

Blackout **a new musical**

book & lyrics by Daryl Lisa Fazio
music by Aaron McAllister
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LOGLINE

Four New Yorkers—high, low, charged, broke, strangers, sisters, black, white—navigate a city of swelling temptation and simmering anger, a time of random fires and swinging sex, and streets where soul and disco serenade the down and up. And they harbor a buried dream that it could be there's a light at the end of that long, cracking tunnel. Until the power goes out. All of it. And they're forced into a night of both fantasy and nightmare where they'll have to come together to come out the other side.

CHARACTERS

1. ALICE DELANCEY, **f**, late 30s, Italian-American, physician
2. CORA JOHNSON, **f**, 19 or 20, African-American, student
3. MARIE LEO, **f**, early 30s, Italian-American, Alice's sister, runs a Brooklyn bodega
4. SEAN GOONAN, **m**, 20s, Irish-American, single father
5. RODERICK/ENSEMBLE: African-American **m**, early 30s, various roles
6. MRS. O'HEGERTY/ENSEMBLE: **f**, 40s to 50s, various roles
7. ENSEMBLE: **m**, 20s to 50s, various roles
8. ENSEMBLE: **m**, 20s to 50s, various roles

SETTING

Various New York City locations. July 13, 1977.

SONGS

ACT ONE

1. I AM NEW YORK (*All*)
2. FLIP-SIDE (*Cora*)
3. TAKE A RIDE (*Marie*)
4. THIS MAN'S WORLD (*Alice, Marie, Cora*)
5. TINY (*Sean*)
6. SLAVE (*Cora, Roderick*)
7. THE CURE (*Alice*)
8. BRIDGE AND TUNNEL (*Sean with Male Ensemble*)
9. POWER (*All*)

ACT TWO

10. LOOT (*All*)
11. WHO ARE YOU? (*Principles*)
12. LOOT REPRISE (*Cora with Ensemble*)
13. IN THE DARK (*Alice, Marie*)
14. TINY REPRISE (*Sean*)
15. JUMP (*Cora*)
16. I AM ALIVE (*Principles*)

ACT ONE

In black.

A baby cries.

Music cue (#1), drowning out the baby's wail.

Lights up abruptly.

New York City. July 13, 1977. It's late afternoon, and the stage swelters with the activity of hot, tired city-dwellers in their various homes and hang-outs. The entire COMPANY is on stage.

5:15 pm

SEAN GOONAN, 20-ish and fit, is "at work" on the street, holding cheap photocopied fliers to entice passers-by into Times Square strip joints.

SONG (#1)—"I AM NEW YORK"

SEAN

SLICK AND TALL,
THIS HARD-BOILED PALACE,
IT AIN'T COZY,
IT AIN'T CALLOUS.
THOSE ARE WORDS
THAT DON'T MEAN
SHIT WHEN SHINE
HAS LOST ITS SHEEN,
BLOWN YOUR COVER.
BLISTERED—

The entire cast sings, including now the four-member ensemble which poses as business-folk, junkies, and money.

ALL

DREAMS.

I AM UP
I AM DOWN
I'M A SAVIOR
I'M A CLOWN
I AM THE ISLANDS
AND THE HEIGHTS,
THE PARKS, THE BRIDGES,
SIREN NIGHTS.
I AM NEW YORK.

CORA JOHNSON, 19 or 20 and African-American, throbs with the attitude and anger of youth. She's on a fire escape, suiting up with a heavy backpack so full she can't even zip it. She shakes a can of spray paint.

CORA

I AM PAINTED,
I AM TORN,
I AM SIGNED
IN SPRAYS OF HATE.
I AM FLASHING,
I AM BUZZ,
I AM NEON
BURNING LATE.

ALICE DELANCEY, mid to late 30s, reddish-brown hair pulled back in a tight bun, is flawlessly dressed and topped off with an immaculate white doctor's coat. She snaps off a pair of rubber gloves.

ALICE

I AM SQUANDERED.
I AM SKILLED.
I AM SCRUBBED
UNTIL I'M RAW.

MARIE LEO, about 30, is pretty, but hardened, her long dark hair tied back in a crude pony tail, strands hanging in her face. She unpacks HUSTLER magazines from a box.

MARIE

I AM CHOSEN.
I AM TOSSED.
I AM FACES
WRITTEN OFF.

ALL

I AM LOW.
I AM HIGH.
I'M A TUNNEL,
I'M THE SKY.
I AM BROOKLYN,
AND MANHATTAN,
QUEENS, THE BRONX,
THE ISLAND STATEN.
I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

MARIE

I AM OPEN
ALL NIGHT AND DAY.

ALICE

I AM CLOSED.
I'M THE WRONG WAY.

SEAN

I AM COKE AND
EMPTY BOTTLES.

CORA

I AM SEX.
I AM THE THROTTLE.

I'M THE EXPRESS,

MARIE

I AM RED LIGHTS,

CORA

I AM LAST CALL,

SEAN

I AM LAST RITES.

ALICE

I AM A MARRIAGE
AND A FLING.
I AM YOUR HOPES
AND DIRTY THINGS.

ALL

I AM UP
I AM DOWN
I'M A SAVIOR
I'M A CLOWN
I AM THE ISLANDS
AND THE HEIGHTS,
THE PARKS, THE BRIDGES,
SIREN NIGHTS.

I AM LOW
I AM HIGH
I'M A TUNNEL
I'M THE SKY
I AM BROOKLYN,
AND MANHATTAN,
QUEENS, THE BRONX,
THE ISLAND STATEN.
I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

Lights down on the other principles as CORA leaps off the fire escape, hitting the ground like a soldier, shaking her spray paint can furiously and still trying to zip up her overstuffed bag while also reading a book.

6:10 pm

CORA

(singing)

I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

*A moment later, she collides with a well-appointed **WHITE WOMAN** carrying several bags.*

The WOMAN's bags are spilled, along with CORA's backpack. CORA, scrambling to pick everything up, never sees the woman.

CORA

Sorry. That was all me. Can't seem to put this book down. Sometimes I wish I was an arachnid. You know, eight arms.

WOMAN

(singing, huffily, to CORA)

I AM NEW YORK.

Beat. CORA looks up, makes eye contact, and her attitude and speech pattern turn on a dime.

CORA

(singing, in the WOMAN's face)

I AM NEW YORK.

The WOMAN is startled. She takes a step back.

WOMAN

I AM NEW YORK

CORA takes a step forward.

CORA

I AM NEW YORK.

You must be lost. Ain't no Neiman Marcus this side of the river.

The WOMAN warily picks two books up off the ground.

WOMAN

I believe this is yours.

CORA

It scare you?

WOMAN

Webster's Dictionary?

CORA

(snatching the book away and gesturing at the other one in the woman's hand)

Not this one. That one.

WOMAN

(pausing then collecting herself)

If you really were a Black Panther, you wouldn't have to read a book about them. And certainly not one that came from the... *(pause, looking at a stamp on the book's cover)* Medgar Evers College library.

The WOMAN hands CORA the book and gets the rest of her belongings off the ground.

Are you going to let me past?

CORA stares her down, steps aside and watches her go. She picks up the rest of her stuff, then goes to a nearby trashcan and tags it with spray paint..

“YOUR AUDACITY”

A homeless AFRICAN-AMERICAN HEROIN ADDICT, who’s been sleeping against the wall, grabs her arm.

HEROIN ADDICT

You forgot one. (*reading the title, tripping over it*) The F-Feminine M-Mis-Mistake.

She grabs the book from his hands.

CORA

It’s “Mystique,” smack-man. And it made me into the she-goddess you starin’ at right now. Clean up and look around, man. Damn. You’re too busy passed out in the street, actin’ like you the damn shot-up UN ambassador to shit-hole blocks. Me, I’m out here bein’ two people at once. And you. You’re barely one. Pissin’ in your own pants.

Beat.

HEROIN ADDICT

Here’s another book.

He holds up a package wrapped in brown paper and string. It’s heavy.

CORA

This one ain’t a book.

She takes it carefully and is quickly back on the move, her feelings exploding in the middle of the street.

Song (#2)—“FLIP-SIDE”

KICK THE WALL,
MAKE IT PRETTY,
BREAK THE DAM,
SHAPE THE CITY.
BE AN ANGEL.
SHOW AFFECTION.
BE A WARRIOR.
CHANGE DIRECTION.
CHANGE DIRECTION.
CHANGE DIRECTION.

ON THIS SIDE
I CAN’T SHAKE THE PAST.
WHEN I AM BOXED,
I NEED TO BLAST.
ONE DAY NOW
IT WILL ALL COME OUT.
I GOT SOME PLANS
I GOT TO SHOUT.

NOW FLIP IT.

ON THAT SIDE

SCHOOL IS LIKE A DREAM
WHERE FUTURE'S BRIGHT
AND MY PLANS SEEM
TO TURN TO
SOMETHING GOOD AND RIGHT.
BUT IS IT ME
IF I DON'T FIGHT?

NOW FLIP IT

CHILD, YOU GOT TO RISE UP
AGAINST THE MAN.
GIRL, YOU PUT YOUR EYES UP,
SEE WHAT YOU CAN.
GIRL, THERE IS A HEAVEN.
CHILD, THIS MIGHT BE HELL.
YOUR TIME ON ONE IS OVER
WHEN YOU HEAR THAT BELL,
AND YOU SKIP IT
TO THE FLIP-SIDE
YOU FLIP IT
TO THE FLIP-SIDE

THE FLIP AND FLY THE SKIP AND SKY
(SCAT SINGING)

CHILD, YOU GOT TO RISE UP
AGAINST THE MAN.
GIRL, YOU PUT YOUR EYES UP,
SEE WHAT YOU CAN.
GIRL, THERE IS A HEAVEN.
CHILD, THIS MIGHT BE HELL.
YOUR TIME ON ONE IS OVER
WHEN YOU HEAR THAT BELL,
AND YOU SKIP IT
TO THE FLIP-SIDE
YOU FLIP IT
TO THE FLIP-SIDE

Lights up on:

The mom-and-pop, down-at-the-heels corner market where MARIE is smoking a cigarette and absently tidying up the nudie magazines she's recently shelved.

6:30 pm

MARIE

I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

From outside the market, we can hear the occasional sounds of screeching tires, blaring music, and voices, like a zoo.

MARIE listens to a beat-up radio.

(RADIO)

—just two weeks since the killer calling himself the Son of Sam last struck, his victims, a couple from Bayside, Queens who were luckier than most, only wounded. Now with the year anniversary of his first murder looming—there have been eight—New Yorkers keep their brunette daughters and girlfriends close as—

CORA walks into the store, the door slamming and knocking the radio off its perch. It goes silent.

MARIE

20 minutes late. Lemme guess. The bus never came. Your mother was sick. Martians landed and took you to Coney Island to ride the Ferris wheel.

CORA

(putting on an apron)

No, I was changing the world.

MARIE

You forgot this block.

CORA

(adjusting controls on a battered A/C window unit and pounding on it with her fist)

The husband ain't here?

MARIE

He's in New Jersey. Took little Joe with him to some seminar on small business accounting, which I'm sure is the answer to all our problems. So it's just the girls tonight.

CORA

Solid.

MARIE

You don't like big Joe.

CORA

The temper's nasty.

MARIE

Wasn't before Vietnam.

CORA

The man tells you what to do.

MARIE

Does it matter I don't listen?

CORA

You really think you don't?

MARIE

I'm older than you, Cora.

CORA

I'm darker than you, Marie.

MARIE

Yeah, let me get out my violin. The whole city's in a sinkhole. Your people aren't the worst.

CORA

You been to Bed-Stuy lately? Or maybe just up the damn street? Better not even cross the line without an armored tank. The police sure don't.

MARIE

I honest-to-God got enough to worry about on this Negro block war zone. I can't worry about the rest of 'em.

CORA

Negro?

MARIE

What?

CORA

We're "black." Negroes pick cotton and tap-dance with Shirley Temple.

MARIE

You really have got to keep that crap to yourself. *(beat)* On second thought, Joe's not here, so go ahead.

CORA is silent.

You wanna call me a wop? Say we're even?

No response.

It's a joke. The day you laugh with me'll be the same day I drink tea off a doily.

Sound of THUNDER rumbling in the distance.

CORA

(starting to leave)

I have to study.

MARIE

Yeah, and I'm proud of you for that. I really am, but—

CORA

I don't need your pride.

MARIE

Good, because I need you to go clean out the ice cream freezer. Piece of garbage broke today and melted all the Carvel's.

CORA starts to leave. MARIE stops her and hands her a key.

Wait. This is for you. Joe wants to keep the door locked starting at seven, if he's not around. He had a buzzer installed. You can let yourself in. But we'll have to, you know, buzz in the rest.

CORA

'Cause why?

MARIE

(locking the door)

That murdering lunatic.

CORA

He only kills white people.

MARIE

What do I look like?

CORA shrugs it off and straightens a shelf.

It burns you up, doesn't it?

CORA

What?

MARIE

I'm not stupid. I get it. I'm in your territory. Mucking everything up. That's what you think. That's probably even what you mean when you say you're out changing the world. You're hatchin' something. Am I right?

No response.

You know, I used to be quite the political hell-raiser myself. Anti-war demonstrations. Sit-ins. Didn't shave my armpits.

The phone rings. MARIE answers it.

Leo's Market. *(pause)* Hey, *bambino*. *(pause)* You did? Well, did Dad Vader get you somethin' to eat? *(pause)* I am proud of you, sure, Joe Joe. But french fries aren't really a vegetable. Lemme talk to your Pop. I love you. *(waiting, then:)* Joe, Christ, why haven't you left Jersey yet? You're so worried we're gonna get burned down or I'm gonna get my face shot off, but you leave me and Cora here half the night like sitting ducks. *(pause, then much more quietly)* What for? I— *(pause)* Yeah, no, you're right. Yeah. *(pause)* I said yeah. I just...take care of our boy, okay? He's tired. He gets cranky. Don't lose your cool. *(pause)* Sorry, sorry. Yeah, I know. A bitch calling the kettle black. It gets funnier every time you say it. *(pause)* Was the class worth anything? *(pause)* Joe?

MARIE hangs up. Then she says very quietly, embarrassed:

They're staying the night in New Jersey with his folks.

Beat.

CORA

Uh-huh. You a hell-raiser.

MARIE

Ask my sister.

CORA

Prove she exists first.

MARIE catches sight of herself in a window and tries to tidy her hair and wipe the dark circles from under her eyes.

CORA exits into the back room without being noticed.

MARIE

You don't know anything about me. Nobody here knows what I used to be like. So don't just write me off like—

MARIE turns around and realizes she's alone. Calling out to the back room—and whomever might hear:

I had boyfriends like nobody's business. I had an ass like you wouldn't believe. And my skin. Don't tell me it's not comin' back!

SONG (#3)—“TAKE A RIDE”

MARIE

(singing)

OO, TAKE A RIDE
TAKE A RIDE
OO, TAKE A RIDE
TAKE A RIDE

LONG TIME AGO
BOYS CHOSE TO ADORE
ME. IF I CAN'T BREATHE, GUYS,
I'LL SHOW YOU THE DOOR.
THEN LOVE FOUND ME
ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL.
WE LEFT THE CHURCH,
MY FATE WAS SEALED.

I'D THINK
GIVE ME A CHANCE
TO LEARN HOW TO FLY,
OR PACK UP YOUR FLOWERS
AND TAKE A RIDE.
PACK UP YOUR DIAMONDS
AND TAKE A RIDE.
OO, TAKE A RIDE
OO, TAKE A RIDE

I THOUGHT WE AGREED
THAT WAR HAD NO PLACE.
BUT JOE PUFFED OUT HIS CHEST,
AND JOINED THAT RACE.
SO HERE I WAS
ALONE WITH HIS SON,
ALONE IN HIS STORE,
ALONE AND UNDONE.

I'D THINK
GIVE ME A CHANCE
TO LEARN HOW TO FLY,
OR PACK UP YOUR EGO
AND TAKE A RIDE.
PACK UP YOUR BITCHIN'
AND TAKE A RIDE.
OO, TAKE A RIDE
OO, TAKE A RIDE

SURE.

I USED TO THINK
ABOUT REVOLUTION.
NOT LIKE A WAR.
THAT AIN'T A SOLUTION
TO BOREDOM.
THESE DAYS I THINK
ABOUT STATUS QUO
AND STOCKING THE SHELVES
AND FORGETTING TO GROW
AS A PERSON.

I THINK
GIVE ME A CHANCE
TO LEARN HOW TO FLY,
OR PACK UP THIS PIT
AND TAKE A RIDE
GIVE ME A CHANCE,
ALL I DO IS CRY.
SO PACK UP THIS PITY
AND TAKE A RIDE.
OO, TAKE A RIDE
OO, TAKE A RIDE

Music ends.

*Lights up simultaneously on ALICE, in her office, writing a prescription for a **WEALTHY FEMALE PATIENT**, dripping in ostentatious jewelry, drumming her fingers on the desk impatiently.*

ALICE

(singing)

I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

Here you are, Mrs. Crenshaw. And remember not to mix them with alcohol.

WEALTHY FEMALE PATIENT

But I sleep so much better with both. Certainly one little drink won't hurt.

ALICE

Mrs. Crenshaw—

WEALTHY FEMALE PATIENT

All right, all right. For heaven's sake.

MRS. CRENSHAW gathers up her fancy belongings and exits.

(singing)

I AM NEW YORK.
I AM NEW YORK.

ALICE dims the office lights, everyone else having left for the night.

MARIE picks up the phone, dials a number casually. She lights a cigarette.

ALICE also lights a cigarette, nervous, jittery. She promptly puts it out in an ashtray without smoking it.

The phone rings. ALICE answers it.

Alice Delancey.

Startled silence.

MARIE

You answered.

ALICE

Who is this?

MARIE

Your voice is all white-washed. I can't get over it. I'm not sure I should get over it.

Pause.

ALICE

Marie?

MARIE

I call your office all the time, but you never pick up, so I just listen to it ring.

ALICE

You call all the time?

MARIE

Mostly after-hours, I guess. Is that a bad thing? (*pause, then with a native Italian lilt:*) Alicia?

ALICE

Alice. Please, Marie. You know that. It's easier for, well, other people.

MARIE

You mean easier for you to sound like an upper-crust Anglo-princess. Don't ask me to get used to it. Ma won't let me—she reminds me every time I see her, along with a few "Hail Marys", maybe some genuflecting if it's especially called for.

Silence.

Sorry. I'm wound up. It's not you. (*beat*) Or maybe it is. Hearing your voice. It's like a ghost or something. A shock to the system.

ALICE

Mine too. (*pause*) How's your family? Your boy?

MARIE

The big boy is a husband. The little one, he's a gift.

ALICE

And he's how old now? Three?

MARIE

Ten.

ALICE

(absently)

Good. That's good to hear.

Beat.

MARIE

Yeah. Thanks. What about your guy?

ALICE

What? Oh, we've separated. *(pause)* That's actually the first time I've said so out loud.

MARIE

Christ, Alicia. You don't call?

ALICE

It just happened. A week ago? Somehow, I'm not sure. I'm always in the office treating what seems like the same case of tennis elbow, the same hypochondriac over-medicated socialite, over and over again. I lose track of time. Jack wanted me home with him. Wanted me to learn to make his grandmother's Salisbury steak and darn his socks...as if...I don't...I...Salisbury steak?

Silence.

MARIE

Remember when we were kids, and I always used to say I couldn't understand half of what you said? I feel like that now.

ALICE

I'm sorry. I have a lot to... *(trailing off)*

MARIE

I'm sorry too. About your husband...*(stopping dead in her tracks)*

Pause.

ALICE

Jack.

MARIE

Yeah.

Silence.

You save anybody lately?

ALICE

No. You?

MARIE

Hell, no.

ALICE

How's the neighborhood?

MARIE

Loud, dirty, rough. The store, it's the roughest. Joe really picked ground zero here, but it's all we could afford. Why, you miss it?

ALICE

I can't really remember it.

MARIE

I'm pretty loud, dirty, and rough too. You remember me?

ALICE

Don't do that, Marie. You're beautiful. I remember that.

MARIE

Yeah? You haven't seen me with your own eyes in nearly ten years. I've changed. A lot.

ALICE

And don't imagine my wearing a white coat in a Manhattan boys' club means I've achieved Nirvana.

MARIE

Achieved what?

Another spotlight hits CORA, in rubber gloves up to her elbows, holding a scrubber brush in one hand and a little plastic bag in the other.

CORA

(calling out)

Marie, the reason the freezer died is 'cause your husband's been hidin' his stash of doobies inside the breaker box!

MARIE covers the phone's mouthpiece.

MARIE

(calling back)

You're not funny, Cora!

CORA

Neither is the size of this roach! The joint must've been big around as a broom handle!

MARIE

(back on the phone)

Al? You still there?

ALICE

What was that?

MARIE

Just Joe managing to be a horse's ass all the way from East Orange.

ALICE hears a MAN'S VOICE out in the hallway.

ALICE

I'm going to hang up now, Marie. I like...hearing your voice. I should—you take care of yourself. You'll be all right.

ALICE sets the receiver lightly in its cradle and drinks some Pepto Bismol straight out of the bottle.