

Hope & Wisteria

Educator/writer/poet Kwame Dawes has an uncanny ability to convey the feelings and emotions of others through his work. He looks through the eyes of others and through his words, their joys and despairs, hopes and hopelessness take on new meaning.

Dawes' poetry is the centerpiece of arguably the most unique production at this year's National Black Theatre Festival. "Wisteria: Twilight Poems from the Swamp" and "HOPE: Living and Loving with HIV in Jamaica" will be presented back-to-back with an intermission between them.



Dawes



Simmonds

Each is a multimedia show that tells a captivating story with the awesome trifecta of Dawes' poems; composer Kevin Simmonds original music (performed by a bevy of live musicians and singers); and powerful photographs, many by the esteemed Joshua Cogan.

"Wisteria" is based on Dawes' 2005 book of poems by the same name. His poems are based on interviews he conducted with elderly women in Sumter, S.C., who shared their experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South. Simmonds' music and photographs are from the Richard Samuel Roberts Collection of the Carolina Library at the University of South Carolina.

HOPE is based on interviews Dawes conducted with residents of Jamaica who are infected with HIV. In this show, the photographs

are by Cogan, whose images have graced the pages of publications such as the "New Yorker," "Washington Post" and "New York Times."

HOPE was commissioned by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, a nonprofit that works to shine light on important topics that receive scant media coverage. The Pulitzer Center is sponsoring both "Wisteria" and "HOPE" at the 2009 NBTF.

Born in Ghana and partly raised in Jamaica, Dawes is the Distinguished Poet in Residence and Louis Frye Scudder Professor of Liberal Arts at the University of South Carolina. He also is founder and executive director of the South Carolina Poetry Initiative; director of the University of South Carolina Arts Institute; and programming director of the Calabash International Literary Festival, which takes place each May in Jamaica.


Simmonds earned a Ph.D. in music education at the University of South Carolina. His music has been performed throughout the country and in the United Kingdom, the Caribbean and Japan. A who's who list of noted singers and musicians, many from the Carolinas, will lend their talents to the shows. They include Valerie Johnson, who teaches and directs the choir at Bennett College; Valetta Brinson, an adjunct instructor at Southwest Tennessee Community College; University of Pittsburgh instructor Billy Coakley; and Celia Teasdel, Christopher Neely and Nicole Neely, University of South Carolina graduates.

Other musical talent includes UNC Greensboro alumnus Curtis Cotton III; University of N.C. School of the Arts graduates Jessica McJunkins, Cora Phillips, James Miller and Herb Stephens.

**Aug. 6 at
8 p.m.
Aug. 7 at 8 p.m.
at Salem's Hanes
Auditorium**

Ticket Price: \$25

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