

BILLIARDS VMSSOA

Richmond, VA | \$8.04

October 2024

ON CUE:
Black Men Educators
Leading the Break in
Arts Education.

THEATRE ARTIST:
Inside the Process
With NIA Simone

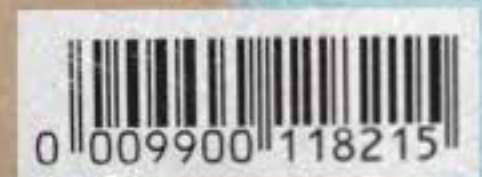
THE BILLIARDS CANVAS:
WHAT'S TEA?!

This month's issue
is dedicated to
Jadon Z. Jenkins
Our inspiration,
Celebrating his
legacy.



NIA
SAFARR
BANKS

STITCH BY STITCH
Visionary VA based costume
designer weaving culture,
creativity, and character
into every thread



NIA SAFARR BANKS

STITCH BY STITCH



NIA SAFARR BANKS

STITCH BY STITCH

This month, Billiards Canvas CCA member Vania Alonnie sat down with Nia Safarr Banks, a dynamic costume designer whose work is turning heads from Richmond to New York. With an MFA in her back pocket and a portfolio full of standout designs, Nia shared the story of how she's redefining costume design—on her terms—and how Virginia's theatre scene helped set the stage for her rise.



Swipe left to see how Nia Safarr Banks is crafting her way to the top!



Nia Safarr Banks, a talented costume designer from Virginia, credits her upbringing for shaping her passion for fashion and storytelling through design. In a recent conversation with Billiards VM SOA Magazine host Vania Alonnie, Nia shared her creative journey, reflecting on how her experiences growing up in Virginia have influenced her unique approach to the industry. Here's what she had to say—

NIA SAFARR BANKS

STITCH BY STITCH

Vania: Hey y'all, We are back with the October 2024 issue of Billiards VM SOA Magazine and today, we're spotlighting 804's finest—a visionary costume designer whose work has graced stages from Richmond to New York — Nia Safarr Banks! Nia, you're doing amazing things! Congrats on everything!

Nia Safarr Banks: Thank you so much!

Vania: So, who is Nia Safarr Banks?

Nia: I'm just a girl from Richmond, Virginia, trying to make it! I got into costume design as a teenager and just ran with it. Trying to live life, trying to be Black, you know what I'm saying?

Vania: (Laughs) Aren't we all? So, you started costume design at 16?

Nia: Yeah! I was a theatre kid growing up and took Theatre Tech and Production in high school. I signed up for an internship at Richmond Shakespeare, which, unfortunately, doesn't exist anymore. But from there, it's been level after level up!



BILLIARDS



Vania: Wow, okay! So as a certified 804 legend, would you say that Virginia has influenced your work as a costume designer?

Nia: Yeah, a little bit. When it comes to period pieces, anything pre-1980s, I tend to look locally. I go to the library, research, and follow historic Richmond accounts on social media for inspiration. Growing up in Virginia, surrounded by entertainment, music, and dance—those moments definitely had an influence.

Vania: You've designed costumes for productions all across the country. Which ones have been some of your most transformative projects, and why?

Nia: Last summer, I did Hamlet at the American Shakespeare Center. It was my first big Shakespeare show, and the director gave me a lot of freedom. He wanted a clear visual difference between the older and younger generations, and he wanted everyone to stand out. That's the kind of collaboration I thrive on. Plus, I've met amazing people along the way, like Quan, one of the founders of this. We met recently, and it's been project after project ever since!

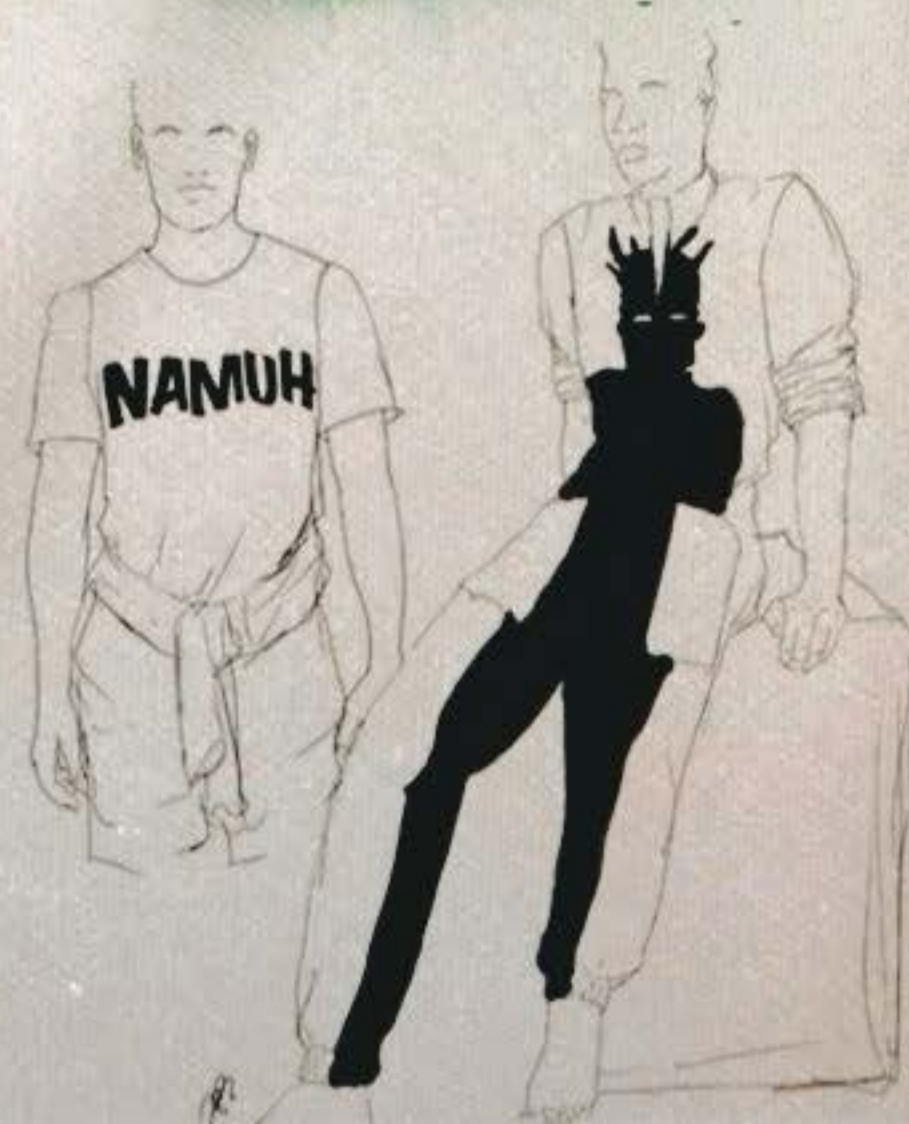


Vania: When you get these types of notes for costume design—something more conceptual rather than specific like colors or silhouettes—how do you turn that into something physical?

Nia: It can be tricky! Directors often speak in abstract concepts, so you have to learn how to communicate with them. I didn't fully understand that until grad school. Directors often speak more in terms of emotion or feeling, while designers are talking about colors, shapes, and space. It's all about bridging that gap.



**NIA SAFARR
BANKS**
STITCH BY STITCH



Vania: That's so fascinating! You've worked in theaters across Virginia—how do you think Virginia's theatre scene compares to the broader national stage?

Nia: It's definitely a vibrant scene, but we have challenges. For example, Virginia Repertory Theatre is struggling right now, and they need to raise \$600K to keep their doors open. It's unfortunate because the pandemic hit the industry hard. Nationally, we're seeing big names brought into theatre to draw people back in, but Virginia doesn't have the same resources to do that.

Vania: Right, but it feels like the scene is on the rise! And looking at your Instagram, your work really stands out. What influences your costume design style?

Nia: I don't think I have a set style—it all depends on how much access I have to the team. It's never about just my costumes, but the overall visual look of the production. It's all about collaboration—working with the lighting designer, the actors, and the set designers to make everything cohesive.

Vania: You're transitioning into TV and film now, right? How's that going?

Nia: Yes, I just joined the union and I'm learning the ropes. It's a completely different world compared to theatre. In TV and film, things move much faster. You have to be on your toes—once filming starts, there's no stopping or switching things out like in theatre. But I love that spontaneity!

Vania: I bet! So, what's the ultimate dream?

Nia: (Laughs) Financial stability! Honestly, it's less about awards and more about collaborating with people I admire. I want to work with talented directors, designers, and artists. I've done a lot of that already by just reaching out to people I admire and saying, "Hey, let's work together."

Since this interview Virginia Rep has met their goal and raised over 600k!



Vania: I love that! One last question—would you ever want to collaborate with Billiards on a dream project?

Nia: Absolutely! Give me a date and a budget, and I'm there. I love collaborating with friends, and it's exciting to be part of creative communities like this.

Vania: That's so dope! Thank you so much for making time for us today. You've been an inspiration, and I feel like I learned something from this conversation. Is there anything you want to leave folks with?

Nia: Just be inspired! Take care of your mental health and take breaks when you need them. That's what I'm doing right now—taking a break!

Vania: Amen to that! Y'all, be sure to check out our full recorded interview with Nia Safarr Banks at www.billiardsvmsoa.com and on our Instagram page. Until next time, I'm your host Vania, reminding you that Virginia isn't just for lovers, it's a sanctuary for dreamers!



NIA SAFARR

BANKS

STITCH BY STITCH



ON CUE

BLACK MEN EDUCATORS LEADING THE BREAK IN ARTS EDUCATION



In this month's digital issue, we're thrilled to introduce ON CUE: Black Men Educators Leading the Break in Arts Education. This segment spotlights Black male educators who are shaping the next generation of artists and paving the way for a more inclusive arts landscape.

ON CUE **BLACK MEN EDUCATORS
LEADING THE BREAK
IN ARTS EDUCATION**

We are excited to kick off our first feature in ON CUE. Black Men Educators Leading the Break in Arts Education with an inspiring spotlight on Nile Price. Nile is a filmmaker and adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University's Cinema Program, where he shapes the next generation of artists. His remarkable career and contributions to both the classroom and the creative world are truly paving the way for young filmmakers. Dive into his story and see how he's making history right here in Virginia.



**NILE
PRICE**



Ext.A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

Ext.A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

NILE Price, Who's the man behind the name?

"I'm a humanist and a storyteller at heart," Price explains. "I live by one of JFK's quotes, 'Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.' But I replace 'country' with 'humanity.' My work is about serving humanity."

The Journey from Law to Filmmaking

Originally, Price intended to pursue law, with dreams of entering politics. "I wanted to be the first Black president, but Barack Obama beat me to it," he jokes. His introduction to filmmaking came unexpectedly when he took a photography class in high school and later became involved with his school's daily announcements. "I'd sneak back into the school studio after hours to teach myself how to edit," he recalls. That was the beginning of his passion for film, a passion that took root and evolved over time.



Ext.A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

Ext.A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

Virginia's Influence

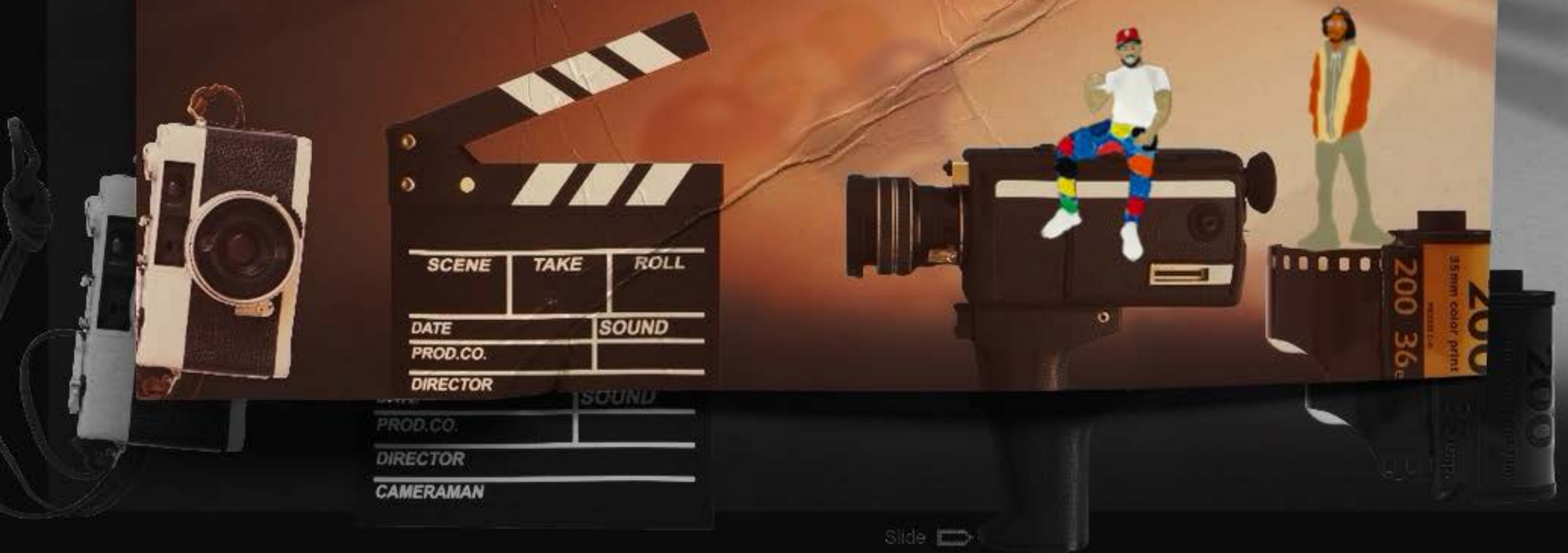
"Virginia has a poetic feel," Price says, explaining how his home state's history and culture have influenced his work. "Filmmakers rarely showcase life from Virginia or the South in an authentic way. But Virginia has such a rich texture, and I'm drawn to exploring its history and the intersection of time and lineage in my films."

Why Film?

For Price, filmmaking is more than just a career. "It's the only thing I know how to do," he admits. Growing up as a sick child, he found solace in movies. "They were my escape, my education, my window to the world. I owe a debt of gratitude to film—it was always there for me."

The Power of Storytelling

A pivotal moment for Price came when he created a short video for his high school's graduation ceremony. The emotional response from his classmates' families made him realize the impact a single frame can have. "Hearing how the video moved people showed me the power of film. That's when I knew this was my path."



Ext. A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

Ext. A Home Backyard , Richmond, Virginia- NIGHT

On Collaboration and Teaching:

Price emphasizes the importance of collaboration in filmmaking, comparing it to a dance of trust and creativity. "You have to put your ego aside and serve the story," he says. As a professor at VCU, he imparts lessons of presence and stillness to his students. "You need to be present in the world around you to create impactful art. That's the key to great storytelling."

FINAL WORDS

"To all the filmmakers out there, be present, be patient, and always serve the story," Price advises. His journey, from Richmond to NYU, from dreaming of law to living his passion in film, is a testament to perseverance and purpose.

CUT TO BLACK:



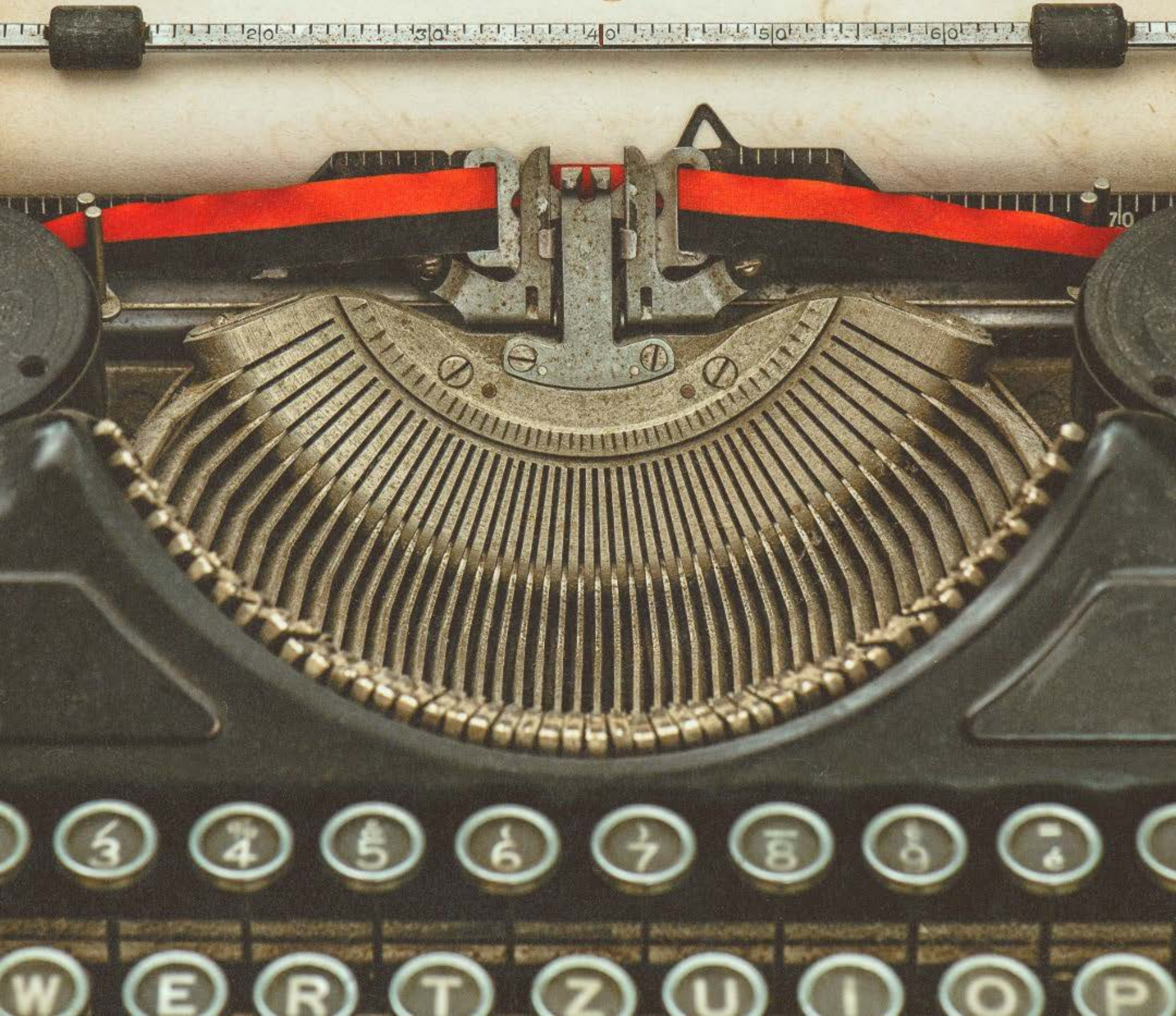
THE END



THEATRE

INSIDE THE PROCESS

ARTISTS



THEATRE INSIDE THE PROCESS ARTISTS



With Nia Simone Blondell

In this special October edition of Billiards VMSOA Magazine, we are thrilled to feature Nia Simone, a talented stage actress with deep Virginia roots. Nia, a current senior at VCU earning her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre, sat down with us to reflect on her journey, her process, and her powerful experience with the iconic For Colored Girls.



Nia Simone, WHO is she?

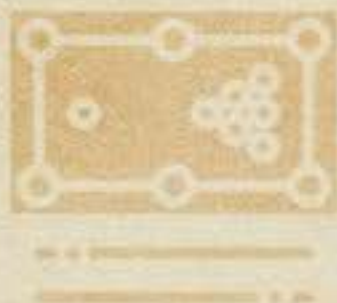
"I'm a full-blown performer. When people ask me, 'What would you do if acting doesn't work out?' I'm like, what do you mean? Being an actor is about acting, auditioning, making work—showing up, you know? This is who I am, and I'm going to show up."

Beyond the stage, Nia Simone describes herself as an "auntie" to Jedi and Juno, and as someone deeply rooted in community and activism. "In another life, I'd be out there riding with Angela Davis."

On the Virginia Theatre Scene

"There's a lot of great art happening in Virginia that people don't realize, especially in the Tidewater area. You just have to want to find it."

Growing up in Suffolk, Virginia, Nia got her start at the local community center and participated in theatre camps.



THEATRE INSIDE THE PROCESS ARTISTS



With
Nia Simone Blondell



The Process

"For me, the process begins with the material. Where is the excitement? How does my body react to it? Then I go into auditions or callbacks ready to show them my idea of how I can exist in that world."

Nia's approach to a role is deeply intuitive and connected to the text.

"This process has grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me. It's tumultuous, inspiring, beautiful, and messy. You have to be fully present—it can't be calculated. You're responsible for creating the world on stage."

Her current challenge, *For Colored Girls*, has been a transformative experience.

What's Next?

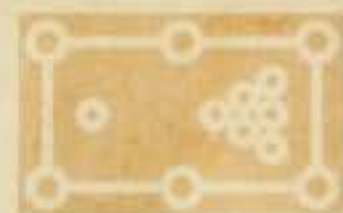
"Grad school wasn't always on my radar, but my mentors put it in my ear, and now I'm fully committed to this next step."

After graduation, Nia plans to pursue graduate school

Final Words

"Something a mentor told me that changed everything: It's not about how talented you are, but how connected you are to yourself.

That applies not just to acting, but to life. Stay connected to who you are."





**HAPPY HEAVENLY
BIRTHDAY**





HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY

"JADON IS SOMEONE WHO EXEMPLIFIES USING ALL THE GIFTS AND TALENTS GOD GIVES YOU. FROM MY EXPERIENCE WITH JADON HE WAS A ONE OF A KIND GUY. FUNNY, TALENTED, SMART (I KNOW BECAUSE HE LET ME CHEAT OFF HIS WORK IN CLASS LOL), FRIENDLY, AUTHENTIC, AND ORGANIZED. JADON WAS ALWAYS INVOLVED WHETHER IT WAS THEATRE, SCHOOL, CHURCH, VA STAGE COMPANY— ANYWHERE HE WAS DESTINED TO BE. I WAS ALWAYS AMAZED AT HIS TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS ESPECIALLY FOR SOMEONE AT HIS AGE IN UNDERGRAD. THROUGHOUT HIS BUSY SCHEDULE HE ALWAYS MADE TIME FOR GOD AND I TRULY ADMIRER THAT. I'LL ALWAYS CHERISH MY MEMORIES WITH JADON. HE TOUCHED MANY PEOPLES HEARTS. FROM THE STAGE TO THE COMMUNITY AND ONWARD, JADON'S IMPACT WILL ALWAYS BE FELT."

HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY WE MISS YOU 🍷

- LAUREN



HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY

“ I THINK I WAS REALLY LUCKY TO HAVE CROSSED PATHS WITH JADON. WE MET IN HIGH SCHOOL DURING A THEATER COMPETITION AND WE WERE IN SCHOOLS THAT WERE SUPPOSED TO BE COMPETING WITH EACH OTHER. AFTER WE ALL PERFORMED I JUST REMEMBER HIS ENTHUSIASM ABOUT WANTING TO KNOW WHO WE WERE AND HOW LONG WE HAD BEEN ACTING AND THE KIND OF WELCOME AND JOY HE HAD WAS CONTAGIOUS. WHEN SOMEONE IS A LIGHT IN THAT WAY, YOU CAN SEE IT ALL OVER THEM. HE WAS A BEAUTIFULLY BRIGHT GUY AND EVEN IF WE NEVER KEPT UP BEYOND THAT, I'M REALLY HAPPY I MET HIM.”

- NAIRE



**HAPPY HEAVENLY
BIRTHDAY**

“ JADON AND I WEREN'T BESTIES BUT HE PLAYED ONE OF THE BIGGEST ROLES IN THE TRAJECTORY OF MY LIFE— HANDS DOWN. I DIDN'T PLAN TO TAKE THEATRE SERIOUSLY, I DIDN'T EVEN PLAN TO TRY ACTING.

AFTER BEING THRUST ON STAGE WITH HIM TO FACE THE CHALLENGE OF HOLDING IT DOWN AS HIS OPPOSITE LEAD, ROSE IN “FENCES” BY AUGUST WILSON, I HAD SEEN A LEVEL OF SKILL IN ACTING I DIDN'T KNOW COULD EXIST IN SUCH A CLOSE PROXIMITY.

WATCHING HIM MADE ME WANT TO BE GREAT AT IT LIKE HE WAS AND EXPERIENCE WHATEVER HE HAD TO BE EXPERIENCING TO DO WHAT HE WAS DOING. THERE WAS A FREEDOM I WAS WITNESSING FROM HIM THAT I JUST COULDN'T GRASP.

HIS RAW TALENT WAS THE CATALYST IN MY PASSION FOR STORYTELLING DEVELOPING INTO WHAT IT IS NOW.

HE WILL ALWAYS BE APART OF THE STORY WHEN SOMEONE ASKS ME 'WHY ACTING?' ”

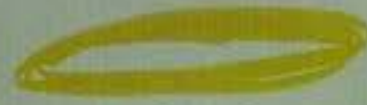
- VANIA



**HAPPY HEAVENLY
BIRTHDAY**

**"NO MATTER HOW MUCH TIME PASSES, YOU REMAIN
EVER PRESENT—WHETHER IN THE SMALLEST DETAILS
OR THE GRANDEST MOMENTS, YOUR PRESENCE IS
ALWAYS FELT. EACH DAY WE'RE GIFTED IS A CHANCE TO
LIVE A LITTLE MORE THAN THE LAST, TO CHASE THE
DREAM. THAT IN ITSELF IS A CELEBRATION OF YOU AND
YOUR LIFE, NOT JUST TODAY, BUT EVERY DAY. EVERY
NEW ROOM WE ENTER, LEADING US TO THE NEXT, IS A
TRIBUTE TO THE EXPERIENCES AND CHAPTERS OF LIFE
WE'VE SHARED. ALWAYS."**

- JĀQUAN



**HAPPY HEAVENLY
BIRTHDAY**

**THIS DAY WILL FOREVER BE A CELEBRATION.
A CELEBRATION OF A LEGACY THAT
ENDURES. OF IMPACT THAT RESONATES. OF
LOVE THAT GROWS. OF DREAMS THAT LIVE
ON. OF WORK THAT CONTINUES. AND OF LIFE
THAT REACHES BEYOND THIS ONE. HAPPY
HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY, OUR 3-BALL SPECIAL.**

- BILLARDS



**HAPPY HEAVENLY
BIRTHDAY**

10. 06. 2024