

# CHICAGO DEFENDER

WORK SAMPLES  
ARTICLES PUBLISHED  
& PLACED  
IN *THE CHICAGO  
DEFENDER* - 2012

*KAHIL EL'ZABAR:*  
*Music and the 2012 African Festival of the Arts*  
by Angelique Westerfield

Kahil el'Zabar began playing his first musical instrument – a drum kit - at the age of two. It seemed only natural for him to begin playing at an early age since he grew up on Chicago's Southside surrounded by music. His father and uncle were professional jazz drummers and his very first musical heroes. Kahil also received musical mentorship and hands on instruction from the best and brightest in jazz including musical icons Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.

Upon graduating from high school at the age of sixteen, Kahil joined jazz saxophonist, Gene Ammons, on tour in Paris. Transitioning into a life as a professional musician while living overseas was an extraordinary and sometimes surreal experience. Kahil says, "One of the things is that I had never really met Black people that had an expressiveness outside the oppression of America. So when I was meeting French Blacks and African Blacks, it was a certain kind of relaxed way of being where you didn't always have to watch for certain protective things of your spirit and your mind. People were just so open and fluid."

Kahil's experiences studying various forms of music, touring, and living around the world is certainly reflected at this year's African Festival of the Arts in Washington Park. The African Festival of the Arts is Chicago's largest neighborhood festival taking place August 31<sup>st</sup> thru September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Attendees are transported across the Diaspora with an infusion of African markets, live drumming, storytelling, interactive demonstrations, informative health and wellness workshops, and staged musical performances. Kahil is both a performer and musical curator of the African Festival. He has coordinated a rich and diverse line-up of artists. This year's roster includes a special musical focus on the French West Indian island of Guadeloupe as well as performances by Nona Hendryks, Lyfe Jennings, Dwele, and George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic. Kahil notes, "My goal is that the art and the music become a ritual of regeneration and reflection."

The theme of the 2012 African Festival of the Arts is "Reflections of our Culture". But as we look back, we must also move forward. Kahil has coordinated a powerful team in charge of elevating #AFA2012 into *Social Mediasphere*. There will be a series of online events that include live social media activity during the festival (i.e. live tweets, Facebook and Instagram coverage, ect...). The African Festival of the Arts is also excited to **premiere** its Chicago Google Hangout Live Broadcast (#AFA2012 Live) featuring Kahil El'Zabar on Thursday, August 30, 2012, 6pm to 8pm (CST). This online event is open to the public and will feature surprise musical guests. Non-Google Plus account holders may also access the broadcast with ease by clicking on The Skychi Travel Guide website - [www.skychitravels.com](http://www.skychitravels.com).

For festival information, up-to-date social media activity, contests, and giveaways, go to [www.AfricanFestivalChicago.com](http://www.AfricanFestivalChicago.com), [www.facebook.com/AfricanFestivaloftheArts](http://www.facebook.com/AfricanFestivaloftheArts), or <http://twitter.com/AfricanFestChi> (#AFA2012).

*SOMETIMES I CRY: A CONVERSATION WITH A DIVA*  
by Angelique Westerfield – Published in November 2012

Sheryl Lee Ralph is a renowned actress and singer. For over three decades, she has impressed audiences with her immense talents on Broadway, television, and the big screen. Ms. Ralph is also devotes much of her time and talents as avid HIV/AIDS advocate. On Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, the University of Chicago will host her one woman show - *Sometimes I Cry* – as part of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual SHINE Conference. Sheryl Lee Ralph spoke exclusively with the Chicago Defender about her show and extensive work with women of African descent who are infected by HIV and AIDS.

CD: Why did you choose to the name the piece *Sometimes I Cry*?

SLR: Because most times life is really good, and we carry on even when it gets bad. The when bad things happen, sometimes we cry.

CD: Explain how you were inspired to write the piece.

SLR: In the summer of 2002, I began to see how the rate of HIV infection in women was starting to match that of men. I happen to be travelling across the country, and I was hearing all of these women's stories. It had always been my fear that if sex could have been a problem for men, women couldn't be too far behind. So, once I discovered this fact about women, I was in shock. And there was the same [public] silence when gay men first started becoming infected and dropping dead. But this time the silence was thicker and deeper for women – particularly women of color. That's why I had to do something.

CD: Who are some of the women you portray in the show?

SLR: The monologues are all based on real women and real stories. I take their stories and I fictionalize them. The first character I wrote is called Ms. Channel. Ms. Channel is based upon on a woman in Chicago – Rae Lewis-Thornton. When I saw Rae on the cover of Essence Magazine and the caption said 'The New Face of AIDS', I was taken aback. Then I [saw her again] on a speaking engagement somewhere down South. This young beautiful woman - about the same age as I – was wearing this beautiful winter white Channel suit. When she told her story, it stunned the room to silence. I never forgot that, and [her story] became the impetus for the first monologue. Then there's Precious. Precious lives in California. After living a life full of bad choices, she literally bought a gun and tried to shoot herself. But it didn't go as planned. She ended up wearing a scar across her face. Then there's my African sister...from Kenya. And she told how she buried her sister in the red dirt of Africa. She said, 'People would forget, but I will never forget.' And I never forgot that line. So, those are just some of the women.

CD: What other HIV/AIDS advocacy work do you employ?

SLR: Twenty-two years ago, I founded the DIVA Foundation – Divinely Inspired Victoriously AIDS Aware. The foundation is a memorial to the many friends I've lost to AIDS. It started when I was an original company member of *Dreamgirls* on Broadway. Out of that, I've produced the longest running consecutive musical AIDS benefit in the country

– *Divas' Simply Singing*. On World Aids Day (12.1.12) at Club Nokia in Los Angeles...once again the Divas will gather together on the mic. The Divas sing one song, and it's one voice at a time to raise awareness around HIV/AIDS. I've also created a line of socially responsible T-shirts – Red Ribbon Diva – where we put a red ribbon on T-shirts. A lot of people have forgotten the red ribbon stands for HIV/AIDS awareness. I actually won the Red Ribbon award at the United Nations for creating artful and artistic ways of combating HIV/AIDS. My husband, State Senator Vincent Hughes, and I created [www.testtogether.org](http://www.testtogether.org). This website is designed for couples (lovers, parents and children, friends, any type of couple) to get tested together. You can enter your zip code on the website, and a number of HIV/AIDS testing locations pop up. Many of the [testing sites] are free. So, those are just some of the other advocacy efforts I've been doing over these past twenty-two years.

CD: In the wake of the recent 2012 election, how do you feel our legislators can better serve combating and raising awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through policy?

SLR: My husband I put up images of ourselves on billboards and buses throughout the city of Philadelphia a few years ago with words that simply said, 'We Got Tested, Know Your Status'. The impact of that alone really made people go out there and know their status. So, I wish more legislators stepped up to the table and did those simple things. Let people know, we have to get you tested. Your health is your greatest wealth. And I wish a lot more [legislators] would just start saying it. When President Obama said the big plan is health and education, I wish more legislators would start telling people, 'Look we've got to get America smart again. We've got to get Americans healthy. We can not have a sick dumb America. There are going to be millions of jobs coming up in the future, and we're not going to be healthy enough and educated enough to take them.' Those are simply statements that must be said out loud.

CD: Have you travelled to other countries – specifically in Africa and the Caribbean – to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS?

SLR: Another one of the programs that I created out of the DIVA Foundation is called 'The Sister's Circle'. About six years ago I said to myself, 'If women of African descent in America are being hugely impacted by this disease: 1) Why is no one bringing her to the table, 2) Why is she not demanding a table for herself, and 3) Why are these women whose rate of infection are beginning to match those of sub-Saharan Africa not being brought together?' At the time, we couldn't bring African women to the United States because there was a ban against people who were infected. So, I created the 'Sister's Circle'. I brought together about 35 HIV positive infected and effected women from the United States, and flew them to South Africa to meet with about 127 HIV infected and effected women in the township of Cape Town. And when these women came together, it was amazing. The type of healing that can take place when you don't even speak the same language, but are walking the same road and share the same cause. As a result of that, we have been working with some of those HIV positive women in South Africa who have incredible talent but are challenged greatly by the disease. They are challenged, but have great talent in beadwork. Sometimes people see me with their beaded earrings....that's because we support through micro-financing. That means we buy the beadwork from the South African women. And when people make a donation to us, they

get the beadwork in a gift. So, that is another project we've done with women in different countries.

Also under the Bush administration, G.W Bush sent me to Botswana, Namibia, Cape Town South Africa, and two other South African nations performing my one-woman show [*Sometimes I Cry*]. And I remember thinking at that time, 'How can my country figure out what to do with me outside of my country, but can not make the same way for me in my great nation – the United States of America.'

As far as the Caribbean, President Clinton gathered me and some others at his office in Harlem some years back. He wanted to do a major push with his Clinton Foundation in the West Indies. I said to him, "Mr. President, we can not even get people in the West Indies to talk about homosexuality. We can't get our churches to have this conversation because for many of them, AIDS is still a gay disease. We all [in this room] should know that the number one way people of color – of African descent – are catching this disease is through heterosexual sex. So until we can have this conversation out loud, what are we really doing?' I will never forget the look that he gave me like we weren't supposed to be talking about that right now. Well, that was then – years ago – but we are still there (in a lot of ways) in the same place when it comes to the islands because we have not had certain conversations. Until we do that, we will have little movement on this disease. Too many women will become infected needlessly. Too many children will own this disease. In places like Trinidad, the numbers are off the charts and it shouldn't be that way.

Theater is an excellent tool to initiate conversations about sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS. Sheryl Lee Ralph will be performing her one woman show – *Sometimes I Cry* – on Saturday, November 17th at The University of Chicago International House beginning at 7pm. This event is free and open to the public. Registration is encouraged. Please visit <https://myssa.uchicago.edu/RSVP/diva2012> or call (773) 834-3070.

*DIABETES AWARENESS, PREVENTION, AND EMPOWERMENT*

by Angelique Westerfield

Most African Americans know someone in their family or a friend who has diabetes. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes as non-Hispanic whites. In addition, they are more likely to suffer complications from diabetes, such as end-stage renal disease and lower extremity amputations.

Dr. Monica Peek is the Associate Director for the University of Chicago's Medicine's Center for Diabetes Translation Research, and the Principle Investigator for the Center's Improving Diabetes Care & Outcomes on the Southside of Chicago Project. She focuses much of her practice and research efforts on diabetes because she simply wants to know why African Americans are highly effected and suffer more with the disease.

Dr. Peek points out that since African Americans experience more complications and other chronic conditions related to the disease, we have to be aware that these complications and related conditions become leading causes of death among African Americans such as kidney failure or congestive heart failure.

However, there are preventative steps individuals and families can take to overcome many of the health challenges associated with diabetes. Dr. Peek believes that it is all about *Patient Empowerment* and allowing patients to take ownership over their health and their healthcare decisions. There has to be optimal communication between patients and doctors. The way patients and doctors communicate with one another directly impact a patient's health. She adds, "The qualities of care that we've received in health care systems hasn't been equal a lot of the time. So, there are things that shape or happen in a clinical encounter that can act as a tool to empower African Americans to be more proactive and feel more confident when they walk into the healthcare system. They are able to better negotiate what happens at their doctor's visit and the kind of care they are receiving."

Dr. Peek seeks to take patients to the next level of empowerment through various community-outreach programs. On Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup> beginning at 12noon, The Diabetes Care & Outcomes Project presents its 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Diabetes Cook-Off at the Washburn Culinary Institute on the campus of Kennedy King College (740 W. 63rd Street, Chicago). This free public event is intended to increase awareness of fun low-cost healthy food preparation. People can prepare foods in a limited time, with limited resources, and have it taste good for the whole family. Celebrity judges Attorney Jeffrey Leving, The Food Network's *Fat Chef* Michael Digby, and WVON's Morning Host Matt McGill will choose the winner out of 12 finalists.

In addition to the Cook-Off, The Diabetes Care & Outcomes Project coordinates other community outreach programs including a prescription coupon give-away for diabetic patients to use at local Farmers Markets and participating Walgreens locations, grocery store tours, public cooking demonstrations, and diabetes education classes. All have been

successful in assisting residents in diabetes prevention, diabetes control, and all around healthy living. Patients who visit one of the following South Side clinics are eligible:

**Participating Clinics:**

- Access Booker Family Health Center, 654 E. 47th St.
- Access Grand Boulevard Health and Specialty Center, 5401 S Wentworth Ave.
- Chicago Family Health Center, 9119 S Exchange Ave.
- Friend Family Health Center, 800 E 55th St.
- Kovler Diabetes Center at the University of Chicago Medicine, 5841 S. Maryland Ave. The Primary Care Group at the University of Chicago Medicine, 5841 S. Maryland Ave.

**Participating Walgreens Stores:**

- 1213 W. 79th St.
- 5036 S. Cottage Grove Ave.
- 8636 S. Ashland Ave.
- 650 W. 63rd St.
- 2924 E. 92nd St.
- 1533 E. 67th Place
- 2015 E. 79th St.

**Participating Farmers Market:**

- 61st Street Farmers Market (between Dorchester and Blackstone)  
Saturdays, 9am to 2pm; mid-May to mid-December

For more information on the project visit <http://southsidediabetes.org>. You may also follow The University of Chicago Medicine on Twitter at @UChicagoMed, Facebook at facebook.com/UChicagoMed, the research blog at [sciencelife.uchospitals.edu](http://sciencelife.uchospitals.edu), or the University of Chicago Medicine Newsroom at [uchospitals.edu/news](http://uchospitals.edu/news).



*Charles 'Roc' Dutton Brings his One-Man Play to Chicago*  
by Angelique Westerfield

Award winning actor Charles Dutton is in Chicago this week performing his one man play, "From Jail to Yale: Serving Time on the Stage". The show chronicles Dutton's journey from prison to theatrical and television success. Dutton spoke exclusively to The Chicago Defender about his one man show and the impact arts can have on youth.

ChgoDef: Your stage play is based off of your life from jail to Yale, what exactly inspired or attracted you to acting while you were in jail?

CDutton: It was after many years of being in different penitentiaries throughout the State of Maryland, that one day I read a play – "A Day of Absence" by Douglas Turner Ward. I found it so hilarious that I thought I'd get 8 or 9 of the craziest guys I knew in the prison and start a drama group. It was the early 1970s, and it was still a lot of rehabilitation going on in the prisons. It's all about punishment now. But it was through the course of the [drama group] that I discovered what I was born to do.

ChgoDef: Did you apply to the Yale School of Drama immediately after you got out of prison?

CD: No...I got out of prison in 1976 with my Associates degree. Then I graduated from Towson State University in '78 with a B.A. degree. I messed around the Baltimore and D.C. area doing local theater. The Chair of the undergraduate department at Towson State suggested that I apply to Yale. I laughed it off, but gave it a try. I filled out an application, auditioned, and to my surprise....I was accepted.

ChgoDef: Are there multiple characters in the play, or is it one man's journey?

CD: It's a narrative of my life story interspersed with a medley of scenes and monologues from the great plays I performed – Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neil, and August Wilson. But, I don't make it tragic. I do that to let young people know that when I was a teenager, I was undergoing the same things they are undergoing. It's to get them to know that they don't have to go to prison in order to succeed.

ChgoDef: How important is the arts in the lives of young people?

CD: I really believe that if we had more art complexes than crack houses and fried chicken joints in challenged communities, we would have less crime. That's not to say [art] will save the world or stop any carnage, but it's a way to put a dent in the problems. But we as a nation have to change the way we think. We have to want to give young people a chance and change their lives. It's got to be an overall change in philosophy about life.

Charles Dutton performs "From Jail to Yale: Serving Time on Stage", Wednesday, Feb 20<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, Feb 21<sup>st</sup> at the Logan Arts Center, 915 East 60<sup>th</sup> Street. For more information, call 773.702.2787, at the Logan Arts Center's Box Office, or online at [ticketsweb.uchicago.edu](http://ticketsweb.uchicago.edu).

Proceeds from the performances will benefit the Chicago Youth Leadership Academy, a program that exposes youth from high-risk neighborhoods to college life through a collaborative effort of the Chicago Police Department's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Districts and the University of Chicago's Office of Civic Engagement.



*A Photographic View of Life on the Inside*  
by Angelique Westerfield

October 23<sup>rd</sup> marked the opening of the latest exhibit featured at the African American Cultural Center on the campus of UIC. The exhibit entitled “Black Inside: Exploring History of Captivity and Confinement” consists of photographs depicting African Americans incarcerated. Dr. Lori Barcliff Baptista is the Director of the Cultural Center. She says that the exhibit helps opens dialogue on a major challenge African Americans have faced for centuries.

Billy Dee, Teresa Silva, and Mariam Kaba are the curators of “Black Inside”. The exhibit also features photographs from various prison camps, the incarceration of political prisoners such as Angela Davis and George Jackson, pictures of the infamous Scottsboro Boys case, and modern day cases of individuals wrongfully convicted of crimes. Baptista also points out the most striking element – a 6X9 jail cell constructed specifically for the exhibit. This is one of the only three-dimensional pieces that is part of the installation. However, all of the pieces are presented to promote dialogue, and encourage community participation in supplemental programming.

The African American Cultural Center @ UIC has arranged guided tours for several school groups and community organizations. Baptista encourages public attendance to the theatrical performance scheduled for Wednesday, Nov 7th at 7pm entitled, ‘Feeling Beautiful All Over’. The group performing is Sister’s Rising - a theater ensemble comprised entirely of formerly incarcerated women. Their performance is based on their experiences as inmates, and an ‘up close and personal’ view of the structural inequalities of the prison system as it relates to African American women and men.

The theater performance not only offers the women of Sister’s Rising an opportunity to promote dialogue, but also offers a practical vehicle for employment. Baptista points out that job reentry is a real challenge for many former inmates. “If you have a record how do you work? How do you reintegrate in society? We hope to touch upon some of these major issues, themes, and concerns [in the exhibit]. We also hope to open a space for people to enter the conversation and not feel overwhelmed or hopeless. We can all approach these issues in different ways, because we are all impacted in different ways”, she adds.

January 2013 will be the 150th year of the Emancipation Proclamation. Baptista wants people to walk away from the exhibit questioning the meaning of freedom. She notes, “It’s a complicated questions, but we need to really think about solutions. How can we get to the root causes of the criminal system that leads to mass incarceration? If we decriminalize certain offenses at a certain level can we lessen the incarceration rate?”

“Black Inside: Exploring History of Captivity and Confinement” exhibition runs through November 21<sup>st</sup> at the African American Cultural Center at the University of Illinois Chicago. For more information on “Black Inside”, visit <http://blackinside2012.wordpress.com>.



Jackie Sibbles Drury

## A real and surreal piece of African History...Now at Victory Gardens Theater

By Angelique Westerfield

The unfortunate circumstance of genocide has plagued world history for centuries. In modern times, many of us remember the atrocities of Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, and the slaughter of millions of Jews at the hands of Nazi Germany. But many of us may not be as familiar with another genocide considered the first of the 20th century.

During the European scramble for Africa - between 1904 and 1907 - nearly 100,000 Herero people of German South-West Africa (modern day Namibia) were killed. German colonist purchased much of the land owned by the Herero people, and the German settlers (commissioned by the German government) took control of the Herero territory. As German settlements grew, it became almost impossible for the Herero people to reclaim their land. Eventually the Herero revolted... but to no avail. They were captured and relocated to desert land. German settlers made it impossible for the Herero leave desert land, causing death by starvation and lack of water. The Herero who survived were forced into concentration camps, and subsequent slavery.

So, how can one begin to tell this story? Playwright Jackie Sibbles Drury has documented one version with her play - *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South-West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915*. Yes...that is the title of the play. At first glance, the title's length seems ridiculous; how-

ever, that was Drury's intent. She wanted a mixture of comedy and drama to audiences can digest the tragic nature of genocide.

Drury elevates this theatrical approach by literally presenting the subject in an unusual but highly effective way. The play opens with an ensemble of six actors who are the "Presenters": Black Woman, Black Man, Another Black Man, White Man, Another White Man, and a random white woman. And yes, these are their character names.

In a very smart comedic interpretation of events, "the actors present" a timeline of the German "discovery" of German South West Africa and the killing of the Herero people. It is a fast-paced, yet short sequence that transitions into the world of the actors. Through a series of improvised scenes, the actors attempt to dramatize history. Led by 'Black Woman', the ensemble take letters written by German settlers. They attempt to extract the real story - particularly from the perspective of the Herero people. Because what does it mean to come from an oral tradition, then that tradition be completely eradicated? Can anyone tell your story? Or can your story be told by non-Africans? After several tries, the group successfully interpret "the" story; but at a very high and daunting price.

*We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South-West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915* runs through April 29 at Victory Gardens Theater.

## INTRODUCING THE FIFTH THIRD BANK TIME TO UPDATE THE KITCHEN FROM PREHISTORIC TO CONTEMPORARY EQUITY FLEXLINE:

6-MONTH INTRODUCTORY RATE\*

**1.99% APR**

ADJUSTS AS LOW AS

**2.99% APR**

We all have things we've been putting off. We're guessing that back burner of yours could use a little clearing out. A Fifth Third Equity Line at an APR of 1.99% for 6 months can help you finally get to the important things. Like home repairs, stuff for the kids, vacations. Maybe even a new back burner. To learn more about the ideas we have for making borrowing better for everyone, call 1-866-53LOANS, visit your local banking center or find us online at [53.com/equityflexline](http://53.com/equityflexline).

We're Fifth Third Bank.

The curious bank.



\*Offer subject to credit review and approval. The applicable interest rate varies depending on your credit qualifications, line amount, property state and loan-to-value ratio. Loan-to-value restrictions may vary by property location. A Fifth Third Checking account and payments made automatically using Auto BillPay are required for the following pricing. When opened, the introductory Annual Percentage Rate (APR) is 1.99% for the first 6 months. Beginning on the first day of the 7th month, for an Equity Flexline in the amount of \$10,000-\$24,999, the applicable interest rate varies from a variable APR of Prime + 1.00% (currently 4.25% APR) to Prime + 2.25% (currently 5.50% APR). For an Equity Flexline in the amount of \$25,000-\$49,999, the applicable interest rate varies from a variable APR of Prime + 0.75% (current minimum is 4.00% APR) to Prime + 2.00% (currently 5.25% APR). For an Equity Flexline in the amount of \$50,000-\$99,999, the applicable interest rate varies from a variable APR of Prime + 0.75% (current minimum is 4.00% APR) to Prime + 1.75% (currently 5.00% APR). For an Equity Flexline in the amount of \$100,000 or more, the applicable interest rate varies from a variable APR of Prime - .25% (current minimum is 2.00% APR) to Prime + 1.75% (currently 5.00% APR). Interest rates may vary and are indexed to the Prime Rate as published daily in The Wall Street Journal Eastern Edition "Money Rates" table. As of 3/1/12, the WSJ Prime Rate is 3.25%. Offer is available on new Fifth Third equity lines of credit only. The maximum APR will not exceed 25% or the state usury ceiling, whichever is less. Annual fee of up to \$65 waived for one year. In Georgia, intangible taxes apply. The bank is currently paying these taxes on the borrower's behalf. In Tennessee, recording taxes may apply. The bank is currently paying these taxes on the borrower's behalf. Rate and offer are subject to change without notice. Consult a tax advisor regarding deductibility of interest. \$50 minimum deposit required to open a new checking account. Fifth Third Bank, Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender. © Fifth Third Bank 2012.



# THE CONVERT

BY DANAI GURIRA  
DIRECTED BY EMILY MANN

## Review: The Convert

By Angelique Westerfield

I remember when I graduated from college in the mid 90s. Fresh out of school with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from New York University, I returned home to Chicago and took a year off before beginning my track in grad school. I worked at a temp agency and was immediately assigned an administrative assistant position in a downtown corporate office. Front and center...my tasks included greeting guests, answering phones, making coffee, taking messages, ect...I would be the first impression to all who walked through the doors of this prestigious company. Well my first impression fell flat. I was asked to go home because braids were not an appropriate style for the corporate environment. I was told I straighten my hair so I would be accepted into the corporate environment.

The dismissal, degradation, and even destruction of cultural practices had been a fight among people throughout the world. Playwright Danai Gurira tackled this theme in her new play, *The Convert*, now running at the Goodman Theatre thru March 25. The play is set in the African country of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The year is 1895 and a time when European colonists are aggressively scrambling for control of the Southern region of Africa. The story centers on Jekesai - a young woman born and raised in the traditions and cultures of her African community. *Convert* opens with Jekesai's narrow escape from a life

of arranged marriage to a much older man. Arranged marriages are a long standing cultural practice that Jekesai refuses to accept. With the help of her cousin Tamba and her aunt (Mai Tamba), Jekesai successfully escapes into the home Mai Tamba's employer - Mr. Chilford Ndlovu. Mai Tamba is Chilford's domestic help. Chilford allows Jekesai to work as a domestic...with conditions. Chilford is also African and has left his family and culture behind for a life dedicated to the Catholic church. Jekesai is told she can only speak the King's English...no native tongue allowed; she must dress in European styled clothing...no traditional garb allowed; and there is certainly no traditional African religion practiced in Chilford's home...only the practice of Holy Catholicism. From the time when Jekesai is asked to change her name to Ester, the audience is introduced to a powerful group of characters and well-written story.

Danai Gurira's inspiration for writing *Convert* comes in part from her desire to express the stories that speak to the African female perspective. Danai was born in the United States and raised in Zimbabwe - her parents native land. She returned to the U.S. to attend college where she earned her Masters of Fine Arts Degree in Acting. Danai's other playwriting credits include *Eclipsed* and *In The Continuum* of which she co-wrote with Nikkole Salter. *Convert* is definitely worth attending.

## Illinois short film competition open for entries

CHICAGO (AP) - The Illinois Film Office is inviting filmmakers to enter this year's Shortcuts competition for short films. The winning film will be screened during the Chicago International Film Festival in the fall.

The competition, which is in its fifth year, is designed to boost growth in Illinois' film industry.

Entrants must be Illinois residents older than 18, or students older than 18 attending Illinois colleges and

universities.

Participants may use film, video, graphics and/or animation. Fictional stories, documentaries and free-form visual expression of ideas are welcome. Running time for submissions must be 15 minutes or less.

A panel of film industry professionals will judge the entries. Submissions will be accepted through Aug. 31st.

Online: <http://www.illinoisfilm.biz>



# Chico & Rita all that jazz...and



Chico & Rita - A film by Fernando Trueba & Javier Mariscal

By Angelique Westerfield

A great musical and cultural fusion occurred between Afro-Cuban and African American jazz in the 1940s and 50s. Musicians like Mario Bauza, Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and the great Chano Pozo emigrated from Cuba to New York to play with the likes of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. The animated film *Chico & Rita* reflects on this golden age of jazz. It is an adult

musical era while captivating audience attention with a piercing love story.

The film opens with an up tempo glitzy jazz score panning a modern day Havana, Cuba. The camera quickly zooms into Chico - shining the shoes of one his customers. After work, he walks through the neighborhood to his one room apartment, and relaxes with two drinks and the radio. He scans various stations until he happens upon jazz of the golden age. The film introduces a

Taste of Me" by Chico and Rita. The song sparks memories of a life once lived, particularly the musical love dynamic Chico shared with Rita.

It is 1948 and a younger Chico is revealed as a premier jazz pianist. He is out on the town with his best friend Ramón and two American female tourists. They take their festivities to the Tropicana Club where Chico discovers Rita - the gorgeous Afro-Cuban jazz vocalist - on stage singing a beautiful love song. Chico quickly realizes he wants Rita to be his lead singer, as well as his lover. The two meet again at an upscale club. Musicians at the club immediately recruit Chico to fill the place of their pianist who is missing in action. Chico is struck with fear when the score for a new Igor Stravinsky song sits on the piano. Despite his fear, Chico plays to perfection, and Rita becomes enraptured.

After a night of intimacy, Rita discovers Chico may have another woman in his life. She vows never to see Chico again, until approached by Ramón to join Chico to enter a local radio contest. Rita agrees after

are announced, Rita and Chico make amends. But, she is soon whisked off to New York to be a singing superstar.

The love story doesn't end there. That is only a quick summary of the first 15 minutes. The film is 94 minutes in length and filled with great jazz music and the romantic drama set over several decades. For all

jazz lovers a is a winner. nominated Feature at Awards, and Award in Sp Film. It will Siskel Film through Apr English sub

“★ ★ ★  
YOU'LL LOVE THIS



“A MUST-SEE