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THEATRE**

PRESENTS



HOW TO BRUISE GRACEFULLY

BY
Brittany Fisher

DIRECTION BY **Melissa Mowry**

WORLD PREMIERE
MAY 12 - 21, 2023
at the Libby S. Gottwald Playhouse



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
**VIRGINIA
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ANNA SENECHAL JOHNSON
Artistic and Managing Director Cadence

present

How to Bruise Gracefully

By Brittany Fisher

Originally developed through Cadence Theatre's Pipeline New Works Fellowship Program (Program Director, David Lindsay-Abaire; Artistic and Managing Director, Anna Senechal Johnson). The world premiere of *How to Bruise Gracefully* was presented by Cadence Theatre Company in partnership with Virginia Repertory Theatre, May 2023.

May 12 - 21, 2023 Libby S. Gottwald Playhouse

CENTERED STAGE

Join us for **Post Show Talkbacks** with artists and the creative team after the performance on May 14th

Director
Melissa Mowry^

Scenic Designer
Faith Carlson

Costume Designer
Margarette Joyner

Lighting Designer
Michael Jarett

Projections Designer
Dasia Gregg

Fight Choreographer
Aaron Orensky

Production Manager & Stage Manager
Shawanna Hall

The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.



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CAST

Vi	Nena Nicole
Stevie	Chayla Simpson
Rose/Police Officer	Monique Davis
Fuschia/Physician A	Tatjana Shields
Magenta/Paramedic B	Alex Whitehead
Physician	Noah Jennings
Physician	Derek Gayle
Physician	Andrew Gall

STAGE MANAGEMENT & CREW

Assistant Stage Manager	Timothy Glover, Jae Austin
Technical Direction	Bruce Rennie
Master Electrician	Michael Jarett
Carpenters	Tommy Hawfield, Hans Paul, Carol-Anne Petit, Mckinley Sprinkle
Scenic Painting	Dasia Gregg
Wardrobe Assistant/Crew	Courtney Holmes
Projections Operator/Crew	Terra Comer
ASM Production	Kaylin Corbin, Scott Nuckols, Emily Parker

SETTING AND TIME

Time: 2018 (sort of)

Setting: Burger King (sort of)

The running time is approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

SPECIAL THANKS

Chris and David Lindsay-Abaire, University of North Carolina Costume Shop, Michael Jarett, Will Winsheimer, Tommy Hawfield, Bruce Rennie, Alexyn Scheller, Aaron Orensky, ASM, Virginia Repertory Theatre, The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, The Gary Flowers Show, the *Richmond Free Press*, *Style Weekly*, Kym Grinnage WWBT/NBC 12, Dr. Chip and Mrs. Margaux Anderson, Dr. Monroe E. Harris, Jr., Mark Badger and Laura Heymann, Melissa Mowry, Shalandis Wheeler-Smith, and the Cadence Board of Directors.

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JUNE 21 - 26, 2023

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Back lawn of Wilton House Museum

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Note from Playwright, Brittany Fisher

It's truly an honor to tell the story of these powerful women, and I want to thank you for coming to witness it. From the very beginning, my promise to myself as an artist has always been to be brutally honest in my work, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable it may be. Sometimes, there has to be pain before there is growth, and we can't heal what we don't talk about. This play is a direct reflection of that promise, that reality, and how we start these important conversations.

The need to explore this topic called out to me for many years before this play was created, and when the Pipeline New Works Fellowship came along, I knew it was the perfect opportunity to bring life to these voices. Through the mentorship of the incredible David Lindsay-Abaire, I was able to give story and structure to the chaos happening inside of my head surrounding this painful moment in history. *How to Bruise Gracefully* was born: a theatrical experience intended to be eye-opening to the mistreatment of Black women in America, to shed light on how far we've come, and how far we still have to go in battling these injustices.

How to Bruise Gracefully uplifts the voices of Black women of the past, present, and future. These characters acknowledge the pain and hardship, but more importantly, they choose not to dwell in it and let it define them – that's one of many things about them that I feel that we can all be inspired by.

Note from Director, Melissa Mowry

First, I would like to thank you for your support of Cadence, of live and local theatre, and of this world premiere production of Brittany Fisher's *How to Bruise Gracefully*. What you are witnessing tonight has been years in the making, some might argue generations. Generations of listening and learning. Of frustration and patience. Of pain and healing.

When I first read *How to Bruise Gracefully*, it was clear to me that Brittany had created a beautiful love letter to Black women. A play that recognized the exceptional circumstances of what it means to be a Black woman in America, while simultaneously showing us the power of Black sisterhood and community. I call it "the cost of Black Girl Magic", what it means to create in a world that is set up for you to fail.

What you are about to witness is a true act of love and courage on behalf of Brittany, the cast and the characters, as they reveal what it means to be strong in the face of great adversity. Tonight, as you watch this piece, I ask that you listen to these women and believe them. And as the lights fade on this performance of *How to Bruise Gracefully*, you continue to carry these women and the millions just like them with you.



CAST



Monique Develyn Davis, she/her, (Rose/Police Officer) is making her Cadence debut in Brittany Fisher's *How to Bruise Gracefully*. Previous roles include Harriet Tubman in Virginia Rep's educational touring production of *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*, Fran in *The Heidi Chronicles*, and Viney in *The Miracle Worker*, both at Theatre Under The Stars in West Orange, New Jersey. She is grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of a uniquely groundbreaking work.



Andrew Gall, he/him, (Physician) is a multi-disciplinary theatre-maker living in Richmond, VA. Locally, he has worked with the Firehouse Theatre, Richmond Shakespeare Festival, and Cadence; where he is currently part of the Pipeline New Works Fellowship. Before coming to Virginia, he co-founded and served as the Artistic Director of the Wing-and-Groove Theatres in Chicago and Highland Rep in Western NC. He was the Producing Artistic Director for NC's historic Parkway Playhouse for 12 years. As an arts administrator, he is a change agent that has directed massive expansions of programming and physical plant renovations. Under his leadership, arts organizations have been recognized with major grants and funding from private and public foundations. As an educator, Andrew has taught performing arts at the undergraduate, graduate, and high school level as well as inside correctional facilities. He has served on the boards and grant panels for the North Carolina Arts Council, the League of Chicago Theatres, the Southeastern Theatre Conference, and is a past president of the North Carolina Theatre Conference. Andrew received his undergraduate degree from Northern Michigan University, a Master's Degree from Louisiana Tech University's School of the Performing Arts, and is in progress on an MFA in Playwriting/Screenwriting from Augsburg University. He is the father of three children and (currently) two dogs. He is profoundly grateful for the support, encouragement, and inspiration he gets from his partner, Amanda.



Derek B. Gayle, he/him, (Physician) is honored to return to the stage for the first time in many years with this production. A Richmond-based writer and podcaster, he co-wrote and performed in several shows with Three-Penny Theatre, and has produced, hosted, and guested on hundreds of film and television-centered podcast episodes and video essays. He can currently be heard hosting the ongoing podcasts *Gimmicks* and *Walloping Websnappers*.

CAST



Noah Jennings, he/him, (Physician) is ecstatic to be part of an important production with this being his first show with Cadence! Noah's professional credits include Christopher Wren in *The Mousetrap* and Henry in *Next to Normal* for The Company of Moment Makers. He is also credited with dinner theatre shows with Third Space Theatre in shows like *Mystery on Main* and *Even Monsters Can Be Royalty*, playing and understudying many characters. As a recent graduate of Bluefield University, his collegiate credits include *Twelfth Night*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Dracula*, *The 39 Steps*, *You Can't Take It with You*, Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, and musicals such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair* and *Philemon*. Noah's most recent production of Sheridan's *The Rivals* with the University of Richmond in the Alice Jepson Theatre serves as his first experience with the Richmond theatre community. He enjoys working with companies, like Cadence, who are dedicated to telling new stories in theatre. He would like to thank the cast and crew of this production for their hard work, his family for their love and support, and his loving partner, Cale, for the beautiful life they share together.



Nena Nicole, she/her, (Vi) is a Richmond Native. Ever since she was a little girl, she has been involved in the arts. She attended Appomattox Regional Governor's School for the Arts in Petersburg and completed the two year Meisner Program at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. She is very excited to say that she has been with this play since its first reading back in 2018 as Vi, and now its world premiere! She is extremely thankful for the team that put this together and hopes you all enjoy it!



Tatjana Shields, she/her, (Fuschia/Physician A) is delighted to work with Cadence as they bring to life *How to Bruise Gracefully*. A recent Virginia Commonwealth B.F.A. graduate, her past credits include: *Cross Stitch Bandits* (Kaija) and *Everybody* (Somebody u/s) Cadence/Virginia Rep, *Miss Bennett: Christmas at Pemberley* (Anne DeBourgh) Virginia Rep, *Intimate Apparel* (Mrs. Dickson) VCU, *Men on Boats* (OG Howland) VCU. She looks forward to performing such a beautiful work and telling the story of these wonderful black women.

CAST



Chayla Simpson, she/her, (Stevie) is a director, producer, and actress from Richmond, VA. She graduated from Henrico High Schools' Center for the Arts theater studies program in 2014 and the illustrious Howard University with a B.A. in Film Production and Theater Arts in 2018. Chayla is currently teaching Theater with Richmond Public Schools and Richmond Parks and Recreation. She is also pursuing a Masters in Education at Virginia State University. Recently, Chayla was the assistant director for Richmond Triangle Players' production of *How Black Mothers' Say I Love You*, and the understudy for the role of *Valerie*. She also played in Glennis Crosbys' production of *The Hypocrite* as Paula, Agnes in *Say My Name* (the winner of the 2018 Watermelon Festival in Maryland), Nikki in *The Regulars* at the 2017 DC Capital Fringe Festival, Nikki in *Simply Lace*, and Evie in *Prison Plumblin*. Other acting credits include: Pastor in the mini series *House Nigg(ER)*, Shani Young in the series *Unapologetic*, Cierra Redd in the film *Heart & Soul*, Accomplice in the series *Taste of the Mecca*, Renne in the series *Doing It Wrong*, and Kayla in the film *Wild & Blue*.



Alexandra Whitehead, she/her, (Magenta/Paramedic B) is beyond excited to perform in her first role at Cadence, and a world premiere at that! She is delighted to be returning to the stage after years away, previously playing Dottie in *Noises Off!* (SUNY Buffalo). In her spare time, she takes acting classes at HATTheatre in Richmond, VA. She is looking forward to

bringing this beautiful piece of work to life with her castmates, and hopes everyone enjoys the show.

CREATIVE TEAM

Brittany Fisher, she/her, (Playwright) is a recent graduate of Juilliard's Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program. Her play *How to Bruise Gracefully* won the Kennedy Center Lorraine Hansberry Award and was recognized by the Rosa Parks Award and Paula Vogel Award. Her play *Your Regularly Scheduled Programming* was recognized by the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Award. She was a 2018-20 Pipeline New Works Fellow, and her work has been developed by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, Great Plains Theatre Conference, recognized by the O'Neill NPC, the Alliance Theatre's Keneda National Graduate Playwriting Competition, Signature Theatre, and produced by Cadence Theatre Company and Virginia Repertory Theatre. She received her B.A. from James Madison University.

CREATIVE TEAM

Melissa Mowry, she/her, (Director) is excited to be collaborating again with Brittany Fisher and Cadence on this incredibly striking world premiere production. Melissa is an East Coast based director with creative collaborations in Richmond, New York, Indianapolis, Vermont, and Tamil Nadu, India. She holds a BA in Drama from Randolph-Macon College and an MFA in Directing from The Actors Studio Drama School at Pace University. Previous works include: *tango of a crumbling wall* (Theater Latea/New York), *Skeleton Crew* (Summit Performance Indianapolis), *I Have a Dream* (Virginia Repertory Theatre/Virginia), *Mr. Lee* (Actors Circle Ensemble/Los Angeles), *Lost Sock Laundromat*, *Astoria*, *Queens* (The Wild Project/New York), *Trouble in Mind* (Rutgers University/New Jersey), *The Slave* (ASDS Repertory Season/New York), *The Audition* (ASDS Repertory Season/New York), *Proof* (ASDS Repertory Season/New York), *North of Providence* (ASDS Repertory Season/New York). In 2018, Melissa was awarded an SDCF Observership, where she assisted director Patricia McGregor on her production of *Lights Out: Nat King Cole*. She is a former Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Fellow at The New Group. Melissa is an associate member of the Stage Director and Choreographer's Union.

Faith Carlson, she/her, (Scenic Designer) is delighted to be a part of the production team for *How to Bruise Gracefully*. She's currently watching *Game of Thrones* for the first time- say what?! Are you team #Tyrion? Her recent credits include: Scenic Design and Set Dresser for *Cross Stitch Bandits* at Cadence Theatre/Virginia Rep, Scenic Design for *The Niceties* at The Conciliation Lab, and Scenic Charge for *How I Learned to Drive* at The Conciliation Lab. faithcarlson.myportfolio.com

Dasia Gregg, she/her, (Scenic and Projection Designer) is excited to be designing her first production with Cadence! She is based in Richmond, VA and graduated from TheatreVCU in 2018 with a B.F.A. in Theatre and a concentration in Scenic Design. Some recent and favorite credits include Scenic and Projection Designer for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (SPARC), Scenic and Projection Designer for *Taking Measure* (Zeiders American Dream Theater), Asst. Projection Designer for *On Your Feet! The Musical* (GALA Hispanic Theatre), Scenic and Projection Designer for *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties* (RTP), and Projection Designer for *Pipeline* (Virginia Rep). She would like to thank her cat, Marvel, for his watchful eye, and continuous support.

CREATIVE TEAM

Shawanna Hall, she/they (Production and Stage Manager) is fortunate to work with Cadence for a third consecutive production. They've worked in the industry for twelve-years. Theme Park shows and small cast straight plays are probably their favorite genres to stage manage. Recent stage management credits include Folger Shakespeare Theatre's Reading Room, *A Room in the Castle*, *How to Bruise Gracefully*, Kings Dominion's *Grand Carnivale 2022*, *Sugar In Our Wounds*, and *A Doll's House Part 2*. Covid Safety credits include *Broadway's Wicked Tour*, *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, and *Ella and Her Fella Frank*.

Michael Jarett, he/him, (Lighting Designer) has previously designed *Annie Jr*, *Heathers*, *Grease*, *Gloria* (co-design with Weston Corey), *Appropriate*, *Rabbit Hole*, *4000 Miles*, *Equus*, and *Caroline or Change* for Cadence/Virginia Rep. He has received RTCC Awards for his designs of *Urinetown*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Moth*. His designs have been seen across Richmond's stages, in New York, regionally, and internationally. Mike received his M.F.A. from Brandeis University and is an Assistant Professor/Design Specialist for the Department of Dance at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. www.michaeljarett.com

Margarette Joyner, she/her, (Costume Designer) is delighted to once again work with Cadence. Joyner is a Director, Actress, Poet, Singer, and Costume Designer based in Charlotte, NC. She is a Visiting Professor of Costume Design at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte where she just completed designs for Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*. She graduated with an M.F.A. from VCU after receiving her undergraduate degree from the University of South Alabama. Joyner founded The Heritage Ensemble Theatre Company in 2012 and served as the Artistic/Executive Director for 10 years. She taught theatre and served as an academic advisor and Interim Chair at Virginia Union University for six years. In addition to writing, directing and producing several stage plays, Joyner recently released a co-authored book, *When I Kill Him, Jesus Can Have Him* through Pecan Tree Publishing. As an Actor Interpreter at Colonial Williamsburg, she not only performed but wrote several of her solo programs honoring those of the enslaved community of Williamsburg in the 18th Century whose voices were not heard. Joyner has designed costumes and props for Cadence Cinema Film & TV's *Still Fighting*, *Bleach*, *Break*, and *Bloodlines*, and for Cadence's summer shows including *Heathers* and *Annie Jr*. Yet of all these accomplishments, her greatest is to have raised a daughter who is a loving human being and her best friend. Says Joyner of her talents, "I am humbled by the fact that God has chosen me to represent His work in so many ways."

CREATIVE TEAM

Aaron Orensky, he/him, (Fight Choreographer) has been studying theatrical and martial combat domestically and internationally for over twenty years, training with the Society of American Fight Directors, the United Stuntmen's Association, and Art of Combat. He has fought, taught, and assisted at workshops from Australia to Canada to Seattle. Aaron has worked on productions ranging from *Lucrezia Borgia* with The Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center to *The Three Musketeers* in Seattle, WA, to the motion picture *Lincoln*. More recently he has given life to the violence for theatrical productions of *Stupid Kid*, *Gloria*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *The End of War*, *Peter Pan*, *The Pillowman*, and various local film projects. Aaron is the Director of the Virginia Stage Combat School and a Fight Director with Art of Combat.

Terra Comer, she/her, (Projections Operator/Backstage Crew) is an alumna of Clark Atlanta University where she received a B.A. in Film/TV with a focus on writing and directing. During her time in Atlanta, some of her roles included Jeanine in *Fat Pig* (2021), Jessica in *This is Our Youth* (2018), and Prix in *Breath Boom* (2018). In college, she was able to direct her first short film called *Salute Madness*. While in high school at Henrico's Center for the Arts, she had the opportunity to write and perform in her play *Belle da Bully* her senior year. She trained in New York at the Bill Esper Studio and LA with Meisner instructor Anthony Montes. She aspires to start her own theatre company one day. When she is not in the theatre, she is working in her studio creating Polaroid art with her favorite camera. She is so excited to work as an intern at Cadence Theatre!

Courtney Holmes, she/her, (Wardrobe Dresser/Backstage Crew) is a Richmond native who has worked as backstage crew for two seasons with Virginia Repertory Theatre and for four seasons with Cadence Theatre. The most recent show credits are Assistant Stage Manager for *Miss Bennet's Christmas at Pemberley*, Assistant Stage Manager for *Chicken and Biscuits*, Wardrobe Dresser for *Beehive: The '60s Musical*, and Assistant Stage Manager for *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* for Virginia Rep; as well as backstage crew for *Small Mouth Sounds* and *Everybody* for Cadence Theatre in partnership with Virginia Rep.



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