

---

6-26-2014

# "The Color Purple" Takes Us On Emotional Journey of Self-Discovery (Performance Review)

Daryl Cumber Dance

University of Richmond, ddance2@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/english-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Caribbean Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Dance, Daryl Cumber. "'The Color Purple' Takes Us On Emotional Journey of Self-Discovery." Review. *Richmond Free Press*, June 26-28, 2014.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

# Happenings

## 'The Color Purple' takes us on emotional journey of self-discovery

Extraordinary. That's the only way to describe the Virginia Repertory Theatre's musical version of "The Color Purple."

Based on Alice Walker's classic novel, this Broadway-class show takes the audience on a moving, soulful journey of self-discovery with the heroine, Celie.

Purple is both the color of horrific bruises and of royalty, symbolic of this inspiring Job-like story.

But this time it is the story of a woman who suffers. In this version, she suffers the torments of a life of horrific abuse, incest and cruelty, but ultimately finds joy, hope and self-fulfillment.

Inside the November Theatre, the show brings together some of Richmond's finest performers and creative people for a production that creates elicits tears of sadness and shouts of joy, along with mirth.

Set in the rural South of the early 20th century, the production introduces us to the heroine, Celie, as a young teen and her beloved sister, Nettie. We are treated to the rollicking gospel-style singing of the 30 plus member cast, led by the powerful Karla Brown and three gossipy church ladies played by Stephanie Hill, Amanda Montague and Shalimar Hickman Fields.

Then we are off on an emotional rollercoaster filled with superb music and singing.

In the beginning, Celie, meek and submissive, is under the thumb of cruel men. First it is her stepfather (J. Ron Fleming), who impregnates her, then snatches her babies away.

Then it is her husband, Mister (Jerold Solomon), who weds her unwillingly and treats her like a slave.

Over time, Celie, wonderfully portrayed by Felicia Curry, comes to realize her inner warrior and summons the courage to build a life, summed up in her soulful performance of the song "I'm Here." For the women in the audience, it is an exhilarat-



Photo by Aaron Suttan

**Carolyn Minor Daughtry, left, plays Shug and Felicia Curry portrays Celie in the play "The Color Purple."**

ing moment.

She finds her way thanks to a series of teachers and mentors. Among them is the powerful Sophia, superbly rendered by Desiree Roots Centeio, who is everything Celie is not — strong, independent, self-confident, demanding.

One of the unforgettable songs in this musical production is a fabulous number titled "Hell No!" that features Sophia and other women voicing their refusal to be controlled or subjugated.

Celie also is awakened by the sexy, self-centered and talented Shug, who in the hands of Carolyn Minor Daughtry almost steals the show. She's a knockout in "Push Da Button," another wonderful number.

In the end, the audience rejoices in Celie's emotional reunion with her now grown children and her sister, who has taken care of them in Africa.

Throughout, the company engagingly portrays varied roles — ranging from church members to field hands to African warriors and juke joint customers — to propel the story along.

Director Chase Kniffen deserves plaudits for enabling the actors to bring these unforgettable characters to life.

Music director Ben Miller and his band highlight the powerful singing of the cast who know how to make joyful music. Choreographer Leslie Owens-Harrington masterfully brings together African, jazz and swing rhythms beautifully. And Sue Griffin's period costumes help tell the story.

The set is a marvel. There are no curtains — the stage is fully visible at all times. Ron Keller's imaginative use of beams and boards creates a rustic feeling. Cast members also fill in as clotheslines and the bars of a jail.

Many of us left the production resolving to support the Virginia Repertory Theatre in its effort to be a regional theater of national standing.

"The Color Purple" continues through Aug. 3 at the November Theatre, 114 W. Broad St. Tickets are \$30 to \$60. Information: (804) 282-2620 or [www.va-rep.org](http://www.va-rep.org)

*This review is based on the reporting of Daryl Cumber Dance, professor emerita at the University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University.*