

**BREATH &
IMAGINATION**

THE STORY OF ROLAND HAYES

A MUSICAL BY

DANIEL BEATY



**DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.**

BREATH & IMAGINATION
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The world premiere production of BREATH & IMAGINATION was produced by Hartford Stage (Darko Tresnjak, Artistic Director; Michael Stotts, Managing Director) and City Theatre (Tracy Brigden, Artistic Director; Mark R. Power, Managing Director), in Hartford, Connecticut, opening on January 18th, 2012. It was directed by Darko Tresnjak; the scenic design was by David P. Gordon; the costume design was by Fabio Toblini; the lighting design was by York Kennedy; the music design was by Mike Ruckles, and the sound design was by Jane Shaw. The cast was as follows:

ROLAND HAYES Jubilant Sykes
ANGEL MO' Kecia Lewis-Evans
THE ACCOMPANIST/OFFICER/
PA/PREACHER/MR. CALHOUN/MISS ROBINSON/
FRENCHMAN/KING GEORGE V Tom Frey

BREATH & IMAGINATION was commissioned by Hartford Stage (Michael Wilson, Artistic Director; Michael Stotts, Managing Director).

CHARACTERS

ROLAND HAYES (ages 10–55)

ANGEL MO' (his mother)

THE ACCOMPANIST/OFFICER/PA/PREACHER/MR. CALHOUN/
MISS ROBINSON/FRENCHMAN/KING GEORGE V

SETTING

Angel Mo' Farm, in the Flatwoods of a Negro settlement in Georgia

YEARS

1887–1942

BREATH & IMAGINATION

Lights up on Roland Hayes sitting in a chair in a private moment. He is dressed in a full tuxedo. He wears bright yellow dress shoes. The laces are untied. He struggles to tie his laces, wincing in pain. Frustrated, he takes off the shoes and throws them across the room. He begins to cry with his head in his hands.

After a moment, lights rise on a female figure behind a scrim. She sings with an angelic voice.

ANGEL MO’.

MMMM...

OH...

OH, WHEN I COME TO DIE,

OH, WHEN I COME TO DIE,

OH, WHEN I COME TO DIE,

GIVE ME JESUS...

(Roland begins to listen. He recognizes the voice. He looks around the room.)

Remember, Roland. Keep yo’ focus.

(Throughout the following, Roland attempts to ignore the voice. He puts on a pair of traditional black dress shoes. He fights to stand up, wincing from a severe pain in his side. Slowly regaining his strength, he stands, though still in pain.)

JUST ABOUT THE BREAK OF DAY,

JUST ABOUT THE BREAK OF DAY,

JUST ABOUT THE BREAK OF DAY,

GIVE ME JESUS,

GIVE ME JESUS,

GIVE ME JESUS,

YOU MAY HAVE ALL THIS WORLD,

GIVE ME JESUS—

(Angel Mo’ disappears as the lights shift. The scrim lifts, revealing a chandelier and a grand piano, at which sits the Accompanist, who begins the melody for “Plenty Good Room.” Roland sings directly to the audience with a bright, charming energy, though he occasionally displays some signs of physical soreness. The year is 1942.)

ROLAND.

PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
GOOD ROOM IN MY FATHER'S KINGDOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
A JUS' CHOOSE YO' SEAT AND SIT DOWN.

I WOULD NOT BE A SINNER,
I TELL YOU THE REASON WHY,
'CAUSE IF MY LORD SHOULD CALL ON ME,
I WOULDN'T BE READY TO DIE, OH!

PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
GOOD ROOM IN MY FATHER'S KINGDOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
PLENTY GOOD ROOM,
A JUS' CHOOSE YO' SEAT AND SIT DOWN.
A JUS' CHOOSE YO' SEAT AND SIT DOWN!

(The melody continues as Roland speaks.)

Good evening!

Oh, we believe in call and response here. You'll have to do better than that...

Good evening!

That's more like it.

Welcome to Angel Mo' Farm, named after my mother, my Angel Mo'.

After decades away, it is a full and complex feeling to be back here in Georgia.

To be here on this plantation where my mother was born a slave—

Yes, the very place you sit, my mother toiled the land as another man's property.

I bought this land and renamed it in my mother's honor,

And we have been working tirelessly to transform this place of such ugly history

Into a school of music where white and black students can come

And learn together what it means to be an Artist...

(Music out. Roland steps forward.)

The past several months have been taxing to say the least—

Tearing down and building up is always hard work, isn't it?

This evening was intended to be a celebration of all our efforts—

An official dedication of the school.

Instead it will be a goodbye.

I have decided I will not open this school—not here, not now.

I know this comes as a shock and a disappointment,
But I have decided to move my family back North.
I cannot—I will not be responsible for what harm might come to my family—
My lovely wife, Azalda, and my gorgeous daughter, Afrika—
Or to you black and white students studying together here in this racist South.
I know some of you students have already arrived and are here with us this evening.
At the end of tonight's program, you must gather your belongings and return home.
The other eighteen students who have been invited will receive letters
And be asked not to come.
Simply put, I do not believe 1942 Georgia is ready for this school or for Roland
Hayes—

(Dissonant chord. Roland winces in pain. Lights shift dramatically.)

OFFICER. I know who you are.

ROLAND. I received word my wife and daughter are being held here.

OFFICER. Received word?

ROLAND. Yes, sir.

OFFICER. They in jail.

(Dissonant chord. Roland winces in pain. Lights shift back to the concert. Offstage we hear the voice of Angel Mo'.)

ANGEL MO'.

DARK MIDNIGHT WAS MY CRY,
DARK MIDNIGHT WAS MY CRY,
DARK MIDNIGHT WAS MY CRY,
GIVE ME JESUS.

(Roland attempts to ignore Angel Mo's song and the pain. He tries to speak over her.)

ROLAND. Nothing comes before the safety of my wife and daughter.

And I have worked hard.

I deserve to rest. I am *tired*—

(Both the pain and Angel Mo's voice still offstage grow in intensity, pulling Roland into memory.)

ANGEL MO'.

IN THE MORNING WHEN I RISE,

ROLAND. Tired—

ANGEL MO'.

IN THE MORNING WHEN I RISE,
IN THE MORNING WHEN I RISE,
GIVE ME JESUS.

ROLAND. Tired.

(The lights shift as Roland collapses in pain. Angel Mo' enters as she sings; she walks towards Roland and lifts him up.)

ANGEL MO’.

GIVE ME JESUS,
GIVE ME JESUS,
YOU MAY HAVE ALL THIS WORLD,
GIVE ME JESUS—

(When Roland rises he embraces the physicality/voice of a ten-year-old boy. The year is 1897. The piano transitions to the melody for “Let’s Have a Union,” as Angel Mo’ speaks to her son. Memory: “I’m tired, tired, TIRED!”)

It’s Sunday morning, Roland. Time for church—

(She sings as they walk to church. Roland is reluctant and very tired.)

LET’S HAVE A UNION, JESUS LISTENING,
LET’S HAVE A UNION, JESUS DIED.
PRAY IN THE UNION, JESUS LISTENING,
PRAY IN THE UNION, JESUS DIED.

COME AN’ HELP ME SING!
COME AN’ HELP ME PRAY!
’CAUSE I GOT TO GO TO GLORY,
AND I’M ON MY WAY.

(She forces Roland to join in.)

ANGEL MO’ and ROLAND.

LET’S HAVE A UNION, JESUS LISTENING,
LET’S HAVE A UNION, JESUS DIED.

(Lights rise on the Preacher.)

ANGEL MO’, ROLAND, and PREACHER.

PRAY IN THE UNION, JESUS LISTENING,
PRAY IN THE UNION, JESUS DIED.

PREACHER. Praise the Lord, church!

(They sit on a bench as the melody transitions to the song sermon “Witness.”)

ANGEL MO’. Come on and bless us Preacher!

Sit up straight, Roland.

(He does.)

Don’t make me tell you again. You respect the house of the Lord.

(To the Preacher, clapping her hands.) Come on, Preacher. Tell us what say the Lord!

PREACHER. *(Singing.)*

MY SOUL IS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.
MY SOUL IS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.
MY SOUL IS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.
WILL YOU BE A WITNESS FOR MY LORD?

ANGEL MO’.

YOU READ IN THE BIBLE AND YOU UNDERSTAND,
METHUSELAH WAS THE OLDEST MAN.
HE LIVED NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-NINE.
HE DIED AND WENT TO HEAV’N, LORD, IN A-DUE TIME.

PREACHER.

METHUSELAH WAS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.

ANGEL MO’.

METHUSELAH WAS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.

ROLAND.

METHUSELAH WAS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD.

ANGEL MO’.

WILL YOU BE A WITNESS FOR YOUR LORD?

PREACHER.

DANIEL WAS A HEBREW CHILD,
HE WENT TO PRAY TO HIS GOD AWHILE,
THE KING AT ONCE FOR DANIEL DID SEND,

ANGEL MO’.

AND HE PUT HIM RIGHT DOWN IN THE LION’S DEN

PREACHER, ANGEL MO’, and ROLAND.

O, WHO’LL BE A WITNESS FOR MY LORD?
WHO’LL BE A WITNESS FOR MY LORD?
MY SOUL IS A WITNESS FOR MY LORD!
MY SOUL IS A WITNESS!

(The melody transitions to the song sermon “What Kind of Shoes You Going to Wear?”)

ROLAND. I’m tired, Mama, how much longer?

ANGEL MO’. Tired? Chile, I never—try plowing them fields all day.

Don’t you think Jesus was tired up on that cross?

You honor Spirit even when you’re tired.

We gone keep on singing till the strongest of us is passed out the floor.

(To the Preacher.) Come on, Preacher, what say the Lord?

PREACHER. *(Singing.)*

WHAT KIND OF SHOES YOU GOING TO WEAR?

ANGEL MO’.

GOLDEN SLIPPERS!

PREACHER.

WHAT KIND OF SHOES YOU GOING TO WEAR?

ANGEL MO’.

GOLDEN SLIPPERS!

BREATH & IMAGINATION

THE STORY OF ROLAND HAYES

a musical by Daniel Beaty

2M, 1W (doubling)

Before there was Marian Anderson, there was Roland Hayes—the first world-renowned African-American classical vocalist. Born the son of a slave in Georgia, Roland discovered his voice as a young boy singing spirituals in church. BREATH & IMAGINATION is a musical play that chronicles the amazing journey of this pioneer from the plantation in Georgia to singing before kings and queens in Europe. At the heart of the story is Roland’s loving, yet complex relationship with his mother—his Angel Mo’. Employing spirituals and classical music, BREATH & IMAGINATION is an inspirational exploration of one man’s determination to be an Artist despite seemingly insurmountable odds.

“Beaty has done theatergoers a great service in bringing... Hayes’s exceptional story to the stage.”
—**The New York Times**

“... [a] rich, moving and satisfying work... a joyful melody all on its own. ... Beaty’s uncompromising research... is neatly tucked into what obviously is a tribute and labor of love.”
—**BroadwayWorld.com**

“... a stirring story of song... Stuffed with moving spirituals, the classical music [Hayes] sang... [and] original songs by Mr. Beaty, the show is inspiring.”
—**New Haven Register**

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