

Excelsior



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M.C. Benton
Convention
Center -
North Main Hall

Tues, Aug. 4 8 p.m.

Wed, Aug. 5 3 p.m.

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\$20

*The talented
young cast
brings
"Excelsior"
to life.*

The N.C. Black Repertory Company is giving some of Winston-Salem's most talented young performers a chance to shine before audiences from around the world. The Teen Theatre Ensemble, a division of the Black Rep created to nurture tomorrow's on-stage and behind-the-scenes talent, will present Samm-Art Williams' "Excelsior" at this year's NBTF, just months after the historical drama was received warmly by local audiences for its debut.

The play tells the story of Charlotte Forten, a black woman born into a wealthy Philadelphia family who packs up and heads South after the Civil War to teach newly emancipated blacks on the South Carolina Sea Islands. She makes this decision to the chagrin of her family and against the advice of doctors, who warn her that the humid Southern climate may kick her tuberculosis into overdrive.

Forten had long fought for an end of slavery. Her anti-slavery work put her in contact with many of the stars of the abolitionist movement, including William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Her diaries offer one of the few windows into the life of a free (and wealthy) Northern black woman in the 1860s.

Williams relied on those diaries and other resources to pen the play. The North Carolina native received both Tony and Drama Desk nods for his play "Home," and his television screenwriting credits, which include "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" and "Cagney and Lacey," have earned him two Emmy nominations. Williams has frequently collaborated with the Black Rep and is one of the many legends who is a regular at the biennial NBTF.

Black Rep Artistic Director Mabel Robinson directs "Excelsior," whose cast includes Teen Theatre Ensemble veterans like Thatcher Johnson-Welden, Jordan Speas and 16-year-old Sierra Duckett, who plays Forten. ■

Emerging Producer Award

*Erich
McMillan-
McCall*



Erich McMillan-McCall is the founder and CEO of ProjectVOICE. The mission of the not-for-profit performing arts organization is to expand and promote the African-American theater tradition. Each year on the third Monday in June, ProjectVOICE presents VOICE/PLAY/1DAY, when theaters, libraries and other institutions across the world organize readings of the same play or musical. The event is designed to foster community awareness and audience recommitment to local arts institutions. This year, Samm-Art Williams' "Home" was selected. Past selections have included Ntozake Shange's "For Colored Girls," Alice Childress' "Trouble in Mind" and James Baldwin's "The Amen Corner."

McMillan-McCall is also a talented actor and singer whose stage credits include "Once on This Island," "The Who's Tommy," "Chicago" and "Harlem Song."