

Wanda's Picks February 27, 2008

Contributed by Wanda Sabir
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Walkin' & Talkin' Bill Hawkins … In Search of My Father

Written and performed by W. Allen Taylor, the wonderful play closes this Sunday, May 2 at the African American Art and Culture Complex, 762 Fulton Street in San Francisco. The shows runs Thursday – Saturday at 8 p.m.. and Sunday at 3 p.m. Visit www.walkintalkin.com and www.afrosolo.org or call (800) 838-3006 for tickets, (415) 771-2376, for information. I love this show. In it Allen searches for a father he never knew, How much is one's identity connected to one's roots? Can you whole if there are pieces oneself one doesn't know or can't access? On a certain level Allen's story is the story of black people separated by generations from their roots. Can any of us be authentically African when we don't know who our people are? Well Allen finds people who tell him about his father, beginning with his mother—the other woman who kept the secret to protect her son, herself and perhaps the man she loved. Where does this leave Allen? Well confused, but in this journey Allen uncovers a lot about himself and the man whose genes he carried—he discovers that they were closer than he ever knew. The journey is musical and entertaining as the deejays –son and dad get to know one another in this journey Allen undertakes single-handedly through the medium of music. The era is one the film Talk to Me recalls, when Race Music and deejays who combined news on the ground with music that reflected the sentiments of the times, were being copied and edged out of the business by white deejays on neighboring stations who were watching their ratings fall. Men like Allen's dad were pioneers in the industry. Masters of rhyme they provided a show for their audiences listening pleasure. Allen did his homework and the story, while well documented flows with ease from start to finish. I've seen Walkin' & Talkin' Bill Hawkins in various stages of its development and each time I was pleased. I don't know if anything has changed since I saw it in it's Berkeley run at The Marsh. You don't want to miss this amazing story about a son's search for his dad.

The Art of Living Black 2008 Open Studios March 1-2

Lorraine Bonner will be at Mills College, 5000 MacArthur Blvd., Student Union, Oakland, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visit http://www.therichmondartcenter.org/html/new_exhibitions.html At the Richmond Art Center, 2540 Barrett Avenue, Richmond, besides the TAOLB group show, is Emory Douglas: the Art of Protest. Opens studios continues next week. Gallery hours at The Richmond Art Center at Tuesday-Saturday, 12 to 5 p.m. Call (510) 620-6772 or email: admin@therichmondartcenter.org
Admission is free.

Haitian Song Class March 1 @The Drum Museum

12-2 p.m. at 609 Paris St. @ Italy St. in San Francisco. The fee of \$20 includes a haitian Song book compiled by Zeke Nealy. For information call (415) 469-8688 or (415) 425-8513 or email: zdrumz@msn.com

New Roots Band

The New Roots Band features two sisters who have been delighting audiences from the stage since they were youngsters growing up in Kansas City: Trombonist, Angela Wellman and vocalist Lori Wellman. New Roots performs spirited, contemporary music, creating new forms, styles, and roots in the Jazz tradition. The band also features the award-winning composer and trumpeter, Mark Wright and the highly acclaimed contemporary Jazz guitarist and genuine national jazz treasure, Calvin Keys. New Roots was recently featured at the San Francisco de Young Museum's “Jazz at the Intersection” series and has performed at many Bay Area Jazz Festivals.

The band is performing at Anna's Jazz Island, 2120 Allston Way, Downtown Berkeley. Reservations are recommended. Call (510) 841-5299 after 5 p.m. Visit www.AnnasJazzIsland.com. The club validates (\$3 for the evening) for Allston Parking Garage, a half block west of Shattuck. A map is on the web site.

Criminal: Art and Criminal Justice in America Symposium

This Saturday, March 1, 12 Noon to 6 p.m. there is a symposium entitled: Prison/Culture: Art, Issues and Dialog with a keynote address given by Angela Y. Davis from 2:30 to 4 p.m. This will be followed by original performances from Intersection for the Arts's Prison Project. Earlier that day, 12- 2:30 p.m. there will be break-out sessions on juvenile justice, prison poetry, the abolition of the death penalty and more. Robert King, Angola 3 representative, is in town and will participate in one of the workshops earlier in the day. King recently celebrated seven years of freedom. Visit www.angola3.com and www.kingsfreelines.com For information about the symposium visit www.gallery.sfsu.edu or call the gallery (415) 338-6535. You can also visit www.theintersection.org for information on their exhibit, The Prison Project

up until March 29. The symposium is in Jack Adams Hall, Student Center, SF State, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco. Visit the blog which is linked to this site for photos and a story about Robert King.

SFBAAAM Concert Sunday, March 2

“Beware of the Vibes March: A Vibraphonist Summit” features: Yancie Taylor, Herb Gibson and Roger Glen with string section on violins, cello and viola, Sandy Poindexter; rhythm section featuring Glem Pearson on piano, Marcus Shelby on bass and Babatunde Lea on drums. It all happens Sunday, March 2, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music, 1616 Franklin Street, Oakland. tickets are \$20 general and \$15 for seniors and children under 18. Gourmet delights by Dial-a-Chef are included in the ticket price. Order tickets at www.brownpapertickets.com. Tickets are also available at the door. Remember when Yoshi’s came out with a CD to celebrate their anniversary and omitted black artists from the CD? Well SFBAAAM, which stands for San Francisco Bay Area African American Musicians, was formed after a series of meetings over a number of months for jazz artists to have a vehicle to control the medium, share resources and develop community. These concerts occur periodically at the Oakland Public Conservatory, the site of these intense and extremely rewarding gatherings last year.

A New Musical Based on Rosie the Riveter & Richmond's Kaiser Shipyards

The play, Rivets with book and lyrics by Kathryn G. McCarty and a musical score by Mitchell Covington, directed by Clay David, is at the John and Jean Knox Center for Performing Arts at Contra Costa College Campus in San Pablo, February 28 & 29, March 1 at 8 p.m.. Sunday March 2 at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and are available at the box office. Call (510) 235-7800 X4274. The first song of the show is on the website along with pictures of the cast <http://ccc драма.homestead.com> This is so exciting! For so long I thought Rosie the Riveter was a white woman. I was so proud to learn she was African American.

Two generations ago, minimum wage was 30¢ cents an hour, gas cost 19¢ a gallon and a new home in Walnut Creek could be purchased for under \$4,000. “The 1940’s were the time of Rosie the Riveter — the beginning of monumental transformations between both sexes and races” said David, citing changes brought about by President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802. “At that time in our history, Blacks and Whites were assigned separate drinking fountains and interracial relationships were a felony. As a result of pressure from the African American Porter’s Union, President Roosevelt banned discrimination in War Production industries and Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin. These men changed the world.”

With most of the Country’s men at war, women entered the work force for the first time in history “This is the story of our parents, our grandparents,” said McCarty, who spent over 4 years researching the development of the Bay Area during this period. “What I repeatedly ran into were stories of ordinary men and women, most of them unskilled and uneducated, doing extraordinary work which changed our entire history. Had the United States not stood together for one goal, we certainly would have lost WW 2.”

From 1941- 1945 over 500,000 people migrated to the Bay Area to find work in the Defense Boom. They found jobs in the Shipyards and Defense Industries throughout the Bay Area. The Kaiser Shipyards serve as backdrop for Rivets.

“This is the story of the Home Front soldiers, the men and women of World War II,” said David. “These Rosie the Riveters influenced the development of the entire Bay Area; over 120,000 people migrated to the Richmond area in search of war production work.”

“I’ve mixed historical information in with fictitious story lines and characters,” explains McCarty, who says Rivets explores changing roles of both White and African American men and women. After the CCC production of Rivets, the musical will continue in its development. In the Fall, the show will be performed in conjunction with the Richmond Museum Association on the SS Red Oak as part of the 2008 Rosie the Riveter Home Front Festival by the Bay. Following those shows, Rivets will be produced by Galatean Players Ensemble Theatre Thursday-Sundays, October 9-26, 2008 on the SS Red Oak. The SS Red Oak, a Victory ship built and launched in the Kaiser Richmond Shipyard, was built by the Rosie the Riveters of WW 2.

SFNoir February 27-29

Tonight Dr. Raye Richardson, founder of Marcus Books, Ave Montague, founder and executive director of the San Francisco Black Film Festival, and London Breed, Executive Director of the African American Art and Cultural Complex receive the 2008 Kuumba Award for Excellence in the Arts at Yoshi’s, 1330 Fillmore, in San Francisco. The event begins at 8 p.m. There will be spoken word performance preceding the presentation. Guests are invited to attend Arturo Sandoval’s Mambo Big Band at 10 p.m. the cost is \$50 for the evening. Visit <http://www.sfnoir.org/> for the complete schedule which includes poetry 2/28 at Levende Lounge, and a film screenings at The Metreon 2/29. Nothing is free. Email reservations@sfnoir.org for information about discounted tickets.

Honeydripper

I saw the Honeydripper band at the Monterey Jazz Festival last year. Director, John Sayles was there and he gave a wonderful talk about the film highlighted with clips. Later that afternoon, there was a concert on an outdoor stage I came to really enjoy for its intimacy and warmth, even though it was cold and wet that weekend—cast members and the Honeydripper band played to an appreciative crowd. So when I heard the opening lines of Metalmouth Sims' harmonica wailing, then saw Dr. Mable John singing at the Honeydripper club, I was tickled to see her again and wondered who in the audience had been there at the concert last year.

I'd been waiting for a long time to see the completed film and when I got the email I was so happy I could fit the screening into my schedule. When I asked to speak to Danny Glover, I hardly expected him to say yes. But he not only said yes, he remembered our conversation about Bamako last Spring at the San Francisco International Film Festival which is almost upon us again.

Glover took me on a journey into black consciousness and a historical legacy all but consigned to nostalgia, a period so removed from contemporary politics, its to our credit it isn't lost. Yet, if films like Honeydripper, The Great Debaters, Talk to Me, and others that celebrate black life disappear without a trace, and don't even make the Oscar radar then in the absence of an independent distribution system for independent media, our stories have the potential of getting lost.

'Honeydripper' which opens Friday at Sundance Kabuki Cinemas, Grand Lake Theatre & Smith Rafael Film Center, is the story of Tyrone Purvis. Glover's character, known as 'Pinetop,' is a pianist and former blues artist, and club owner, whom we meet in Harmony, Alabama. Its set in the 1950s, a time when black men are going off to war, cotton is still an occupation for some, and though the Great Migration north has already come and gone, the town needs some shaking up.

I made the mistake of seeing too easily into the way 1950 Alabama was faced with similar issues as 2008 Louisiana. Glover proceeded to school a sister on the period in a way which was both enlightening and funny, 'cause he ended up agreeing with me.

He says: 'We have to understand the moment we have here in Honeydripper. We are on the verge of the most incredible movement in the 20th century, not only in this country, but around the world. People who created these movements are searching for national identity: from the Civil Rights Movement to the movement for African Liberation and the end to colonialism is happening all of the world from India to China to Africa. Its only three years before the democratically elected government of Iran is overthrown because its a nationalistic government. In 1954 the democratically elected government in Guatemala is overthrown. So we have this enormous movement that is happening among people and I think in order to draw references to what we see today is not the right way of interpreting what is happening, you know what I'm saying?'

I agree.

Glover says: 'We have to understand the role in African American life the events of this period have. What's happening is change is happening. Here we have, Pinetop Purvis, born in 1895, a year before Plessy v. Ferguson, which rectified separate but equal. He is symbolic of what is happening among a movement of people. I can understand how you'd want to draw inferences around the scenes and what we have here. They might have some points… Its a progression—these things that are happening.

'Let's look at a people who were living in a segregated society, no different than… then we have the Emancipation Proclamation 1877 reconstruction—enforced servitude from 1877 to 1950 where we are in the film. In 1950 several things are happening, and all of this will have a monumental impact on the black community. In 1944 the cotton picking machine is invented. In 1944, 100 percent of the cotton in this country is picked by hand, (yet), in the next 25 years, 100 percent of the cotton will be picked by machine. Automation and technology has shaped the nature of what the south looks like. Right on the heel or within the framework of that there was a desegregation of the federal workplace in 1948; a desegregation of the armed forces in 1947. We have this opening up happening right now in front of our eyes. Every single family of color is going to be moved or forced to move. Now liberated from the land, they move to the north; they move to the west, the Midwest—all over (as) these people are forced off the land.

'From 1940-44 over the next 25 years, people are moving. This is the situation Pinetop finds himself in in 1950. This is an important time. We see some evidence in the 1954 decision in Brown vs. Board of Education, the subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, the voter registration and all those things to come for movement of inclusiveness to get rid of the most draconian forces of racial segregation, and the most embarrassing blot on America's image to the world.

'America's image to the world. Pinetop looks at how funny it looks for African American men running around killing Japanese when black people still were discriminated against at home.

“How we take this historical moment and place that in some kind of context for what is happening right now, it’s important to understand the history between 1950 and now. What is happening is the Civil Rights Movement. You have a society which it seems to be or gives the illusion of inclusiveness. At the same time when we look at the population of the this country, we have 2.5 million people, half of those are African American. Then when you look at the number of African Americans who have gone to college, during that period of change, the numbers have been reduced. 1950 is a moment in history when we were on the upswing or the upsurge of change and hope to one where all the hope has been erased.

“New Orleans is a clear example of that. Here is New Orleans, the most unique city in this country. It’s the destination for vacations for people who want to enjoy the food, cousin and culture of that area, of that city –that region, then the people responsible for that culture and food and everything else are the ones who are most marginalized and disenfranchised. So in that sense, yes, it’s a reality and in the 21st century. Remember when we talk about 1950, they didn’t have television then to extol and celebrate the virtues of democracy and commercialism and consumption and everything else. Now in 2008, we have all those things in place. If New Orleans would have taken place in 1965 instead of 2008, can you imagine the type of outcries you would have had?! You would have had an active, politicized movement in place to take up the battle and change the whole dynamic. Do you think Bush, then Johnson, would be able to walk away? He would have had his butt down there in no time flat! You understand what I am saying? Do you think the black middle class would have abdicated its responsibility in 1965, 40 years before? Absolutely not! The government would have been called to task by (an) active national movement for change to battle this. Do you think what is happening in New Orleans and the gentrification and privatization of what’s happening in public services would have occurred in 1965? No! That’s why you can’t compare the moments.”

I laugh.

Glover continues: “Every national leader would have not only been down there, we would have had a 250,000 March on Washington because of New Orleans. We would have had a Poor People’s Campaign. All that stuff that’s happening now (is possible because) we have been demobilized. The Civil Rights Movement was built on leadership from the bottom up, make no mistake about it. The leadership from the bottom up has been eviscerated. It doesn’t exist. The leadership for the people who are most marginalized, most affected by what is happening, has been nonexistent because of the structural violence that attacks people’s lives: from the inadequacy of their schools, inadequacy of health care, the inadequacy of transportation, the inadequacy of infrastructure.

“In the Ninth Ward, in the Lower Ninth Ward, 65 percent of the people own their own homes, so these weren’t swatters or people living on the streets. Let’s look at the picture of what has happened (once) that enormous time of change and possibility to what is happening now.

“My character represents the kernel or beginning of that scene. Pinetop who is nurtured by the music finds himself in a dilemma, so he embraces this new music, embraces new culture. He did not remain in the past. In the course of this he has to deal with demons of his past as well.”

See what I mean. But there’s more. Glover is so smart about these things. An honored world leader and cultural ambassador and activist, Glover has been in the world long enough and has donned significant roles from Nelson Mandela to a priest in Charles Burnett’s latest film *Namibia* and now, Pinetop, to know intuitively and specifically, because he has worn these lives, what it means to be African in America and elsewhere. It is the art that connects him so intuitively to the work and a people whom he is committed to mind, body and soul.

The actor spoke of his mother whose family would pick cotton in September, yet, instead of pulling her from her studies, her parents left her in school. Glover spoke proudly of his mother who graduated from college in 1942. Delilah saves money for China Doll to go to beauty school, so she doesn’t have to polish silver for a living like her mother. *Honeydrinker* is about the next movement along the continuum, it’s about trust and free-falling and just letting go. It’s also about cultural competency and Pinetop has been around long enough to know how to improvise, his mistakes so pretty you’d swear he’d played the note on purpose. Posters on the club’s walls and news clippings testify to his greatness as a bandleader. No one doubts that.

Sonny (actor Gary Clark Jr.) jumps off the train at the right moment, and later as he walks through town looking for a gig, he runs into Possum (Keb-Mo) playing the guitar. Blind, Possum tells Sonny about the *Honeydrinker* and Pinetop, and off Sonny goes, toting his homemade electric guitar, his case filled with possibility.

Honeydrinker tells the story of the blues and the what happens when an amp is added to the guitar and it becomes a solo voice in the band. The story of black music reflects our sojourn in this country—from the gospel hymns and Negro spirituals which lamented slavery and promised freedom, to the blues which continued to document a story filled with joy and pain, to the more electrified blues or Rock and Roll which shifted the guitar from back-up to soloist.

Honeydrinker speaks to a people’s ability to shift and adapt when the weather demands it. Black people might not control the weather, but we certainly know how to dance to it or compose songs and sing about it. Life is a celebration,

even one as crippling as the one black people faced post-reconstruction. One character called the south "the stone age," and in many ways it was., but not for long. Servitude is juxtaposed with union organizing. Harmony is a place where black men are hired out as slave labor if caught without employment. A friend of mine called it the "72 hours law." He said the police would pick you up in New Orleans for 72 hours and while in jail men would lose their jobs, often coerced into signing false confessions which could include sentences of ten years. It didn't matter, he said, if you had check stubs or other proof of employment. You were fair game.

In the midst of all this Pinetop represents the segue between the past and the present. In order to keep Honeydripper open he has to be able to compete with the bar up the road and his solo act is not drawing the crowds. He tells blues singer Bertha Mae (actress Dr. Mable John) he won't be needing her services the following week. Pinetop has Guitar Slim lined up for that weekend. It's a gamble he hopes will help pay off his debts and have a little profit too.

"Music is changing," Glover says. "Electrification of the instruments, the movement of people, the movement of time. All this is a dynamic that is life affirming, that in a way, is part of human existence. It's not commercialized, commodified. The movement is absorbed in the leadership of the people as it moves to higher ground."

There is a scene in the film where Delilah, obsessed with getting saved is off to another camp meeting. As she puts her husband's dinner in front of him and gets ready to hurry off, he tells her she isn't the one that needs saving. I ask Glover to comment on this line and ask if Pinetop is speaking of his inner conflict, as well as the society in 1950, how unfair it is for black people.

Glover agrees with me, he says: "Pinetop is also talking about the need to move forward. He is saying we need to have a liberation theology. The church has always played a role in institutionalizing the struggle, giving voice to the struggle. The church was there in 1909 in the formation of the Niagara movement, the formation of the NAACP. The church has always been there at (crucial points in African American history). When the church became a part of the change, it did so because the people demanded it. Pinetop is also saying we cannot allow ourselves to just be victims of this. We have to be participants in our own rescue."

Hounded by creditors—he can't even get liquor on credit, Pinetop doesn't give up. He is a man most white folk in town, represented by Sheriff Pugh (actor Stacy Keach) would love nothing more than to shut him down or find something, anything they can use to make this upright man submit. When Pinetop looks the sheriff in the eyes, the white man sees no fear. It's rumored that Pinetop killed a man, yet he's gentle with his daughter China Doll and loves his wife, Delilah. His best buddy Maceo is a man he'd die for and together they are trying to make the business succeed because the Honeydripper is Pinetop's life.

Glover talks about his long friendship with actor Charles Dutton and we touch a bit on spirituality and how Keb's character is similar to that of an ancestor or a guardian angel. Honeydripper, if nothing else shows us that none of us is in this alone. That there are forces, many with their own musical scores who are conducting this theatre piece Shakespeare called life.

"Charles Dutton and I have known each other almost 30 years and this is the first time we've been able to perform together," Glover says with a smile in his voice. "It's a different kind of place when Charles and I perform. We know each other and we trust each other out there. Charles is one of the finest actors in the country. We have Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Lisa Gay Hamilton, Yaya DeCosta, and all the young actors in the cast. Gary Clark, Jr. is charismatic and energized. When we talk about an ensemble piece, we've got to have the words to create the relationship between members in the ensemble. We have all that thanks to John Sayles."

I agree, the writing is really marvelous. As I watched the film jewels would fall from characters' mouths. It was so beautiful and having a character like Possum performed by Keb. It is so classical, then the way he appears, like an omen, and what he says to Pinetop and Sonny. He is really great, especially when in the last scene. I didn't even mention the lovely cinematography and the cute children, two boys, who open the film and pop up often as they sneak into the Honeydripper to watch the musicians play then go back home and play on their own instruments.

"The whole concept of spirituality comes from the intersection of our pain and our historic movement, revolution," Glover says. "A lot of this harkens back to Africa and the intersection between Africa and the culture we (in the Diaspora) created even though we were denied artistic expression. We used other vehicles and other means. (Our spirituality is reflected in) how we got through. How we got over is understanding the relationship between the literal life and the spiritual life. That's part of the tree and we're honored by that. We're honored by the past. I'm speaking of our psychic past, our historic past—Pinetop and Sonny can see Possum. Possum leads Sonny to Pinetop because he knows for Pinetop to resolve what's past, he needs Sonny to be a part of that evolution."

China Doll is also a part of that evolution. She finds Sonny when he is kidnapped.

“(True), China Doll represents the future. When she talks about traveling and having a portable profession —hairstylist. Those are powerful images of spirit. She is leaving.”

She wants to go to California, Sonny has been there. Through the music Sonny understands the legacy he carries, nothing is lost as he strides forward into tomorrow. He has taken his instrument to another place no one else had similar to musicians Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Glover says, “We have to look to the past often to get to the future.”

Right, that’s really African too. I respond as I think about Slick (Vondie Curtis Hall’s character) sitting on the tombstone drinking and talking to himself about how things are moving forward and though he resisted it, we shouldn’t be afraid of progress. Because we don’t lose anything.

The film, Honeydripper opens this weekend in the San Francisco Bay Area at major theatres. It runs 123 minutes, and is rated PG-13. It’s not a children’s film —I think a child would be bored, but there is no nudity, strong language, violence or sex. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlcamZUs4SQ> to see clips from the film and <http://honeydripper-movie.com/>

Come Home

I saw Jovelyn Richards’s play the evening before the film, Honeydripper, and the two stories resonated. Come Home is set in Arkansas where 26 black men went to war and 13 came home. The actress squeezes the life from Ms. Dee’s husband,, so affected by the loss of his friends they haunt the couple’s bed—their eyes Ms. Dee’s husband’s eyes when he looks down at her when they have sex.

The veteran can’t tell her about the horror, a horror that exists still in the town they live in, and the people of that town. Nothing has changed since they went away and sacrificed their lives for a country which respected it’s enemy more than its citizens.

The narrator describes Ms. Dee’s earlier relationship with her husband, first boyfriend. She counts his eyelashes. I don’t quite get the analogy but I like it the way one knows the “he loves me…he loves me not.” The actress sings with her body and voice—the chorus, three women: pianist, percussionist and violinist are ground that catches the beautiful actress.

Richards channels the spirit world, ancestors and the energy of the trees, which encircle her Ms. Dee at some point as she prays for her son’s safety. Lighting designer, Stephanie Anne Johnson is inspired as she fills the stage with town folk and just as quickly empties it as the narrator speaks. Come Home opens with a lynching of a young boy. Perhaps this was foreshadowing…I didn’t catch.

The couple have two children, Po Boy who is crazy about his mom and looks just like his dad. The younger child is Thunder. The family get along, because even in the silence and the hurt places, there is love. Jovelyn’s voice and the characters she portrays are so remarkably seductive. One can’t help caring and then it happens and one wants to wish it away. Hasn’t this family been hurt enough?

It is the same when Pinetop rescues Sonny when he recognizes the hunger in his face. It is the same with Possum who plays his instrument for certain people to hear, in this case, Sonny and Pinetop. It is the same with Miles and Nina, (Satellites @ Aurora) the baby a nagging reminder that something is wrong—something the parents need to fix inside. Come Home is such a luscious play. The souls of black people give it breath. One can hear the playwright’s conversations with relatives in Arkansas as a child. We can see the plough, hear the chickens in the yard and catch the door before it hits the frame, just in case someone is resting….

She said all her stories start in the same place: Arkansas. One can see Ms. Lucy who lives in all her stories. Ms. Lucy is a mysterious woman who lived with the playwright’s family when she was a little girl, then Ms. Lucy disappeared just as quickly as she came. “I think she was a victim of elder abuse,” Richards said as she recalled the woman who helped her mother for a year for room and board.

Jovelyn Richards’s work has an authenticity that is larger than any one community, unless we’re speaking of the human species. The way trauma can disrupt one’s life is certainly central to this story, yet, time really does heal sometimes when one is faced with a similar trauma.

When Thunder saw her brother carried off by a white mob, and ran home to her father, he seemed to wake up—the other 13 men seemed to wake up too, as they recalled a time before war when they claimed their dignity and reclaimed it in that moment and went to address the terror in Thunder’s eyes.

It was a beautiful moment in the story that reminded me of Zora Neale Hurston's collection Spunk when in the piece Gilded Six-bits, the husband forgives his wife. In this case, the men forgive themselves and reclaim the love—not lost, but abandoned in their grief for the 13 men who didn't return home and for a country which denied them their rights as citizens and as people. Come Home at The Marsh, 1062 Valencia (at 22nd Street), in San Francisco, runs Thursday-Saturday, January 31-March 8, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15-35. The show runs an uninterrupted 70 minutes and really needs an audience. The actress plays for who's there but I'd like to see what it feels like to have other energy present in the house. I am bringing my college classes next Thursday, March 6.

W. Kamau Bell Curve: The show designed to end racism in about an hour.

I had so much fun at W. Kamau Bell Curve last month at the Sheldon Theatre in San Francisco. It was funny and educational at the same time. I didn't know what to expect except that it would be about race and that if I brought someone of a different race to the event I'd my guest would get in free or half off or something like that. When I walked into the theatre, it was full. People were scooting over so some of the hopefuls out in the lobby might get in. Kamau, has become a Bay Area phenomena in just four runs, this weekend his first foray into the East Bay. Guest where? The Jewish Community Center of the East Bay on Walnut Street. They don't bite. No seriously, I worked there as a preschool teacher over twenty years ago before the name change.

I spoke to Kamau Monday evening up to the time he was heading out to the Punchline for a gig. He was the headliner he told me as the clock approached 8, so he didn't need to rush off. Raised in Chicago, Kamau, which means "quiet and gentle warrior in Kiswahilli," the tall brother comes across as anything but and his route to comedy through circuitous has certainly been one that the artist has maintained. There is an integrity in his show which includes multimedia, that is honest and unapologetic. From the racism litmus test where one gets to check one's temperature, to a survey of recent media insults, to images of why the W. Kamau Bell Curve is still relevant, perhaps even more so as black people are disappeared behind walls or walled are erected to keep them distant and out of view, the show is relevant and irreverent and funny.

The show opens with "words you won't hear in this show," which are all the racial epithets especially the N-word. Nooses and the racial rubric are inspired moments in the show which is one that changes Kamau said, in the moment—he has his set list, but if the spirit moves him, he's gone.

W. Kamau Bell Curve could be this nation's first Truth and Reconciliation Hearing on Race. It's something his mother, a former Stanford professor in African Diaspora Studies and author/entrepreneur, Dr. Janet Cheatham Bell, wants to happen. Leave it to her son, a child weaned on The Fire Next Time and the Souls of Black Folks to attempt this feat in the San Francisco Bay.

Kamau was a comedic wall flower until his best friend, Jason, invited him to a comedy open mic in Chicago where he sat in the audience for a few weeks before getting up his nerve to try the stage himself. "They weren't that good," Kamau recalled, which should have given him courage. Finally he performed, but it wasn't until his mother suggested he enroll at Second City Conservatory, the place where Saturday Night Live gets its talent, that improv became second or third nature—he kid felt his calling and well, it was on.

Kamau has opened for Dave Chapelle on a number of occasions and counts as one of his heroes Richard Pryor, his book, Pryor Conviction, one he used to perfect his writing and craft, said, as he has gotten older, certain ideas are hard to ignore—one of the them race. As he continues to develop material, he said the other isms: sexism, homophobia, etc. edge towards the chopping board. "It's not good form to pick and choose," he said. Even though he doesn't get up and leave the venue when someone makes a joke about these subjects, as he does when a comedian thinks it's funny to insult black people, he has looked more closing at his work to see if he is adding to the manucia masquerading as fun. "It's all linked," He said.

"There were things I'd accept at 21 when I first started doing stand-up comedy, not just stand-up but to get along with the group that I won't put up with anymore. It's not okay. My challenge is to find out why it isn't okay and communicate that to people." He's reached his toxicity level.

"On the racial rubric," Kamau explains, "I have levels one through five. As much as people believe a four or five is violence. If you're experiencing ones and twos all day, that stuff is cumulative. It starts to feel like a four or a five.

"I don't want to be the living example, but I also don't want to put poison in the world either," he said. "I certainly don't mind being honest and if people find that offensive, I thought about it before I said it. I'm not just cavalierly throwing it out. I respect people's right to be offended

"Laughter is the soul saying yes." Kamau quotes Quincy Jones. "This can go either way—good and evil, socially acceptable and otherwise." So be careful what you say yes too folks it might

come back to bite you. After his show, which opened with Paul E. Hunt's fabulous band, I found myself quoting Kamau: "Black people are only 30 percent of Oakland's population. San Francisco doesn't have any black people.

Check him out March 1st & 2nd, 8:00 at the Jewish Community Center of the East Bay, 1414 Walnut Street, Berkeley. Bring a friend of a different race and your friend and your guest gets in for free!

General Admission \$20 Visit <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/27298> and visit his blog <http://thewkbellcurve.blogspot.com/> For a clip watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeaXzQYs2-M>

Satellites by Diana Son at Aurora theatre through March 2

The concept of what happens to people who are dislocated emotionally and genetically from their cultural source is interesting, especially when these people have children and the parents want to give their child an opportunity they themselves lack. Although, what drew me to the play in the first place was what I thought was a revisiting of themes Lorraine Hansberry addressed in "A Raisin in the Sun." (I hope folks watched the great revival of the classic work Monday evening, February 25, on NBC, with the all-star Broadway cast and newcomer, executive producer, Sean Combs, as in Puff Daddy, P. Diddy and other incarnations. In the telemovie, Combs is Walter Lee, a chauffeur who has dreams he can't afford, that is until his dad's insurance money arrives—seed he needs to go into business with his friends. Combs' Walter plays alongside Phylicia Rashad, the matriarch of the family. During the course of the film, the mother has to let her son grow up and be a man, even if he stumbles and falls. In a household where the only other male is his son, Walter is outnumbered and one can see how hard it could be for him to assert himself.

Rashad received the Tony for this role, the first African American to win best lead in a play. Walter is a strong protagonist and Combs said he spoke to actor Sidney Poitier about the role. Poitier was "Walter" alongside Ruby Dee's "Beneatha," his sister, in 1961. In 1959, Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" opened on Broadway, the first play ever by an African American woman to do so. (Tony-nominated Saana Lathan stars in this role.), Combs had to stretch and I think he does okay. I like the story, and the new interpretation is strong.

Back to Satellites, so when I got an email from Michael Gene Sullivan that he was in it, I wanted to see it even more, because Michael is one of my favorite actors. So I'm sitting in the theatre, the set looks like it's moving day, the only problem is, the boxes never disappear—it looks like my livingroom, two years after I buy the house, but they have four stories—I only have one. The problem is not space here. When is the house going to be home, when are the planets going to adopt an obit, share a universe?

The name "Satellites" should have been a clue, then if it wasn't, then the fact that Diana Son, a playwright known for work that examines identity and confronts a society unable to handle the shifting expressions of such—chooses her titles intentionally. In what she termed her first play where she wrote for specific ethnicities—Michael Gene Sullivan's "Miles" is black, Julie Oda's "Nina" is Korean, and Darren Bridgett's "Eric, Miles" brother, is white. Obviously Miles is adopted, yet the circumstances of his early life are revealed only towards the end of the play. One wonders about the ambivalent relationship between the two—Eric is a loser. When we meet him he enters the house breathless. He says he was chased by hoodlums from the train station, who snatch his backpack and steal his ipod. Miles is married to an architect, wearing a Google.com tee-shirt, and though recently fired, he has had a successful career in technology, plus the couple has just bought a house to raise a family—their six week baby girl.

The child is inconsolable. Perhaps the motif—this child, reflects a household, or perhaps a world where doubt and unexpressed suspicion prevent authentic relationships from developing? If it's not the crying then the abrasive music which indicates scene changes is enough to drive one mad.

Satellites orbit the earth, yet are not a part of the solar system—outside, they desire inclusion but don't know how to break the barriers of exclusion. In Nina's case, not knowing her language, and in Miles' case, not knowing his ancestry—where he came from and more importantly, why he was abandoned increases the despair. The couple buys this house which depletes Miles' retirement; he loses his job and Nina is the sole breadwinner. Miles' manhood is fragile at this point and Nina almost blows his house down.

The new couple on the block are interlopers in the Brooklyn neighborhood where black people are being driven out by marauding yuppies looking for a place to land. When the rock, an all too familiar symbol of welcome, breaks an expensive glass pane near their door one night, one doesn't necessarily think it's about race, rather, it could be a response to the subtle ethnic cleansing masked as revitalization of a neighborhood. I think about the rock that sailed through Lorraine Hansberry's childhood home in Chicago when he father bought a house in a neighborhood hostile to black people.

Raised away from others like himself, Miles is about as white as Eric, without the white-skin privilege Eric wastes. The

showdown comes too late in a play, which performed without intermission, lingers a bit too long in the cosmos. The satellites orbit themselves, each of the characters' lives the center of his or her universe, whether that is, actor, Michael J. Asberry's "Reggie," Miles and Nina's neighbor or actress Ayla Yarkut's "Kit," Nina's business partner. Both Reggie and Kit are determined to hold on. The presenting symptoms differ, but the end is the same, survival—Kit for her career and Reggie for his family.

Miles is suspicious and scared of black people for all the reasons televised and printed in corporate media, so when Reggie drops by he misreads the friendly gesture. Miles responds to Reggie the way employers do to him when he applies for work and is disqualified solely on the fact that he is black. What differs here is that Reggie is really black, whereas Miles is as white as they are. "Hey folks," he probably cries inside. "My parents are white and my brother is too." Unfortunately, they can't hear him.

Miles is so traumatized, he fears touching his baby—the couple is shell-shocked. Most new parents are which is what the nanny tries to tell Nina, as does Kit but Nina doesn't hear them there is too much ambient noise swirling around them.

The new dad feels he has nothing to offer his child except curly hair and brown skin. What is his legacy? He doesn't know. He just knows that there are no photos of his lineage in the family album at the family home stretching back more than seven generations. His brother Eric scoffs at his kid brother, too absorbed in his own life to see how painful it is for Miles to not know anything about his history except he was abandoned then rescued. (There are other stereotypical references I won't mention, which the audience will also see.) Miles is a super achiever for all these reasons—to fill the void inside.

I don't know if Eric ever tells Miles how much he admires him for his ability to do everything well—Eric only says these things to Nina's business partner, Kit, to gain her sympathies so he can ask for favors later—the guy is a leech shaped like a chameleon.

Then there is actress Lisa Kang's "Mrs. Chase," whom Nina hires as nanny to teach her daughter Korean so that she knows who she is and doesn't feel as isolated as Nina feels among her people. Mrs. Chase is so misunderstood, but then so is everyone else. No one hears the other, especially Nina who is stuck in her version of the world and is resistant to change especially when it rocks her steely perceptions of righteousness. The girl's got issues. One can see how she and Miles collided.

Satellites is Nina's story and the other space dust, rocks and lifeless debris float in and out of her universe. She is the one raging throughout the story. She is the one carrying the crying baby Miles can't grasp, let alone hold onto until the end. She is the one who has to give up the control. Satellites ends without closure, yet, the characters, Miles and Nina are a little closer to a personal truth which will allow them to live more authentically—at least that is the hope. Ultimately, we have to lie down on the floor and look up at the stars visible in the place where once there was a ceiling—the fixed order is a source of contentment and safety for Reggie who tells his new neighbors about the culture of the house and the neighborhood they have adopted as their own. History is important, but in its absence one can still invent a future based on what one knows for sure.

"Satellites" continues Thursday-Sunday, March 2 at the Aurora Theatre, 29=081 Addison Street, Berkeley. Visit auroratheatre.org or call (510) 843-4822.