

Ntozake Shange, NOMMO authors demonstrate literary brilliance

Written by Titilayo Bediako
Wednesday, 27 May 2009 14:04

The Givens Foundation has made the Twin Cities come alive with its NOMMO series. They host African American giants who enrich Minnesota with the power of words through poetry and literature.

NOMMO is a Dogon word meaning the "magic power of the word." The Series celebrates *the supremacy of the word* through conversations with nationally recognized authors who demonstrate the brilliance of African American literature.

WE WIN Institute, Inc., an organization dedicated to the academic and social success of all children, brought students from their Cooper High School Mentoring Program to experience the words of the extraordinary Ntozake Shange. The event was hosted by Alexis Pate, a University of Minnesota professor and author of the book *Ami stad*.

Shange was born Paulette Williams in Trenton, NJ. She changed her name to Ntozake Shange which means "she who comes with her own things" and "she who walks like a lion" in Xhosa, a Zulu language from southern Africa.

Shange is most famous for her choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*. The choreopoem (a word created by the author) is composed of a series of stories by the ladies in brown, yellow, orange, purple, red and blue. The setting of the play is a naked stage where each woman lives in a different city: Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Baltimore, San Francisco, Manhattan, and St. Louis. It is one uninterrupted movement from beginning to end comprised of twenty titled poems. Shange explains that, "the women were nameless and assume the hegemony as dictated by the fullness of their lives."

She is the only poet to have her poetry transformed successfully on Broadway. One of the famous lines from the choreopoem was the words of the lady in yellow, "I found god in myself and I loved her I loved her fiercely"

Besides her plays, Shange has written poetry, novels, and essays. She has taught at California State College, the City College of New York, the University of Houston, Rice University, Yale, Howard, and New York University. Among her many awards are an Obie, a Los Angeles Time Book Prize for Poetry, and a Pushcart Prize.

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Through Shange's writings she initiates an awareness of present-day femininity in society. She also brings an awareness of the realities of African American life, the good times and the struggles.

She demonstrated some of the hardships with her poem, "With no Immediate Cause," which visibly moved her audience at the Humphrey Institute.

With No Immediate Cause

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten

every five minutes a

woman is raped/every ten minutes

a lil girl is molested

yet i rode the subway today

i sat next to an old man who

may have beaten his old wife

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3 minutes ago or 3 days/30 years ago

he might have sodomized his

daughter but i sat there

cuz the young men on the train

might beat some young women

later in the day or tomorrow

i might not shut my door fast

every 3 minutes it happens

some woman's innocence

rushes to her cheeks/pours from her mouth

like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn

apart/their mouths

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menses red & split/every

three minutes a shoulder

is jammed through plaster and the oven door/

chairs push thru the rib cage/hot water or

boiling sperm decorate her body

i rode the subway today

& bought a paper from a

man who might

have held his old lady onto

a hot pressing iron/i don't know

maybe he catches lil girls in the

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park & rips open their behinds

with steel rods/i can't decide

what he might have done i only

know every 3 minutes

every 5 minutes every 10 minutes/so

i bought the paper

looking for the announcement

the discovery/of the dismembered

woman's body/the

victims have not all been

identified/today they are

naked and dead/refuse to

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testify/one girl out of 10's not

coherent/i took the coffee

& spit it up/i found an

announcement/not the woman's

bloated body in the river/floating

not the child bleeding in the

59th street corridor/not the baby

broken on the floor/

there is some concern

that alleged battered women

might start to murder their

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husbands & lovers with no

immediate cause"

i spit up i vomit i am screaming

we all have immediate cause

every 3 minutes

every 5 minutes

every 10 minutes

every day

women's bodies are found

in alleys & bedrooms/at the top of the stairs

before i ride the subway/buy a paper/drink

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coffee/i must know/

have you hurt a woman today

did you beat a woman today

throw a child across a room

are the lil girl's panties

in yr pocket

did you hurt a woman today

i have to ask these obscene questions

the authorities require me to

establish

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immediate cause

every three minutes

every five minutes

every ten minutes

every day.

The woman in the ordinary

The woman in the ordinary pudgy downcast girl

is crouching with eyes and muscles clenched.

Round and pebble smooth she effaces herself

under ripples of conversation and debate.

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The woman in the block of ivory soap

has massive thighs that neigh,

great breasts that blare and strong arms that trumpet.

The woman of the golden fleece

laughs uproariously from the belly

inside the girl who imitates

a Christmas card virgin with glued hands,

who fishes for herself in other's eyes,

who stoops and creeps to make herself smaller.

In her bottled up is a woman peppery as curry,

a yam of a woman of butter and brass,

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compounded of acid and sweet like a pineapple,

like a handgrenade set to explode,

like goldenrod ready to bloom.