



INVISIBLE THEATRE - PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Invisible Theatre continues its 49th Anniversary Season

with

A Deborah Riley Draper Film

VERSAILLES '73

Sunday, March 8, 2020 at 2:30 PM

The Loft Cinema

3233 E. Speedway Blvd., Tucson, Arizona

**\$10/\$8 Loft Members/IT Season Ticket Holders
(520) 795-0844 <https://loftcinema.org/>**

(February 21, 2020 Tucson, Arizona); Join us for a screening of the critically acclaimed documentary **Versailles '73**. It is the first intimate look at the infamous Palace of Versailles fashion show fundraiser. The documentary is an exciting, behind-the-scenes story of the competition between French and American designers that resulted in the elevation of the U.S. fashion industry and the breaking of the color barrier for black models.

Join award winning director Deborah Riley Draper and Fashion Icon and "Versailles" model Norma Jean Darden for a Q and A after the film!

**Become an IT VIP and receive reserved seating,
and a post screening gourmet dinner with our guest artists!**

\$100 (\$75 tax deductible).

Limited seating - please call (520) 882-9721

**This Production is made possible in part through the generous support of
Anne F. Cavanagh**

VERSAILLES '73

Not many moments in life change the course of history, shatter the status quo and usher in a paradigm shift. But on November 28, 1973 at the Chateau de Versailles, such a moment took place. For the second time in history, the Americans stormed France in an epic battle. This battle, however would pit the French haute couture establishment -- Yves Saint Laurent, Christian Dior, Hubert de Givenchy, Pierre Cardin and Emmanuel Ungaro -- against American designers Anne Klein, Stephen Burrows, Oscar de la Renta and Halston. In front of an audience of royalty, millionaire luminaries and icons including Andy Warhol, Princess Grace of Monaco, Christina Onassis and Josephine Baker, the Americans catapulted ready-to-wear to global stardom. Their secret weapon was fresh, innovative designs and the tour de force, a collective of stunning black models who sashayed down the runway and into the hearts of the high-profile audience.

Versailles '73: American Runway Revolution is a funny, extraordinary and often poignant collection of memories shared by the models, designers, journalists, patrons and others lucky enough to witness the night that changed fashion forever. The cast includes Stephen Burrows, Bethann Hardison, Marisa Berenson, Pat Cleveland, Grace Mirabella, Harold Koda, Dennis Christopher, Mikki Taylor and more.

“This is an excellent story, and Ms. Draper tells it clearly and stylishly, teasing out the interesting angles and repercussions. She gives you all the backstage drama and one-upmanship of ‘let’s put on a show,’ building to the appropriate climax: the big night.”

-The New York Times

"Superbly told, enjoyably dishy."

-The Los Angeles Times

TO PURCHASE TICKETS OR FOR INFORMATION:

To purchase tickets for the Versailles '73 film at The Loft Cinema, phone (520) 795-0644 or on-line at loftcinema.org.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:

The Invisible Theatre is fully accessible to patrons using wheelchairs or with other mobility challenges. Seating areas to accommodate persons using wheelchairs are located in the theatre. If patrons require special seating they should inform the Box Office at (520) 882-9721.

ABOUT THIS PRESS RELEASE:

This mailing list is for members of the professional media and allied organizations who have requested e-mail press releases from The Invisible Theatre. If you no longer wish to receive e-mail press releases or if there is someone else with your organization that should be added to our list, send a message to cathy@invisibletheatre.com or phone Alayna at (520) 884-0672 with your request.

ONLINE MEDIA MATERIALS:

Photos of Norma Jean Darden and Deborah Riley Draper are attached to this press release. They may also be downloaded at www.invisibletheatre.com (Press).

You may send an email to cathy@invisibletheatre.com requesting photos be sent directly to you.

GETTING TO KNOW NORMA JEAN DARDEN

From Model to Restaurateur, She Creates a Legacy Through Fashion and Food

When you walk into Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too, the unassuming restaurant serving authentic southern cuisine and award-winning peach cobbler will have you coming for the gumbo, collard greens and fried chicken and leaving as a storyteller sharing our own memories around food. Owned by Norma Jean Darden, the restaurant has become a Harlem icon since opening its doors 21 years ago on Halloween day. "We couldn't see who are guests were," jokes Darden. However, since then, the former model turned restaurateur has seen a diverse and hungry roster of diners at her cozy eatery located across from Morningside Park.

Before there were thoughts of fresh ingredients, menus, family recipes and catering events, there was the fashion runway. A model with the Wilhelmina agency for seven years, Darden worked for fashion powerhouses Anne Klein, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren and also appeared in commercials and print with *Vogue*, *Harper Bazaar* and *ESSENCE* magazines to her list of credits.

Darden was one of eleven models selected to take part in the historic fashion event known as The Battle of Versailles Fashion Show in 1973 where French designers battled their fashions against American designers in a special effort to raise money for the restoration of the Palace of Versailles. Darden was later honored in 2011 with a Style Award by the *Huffington Post*.

When an illness ended her modeling career, she went to work for a Black fashion designer who asked her to bring a dish that everyone could enjoy after one of his fashion shows. Darden and her sister Carole made a quiche that would change the trajectory of her fashion career once again. When they received an inquiry about their catering services, Darden says she told the person, "We're not food people. We don't know anything about this. And she said, 'My budget is \$5000,' and I said, 'We're in,'" she laughs. From there, the sibling duo, who still work together to this day, started Spoonbread Catering that continues to excite taste buds 25 years later.

Shortly after starting their catering business, the Darden sisters wrote a cookbook, "Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Black Family," in 1978 that sold more than 200,000 copies before being reprinted as a paperback. The book's title also inspired Darden's one-woman Off-Broadway show in the late 1990s. Her play, "Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine," traveled the country telling stories of her family history as she prepared food which the audience ate. "I was the only playwright who could eat their words. I was one of the first people to do a play with food. I cooked while I told stories and then they ate after intermission and then they told their stories about food. And boy did we get some strange stories," says Darden.

Her own stories included finding out that her paternal grandfather was a slave and only nine-years-old when slavery was abolished. Something the family didn't talk about. She also shared stories of being one of thirteen children and how they spent summers in North Carolina with aunts and uncles. "We got put on the train with a little name tag and went to Wilson, N.C. every summer. We would ride all night and have a shoebox lunch (fried chicken, deviled eggs, carrot and celery sticks and a box of raisins). Then we get to Wilson and our aunts and uncles would be there and that was our summer," says Darden. Before ending its run, "Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine," was described as a show that embraced "the commonality of all folks who cherish family life and love to eat."

Four years after starting their catering business, Darden opened Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too in the storefront right beside Spoonbread Catering. "We didn't know anything about being in the restaurant business, because we were caterers," says Darden, but over time they managed to figure it out. Now a cultural spot offering dishes inspired by her family that are also in the cookbook, the restaurant has welcomed some of Harlem's top elite diners including President Bill Clinton who told Darden that they had the best collard greens.

Family photos adorn the restaurant's wall as well as press clippings that diners can look at as they enjoy a weeknight dinner or Sunday brunch. Catering clients over the years have included Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and the late Minnie Mandela as well as clients as far as Washington, D.C.

Darden says she keep the staff small and calls in extra help when catering needs require. Having helped so many staff members launch their own catering businesses, she also influenced one of R&B's hottest singers who was working as one of her catering waiters along his road to stardom. Darden said, at an event years ago, singer Maxwell saw her and shared how he used to work for her and how much he learned. Unknowingly, Darden says she asked him, "What was your name back then?" And he replied, "Maxwell," she chuckles.

It is hard to visit Harlem and not hear the name Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too when looking for authentic, made from scratch soul food. Darden and her team will be joining the more than 60 participating restaurants and food vendors once again at this year's Harlem EatUp! on Sunday, May 18. Foodies and soul food enthusiasts can look forward to sampling Darden's crispy catfish with peach slaw and cilantro and buttery cornbread. Since starting five years ago, the event has been a great vehicle for introduction Miss Mamie's to those returning or visiting Harlem for the first time who are not familiar with the restaurant. It also gives Darden another opportunity to share her story and her family's story through food, one plate at a time.



Norma Jean Darden

(Photo credit courtesy of V. Sheree Williams)

ABOUT DEBORAH RILEY DRAPER

Filmmaker

Deborah Riley Draper is an award-winning and critically-acclaimed filmmaker, motivational speaker and advertising agency veteran. *Variety* Magazine named Draper to their “2016 Top 10 Documakers to Watch” list. She is a 2018 TEDx speaker, 2019 Facebook SEEN Initiative participant and frequent guest on panels and in media speaking on storytelling, diversity and advertising. Her 2019 short film *Illegal Rose* starring Jasmine Guy tells the story of a disengaged nurse who accidentally kidnaps a 9 year-old ICE Detention Center runaway. Draper adapted the screenplay and will direct her next project, *Coffee Will Make You Black*, which is produced by Octavia Spencer and Tate Taylor based on the coming-of-age novel of the same name. Her 2016 documentary, *Olympic Pride, American Prejudice*, tells the untold story of 18 African Americans who defied Hitler and Jim Crow in 1936 and is a 2017 nominee for the NAACP Image Awards Outstanding Documentary Film and qualified for the 2017 Oscars. The film world-premiered at the 2016 LA Film Festival and is an official selection at many festivals, including the Traverse City Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, St. Louis International Film Festival, Cambridge International Film Festival (UK), and the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival.

Her debut film, *Versailles '73: American Runway Revolution*, opened New York Fashion Week and Toronto Fashion Week in 2012. *Versailles '73* is the first intimate look at the infamous Palace of Versailles fashion show fundraiser, which catapulted the American ready-to-wear to global prominence. Draper will serve as executive producer of the upcoming feature film version of the optioned documentary.

Draper’s leadership in advertising can be seen in campaigns for Lamborghini, Coca-Cola classic, FedEx and adidas. She has earned two regional Emmys, a Gold Effie, and several Addy Awards.



**Deborah Riley
Draper**

*(Photo credit courtesy
of the artist)*