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HIP-HOP PROJECT: INSIGHT INTO THE HIP-HOP GENERATION

By Steve Broadnax

Aaron Todd Douglas, Director | Choreography by Millicent Johnnie

University of Illinois | Department of Theatre

Thursday-Saturday, October 15-17, 2009, at 7:30pm

Thursday-Saturday, October 22-24, 2009, at 7:30pm

Sunday, October 25, 2009, at 3pm

Colwell Playhouse

HIP-HOP PROJECT: INSIGHT INTO THE HIP-HOP GENERATION

Playwright	Steve Broadnax
Director	Aaron Todd Douglas
Choreographer	Millicent Johnnie
Scenic Designer	Stephanie Polhemus
Scenic Charge	Christina Rainwater
Costume Designer	Amanda Spaanstra
Lighting Designer	Brianna Johnson
Sound Designer	Doc Davis
DJs	DJ Vex Jonah Weisskopf
Properties Master	Zachary Serafin
Hair/Makeup Master	René Chadwick
Stage Manager	Stanley L. Ralph III
Technical Director	Chris Blad
Dramaturg	Max Goldberg
Projections Design Team	Jeremiah Ankrom Devin Carrol Matthew Eberle

CAST

Ensemble	Onyema Grace Azunna	Dancers	Blessing Adeoye
	Jonathan Butler-Duplessis		Scott “Kid-Gorgeous” Chou
	Jenna Carina Jiménez		Mark Deler
	Deandria Janice Kelley		Leila Henry
	Shasta “Klevan” Knox-Mathews		Marcus Mcfall
	Kelson McAuliffe		Elyssa McNeil
	Marcus Mcfall		Katherine Roarty
	Robert Montgomery		Erin Sutkay
	Anastasia Pappageorge		
	Julian Parker		
	Dancer		
	Tyrone Phillips	Understudy	Brazhal Brewer
	Kalyn N. C. Rivers		
	Jessica Turner		

With additional poetry and writings by Johnny Jones, Royce Massengill, Ricky Nelson, John Proctor, Oscar Camacho, Moriah Hicks, Cynthia Tally, Precious Hall, Nathan James, Clory Jackson, Adam Ferrone, James Savage, Allen Miller, Jessica Turner, Kelson McAuliffe, Onyema Grace Azunna, Marcus Mcfall, Shasta “Klevan” Knox-Mathews, Stanley L. Ralph III, and Aaron Todd Douglas

Choreography contributions by Marcus Mcfall, Leila Henry, Fede Bassetti, and Djibril Camara

This production contains adult themes.

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Poster design by John Jennings.

Thank you to *The News-Gazette* and *American Classifieds* for supplying the newspaper dispensers.

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Thank you to Sam Smith, Dana Rush, Fede Bassetti, ISalsa, Djibril Camara, Jamie McGowan, and Monique Rivera-Rogers.

PROGRAM NOTE

When asked to give his definition of “hip hop” in 2001, 33-year-old rapper Talib Kweli said, “Hip hop is us; it’s what we are, what we’ve become. Hip hop is a word that defines this generation. I don’t think it’s just music. I don’t think it’s just an art. I think it’s a whole way you think.” For those familiar with hip hop, this definition is self-evident. For those less engaged with hip hop, it may be difficult to understand hip hop as a worldview. The term is used in a variety of ways to refer to an art form, a style, or a way of understanding the world. Steve Broadnax takes up the complexity of the term and its identity in *Hip-Hop Project: Insight into the Hip-Hop Generation*.

Hip hop originated in the South Bronx in the late 1970s. The term had existed at least since 1979, but the form of music began nearly a decade before. By the 1970s, the gangs who ruled these neighborhoods for nearly two decades began to lose power (because of intense competition and violence over the drug trade). When the gangs faded away, block parties led by local DJs sprang up across the borough. Over time, DJs discovered that audiences responded well when the drum solo portion of a record (called the break) was looped continuously and also when an MC rapped over the record to interact directly with the audience. The rest is history: with the commercial success of The Sugarhill Gang, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force, Kurtis Blow, and Run DMC, hip hop entered into the American public consciousness at large.

Hip hop has always drawn from a number of sources for inspiration. Rooted in the storytelling tradition of the griots of West Africa (which has persisted in the United States through blues mythology and bragging games like the dozens), DJs and MCs have appropriated various musical traditions and popular culture. For example, famous DJ Grandmaster Flash combined spoken dialogue from the TV show *Flash Gordon* with samples of contemporary music from artists as varied as Chic, Queen, and Blondie to create his 1981 hit “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel.” Thus, it might be said that anything that can be appropriated by hip-hop culture, fused in some way with one of hip hop’s artistic outlets, is itself hip hop.

Furthermore, hip hop is always reinventing itself. The culture and music no longer resemble what they were 20 years ago. What was primarily a culture of participants who DJed, MCed, and danced along with the stars of hip hop is now a culture of consumers, of observers who do not themselves participate in the art form. Technological changes made live bands obsolete early in hip-hop history, and drum machines, synthesizers, and computers threaten the DJ’s beat-providing role. All the while, producers, who create beats from these new digital technologicis, have become much more important. Even rap itself is changing, as artists are now able to alter their voices with pitch-correction software.

Like hip hop, *Hip-Hop Project* is constantly changing. Steve Broadnax compiled poetry written in a creative writing class he taught as the head of the John McLinn Ross Theatre Program at the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff (UAPB) and directed and choreographed a piece based on these works. The next year, *The Hip Hop Project 2: The Remix* premiered at UAPB with new poetry and choreography and went on tour throughout Washington State. The play won numerous accolades from the 2005 American College Theatre Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, including awards for directing and choreography (not to mention being the only sold-out show in the festival’s 40-year history). It has subsequently been staged at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre (2005) and Penn State University (2008). This production of *Hip-Hop Project* continues its pattern of innovation. This is the first version of the play not directed or choreographed by Broadnax.

Broadnax, who received a BFA in acting from Webster University and an MFA in acting from Penn State University, currently teaches African American theatre and acting at Penn State. In addition to *Hip-Hop*, he has written several plays, including *R. L. at the Crossroads*, a one-man show based on the life of the famous blues guitarist Robert Johnson that Broadnax performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and *American Taboo*, a theatrical examination of African American homosexual culture that was performed at UAPB

and Penn State. Most recently, he directed and choreographed Herbert Newsome’s hip-hop adaptation of *Hamlet* called *Return of a King*, which was produced in April and May 2009 at Phoenix’s Playhouse on the Park and in August at the University of North Carolina as part of the National Black Theatre Festival.

—Max Goldberg



Onyema Grace Azunna (Ensemble) is ethnically Nigerian but natively American, and “the one who knows” defines the name of this hip-hop entrepreneur. This Chicago resident articulates the essence of hip hop through radio, rap, poetry, and acting. Raised on the North Side of the city, Onyema

expanded her diverse talents through the many artistic resources at the U of I. In the middle of her sophomore year, she became one-third of the group The Unwritten Amendment, which expresses social ideologies through melodic poetry. Currently, Onyema Grace Azunna is pursuing her rap career and hopes to activate minds and rearrange the time.



Jonathan Butler-Duplessis (Ensemble) is a senior from Champaign and is pursuing a BFA in acting at the U of I. His credits include *Pippin*, *Measure for Measure*, *Anon(ymous)*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. He was last seen on a Krannert Center stage as Twimble in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.



Jenna Carina Jiménez (Ensemble) is currently a senior in the BFA acting program at the U of I. She has appeared as Eurydice and others in *Metamorphoses*, as Juliet in *Measure for Measure*, as Nasreen and others in *Anon(ymous)*, and as an ensemble member in *Map Light*.



Deandria Janice Kelley (Ensemble) is making her Krannert Center debut. She is currently a sophomore in the BFA acting program at the U of I. She is a graduate of Jones College Prep in Chicago, where her credits included the role of June in *Chicago* and the Fortune Teller in *Skin of Our Teeth*.



Shasta “Klevan” Knox-Mathews (Ensemble)—born in a city lacking the generational music, fashion, and dance that lay the foundation for any culture—amazingly adopted her father’s passion for hip-hop music. She stayed at home to attend the U of I and is currently a sophomore pursuing a degree

in journalism. Although her education has always been important to her, she will only find a true sense

of accomplishment and satisfaction by pursuing not only a career but also a lifestyle surrounded by hip hop. She has been rapping for many years but has just recently decided to make something of it. For her, *Hip-Hop Project* provides exposure and experience that will improve her confidence and stage presence, which will be necessary elements in her future endeavors.



Kelson McAuliffe (Ensemble) is a sophomore acting major at the U of I and is making his debut at Krannert Center. His previous credits include the Hare in *Aesop’s Foibles*, Androcles in *Androcles and the Lion*, Haemon in *Antigone*, and Lysander in *The Tempest*.



Marcus Mcfall (Ensemble/Dancer) is a senior sociology major at the U of I and is a member of the Hipnotic Dance Team on campus. He has been rapping and dancing for about eight years and acting for two years.



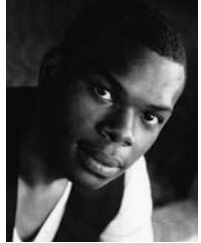
Robert Montgomery (Ensemble) is a sophomore in the BFA acting program at the U of I. This is his Krannert Center debut, but you may have seen him previously in the Armory Free Theatre productions of *Three Days of Rain* and *Bent*.



Anastasia Pappageorge (Ensemble) is currently working toward her BFA in acting at the U of I. She recently performed in *Map Light* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.



Julian Parker (Ensemble) is a sophomore acting major at the U of I. His favorite credits include Solomon in *Speech and Debate* at the Station Theatre in Urbana, Steven in *Within the Shadows*, and Animal Kingdom in *Impulse 24/7* at the Armory Free Theatre.



Tyrone Phillips (Ensemble) is a sophomore pursuing a BFA in acting. He has recently appeared in *Speech and Debate* (Howie) at the Station Theatre, *Impulse 24/7* and *SPOT* at the Armory Free Theatre, and the Illini Union Board's production of *West Side Story* (Chino). Tyrone spent this past summer as a backup vocalist

for *In The Heights* at the Taste of Chicago and has also been seen in *The Best Medicine* and *Brought to Life* with ensemble113, a theatre company based in Chicago's North Shore.



Kalyn N. C. Rivers (Ensemble) is a sophomore in the acting program at the U of I. She is a transfer student from Hope College in Holland, Michigan, where she performed in *1940's Radio Hour*, *Laundry and Bourbon*, and *Big Love*. This is her first performance at the U of I.



Jessica Turner (Ensemble) makes her Krannert Center debut in *Hip-Hop Project* and is currently a sophomore majoring in theatre at the U of I. Her previous credits include Mrs. Willis in *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, which was performed at Krannert Art Museum as part of Artzilla, as

well as performances of her poetry at open mic nights on campus and in Chicago.



Blessing Adeoye (Dancer) is a junior at Central High School and is from Champaign. Starting with his church dance team, Blessing has been blessed to have learned different types of hip-hop dance styles from various people as well as by teaching himself. He has performed many times with his dance team in different places around the area.



Scott "Kid-Gorgeous" Chou (Dancer) is a senior in economics and statistics at the U of I. He has been b-boying since he began college three years ago and has some experience in choreo and other hip-hop styles. Scott is also involved with the Asian American Association and performs dances in its annual fashion show.



Mark Deler (Dancer) is a dance major in his sophomore year at the U of I.



Leila Henry (Dancer) was born in Wilmington, Delaware, and was raised in Chicago, where she has trained in hip-hop dance for the past nine years. Henry performed in numerous talent shows throughout high school and around Chicago. Toward the end of her high school career, she realized that dance was

her true passion and began training in ballet and jazz as she continued to train rigorously in hip hop. Currently, Leila Henry is a junior BFA candidate with Dance at Illinois. She is also a co-coordinator and hip-hop choreographer of Omnimov Dance Troup at the U of I. In May 2009, Henry received the Emerging Choreographic Voice Award from Dance at Illinois for a self-choreographed hip-hop solo she performed at Studiodance II. This past summer, she had an amazing experience at Lollapalooza Music Festival in Chicago, as she danced backup for an up-and-coming electro pop artist named Money Penny.



Elyssa McNeil (Dancer) is thrilled to be making her debut performance at Krannert Center. Elyssa is a sophomore with Dance at Illinois and is hoping to complete her BFA in dance. For four years, Elyssa was a member of FUSION Dance Company, a well-known hip-hop dance team

that performs all over the Chicagoland area. Elyssa is in her third semester with the UI Dance 2XS team, which is a worldwide dance organization.



Katherine Roarty (Dancer) began her dance training at the Thomas Studio in Pittsburgh. She studied under the creative director Jessica Spencer and was a member of the award-winning dance company. Currently, Katherine is a junior pursuing a BFA in dance and a minor in business at the U of I. Since she

began dancing at the U of I, she has worked with choreographers Richard Colton, Germal Barnes, Jennifer Monson, and Renay Aumiller.



Erin Sutkay (Dancer) is currently a junior and a dance major at the U of I. She began her dance career in Rockford, where she studied under the very talented Summer Henderson. Erin has since worked with many choreographers in both hip-hop and contemporary fields, including Barry Youngblood,

Toya Ambrose, and Jennifer Monson. She is very proud to have the privilege of working with such a talented group of artists and greatly enjoyed exploring the voice and movement of hip hop with everyone.



Brazhal Brewer (Dancer Understudy) began her formal dance training in classical ballet and modern dance at the Studio Once Dance Conservatory (SODC) in Chicago. Since the age of two, she has studied ballet, Horton, Graham, jazz, tap, pointe, hip-hop, African, and Latin dance. Besides

SODC, she has trained with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater in New York, the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, Ballet Chicago, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and the Gallery 37 dance program. Brazhal has performed many works around Chicago, including at Millennium Park, the Chicago Theater, and the Taste of Chicago. Graduating from Whitney Young High School in 2007, she moved on to the U of I with a talent scholarship to pursue a BFA in dance. Currently in her third year of school, she is double majoring in dance and health with a concentration in health and behavior change. Her goal is to teach dance, perform and compose dances, and become a movement therapist (combining the art of dance and the study of physical therapy). Her inspiration to dance and perform comes from her mother and father, who have supported every decision that she has made in her successful career as a performer.



Aaron Todd Douglas (Director) is a freelance actor, director, and part-time faculty member at Loyola University and is currently based in Chicago. Originally from Cincinnati, he earned his BS from Eastern Michigan University and his MFA from the U of I. His recent projects include *Pill Hill* (ETA Creative Arts); acting

in *Wait until Dark* (Court Theatre) and *Perfect Mendacity* (Steppenwolf); and directing *Talented Tenth* (Congo Square), which was awarded Best Play by the Black Theatre Alliance, *Checkmates* (ETA Creative Arts), and the world premiere of *Cake* (13 Carat Productions/Theatre Building Chicago). Other directing projects include *Invisible Man* (Art Institute of Chicago), *The Actor's Rap* (Hip Hop Theatre Festival/Congo Square), and *The African Company Presents Richard III* (Congo Square).

Douglas is a founding ensemble member of the Congo Square Theatre Company and the former associate artistic director. He originated the role of Flip in the world premiere of *Stick Fly* by Lydia Diamond. Other Congo Square acting credits include *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, which was produced at the Goodman Theatre as part of the August Wilson Celebration, *Seven Guitars*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Before It Hits Home*, *Spunk*, and *Ali*. He has worked extensively throughout Chicago, most notably with the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago

Shakespeare Theatre, and Victory Gardens Theatre. Additional credits include *Journal of Ordinary Thought* (Chicago Theatre Company), *Fortunes of the Moor* (ETA), and *The State of Mississippi v. Emmet Till* (Pegasus Players). Douglas is also a former company member at the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival, where he appeared in numerous productions including *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, and *Three Musketeers*, and he played the title role in *Othello*. His upcoming projects include directing *Twelve Angry Men* (Raven Theatre).



Millicent Johnnie

(Choreographer), a native of Lafayette, Louisiana, received both her BFA and her MFA in dance at Florida State University. Johnnie served on the dance faculty of Tulane University and Dillard University after touring as the resident choreographer and acting as the rehearsal

director of the Urban Bush Women in New York City. Johnnie moved to New York City after teaching hip hop and jazz movement for several years as a veteran staff member of the Universal Dance Association based in Memphis. Millicent co-founded the Phlava Hip Hop and Jazz Dance Company based in Tallahassee, and she received a Prague International Dance Festival Best Choreography award and the First Place International Dance

Title for her hip-hop choreography entitled *Wrath*. Millicent's choreography has been featured with Cleo Parker-Robinson Dance, the Urban Bush Women, and Hubbard Street II; has been seen on *The Alternate Roots Cultural Tour Uprooted: The Katrina Project*, ESPN, the Prince William Network, and the Sunshine Network; and has been presented at settings such as the Danspace Project Food for Thought in New York, Dancenow/NYC Dance Harlem and Joyce Soho Series, the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, The Yard at Lincoln Center, the International Association for Blacks in Dance Conference (2000, 2001, and 2002), the Houston Black Dance Festival in Texas, and the New Orleans Jazz Dance Project. Millicent's performance and choreography career has led her to working with noted celebrity photographers and companies such as Lou Freeman, Saddi Khali, Dominick Gheesling Photography/Portraits for People Photography, Austin Photography, and Leo Marshal, to name just a few. Millicent is currently on the dance faculty at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. She is represented by BlocSouth management based in Atlanta.

Chris Blad (Technical Director) is in his third and final year of pursuing an MFA in scenic technology. His previous U of I credits include *Rappaccini's Daughter* and *Well*, and he is currently working on the upcoming production of *South Pacific*. He worked as the technical director for the 2008 Summer Studio Theatre season at Krannert Center and has spent a season working at the Texas Shakespeare Festival.

Chris is also an avid photographer and enjoys the challenge of getting “that perfect shot” from all his endeavors.

René Chadwick (Hair/Makeup Master) joined the UI Department of Theatre faculty in the fall of 2004 to teach costume and makeup courses. At the same time, she joined the staff of Krannert Center as the director of the Wig and Makeup Studio. René received a BS from the University of Utah in organizational communication. While there, she completed an internship in makeup and wigs with the Utah Opera Company. She received an MFA in costume design from the U of I. René has designed professionally for the Nashville Ballet Company, Nashville and Illinois Shakespeare Festivals, Celebration Theatre Company, American Negro Playwright Theatre, Epiphany Dance Company, Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, and UI-based Summer Studio Theatre Company. René’s academic design credits include works for the U of I, the University of Utah, Tennessee State University, Belmont University, Tennessee’s Governor’s School for the Arts, and Middle Tennessee State University.

Doc Davis (Sound Designer) is an MFA candidate in sound design. He received his bachelor’s degree at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. During his time in Jackson, he was the sound designer for *A Christmas Carol* at the New Stage Theatre as well as the sound designer for *The Glass Menagerie* at Belhaven College. Doc has worked as a sound designer and audio department lead at the Jenny Wiley Theatre in Kentucky and has worked as a

live sound engineer in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi.

Max Goldberg (Dramaturg) is a senior at the U of I pursuing a BFA in theatre studies. He assistant directed last fall’s U of I production of *Anonymus* and the Armory Free Theatre’s production of *Chess* in the spring. Most recently, he served as dramaturgy and literary management intern at La Jolla Playhouse.

Hope Goldman (Assistant Choreographer) is currently pursuing her MFA in dance at the U of I, where she also has a teaching assistantship. Her work has been presented in the Midwest and areas along the East Coast. She graduated with a BFA in dance performance from the University of South Florida in Tampa, where she performed in works by Michael Foley, John Parks, Dionne Sparkman-Noble, and Lynne Wimmer. She has also had the pleasure of dancing for Renay Aumiller, Laura Chiaramonte, Jan Erkert, and Robert Moses.

Brianna Johnson (Lighting Designer) is a second-year MFA lighting design candidate. She got her BA in theatre design from Alma College, where she had the chance to design more than 15 shows. Last semester, she made her design debut at the U of I with Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*.

Stephanie Polhemus (Scenic Designer) is a third-year scene design MFA candidate. After graduating from the University of West Georgia, she spent a year exploring theatre in her hometown of Atlanta before coming to the U of I. Her Krannert Center credits include scenic design for *Armide* and *Three*

Sisters and props work on *Roméo et Juliette* and *Henry IV, Part 1*. She spent this past summer as the prop master at the Williamstown Theatre Festival and is working on the upcoming production of *South Pacific* for the School of Music Opera Program.

Christina Rainwater (Scenic Charge) received a BFA in theatre from Missouri State University and an MFA in scenic art from North Carolina School of the Arts. There, she developed the workshop “A Distressing Subject” on distressing techniques for new surfaces. She was the scenic charge artist at the Flat Rock Playhouse in Flat Rock, North Carolina, for two years and has worked as a scenic artist for the past eight years. She has an ongoing working relationship at Goodspeed Musicals, where she had the pleasure of working on *Half a Sixpence* and *Happy Days* the musical. She has also worked for Feld Entertainment in Palmetto, Florida, and participated in the production of *Disney Princesses on Ice* and the Disney Playhouse Tour II.

Stanley L. Ralph III (Stage Manager) is a second-year MFA student at the U of I. From South Africa to China, Florida to California, and North Carolina to London, Stanley has traveled the world in the name of theatre. These past couple of years, Stanley has had the chance to work with superstars such as Patti Labelle, Angie Stone, and more. Stanley has a passion to do social issues theatre on an international level to bring the issues of the world to the eyes of those who can help enact change.

Zachary Serafin (Properties Master) is a first-year MFA scenic design student at the U of I. This is his

first show at Krannert Center as well as his first time serving as a properties master. He holds a BA in theatre from Buffalo State College in his hometown. His previous work includes acting as well as costume and makeup design and application at the Lockport Palace Theatre and the Marcella Show Club and Lounge. In addition to theatre work, Zach also held visual merchandising positions at Macy’s and Pottery Barn Kids.

Amanda Spaanstra (Costume Designer) is a second-year costume design MFA candidate at the U of I and holds a BA in theatre from Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Her most recent work includes designing costumes for *Tuesdays with Morrie* for the Summer Studio Theatre and assistant costume designing for *Hamlet* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* at the U of I. Amanda’s work as co-costume designer has been seen in the world premiere of *Rose and the Rime*, directed by Nathan Allen of the House Theatre of Chicago, which was first performed at Hope College and subsequently at the Region III and National American College Theatre Festival at the Kennedy Center in 2008.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant to the Director	Astarte Howell
Assistant Choreographer	Hope Goldman
Assistant Stage Managers	Bridget Rosella Benton Cody Chen
Assistant Technical Director	Linda Esperance
Assistant Costume Designers	Sabaah Jauhaur-Rizvi Jessica Trier Annaliese Weber
Assistant Lighting Designer	Josie Blough
Assistant Scenic Charge	Ian James Anthony
Master Electrician	Devin Carroll
Costume Craft Head	Kimberly Coleman
Stage Carpenter	Grant Bowen
Scenery Running Crew	Neala Barron Luke Grimes Tom Kelly Dana Parker Katie Snyder Sam Sullivan
Props Running Crew	Marielle Adatto David Lee Charlie Lubeck
Costume Running Crew Head	Sabaah Jauhaur-Rizvi
Costume Running Crew	Mason Born So Young Kim Brittany Nolan

Makeup Running Crew Head	Amy Bartelt
Makeup Running Crew	Joseph Boersma
Light Board Operator	Ron P. Bowden Jr.
Deck Electricians	Jack Horwitch Chang Yajiao
Patch Operator	Erin McParlin
Audio Crew	Elena V. Levenson