

## Melanin magic

Local duo launches Boston's newest black theater group

Celina Colby | 4/5/2018, 6 a.m.

Maurice Parent and Dawn Simmons bonded over diversity in theater and Manhattan cocktails during the 2015 production of "Saturday Night, Sunday Morning," at Lyric Stage. Little did they know their kindred spirits would result in the creation of Boston's newest black theater company, Front Porch Arts Collective.

For more information about Front Porch Arts Collective, visit: [www.frontporcharts.org](http://www.frontporcharts.org)

Now in residence at the Central Square Theater, Front Porch will launch its first season this fall. Its shows will include "Breath of Imagination," in partnership with Lyric Stage; "Black Odyssey," at Central Square Theater; and "Three Musketeers," in honor of author Alexander Dumas's partial Haitian heritage, with Greater Boston Stage Company. The new company's focus is on black creators, who have been impacted most by racism in the industry, but they're supporting talent that identifies as brown as well.

"Equally important to us is community engagement, and eliminating the barriers to access that people of color have in the theater," says Parent. "Answering the questions, what can we do to make them feel more at home in the space, what can we do to make them feel vital to the storytelling?"

### Community resource

Education is an essential piece of the Front Porch mission. Parent, executive director, and Simmons, artistic director, hope the organization will serve as a resource for other companies in Boston, an information bank of black talent in the city. In this way, Front Porch can provide both consistent opportunities for creatives of color and information for companies that want to include more diversity in their audiences and actors.

"Part of what we can do is show more companies how to welcome more people, how to make that space more inclusive, how to have a different theatrical experience," says Simmons. "That transaction of 'We are watching this show' doesn't have to look like it always does."

Front Porch Arts Collective accepts community support online through Central Square Theater's donations portal. Donors should include "Front Porch Arts Collective" in the notes section to ensure the funds are properly allocated. Funding will go toward an education series Simmons and Parent hope to launch, wherein an outside educator will create a curriculum around colorism and beauty standards and how those affect young people of color.

Parent and Simmons have put in the legwork and the long hours to launch Front Porch Arts Collective with a strong foundation. By building connections in the theater community, the duo hopes to create a long-term space for black talent in Boston. Parent says, "We want to capitalize on our agency as black and brown people, to inspire people to be like, 'Oh, okay, someone like me is running the show.'"