

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Thursday, March 12, 2009
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Syracuse University Department of Drama Presents

Home

By Samm-Art Williams
An MFA Thesis Production by Director Sonita Surratt

BLACK BOX THEATRE at SYRACUSE STAGE
Opens: March 27, 2009 Closes: April 5, 2009

(SYRACUSE, NY)—Cephus Miles is on a journey, but not the journey he anticipated as a boy working on his grandfather's farm in Cross Roads, North Carolina. Life had other plans, taking him to the fast-paced and volatile world of New York City. A classic story of the African American experience, Samm-Art Williams' 1979 Tony-nominated *Home* is poetic and forceful, capturing the turbulence of the '50s, '60s and '70s while celebrating the inherent personal dignity in struggling to overcome misfortune. Directed by MFA student Sonita Surratt, *Home* is presented by the Department of Drama in The College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University. **Running March 27 to April 5, free seating can be reserved by calling 315-443-3275, or in person at the Box Office, 820 East Genesee Street.**

With themes of salvation, acceptance and anti-war sentiment, *Home* takes its audience on a transformational journey from the plantations of North Carolina to hectic New York City and back again to the South. While many African Americans traveled North with hopes of prosperity, *Home* exposes the desire held by many to go back to the South.

"It is the heart that matters," said Director Sonita Surratt. "When we are left alone, without the voices and visual reminders that keep us on the 'straight and narrow,' it is the hearth that sustains us."

Williams' writings have tackled a variety of subjects including African American life in rural and urban contemporary settings, the plight of abandoned slaves during the Civil War, political upheaval on a Caribbean island, and the legacy of nineteenth century minstrel entertainers. In *Home*, his most notable play, the mood is kept light with comedy, witty quips and rhythmic spoken word. Melody underscores the play from start to finish. "Williams is a prose poet with a lavish sense of humor," wrote T.E. Kalem of *TIME* in a review of the Broadway production.

Receiving rave reviews Off-Broadway in 1979, *Home* moved to Broadway in 1980. The Negro Ensemble Company production was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play, and for a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play.

SYNOPSIS

Growing up on his farm in Cross Roads, North Carolina, Cephus Miles tended the land, courted his sweetheart Pattie Mae, and tried to live the message of the Lord. After the deaths of his grandfather and uncle and the departure of Pattie Mae for a more affluent lifestyle, Cephus turns to the land for comfort. In keeping with the Lord's messages that "Thou shall not kill" and "Love thy neighbor," Cephus rejects serving in the Vietnam War, going to prison for draft evasion for 5 years. He returns home to find his land forfeited to tax collectors, and his reputation in the community lost due to his unpatriotic stand. Hardened by these events, feeling abandoned by the Lord "for a vacation in Miami," Cephus heads North for a new life in the big city.

There he works loading trucks, leading a swanky new lifestyle with a free-wheeling girlfriend. But when his employer learns that Cephus is an ex-con, he is fired from his job and loses both his apartment and his girl, becoming a homeless drug addict. His North Carolina roots draw him back to life, and home.

PLAYWRIGHT

Samm-Art Williams: Plays include *Welcome to Black River*, *A Love Play*, *The Coming*, *Brass Birds Don't Sing*, *Home*, *Eyes of the American*, "Eve of the Trial" in *Orchards*, and *Cork*. Mr. Williams also wrote the book for the musical *Bojangles*, and contributed to the book for the musical *Sophisticated Ladies*. Writing for television includes story editing and scriptwriting for the television series *Frank's Place*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Stage appearances include the Freedom Theatre, Philadelphia, and the Negro Ensemble Company, New York City, in the plays *Nowhere to Run*, *Nowhere to Hide*, *The Brownsville Raid*, *Black Body Blues*, *Old Phantoms*, *Plays from Africa*, and *Big City Blues*. Other New York stage appearances include *Black Jesus*. Film appearances include *Dressed to Kill* and *Blood Simple*. Television appearances include *Cook and Peary: The Race to the Pole*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The New Mike Hammer*, and *Frank's Place*, as well as commercials. Mr. Williams holds a B.A. in Political Science and Psychology from Morgan State University, and is a member of Actors Equity, the Screen Actors Guild, the Writers Guild of America, and the Dramatists Guild.

DIRECTOR

Sonita Surratt decided to pursue her MFA in Stage Direction after enjoying many years on dramatic and operatic stages, and as a Theatre Arts professor in the Syracuse University School of Education. As an actor and classically trained vocalist, she has performed Off-Broadway, sung several seasons with the Glimmerglass Opera

Company, toured with her performance ensemble Opera in the Hood, and is the Artistic Director for Rising Sun Productions.

CAST

Danielle Lenee' (Pattie Mae) is a junior BFA Acting major with an Accounting minor. **Semaj Miller** (Cephus Miles) is a senior Acting major also studying Political Science, from Dolton, IL. **Nowani Rattray** (Woman 1) is a sophomore Acting major from New York City. **Elisabeth Tsubota** (Woman 2) is a sophomore Acting major from Oakland, NJ.

TICKETS

Tickets for the Syracuse University Department of Drama's production of *Home* are free of charge but reservations are strongly encouraged. For reservations and more information, contact the Department of Drama box office at 315-443-3275 or visit <http://vpa.syr.edu/drama>.

VPA AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

VPA is committed to the education of cultural leaders who will engage and inspire audiences through performance, visual art, design, scholarship and commentary. It provides the tools for self-discovery and risk taking in an environment that thrives on critical thought and action.

Fact Sheet

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BLACK BOX THEATRE at SYRACUSE STAGE
Opens: March 27, 2009 Closes: April 5, 2009

Designers:

Bridgette "Jet" Levy (Set Designer)
Samantha A. Schroer (Costume Designer)
Evan Gannon (Lighting Designer)
David Huber (Sound Designer)

Stage Manager: Daria Maidenbaum

Cast:

Danielle Lenee' (Pattie Mae)
Semaj Miller (Cephus Miles)
Nowani Rattray (Woman 1)
Elisabeth Tsubota (Woman 2)

Performances: March 27- April 5

March 27 - 8 p.m.
March 28 - 8 p.m.
March 29 - 2 p.m.
April 1 - 8 p.m.
April 2 - 8 p.m.
April 3 - 8 p.m.
April 4 - 2 p.m.
April 4 - 8 p.m.
April 5 - 2 p.m.

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