



OUT OF THE BLUE

Reflections from Ground Zero

A free event for the community
at the Laurel Mill Playhouse
Wednesday, September 11, 2024

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The First Responders

Bianca Bob – Salvation Army volunteer. Worked at Ground Zero for 3 months

Daniel Carione – NYPD Lieutenant. One of the first NYPD members to arrive at Ground Zero on September 11

Charles Catanese – Medical Examiner in Kings County (Brooklyn). Was attending a class near Ground Zero and ended up starting and working in the morgue established at Ground Zero

Vinny Forras – New York State volunteer firefighter. Worked at Ground Zero for 4 months. After his service at Ground Zero, Vinny founded Gear Up Foundation, to provide fire and emergency equipment to underserved communities and Third World countries

Joseph Fox – Chief of NYPD Patrol Borough Brooklyn South. In addition to his service to NYPD, he lost his nephew, FDNY Firefighter Robert Richards, on September 11, 2001

Eren Gibson – Red Cross and ASPCA volunteer. Worked extensively with other volunteers and K-9 dogs

Daniel Lugassy – First year medical student and former EMT. September 11, 2001 was literally Danny's second day in medical school at SUNY Downstate Medical Center (Brooklyn)

Anita Ryan – NYPD Sergeant and assistant to Chief J Fox at NYPD Patrol Borough Brooklyn South

Tucker Woods – Emergency room physician at Long Island College Hospital (LICH), Brooklyn. LICH treated many of the people who walked over the Brooklyn Bridge to safety

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As a native New Yorker, the events of September 11, 2001 are permanently etched in my mind. It was a day that our City, and our country were attacked, literally, out of the blue.

I had just finished my training as a New York City Auxiliary Police Officer in late August, 2001, and was waiting for my vouchers to be able to purchase my uniform and other accessories. It was an exciting time for me, looking forward to being able to serve the people of New York, and do some good in the communities I grew up in and worked in.

At the time, I was also a graduate student in Public Health at Brooklyn College. I was nearing the end of my coursework, and was ready to do my final project – either a research paper or a thesis. My good friend and colleague, Dr. Kathleen Powderly (a nurse, historian, and public health professional), made a suggestion. She pointed out that I was in a unique position, having access to the Police Department, Fire Department, and the public health field. She wondered whether there could be a connection between those areas, and if that could be the basis for some original work in public health.

From hearing discussions among police and others who had experience responding to and subsequently working at Ground Zero, and having done some counseling with people who worked in the area and had witnessed the events first-hand, it was obvious to me that there was a need for people to talk about their feelings, and also that there would be a need to look at the physical challenges and possible health consequences of working in that environment. There were bound to be effects from breathing in the smoky air filled with chemicals and debris, and there were bound to be effects and perhaps injuries resulting from unstable structures and building materials.

We decided to do a series of interviews with some first responders, which could then serve as the basis for a thesis, looking at the health effects of working at Ground Zero. Between 2002 and 2005 we spoke to over 25 first responders, asking them about their mental and emotional state, as well as any physical and safety challenges they faced. The results were overwhelming. Not only was everyone eager to talk about their experiences, but they were grateful that someone would listen and offer support and resources if needed.

Their stories are intense and often difficult to hear. They endured many difficulties, including unsafe conditions, inadequate safety equipment, delays in getting supplies - and physical hardships like lack of sleep, intense heat producing burns and other injuries, respiratory illnesses, back and neck injuries, and exhaustion. Many of them developed various types of cancers and long-term physical disabilities.

I finished my Masters in Public Health in 2006. I am ever-grateful to the first responders who were so generous with their time and willingness to tell their stories. When I contacted many of the to let them know I planned to do this presentation, they were still appreciative that we cared enough to help and support them, and they have given their blessings to this event.

I would like to dedicate OUT OF THE BLUE to my friend and mentor Dr. Kathleen Powderly, who unfortunately passed away in 2021. I know that if she could, she would definitely be here with us, still proud of the work of these brave men and women, and still proud of the work that we did, to shed some light on the realities and sacrifices of being a first responder. May she rest in peace, along with the 2,996 people who perished on September 11, 2001.

-Lorraine Brooks

THE CAST



Jacqueline Youm – (Narrator) Jacqueline is a Senegalese American actor, lawyer, and French, English, Spanish, Mediation, and Negotiation teacher. She has been teaching languages for more than 15 years. You can find many of her language lessons (and other resources) on Youtube (Cestjackie):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvd4LWK9h1msuj9oeFXHtng> | Instagram: @jy_artiste | Facebook:

Jacqueline Elisabeth

“La langue est un théâtre dont les mots sont les acteurs.” Ferdinand Brunetière



Steven Todd Smith – (Vinny Forras) Steven is a Baltimore area actor with over a decade of theatrical experience in the DMV, NYC, LA, regional tours, and virtually. NYC resident 2002-2010. Love to the city & New Yorkers. May the memories of those who lost their lives be blessings. Recent credits: King Richard (*Richard II*, Frederick Shakespeare Festival), Dr. Douglas (*Miss Evers Boys*, Laurel Mill Playhouse), Romeo (*Romeo & Juliet*, Chaos Theatre Collective), Guiderius (*Cymbeline*, Baryshnikov Center, NYC), Michael (*Picking Up*, DR2 Theatre, NYC). B.F.A., NYU Tisch School of the Arts.



Gene Valendo (Daniel Carione) Gene has appeared onstage in 31 productions at area theaters since 2012, including 4 at Laurel Mill Playhouse, and was a cast member at the Maryland Renaissance Festival for four seasons. He was nominated for the Washington Area Theater Community Honors Award for Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play in 2015, and for the WATCH Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Play in 2023. On the production side, he produced 2nd Star Productions' 2017 production of *Mary Poppins* (WATCH Nomination for Outstanding Musical) and 2018 production of *Singin' in the Rain*, and was awarded the WATCH Award for Outstanding Special Effects for each of those productions. He has also served as Set Designer and Lead Carpenter for multiple production at 2nd Star. Gene is a retired U.S. Navy cryptologic officer. He has served as 2nd Star Treasurer since January, 2015.



Dionne Belk (Eren Gibson) new to Laurel Mill Playhouse, is honored to be a part of this remarkable and moving commemoration of the brave people of 9/11's Ground Zero. She is grateful to work alongside this group of incredible artists as we give voice to the remarkable stories of those who gave so much on that fateful day and in the resilient aftermath. Dionne is entering her second year in community theater—having first performed in BCT's production of *The Old Settler* as Quilly McGrath (for which she earned a WATCH nomination), later at PTP as Mama Lena in *A Raisin in the Sun*, and most recently as Lt. Rooney in BCT's production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Dionne would like to thank her family and friends for their ongoing support in her quest to tell the stories that touch the heart, stimulate the mind, and stir the soul.



Laura Malkus (Bianca Bob) is a veteran of Baltimore's stages where she has performed, advocated, worked and served for more than three decades. Laura is and has been an actor, deviser, playwright, teacher, producer, arts leader, musician, and a singer/songwriter for an alt-country band. Favorite past roles are Jean in *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (FPCT), Miss Thelma in *Promenade Baltimore* (Single Carrot Theatre), and Harper in *Angels in America I & II* (Axis Theatre). She currently serves as the Board President of Fells Point Corner Theater, and the Treasurer of the Baltimore Small Stage Coalition. She is an artistic company member at Chesapeake Shakespeare Company. By day she works for Towson University's College of Fine Arts and Communication, where she earned her acting degree. She attended the professional actor training program at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute (NYC) and holds a Graduate Certificate in Arts Leadership and Cultural Entrepreneurship from Northeastern University.



Leena Shrivastava Dev (Danny Lugassy, Tucker Woods) Leena is honored to be in this production that honors first responders to the Sept 11 attacks. She herself had to drop her children at daycare that day to study for pediatric board exams and feels a void because she couldn't grieve in real time like most others did. She is honored to lend her voice to this production. She was last seen as Connie in *Dance Nation* and *Old Shady* in *Men On Boats* both at Silver Spring Stage. She has also been assistant director for *Communicating Doors*, properties for *Murder on The Orient Express* and co-producer of *Stick Fly* all for Rockville Little Theater. She has training in classical Indian music and dance. She thanks Lorraine for creating this touching piece and hopes you find something to ponder when hearing the voices in *Out of the Blue*. "On my honor I will try..."



R. Anne Hull (Anita Ryan) enjoys community theater life as an actor, scenic designer/painter, board member and patron. Favorite roles include 'Mrs. Peacock' in *Clue*, 'Ouiser' in *Steel Magnolias*, 'Granny Weatherwax' in *Wyrld Sisters*, 'Miss Marple' in *A Murder is Announced* and 'Mame' in *Auntie Mame*. In BCT's *Women of Locherbie* she played a similar role as the one tonight. Thank you for coming and remembering the courageous people who "just did what they had to do."



Aparna Sri (Bianca Bob) is a prolific stage actress in the local Maryland theatre scene and is honored to voice the thoughts and sheer courage of a woman who jumped in to volunteer with the Salvation Army in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack in NYC. She is deeply grateful to Lorraine Brooks, the talented mastermind of this work, for showcasing American grit and spirit to help one another survive. This unforgettable tragic day in US history is the impetus for Aparna's profession on behalf of our great nation.



John Cholod (Joseph Fox) is a retired federal employee who would rather act than play golf. He has drooled and cursed as a homicidal psychopath in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, presaged modern day pestilence as Leonardo daVinci in *The P-Team*, helped solve a crime in *Towards Zero*, tried to convict an innocent man in *12 Angry Jurors*, and been an anguished but proud dad in *Much Ado About Nothing*. He is very thankful for the chance to work with Lorraine on this profoundly moving project.