

# Voices of the Spirits in My Soul

Actress Nora Cole brings her family's fascinating history to the stage in her one-woman show "Voices of the Spirits in My Soul."

Cole's family legacy includes the traits that are common for most African-Americans: slavery; children fathered by a slave owner; struggles for equality; and great strength and pride.



RACCA Photo  
Nora Cole  
in "Voices."

"I want to enlighten people about African-American history," said Cole, a native of Louisville, Ky. "I want people to realize what a miracle it is that black people are where we are today."

Using her own family as a springboard, Cole tells a much larger story in the show. She uses letters and photographs from her own family's archives to link their struggles with those of people like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela and historical events like the tumultuous integration of schools in Little Rock, Ark., and Fannie

Lou's Hamer 1968 Democratic Party revolt.

New York's Richard Allen Center for Culture and Arts' Seaport Salon also brought Cole's "Voices" to the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival. Written by Cole, the show is produced by Imani, the artistic director of the Richard Allen Center for Culture and Art. Candace Lunn is the production stage manager and Melody A. Beal is the lighting designer.

In addition to her acting, Cole is an adjunct professor, director and acting coach at Eastern Connecticut State University, where she debuted "Voices."

Cole is no stranger to the National Black Theatre Festival. She played Coretta Scott King in Woodie King's "I Have A Dream," which was staged at the 1989 festival, and had her first solo role in the Herman LeVern Jones-directed "Olivia's Opus" at the 1993 festival.

Recent notable performances by Cole include "Fences" (opposite actor Tony Todd) at Rochester's GEVA Theatre; the Milwaukee Rep's staging of "Doubt" and the George C. Wolfe-directed "Caroline, Or Change" at the Royal National Theatre at London. Cole's television appearances include "The Cosby Mystery Movie" and the daytime dramas "All My Children," "Loving," "Another World" and "The Guiding Light."

- The Chronicle



Wiley Productions Photo

Mike Wiley in "Dar He."

## Dar He: The Lynching of Emmett Till

Anyone who doubts that riveting entertainment can't be educational as well has obviously never seen Mike Wiley in action.

For the past decade, the Durham, N.C., resident has penned and performed a series of powerful plays based on some of the most unforgettable episodes from black history. Wiley, who has a master's in fine arts from UNC Chapel Hill, is a chameleon. Though his plays are billed as one-man shows, that is a bit misleading since he plays sometimes dozens of roles in a single play.

For example, in his play "One Noble Journey: A Box Marked Freedom" (about the true story of the slave who mailed himself to freedom), Wiley plays Henry "Box" Brown, Ellen Craft, William Craft, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, among many others.

He will bring one of his most popular plays to the National Black Theatre Festival. "Dar He: The Lynching of Emmett Till" has left audiences across the state and nation in utter awe. Debuted in 2006, the play was named "the best of the year's ten best" by theater critics of the Greater Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill area.

Many know the story of Till, the 14-year-old black Mississippi boy who in 1955 was savagely lynched by a white mob after he supposedly whistled at a white woman. But in the masterful hands of Wiley, the story takes on new dimensions.

Within the first few minutes of the show, Wiley plays seven different characters - men and women, black and white. He makes each character, especially that of Till, human and personable and connects with each audience almost effortlessly.

"I want my work to not be just in front of people, but inside them," Wiley says. "Each play requires willing audience participation ... I want to bring people out of their seats and have them feel what a slave, a civil rights worker or a juror might feel."

Wiley is a favorite of school systems across the state and nation. He regularly stages his plays for students of all ages. The genius of his work is that it easily translates to both youth and adult audiences.

It was Wiley's intention when he formed Mike Wiley Productions ([www.mikewileyproductions.com](http://www.mikewileyproductions.com)) to "shine light on untold stories from the African American past." His repertoire of plays also include "Jackie Robinson: A Game Apart," "Tired Souls: The Montgomery Bus Boycott" and "Brown vs. Board of Education: Over Fifty Years Later." Last year, he added two more plays, both based on popular books. "Life is So Good" revolves around the inspirational true life story of George Dawson, the grandson of a slave who learned to read at age 98; "Blood Done Sign My Name," based on Tim Tyson's best-seller, tells of the unrest that occurred in Granville County, N.C., in the 1970s after a black man was murdered.

- The Chronicle

**Aug.  
4 at 8 p.m.;  
Aug. 5 at  
3 & 8 p.m.  
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