

Beware the Bear
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Four Performances Left Don't Miss Out!

Karissa Murrell Myers'
Black Bear Island
Now - April 27



On Female Rage: From Script to Stage

A Workshop Production
Written by Karissa Murrell Myers
Co-Directed by Jonathan Shaboo and Dan Washelesky
Co-Produced by Silk Road Cultural Center &
Stage Center Theatre at Northeastern Illinois University

"The Black Bear Inside Us"

Written by dramaturg Yiwen Wu



Melody Aponte as Girl (background) and Luke Steadman as Boy (foreground)

In the loud sound of silence inside a forest, Karissa Murrell Myers first had the idea of writing *Black Bear Island*. “Watch out for the bear,” she was told. Then, all of a sudden, the sound of the wind, the movement of the leaves, a crack in the wood—every sound became “the bear.” Even though nothing really happened, the very thought of a possible attack ended up bringing about an eerie and deep-seated feeling of fear, no less intense than the fear in the face of actual violence.

Black Bear Island, as a play, explores how the presence of violence, whether enacted or not, profoundly affects our psyches. Taking place in between a psychological sphere and a natural forest, the play pushes the boundaries between the real and the fantastical. It calls us to ponder the power of our unconscious through languages of nature: as the play goes on, the forest expands and eventually outgrows itself. Meanwhile,

memories rewind in full force, and fantasies take over to haunt our senses. In the end, the play forces us to confront our inner black bear, the more emotional and animalistic sides of ours that lie within.

While zooming into the inner worlds, the play also encourages us to see how the very personal is simultaneously social and political and how our ascribed racial and gender identities powerfully shape our expression of feelings. Following the lives of two young lovers growing into adulthood, the play unfolds to reveal the reverberations of cultural identities: how historical ideals of masculinity continue to valorize physical strength and chivalric violence among men while discrediting the power of female rage, especially for women of color.

The black bear, again, can provide us with a vivid illustration of how differences are socially constructed. Bears, like shapeshifters, continue to take on new meanings in various mediums. From the medieval epic *Beowulf*, where they symbolize bravery and resilience, to the contrasting image in “The Fisherman and the Bear” where they are portrayed as both aggressive and clumsy yet sweet and caring. In contemporary media, bears often take on the role of fantastical creatures perceived as dangerous, despite the reality that black bears, which are primarily vegetarian, seldom pose a threat to humans. They are a shy and adaptive species but made dangerous and fearful by our collective construction of myths and memories. This question of how something so innocent and pure can grow into something violent lies at the core of our play.

Like the ever-changing images of the black bear, the characters in this play also defy simple categorization. They are at once tender and tough. They love. They fight. They forget. They remember. They would not stop finding humor even in the most distressed situations. They are humans. Ultimately, we hope

that *Black Bear Island* can provide a space where we can explore a multiplicity of possibilities in ourselves.

About *Black Bear Island*

Amitra never believed the myth about her old island hometown. But when Warren, her estranged childhood sweetheart, dies mysteriously and bequeaths her everything he owned, she returns to the island one last time. As the forest begins to engulf the house and the past collides with the present, Amitra is determined to discover the truth about who Warren really was and what actually happened to him.

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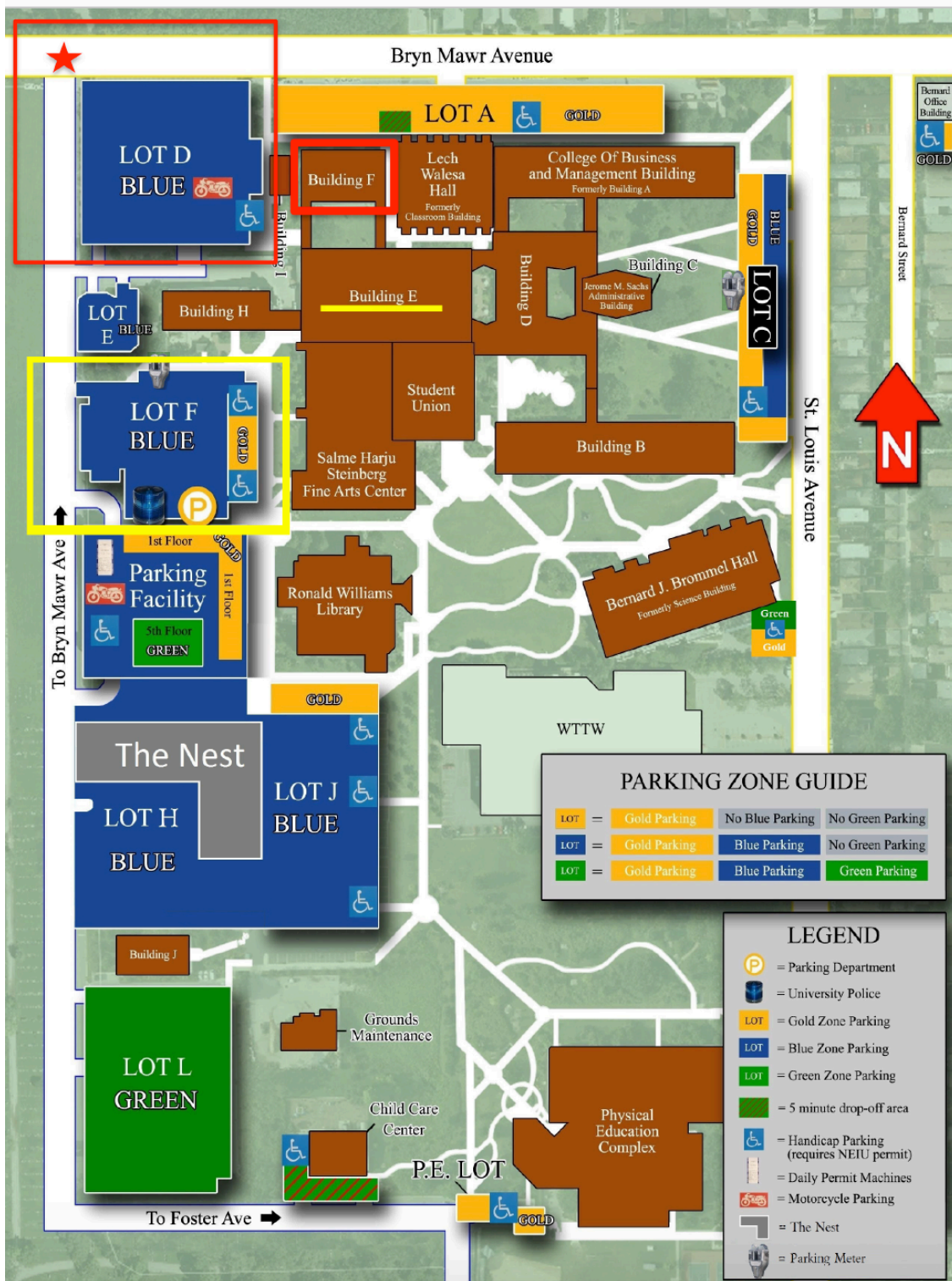
Performance Schedule

Wednesday, April 24 at 7:30 PM
Thursday, April 25 at 7:30 PM
Friday, April 26 at 7:30 PM
Saturday, April 27 at 3:00 PM

*Live streaming will be available on April 27th

Performance Venue

Stage Center Theatre
Building F
Northeastern Illinois University
[3701 W Bryn Mawr Ave, Chicago, IL 60625](#)



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