

The Love Project

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7 Stages' Production Explores the Joy of Creating a Love Story

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By Kevin McNeir

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By Sr. Correspondent, D. Kevin McNeir

How do you begin to find true love and if you ever do find it how do you survive after the love is gone? These questions and other related heartfelt queries are explored in *The LOVE Project*, a play just ending its run at Atlanta's 7 Stages Theatre, located in the Little Five Points community.

Written by best-selling author **Pearl Cleage**, **Zaron W. Burnett** and the one-two punch of the show's stars, **Rhodesa Jones** and **Idris Ackamoor**, the piece details through song, dance and storytelling, the challenge of finding and sustaining love.



Award-winning journalist with over 12 years in the business as a news, features and editorial writer. Degrees from U of Michigan, Emory and Princeton with two first place awards for feature writing by Chicago Association of Black Journalist. Writing is my passion. Newest projects include J'Adore Magazine and National Black MBA Magazine.

"I was originally interested in looking at black performing couples - the perfect example being Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis," Jones said. "And while Idris and I were romantically involved many years ago, we were able to maintain something much deeper, rubbing bellies, living in the world, making art and developing a friendship where we were allowed to look at our failures and discuss how we should proceed."

Ackamoor and Jones, both based out of San Francisco, have proven themselves as actors, dancers, directors and producers. Each has received awards for their contributions to the arts and for almost 20 years, they have developed over a dozen original duet productions that have toured the US, highlighting Jones's uncanny ability to make audiences both laugh and cry in combination with the tap dancing-saxophone playing skills of Ackamoor.

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One day you look around, and it's started all around you."



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But what does that mean?

"Our friendship has lasted for over 30 years and being his sister-friend for so long, we can discuss our past. The quotation means if you have the good fortune, timing and sense, you open up and let the love story swallow you whole. With that in mind, the play is an attempt to open up the discussion to the community and ask, "How do we love each other?"

The talented twosome has been on the road for the past six months and enjoys the fact that the show fosters audience participation - from inviting the crowd to respond in a style reminiscent of the black church's "call and response" mode to sharing several delicacies prepared by Idris. There is even a portion in the play where three or four individuals are asked to come onstage to sing their favorite love songs. And from the actors' perspective, the show is therapeutic to its viewers.

"We were in Tampa and there was a man who was having serious medical problems - some kind of tumor - and he told us that seeing the show was one of the best things he could have done for his condition," Ackamoor said.



"There is a lot to experience in the show but it's the cumulative effect of what people see that seems to hit them at the end. We are discovering that it almost evokes a healing process."

"The majority of our audiences have been African American and as a people we continue to suffer from self-loathing," Jones added. "The key is that it's okay to look at each other and laugh. Everyone wants love but you have to bring emotional maturity to the table, especially if it moves beyond sex. There has to be a history that two people can share - and there really is a mystery in terms of how love between individuals develops.

There is this poetic existence which rests and waits for us - but only if we are ready. We developed the show based on the premise that friendship and love are God-given gifts. We have to look at our lives and make a list of the people God has given to us - and it's not always for the purpose of sex - or maybe the sexual part fades away. But if you're lucky and the pillow talk was sweet - then the relationship, the friendship, continues."

In one of the show's more controversial and yet "real" moments, Jones acts out what life and love might be like between President Obama and his first lady, Michelle, causing more than a few folks in the crowd to blush.

"We have had a few of our older patrons express their displeasure with that part of the play," Jones said. "But I say what's wrong with celebrating the kind of love the two of them share. When I see Barack look at her, I know it has to be that way. When we wrap ourselves up and refuse to open up the possibility of real love, we become a very small package."

The next show scheduled at 7 Stages is a one-woman show starring Yvonne Singh called Zora, and is an inspiring tale about the role of one of the Harlem Renaissance's leading ladies and authors. For more information go to: [7 Stages](#)

Jones and Ackamoor can be reached at:

[Rhodesa](#) or [Idris](#) at [Cultural Odessey.Org](http://CulturalOdessey.Org)

Ackamoor has recently released his fourth CD - a wonderful collection that illustrates how he has been influenced by music around the world.

Cultural Odyssey gratefully acknowledges the following for their support:

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