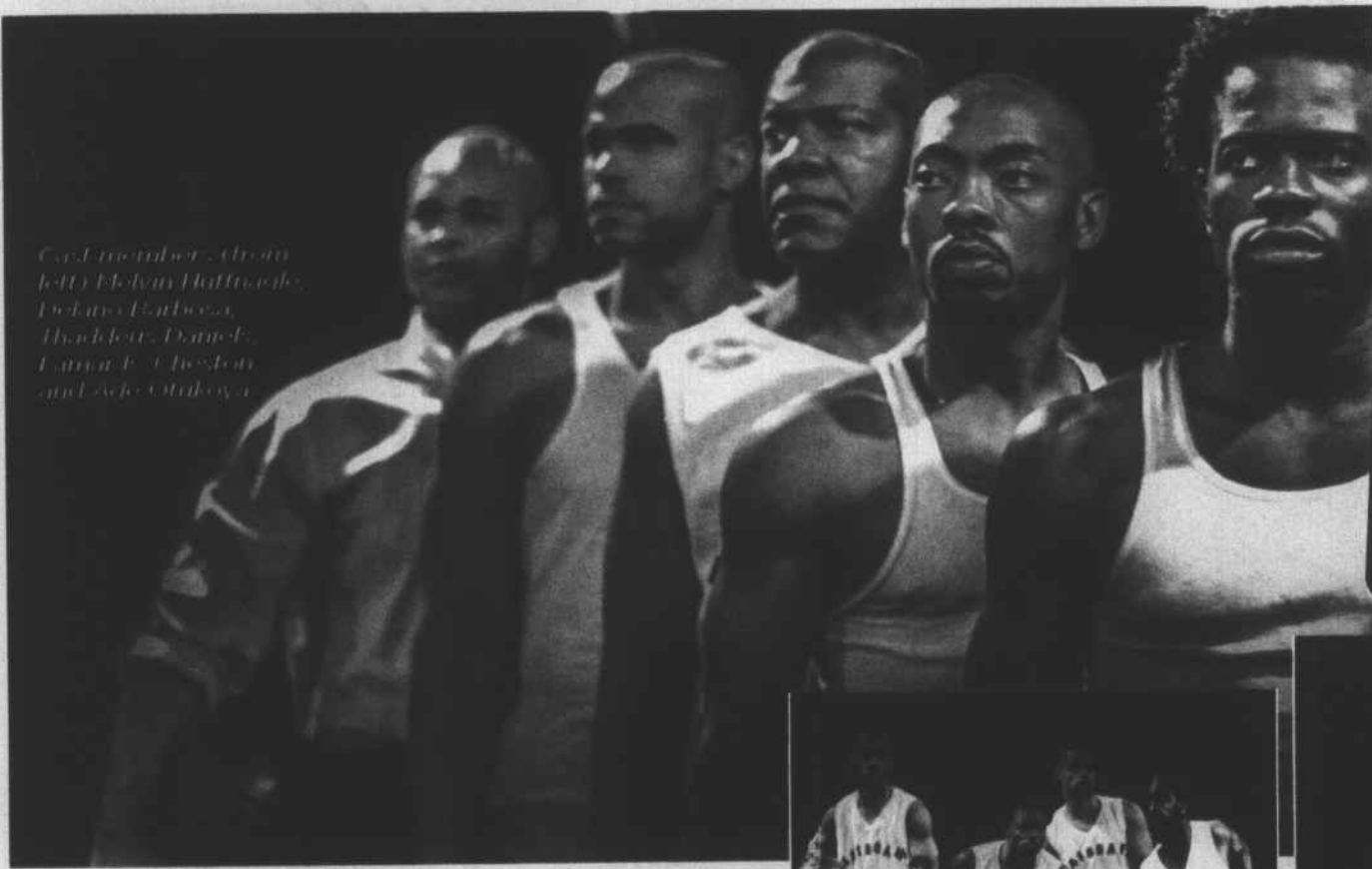


Kings of Harlem



Cast members: (from left) Melvin Huffnagle, Delano Barbosa, Thaddeus Daniels, Lamar C. Cheston and Ade Otukoya.

Kings of Harlem

Hanesbrands Theatre at the Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts

Fri, Aug. 7	3 p.m.
Fri, Aug. 7	8 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	3 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	8 p.m.

\$41

“**K**ings of Harlem” details the success of the “Harlem Rens” basketball team. Started in the late 1920s, the team would compile a more than 2,000-win record while playing games around the nation, including in the segregated South, where blacks, especially, were buoyed by their success.

The play is the latest from writer/director/producer extraordinaire Layon Gray and his NYC-based The Layon Gray American Theatre Company, which has as its motto, “History Deserves The Right To Live.” Gray has a long track record of success when it comes to turning little-known episodes of black history into engaging theater. His Tuskegee Airmen play “Black Angels Over Tuskegee,” a previous popular National Black Theatre Festival offering, is now in its fifth year of Off-Broadway success. “The Girls of Summer,” centered around the all black female baseball leagues that existed during segregation, has also been staged at the NBTF and has toured the country. At the most recent NBTF in 2013, Gray won rave reviews for “Searching for Willie Lynch,” which also has historical undertones.

“I have been chosen to tell stories that erupt the soul and shed a beacon of light on those people or things that have been forgotten,” the Louisiana native said. “To be a conduit from the past to the present – I accept that challenge.”

Like his past productions, the “Kings Of Harlem” has shined Off-Broadway. Actors Delano Barbosa, Lamar Cheston, Thaddeus Daniels, Melvin Huffnagle, Ade Otukoya and Jeantique Oriol bring it to life, as does Gray, who is also an accomplished actor.



A poster for the Off-Broadway hit “Kings of Harlem.”



Layon Gray

The Harlem Rens (the team got its moniker because it played games at the Renaissance Casino Ballroom in Harlem) was founded five years before the better-known Harlem Globetrotters. The Rens truly blazed trails, playing games against white teams during a time when segregation wasn’t only the norm but the law. Despite the team’s success – and world championships – players never won professional or social acceptance, facts poignantly made in the play. The team did not receive formal recognition until 1963, when it was inducted into the Professional Basketball Hall of Fame. Now, 50 years later, the team is lifted up again through a play that critics say shows Layon Gray at his very best. ■