

# Dream Interpretation

*Kuntu Repertory Theatre explores the bonds between African-American women.*

## **KEEPERS OF THE DREAM:**

### **A CELEBRATION OF SIGNIFICANT SISTAHS!**

CREATED AND DIRECTED BY  
JACQUELINE MOSCOU  
PRODUCED BY KUNTU  
REPERTORY THEATRE  
CITY THEATRE'S LESTER HAMBURG,  
SOUTH SIDE  
THROUGH APRIL 18: 431-CITY

**K***eeper*s of the Dream is an exuberant celebration of African-American women and their contributions to culture and society. The show mixes together gospel and blues songs, dance, storytelling, poetry and quotations from prominent African-American women of the past and present: Maya Angelou, Mary McLeod Bethune and Sojourner Truth. Their words and stories are offered as snapshots which, when viewed together, depict the journey from Africa through slavery and civil rights to the present.

Jacqueline Moscou, who created and directed the piece, has a fine sense of dramaturgy. The songs, stories and quotes flow well from one to the next, and the overall effect, as intended, has the feel of a continuous voyage. Aside from the songs and dances (choreographed by Norma Jean Barnes), the most enjoyable parts of *Keepers of the Dream* are when the actors are allowed to play actual characters rather than simply quote lines. These moments add another dimension to a performance piece that, at times, edges a little too close to preachiness.

The show is driven by an incredibly talented ensemble of five women: Terri Bridgett, Wabei Siyolwe, Bonita Thomas, Karla Washington and Mayme Almeta Williams. They work well enough together to seem like a family on stage; they listen attentively to each other and offer applause, approval and support. It's important that the audience feels and believes this relationship, as the show

revolves around an assumed link or kinship between black women.

Whether this link extends to include all people is questionable. On one level, *Keepers of the Dream* proposes that it does. Celebrating the strength of one group of people allows us to acknowledge the power of all individuals — the power to change, to do good, to affect the world and each other. *Keepers of the Dream* sends this message in the way the actors encourage the audience to participate, to clap their hands and shout and dance. It sends this message in the pictures of children — African-American, Asian, Native American, Caucasian — that are projected onto screens near the end of the performance.

And yet, while I enjoyed the music and the performances, while I could clap my hands and laugh at the jokes, I didn't feel invited into the family — not because of race or gender, but because of religion. *Keepers of the Dream* asks you to connect on a spiritual level, but rather than relying on a general spiritual sensibility, the show is fairly firmly rooted in specifically Christian ideology. There is, of course, the gospel music, but furthermore, the structure loosely follows what Gerald L. Davis describes in *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know* as the traditional African-American sermon. The first thing the preacher does is "line up the congregation" by putting forth ideas and promoting interaction and participation. In *Keepers of the Dream*, the audience is welcomed to "the meeting" and invited to join in.

There is also a very strong emphasis put on the church and God as sources of inspiration, strength and experience in the African-American community. True as this may be, there are people for whom it will not foster the sense of communal jubilation toward which *Keepers of the Dream* seems to strive. Still, it's most certainly a story worth telling.

— ANNA ROSENSTEIN