

THEATER OF WITNESS

presents



GrandWomen



“It gets softer.”

Jean Coyne

Lead support provided by
William Penn Foundation



Rochelle Tuzman Sauber
Tzedakah Fund

Henrietta Tower Wurts
Family Foundation



GrandWomen

Performances:

June 11th, 12th & 13th, 2026
Suzanne Roberts Theatre

Created and Directed by Teya Sepinuck

Performed by:

Hilda Campbell
Jean (Regina) Coyne
Judith Palmer
Kim Nguyen
Sheila Weinberg
Tiguida Kaba

Music by:

Niyonu Spann

Singers:

Ingrid Lakey
Foluké Bennett
Niyonu Spann

‘Bread and Roses’
sung by Anna Crusis Choir

Cover photos by Raymond Holman

Production Team

Paintings

Sara Steele

Projection Designer

Larry Barnes

Lighting Designer

Lily Fossner

Production Manager

Jeff Pufahl

Stage Manager

Jamel Baker

Production Assistants

Matilda Ostow

Karen Anderson

Props Manager

Emily Schuman

Costumer

Cybele Moon

Videographer

Daniel Madoff

Photographer

Raymond Holman

Theater of Witness Team

Operations Manager

Olga Liu

Creative Designer

Samantha Slade

Outreach Coordinator

Laurie Rosard

Philadelphia Theater Company

Front of house

Haley Fluke

Deck

Kelly Palmer

Lights

Elliot Constant

Audio

Olivia Denison

A2

Flo Kahn

Video

Brian Morsberger

Props

Jeremy Hugo

Wardrobe

Lily McClure

Director's Notes

Origin Story



Dear Friends,

Thank you for coming to witness our six *GrandWomen* performers shine. This whole project has been a miraculous coming together of people, energy, commitment and love. This project began with the mysterious whisper of an idea one November morning in 2024 when I thought I was finished making new work. And I love mystical and mysterious moments. Just before leaving for a performance of *Cleaning in the House of Healing*, I opened an email from former Theater of Witness performer Hilda Campbell. She asked if I would create a new production about inner-city violence to honor her grandson, Jamar, who had been murdered four years earlier.

I found myself overwhelmed by Hilda's grief, yet equally clear that I did not want to make this piece. I could hear myself saying "no, no, no." But in what I can only describe as spirit speaking inside my head, another voice responded: "But this is your beloved Hilda asking."

This back-and-forth continued for some time until other thoughts emerged: what if Hilda herself could be in it as a grandmother? What if it brought together a diverse group of elder women? What if it were not only about inner-city violence, but about the lives of elder women more broadly? Suddenly, that sounded like something I truly wanted to do. Then, a mere few hours later, following our performance, an audience member asked me what I was going to do next. I opened my arms wide and said, "I am making a piece with grandmothers." In that moment, I felt Hilda's spirit speaking through me, calling the project into being.

With that origin story as a beginning, I invited six remarkable elder women to join the creative process. Early on, a friend suggested I refrain from using the word “grandmother” in the title, noting that it would exclude women who did not have children or grandchildren.

Unsure what to call the piece, I went to sleep holding the question. When I woke the next morning, the word *GrandWomen* was already on my tongue. I would create a piece with a diverse group of six grand women — elder women who had previously performed in Theater of Witness productions, women who were friends, women I admired, and women I knew could together weave a web of creativity and love. Together we would model a prayer of peace.

So, with faith and spit, I put out a call for performers and funding. More than 66 of you responded with extraordinary generosity. A special call-out goes to my friend Rochelle Tuzman Sauber, who believed in this project from the very beginning and provided both initial and ongoing support through her Rochelle Tuzman Sauber Tzedakah Fund. Deep gratitude as well to our lead funder, The William Penn Foundation, and to the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial for their support.

Our creative process has been messy, intimate, deep, surprising, connective, and ultimately glorious. We created the script from the true stories and words of each of the women through deep-listening interviews and group rehearsals that fostered profound connection among them. Along the way, we have been blessed by an extraordinary team of angel collaborators: composer Niyonu Spann; singers Ingrid Lakey and Foluké Bennett; production assistant Matilda Ostow; volunteers Laurie Rosard and Karen Anderson; administrator Olga Liu; and creative designer Samantha Slade.

A whole new circle of extraordinary theater makers has also joined our team: Jamel Baker, Jeff Pufahl, Larry Barnes, Lily Fossner, Cybele Moon, Emily Schuman, and videographer Daniel Madoff, who will be working with us over the next two years.

At this very fraught moment in time, it is a special honor to be held by a group of people who are all giving their very best towards the common goal of creatively supporting elder women and their life stories. We have a grand team. Of grand women and men.

Thank you for being with us. Please join our mailing list and stay involved.

Teya Sepinuck

Teya Sepinuck

Artistic Director, Theater of Witness

About the Production

GrandWomen, is a new Theater of Witness production and film, created and performed by a diverse group of women in their 70's and 80's. They share their own life stories, and wisdom in spoken word, movement, and music, offering us a new paradigm for peace.



Some of the performers are grandmothers or great grandmothers, others, single and proud. They have; knit families and communities together, survived illness, loss and heartbreak, lived with racism, poverty, sexism, xenophobia and fear. Some were born in the US, others from far away. They've been caretakers, friends and lovers. They have fought for justice, and dared to live small and large dreams. They've been pathfinders, artists, service workers, healthcare providers, caregivers, craftspeople, spiritual leaders and teachers. What wisdom can this group of *GrandWomen* pass on to all of us?



The *GrandWomen* Performance is the first chapter of a two-year journey dedicated to amplifying the voices, wisdom, and lived experiences of women across generations and communities. This growing project will also include:

- A new *GrandWomen* production and film created with young women from AFAHO (African Family and Health Organization) in Summer 2026
- A new *GrandWomen* production and film created with students from CAPA (Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts) in Spring 2027
- A series of films by Daniel Madoff, extending these stories and conversations to wider audiences
- Community-based *GrandWomen* workshops that invite reflection, connection, storytelling, and dialogue

Together, these interconnected projects seek to build bridges across generations, foster deeper understanding, and honor the strength, resilience, and wisdom of women whose stories can inspire, heal, and transform our communities.

Performances:

June 11th, 12th & 13th, 2026
Suzanne Roberts Theatre



How you can become involved:

We look forward to hearing back from you. **Please fill out the reflection sheet** given to you either in person at the theater or online. Your responses are gifts to the performers.

We also invite you to **share a story and picture with us about a grand woman you would like to honor** on our [Legacy Page](#). This webpage will be a lasting tribute to the many women who have greatly enhanced our lives.

Invite us to screen *GrandWomen* films at a community or living room event (Beginning in Fall 2026). We are also able to follow screenings with workshops. teya@theaterofwitness.org

Lastly, spread the word!

Bios

Teya Sepinuck (*Artistic Director, Script Writer, Producer*), founder and Artistic Director of the Theater of Witness, has been creating and producing original theater productions and films at the intersection of art, social change, spirituality, education, and peacemaking since 1986. Drawing on her deep compassion and curiosity about people, along with her backgrounds in dance and counseling, she developed this unique form of performance to bring forward the untold stories of those rarely heard by mainstream society. Performed by the people themselves, these deeply personal stories are transformed into powerful, raw theater that humanizes “the other,” builds connection across divides of difference, and inspires audiences with the possibility of healing, transformation, and peace.

She has created and produced more than forty original Theater of Witness productions and films in the United States, Poland, and Northern Ireland, collaborating with refugees, immigrants, prisoners and their families, survivors and perpetrators of abuse, police officers, people impacted by inner-city violence, and those living with the aftermath of war. Among her recent collaborations are *Tangles in Time*, created with Thomas Jefferson University and featuring medical professionals, caregivers, and people living with dementia, and *Cleaning in the House of Healing*, developed with individuals who clean hospitals in the Philadelphia area.

Teya is the author of *Theatre of Witness: Finding the Medicine in Stories of Suffering, Transformation and Peace* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013) and *We Are the Ripple Effect - Theatre of Witness in Northern Ireland* (The Playhouse, 2022).

Niyonu Spann (*Composer/Singer*) Growing up in Newark, New Jersey during the uprisings of the late 1960s, and witnessing burning buildings alongside crumbling neighborhoods, helped ignite Niyonu's lifelong commitment to activism and musical expression. She developed her musical gifts at Newark's Arts High School and as a member of a traveling choir that performed throughout the United States. Her passion for music led her to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, after which she taught high school choir and directed numerous musical productions.

In 1994, Niyonu founded the performance ensemble *Tribe 1*, bringing songs of inspiration, peace, justice, and joy to audiences across the United States, including a special tour in Nicaragua.

Alongside three *Tribe 1* recordings featuring her original music, Niyonu has released two solo albums, including *Spirit Fuel* (2021), a collection of entirely original compositions.

GrandWomen marks the third production with Theater of Witness to feature Niyonu's original music. Reflecting on this work, she shares: "More than ever, the music for this production seemed to emerge from the depths of each woman's soul. I tried to stay true to what was coming forth. I only hope to fully honor these extraordinary grandwomen and the many lives they touch."

nuyoni.com

Performers:



Hilda Campbell is a 76-year-old United Methodist minister, police chaplain, youth advocate, poet, grandmother and great grandmother. Born in her grandmother's house in Georgia, raised, and residing still in Chester, Hilda was the first female union carpenter in Local 626, where she survived extensive racism and sexism. She lost her grandson Jamar to gun violence in 2020 and dedicates *GrandWomen* to him. Hilda has performed in two other Theater of Witness productions.



Regina (Jean) Coyne is an 87-year-old compassionate, retired attorney who has represented hundreds of clients in criminal cases ranging from theft of goats to death penalty cases in Pennsylvania and U.S. Virgin Islands courts for 37 years. She is also a mother, grandmother, and writer and loves to dance.



Judith Palmer is a practitioner of fabrications and fixing things. She is an 80-year-old former piano technician, wood crafter, and founding member of the Anna Crisis Feminist Choir, where she is a singer, composer, and arranger. The choir's commitment to LGBTQ+ issues has provided a place for reflection on her own personal journey. She and her wife have two children and two grandchildren.



Kim Nguyen is a social worker, folklorist, and performance artist. A former refugee from Vietnam, she has worked with refugees from all over the world since 1979. Ms. Nguyen has done extensive fieldwork, research, and documentation on arts and cultures of diverse communities in New Jersey where she

produced folk arts programming and educational guides that are used in classrooms and other settings. Nguyen also worked with the Delaware Arts Council's Folk and Traditional Arts program as a consultant in FY 2025. She performed in the Theater of Witness piece *Two Sides of the Moon* that depicted true stories of the plight of Vietnamese refugees. *GrandWomen* is the third Theater of Witness piece Nguyen has performed in.



Sheila Weinberg is an 80-year-old Rabbi, author, speaker and spiritual director. She co-founded the Institute for Jewish Spirituality where she taught mindfulness meditation and yoga for many years. A passionate activist involved in peace and justice causes her entire life, Sheila and her husband Maynard are leaders in the American Friends of Combatants for Peace - supporting ex-combatants from Israel and Palestine working for peace and justice. She is the grandmother of six.



Tiguida Kaba is a 71-year-old immigrant from Senegal. She came to the US following the shame and taboo of being a divorced African Muslim woman. Before learning to speak English, she worked as a cook, eventually opening an African restaurant in West Philadelphia. Later, she became a public health outreach coordinator, serving clients with HIV-AIDS. She founded AFAHO - the African Family Health Organization in Darby in 2001 as a way to bring free healthcare to those from African and Caribbean countries. She is the grandmother of twin boys. She wants to dedicate her performance of *GrandWomen* to the memory of her late sister who she wishes was here to witness this day.

Artistic Team:

Sara Steele (*Paintings*) is an award-winning artist and activist whose work has been exhibited and published for nearly fifty years. She has had over sixty solo shows nationally and internationally and her work is widely collected. Steele currently has a major piece in “Speaking Volumes/ Transforming Hate” (www.speakingvolumes.net), an exhibit of art created from white supremacist books as commentary on freedom of speech, now touring the U.S. Some of her work can be seen at www.sarasteele.com. Those images are all: “Paintings c. 2026 by Sara Steele, All Rights Reserved.”

Ingrid Lakey (*Singer*) enjoys singing a range of musical genres from jazz to Broadway show tunes to classical. She sang with the ensemble, Tribe 1, for more than 20 years and is featured on two Tribe 1 albums. As an activist, she especially loves to sing with others during social justice protests. She is grateful to be part of this production that is lifting up the wisdom and resilience of women and believes that hearing these stories is medicine for these times!

Foluké Bennett (*Singer*) has loved music of all kinds since childhood and has been singing for as long as she can remember. She has recorded with the University of Maryland Gospel Choir and Tribe One, and most recently performed in Prague in summer 2025 with the Jeremy Winston Chorale and the Czech National Symphony Orchestra. Foluké is honored to celebrate the stories and lives of these “Grand Women” through song.

Production Team:

Jeffrey Pufahl (*Production Manager*) is a multi-modal community-engaged theatre practitioner, educator and scholar working at the intersection of the arts and community health with over 30 years of professional experience in Canada, the US, the UK, and India. Before moving to Philadelphia, he was a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Florida in the globally known Center for Arts in Medicine where he worked with students, community members, and campus partners on key social justice and health issues. He is honored to be a part of this production.

Jamel Baker (*Stage Manager*) is a freelance stage manager based in Philadelphia. In addition to stage managing for many theatre companies over the past 10 years, he has taught stage management courses, led workshops and guest spoke in many educational settings. When not stage managing, Jamel is the Lead Producer at Passage Theatre in Trenton, NJ.

Matilda Ostow (*Production Assistant*) is working on her third Theater of Witness performance in the last decade. Matilda has transcribed oral history interviews with bioethicists, restored old books (including a 19th century whaling journal), and traversed the entire perimeter of Philadelphia on foot. She received a BA in anthropology and environmental studies from Wesleyan University and was a 2018 Humanity in Action Fellow in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Karen Anderson (*Production Assistant*) recently retired after a successful career as an advance practice psychiatric nurse and is beginning the next leg of her journey. Informed by her passion to help patients and families, Karen is volunteering with the Red Cross, Philly Visibility, Weavers Way and most recently with Theater of Witness to bring *GrandWomen*

to the stage. Karen is a wife, aunt, God mama, friend and neighbor. She enjoys travel, hiking in the Wissahickon with her puppy Mollie, cooking NYT recipes and the Philly Folk Fest.

Lily Fossner (*Lighting Designer*) is a Philadelphia-based lighting designer. This season's highlights include: *The Woman Question* at People's Light, *The Garbologists* at Montgomery Theatre, *Proof and Misery* at Act II Playhouse, *The Real Thing* at the Lantern, and the full season at Hedgerow Theatre in Media, where she is the resident lighting designer. Lily's work includes teaching as an adjunct at several institutions in Philly, including Bryn Mawr College. Other projects have included collaborations with/at Hudson Valley Shakespeare, Chautauqua Theater Company, Berkshire Theatre Group, Juilliard Opera Theatre, NYU/Grad Acting, Nichole Canuso, Monica Bill Barnes, Doug Varone, and the Glimmerglass Festival. MFA, NYU/Tisch. Member, United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829. Love to my wife Kate and our daughter Charlotte. lilyfossner.com/

Larry Barnes (*Projection Designer*) is honored to be a part of Theater of Witness' production of *GrandWomen*. Larry is a Founding Member of 10th Floor Productions. **Theater:** *John Proctor is the Villain* (Video Programmer); *Queen of Versailles* (Video Programmer); *New York, New York* (Assistant Video Designer). **Opera:** *The Listeners* (Video Programmer); *Home for the Holidays* (Co-Video Design). **Concert/Tour:** *Tyler Childers' Mule Pull '24 Tour* (Video Programmer); *Journey 50th Anniversary Tour* (Video Programmer/Video Design). **Other:** Lighting Director for the Philadelphia 76ers. For more information, visit www.10thfloor.live.

Emily Schuman (*Props Manager*) has been working as a prop designer, actor and musician in the Philadelphia region for over 10 years and is proud to be a part of this

vibrant arts community. She received her BA in Theatre from Denison University and is a graduate of the Arden Apprentice Program. She is currently the resident props artisan at Philadelphia Theatre Company. She has worked with such companies as 1812 Productions, New Light Theatre, Pig Iron, Delaware Shakespeare, Applied Mechanics, and Nichole Canuso Dance Company. Recent prop credits include: *Wilderness Generation*, PTC, *Poor Judge*, Pig Iron, and *Rift, Or White Lies*, InterAct. Many thanks to Teya and Theater of Witness for the opportunity to work on this incredible piece.

Emilyschuman.net

Cybele Moon (*Costumer*) is a visual artist and educator. She has designed costumes for over 160 dance and theater productions with professional companies, as well as colleges and universities, across the United States. Recent favorite productions include designs for 'Sweetwater' the musical, for the University of the Arts Polyphone Festival, and for Flamenco dancers as part of Pasion Y Arte's '*Hacia La Luz*'. Her visual and installation art has been exhibited at galleries, a museum, and outdoor community events. As the Costume Coordinator for the Dance Department at Swarthmore College, Cybele oversees and co-designs costumes for 10 - 20 new choreographic works by students and faculty each year. More info here: cybelemoondesign.com

Theater of Witness Team:

Olga Liu (*Operations Manager*) is a finance and operations professional who supports nonprofits and small businesses through her independent consulting practice, where she manages finance, operations, and organizational systems for a diverse group of clients. With academic training in biology and anthropology, she spent over a decade working in HIV and cancer research before transitioning into business operations and financial management. Outside of work, she enjoys sewing, volunteers with the Menders at the Broad

Street Love, and has studied Ayurveda and Yoga, bringing a thoughtful and holistic perspective to both her professional and personal life.

Samantha Slade (*Creative Designer and Communications*) is a Philly-based creative communications consultant and web designer who has spent the past 15 years collaborating with nonprofits, educational institutions, wellness practitioners, and artists on brands, websites, fundraising campaigns, and much more. With degrees in visual art and library science, her work is grounded in both creativity and thoughtful information design. Samantha is also a 5Rhythms teacher-in-training, co-produces conscious movement events, and maintains a personal practice of meditation and breathwork. She lives in Mount Airy and is raising two teenagers amongst the Wissahickon. Find out more at samanthaslade.com.

Laurie Rosard (*Outreach Coordinator*) became involved with the *GrandWomen* project after both her mother and mother-in-law—women she considered true GrandWomen and learned so much from—passed away last year. Their loss inspired her to reflect on the importance of preserving and sharing the stories of GrandWomen in their own words during their lifetimes. She believes that people of all ages can benefit from hearing these first hand stories of hope, inspiration, and courage, and that they have the greatest impact when shared authentically by the women who lived them.

Joa Jin of [Funding for Social Change](#) (*Grant Writer*)

Theater of Witness is a member of [Culture Trust Greater Philadelphia](#)

Special Thanks:

Philadelphia Theatre Company and all their current and past staff, especially: Jacob Gilbert, Sydney Justice, Tyler Dobrowski, Taibi Magar, Carolina Vargas, Margo Moskowitz, Lauren Davenport, Josh Campbell. You have made us feel welcomed and well taken care of.

Johnny Gerant of Culture Trust who has gone beyond this role to support our growth.

GrandWomen's Board of Advisors: Anthony Moore, Daniel Sipe, Hector Aristizabal, Katie Margo, Sara Joffe and Sharon Friedler who have supported *GrandWomen's* vision.

Laurie Rosard, mega volunteer who has poured her heart and soul into this project.

Daniel Madoff, filmmaker extraordinaire, who has gone beyond, to support *GrandWomen* with expertise and beauty. We look forward to our continued work together on this project!

All of the individual donors who believed in this project, stretched their resources, and gave generously from their hearts.

We thank our *GrandWomen* Donors

Megan Anderson

Janice Asher

Mary Bernstein

Nancy Hellebrand Blood

Jill Bonovitz

Ellen Boscov

Barbara Breitman

Ilan Caplan

Phyllis Chartor

Ginny Christensen

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Katie Margo

Ruth Gonsalves Moore

Paula Paul

Patricia Pearce and Kip Leitner

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Maynard Seider

Nancy Weissman and
Ned Wolff

Nikki and Owen Wiles

Emily Fitch Zimmerman

Contributions:

If you would like to further support Theater of Witness's *GrandWomen* project please donate. Your contribution will also help support teen performances, films and workshops. We can't do this work without you.

[Donate](#)

Or, you can make a check payable to:

Theater of Witness of CultureTrust Greater Philadelphia
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 300
Philadelphia PA 19107



About Theater of Witness

Theater of Witness is an innovative form of testimonial theater developed by founder and artistic director, Teya Sepinuck in 1986 in which the true stories of people whose voices haven't been heard in society are shaped into original theater and films performed by the people themselves. The performers share their own true stories of trauma, marginalization, resilience and transcendence. The purpose of this work is to open the hearts of audiences to humanize 'the other' and bring people together across divides of difference. **Theater of Witness** is authentic, raw story-telling that cultivates compassion and understanding while celebrating the resilience of the human spirit and fostering empathy and understanding. theaterofwitness.org

*“My heart is filled with
gratitude and love”*

Kim Nguyen

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