

“There’s an army of us here... of assorted parts / Together, we make a whole.”

# THE HISTORY OF BLACK THEATRE IN MONTREAL

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## ‘33

EXCELSIOR DEBATING & DRAMATIC CLUB

## ‘30s

NEGRO THEATRE GUILD won Dominion Drama Festival Scenery Design Award and Martha Allan Cup

“A director offers me a role on condition that I don’t bring up any black issues, claiming to understand my position, but not wanting to make the white actors uncomfortable.”

—Lorena Gale

## ‘64

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO Association (TTA) Drama Committee

“Fresh and exciting Caribbean and Black ‘cultural extravaganzas’ of students at McGill and Concordia.”

## ‘66

REVUE THEATRE FOUNDED by Black American choreographer Arleigh Peterson

The company never considered itself a Black company, but it was not opposed to doing the best off-Broadway Black plays. Its appeal was to Jewish and non-traditional white audiences. In fact, most of its plays were for white actors—although whenever possible, Arleigh provided work for Black performers and technicians.

## ‘70

DR. CLARENCE BAYNE reflects on the positioning of Black theatre in Quebec

“In 1970 I attended a St Jean de Baptiste Society meeting where I met a young French Canadian female lawyer. I was able to easily identify with her passionate belief in her culture. So I asked...”

Q: What kind of support can Blacks hope for from francophone Quebec?

A: We French Canadians have so much to do for ourselves that we have no time to be concerned with other problems. After we fix our problems, we will see what happens.

## ‘71

THE TTA BECOMES the Black Theatre Workshop

Production of Lorraine Hansberry’s *How Now Black Man*. Director Jeff Henry ups the game by bringing professional discipline, commitment to the work ethic of serious theatre, and a pan-African view of membership to the BTW.

## ‘72

THE BTW IS incorporated as a non-profit

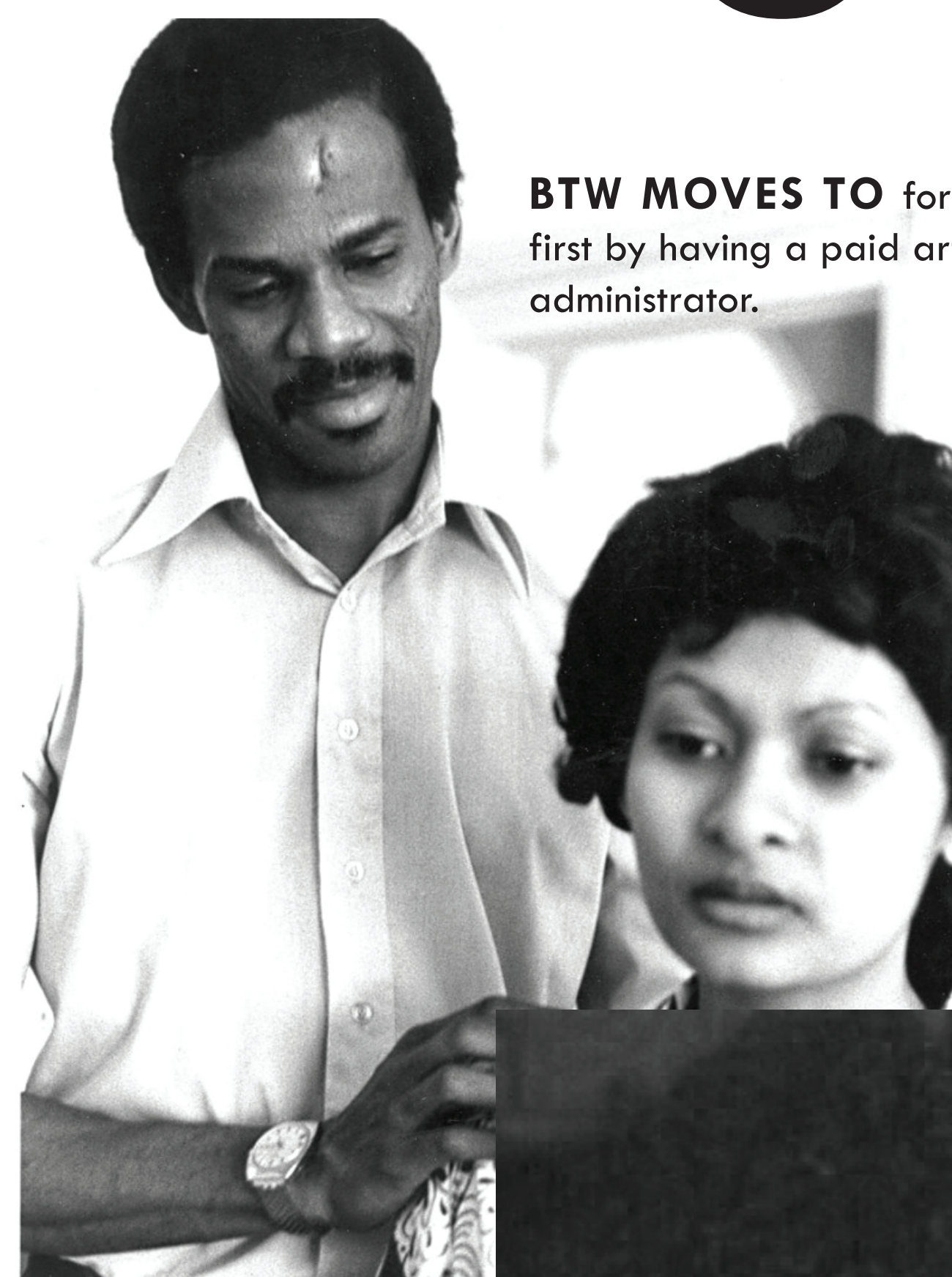
WHAT DISTINGUISHED THE BTW FROM THE START?

- + A captive audience of new immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, with a thirst for “back-home art and culture.”
- + Ample supply of culture-specific talent available through the influx of immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- + Easy access to management and directorial resources through the universities.

Thus, it had a competitive monopoly on its specific cultural product, which they then diversified by opening up to works of Africa, the diaspora, and the creation/production of Black Canadian works. Other smaller Black theatre initiatives couldn’t keep up.

## ‘78

REVUE THEATRE GOES UNDER



1980

## ‘80

BTW MOVES TO formalize its administration, first by having a paid artistic director & a paid administrator.



1983

## ‘88-’92

THE NEED FOR FUNDING & distancing from the community

PROFESSIONALISM REQUIREMENTS FOR FUNDING:

- + Professional artists, often from elsewhere, replaced the community-based non-professionals
- + Paid positions took over jobs from the community board members
- + The involvement of the community board members in creative aspects, once a crucial aspect of the company, was not encouraged by government funding agencies.
- + The community lost creative control and black audiences waned. However, there was increased attendance and participation by other Anglophone communities.

“Colored Girls” a smash for Black Theatre’s Gale



For *Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, playing at Montreal’s Black Theatre Workshop, is sensational. It’s also a triumph for artistic director Lorena Gale.

1985

## ‘98-

NEW STRATEGIC INITIATIVES to reconstruct its relationship with the Black Community and expand its audiences in other ethnic and mainstream communities (script-development, play-reading, Artist Mentor-ship Program).

ARTIST MENTOR-SHIP SERIES connect emerging artists with professionals in the community for a year-long mentor-ship period.

SCHOOL TOUR SERIES tour culturally relevant shows to schools around the province for Black History Month.

DISCOVERY SERIES script development program for workshopping new Black Canadian pieces.



2014

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1973