



# BLKS

BY

AZIZA  
BARNES



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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BLKS had its New York premiere at the MCC Theater (Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey, and William Cantler, Artistic Directors; Blake West, Executive Director) on May 9, 2019. It was directed by Robert O’Hara, the set design was by Clint Ramos, the costume design was by Dede Ayite, the lighting design was by Alex Jainchill, the sound design was by Palmer Hefferan, and the production stage manager was Brett Anders. The cast was as follows:

OCTAVIA ..... Paige Gilbert  
IMANI ..... Alfie Fuller  
JUNE ..... Antoinette Crowe-Legacy  
RY ..... Coral Peña  
JUSTIN ..... Chris Myers  
THAT BITCH ON THE COUCH ..... Marié Botha

The world premiere of BLKS was produced and presented at Step-pewolf Theatre Company (Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director; David Schmitz, Executive Director), Chicago, Illinois, in December 2017. It was directed by Nataki Garrett, the set design was by Sibyl Wickersheimer, the costume design was by Trevor Bowen, the lighting design was by Marcus Doshi, the sound design and original music was by T. Carlis Roberts, and the stage manager was Malcolm Ewen. The cast was as follows:

OCTAVIA ..... Nora Carroll  
IMANI ..... Celeste M. Cooper  
JUNE ..... Leea Ayers  
RY ..... Danielle Davis  
JUSTIN ..... Namir Smallwood  
THAT BITCH ON THE COUCH ..... Kelly O’Sullivan

BLKS was developed at the Ojai Playwrights Conference (Robert Egan, Artistic Director/Producer) in Ojai, California, 2016.

## CHARACTERS

### OCTAVIA

Is a deeply awkward, weird, introvert, super dork blk girl. Queer. Blk. Mixed blk. 1/2 blk. Whatever. Blk with a white dad from Cornwall, England, who don't get it. 22. Aspiring writer of movies. Dates Ry. Drinks too much and can't hold it as well as Imani. No filter. Speaks thoughts as they exist in her head because the world is her head. Nerdy white boys build shrines to her for her genuine love of Japanese anime, *Harry Potter*, and Octavia Butler, the woman after whom she is named. Her adoration of *Star Trek* is astounding and she can quote Blaxploitation movies offhand. She loves other worlds, would rather live in them than this one. She's beautiful and makeup confuses her. Her uniform is sweatpants paired with large chunky heels or boots, for her love of comfort and hatred of being short. She hasn't told her parents that she's queer.

### IMANI

Haitian. Very Haitian. Matter fact, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone more Haitian. No accent, but can turn it on when she wants for emphasis. 23. A budding alcoholic by American standards. Does a first-rate impression of Eddie Murphy from his *RAW* stand-up/movie and is always striving to perfect it. Single. Constantly gets fired from the same job at Nuyorican Poets Cafe on E. 3rd Street between Avenue A and B for jumping on the mike in the middle of her bartending shift and doing her Eddie Murphy impression. Her dad passed away three months ago. Pancreatic cancer. *RAW* is what they watched on repeat together when he was in the hospital. The last days.

### JUNE

Dates a dude named Jamal, has dated a dude named Jamal for five years, since she and Octavia were in high school together in Los Angeles, their city of birth. Octavia is June's ace boon and roll dogg. Don't leave the house without her. 22. June is the only responsible drinker among the three roommates. Knows how to hack into databases of collegiate universities to access free JSTOR accounts. Plays a lot of *Call of Duty*. Is most at home in front of a screen. She is

studying to be an accountant. She sells weed and is very professional about it. She comes from bougie blk folks who have had money in the family for two generations. Did Jack and Jill, LINKS, the whole nine. Jamal was her date to cotillion. Light skin blk girl. Hair always straight and long without weave. She is very proud of this. A prude, in a way. Cold, sometimes. Nah. Cold often. Usually unemotional, repressing. Makes pancakes for her roommates' hangovers.

#### RY

An employee at Blink Fitness. Errs on the side of butch femme, landing in a mostly androgynous aesthetic. Loves to laugh and tells a good joke. Occasionally insensitive, but this is a product of her strict boundaries and clear communication. Wildly mature, for her age, for all ages. From the Bronx. Says "breh" at the end of most thoughts and/or sentences. 25. Has been trying to land an internship with Terence Nance for two years. Doesn't really drink. Some OCD tendencies. Goes to Pride every year. A fantastic chess player. Dominican. Whole family Catholic. Only queer woman in her family that she knows of. Part-time film student at Brooklyn College. Overwatches Aaron McGruder's *The Boondocks* until the April 21st, 2014, hijacking of the show from Aaron McGruder, which broke her heart completely.

#### JUSTIN

A lovesick. Watched *Shakespeare in Love* too often as a child through his parents' divorce. Says things like "I want to make love to you," and "I want to rub your feet," and means them. You'd think he'd get all the ladies. He doesn't and hasn't for quite some time. Plays upright bass in a jazz band and acoustic guitar in his apartment. His favorite song is Barry White's "I've Got So Much to Give." 23. He believes in love and fate and whiskey, always with love as the first and most important, the other two changing depending on the day. Possesses some stalker tendencies: overcalling, overtexting, etc. He would call himself "passionate." Talks to his mom on the phone every morning. Works at Sunshine Cinema (RIP) and sees a lot of couples on dates. From Trinidad and Tobago. His parents are extremely reserved. He is the family oddity, even from his brother, who is his polar opposite in all things.

## THAT BITCH ON THE COUCH

Is the only white person in this play. She's from Westchester, New York. Incredibly wealthy, like old money white folk WASP and all that. 23. Incredibly white. Went to Exeter Academy for high school type shit. Did cotillion and founded her boarding school's Blk Student Union. It was confusing.

## DRUNK WHITE WOMAN

## ETHNICALLY AMBIGUOUS DUDE

## SOSA

## NOTES

1. Whoever plays Justin should also play Sosa and Ethnically Ambiguous Dude.
2. Whoever plays That Bitch on the Couch should also play Drunk White Woman.

# BLKS

## Scene 1

*Noon. June 1st, 2015. Friday. Brooklyn. Where Bed–Stuy meets Bushwick off the J at Kosciuszko. 850 Broadway, Apartment #3. Trap music and bachata blare from their neighbors, are audible through the apartment; think Fetty Wap and Romeo Santos.\* June is out. Imani is in her room, watching Eddie Murphy’s RAW stand-up. Octavia and Ry are having sex in her room. Ry giving her head. The end of that vibe. Octavia finishes. Post-fucking bliss.*

RY. Why you always do that?

OCTAVIA. Do what?

RY. When you cum—you like, grunt.

OCTAVIA. Girl, no I do not. You gassed up.

RY. Fam, I’m tryna give you some information here—

OCTAVIA. What you want me to stop?

RY. Nah...

OCTAVIA. Then cool out—I gotta pee.

*They kiss. And kiss. Octavia goes to the bathroom.*

WHATTHEFUUUUUUUUUUUUCKKKKKKKKKKKKKK!

RY. What’s good?

IMANI. The fuck is going on?!

RY. It’s just ’Tavia, I got it.

OCTAVIA. Ry! RY COME IN HERE REAL QUICK.

IMANI. ’Tavia, you need anything?

\* See Note on Songs/Recordings at the back of this volume.

OCTAVIA. Nah, nah I just need Ry!

IMANI. Are you cut?

OCTAVIA. No! No, I'm not cut!

IMANI. Are you bleeding?

OCTAVIA. No! I'm not!

RY. Imani!

IMANI. You sure you don't need anything?! I can go to the CVS and get you some Band-Aids!

OCTAVIA. Sure! Do that!

*Imani runs to her room to get her keys and wallet, then crashes out the door.*

RY. What you screaming for?

*Ry enters the bathroom.*

OCTAVIA. Look at this!

*Octavia tries to show Ry her clitoris.*

RY. (*Laughing at her.*) God, you're not one of those people that likes when someone watches them pee, are you?

OCTAVIA. I just found something! Something fucking weird on my clit!

RY. Like STD weird?

OCTAVIA. No! I think it's a mole, I mean, it looks like a fucking mole.

RY. Ew.

OCTAVIA. I mean it's a black dot but that's essentially a mole, right?

RY. Ew. That's a lot.

OCTAVIA. It wasn't there the day before! And I know it wasn't there last night—at least I don't think it was.

RY. This all just feels unsanitary somehow—

OCTAVIA. Did you see a mole just now?

RY. How the fuck am I supposed to know?!

OCTAVIA. You were literally just down there!

RY. I wasn't actively inspecting for moles!

OCTAVIA. Maybe that's good? Means it's new?



RY. Sure—

OCTAVIA. Can you WebMD it real quick?

RY. WebMD a mole?

OCTAVIA. Can you look at this please? I need to know if it looks bad, like objectively.

*Octavia starts to pull down her underwear again.*

RY. Oh my god can you please stop!

OCTAVIA. What?!

RY. I just don't need all this information, 'Tavia.

OCTAVIA. What?

RY. You're like, describing this mystery mole down there... it's a lot to put on a person, okay?

OCTAVIA. So, you can eat my pussy out but the minute I get a mole on my clit it's like I got fucking cooties?

RY. Those are just not the same situation and you know it.

OCTAVIA. It's still my pussy, tho.

RY. Aye! It's a mere question of context, G. I'm not your doctor!

OCTAVIA. What the fuck is wrong with you?!

RY. You the one screaming the house down, I'm scared as hell then you want me to look at your thing for a mole!

OCTAVIA. "My thing"?

RY. You know what I'm tryna say.

OCTAVIA. My clitoris, Ry.

RY. Yea, thanks.

OCTAVIA. You have a fucking clitoris too!

RY. Stop saying clitoris!

OCTAVIA. Why?!

RY. Sounds like the word "moist."

OCTAVIA. What?

RY. Not like the thing itself, just the sound of the word.

OCTAVIA. I don't have time for sonic associations!

RY. Just go to the doctor!

OCTAVIA. How the fuck do you know I need a doctor, you ain't even looked!

RY. I gotta go to work.

OCTAVIA. What?

RY. Work, 'Tavia. It's this place I attend called Blink Fitness on Lafayette and East 4th wherein I receive payment for hours successfully in attendance.

OCTAVIA. Yo, you're dead being rude right now, tho.

RY. 'Tavia! You know I'm the only one on this crew with a day job. If I get fired from Blink, my movie don't get made.

OCTAVIA. Your movie?

RY. I just mean I'm filming it, directing it. I'm fundraising for it.

OCTAVIA. Yea. And I'm writing it, so what you tryna say?

RY. Just that we have different roles in making this, that's all.

OCTAVIA. And nice jab at my joblessness. Was that really necessary?

RY. Look, it's a real ass consideration. I don't even know why you quit the Bean anyway.

OCTAVIA. Fired.

RY. You were—

OCTAVIA. Fired.

RY. Why didn't you tell me?

*A moment.*

OCTAVIA. Why won't you look at my clit?!

RY. HOW ARE WE BACK TO THIS?!

OCTAVIA. This is incredible.

RY. I just like don't really know what you could want from me right now.

*A beat.*

OCTAVIA. I think you should leave.

RY. Yea, I'm working on it.

OCTAVIA. No. Now.

RY. You trippin'.

OCTAVIA. Get out of my house, Ry.

RY. Lemme get my clothes, aight?

OCTAVIA. Nigga is you deaf?! OUT. OF MY HOUSE. NOW.

RY. Aight then! Shit.

*Ry exits the bathroom, goes to Octavia's room. Octavia walks out into the living room and waits for Ry to get her shit. Ry enters the living room, holding her shoes in one hand, her backpack in the other. Ry starts putting on her shoes.*

OCTAVIA. Now!

RY. Can I put my shoes on first?

OCTAVIA. Fuck no!

RY. Octavia!

*Octavia takes Ry's shoes and backpack out of her hands and throws both into the hallway.*

You crazy, breh.

OCTAVIA. Fuck off.

*Ry walks into the hallway. Octavia shuts the door. Octavia slides down the length of the door and sits. Imani opens the door with two bags full of Band-Aids, pushing Octavia forward.*

Jesus Sister Fuck the fuck you doing?!

IMANI. 'Tavia! Why's Ry in the hallway?

OCTAVIA. Dude. She said "ew."

IMANI. Oh. Well, I guess I get that.

OCTAVIA. What?!

IMANI. Blood really freaks some folks out, 'Tavia.

OCTAVIA. Aw, Jesus.

IMANI. Don't mean you gotta kick em out n shit. That's like a very serious phobia.

OCTAVIA. I'm not bleeding, 'Mani!

IMANI. Then what the fuck you have me running to get you all these Band-Aids for?

OCTAVIA. UGH.

IMANI. Okay, no need to get an attitude about it.

# BLKS

by Aziza Barnes

1 man, 5 women

When shit goes down, your girls show up. Waking up to a shocking and personal health scare, Octavia and her best friends, June and Imani, go on a crusade to find intimacy and joy in a world that could give a fuck less about them or their feelings. This 24-hour blitz explores what it is to be a queer blk woman in 2015 New York, how we survive and save ourselves from ourselves.

*"Aiming to be a raucous comedy of misbehavior and a quiet tragedy of mistreatment, [BLKS] amazingly succeeds at both. ...For quite a stretch of the breakneck 90-minute production, you feel the pure joy of seeing the best of people at their worst. ...the uncomfortable proximity of terror and pleasure, the mark of mortality in the midst of intimacy, percolates beneath the surface at all times, so that even at its most extreme and obscene—BLKS is not for prudish ears or eyes—it is serious and sad and profoundly human."*

—**The New York Times**

*"Unvarnished and totally uninhibited, [BLKS] is hilarious in the most uncomfortable ways. It's the kind of comedy you watch with one hand covering your eyes, and the other suspending your dropped jaw. ...Barnes's lack of fear as a writer is what makes BLKS a particularly joyous experience. ...Each of Barnes's characters is a mess in his or her own special way, and it is in their flaws that we are best able to see reflections of ourselves—and laugh-crige at the mirror's harsh truth."*

—**TheaterMania.com**

*"...[a] disarming, vivacious comedy... Barnes's irreverent and exuberant play, saturated in race and sexuality, is part romantic sitcom, part existential reflection... Before you know it, a deep, soulful riff is unwinding... It's a persistent, perceptive entertainer. The zest of these women is off the charts."*

—**The Washington Post**

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