

Barbara Jordan: A Rendezvous with Destiny



Sandra McClain

Few can legitimately claim the title of legend. Sandra McClain is among that few. She has earned that status over the last four decades through her professionalism, dedication and immense talent.

Festival-goers saw her stage acumen at its very best in 2013 when she played one of history's most transformative lawmakers in "Barbara Jordan: A Rendezvous with Destiny." Those who have been beating themselves up for missing the show can redeem themselves this year. It is back this year, being presented by the Kansas City Theater Foundation and directed by Oz Scott, a legend in his own right.

Jordan has been dead for more than 20 years, but it bothered McClain – the proud grandmother of four – when she realized her own progeny had no idea who Jordan was.

"I think the inspiration was a political argument with my son," McClain told the Kansas City Star. "He's very into inalienable rights, and I was talking about civil rights ... and when I mentioned Barbara Jordan, he said, 'Who?'"

The exchange led McClain to write the one-woman show and to shine a spotlight on Jordan, who in 1967 became the first African-American since Reconstruction to be elected to the Texas State Senate. In 1973, Jordan made history again, becoming the first black

Southern woman elected to the

U.S. House of Representatives. An eloquent and powerful speaker, Jordan became a national figure after television viewers watched her deliver an impassioned speech in support of Richard Nixon's impeachment before the House Judiciary Committee. At one point, Jordan's name was tossed around as a possible running mate for Jimmy Carter. Though the Carter campaign went with Walter Mondale, Jordan was picked to deliver the keynote address at that year's Democratic National Convention. Her speech is consistently ranked as one of the best of the 20th Century.

Philadelphia native McClain was attending Temple University when she was picked from a crowd for a bit role in the Sidney Poitier film "The Lost Man." The experience so captivated her that a few months later she took a train to New York to pursue an acting career.

"While working at NBC as assistant talent coordinator for Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show," I took classes and participated in workshops everywhere, from HB Studio to the Actors Studio to the Negro Ensemble Company and all places in between," McClain recalled.

She has worked in every aspect of theatre, from directing and writing to serving as an arts consultant and teacher, but she is known and respected mostly as a dynamic actress who has shined on stage and on the big and small screens. Her film credits include "Maid in Manhattan," "The Sixth Man," "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge" and "Dirty Teacher." She has had recurring roles on "Grey's Anatomy," "Third Watch," "Law and Order," "Law and Order: SVU" and recently starred as Aunt Bae in Lifetime's hit biofilm "Whitney." Her stage credits include virtually every classic there is. She is an ensemble member of Hollywood's Antaeus Theatre Company and a lifetime member of the Actors Studio. ■

Double-Billed!

Barbara Jordan: A Rendezvous with Destiny & Adam: The Story of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

Reynolda House Museum of American Art

Tues, Aug. 4 3 p.m.

Tues, Aug. 4 8 p.m.

Wed, Aug. 5 3 p.m.

Wed, Aug. 5 8 p.m.

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