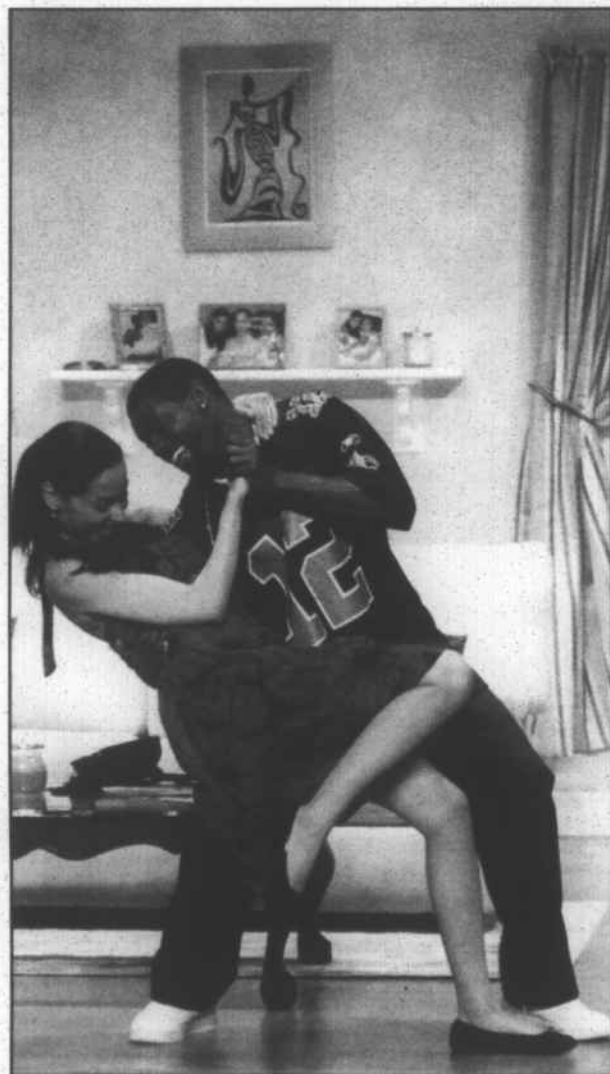


The High Priestess of Dark Alley



Mari White and Nicoye Banks.

Photos by Edouard H.R. Gluck

What happens when a haute mother who thinks light is right discovers that her daughters subscribe to the "blacker the berry" school of thought?

Find out in "The High Priestess of Dark Alley," an acclaimed play that promises to keep audiences engaged and glued to their seats. Written by Jackie Alexander, whose play "Plenty of Time" was staged at the 2005 NBTF, the production is set in modern-day New Orleans and centers around the lives and loves of two sisters, Claire and Janee, who escaped their domineering and judgmental mother, Celeste, to live on their own.

The drama starts when Celeste makes an unannounced visit. She is instantly at odds with the girls over their dating choices. Celeste doesn't care for blacks who are not of Creole descent - which is why she is mockingly referred to as "The High Priestess of Dark Alley" - and the girls' boyfriends are tall, very dark and handsome. It is Celeste's desire to reunite Claire with her estranged husband, the more color-appropriate Charles. The conflicts among the women open old wounds and create newer, deeper ones, taking audiences on a sometimes-comical, sometimes-emotional journey.

Playwright Alexander said he wanted to explore intra-racial prejudice among blacks because it is a topic that theater has seldom addressed.

"As society finally begins to embrace the rainbow of colors encompassed in the African-American community, it's baffling that some within still cling to age old prejudices and myths that serve only to create division among us," said Jackie Alexander, who also directs. "African-Americans are conquering what were once unthinkable heights. I hope this play is a reminder that the biggest hindrance to that progress is often self-imposed."

The play is produced by the legendary Marjorie Moon, whose New York-based Billie Holiday Theatre has brought numerous unforgettable plays to the NBTF over the years.

The talented cast includes Aura Vence as Janee and Mari White as Claire. A native of Panama, Vence's stage credits include "For Colored Girls..." and small and big screen credits such as "Nora's Hair Salon" and "As the World Turns." White may be familiar to sports fans. She was a host on ESPN. White now hosts the popular video show "IcthusEq" on New Evangelization Television.

Stage veteran Marcelle Gover plays Celeste. She starred in "Joy," Alexander's 2002 film that was named "Best Film of the Year" by the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame. The men in their sisters' lives are played by Nicoye Banks, whose credits include the films "G" and the soon-to-be-released "Green Zone;" Michael Chenevert, who has appeared on "Guiding Light" and "One Life to Live;" and Zeb Hollins III, who can currently be seen in the independent film "The Battle of Pussy Willow Creek."

Aug. 7 at
3 & 8 p.m.
Aug. 8 at 3 & 8 p.m.
at WFU Mainstage

Ticket Price: \$37

- The Chronicle



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