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This month, we check in on 2013 Festival show **My Heart is The Drum** and its authors Stacey Luftig, Phillip Palmer and Jennie Redling on their recent reading at NAMT Member The Village Theatre in Issaquah, WA and their upcoming production at NAMT Member Kent State University.



My Heart Is the Drum is a big musical set in West Africa with a driving, African-influenced score. It is about Efua Kuti, a 16-year-old girl who aches to leave behind her stifling, poverty-struck village to become a teacher, and Edward Adu, a traditional farmhand who is in love with her. Inspired by the spirit of her grandmother, Efua runs away to the city of Accra to attend the university, but on arrival gets abducted into prostitution. Edward sets out to find her. Efua has always been able to draw on her cunning to solve her problems, but will she escape these most desperate circumstances? And if Edward finds her, will he still love her now that she has been “disgraced?” At its core, the musical is about finding the inner strength to achieve your goals and create social change.

What was feedback like for your show after you presented in our Festival?

Mainly, people told us they wanted to know what will happen to Efua, our heroine, in Act II. We took that as a good sign.

You had the opportunity to bring the show to Goodspeed’s Johnny Mercer Writers Colony this winter. What did you work on during that time in snowy Connecticut?

First, we went through the script and pinpointed the scenes, lyrics and music that we had always labelled “good enough for now” and that we’d fix “later.” Our time at Goodspeed was our “later.”

We also focused on two pivotal moments for Efua, one in Act I, one in Act II. We all feel very passionately about her, and it took several passes—including one serious crash and burn—before we found the monologue in Act I, and the completely unexpected song in Act II, that we all felt to be “effortlessly” right.

This month at Village Theatre, you had your first ever reading of the full show. What was it like to finally hear the whole show aloud in front of a public audience?

Thrilling and gratifying. After so many years since its start at the BMI workshop, we could see that we had a full, working show and one that moved people. The audience also responded strongly to the script’s humor. For the songs, they not only clapped, but cheered for most of them and scene moments also drew applause.

When a member of the audience approached us afterwards to point out how moved she was by one of those key moments for Efua we’d labored over—the spot where a song had crashed and burned at Goodspeed, and which we’d gone on to reconceive completely—well, that was a proud moment.

What did you learn from that reading and what changes are you looking to make now?

As the reading at Village Theatre was only a week ago (and we’re still basking in the afterglow), we’re just now figuring out what changes need to be made. We’re also looking forward to receiving and reading the comment sheets from their audience members for additional feedback. But we do know we’d like to trim and sharpen Act II, to create even more tension and a greater acceleration toward the end of the show.

Next season, you are heading to Kent State University, near Cleveland, for a full production! What are you excited about working on when you finally get the show on its feet?

Everything! But “on its feet” are key words. Dance is completely integrated with music in West African cultures and we can’t wait to adjust the show, as needed, as we finally discover how dance helps bring the show to life.

Also, it is an extremely visual show, with images that are unfamiliar to most of our audience. Daily village life and work, urban street hawkers, the clash of African traditions and poverty with modernity and rich businessmen—we think that these visuals will add many layers to the story.

Why should people plan to come to Kent State to catch *My Heart Is the Drum*?

We believe that *My Heart Is the Drum* is something rare today: an original story that is transporting and dramatic, told with warmth, humor and hope. It has a driving, African-influenced score that is deeply theatrical. And while the themes are universal, many of the timely details are particular to the hardships of those in West Africa, particularly of girls who struggle for an education, and who make great sacrifices as they strive for a better life.

For details about the Kent State production, please visit www.kent.edu/theatre_new/my-heart-drum.

For more about the show, please visit www.myheartisthedrum.com or like My Heart Is The Drum on Facebook.