

ST. LOUIS WOMAN
by Joe Hanrahan

PROJECTIONS: Just after house lights go out, as MUSIC/band begins,
THANK YOU list of SPONSORS on the screen.

SET: PROJECTION SCREEN framing Band.
Stage Left Chair upstage
POSSIBLE Set Piece to hold a few costume pieces

LIGHTING KEYS:

General Wash for most narrative sequences. (PROJECTIONS will enhance.)
Spotlight/Star Focus for Songs (All Stage Center) - can be refined slightly for different periods.
Distinctive Character Light when LAKA is speaking as Josephine Baker, Tina and more

ACT I

LIGHTS up low, sultry
MUSIC: Band plays soft, very soft FRANKIE & JOHNNY, continues under
simultaneous with
PROJECTION: images of houses just off business district, Downtown,
St. Louis Circa 1900. (MOST ACT I images B&W)
Images shift, giving 3-4 different views.

(LAKA enters Stage Left. Crossing to stage right. Band stops when she hits center stage, re-
cites first lines)

LAKA: That...woman. That...St. Louis Woman...(shakes head, small laugh)...She caused the
eyes and ears of the nation...to turn to this city.

MUSIC: Band picks up under, as LAKA moves right

LAKA: She was Frankie Baker.
Some said she was a good girl. Some said she was a whore.
All did agree...she was beautiful.

Frankie had a man. Albert Britt. AKA...Johnny.
Some said he was her lover. Some said he was her pimp.
All did agree...he was a good-lookin' man.

PROJECTION: Phoenix Hotel or likeness 1900

LAKA: One night Frankie followed Johnny to the Phoenix Hotel. And caught him in
a hallway, makin' time with Alice Pryor. AKA Nelly Bly.
Frankie stormed out. And Johnny followed her.

(LAKA takes two steps downstage)

PROJECTION: Apartment Building St. Louis or thereabouts 1900

LAKA: She said he beat her. She said he pulled a knife.
All did agree...she pulled a .44. And shot him...

SFX: 3 gunshots

LAKA ...three times.

LIGHTS: Bump up

PROJECTION: Images of World Fair St. Louis industries

LAKA: Soon as the smoke cleared...there was a song. And the song became a legend.

MUSIC: Band continues Frankie/Johnny riff behind

(LAKA moves center)

LAKA: St. Louis was known for other things, of course. World's Fair right around the corner.
First in booze, first in shoes...first in fear, misery and terror if you happened to be a Negro.

But it was Frankie's song...that told everybody all they needed to know about a St. Louis
Woman.

She's strong. She's passionate. And she'll love you...

SFX: 3 gunshots

LAKA: ...right up to the end.

PROJECTION: St. Louis Imagery 1900

LIGHTS Up

MUSIC: LAKA sings FRANKIE & JOHNNY
After song, Band stops

LAKA: FRANKIE AND JOHNNY was on the streets two weeks after Frankie plugged Albert.
And since then it's been recorded 300 times. By Sammy Davis Jr., Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder,
Bob Dylan, Lena Horne.....St. Louis sung around the world.

(LAKA moves Stage Left)

PROJECTION: Targee Street St. Louis 1900 (or thereabouts)

LAKA: When Frankie shot Johnny - and by the way, it was only right that Frankie Baker was acquitted of shooting him, she lived at 212 Targee St., Mill Creek Valley, between Downtown and Union Station.

In time all those houses were torn down, and a lot of people moved around. And that made way for a building that today is the home of...

LIGHTS: Blue accents

PROJECTION: Scotttrade Center B&W/action shot of Blues hockey

MUSIC: Plays first iconic notes of ST. LOUIS BLUES, then continues song under

LAKA: ...the St. Louis Blues. On ice!

PROJECTION: W.C. Handy blended with St. Louis imagery

LAKA: Now right near that part of town, right about that same time Frankie & Johnny were gettin' to it, Mr. W.C. Handy ran into a woman on the street. She was so very very upset about her husband's long, unexplained absence, and she told Mr. Handy...

(LAKA half sings/half talks the line)

...“Ma man's got a heart like a rock cast into the sea.”

And another song was born. Once more St. Louis was on the musical map of the nation. And once more the song was about...

(LAKA moves Center)

“...that St. Louis Woman...with her diamond rings
she pulls my man by her apron strings.”

MUSIC: LAKA sings ST. LOUIS BLUES
after song, Band continues slow rhythm of song under

PROJECTION: One-step dancers, circa 1900

LAKA: That song became a jazz standard...it's been called “the jazzman's Hamlet.”

One reason it was so popular, so fast...most of the dances in those days were to the tempo of the Memphis Blues.

MUSIC: Band plays a bit of MEMPHIS BLUES; LAKA does a step or two.

LAKA: But Handy's song - kind of like St. Louis, where two great rivers meet - was the confluence of two great musical styles. It started with a cool tango introduction, and then moved right into low-down blues.

MUSIC: Band starts with Tango section, then blues of ST. LOUIS BLUES

(LAKA does a bit of one-step with the next lines)

LAKA: Dancers went out of their minds. The song hit 'em right in the middle of an instinct that wanted to live. It took 'em by the heels and soon they were flingin' their arms to spread the joy.

MUSIC: LAKA reprises a final line as the band ends song.

(LAKA moves Stage Right)

PROJECTION: St. Louis images circa 1920, a slightly broader view.

LAKA: Those two songs put St. Louis front and center during the early days of the roaring 20th Century.

But not all St. Louis Women were about sex and guns, torment and betrayal. And not all St. Louis music was about honky tonkin'. There were those who sought more spiritual realms.

PROJECTION: Willie Mae Ford Smith, blended with smaller St. Louis churches
Type: Willie Mae Ford Smith

LIGHTS: Soft glow

MUSIC: Band plays CANAAN rhythm under.

LAKA: Like Willie Mae Ford Smith. Born in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, Willie and her thirteen siblings came to St. Louis when she was a teenager. She sang in church choirs, but her life took a big turn when she ran into the composer Thomas Dorsey. He became one of Gospel Music's greatest composers. And singing his songs and others, Willie Mae became the most influential Gospel singer our country has ever known.

(LAKA moves two steps downstage)

She travelled all over, singin' and preachin', and became known as the Godmother of Gospel - on the radio, not records.

She never asked for any pay. She'd accept donations, but the take was always meager. But when she'd return home from tours, and stepped off the train at Union Station, massive crowds of the faithful would welcome her back

It was never easy. A lot of churches rejected her "singin' and sermonizin'." Got the people movin' a little too much. But those who attended her appearances had some of the deepest experiences of their lives.

(LAKA moves Center Stage)

LAKA: To sanctify our evening here, a few of Willie Mae's favorites...a sermon in song, from a blessed St. Louis Woman.

PROJECTION: early 20th Century St. Louis (or thereabouts) church or churches

MUSIC: LAKA sings MEDLEY Willie Mae Ford Smith songs

PROJECTION: St. Louis Images circa 1930
(LAKA stays center stage)

LAKA: Booze! Broads! The Bible! Welcome to St. Louis!

Now I wasn't born here. But this is my home. I'm proud to call myself a St. Louis woman.

So, even if you weren't born here, or maybe you're just visiting...if you're a woman who's proud, and strong, and spiritual, you're one of us. St. Louis will always be a home to you.

MUSIC: Band a touch of each style behind LAKA

LAKA: And St. Louis will always be known as one of the early homes to Ragtime music...and Jazz...The Blues...Country Music...and Rock 'N Roll.

And whenever that music was playing, if there wasn't a St. Louis Woman singin' it, they were singin' about her...like Frankie and her Johnny...

MUSIC: Band does a touch of Ragtime...then a touch of Berry

LAKA: And like TREEMONISHA...the Scott Joplin opera

PROJECTION: Joplin and script of his Opera. image of title character

LAKA: And LITTLE QUEENIE...from Chuck Berry. image of girl/woman circa 1950's

PROJECTION: Chuck Berry. Then back to images circa 1930

LAKA: Now tonight, we're going to take you on a tour of some of the great, great music - and some other great, great art - a little dance, a little poetry...that's come out of this city. That's come from some of the great, great women who were born here, lived here, and sometimes travelled on, leaving some of their soul and spirit behind.

A lot of them had to face some tough, tough times. Despite that...and sometimes because of that...they went on to create something amazing.

(LAKA moves stage left)

And sometimes, things were so tough, they had to leave.

PROJECTION: Old Union Station

Like little Freda Josephine McDonald. She grew up on Targee Street, not far from where Frankie Baker lived. As a child, she played in the railroad yards in Union Station.

PROJECTION: Fires from E. St. Louis riots.

And when she was eleven, she stood on the banks of the Mississippi and watched houses burn during the East St. Louis race riots. And heard screams of families running across the bridge. 100 people killed. 6,000 people left homeless.

By the time she was 13, little Freda Josephine was dancin' on street corners for pennies, livin' out of cardboard boxes, scavengin' food out of garbage cans.

By the time she was 15, she'd married for the second time. She took the name of that husband, Willie Baker. Then she took her middle name and set out to become Josephine Baker.

PROJECTION: Image of young Josephine Baker, NY City vaudeville

Type: Josephine Baker

She took a train to New York City. Where she fast became one of the highest paid chorus girls in vaudeville. She was "The Pony," the last girl in the chorus line. She would bring down the house laughing, as she scrambled trying to remember her steps.

MUSIC: Band plays JUNGLE DRUMS

(LAKA does a few comic, awkward steps)

SFX: Big audience laughter

LAKA: And at the encore, she would come out and do the dance to perfection.
(LAKA does one step and a pose).

SFX: Big audience applause

LAKA: But Josephine Baker wanted to be more than a chorus girl. So she took a steamship to the most exciting city in the world - Paris, France during the 1920's. And she set out to take that city by storm.

(LAKA exits stage left to change)

PROJECTION: Images of Paris in the 20's (longer sequence or repetition to cover costume change)

MUSIC: Band plays JUNGLE DRUMS underneath, and as LAKA comes back to dance -
JUNGLE DRUMS

(LAKA enters in Josephine banana skirt, dances)

LAKA: After Paris got a load of her and her banana skirt...(pause, pose) ...she had that city in her hip pocket.

(LAKA makes a gesture as if shoving something in a hip pocket, finds nothing there, smiles, shrugs, and rushes off stage left.)

MUSIC: Band plays ANIMAL RACE

PROJECTION: Type and Images

- Josephine received over 40,000 love letters
- over 2,000 marriage proposals
- and the friendship, love and respect of
(images/type) Ernest Hemingway
(type) (who called her “the most sensational woman anyone ever saw”)
Albert Einstein
E.E. Cummings
Jean Cocteau
Le Corbusier

- and painted by Pablo Picasso
(image of Picasso, his paintings of her)

(LAKA returns stage left, in cabaret dress)

PROJECTIONS: image of Exposition des Arts Decoratifs

LIGHTING: Special Character Light

(LAKA stops center for first line - then moves stage right)

LAKA: Paris belonged to me, Josephine Baker. The art of the day went hand in hand with my success, as I was said to embody the new style...all the rage...“Art Deco”...with its unmistakable, streamlined design.

(LAKA hand gesture along her body, illustrating her sleek, streamlined profile)

PROJECTION: illustrated Casino de Paris poster with Josephine/cheetah

LAKA: I'd be accompanied on stage by my pet Cheetah, Chiquita, who proudly wore a diamond collar. Chiquita would often escape into the orchestra pit, causing even extra excitement for my shows, as if my shows needed any more excitement.

MUSIC: Band does a bit of JUNGLE DRUMS

PROJECTIONS: images of products? bananas?

LAKA: I endorsed so many products - hair gels, shoes, cosmetics, and, course, bananas.

PROJECTIONS: Paris clubs

And as I worked and worked, success followed and my voice got even more seductive, even more enchanting. I even starred in an Opera...Offenbach's La Creole.

I continued to be the biggest thing going in clubs, and recorded what became my most famous song...J'ai Deux Amours.

(LAKA moves Center Stage)

MUSIC: LAKA sings J'AI DEUX AMOURS (English version)

(LAKA moves Stage Left)

LAKA: That song was about my two loves - my country and Paris, France. But just a few years later, my new home was threatened by one of the most evil forces that has ever landed on this earth.

(PROJECTIONS stills/footage of Nazi occupation of Paris)

(LAKA moves left stage, chair a bit downstage. Sits.)

LAKA: Because of who I was... "the most sensational woman anyone ever saw"...I was one of the few people who were able to move freely among the Nazis.

Who loved me as much as any American or Free French ever did.

MUSIC: Band plays SCRAPPLE FROM THE APPLE under

(LAKA pretends to listen, nod, to a few fellow partygoers)

LAKA: I was able to attend parties with some of their highest ranking officers, chat with them, and learn some very interesting information.

PROJECTIONS: de Gaulle

Which I was able to pass on to my new friend, General Charles de Gaulle.

PROJECTIONS: Rural France '40s

As an entertainer, I was allowed to travel extensively throughout France, collecting valuable intelligence at every turn, and passing it along to the right people. Sometimes written in invisible ink on my sheet music. Sometimes tucked into my underwear. No one would dare strip search Josephine Baker.

PROJECTIONS: Allied troops in an audience

(LAKA up from chair and moves center stage.)

And later in the war, as I travelled around, I had the opportunity to entertain our troops. I would always sing J'ai Deux Amours. I'd include a Negro spiritual, to show my roots, and to show the poetry of the American soul, a Gershwin tune.

LAKA: Hi there, fellas. How are you doing?

SFX: Troops cheer

PROJECTIONS: American troops at a show

MUSIC: LAKA sings THAT CERTAIN FEELING

LAKA: After the war, General de Gaulle made me a Chevalier of the Legion d'honneur, and I was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Rosette de la Resistance.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTIONS: American Night Clubs

LAKA: And after the war I continued to entertain...with a great success at the Copa City Club in Miami.

SFX: Nightclub crowd cheers/applause, then SFX fade

(LAKA bows)

LAKA: But I also faced blatant racism in the good ol' US of A...particularly at the Stork Club in New York City. Hymphhhh!

So I became more and more aware of the plight of my fellow black citizens in the United States. And I began to speak out. And speak out loud.

PROJECTIONS: early 50's Civil Rights march

LAKA: In 1951, the NAACP declared Josephine Baker day in Harlem, with a giant parade.

SFX: Parade noise, cheering

LAKA: But despite the good I was doing and trying to do, I felt...unfulfilled. Like there was something missing in my life. I'd always wanted to have a child, but after much work, the doctors finally said it would be impossible for me.

MUSIC: Band plays JAI' DEUX AMOUR under

(LAKA bends as if talking to a small boy)

On a trip to Japan, I visited a children's home, and met two little boys. I brought them back to France, and they became mine. And they were the start of my rainbow tribe.

PROJECTIONS: Rainbow Tribe

LAKA: I eventually adopted twelve children...from Korea, Japan, Morocco, Colombia, Finland, Algeria, Venezuela and France...my Rainbow tribe. Children of all colors, all nationalities, all religions. It was my family...and it was created not only to give these precious children a home,

but to offer an example of how people - all people, whoever they are - can live and learn and grow together.

My tribe gave me the resolve to continue my work for the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

PROJECTIONS: March on Washington, MLK

(LAKA moves center stage)

LAKA: I was there for the March on Washington. I spoke to the crowd. And as I spoke, I remembered what I learned watchin' those fires across the river in East St. Louis.

SFX: murmurs from large crowd, applause, throughout following

LAKA: I have walked into the palaces of kings and queens. And into the houses of presidents. But I could not walk into a hotel in America and get a cup of coffee...and that made me mad. And when I get mad, you know that I open my big mouth. And then look out, because when Josephine opens her mouth, they hear it all over the world.

SFX: large crowd cheer

(LAKE moves stage right)

LAKA: After Dr. King's tragic death. Coretta King asked me to pick up the flag, and lead his work onward. I wasn't up to that, but I continued to help, and continued opening my big mouth.

My later years were not easy. Health problems, financial problems. But I was able to go out exactly the way I wanted...spectacularly.

(LAKA moves center stage)

MUSIC: Band begins TIMES THEY ARE A' CHANGIN' beat under

PROJECTIONS: Bobino in Paris and/or Josephine in type

LAKA: A celebration in Paris of my 50 years in show business, titled "Josephine." The revue was financed by my good friends...

PROJECTIONS: Princess Grace and Prince Rainier, Jackie K, Sophia Loren, Mick Jagger

...Jackie Kennedy Onassis, and Princess Grace and Prince Rainier of Monaco. And I gave my final performance to a sold out house that included Sophia Loren and Mick Jagger.

PROJECTIONS: (in type) JOSEPHINE

MUSIC: LAKA sings THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

LAKA leaves stage

MUSIC: Band reprise of TIMES THEY ARE A' CHANGIN' through final type slides

PROJECTIONS: (in type) Four days after her final concert, Josephine Baker died peacefully in Paris.

(type) In 2021, she became the first American born citizen, and first black woman, to be inducted into the Pantheon of France.

LIGHTING BLACKOUT house lights up for intermission

END ACT I

INTERMISSION

ACT II

PROJECTION: St. Louis in the 50's

MUSIC: Band starts driving intro music for song

(LAKA as TINA TURNER rolls out Center Stage, rocking)

MUSIC: LAKA sings NUTBUSH CITY LIMITS

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTION: Nutbush scene

LAKA (as TINA): Nutbush, Tennessee. I was raised there. And raised as Anna Mae Bullock. Times were tough. Momma and poppa moved around a lot - to find work - and to get away from each other. So I was moved around, too.

PROJECTION: East St. Louis, 50's era/add Ike Turner from that era.

As a teenager, I wound up in St. Louis. Sang in the church choir. And then one night, my sister, Alline, took me over to the Club Manhattan in East St. Louis. And I saw Ike Turner. Ike Turner...and his band.

MUSIC: Band does an early Ike Turner beat

LAKA: I'd never heard anything like that. I wanted nothing more than to get up there and sing with that band...and with that man.

Ike looked at me like I was a kid. Which I was. But finally, after I kept showing up, he brought me up on stage. And I never left.

Ike was producing records. I sang backup. But one day we were going to record a song Ike wrote called A FOOL IN LOVE. Art Lassiter was supposed to sing lead, but when he didn't show up, I jumped in and said "I know that song."

(LAKE moves center stage)

Ike thought that later he'd be able to cut me out and put Art back in. No way, baby.

MUSIC: LAKA sings A FOOL IN LOVE.

LAKA: My first record. Number One in St. Louis. And Ike's first national hit.

PROJECTION: Club Imperial

And from there, little Anna Mae became...TINA!

PROJECTION: Type: Tina Turner

PROJECTION: Sheena

That was because Ike liked to watch this tv show...SHEENA! Queen of the Jungle! (laughing)

Guess I was the Queen of Ike's Jungle. Cause next thing I know he'd picked me out...and married me.

We became the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. We started playin' all over, and everywhere we went people loved us. But we couldn't sell many records.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTION: Phil Spector

Then a guy named Phil Spector...producer of the Ronettes, the Righteous Brothers and The Beatles...that Phil Spector...picked me out, and produced a song we were all sure was going to put us over the top...River Deep, Mountain High. It didn't, and Ike - who had kinda been put on the sidelines by Phil - said he knew it wasn't going to work. And he took over again.

So we went back on the road and went back to work, and finally...finally...one of our songs hit.

PROJECTION: The Ikettes (in action)

MUSIC: Band starts PROUD MARY

(LAKA moves center.)

LAKA: This is the way we introduced that song.

You know, every now and then
I think you might like to hear something from us
Nice and easy but there's just one thing
You see, we never ever do nothing nice and easy
We always do it nice and rough
So we're going to take the beginning of this song
And do it easy
Then we're going to do the finish rough
This is the way we do 'Proud Mary'

PROJECTION: Riverboat

MUSIC: LAKA sings PROUD MARY

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTION: Ike Turner

LAKA: That song finally put us where we wanted to be. But success put something in Ike's head. With money from record sales, he built the studio he wanted. And started driving everybody hard...very hard...to get another hit record.

Ike'd always been...maybe not good...but good enough...to me. But when he started hitting some brick walls with our music, he started hitting me.

With Proud Mary money, he could also put all the cocaine he wanted in his head. Maybe that was it. He'd always been in control. But now he was cruel.

He was watching every move I made. Treating me like his personal slave.
It all came to a head on a trip to Dallas. In the car on the way to the hotel, he went after me again, for no reason. I decided enough was enough. I got out of there, and I didn't look back.

(LAKA moves stage right)

So now I had to rebuild my career. Or build a new one.

PROJECTION: Hollywood montage

I played anywhere - and everywhere . I did a lot of time in Vegas. I was on every tv show that'd have me: Sonny & Cher, Donny & Marie...Hollywood Squares. (laugh)

PROJECTION: Stadium Rock Concert

MUSIC: Band plays a bit of Stewart/Stones beat

LAKA: Then Rod Stewart invited me to do HOT LEGS with him on Saturday Night Live, and The Rolling Stones asked me to open for them on their American tour. And while I was playing with them, I realized...that's what I want to do. I want to fill stadiums.

SFX: Rock Concert Stadium cheers

(LAKA pauses, lets music go a few seconds while she images stadiums; music will transition under next dialogue into next song)

LAKA: A music manager named Roger Davies saw me...I guess he really saw me...and he agreed to take me on. And soon he delivered a song to me...that I delivered to the world... and the world really listened.

(LAKA moves center)

MUSIC: Band starts WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT

PROJECTION: New York City streets/skyline

(LAKA sings WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT.)

LAKA: (center stage) What's Love Got To Do With It? I'll tell you what it's got to do with. A Grammy Award. Song of the Year. And before I knew it...I was filling stadiums.

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTION: Press/Papparazi

LAKA: With all this new attention on me, the press wanted to know about my days with Ike...the abuse, our breakup. I refused to talk about it. I refused to dwell on that pain. I wanted to do nothing but move forward.

So I did. With lots more music. And lots more filled stadiums...all over the world.

PROJECTION: Mad Max scene

I even got a chance to do a movie. MAD MAX: BEYOND THUNDERDOME. I was Auntie Entity, the Amazon Queen of Barbertown.

(LAKA moves center stage. Becomes Aunty Entity.)

SFX: Racous yells from the Thunderdome

LAKA: (as Aunty Entity.) AAAAAAAH!!! WHAT'S THIS? WHAT'S THIS? You think I don't know the law? Wasn't it me who wrote it? And I say this man has broken the law. Right or wrong, we had a deal. And the law says, bust a deal...face the wheel! BUST A DEAL, FACE THE WHEEL!!!

(laughing) Man, that was a lot of fun.

PROJECTION: What's Love...movie poster

They made a movie ABOUT me, too. Called WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT? And once more, there was a lot of attention on me. And once more, they wanted to talk about my past. And once more I told them, No, I'm not going there. I didn't even watch the movie.

So I moved forward. Into more music. Into more life.

Right up to today, when there's a show on Broadway, titled...TINA.

What else?

PROJECTION: Large Type TINA

MUSIC: Band plays refrain of WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT

(LAKA exits stage left)

PROJECTION: St. Louis in the 60's - several images to cover costume change)

(LAKA returns, stage left, in costume that will cover Fontella Bass/Ann Peebles; possibly outfit where later - for Katherine Dunham, dress can be taken off onstage for a dance outfit?)

PROJECTION: Fontella Bass and Ann Peebles

LAKA: There's only one Tina. But some other St. Louis women were right behind her - and right beside her - giving us some great songs, some big hits.

Like Fontella Bass and Ann Peebles. Both were born in St. Louis. Both grew up singing with their families in church choirs. And both sang with the Oliver Sain band.

Fontella made some early records. She was produced by Ike. And Tina sang backup for her.

PROJECTION: Chess Records logo

LAKA: The big break for Fontella Bass came when she went to Chess Records - and gave them their first million-selling single since Chuck Berry, ten years earlier -

(LAKA moving center stage)

LAKA: Rescue Me.

MUSIC: LAKA sings RESCUE ME

PROJECTION: Ann Peebles

LAKA: And then...a few years later...Ann Peebles...gave us this song...

MUSIC: LAKA sings I CAN'T STAND THE RAIN

LAKA: And if you're wondering how that song came about, Ann Peebles told the whole story in her song, St. Louis Woman (with a Memphis Melody)

MUSIC: LAKA sings ST. LOUIS WOMAN (WITH A MEMPHIS MELODY)

PROJECTION: St. Louis in the 70's

LAKA: Fontella and Annie Peebles - two great St. Louis singers

And now let's talk about two other women...who expressed their art...expressed their souls...in other ways. One who came to St. Louis late in life. Another who left early.

PROJECTION: Young Katherine Dunham

LAKA: First, Katherine Dunham. Born in Chicago, she must have been born dancin'.

She started a private dance school for kids when she was a teenager.

PROJECTION: University of Chicago

LAKA: On to University of Chicago. Where she formed her first adult dance school.

PROJECTION: glimpses of Africa, Haiti, Jamaica

LAKA: Then off to Haiti and Jamaica, Trinidad and Martinique. Studied the culture, learned the dances. She could have gone on to an academic career, but she felt that dance could reach a larger audience.

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTIONS: 1940's/'50's Broadway/Hollywood images

LAKA: And did she ever reach a larger audience. She and her company danced all over the globe.

On Broadway and in Hollywood movies. Mexico, Europe, North Africa, Australia.

In New York City, she formed her School of Dance and Theatre. A Young artists came by to work with her...Eartha Kitt, James Dean, Gregory Peck and Sidney Poitier. Marlon Brando liked to drop in to play the bongo drums.

PROJECTIONS: Abstract graphic of dancers in a class

LAKA: And as she explored the outer reaches of dance, she developed what has become known as the Dunham Technique.

MUSIC: plays MAHI

(LAKA goes center stage; she can do modest movement to beat)

LAKA: The Dunham Technique is a technical dance that fuses the rhythms of Caribbean voodoo with the classic discipline of Western dance.
The Dunham Technique was brand new to the dance world. Everything on the body moved and it didn't stop moving.

MUSIC: MAHI/DANCE

LAKA: The dance and the drumming blended together.
This wasn't just a new dance style. It was a new art form

(LAKA moves stage right, as drumming slows and stops)

PROJECTIONS: East St. Louis in the 60's and 70's.

LAKA: Later, Katherine Dunham became artist-in-residence at Southern Illinois University, in Edwardsville.

She quickly became very aware of the challenge of poverty in East St. Louis.

MUSIC: Band plays CALYPSO BLUES

She'd give lectures. One night a member of the Imperial War Lords, a Black Power group, was in the audience. After she agreed to go with him to a bar, where she met other members of his group.

They were surprised by a police raid, Katherine was arrested. When the police found out who she was, they released her. But her arrest helped her gain the respect of the community, and the kids, and she was off and running.

She formed the Performing Arts Training Center, aimed right at the youth of East St. Louis. Soon, she had over a thousand students.

Her Training Center performed everywhere - capped by an appearance at The White House, with 42 of her East St. Louis kids.

PROJECTIONS: Scott Joplin and sheet music/something from TreeMonisha.

MUSIC: Band plays a bit from TREEMONISHA and under her bit on that

(LAKA moves stage left)

LAKA: In 1970, TREEMONISHA, Scott Joplin's opera that he composed in 1908, was rediscovered. It had never been produced during his lifetime.

But Morehouse College preparing a production. They invited Katherine to see a rehearsal, hoping they might be able to talk her into doing the choreography.

She watched one rehearsal, and proclaimed "Someone else will have to do this show...over my dead body." She took over and staged that production and took it to all the way to Broadway. Scott Joplin was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTION: Haiti boat people, early 90's

LAKA: And at the age of 83, she crowned her life of social activism with a 47-day hunger strike to protest the U.S.'s forced repatriation of Haitian refugee boat people.

MUSIC: Band plays CALYPSO BLUES

PROJECTION: Type or Image: Katherine Dunham/Dunham Museum/Dunham Hall

LAKA: Throughout her entire life, Katherine Dunham roamed this earth. Seeing, learning, dancing...and leaving her mark everywhere she went. And today both the Katherine Dunham Museum in East St. Louis and Dunham Hall on the campus of SIU-Edwardsville stand proudly.

(LAKA moves stage left)

LAKA: Another legacy was created by a woman who, unlike Katherine Dunham, was born here. And like Katherine, she filled her life with a whirlwind of creation. Not just dance...but also with poetry, with movies and theatre, with social activism...and more.

PROJECTION: Type: Maya Angelou

LAKA: Maya Angelou. She had the most difficult of beginnings. She was raped as a child. And when the man who did it was murdered - probably by her uncles - Maya was deeply traumatized. She had said his name, and so she believed she could kill someone with her voice. And she didn't want to speak again. She became mute. And didn't speak again. For five years. But it was five years when she steadily watched the world...reading books...observing everything...and becoming the writer the world would one day know.

PROJECTION: 50's era San Francisco

LAKA: Her family bounced her between St. Louis and Arkansas, and then she moved to Oakland, California.

And her life in art started to take off.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTION: Montage of dance/calypso dancers

MUSIC: beat starts

LAKA: Dancing with Alvin Ailey...before he was Alvin Ailey. They were known as "Al and Rita."

(LAKA begins a series of short, quick moves first stage left - then back stage right and forth - as MUSIC beat - drums/other instruments support her. A touch of calypso for the next section.)

LAKA: (glancing at drummer, doing a bit of calypso dance) She did calypso dances in clubs, recorded an album called MISS CALYPSO, and was in an off-Broadway show that turned into the movie CALYPSO HEAT WAVE.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTION: Harlem in the 50's

LAKA: Guess that was enough calypso, so she started writing, and at the behest of her buddy, James Baldwin, she joined the Harlem Writers Guild and was published for the first time.

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTION: MLK

LAKA: She met Martin Luther King and started working for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

(LAKA moves stage right)

PROJECTION: James Earl Jones Cicely Tyson

LAKA: She did some acting - appearing off Broadway in Jean Genet's THE BLACKS, along with James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson.

(LAKA moves stage left)

PROJECTION: Ghana

LAKA: She married a South African freedom fighter, moved to Ghana, and became a leading journalist there.

(LAKA moves stage right)

MUSIC: Alters beat, slower beat, slow LAKA delivery of next segment)

PROJECTION: MLK Malcolm X

LAKA: She befriended Malcolm X...(long pause)...and was working with him when he was assassinated.

And..she was helping Martin Luther King organize a march...(long pause)...when he was shot down.

(LAKA pauses, shakes head)

(LAKA stage left)

MUSIC: Music slowly resumes to mid-beat as it heads to close

PROJECTION: I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

LAKA: She wrote the first of her autobiographies - I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS. The book established Maya Angelou as a writer of international renown.

And she had plenty more to do.

(LAKA slowly moves stage right - MUSIC has stopped).

PROJECTION: TV/Movie/Music imagery

LAKA: She kept writing. Composed music. Movie scores, songs for Roberta Flack. She directed plays, and her first feature film. More acting - on stage, she was nominated for a Tony Award - and on TV, she was in a show called ROOTS. And she became a Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.

Maya kept writing. A poem she recited at Bill Clinton's inauguration - and another poem commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations

Here, one of her most powerful poems - PHENOMENAL WOMAN.

(LAKA moves center stage)

PROJECTION: Maya Angelou

MUSIC: Underneath

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

LAKA: That's Maya's Song.

PROJECTION: St. Louis imagery/contemporary

LAKA: Maya Angelou. Katherine Dunham. Willie Mae Ford Smith. Josephine Baker. Fontella Bass and Ann Peebles. Tina. Phenomenal Women. St. Louis Women.

We've been so lucky to have these women be part of our lives here.
Each one contributing to the rich cultural tapestry that has
made our city what it is. And helped make us what we are.

And I'd like to thank you each and every one of you for coming out to see this St. Louis Woman
tell this story.

Thank You, St. Louis!

CURTAIN CALL MUSIC: LAKA sings, Band plays Eartha Kitt's ST. LOUIS BLUES

END

