



Press Release: April 26, 2022



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY SHALANDA SIMS | CO-DIRECTED BY SARAH JANE HARDY

IN COLLABORATION WITH



PART OF THE 2022 VANPORT MOSAIC FESTIVAL

## Experience a Local Story of the Pursuit of the American Dream

*Vanport the Musical celebrates life, community, and the people who paved the way for the future*

Welcome to Vanport, a city located between Portland, OR and Vancouver, WA that thrived during World War II. On the heels of the Great Depression, people were eager to find work and make money. When Henry Kaiser put out a call for workers in his shipyard, people came from far and wide. But what was it really like? Audiences of all ages will discover just that this May with World Stage Theater’s *Vanport the Musical*.

*Vanport the Musical* is one of the highlights of the 7th Vanport Mosaic Festival, May 20 - June 7, marking the 80th anniversary of the building of Vanport – once Oregon’s second largest city, and the largest WWII federal housing project in the United States. In conjunction with the play, the Festival will offer presentations, tours, exhibits, screenings, and artistic tributes honoring the experience of the multiracial community that called Vanport home.

Actor (*The Color Purple, Oregon Symphony Storytime*), author (*The Hooded Quilt Series*), and playwright (*Re-defining Alberta, Church Girls*) Shalanda Sims created *Vanport the Musical* out of a quest to discover why and how her family arrived in her hometown of Portland, a city with a low percentage of Black people. Her mother shared stories about her great grandmother Dorothy who traveled from Texas to work in the shipyard and

introduced her to elders who lived in Vanport as children. With all of this new information she felt a deep sense of responsibility to the elders and descendants of Vanport to take what was in her hand through theater and music and tell this story that had been erased and hidden.

“To them, from stories I’ve heard, Vanport was like a dream,” says Sims. “What excites me is that before 2013 [when the show debuted at Jefferson High School], this story hadn’t been shared this broadly before. Finding these pieces of history, making them come alive, and educating families and communities about something that people had no idea existed here in our hometown is exciting.”

Half of the original cast is returning from the 2013 production. The cast represents the people who lived in Vanport, including adults and children from different backgrounds. New scenes and songs are being incorporated that further illustrate what life was like during that time.

“There are a lot of themes in the play – equity, housing, employment or lack thereof, references to Kaiser, and Housing Authority of Portland – but most importantly family and community,” Sims says. “It’s really a celebration of life, and people who lived here before us, paving the way for us to have a better future.”

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*Vanport the Musical* marks the return of performances on NWCT's Mainstage in NW Portland. Audiences should arrive early to view Vanport Mosaic's pop-up exhibit, *Vanport: A Story Lived, A Story Told* which will be displayed in the lobby.

*Vanport the Musical* is produced in part through the support of Oregon Heritage, Regional Arts and Culture Council, Miller Foundation, Marie Lamfrom Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Kafoury McDougal Lawyers for the People, The Oregon Arts Commission, The Oregon Cultural Trust, and The Oregon Community Foundation. The free show for Vanport descendants and families on Sunday, May 22 at 2pm is sponsored by the Vanport Mosaic. The free sensory friendly show on Sunday, May 29 at 2pm is sponsored by PDX Parent and SUCHa: Uplifting Brand Design. Audio-described and ASL-interpreted performances are also available.

#### **About World Stage Theatre:**

Founded in 2006 by Shalanda Sims, World Stage Theatre was birthed out of a desire for change in storytelling, the narrative, accurate and diverse representation in the arts, textbooks and Portland Metropolitan and SW Washington area. They do this through giving youth and adults the opportunity to perform live, participate in classes, workshops, camps, school residencies, and community conversations. World Stage Theatre is committed to elevating disregarded voices, creating a culture where imagination, exploration, creativity, and growth as artists and more importantly, humans thrive. Learn more at [worldstagetheatre.org](http://worldstagetheatre.org).

#### **About Northwest Children's Theater:**

Northwest Children's Theater's mission is to educate, entertain, and enrich the lives of young audiences -- and they do this through award-winning performances, classes, and camps! Their vision is to use the power of theater to ignite children's imaginations and empower them to impact their worlds and navigate their future. Take a trip to the NWCT theater in NW Portland or look for classes and events happening in your community or at your school. Learn more at [nwcts.org](http://nwcts.org).

#### **About the 7th Vanport Mosaic Festival, May 20 - June 7, 2022:**

On the 80th anniversary of the building of Vanport City, the 7th Vanport Mosaic Festival offers memory activism opportunities to explore the history and legacy of the temporary housing project, home to a multiracial working-class community when exclusion and racial segregation were the norms. The Vanport Mosaic is a multi-disciplinary collective that amplifies the many silenced histories that surround us. Since 2014 they have been collaborating with the Vanport former residents and flood survivors to preserve their experience, creating a living oral history archive, exhibits, educational programs and artistic tributes. Their community-driven effort received the Spirit of Portland Award by City Commissioner Nick Fish and the Oregon Heritage Excellence Award. Learn more at [vanportmosaic.org](http://vanportmosaic.org).

**MAY 20 - JUNE 5, 2022**

#### **PUBLIC PERFORMANCE TIMES:**

Fridays and Saturdays at 7pm

Saturday 5/28 at 2pm

Sunday 6/5 at 2pm

**COST:** \$25 adults, \$20 youth and students

*Most enjoyed by ages 8 and up*

#### **TICKETS & INFORMATION:**

[worldstagetheatre.org](http://worldstagetheatre.org)

or NWCT's Box Office 503.222.2190

*Performed on NWCT's Mainstage*

*1819 NW Everett St.*

**RELEASE DATE:** April 26, 2022

**END DATE:** June 5, 2022

**MEDIA CONTACT:** To set up interviews or discuss other possibilities for stories please contact Rachael Brown, Marketing & Communications Director (NWCT) at [rachael@nwcts.org](mailto:rachael@nwcts.org)