DETRA PAYNE
UT Arlington Department of Theatre Arts
Assistant Professor of Instruction
Coordinating Supervisor and Director for HEAL THE DIVIDE

Interviewed by Garrett Hall, Maverick Theatre Company Student Dramaturg

INTERVIEWER:
If a person knew nothing, or very little, about HEAL THE DIVIDE, and wanted to know more, how would you explain the project and its goals to them?

PROFESSOR PAYNE:
HEAL THE DIVIDE came out of student made protest plays. These plays were archived into a Drop Box and distributed to other universities. These plays are concerned with what is going on in the playwright’s local community. They are meant to bridge people together as they learn about other communities. HEAL THE DIVIDE has tackled such issues as policing, immigration, and sexual assault and has been performed at UTA for the past three years.

INTERVIEWER:
Who are this year’s directors, and how were they selected for this special project?

PROFESSOR PAYNE:
The playwrights direct their own plays, and this year’s playwrights are Shun’drea Burnett, Ashlyn DeHate, Andrew Denton, Madeline Estrada, Analisa Salinas, Emily Truelove, and Straton Rushing (note: James Kazan is directing Rushing’s work due to Rushing’s recent graduation). These participants were selected by responding to the annual announcement for submissions. There is usually a high volume of initial interest, but it usually comes down to four to six committed people.

INTERVIEWER:
Are the plays entirely independent of one another or are they thematically connected?

PROFESSOR PAYNE:
Each year we try to create a theme. This year’s theme is GENDER, DIVERSITY, and INCLUSIVITY. The plays are independent of each other but they still have the thread that connects them by way of the theme. We are excited about the plays this year and what they have to say, as well as how they will present this year’s theme.

INTERVIEWER:
How is HEAL THE DIVIDE being presented?

PROFESSOR PAYNE:
All plays were filmed in some form or capacity. One, THE PARKER REPORT, was shot using the actor’s computer webcam, while another, THE SPACE BETWEEN US, was shot using Zoom for the performance. The other four plays, MY OWN WOMAN, WHO?, THE KNIGHT, and EXHAUSTED, were filmed with a digital camera. Two were filmed in our department’s Studio Theatre and two were filmed outdoors, on campus. We have tried to maintain the fact that they are plays, not movies, and keep the focus on the stories that are being told. I think what we have achieved in basically three weeks’ time, from casting to editing, really is wonderful and reflects everything we were trying to accomplish. I hope the audience enjoys these wonderful works of art. We have never done anything like this before with HEAL THE DIVIDE, nor has the department. We are opening the season with showing what theatre can look like in the future at UTA. I am very proud of the student playwrights/directors and the actors, and I am grateful to my colleagues for their support of this project this year. The plays will be streaming Friday, October 9, through Sunday, October 11. For further information, visit the streaming site at https://theatre.uta.edu/boxoffice

Professor Payne is a member of the Association of Theatre in Higher Education, Black Theatre Network and is a founding member of one of Los Angeles’ most successful running theatre companies, Sacred Fools. She earned a BA in Theatre Arts from the University of Washington in Seattle, and an MFA in Acting from the Actors Studio Drama School, a division of The New School. Her work has been seen off-off Broadway, in regional theatre around the country, and in numerous commercials, films, television, and industrials. She has taught and continues to teach theatre to youth in Los Angeles, New York, Mississippi, and Dallas. Professor Payne is a member of SAG-AFTRA and is represented by The Clutts Agency in Dallas and Colors Talent Agency in Memphis, TN.