

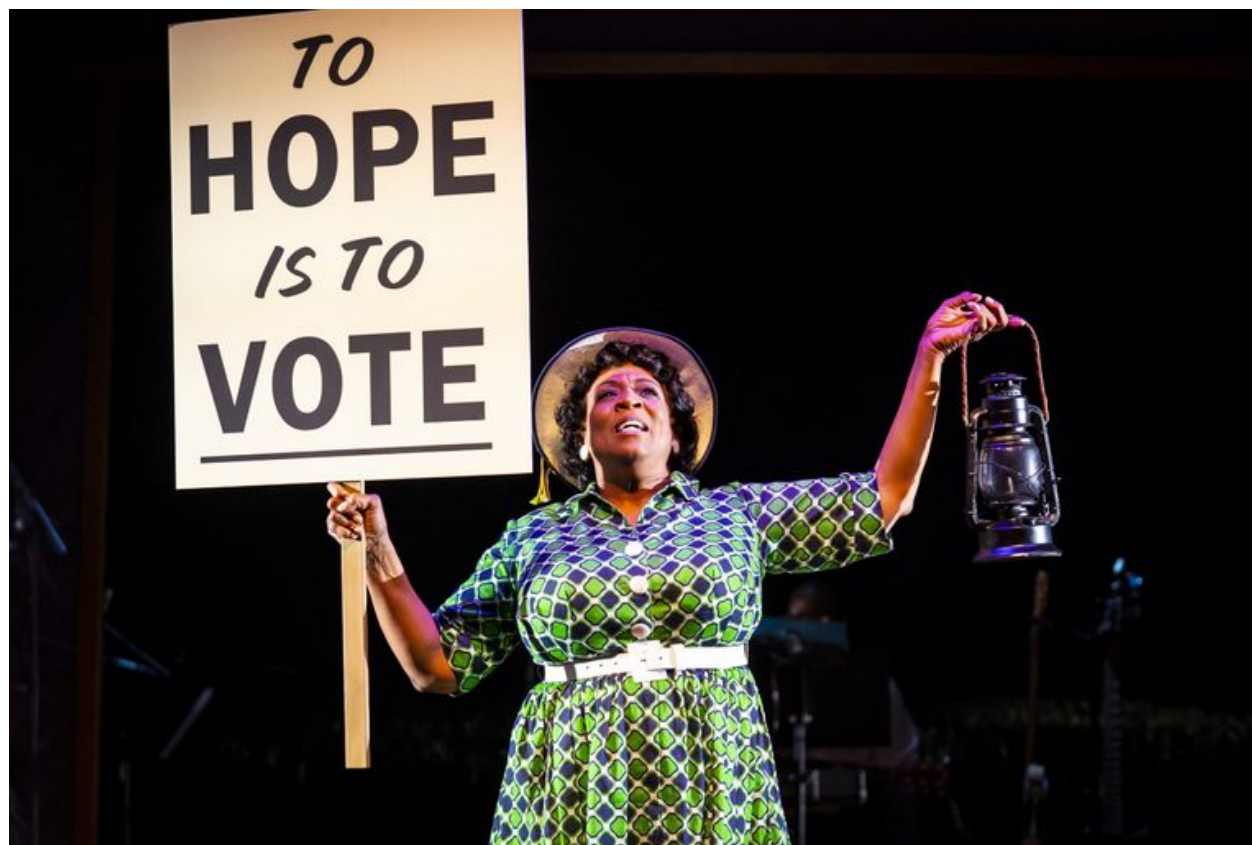
# Seattle playwright Cheryl L. West brings to the stage voices of civil rights leaders whose stories are not as frequently told | The Seattle Times

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Entertainment | Theater

## Seattle playwright Cheryl L. West brings to the stage voices of civil rights leaders whose stories are not as frequently told

Jan. 13, 2022 at 6:00 am



E. Faye Butler in "Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer" by Cheryl L. West, directed by Henry Godinez at Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Co-commissioned by Seattle Rep... (Liz Lauren)

***Editor's note:** Given the rapid spread of the coronavirus omicron variant, please heed local health authorities' safety recommendations as they're updated, and check your event's website for coronavirus requirements and the latest information.*

With her newest play, Cheryl L. West is making sure we hear the voices of civil rights leaders whose stories are not as frequently told.

“You’re seeing how the past connects with the present and the sacrifices that were made on our behalf for the changes and policies that we have now. We have a long way to go to really achieve true equity in this country, but it’s on the backs of the people who came before us that we’re at the point where we are,” said West.

Co-commissioned by Seattle Rep and Chicago’s Goodman Theatre for the 2019 New Stages Festival, “Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer,” is finally getting its Seattle stage premiere. The one-woman show written by local playwright Cheryl L. West will be performed by E. Faye Butler in the Bagley Wright Theater at Seattle Rep Jan. 14-Feb. 13.

in fall 2020. “Speak On It!” has been performed around the country, from Washington, D.C., to Sarasota, Florida, and Ashland, where it reopened the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in summer 2021.

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West, who is Seattle Rep’s most-produced living

Seattle Rep, and it's been thrilling for us to find new projects together, like 'Shout Sister Shout!,' and 'Fannie,' and others on the horizon," said Abraham.

West became interested in Hamer while researching another project. Born in 1917, Hamer was the 20<sup>th</sup> child of Mississippi sharecroppers. She left school at age 12 and worked on a plantation until 1962, when she was fired for her voter registration efforts. Permanently injured by a police beating in 1963, Hamer continued her political activism, speaking around the country and attempting to run for public office. Hamer also launched the Freedom Farm Cooperative and low-income housing projects. She died in 1977 of breast cancer.

"The more I read, the more I said, 'What a story!' This woman was one of the best grassroots leaders our country has ever produced. She was fearless," said West, who supplemented her reading with firsthand stories from Hamer's civil rights attorney Victor McTeer and her campaign manager Charles McLaurin.

West envisioned a one-woman show that would strongly

play builds on that musicality with civil rights songs performed by a three-piece band.

“A one-woman show with music was kind of a departure for me, but I’m so glad I did it this way because the

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were all really looking for hope, when we were looking for that sort of resilience of spirit?” asks West. “She was such an inspiring woman. So the show asks the question, ‘What

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