

Black Angels Over Tuskegee



Layon Gray

The Black Gents of Hollywood took the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival by storm with their blockbuster show "WEBEIME." They are back this year with an equally powerful piece, "Black Angels Over Tuskegee," which is based on the struggles and triumphs of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen.

Written and directed by Layon Gray, the same talent behind "WEBEIME," the play is a narrative journey of six black men in the Jim Crow South working to become pilots in a U.S. Air Force that has little respect for African Americans. While stories about the Tuskegee Airmen - a group of black pilots that had an extraordinary success rate while flying missions over Europe during the second World War - have been plentiful in recent years, Gray's play is different in that it doesn't entirely focus on the pilots' trailblazing successes. In "Black Angels Over Tuskegee," audiences get a look inside the characters of the men who dared to challenge a racist America and military to fight for their country.

The play has been heralded by critics and audiences and has been staged to packed houses at venues such as the California African-American Museum and Hollywood's Whitmore Lindley Theater. The cast includes some of Hollywood's best and brightest rising stars - talents like

Antonio Charity, Jay Jones, Demetrius Gross, Thom Scott, Derek Shun, Donn Swaby and Gray himself. Some of the players are members of the Black Gents of Hollywood - a group of African-American male actors, directors, writers and other creative types determined to change the image of black men through their creative talents. Gray founded the Black Gents in 2007 along with Jones, Scott, Lamman Rucker, Jason Mcgee, Justin Biko and Eddie Lewis, all of whom appeared in "WEBEIME."

Gray has been called "the next Tyler Perry." The Los Angeles Times perhaps paid him an even bigger compliment when it proclaimed "Gray's work is on the same level as August Wilson's "Piano Lesson," and Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin In The Sun." Best known as an award-winning playwright and stage director, Gray has branched out into feature films. His movies "Virgins of Venice," "In Search of William Shakespeare" and "Dairy of a Catholic School Dropout" are in various stages of pre-and-post production. His other plays include "The Girls of Summer," the winner of the 2006 NAACP Theatre Award for Best Play; and "Meet Me at the Oak," which has won a trophy-case full of awards.

- The Chronicle

**Aug. 4 & Aug. 5
at 3 p.m. & 8 p.m.
at Salem's Hanes
Auditorium**

Ticket Price: \$37



The Players.

Photos courtesy of the Black Gents of Hollywood