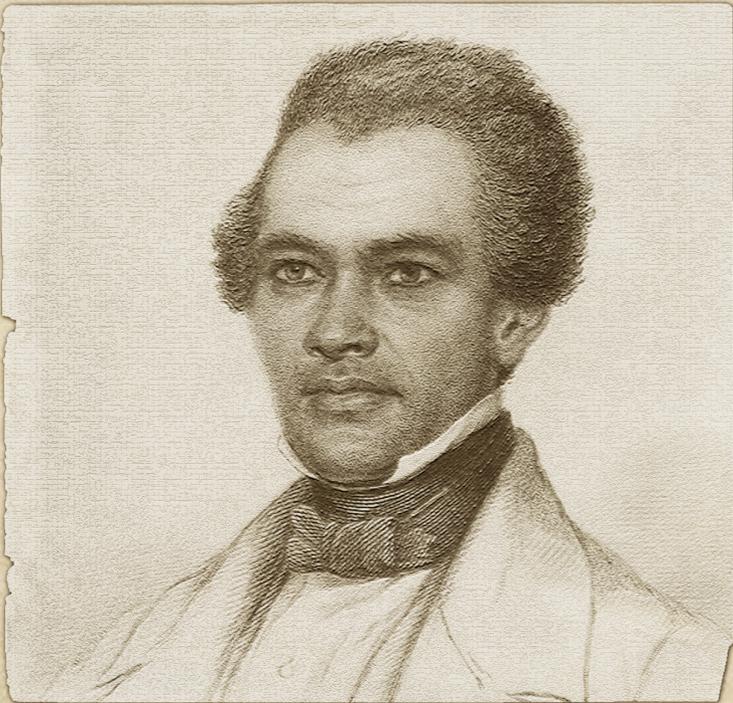


JOHNSON THEATRE 2026

THE ESCAPE; OR, A LEAP FOR FREEDOM

BY WILLIAM WELLS BROWN (1857)



WEDNESDAY, FEB. 25 - SATURDAY, FEB. 28 AT 7:30 p.m.
SUNDAY, MARCH 1 AT 2 p.m.

 **WINTHROP**
UNIVERSITY | *Department of
Theatre and Dance*



AAMS
African American Studies


**CULTURAL
EVENT**

THE ESCAPE; OR, A LEAP FOR FREEDOM

by William Wells Brown

CAST

W.W. Brown & Cato	Elijah Shanks
Dr. Gaines	Taylor Morgan
Mrs. Gaines	Mary-Savanna Truett*
Sampey, Barkeeper, James Jones	Elis Long*
Hannah	Hadiya Weaks
Melinda	Seyven Schlueter
Glen	Amare Sims
Mr. Campbell, Bill Jennings, Marshall	Brayden Brazil
Pete, Brown Trio #2	Faith Mozeak
Bill, Brown Trio #1	Devontaye Merrill
Ned, Sam, Minstrel Man, Brown Trio #3	Kai E.T. Brooks
Mr. Wildmarsh, Major Moore, Mr. Neal	Hunter Hyatt
Rev. Pinchen, Mr. Peters, Ferryman	Tony Nuñez
Dick Walker/Scragg	Christian Inman*
Big Sally, First Peddler	Carrington Golson
Tapioca, Charlotte	Roishanna Anderson
Dolly, Second Peddler	Kyia Jones
Susan, Mrs. Neal	Lauren Smith
Mr. White	Francis Judge*
Thomas	Saye Mayernik
Recorded Cello Player	Noah Squirewell

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Original "Author's Preface" (1858)

This play was written for my own amusement, and not with the remotest thought that it would ever be seen by the public eye. I read it privately, however, to a circle of my friends, and through them, was invited to read it before a Literary Society. Since then, the Drama has been given in various parts of the country. By the earnest solicitation of some in whose judgment I have the greatest confidence, I now present it in printed form to the public.

The main features in the Drama are true. Glen and Melinda are actual characters and still reside in Canada. Many of the incidents were drawn from my own experience of eighteen years in the South. The marriage ceremony, as performed in the second act, is still adhered to in many of the Southern States, especially in the farming districts.

The difficulties created in the domestic circle by the presence of beautiful slave women, as found in Dr. Gaines's family, is well understood by all who have ever visited the valley of the Mississippi.

The play, no doubt, abounds in defects, but as I was born in slavery, and never had a day's schooling in my life, I owe the public no apology for errors. W. W. B

Our Preface (February 2026)

Without "a day's schooling," William Wells Brown wrote and published his personal narrative in 1847, then published the first African American novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, a tragic story of Thomas Jefferson's mixed-race daughters in 1853, and finally in 1858, he published the first African American drama: *The Escape; or A Leap for Freedom*.

Brown rose to prominence as a professional fugitive on international anti-slavery lecture touring circuits. Along these circuits, he performed *The Escape...* as a one-person show where he embodied more than 30 different characters. Equally impressive, Brown married the tragic to the comic through a blend of three 19th century performance traditions: anti-slavery oration, blackface minstrelsy, and melodrama. Trigger warning: during some blackface minstrel moments, you might wonder whether it's cool to laugh. That's up to you and maybe the people around you, but rest assured, Cato is designed to be absurd, even funny. Another trigger warning: in our play, Cato weaponizes the N-word. In Brown's original, nearly every white character wielded the word, hard "er." In our 21st century version, white characters will try to use the N-word, but we won't let that happen.

As far as responsibility, is it even okay for us, as 21st century creatives who have never experienced enslavement, to stage this play? We still don't know. Out of respect to our enslaved ancestors, we begin in an anti-slavery lecture hall, where W.W.B. shares his actual, innermost thoughts on the subject of "presenting" slavery.

As for this concept of a "leap for freedom," for formerly enslaved individuals like Frederick Douglas that leap often began with a fight. This act of violence signaled a rejection of bondage and a claiming of one's own body. But once Cato, Hannah, Glen or Melinda make their leaps, once they choose a side, no turning back, what do they do next? We shall see. M.E.M.

PRODUCTION & CREW

DIRECTOR/ADAPTER Dr. Marvin McAllister

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/ADAPTER Samiyah Jeffery

STAGE MANAGER & FILMMAKER Ethan Ganzell*

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS Morgan Daly*, Amber Ford

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER Brandon Dawson

CHOREOGRAPHER Dakarai Vann

INTIMACY DIRECTOR Rachel Dawson

GUEST COSTUME DESIGNER Jerrilyn Duckworth

COSTUME COORDINATOR Leslie Cook

MAKEUP DESIGNER Jade Watkins*

**MUSIC/VOCAL
DIRECTOR/ARRANGER** Zin Broñola

**ASST. MUSIC/VOCAL
DIRECTOR/COMPOSER** James Gragg

SET DESIGNER Biff Edge

ASSISTANT SET DESIGNER Eric Dykhuis

LIGHTING DESIGNER Daniel Gordon

ASST. LIGHTING DESIGNER Cydnee Corujo*

CO-SOUND DESIGNERS Hunter Bokalosky, Brianna Simmons

PROJECTIONS DESIGNER Kiernan Hedlund*

DRAMATURG & PROPS Abigail Bast

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR John P. Woodey

COSTUME SHOP SUPERVISOR Cheralyn Lambeth

BOX OFFICE MANAGER Brandon Dawson

PRODUCTION & CREW

SCENE SHOP TA'S Reece Dinacci, Cole Flournoy,
Kiernan Hedlund*

COSTUME SHOP TA'S Sierra Dennison, Ethan
Ganzell*, Ash Hernick*

BOX OFFICE TA'S Kyran Anderson, Samiya Jeffery,
Kyia Jones, Valerie Kempton*,
Taylor Morgan, Grayson
Skidmore*

COSTUME CONSTRUCTION CREW Iona Brown, Ashley Colson*,
Cydnee Corujo*, Reece Dinacci,
River Diveley, Hanna Jacobs,
Gabrielle Johnson, Kirk Lowe,
Wil McKeeman, Brooklyn
Sommers*

**SCENIC CONSTRUCTION/
LIGHTING CREW** Savannah Amos, Iona Brown,
Eric Dykhuis, Connor Eifert,
Ethan Ganzell*, Dorothy
Hamrick, Sarah Hoffman,
Shaylee Keogh, Jordan Knightes,
Kirk Lowe, Briana Simmons, Kya
Spurgeon, Dakarai Vann

RUNNING CREW Pat Fleming*, Caroline Ford,
Anire Gordon, Madeline James,
Kirsten Lockler, Jordon Martin,
Kate McKenzie, Lauren
Shannon, Eddie Watson

GRAPHIC DESIGNER Molly Wilson

PHOTOGRAPHER Cassidy Bleitz

Special Thanks to Historic Rosedale Museum
(<https://www.historicrosedale.org/>)
for the loan of costume items

**Please be advised, this production contains a live whip crack,
use of the N-word, suggestions of sexual assault as well as
suggestions and depictions of violence. Also this presentation
has a moment in which a black actor uses blackface.**

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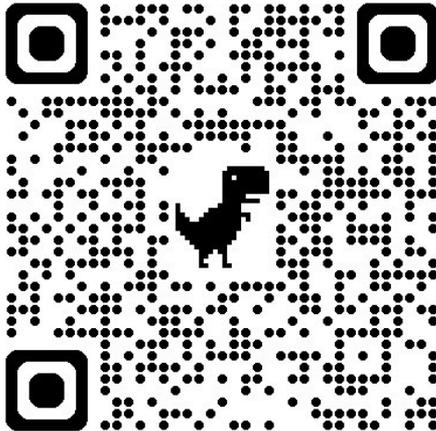
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Due to the potentially emotionally triggering nature of this event, counselors from Winthrop University Counseling Services are present throughout the course of this event. Please note that the counselors have no stake in the nature of the material we are about to present. They are an unbiased presence to support you should you need to have a brief chat about your own reactions to this material. If you would like to speak with a counselor, they will be wearing name tags. One will be located in the theatre, and the other will be available in the lobby. You may discretely walk out and speak with the counselor in the lobby at any time; you may also speak with the counselors during intermission or after the show. Please contact house management if you are not able to locate a counselor.

UPCOMING SHOWS

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)

by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield

March 4-7, 7:30 p.m.

March 8, 2 p.m.

An Enemy of the People

by Henrik Ibsen

April 8-11, 7:30 p.m.

April 12, 2 p.m.

Musical Theatre Workshop

April 15-18, 7:30 p.m.

April 19, 2 p.m.

Spring Dance Showcase

April 24-25, 7:30 p.m.

April 26, 2 p.m.

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