



**GYPSY
& THE
BULLY DOOR**

written by

NINA ANGELA MERCER

**Staged Reading of
*Gypsy & the Bully Door***

**Saturday, April 13, 2013
3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.**

**Central Brooklyn Public Library
Dweck Center
10 Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238**

About the Program

Staged Reading of *Gypsy & The Bully Door*

The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, CUNY, in partnership with the Brooklyn Public Library and The Norman Mailer Center, presents a staged reading of *Gypsy & The Bully Door*, a play by Nina Angela Mercer. *Gypsy & The Bully Door* was developed at The Norman Mailer Center's August Wilson Blues Poetics Workshop, led by author, playwright, and dramaturge Paul Carter Harrison; and coproduced by Ocean Ana Rising Inc. in association with With a Cherry on Top Productions. This production is directed by Nikkieli DeMone, artistic director of The American Theatre of Harlem.

Gypsy & The Bully Door is a story of race, class, sex, dreams, and the magic we conjure to make it in America and in the world. The play is written by playwright Nina Angela Mercer and inspired by Toni Cade Bambara's 1980s novel *The Salt Eaters*, a story about a community of black faith healers set in a small town in the South.

"When I began writing *Gypsy & The Bully Door*, I was rediscovering Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, after reading it eighteen years ago while in college," said Mercer. "I opened the book, and there was Velma Henry—mother, wife, activist, silenced artist, undervalued laborer for the people, trusted friend, the invisible cornerstone at the foundation of the community. Velma had sliced her wrists and crawled into the oven to die. I knew her. I found an awakening of the inward eye through Velma's journey toward her ancestral mothers and their strength, with her community gathered around her in a sacred cipher, merging their own stories with Velma's, and calling on spirit guides and Lwa to create a quilt, a communion, a shelter inside understanding."

About the Playwright



Nina Angela Mercer is a playwright, cultural worker, and emerging biomythologist. She is the executive director of Ocean Ana Rising Inc., an arts education nonprofit organization dedicated to the holistic liberation of women of color through live performance and arts outreach (Oarinc.org). Mercer's plays include *Gutta Beautiful*, *Racing My Girl*, *Sally*, *Itagua Meji*, and *Gypsy & The Bully Door*. Her plays have been produced in Washington, D.C., at The Warehouse Theatre and The Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. In New York City, Mercer's work has had stage readings at Wings Theatre, The Brecht Forum, and the Classical Theatre of Harlem, as well as a full production at Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement. In Trinidad and Tobago, Mercer's work has been staged at The Little Carib Theatre.

She is currently developing a new choreopoem, *Mother Wit & Water Born*, and the one-act play *Politics Aside: The Pot Is Boiling!* Mercer is also the cocurator and cofounder of The Women on Wednesdays Art & Culture Project, a cultural arts series dedicated to empowering women and girls of the African Diaspora in collaboration with The Brecht Forum and Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative. Mercer teaches at Medgar Evers College, CUNY, and works as a teaching artist and coordinator for New Jersey Performing Arts Center Arts Education's Social Impact Arts Intensive. In 2012, Mercer was awarded a scholarship to The Norman Mailer Center's August Wilson Blues Poetics Workshop, where she developed an original stage play in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She is currently working on a novel, and she is also the proud mother of two daughters, Aya Imani and Raisa Selam.

(Photograph by Keliy Anderson-Staley)

About the Director

Nikkieli DeMone is an award-winning actor and singer, and he has been seen on Broadway, Off Broadway, and in nationally and internationally shows such as *Miss Saigon*, *Ragtime*, *Rent*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Crowns*, *Black Nativity*, *The Great MacDaddy*, *Balls: The Musical*, *Grand Hotel*, *The Best of Both Worlds*, and *Side Show*. As a director, his credits include *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Jitney*, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, *Coriolanus*, *Broken Thread*, *Barnum*, *Street Fare Journal*, *Urban Christmas Carol*, *Crowns*, and *The King of Cans*. DeMone is the artistic director of The American Theatre of Harlem.



About the Cast



Althea Alexis (Khadija Freeman aka Rachel), a graduate of Howard University, is from Washington, D.C. She moved to New York and has been studying and working in theater, film, and commercials. Her credits include (on stage) *Munched*; *Antony and Cleopatra*; *A Season in the Congo* as Pauline Lumumba; *No Child...*; Suzan-Lori Parks's *365Days/365Plays* at The Public Theatre; Melvin Van Peebles's *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* at the Classical Theatre of Harlem; Euripedes' *Medea*; the Alumni of the Negro Ensemble Company's tribute production of *Blues in a Broken Tongue* by Leslie Lee; and *The Solution to All the World's Problems*, directed by Woodie King Jr. On screen, she has appeared in *I Am John Wayne*, the webisode *Kindred*, *Sweeter Without Sugar*, *Freedomland*, *Mommie's Maybe*. She has studied with Mary Boyer and William Esper's Professional Acting Conservatory.

Actress, writer, and host **Franceli Chapman** (Neesy aka Elena de Jesus) was recently seen in Katori Hall's *Children of Killers* as well as New Harlem Arts Theater's *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Her play *A Work in Progress* was produced by the Castillo Theatre in 2011. Check out more of her writing on CeliTheactress.com. "I am passionate about activism. Being an artist that can help change the world! That's what it's all about," she said.



Kimani Fowlin (The Dance, choreographer) is cofounder of Boom!Beep!Bop! She codirected MZawa Danz with Maia Claire Garrison. She has choreographed and performed with Ronald K. Brown, David Rousseve, Youssef Koumbassa, Andrea E. Woods, SOULWORKS, Umoja Dance Company, Harambee Dance Company, Antibalis, Manongo Mujica, Julio "Chocolate" Algendones, Mike Ramsey, Nina Angela Mercer, and playwright Amparo Garcia Crow.

Gavin Gregory (Nate Bledsoe) has appeared on Broadway in productions of *The Gershwin's Porgy & Bess* (Crown U/S), *The Color Purple* (Buster/African Chief/Harpo U/S), *Showboat* (Carnegie Hall). He was in the first national tour of *The Lion King* (Mufasa/Scar U/S). In Portland, he has worked with Portland Center Stage and appeared in *The Whipping Man*, *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Mitch Mahoney); *Ragtime* (Coalhouse) (Drammy Award); JAW Playwrights Festival; Cabaret; *An Intimate Evening of Musical Theater*, with Susannah Mars; Portland Playhouse; *The Huntsmen* (Boyfriend /Hitchhiker). He has worked in TV and appeared on *Law & Order: SVU* and *Dawson's Creek*.



Some of **Dameka Hayes's** (Sara Josephine James aka Destiny Rose) best-loved credits include appearing on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*. She was in the first national touring company of *The Color Purple* and played Squeak, on Broadway; she was a dancer swing in Disney's *The Lion King*. She can be seen playing Coretta in the upcoming NETC's *Martin, Before the Dream*. She's also been featured in national commercials for Budweiser, Pepsi, and NyQuil. "Thanks Mom for your unconditional love!"

Jeremiah Hosea (The Pocket Roll Call [the music], Electric Bass), founder of Earthdriver.org, has toured with Grammy-nominated blues/jazz legend James “Blood” Ulmer (who “discovered” both Jeremiah and drummer Swiss Chris at Earthdriver’s third gig), first as part of his ‘Raw Blues Experience” and then as part of “Memphis Blood,” a project costarring black rock pioneer Vernon Reid. Hosea’s adroit technique and mutant approach to sound, his commitment to the ethos of love and radical politics, his vocal talent and kung fu artistry, all coalesce to make him a singular force to be reckoned with.



Gabriel Lawrence (Roy Peoples aka Richard Glorious, Esq.) is excited to join the cast and crew for *Gypsy & The Bully Door*. His regional credits include *Lombardi* (Human Race Theatre), *Dram of Drummhicit* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Man in the Iron Mask* and *Henry IV, Part 2* (Shakespeare Santa Cruz). Lawrence is a proud Houstonian and graduate of the MFA acting program at University of California San Diego.

Darren Lorenzo (The Mayor aka John Grossman, The Anchorman, and Mr. Littlejohn, The Property Manager), a native of Atlanta, Georgia, has had the pleasure of performing in productions on Broadway, Off Broadway, Broadway national tours, regional and international tours around the world. Some of his credits include *Madagascar*, *Daddy Cool*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Smokey Joe’s Cafe*, *No Strings*, *Hair*, *Fosse*, *What the World Needs Now*, *Solid Gold Soul*, *Saturday Night at the Movies*, *Winner Takes It All*, *Tony and Tina’s Wedding*, and *Showdown* to name a few. Lorenzo is blessed to be able to still sing, write, coach, and direct in his spare time.



Lizan Mitchell (The Woman in Yellow aka Ms. Legendare) has performed on stage on Broadway, Off Broadway, in regional theaters throughout the U.S., and in Johannesburg, South Africa. On film and television, she has been featured in movies and episodic television, most recently in *Golden Boy*. On stage, she recently performed in *Myrna in Transit*, by Angela Hanks at Ensemble Studio Theatre, and in Brave New World Theatre’s annual production of *The Long Christmas Dinner* by Thornton Wilder. Mitchell is enthusiastically committed to supporting the next generation of theater artists.

About the MEC Student

RHODE-ELISE ST. JACQUES was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and has been living in the United States for 21 years. She is a student of Medgar Evers College, CUNY, with a major in early childhood special education and a concentration in English. For St. Jacques, writing has always been a way to relate her thoughts and views on the world. She aims to write stories that touch people’s hearts and communicate with their emotions. She looks forward to introduce children to literature and the art of expression through words.



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