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IDRIS ACKAMOR AND RHOESSA JONES

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the online newsletter of Cultural Odyssey

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PRINTER-FRIENDLY
VERSION

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"Love" in a time of Crisis! An Online Experience!

Welcome to Cultural Odyssey's 2nd new technology online experience. We took you to South Africa last time. The theme of this newsletter explores our historic 2009/2010 Season focusing on our most ambitious tour in recent memory and bringing the experiences back home to San Francisco audiences as well as an online global community of supporters and interested parties.

So, once again, hang on, tune in, and experience "On the Road" with Jones & Ackamoor as we proliferate our latest production, "*The Love Project*" in America and join us for Cultural Odyssey's Caribbean Project in Trinidad, Tobago, and St. Lucia.

THE CREATIVE WORK

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Newsletter Info

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- Idris Ackamoor & Rhodessa Jones



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 4, 2008

La MaMa E.T.C. presents

THE LOVE PROJECT

**Written by Pearl Cleage, Zaron Burnett,
Rhodessa Jones & Idris Ackamoor**

Directed by Harriet Schiffer-Scott

Performance Artists Make Interactive Love on La MaMa Stage

With the election of America's first African American President, Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor, two prominent artistic voices in American race and gender politics for the past thirty years, make a timely return to the La Mama stage.

Diary - January 24, 2009

Rhodessa and myself left San Francisco for New York City on Thursday, January 22nd, 2009 for the beginning of our two and a half month tour. In a kind of switch of fate instead of ending the tour in New

**A picture is worth
thousand words .**



**LOVE PROJECT PH
GALLERY**

PRESS

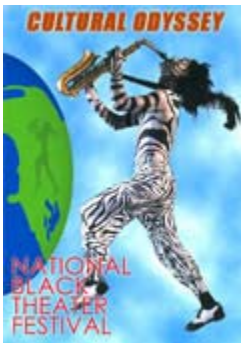


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**NATIONAL
BLACK
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Rhodessa Jones
and Idris
Ackamoor



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York and road testing the material, we began the tour in NYC. Now in retrospect this was definitely the right decision. We got the hardest and most difficult part of the tour out of the way, and also received the blessing of the New York theatrical establishment. *The Love Project* was a hit!



**LOVE PROJECT – LA MAMA THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY FEB.
2009**

Diary 2/4/09

Sitting here on my couch at our New York apartment on West 14th Street. This is the 11th day in New York and what a trip!! My decision months ago about coming to New York was a gamble that is still paying off. La MaMa Theater, like many theaters nationwide, is reeling from the economic crisis. This means it is about self-production. Or pay to play! Basically what you get is the four walls of the theater.



examiner.com
get inside the music
**Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor
demonstrate the art of love.**
February 26, 2009 by Monica Hill



"You don't start a love story. One day you look around, and it's started all around you." With song, dance and storytelling, internationally acclaimed artists Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor tell the love story they've lived themselves living after decades on the road. Partnerships, politics, history, family, and food - whatever your favorite love-song, you can sing along in this show. — 7Stages

There's a message of everlasting love in the "The Love Project", an international tour, on a stop at 7Stages, from February 25th to March 8th. The many layers of talent the performers offer on stage go far beyond the curtains, when their artistic visions meet their purpose. "Hoping love will pull people into the theater," says Jones. It's a love of rap, Jones, the voice of the duo, insist that, "we persevere and demonstrate love," and reach those who need the theater desperately to relieve feelings of repression from poverty, repression and disease.

In their performances, Ackamoor tickles all five senses of the audience by combining his instrumental, choreography, and culinary skills in the show. He has been a musician all his life, when his parents began immersing in his musical education as a young child, they worked with jazz legends, like Cecil Taylor. In 1979 when he continued to evolve as an artist he sought a new level of expression, independent. He started his

**Check out our music
at the following
online outlets:**

[[DETAILS](#)]

Everything else you have to pay for, however, what we got in return was priceless! The New York theater community in this most respected arena embraced the show and responded to it so very enthusiastically!

Before leaving for New York I went online to Craig's List and found an apartment that was much more affordable than a hotel room. \$2000 for 17 days which is pretty good for New York (about \$117 a night). The apartment has one bedroom and a living room. I stay in the living room and Rhodessa has the bedroom. The adventure began! The first few days in New York and at La MaMa were very hard. We really came prepared since we did not know what La MaMa would be able to provide. Weeks before we left I planned meticulously and it really paid off. I brought all of our wireless microphones as well as our own video projector. For the first few days we shopped around a lot to find the other props that we had to provide including two clothes racks, and a rolling cart.

Jowale Zollar, Artistic Director of the Urban Bushwomen, recommended a wonderful dancer that we were able to collaborate with for the production. Her name is Laurie Taylor and she really added another fiery energy to the show!



Love Project at La MaMa Theatre New York City (YouTube - [click to view](#))

Monday, February 2, we had a serious power day! We were up by 4 AM getting ready to make a 6:30 AM interview on WBAI Radio. We made it and had a great interview. Esther (the host) wrote a great review that we will use. Two lines jump out at you:

"Funny, warm, thoughtful and thought provoking are just some of the words that describe 'The Love Project' . . .

AUDIOSTREET.n

Cultural Odyssey

Idris Ackamoor Ensem

Rhodessa Jones



Idris Ackamoor Ensem



Idris Ackamoor Ensem



Idris Ackamoor Ensem

Idris plays the sax as though his soul just opened up to God and let you have a glimpse inside."

After the radio interview we went up to historic Harlem and did a promo at the *Harlem Arts Alliance* meeting. What a blessing to perform in front of such an illustrious audience who shouted and clapped throughout the short excerpt that Rhodessa and myself performed!

Touring on the front lines of the financial crisis.

With the financial crisis affecting the world I was not sure how theater audiences would be affected for our tour. Since La MaMa does very limited outreach and/or marketing for our production it was so important that we made an investment to hire our own marketing person. It was costly, but it really paid off. We hired Marcia Pendleton of *Walk Tall Girl Productions*. We never had a bad house and we had predominately black audiences and received a fair amount of wonderful reviews.

On February 3 the weekend after we opened we did a benefit for La MaMa and it was fantastic! We were in the company of Broadway legend Andre de Shields and film star Keith David. Both raved about our show and it was great sharing the stage with them.

New York was wonderful but a hell of a lot of work! Being in NYC when it was so very cold . . . walking up three flights of stairs every day and night. The fact that Rhodessa rarely complains and sticks it out so well is amazing!! What's to say? The Love Project definitely turned NYC out!! Special thanks to our theatrical mother in New York Ellen Stewart!!

American Theater Magazine wrote:

"Through song and story, Ackamoor and Jones disarmingly

lure audiences into an interactive dialogue about relationships of every kind". - Taylor

Read the [American Theater Magazine article](#).

We closed with a full house for the Sunday matinee. Afterwards the load out was exhausting. It took a lot to pack up everything, haul it up all those stairs, and then to UPS in the morning. But all was well! On to TAMPA!

[^top](#)

On to Tampa!

February 9, 2009

Got up early in the morning of Feb 9 for our airport pickup. Went pretty smooth but the airlines are trying all they can to squeeze every little bit of money out of you. We flew to Tampa for the performance week at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts

Center and arrived as Karla, our sponsor, picked us up and it was so sunny and warm!! What a change after the cold winter in New York! Tuesday, February 10 Rhodessa had a workshop with the *University Area Community Center*. Her ten students were teachers and administrators in the [cultural arts program](#). I begin the rehearsal process with the Patel Conservatory Jazz Ensemble, under the musical direction of



Patel Conservatory Jazz Ensemble plays music of Ackamoor (YouTube - [click to view](#))

Mr. James Crumbly. The Ensemble performed my compositions "*Cubana*" and "*Sierra Maestra*" as a prelude to *The Love Project*. In addition, following the Sunday Matinee the ensemble performed the same compositions for Jazz on WMNF Radio live in the studio!



Love Project at Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center (YouTube - click to view)

The shows on Friday, Saturday and Sunday were great!! We always had pretty good houses and the folks loved it! Big success!!! Kudos for Karla and her wonderful staff!!

[^top](#)

A Snow Storm in HOTLANTA!

We flew out from Tampa the next day after closing the show arriving on Monday, February 16 for our next residency at 7 Stages Theater located in the Little Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta. We arrived a week early so that we could conduct publicity activities to help with audience development. This was a good thing because we conducted interviews with WIGO, WRFG, and several other radio stations as well as interviews with writers for the various online outlets like [Examiner.com](#) and [GBMNews](#). Being in Atlanta felt a little like being at home. 7 Stages has become our artistic home in Atlanta and they are a model organization in terms of artistic, administrative, and PR support. Hats off to their staff! In addition, both Rhodessa and my Family came out to support the production many times and insured a family support upfront row laughing and clapping loader than anyone!

Rhodessa and myself also conducted many residency activities including a workshop with the Clayton State University drama class, a master class for community participants, and a workshop with youth from one of 7 Stages' programs.

In the middle of the run Rhodessa also did a lecture/demonstration for Emory University for their "Life Interrupted" series . . .

Performance Explores Plight of Incarcerated Women

Performance artist and activist Rhodessa Jones of Cultural Odyssey and the Medea Project will be the featured speaker and performer in "[A Celebration of Motherhood: The Arts as Activism](#)" at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 4 at Emory University

All in all the 7 Stages run was fantastic with some of the best publicity that we have had so far! Oh, by the way, what a crazy snowstorm that hit "hotlanta" on our first Sunday matinee which had to be cancelled because of the storm. I mean it was serious! Complete with the first time I saw lighting in a snowstorm!





Rhodesa Jones - Trinidadian Diary, 2009

[Click here](#) to read the full text of Rhodesa's diary

Arriving in Trinidad . . . after boarding American Airlines in Atlanta . . . we are flying back home to this verdant Eden! I am delighted to be returning to this land of calypso, pork Guerra, roti, Carib beer and Eldorado Rum! We arrive to the sweet welcome and loving arms of our host, Professor Rawle Gibbons. Accompanied by his friend Phillips, we pile our bags into two cars and drive to the apartment complex where we will be for the next three weeks. This is the end of our "winter in cold grey America tour" which began in New York City! Our apartment here is a two- storied domicile with individual large bedrooms for Idris and myself. Inside this tropical complex we are a part of a community made up of Hindu, Arabic, Chinese and black Trinidadian families. There are children everywhere- their laughter, cries, games and squabbles create a sense of place in this southern Caribbean country. The fan whirrs and turns constantly in the heat. We go out and buy food, fruits, water, rum and smoke coils- to fend off the night raids of the mosquitoes!

We are here to teach, lecture, and perform in residency at UWI (The University of The West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad). Very soon after we arrive we meet with key persons at UWI. The schedule is a bit heavy! Together we weed out some of the appearances and lectures and cut back on our performance schedule with the drama

department. We are in the Caribbean! We must find time for a swim! We leave the campus and continue the meeting at Wings, our favorite Roti Shop, where we work out a leaner schedule and catch up on the past two years.

Telling the Truth and Teaching Goodness . . .

Week One:

Idris conducts lectures on Business for the Arts and Enterprise Internships in the Arts. I conduct classes and workshops including one in Playwriting in Contemporary Theatre.

We both visit the Women's Prison at Golden Grove, leading a highly energetic interactive performance for two hundred incarcerated women!



Rhodesa Lecture (YouTube - click to view)

In the evening we co-lecture, Theatre for the 21Century, emphasizing creating our performance The Love Project. The students enjoy my fierce and raucous "Forest in the Ghetto", an excerpt from the show. Idris wows them with his Sax Tap routine! They are eager to hear more as we take them inside a discussion of the creativity surrounding modern love in a world gone mad!



Idris Lecture UWI (YouTube - [click to view](#))

On Friday we are meeting with Louis Mc Williams and Marvin George finalizing our participation in the production of "*Fragments*" a performance collage, celebrating the writings of Derek Walcott. In the early afternoon Idris leads a Contemporary Music workshop with students playing his compositions.



UWI Music workshop Plays music of Ackamoor (YouTube - [click to view](#))

Saturday, we catch the ferry for the beautiful island of Tobago. Tobago, emerald isle of a thousand hummingbirds, multicolored parrots, delicious Crab and Dumplings on the golden sands of Pigeon Point, the beach of all beaches! We meet Glenda Rose, our sponsor and host. Ms. Rose takes us to our hotel Arthur On The Beach. Glenda has organized a drama workshop in Tobago with art teachers and performers. It is an exhilarating day of cultural exploration. We workshop, Derek Walcott's *The Sea is History*, with this group of Tobagans.



Tobago Workshop (YouTube - click to view)

On this island- the drumming alone- reminds us all of our African heritage! Incredible! Glenda is excited. We discuss returning in July to create a celebration in honor of Eric Roach, Tobago's leading poet.

Tuesday, we return to Trinidad. I lead a workshop in developmental drama. This course included students working for a certification in Public Service. They were already interning in daycare, orphanages (abandoned children, Aids, the physically disabled), elder care (dementia, abused, Alzheimer's) and prison work. How to use the arts effectively? What is working? Why did you choose a particular community? How to encourage the sharing of stories? What is healing in the arts? How to share with elders?

Art as social change permeates contemporary life at the UWI!

[Click here](#) to read the full text of Rhodessa's diary.

Sunday we had to fly to the scintillating island of St. Lucia! This is such a wonderful way to end our residency! The air is bright and soft. The mountains are majestic overlooking the dazzling sea (here the Caribbean and Atlantic embrace). Tyrone, who works for our host The Cultural Development Foundation on Barnard Hill, meets us. We have been invited to work with local artists, teachers and interested

students. Our challenge here is to speak to the validity of arts education. Is art necessary? Is it vital? I am behooved: on this island that gave the world Derek Walcott!!!

Tyrone takes us to our guesthouse, Chez Marie Alise, in the community of Groslet. We drop our bags and go shopping for basics in Rodney Bay. We have dinner after a ride by the sea.

Monday we meet our group and proceed to build a work utilizing voice, text, music and dance. Again, we use Walcott's "The Sea is History" as a literacy tool inside the process. The group works hard. We have been graced with very talented participants who are seeking ways to embrace the arts as a way of life.



St. Lucia Workshop (YouTube - [click to view](#))

Thursday we return to The University of the West Indies. This gives Idris time to finish his pet project, "Women of Calypso" a proposed cultural exchange through the National Performance Network's Performing America's Project that will feature some of the best women calypso singers in a tour to three American cities.



WOMEN OF CALYPSO (YouTube - click to view)

It is a time to meet and give closure to the residency. Professor Gibbons greets us at the airport. It has been good. Friday we go to the countryside with Rawle. He takes us into the forest to give offerings to the goddess, Oshun, the mother of civilization. There in the cool green glade of the forest we offer fruits of papaya, watermelon, bananas and farm fresh honey as thanks for the success of our residency in Trinidad. Rawle reads the Kola nuts. Yes, Oshun has accepted our offering!



OSHUN'S RIVER (YouTube - click to view)

Saturday we fly home by way of Atlanta

Coming up

Well, we are now back at home in our beloved San Francisco! We are greeted by many upcoming exciting projects. Rhodessa, myself and dancer / aerialist Joanna Haigood are currently in rehearsal for Cultural Odyssey's next production entitled, *The Breach*.



The Breach (YouTube - click to view)



In addition, Rhodessa's collaboration with the Women's HIV Program at UCSF continues to rehearse and will perform on May 23, 2009 at the THEATER MATTERS conference in the Multicultural Center on UC Berkeley campus, and on May 28 at the REGIONAL HOMELESS PERINATAL CONFERENCE at Elihu Harris State Building, 1515 Clay Street.

[[See Living Proof film by Jenny Chu](#)]

In August we return to the 20th Anniversary of the **National Black Theatre Festival** presenting our series "New Performance in Black Theater".

September finds Rhodessa and Idris in Russia on a State Department sponsored tour. If all this is not enough, IKEF Records in Chicago has

just released vinyl albums of Idris' 70's jazz group, **The Pyramids**.

Whew! What a life!!!!

Visit us online at www.culturalodyssey.org

"Odyssey" e-news written by Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones, designed by Paul Hyatt of Open Range in collaboration with Idris Ackamoor. Video footage filmed and edited by Idris Ackamoor. Photos by Idris Ackamoor, Hubert Williams, Vidal (Mickey) Sada, Abby Gaskins, and Rene Walker.

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