The Canadian Stage Company presents
The Nightwood Theatre Production of

HARLEM DUET

Written and Directed by
Djanet Sears

OCTOBER 27 - NOVEMBER 29, 1997
Notes of a “Colored Girl…”

32 short reasons why I WRITE FOR THE THEATRE

By Djanet Sears

1 Carved from that same tree in another age, counsel/warriors who made drums talk now in another tongue make words to walk in rhythm cross the printed page carved from that same tree in another age

Khephra
Talking Drums #1 (Khephra 125)

2 Two years ago I found myself speaking with esteemed writer and Nobel laureate, Derek Walcott, about an upcoming staged reading I was directing of his play, A Branch of the Blue Nile. Towards the end of our conversation I politely requested an opportunity to ask him, what I termed, a stupid question. His eyebrows seemed to crawl up to his hairline, but he didn’t say no. Not that I gave him a chance. Swiftly managing to kick all second thoughts out of my mind, I boldly asked him to tell me, why he wrote. He retreated to the back of his seat, and after several long moments of pondering, he replied, “I don’t know”. He said that writing really wasn’t a choice for him. From as far back as he could recall, he had written. He described it as a type of organic urge. He didn’t know why he wrote, but when he experienced this urge, he felt compelled to act on it. Be it on a plane, first thing in the morning, or last thing at night.

3 From as far back as I can recall, I never believed in miracles. My life had taught me not to. Then I witnessed the birth of my sister’s daughter. I’d seen birth films. I’d even studied human reproduction at the undergraduate level. But this child came out of my sister – already alive. I mean, not yet fully born, her head alone protruding from between her mother’s legs, she wailed. Full of voice, she slipped out of the velvety darkness that was her mother’s womb, into the light. I was overcome. I watched as Owyn, this tiny, golden-umber coloured soul, caught by an opaque rubber gloved doctor, in a white coat, was separated from the placenta and bundled into blanched cloth.
I stood there for a moment and wondered how she would come to know of herself, blinded by the glare of snow? What would this fair world tell her? I experienced such a sadness for her — or maybe it was for myself.

4 I wanted something different for her. I wanted there to be no question of her right to take up space on this planet.

5 I was already eighteen when I saw Ntozake Shange’s, For Coloured Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf, in New York City. This was the first live stage production by a writer of African descent I had ever seen. This will not be Owyn’s fate. She must have access to a choir of African voices, chanting a multiplicity of African experiences. One voice does not a chorus make. And I will not wait.

6 I harbour deep within me tales that I’ve never seen told. I too must become an organ and add my perspective, my lens, my stories, to the ever growing body of work by and about people of African descent.

7 Thirty-seven years ago, and nine months before I was born, in a country over three thousand miles away, Lorraine Hansberry began rehearsals for her first play. In the season of my birth, A Raisin in the Sun opened to extraordinary critical and popular acclaim.

8...Raisin in the Sun marked a turning point, for until this time no black writer, black actor, black director, or technician had benefited financially from any of the plays about black people that had been presented [in the commercial theatre]. (King vii)
SOMEDAY SOMEONE’LL STAND UP AND TALK ABOUT ME, AND WRITE ABOUT ME – BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL AND SING ABOUT ME, AND PUT ON PLAYS ABOUT ME! I RECKON IT’LL BE ME MYSELF! YES, IT’LL BE ME.

‘Note on Commercial Theatre’ (Hughes 190)

Work Cited


KHEPHRA, TALKING DRUMS #1.
Essence Magazine, Vol. 20, No. 11, (March, 1990)


PHILIP, Marlene. She Tried Her Tongue (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1989)

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The Government of Canada through the Department of Heritage and The Canada Council, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Toronto through Toronto Arts Council, the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation, and financial assistance provided by The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto.

Barbara Barnes Hopkins
Magi
Most recently: Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre). Misc.: I come lifting and celebrating the name “Jesus,” in praise and thanksgiving. For healing my life as well as my hurts. Whose tender grace and mercy has enabled me to meet and work with my favorite longtime (she)ro the very gifted and uncommon Maya Anjelou. Has permitted me to witness the fruition of a vision he gave my Robin less than two years ago. On September 2 it manifested “Village Academy” complete with students and staff. Blessed further to again occupy “Magi.” Oh Joy! The “Village” is not set in “Harlem” but the favor of the Lord is upon them both. My God is able and I love Him so much!! He knows when and how to bless me.

Jeff Jones
Canada
For Canadian Stage: Ton-Ton Julian in Once On This Island. Most recently: Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre). Other credits: Rockin’ In Paradise and Once Around the City (Mirvish Productions); the title role in Rigoletto (Theatre Passe Muraille) for which he received a Dora nomination. Television/Film/Radio: Television credits include producer and director of Black World for MTV. Recent film credits include Elvis meets Nixon, Taking The Falls, Top Cops, Counterstrike, Witness to Survival, Down In The Delta and Blind Faith. In November ’96 he recorded “Jeff Jones Live in Concert” at the Glenn Gould Studio. Birthplace: Detroit, Michigan. Misc.: An accomplished vocalist, Jeff has performed with the Count Basie Orchestra, Cecilie Fenrette, the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, Herbie Hancock, Helen Reddy and Jackie Richardson.

Dawn Roach
Amah/Mona

Alison Sealy-Smith
Billie
For Canadian Stage: Hippolyta/Titania in A Midsummer Night’s Dream for the 1995 and 1996 Dream in High Park, and Doreen in Tartuffe (Dora Mavor Moore nomination). Most recently: Billie in Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre) for which she received a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Performance. Other credits: (Partial list) Three seasons at the Stratford Festival – highlights include Rosaline in Love’s Labour’s Lost and Olivia in Twelfth Night. She has enjoyed a close association with Young Peoples Theatre over the past ten years as a performer and will direct there later next season. For Nightwood Theatre, Alison has performed in The Wonder of Man and directed Martha & Elvira. Television/Film/Radio: Television and film credits include three seasons on Street Legal, appearances on E.N.G., Due South, The Newsroom, Zoo, Talk Me, and the voice of “Storm” for the animated series X-Men. Alison has performed in countless CBC Radio dramas. Misc.: Alison would like to dedicate this show to her two daughters – Makyla and Rasheeda.
Nigel Shawn Williams

For Canadian Stage: Paul in Six Degrees of Separation (Dora Award for Outstanding Performance), Richmond in Richard III, Salisbury in Edward IV and Beavis in Henry VI from the War of the Roses Trilogy.

Most recently: World premiere of Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre).

Other credits: Canadian premieres of Angels in America (Manitoba Theatre Centre), The Third Land (Volcano Theatre), Six Degrees of Separation (Alberta Theatre Projects), and The Tyrant of Pontus (Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace). Other credits include Rashomon, Simpleton of the Unexpected Isle, Petrified Forest, Six of Calais (Shaw Festival); Our Town, Twelfth Night, Treasure Island (Stratford Festival); Macbeth (Young Peoples Theatre), Democracy (Manitoba Theatre Centre) and Saved (Annex Theatre).

Television/Film/Radio: Television credits include Black Harbour, Forever Knight, E.N.G. and Top Cops. CBC Radio credits include Wuthering Heights, The Island of Dr. Moreau, Fannished Road and Critical Mass.

Lisa Tobias

Cellist

Most recently: Performs with the Metropolitan Chamber Players.

Other credits: Lisa has performed and recorded with the harp, flute and cello trio ensemble. In 1993-94, she toured to Rome, Dublin and Amsterdam with the performing arts and leadership training group, Up With People!

Birthplace: Canadian of South African heritage.

Misc.: Lisa began her cello studies at the age of six. She is currently under the tutelage of Bryan Epperson and her past teachers have included Ann Valletyn and Zdenek Konicek. Lisa is presently working in Arts Administration at the Glenn Gould Professional School of the Royal Conservatory of Music.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Djanet Sears

Playwright & Director

Most recently: Winner of the Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding New Play and Outstanding Direction for Nightwood Theatre's production of Harlem Duet last spring. Djanet spent part of the '96 theatre season as an international playwriting residence at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre in New York City where Harlem Duet received a workshop and a public reading. She has also maintained a longstanding relationship with Nightwood Theatre and was their playwright in residence during the 1994-95 season. Harlem Duet, published by Scirocco Press, is the sequel to Afrika Solo (Sister Vision Press, 1990), Canada's first published stage play by a person of African descent. This groundbreaking work played to critical acclaim both at Toronto's Factory Theatre Studio, and Ottawa's Great Canadian Theatre Company. Afrika Solo was also adapted for CBC Radio, where it took first prize at the International Major Armstrong Awards, and a silver prize at the International Radio Festival of New York. Her other stage writing credits include: Who Killed Katie Ross (Stolen Lands) Ground Zero Productions, currently available in the anthology Taking The Stage: Plays by Canadian Women (PUC, 1994); Double Trouble, Shakes, and contributing writer on The Mother Project for Crossroads Theatre (USA).

Other credits: Djanet is a directing associate at The Canadian Stage Company. Theatre directing credits include: The Wonder of Man by Diana Braithwaite at the Poor Alex for Nightwood Theatre; Princess Pocohontas and the Blue Spots by Monique Mojica at A Space's Mayworks Festival and The From the Ground Up Theatre Festival; co-director of Dark Diaspora... in Dub by adhri zihndi manda (Toronto Fringe Festival); A Streetcar Named Desire (Talent over Tradition). Djanet was also the artistic director of Negrophilia: An African American Retrospective: 1959-71 for Toronto Theatre Alliance's Loon Café.

Television/Film: A Dora Award nominated stage performer, as well as a Gemini Award nominated screen actor, Djanet is the performer of one of her most successful plays Afrika Solo. She has also co-starred in the Canadian feature film Milk and Honey, and starred in the Canadian motion picture April 01. Her other screen credits include featured appearances in over 25 works for cinema and television.

Astrid Janson

Set Designer

For Canadian Stage: Sets and costumes for Passion, and the design for the upcoming production of Molly Sweeney.

Other credits: Death of a Salesman, Sweet Bird of Youth, Long Day's Journey Into Night (Stratford Festival); Dancing at Lughnasa, The Miracle Worker (The Grand Theatre), Three Tall Women (Citadel Theatre); Michael Hollingsworth's The Global Village: Part II and Part III. Astrid has also designed for The Paris Opera Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Canadian Opera Company.

Misc.: Astrid is the winner of eight Dora Mavor Moore Awards and the Toronto Drama Bench Award for Distinguished Contribution to Canadian Theatre.

Charlotte Dean

Costume Designer

For Canadian Stage: Arcadia (co-production with the Manitoba Theatre Centre), A Midsummer Night's Dream at Dream in High Park, Transit of Venus, The Monument, Odd Jobs and The Legend of the Avro Arrow.

Most recently: Inexpressible Island (Necessary Angel/Canadian Stage), In Good King Charles' Golden Days (Shaw Festival).

Other credits: Seven Lears, The Tragedy of King Lear, Three in the Back, Two in the Head, Property, Glenn and Not Wanted on the Voyage (Necessary Angel); Suddenly Last Summer and My Fair Lady (Citadel Theatre); The Taming of the Shrew and As You Like It (Stratford Festival); The Diary of Anne Frank and Jacob Two-Two (Young Peoples Theatre); Mrs. Klein and The Retreat (Tarragon).

Birthplace: Winona, Ontario.

Misc.: Charlotte has received four Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding Costume Design.

Bonnie Beecher

Lighting Designer

For Canadian Stage: The Dream in High Park production of Romeo and Juliet.

Most recently: Still the Night (Tapestry Theatre/Alberta Theatre Projects), End of Season (Theatre Direct), The Two Mrs. Carrols and The Conjuror Part II (Shaw Festival).

Other credits: Ain't Misbehavin' (Theatre...
Aquarius), Corridors (Desrosiers Dance Theatre), Blessings (Tarragon Theatre), and Riot (Great Canadian Theatre Company).

Misc.: Bonnie has received five Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations and won the 1995 award for her design of Frida K. at the Tarragon Theatre. Future engagements include Doc (Great Canadian Theatre Company) and One Eyed Kings (Tarragon).

Allen Booth
Arranger, Composer and Sound Designer

Most recently: World Premiere of Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre) and co-created the documentary series Exhibit A which airs Tuesday nights on Discovery Channel. Other credits: Allen designs web sites for corporations, composes music for films and writes for television. Recently he designed the corporate web site for NBTEL, New Brunswick's telephone company, composed the music for Our Hiroshima, a documentary about Canada's involvement in the creation of the atom bomb, and co-wrote episodes of Global TV's Traders.

Naomi Campbell
Stage Manager

For Canadian Stage: The Monument (in co-production with Necessary Angel and Manitoba Theatre Company).

Most recently: Assistant Director/Stage Manager for Frida K. (Mexico City, Vancouver East Cultural Centre), Producer/Stage Manager for The Death of General Wolfe (Nightswimming), Stage Manager for High Life (Crow's Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, Autumn Leaf Performance, Theatre Smith-Gilmour, I Fiammighi in Belgium, Theatreworks and The Urge Collective).

Misc.: Naomi was the Producer for Equity Showcase Theatre from 1991-95.

Andrea Ottley
Apprentice Stage Manager

Most recently: World Premiere of Harlem Duet (Nightwood Theatre).

Other credits: C'était avant la guerre... (Théâtre Français), Bog Babies (Theatre Passe Muraaille), Escape from Happiness (Factory Theatre).

Misc.: Andrea is a graduate of McGill University and the Waterloo University Drama program. For My Earl and Bubbles. Power to the People!

Vikki Anderson
Assistant Set Designer

Most recently: Costume design for Brad Fraser's new play Martin Yesterday (Buddies in Bad Times).

Other credits: Vikki has worked with Crow's Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, Autumn Leaf Performance, Theatre Smith-Gilmour, I Fiammighi in Belgium, Theatreworks and The Urge Collective.

Misc.: Vikki has been designing and directing in Toronto over the past three years. She is currently designing set and costumes for Random Acts, a new production by Diane Flacks (Buddies in Bad Times & Nightwood Theatre).

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Nightwood Theatre welcomes you to an important Canadian drama.

Harlem Duet has been an extraordinary achievement for Nightwood Theatre. The premiere production last April received an overwhelming response from audiences and critics alike, garnered four Dora Awards in September, and as you will see tonight is bursting forth in this new second production. Harlem Duet encourages us in the creation of contemporary Canadian Theatre.

More than anything, Harlem Duet is an impressive culmination of powerful artistry and enormous courage on the part of all the artists involved, and most notably, on the part of Djanet Sears playing multiple roles of playwright, director and visionary.

Nightwood has been honoured by Harlem Duet since its inception. We thankfully acknowledge the many artists who have generously assisted in fueling this play to continue bringing it to life.

Leslie Lester
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Producer
Artistic Director

Nightwood Theatre is grateful for the continued financial support of Nancy's Very Own Foundation and the Laidlaw Foundation.


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