will remember our production, two years ago, of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, in which Emily Van Fleet portrayed Carole King. A number of years earlier, we chose a very different kind of celebrity play – a “musical drama” – called *End of the Rainbow*, in which Judy Garland is portrayed.

Regular theatregoers, at the Arvada Center or elsewhere, will remember many other such plays and musicals. Below is a partial list:

Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story
Always...Patsy Cline
Sinatra: The Musical (and also *My Way – A Tribute to the Music of Frank Sinatra*)
Hank Williams: Lost Highway
Me and Bessie (Bessie Smith)
Love, Janis (Janis Joplin)
Get Up, Stand Up! The Bob Marley Musical

(also *One Love: The Bob Marley Musical*)
Piaf (Edith Piaf)
Live Bird (Charlie “Bird” Parker)
The list above doesn't even take into account the musicals about famous groups (*Jersey Boys*, *Ain't Too Proud*, etc.) or about enduring musical genres (*Motown: the Musical*, *Rock of Ages*, etc.).

Is it because they give us an opportunity to see our musical favorites grace the stage once again, even after they've passed? Or perhaps to experience them for the first time, if we never saw them in concert when they were alive? Or do they appeal to us because we get to see a side of the singer that they never showed their fans in real life? If this is the case, we are clearly interested in the darker sides of the artists – many of these musicals present less-than-complimentary depictions. And many of the stories end in tragedy – Patsy Cline's and Buddy Holly's deaths in plane crashes, Janis Joplin's heroin overdose, Bob Marley's early death from cancer, etc.

I won't tell you how Billie Holiday's story ends – you'll see that on stage. But I can promise you that you'll hear beautifully-rendered songs of one of the 20th century's greatest musical artists. Whether you know Holiday's songs by heart, or you're experiencing them for the first time, you're in for a treat!

Oh, and Billie Holiday's nickname, “Lady Day”? That was given to her by saxophonist Lester Young. There's a play about him, too: *The Resurrection of Lady Lester*.

Philip C. Sneed
President and CEO



A NOTE FROM CHRISTOPHER PAGE-SANDERS

DIRECTOR

Denver carries a proud jazz history. In Five Points—once known as the Harlem of the West—legends filled the clubs and streets with rhythm, soul, and truth. To bring *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* to life here at the Arvada Center feels like honoring that lineage while celebrating the timeless voice of Billie Holiday.

Billie's story is one of profound beauty and devastating tragedy. She gave the world music that continues to stir the soul, yet beneath the brilliance was a woman carrying an immeasurable weight of pain. Lanie Robertson's play opens a window into that duality—Billie the legend and Billie the woman—capturing her artistry, humanity, and resilience in the face of hardship.

I am grateful to this incredible production team, whose attention to detail, musical aesthetic, steadfast support, and collaboration have been invaluable - to the entire Arvada Center staff, our designers, actors, musicians, and audiences —this work is only possible because of you. This is what community feels like.

We would like to dedicate this production to the late-great Charles "Charlie" Burrell. To Denver. And all who keep the history of the music ALIVE.



LADY DAY

— AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL —

By Lanie Robertson

Musical Arrangements by
Danny Holgate

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL was first
produced in New York by the Vineyard Theatre.

ARVADA CENTER BLACK BOX THEATRE
September 26 - November 2, 2025

Director
Christopher Page-Sanders

Music Director
Jodel Charles

Sound Design
Jason Ducat

Dialect Coach
Rachel Finley

Scenic Design
Brian Mallgrave

Lighting Design
Jon Olson

Costume, Wig & Hair Design
Jocelen Barnett Smith

Stage Manager
Nick Nyquist*

Assistant Stage Manager
Wessie Simmons*

Artistic Director
Lynne Collins

Associate Artistic Director
Kenny Moten

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LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL is presented by arrangement
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Thank you to our sponsors:

Underwritten by: Diana and Mike Kinsey and
Mike and Mary Ellen Litzau





ESSENCE ANISA TYLER*



JODEL CHARLES

Billie Holiday Essence Anisa Tyler*
Jimmy Powers Jodel Charles

MUSICIANS

Matt Campbell - Drums
Carl Jackson - Bass

PLACE AND TIME

A small bar in south Philadelphia
About midnight of a night in March, 1959
There will be no intermission.

This Theatre operates under an agreement with Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

*Member of Actors' Equity Association





CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

ESSENCE ANISA TYLER* (Billie Holiday) is thrilled to be making her Arvada Center debut! She is honored to be a part of sharing the incredible and important story of the legendary Billie Holiday. She would like to thank her family and friends for continuing to love and support her. Credits: Letitia in *Clyde's* (The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis); Dynamite in *Hairspray* (Laguna Playhouse); Ensemble in *Dear Evan Hansen* (The Muny). "One moment at a time..."

CHRISTOPHER PAGE-SANDERS (Director) is thrilled to return to the Arvada Center after previously choreographing last season's *Once Upon A Mattress*. Founding Co-Artistic Director of NU-World Contemporary Danse Theatre. Other artistic credits include: Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, Dianne McIntyre Group, and Mastervoices. Choreographic credits include: *Triple Threat*, Assoc. Choreo. (Off-Broadway/Theatre Row); *Dreamgirls* (Lone Tree Arts Center); *Raisin - The Musical* (Town Hall Arts Center); *Anastasia - The Musical*, Assoc. Choreo (Fulton Theatre & Maine State Music Theatre). Training: B.F.A.; University of Missouri - Kansas City. www.christopherpagesanders.com, @chrispagesanders0203 @nuworldcdt

JODEL CHARLES (Music Director) is thrilled to be making his Arvada Center debut. His education includes Piano Performance (Boston Conservatory of Music), Computer Science (University of Massachusetts, Boston) and Electrical and Computer Engineering (Illinois Institute of Technology). Professionally, he is a Senior Systems Engineer, executive director for the Renewal 4 Haiti nonprofit, and music director/producer for R&B/Soul singer Such.

His past theatre experience includes *Paul Robeson*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Hi-Hat Hattie* (Aurora Fox Arts Center); *Romeo & Juliet* (Cleo Parker Robinson Dance); *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies* (Vintage Theatre).

JASON DUCAT+ (Sound Designer) returns to the Arvada Center where he has designed over 15 shows including *Noises Off* last season. Jason has designed for many theatres across Colorado including the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Curious Theatre Company (where he is an Artistic Company member), Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company, Creede Repertory Theatre, Local Theater Company, and Theatreworks. International credits include: Prague Quadrennial, Vienna English Theatre, Prague Shakespeare Company, and The Royal Exchange Theatre. Jason currently teaches sound design and technology at the Denver School of the Arts.

KEITH EWER (Assistant to the Music Director) is fortunate and proud to have been involved in every musical production at the Arvada Center since 1987. He has also played for touring and company shows at the DCPA as well as the Aurora Fox and Littleton Town Hall. Keith currently works as a freelance musician, music teacher, arranger and composer, in the Denver area. Thank you to my supportive wife and children!



United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829 of the IATSE
is the union representing
scenic, costume, lighting, sound and projection designers in Live Performance



CREATIVE TEAM

RACHEL FINLEY (Dialect Coach) some recent credits include: *M.I.A.* (Paramount Productions); *Sweat*, *TOPDOG/UNDERDOG*, *Is God Is* (Melbourne Theatre Company and Sydney Theatre Company); *Flyin' West* (Indiana Repertory Theatre); *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Virginia Stage Company); *The Piano Lesson* (Actors' Shakespeare Project); *Loch Lomond*, *Let the Good Times Roll*, *Cabaret* (Phoenix Theatre Company); *The African Company Presents Richard III* (Black Theatre Troupe). Training: M.F.A.; Florida Atlantic University, B.F.A. Carnegie Mellon University. rachelfinleyarts.com
[@rachelfinleyarts](https://twitter.com/rachelfinleyarts)

BRIAN MALLGRAVE (Scenic Designer) serves as Director of Scenic Design and Properties at the Arvada Center. Among his recent designs are *Once Upon a Mattress*, *Clybourne Park*, *Waitress*, and *Rock of Ages*. Brian holds five Henry Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design, most recently for Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. He has received special recognition from *Denver Westword*, *Denver Post* Ovation and True West Awards, OnStage Colorado, and his alma mater, UNO.

JON OLSON (Lighting Designer / Lighting Director) has been a member of the Arvada Center since 2003. Jon has received Henry Award nominations for *The Drowning Girls* and *Educating Rita*. Other notable design credits include *Dracula: A Feminist Revenge Fantasy*, *Really*, *The Laramie Project*, *Sylvia*, *All My Sons*, *The Moors*, the world premiere of *I'll Be Home for Christmas*, and the regional premiere of *Trav'lin - The 1930's Harlem Musical* (Arvada Center); *Hope & Gravity* (Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company); *Exhibit* (Curious Theatre Company).

JOCELEN BARNETT SMITH she/her (Costume, Wig & Hair Design) is a Denver-based designer and currently the Assistant

Costume Director at the Arvada Center. Design credits include: *Clybourne Park*, *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* (Arvada Center); *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, *Dreamgirls* (Lone Tree Arts Center). She would like to thank her family and friends for their continued love and support. And most importantly, so much gratitude and thanks to the amazing costume shop and wardrobe staff.
[@wigheadswillroll](https://twitter.com/wigheadswillroll)

NICK NYQUIST* (Stage Manager) Credits: *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* (Arvada Center); *The Lehman Trilogy*, *The Color Purple*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Indecent* (Denver Center for the Performing Arts); *Casanova* (Colorado Ballet); *Meadows* Production Manager (Aspen Music Festival); *The Winter's Tale*, *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *Richard III*, *Edward III*, *You Can't Take It With You* (Colorado Shakespeare Festival); *You Enjoy Myself* (Local Theater Company); *My Fair Lady* (National Tour); *Machinal*, *Albert Herring* (Boston Conservatory); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Pulse Theatre); and many others. B.F.A. Stage Management from DePaul University.

WESSIE SIMMONS* (Assistant Stage Manager) is a Denver-based Stage Manager who is so excited to be back at the Arvada Center! Her credits include: *My Fair Lady*, *Fiddler on the Roof* (Aspen Summer Music Festival and School / Theatre Aspen); *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Arvada Center); Special Projects Stage Manager (Aspen Summer Music Festival and School); *Hope and Gravity*, *Enemy of the People*, *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *Love Letters*, *Holly, Alaska!* (World Premiere), *Coal Country* (Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company); *FEED: Dry, Impossible Things* (The Catamounts); *Suessical* (Performance Now); *King Lear*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Book of Will*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Alchemist* (Colorado Shakespeare Festival).



PRODUCTION RUN CREW

Stage Manager	Nick Nyquist*
Assistant Stage Manager	Wessie Simmons*
Black Box Lead Stage Hand	JC Williams
Wardrobe	Domino Douglas
Audio Engineer – A1	Weston Rutherford
Audio Technician – A2	Kaitlyn Gamory
Production Electrician/Programmer	Preston Hunt, Katie Simonson
Spot Operators	Zee Howard, Jessie King

THE AUTHOR

LANIE ROBERTSON's (Author) first plays *The Insanity of Mary Girard* and *Back County Crimes* are frequently performed by schools and community theatres. His play about Billie Holiday, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*, was produced on Broadway and in London's West End with Audra McDonald.

Many of his works are about iconic artists and the societal issues they faced: *Nasty Little Secrets* (Joe Orton), *Woman Before a Glass* (Peggy Guggenheim), *Alfred Stieglitz Loves O'Keeffe* (Georgia O'Keeffe), *Nobody Lonesome for Me* (Hank Williams), *The Gardener* (Claude Monet) and *Blythe Coward* (Noël Coward).

His works have been produced at the Alley Theatre, the Alliance Theatre, Annenberg Center, Arena Stage, Barrington Stage, the Edinburgh Festival, Festival d'Avignon, George St. Playhouse, Kennedy Center, Old Globe, Primary Stages, Playwrights Horizons, Theatre de la Huchette, Theatre Petit Montparnasse, Theatre Silvia Montfort, Vineyard Theatre, Virginia Stage, the Walnut Street Theatre, Westside Arts Theatre and Williamstown Theatre Festival.

He is a member of the Dramatist Guild, the Society des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques and the Writers Guild, East.



LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL

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Aspen McCart, Scenic Carpenter
Kenneth Stark, Scenic Carpenter
Jack Stremsterfer, Scenic Carpenter
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Kevin Nelson, Props Artisan

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Samantha R. De La Fuente-Meche, Costume Shop Lead
Jessie Page, Wardrobe Supervisor
Kelley Shephard - Draper
Faylo Kennedy, Stitcher
Alexandra Ligh, Stitcher
Olivia Murrow, Costume Crafts

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Miranda Hunt, Production Electrician/Programmer
Preston Hunt, Production Electrician/Programmer
Zee Howard, Production Electrician/Programmer
Katie Simonson, Production Electrician/Programmer

SOUND

Casey Burnham, Audio Director
Kaitlyn Gamory, Audio Engineer
Weston Rutherford, Audio Engineer

ON THIS PRODUCTION, the Arvada Center Theatre's production staff and crew have created or coordinated all elements of set, lighting, props, sound, and costumes.



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Mateo Castillo, Gallery Intern
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A special thank you to Marty Sweeney

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April 11, 2026