

# The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio

## **The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio Shines a Light on Co-Workers Dealing with a Changing Environment Through the Play, *Skeleton Crew***

New York Times Critic's Pick Play Spotlights the Human Experience Behind Layoffs at an Auto Plant

COLUMBUS, Ohio, January 23, 2024 -- The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio (formerly CATCO) is presenting the *New York Times* Critic's Pick, *Skeleton Crew* February 29–March 17, 2024, in Studio Two in the Vern Riffe Center.

The play, directed by Raymond O. Caldwell, is based on four auto plant workers in Detroit during the 2008 recession who grapple with the possibility of foreclosure and impending unemployment. Set in the auto factory's break room, three union workers clock in, eat, play cards, and catch up on the latest gossip as the recession looms. Tensions rise as rumors of the factory's closure are spread and alliances are questioned. The foreman, who wants to do the right thing but is often uncertain what that is, finds himself caught between his management obligations and his relationship with each employee. This intimate exploration of the lives of these four workers highlights their struggle to survive in an economy that seems to have left them behind.

*Skeleton Crew* was written by Detroit-born-and-raised playwright, Dominique Morisseau. Among her additional critically-acclaimed writing credits is the book for the musical *Ain't Too Proud—The Life and Times of the Temptations*, for which she received a Tony nomination.

"Ohio is a hub of manufacturing and auto industries," said Leda Hoffmann, Artistic Director. "Several companies in Columbus have recently gone through layoffs, so while this play is set in the auto industry, the very human story about what a layoff means to employees is applicable to any industry. Anyone who has gone through a layoff can find themselves in at least one of these characters, given that it is about how we take care of workers in a changing environment. These characters are flawed, relatable, and vastly human."

“This play is about remembering the human beings that are behind jobs while keeping in mind that business has to happen,” said Christy Farnbauch, Executive Director. “These characters have compassion for each other and leave you with a feeling of hope.”

New York Times called the play “adroitly built and written” and went on to say, “its characters are not just building blocks in a moral tale but a pleasure for actors to perform and thus for audiences to experience,” and “It is, in many ways, an old-fashioned play: naturalistic, tightly structured and filled with self-defining monologues of vernacular lyricism.”

Ben Brantley with the New York Times likened the play to the “traditions of an Arthur Miller” furthering his explanation by calling it “a deeply moral and deeply American play, with a loving compassion for those trapped in a system that makes sins, spiritual or societal, and self-betrayal almost inevitable.”

Variety called *Skeleton Crew* “a profoundly layered play” and “a moving drama,” expanding on these reviews to say, “*Skeleton Crew* is more than a play about blue-collar blood and sweat; it is a story filled with depth and relatable characters.”

Performing in the play are:

Alan Tyson, (he/him), plays Reggie. His most recent acting credits include Charity/Business Man in *A Christmas Carol* with Short North Stage & CAPA, Walter Lee Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun* with Actors Theatre of Columbus, Eddie in *...but you could've held my hand* by Jucoby Johnson with The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio, Gary (Cover) in *Slave Play* with Short North Stage, Frank Thorney in *Witch* by Jen Silverman with Available Light Theatre Company and King in August Wilson's *King Hedley II* with Actors Theatre of Columbus.

Shanita is played by Clarissa Rai, (she/her), which is her debut role at The Contemporary. Her acting credits include Tantrum Theater: *Hotel Berry* (Ada Woodson), Vibrancy Theater: *Yerma* (Girl 2/ Yerma u/s perf.), *Absentia* (Diana), Ohio University Theater: *Medea* (Medea), *Everybody* (Usher/God/Understanding), and The Black Theatrical Ensemble: *A Raisin in the Sun* (Beneatha). Clarissa is a third year MFA student in the Professional Actor's Training Program at Ohio University.

Returning to The Contemporary stage is Rico Romalus Parker, (he/him), who plays Dez. Proud member of Actor's Equity, Rico was born and raised in Dayton, OH. His favorite theatre credits include *Reindeer Sessions*, *Barbecue*, *TopDog/Underdog*, *Belleville*, *Colossal*, *The Brothers Size*, *Gem of the Ocean*, *Blue Orange*, *King Hedley II*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Stagger Lee*, *Every Tongue Confess*, *Passing Strange*, and *The Exonerated*. He will be making his film debut as Evan in HBO Max's *Turtles All the Way Down*.

Playing the role of Faye, Wilma Hatton, (she/her), has been part of the Columbus theatre community for over twenty-five years. Wilma has performed in productions such as *Company* and *Curtains!* with Gallery Players, *Hairspray* with Weathervane Playhouse, *How We Got On* as well as several productions with Available Light Theater, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* with

Short North Stage. She was seen in *School Girls; or The African Mean Girls Play* with The Contemporary Theater of Ohio, and *King Hedley II* with Actors' Theatre of Columbus. She was also seen in Julie Whitney Scott's *Snowville Cafe*. Wilma has done several commercials, short films, and stage readings.

Tickets for *Skeleton Crew* are \$48 for and can be purchased online at <https://www.thecontemporaryohio.org/2023-24/skeleton-crew/>.

The preview performances are Thursday, February 29, 7:30 pm and Friday, March 1, 8 pm. Performances run through March 17 with performances on Thursdays at 7:30pm, Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00pm and Sundays at 2:00pm. The play runs for 2 hours with an intermission and is recommended for patrons 12 years of age and older.

The theatre also offers a Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) ticket option for every preview this season. PWYW tickets may be purchased in advance by telephone (614-469-0939), in-person at the CBUSArts ticket office, 55 E. State St., or at the venue starting two hours before showtime. The Contemporary also offers \$20 student rush tickets to every performance. Tickets (one per student with a valid ID) are sold at the box office, 77 S. High St., Fourth Floor, up to two hours before curtain and are subject to availability.

Patrons can enter the building from the High Street entrance, or through the parking garage entered from Front Street.

Nationwide is the season sponsor for The Contemporary's 39th season. Funding for *Skeleton Crew* is provided by Larry & Donna James. Season support comes from The Greater Columbus Arts Council, the city of Columbus, and Franklin County, as well as The Shubert Foundation, Inc., and the Ohio Arts Council, a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically with state tax dollars from the Ohio Legislature. The Contemporary also appreciates the support of Leona and Rowena Kesler Memorial Fund, Helen W. Wildermuth Fund for Drama and Music with the assistance of the Ingram-White Castle Foundation of The Columbus Foundation who assists donors and others in strengthening our community for the benefit of all its citizens.

## **About The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio**

The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio is central Ohio's leading professional Equity theatre company, providing exceptional productions and educational programs for adults and young people, in response to our community's needs. We believe theatrical storytelling transforms people of all ages by immersing them into immediate, communal experiences. The Contemporary exists to harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy. For more information, visit [TheContemporaryOhio.org](http://TheContemporaryOhio.org).

## **The Contemporary Ohio's Vision**

We strive to become an anti-racist, nationally recognized contemporary theatre company that anchors a thriving Columbus theatre ecosystem in an empathetic, equitable world.

## **The Contemporary's Purpose/Mission**

To harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy.

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