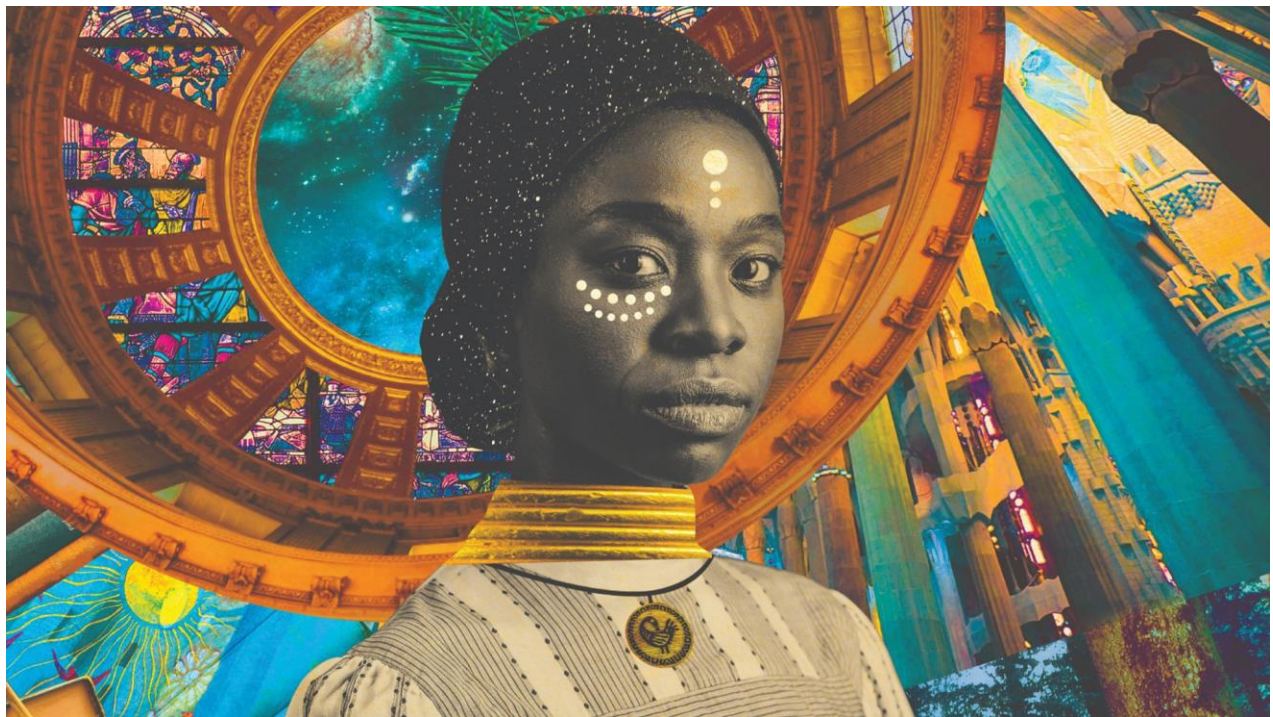


TO Live LUMINATO

Scott Joplin's Treemonisha Access guide



June 6-17, 2023

Bluma Appel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

We are looking forward to having you join us for ***Scott Joplin's Treemonisha*** at the Bluma Appel Theatre. This guide uses plain language to provide audiences, particularly neurodiverse audiences, with specific sensory details of programming in advance to help guide your experience.

Do you need more information, or would you like to schedule a visit to get more comfortable in the space?

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Bluma Appel Theatre

The Bluma Appel Theatre can seat up to 868 people. The orchestra seats 525 people, the dress circle seats 319 people, and the boxes seat 24 people. Seating is assigned in the theatre, and your ticket will tell you your row and seat number. If you require assistance locating your seat, let a theatre attendant know and they will take you right to it.

There are six accessible seats on the orchestra level of the Bluma Appel Theatre, and eight accessible seats in the boxes of the Bluma Appel Theatre.

A venue guide for the Bluma Appel Theatre is available [here](#).



This picture shows the Bluma Appel Theatre from the stage.



This picture shows the Bluma Appel Theatre stage from the centre of the dress circle.

Access measures

ASL interpreted performance

ASL interpreted performances are specifically designed to provide access to performances for audience members who are d/Deaf and/or hard of hearing. These performances feature ASL-English and/or Deaf interpreters who interpret all dialogue into American Sign Language (ASL) in real time, either on stage or to the side of the stage.

The **4:00pm performance** of *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha* on **Sunday, June 11** will be an ASL interpreted performance. The performance will be ASL interpreted by Natasha "Courage" Bacchus and Juan Jaramillo, with script consultation by Jenelle Rouse.

Audio described performance

At an audio described performance, audience members can listen to a description of the visual aspects of the performance described live through a small radio receiver. It is a narration with descriptions of the key visual elements, such as the setting, character descriptions, body languages, and other key details that benefit blind and low vision audiences. Audio description extends beyond the show itself with introductory notes before a performance starts, which includes contextual information, the organization of the performance, description of the cast and costumes, and relevant parts of the program which may include credits and/or brief background information.

The **8:00pm performance** of *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha* on **Saturday, June 17** will be an audio described performance. Introductory notes will begin at approximately **7:50pm**. The performance will be audio described by Rebecca Singh and James McKenzie of Superior Description Services.

Surtitled performances

Surtitled performances are open to everyone but are specifically designed to provide access to performances for audience members who are d/Deaf and/or hard of hearing. At surtitled performances, the speech is converted into written text and displayed on a screen above the stage.

All performances of *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha* will be surtitled performances.

The performers

Scott Joplin's Treemonisha features a cast of 16 actors and one understudy.



Neema Bickersteth plays the title role of **Treemonisha**, the adopted daughter of Ned and Monisha.



Andrea Baker plays the role of **Monisha**, Treemonisha and Lucy's mother.



Kristin Renee Young plays the role of **Lucy**, the younger sister of Treemonisha.



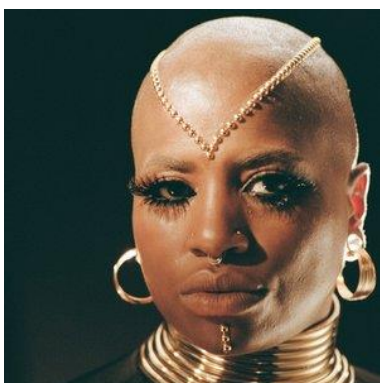
Nicholas Davis plays the role of **Ned**, Treemonisha and Lucy's father.



Ashley Faatoalia plays the title role of **Remus**, Treemonisha's fiancé.



Cedric Berry plays the role of **Zodzerick**, a villager and medicine man.



SATE plays the role of **Nana**.



Marvin Lowe plays the role of **Pastor Alltalk**, a preacher and ring dance caller.



Ineza Mugisha is a soprano in the ensemble of the show.



Queen Hezumuryango is a mezzo-soprano in the ensemble of the show.



Tafari Anthony is a tenor in the ensemble of the show.



Robert Ball is a baritone in the ensemble of the show.



Jim Williams is a low baritone in the ensemble of the show.



Jaz 'Fairy J' Simone is a singer and dancer in the ensemble of the show.



KHAY is a singer and dancer in the show.



Pulga Muchochoma is a dancer in the ensemble of the show.



Charlotte Siegel is the understudy for the role of Treemonisha.

The orchestra

Scott Joplin's Treemonisha features a live on-stage orchestra of nine musicians, one conductor, and one associate conductor.



Kalena Bovell is the conductor of the orchestra.



Rich Coburn is the associate conductor of the orchestra.



Tanya Charles Iveniuk plays violin 1 in the orchestra.



Andrew Forde plays violin 2 in the orchestra.



Lena Fankhauser plays the viola in the orchestra.



Valérie Despax plays the cello in the orchestra.



Brandyn Lewis plays the bass in the orchestra.



Imani Duhe plays the trumpet in the orchestra.



Peter Prez Rojas plays the clarinet in the orchestra.



Zuri Wells plays percussion in the orchestra.



Tunde Jegede plays the kora in the orchestra.

The show

Scott Joplin's Treemonisha will run approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes including one 15-minute intermission.

Originally written by Scott Joplin (c. 1911), *Treemonisha* is one of the few pieces set soon after the abolition of slavery, written by a survivor of that era.

Fusing European classical music with the sounds of ragtime, folk, and gospel to create a thrilling and distinct sound, and introducing a young woman protagonist chosen by her community to lead, Joplin's nearly lost opera was far ahead of its time.

Working from the surviving vocal score and featuring the first all-Black orchestral ensemble in Canadian opera history, the new arrangements and orchestrations by Jessie Montgomery (Sphinx Medal of Excellence and ASCAP Leonard Bernstein award-winner) and Jannina Norpoth (Grammy nominee) merge musical vocabularies, reflecting the major themes of the reimaged version: split identity—African and American—and the role of one's ancestors in coming to terms with the realities of a new land.

Led by a predominantly Black female creative team from across North America, Joplin's groundbreaking opera has been reimaged with a new story and libretto by playwright and broadcaster Leah-Simone Bowen (*The Secret Life of Canada*), working with Emmy-nominated co-librettist Cheryl L. Davis. Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* is conducted by the first Black woman conductor in Canadian opera history, Panamanian-American Kalena Bovell, and directed by award-winning, internationally acclaimed Canadian stage director Weyni Mengesha.

This reimaged version tells a revolutionary story of a young Black woman who, in discovering the truth of her past and overcoming enormous personal loss, discovers her power to unify a divided people and lead her community towards a new future.

The story

Plot details will be revealed below. **Spoiler alert!** [Click here](#) to skip to the next section.

Setting

1884 Maynards Plantation near Texarkana Arkansas

Overture

1864, a year before slavery is abolished. Between the deep forests by the Red River in Arkansas sits Maynards Plantation. A young enslaved woman runs with a baby. She is frantic. She places the baby inside a knot in a large tree. She hears voices and tries to run but is shot and killed.

Act one

1884. Same location. Black people have now claimed Maynards Plantation.

Bag o' Luck: A day before Treemonisha's wedding, the medicine people have arrived in the community to sell their wares to farmers. Treemonisha is given a bag of luck from a medicine man, Zodzerick. Feared by some in the community as being a conjuror, he is instantly attracted to Treemonisha but she is oblivious and betrothed to another -Remus. She has been teaching Remus to read and write, and her father, Ned has settled on Remus as a good match, but Treemonisha does not love him. Remus and Ned are fearful of Zodzerick's medicines and feel they are a curse. Zodzerick tries to tell them he is practicing the ways of the ancestors but they chase him and the medicine people away. As he exits, Treemonisha discovers the bag of luck is in her pocket and quietly places it in her hiding spot in the tree.

The Corn Huskers: More workers come to start the work day and Lucy asks them to join in a ring dance to celebrate the upcoming wedding. **Going Round:** The community dances and sings of the deference of women to men. Remus and Treemonisha begin at the centre of the dance and eventually switch from partner to partner. Unbeknownst to Treemonisha she ends up partnered with Zodzerick and they briefly share a moment before he is once again chased off.

The Wreath: Treemonisha and her sister Lucy go to cut wedding wreathes from the old tree. **The Sacred Tree:** Their mother, Monisha, stops the girls. Monisha tells them that the tree is sacred. It was once a lynching place, but became a spot of redemption. She confesses the story of Treemonisha's true origin -as a baby, Treemonisha was left hidden in the tree by her birth mother who was killed. The tree protected her until Monisha and Ned found her, answering their prayers to become parents. **Surprised:** Treemonisha is devastated to learn that not only are Ned and Monisha not her birth parents but the entire community has kept the secret. **Treemonisha's Bringing Up:** Monisha tries to explain how precious Treemonisha is to her, but Treemonisha

becomes despondent. She doesn't know her birth mother and no longer feels part of the community. The only thing that has been answered is why she has always felt different. **Good Advice:** On the day of the wedding, Parson Alltalk gives a sermon reiterating the place of women as subservient to men. The community agrees. As Treemonisha waits outside the church with Lucy she becomes more and more anxious about entering into the marriage. Feeling she has nothing to lose and is no longer part of the community, she decides to run away in an attempt to find out the truth about her past. Lucy tries to stop her but fails. **Confusion:** Lucy runs back into the church to tell the people that Treemonisha has fled. The community is left in shock and is convinced that it must be that Zodzerick has conjured Treemonisha away with black magic. A despairing Remus leaves to rescue her and, without telling anyone, so too does Lucy.

Act two

Bag o' Luck Reprise: Treemonisha finds herself deep in the forest and runs into Zodzerick who confesses his love to Treemonisha. She realizes that she, too, feels a spark, but she is determined to continue on her journey to find out the truth about herself. Zodzerick offers himself as a guide through the forest and she accepts. **The In-Between:** Zodzerick brings Treemonisha to his people and to a sacred space where she meets their leader Nana Buluku, who has kept many of the old ways alive. Nana tells Treemonisha that there are no coincidences, and that she is one of them. Nana also reveals she knows that Treemonisha is searching for her birth Mother.

Spell of The Dead: Although Treemonisha is frightened at first, she is also intrigued. She participates in a ritual. Each of the medicine people connect to a person they have lost. As the ceremony intensifies, hundreds of bottles hanging in the trees begin to glow with the spirits of the ancestors. Treemonisha learns that her mother is still with her and that families are defined by love, not blood because there has been so much loss.

The Bridge: Treemonisha is changed. She gains not only knowledge of self but of her people through this sacred practice. She realizes that she can be a bridge for her community between the old world and new. She asks the medicine people to return to the community with her as she feels that they would all be stronger together. But the people fear the townsfolk, and don't feel they can leave. She decides to go alone, and Zodzerick offers to guide her. Nana's people tell her that the forest is always there for her if she needs it.

Remus: Treemonisha and Zodzerick leave with the hope of a new life together for their communities, and perhaps even for each other. Walking in the forest with one another, they discover how well they fit together, and are happy. But they are then happened upon by a furious Remus, who is determined to save Treemonisha from Zodzerick. Treemonisha tells Remus that she is no captive, but is in love with Zodzerick. **The Fury:** Remus becomes even more incensed and beats Zodzerick savagely. He then turns to Treemonisha as Lucy arrives, but both women are no match for Remus's fury. The scene is violent. Treemonisha in desperation calls out to the forest for help. Her cries release a wasps' nest. Remus is swarmed, and runs off.

Bag o' luck reprise: As Zodzerick lays dying, he and Treemonisha confirm their love for each other. But as soon as she confesses love, Treemonisha loses it, and Zodzerick dies. **The Rescue:** Treemonisha is devastated to have lost so much so quickly and feels she is responsible for Zodzerick's death. Lucy convinces Treemonisha to carry on and return home. **Going Home:** In their journey out of the forest they come across the main street of a small but bustling black town and meet the mayor of the town, Ms. Dinah. **Rest Awhile:** Ms. Dinah, along with the town's shop owners, convince the bruised and bloodied sisters to rest before their journey home, and bring them food and drink. Treemonisha and Lucy are touched by the kindness of these strangers. **Ms. Dinah Has Blowed De Horn:** As the day ends Dinah and the townspeople rejoice, giving Treemonisha and Lucy supplies, new clothes, and the strength to resume their journey home.

Act three

Prelude

I want to see my Girls: Back at Maynards plantation, Monisha is fearful that her girls are gone forever and is consoled by Ned. **The Return:** When the injured girls appear, Treemonisha reveals the truth of what happened and the community is shocked.

Nana and the medicine people arrive with a captured Remus, confirming Treemonisha's story and demanding harsh justice for Zodzerick's murder. The medicine people take the community aback and tension rises as the two groups try to occupy the same space. Parson Alltalk calls for Remus to be whipped and executed. Treemonisha stops the punishment from going forward and argues forcefully for mercy. She too is guilty of breaking a promise and leaving the community, and so bears responsibility. She, too, has lost much. But she has also seen the possibility of healing after great pain.

Eye for an Eye: Treemonisha reminds both of the heads of the community, Nana and Parson Alltalk, of their own teachings: the teachings of forgiveness and the ancestors. She convinces them the only way to move forward is to break the cycle of violence and bring their worlds together. Remus admits that he did wrong and is much affected by Treemonisha's kindness. He asks for mercy. **Forgiveness:** The community is deeply moved by Treemonisha's words, and discovers that a path to forgiveness is possible. Treemonisha asks Nana to teach Remus Zodzerick's medicines as a way for him to atone and as a way for both communities to begin to understand each other. **We Will Trust You As Our Leader:** Both communities recognize Treemonisha as the bridge they need between the old and new worlds, and they elect her as their leader. Together, they celebrate their first steps on a new path together. **A Slow Drag:** a danced elegy to the excruciatingly slow but achievable speed of progress.

During the performance

The set



The set is comprised of material **rope**. For the first half of the show, there is a **layer of ropes** across the back of the stage. There are several **rope columns** in front of the back layer, as well as a **tree** made of the same rope material that flies in and out from above the stage. There is a **blue floor** with **rubber mulch** hiding its edges.



During the intermission, the **mulch is reset** to cover more of the blue floor and the **rope columns are released**.

The costumes

Each character has a **unique costume**, and several characters have **multiple costumes** throughout the show.



There are **two main communities** in the show, who wear **distinct styles and colours** of costumes. The Freedmans wear **more traditional** costumes in **warm colours**.



The Maroons wear **less traditional** costumes in **cool colours**.

Advisories

A **gunshot** is fired onstage. **Acts of violence** are portrayed. Detailed content warnings are available below.

Haze will be used throughout the show.

During the performance, please feel free to react to the performance in whatever way feels comfortable for you. At the end of the show, the performers will take a bow. You can clap or cheer if you would like to show your appreciation for the performance and the cast.

Detailed content warnings

Some cast members **enter and exit through the audience**, on the right. At the top of Act 2, cast members entering through the audience are singing.

Treemonisha's mother is **shot during the overture** (no gun is visible).

There are **threats of violence**, specific mentions of **beating and killing**.

There are **quick music changes** and fast tempos.

Prop shears are used onstage.

Mention of character **death by hanging**.

Mention of Treemonisha's mother being **shot**.

Mention of **child being abandoned**.

Mention of **parental death**.

Mention of child being **adopted without their knowledge**.

Mention of **“real” mother versus adoptive mother**.

Themes of **misogyny** throughout Act 1 - specific song mentions that wives are meant to obey their husbands.

Some **quick lighting changes**.

Runaway bride.

Small cauldron is carried onstage with **smoke (unscented)**.

There is a **large prop rifle** used to shoot a character onstage - **loud gunshot**.

There are **several large prop machetes** used.

There is a **fight scene** between Remus and Zoderick.

Character death.

Mention of a **plantation**.

There is a **prop handgun** used onstage.

A character is **captured and tied up** with their **head covered**.

A character **threatens to take their own life** by holding machete to their own neck.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or concerns about the access guide or planning your visit to *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha* at the Bluma Appel Theatre, please reach out.

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If you want to tell us about your time at the Bluma Appel Theatre or have feedback that you would like to share, you can send us an email, call us, or write to us.

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Thank you for coming to *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha*, presented by TO Live and Luminato Festival Toronto.