

Produced by Shakespeare in Clark Park (SCP)

August 29, 2021, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Vernon Park, Germantown, Philadelphia

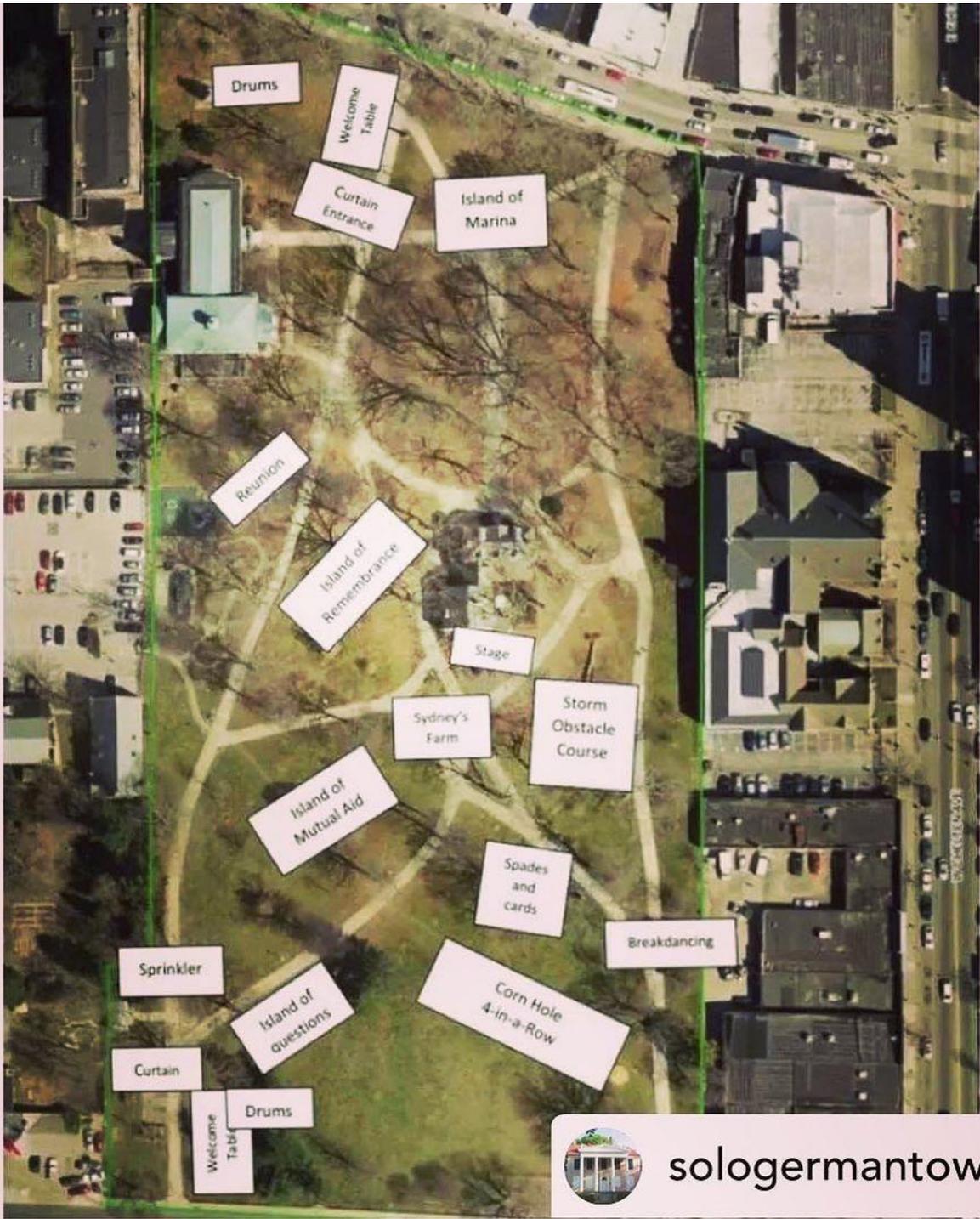
Direction & Consensus Organizing by Seema Sueko

Culminating Play written by Angela Bey

Shakespeare in Clark Park (SCP), a small nonprofit theater in Philadelphia, contracted [Seema Sueko](#) to co-create and direct, with the community of Germantown, Philadelphia, an artistic project to take place outdoors in Germantown's iconic Vernon Park at the end of August 2021, utilizing Shakespeare's *Pericles* as the launching point for creative query. **The overall goal was to connect and nourish the soul of the people of Germantown.**

Seema led a six-month consensus organizing (CO) process beginning in March 2021, which prioritized the people and narratives of Germantown. Through this process, local residents and organizations co-created and named the project [Germantown Plays Pericles](#), an all-ages fair where audience members perambulated through Vernon Park, interacting with nine 'islands,' each reflecting a narrative moment in *Pericles* embodied through a contemporary Germantown activity that included interactive art installations, games, music, breakdancing, mutual aid and resources. The event culminated with an original 30-minute poetic play that refracted *Pericles* through a tale centering Black Germantown and the community's fight against gentrification. The play was written by Angela Bey and incorporated ideas and writings from community members that surfaced through the CO process. [A short TikTok video capturing the day can be found here.](#)





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Welcome tables and curtains were placed at both the Greene Street and Germantown Avenue entrances of Vernon Park, with the invitation to step through the curtains and enter the story.



Drummers were positioned just beyond the entrance curtains to greet audience. (L to R: Michael Blount, Donna “Noize” Dorman, Ronald Carter, and Community Co-Creator Karen Smith).



Island of Questions

Pericles begins with a riddle. *Germantown Plays Pericles* included an Island of Questions where staff and volunteers from the Joseph E. Coleman Northwest Regional Library and Community Co-Creator Anthony Kamani invited attendees to “step right up,” and answer riddles of Germantown. Everyone received a prize and an invitation to write on the “What does Germantown Mean to You?” wall.



The design of this island featured the Library Book Bike, which held the book bags, books, and lanyards which were all given as prizes to the participants.

Island of Mutual Aid

In Shakespeare's *Pericles*, the title character experiences mutual aid when he exchanges food for shelter on the island of Tarsus. Germantown has a history and profound spirit of mutual aid, neighbors helping neighbors as solidarity partners. At the Island of Mutual Aid, anchored by Community Co-Creator Marie-Monique Marthol, community kitchens, ministries and gardens donated fresh produce, groceries, water, hand sanitizer, face masks, children's books, children's and adult diapers, flowers, greenery, personal hygiene items, and more, inviting attendees to take what they need and share what they can. The participating organizations were:

- Germantown Residents for Economic Alternatives Together (GREAT) / Germantown Mutual Aid Fund
- Germantown Avenue Crisis Ministry
- Mastery Pickett Community Garden
- Germantown Kitchen Garden
- Awbury Arboretum



The design of this island featured a 17' canoe and a sail with last three lines of the Gwendolyn Brooks 1970 poem "Paul Robson":

...we are each other's harvest;

...we are each other's business;

...we are each other's magnitude and bond.

Storms

Pericles endures many storms. Our fair featured two metaphorical storms:

- A water storm made from a misting sprinkler hanging across one of the pathways which was an invitation to cool off in the hot August weather
- An obstacle course created by the local Philadelphia School of Circus Arts (PSCA), which included billowing silks, pipes, beams, tightwire, and PSCA experts to guide people to play safely through the course



Island of Play

Pericles' ship crashes on an island where they happen to be holding a tournament. We created an Island of Play which featured a spades card table, lawn-sized 4-in-a-Row, corn hole, and Breakdancing by Twine, Nate "Bboy Nacho" Brooks, Gregory "EZ-Greg" Bissell, and Damon "Dinksworth" Holley.



Islands of Remembrance

Pericles loses his wife in the second storm and, in grief, he gives his infant child to the king and queen of Tarsus. Recognizing that our communities are likewise experiencing great loss and grief, *Germantown Plays Pericles* included two areas focused on grief, honoring, remembering and releasing.

Sydney's Farm – Community Co-Creator Sydney Devereux is the caretaker and resident of Vernon House, the historic home in the middle of Vernon Park. She is building an urban farm on the property. At *Germantown Plays Pericles*, we distributed the three sisters seeds -- corn, beans, squash -- for attendees to take and plant in remembrance.



Life Raft, Message in a Bottle Interactive Art Installation

Attendees were invited to write a message and place it in the bottle on a life raft. They could choose what or who they want to honor, what they want to carry, and what they want to release. This island was anchored by Community Co-Creator Rebecca Segers and staffed by community members Kevin Porter and Ron Simelaro.



Island of Marina – Tables of Education and Activism

Marina, Pericles' daughter, transforms her misfortunes into action and change. The Island of Marina featured Germantown organizations that likewise activate the community. These groups raise awareness, surface collective power, rebalance power and create change: Awbury Arboretum, Crossroads Women's Center, Germantown Info Hub, Germantown Participatory Defense Hub, Germantown Residents for Economic Alternatives Together.



Island of Reunion

In the end, Pericles is reunited with his wife and daughter, both of whom he thought he had lost forever. So, too, are we experiencing reunion as we carefully emerge from the syndemic. Community Co-Creator Lawanda Horton Sauter anchored this island where attendees were invited to think about what they need, walk through the hanging scrolls in the art installation, and pick one to find a quote about love and reunion from Shakespeare or prominent Black Philadelphian artists. Their quotes and reunions were captured with an instant camera, producing a tangible photo they could take home with them.



Boat Tours

Attendees were provided a map and invited to stroll through the Fair in any order, taking as much or as little time as they wish at each Island. Alternatively, they were also given the option of taking a guided tour through the islands led by writer Angela Bey, wearing a Boat Hat designed by Costume Designer Lizzy Pecora.



Culminating Play

At 7 pm, the drummers were given the cue to lead a procession to the stage located at the center of the park, where the culminating play, *Germantown Plays Pericles*, was read, featuring Community Co-Creators Naomi Hirsch, Lawanda Horton Sauter, Marie-Monique Marthol, Krista Nelson, Rebecca Segers, alongside SCP Artistic Director Kittson O'Neill, and SCP Board Member and Writer Angela Bey. Children from the community were also in the play: Amber, Amir, Courtney, Hudsyn, India, Kelechi, Nusayva, MayMay, Thai.



A note from one of the community actors:

Dear friends, Because of my work with Seema I am paying attention to how words are spoken, what parts of a sentence are emphasized, how meaning is affected by sound, and how both volume and speed color delivery. I used to think all that I wanted to convey had to live on the page. Now I see the power of living words is in the ensemble. And I ask, "What does the director bring?" What about the actors themselves, the light, and the audience? Written words are but an iced cake waiting on a pedestal. When they are cut into, served up, tasted, and swallowed; then we have something! Thank you Seema ❤️ Thank you ALL for sharing this awakening moment with me. Congratulations on fantastic transformative theater! I wish you the best of your wildest dreams.