

Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

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newsletter:

tel: 071 732 3885
april/may 1995

Save the
centre...by
any means
necessary

see article page six

Inside:

reviews, writings, centre update, news, what's on, regular groups and more...

Apologies

for this *very* late newsletter.

This was due to our being ridiculously over-taxed with other work as well as having some difficulties with the computers... again. Sorry.

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The past few months for the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre have been difficult but rewarding. We continued our regular tasks. Calls were answered from isolated Black lesbians and gay men, those coming to terms with their sexuality, those wanting information, advice or merely to talk to another Black lesbian or gay man. Talks, highlighting the issues for Black lesbians and gay men, were few though our training and consultancy work have increased dramatically.

With limited resources we have achieved a lot. Significant events have happened in our history. Before the appointment of a new worker, a temporary one was employed to help Clarence Allen. Eleanor Hope began in July 1995 bringing a new dynamism and energy.

Savi Hensman is still involved on a voluntary basis, consistently proving beneficial. Currently she runs her own training/consultancy project, Words Into Action, using the centre as a base.

In June we had a stall at the Lesbian and Gay Pride festival. Our table had information about the centre, HIV and AIDS leaflets and items from other Black lesbian and gay groups.

The centre has undertaken some lucrative training/consultancy work. This will help the centre to raise much of its desperately needed funds. It has worked with Nottinghamshire

Probation Service, South Yorkshire Probation Service and the Globe Centre, London.

In the media, the centre has appeared on the Out series on Channel Four. There have been editorials in the Pink Paper. We have been interviewed by a Black newspaper and a Black magazine. Letters voicing our concerns about negative and hostile reports of Black people and Black lesbians and gay men have been sent. We have also written to the Notting Hill Carnival Planning Committee noting the level of homophobia coming from the official stages.

At the Annual General Meeting on 1 March new management committee members were elected. In the last year some management committee members left and new ones joined

More volunteers got involved. We are truly grateful. Much of the work could not have happened without them. Stay with us. We are still looking for volunteers. It does not have to be much time.

Next year will be even harder on us if the community does not get involved. The funding for the two paid posts comes to an end on 31 March.

It will be then that the future of BLGC will be truly questioned.

(see article page seven)

BLGC definition of Black

People descended through one or both parents from Africa, Asia (i.e the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, and descended from the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean.

FINANCIAL CRISIS HITS BLGC!

From April 1st 1995 BLGC will operate without a grant

The Centre now has only two part-time workers whose posts are funded by the Consortium for Opportunities for Volunteering - but only until 31 March 1995 !

BLGC needs money

to provide the same level of service we're providing at the moment. A fundraising group has been meeting and making applications for grants to charities and other grant-making bodies. However given the nature of BLGC's work, as well as the large number of organisations competing for limited funds, we can't rely on grants as our only source of income and the Centre will have to use a range of ways for raising the money needed for its work.

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW !

There are lots of ways in which you can help BLGC:

encourage your friends to become members or supporting members;

if you belong to an organisation or group get it to take out an organisation membership;

make a donation - get all your friends to donate too!

organise a fundraising event- a group of volunteers have already organised a series of successful women's all-nighters at the Centre;

you can also become a BLGC volunteer (and free-up staff to persue other tasks) or offer to join the Management Committee;

take out a standing order using the the form below;

STANDING ORDER FORM

Your bank _____ Branch _____

Bank address _____

Sort Code _____ Your account no. _____

Please pay _____ on _____ (Date of payment) to BLGC CENTRE ACCOUNT, A/c Number 50724860, Unity Trust Bank plc, 4 The Square, 111 Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1AR. Sort Code 08-60-01 and make similar payments annually until amended.

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

national and international news

Sheba Publishing Collective closes

Sheba, one of the country's most important and influential women's publishing collectives, was forced to close its operation doors last year due to financial difficulties and too few staff.

Although it was established to be a collective, being run as a group of women working together, there was not a sufficient number of women who were willing to join to help make Sheba work, coupled with the existing members not renewing membership.

The collective was founded in the early eighties, and in its fourteen years of publishing it helped to provide a platform and a space for innovative and new, feminist and/or lesbian writers. It has published works by many women with writing by authors as diverse as Audre Lorde, Jackie Kay and Suniti Namjoshi.

Khush in New York

In New York, a South Asian lesbian and gay group defied a ban and actively took part in the city's yearly India Day March. The group had previously been told it could not march as it would use the march "for its own ends" as it had on the last occasion it had permitted to take part. This follows on from a number of Irish lesbian and gay groups being denied the right to participate as out lesbians and gay men in the Saint Patrick's parades in both Boston and New York

Lesbian parenting victory

Lesbian and gay groups campaigning for the rights of same sex couples in child custody cases welcomed the Appeal Court's decision to allow a lesbian mother to keep custody of her two daughters after the court ruled that lesbianism did not make a woman an unfit mother. The court decided that the children would lead no more of a "normal life" if they were to live with their [heterosexual] father. Lord Justice Neill could understand the "father's anxieties", but went on to state that the mother could give the girls more of a normal family life than the father, who had the help of carers. While this decision is worthy of celebration there are still many cases where lesbians win or keep custody of their children, and as usual, during this case the mother's sexuality was heavily noted in court.

"All we can hope for now," said Lisa Saffron, author of *Challenging Conceptions*, a book on lesbian parenting, "is that this will become a trend for other lesbian mothers in the same situation."

Bermuda makes moves to equality

Following a vote in the island's House of Assembly, Bermuda may pass a law to decriminalise sex between two men over the age of eighteen. In a fourteen hour debate last year this measure was passed despite the Prime Minister, Sir John Swan, voting against it. Although Bermuda still remains a British dependent territory, sex between two men remains illegal, although the British government has been putting pressure on the Bermudan authorities to loosen the law.

Gay asylum settler dies

The first openly gay man to receive political asylum in the USA died in September of last year. Ariel da Silva, a Mexican, said that if he were to return to his home town in central America he would face persecution because of his sexuality. It was this that helped him to stay in America.

What was so important about this case of granting asylum is that it forced the United States Attorney General to set a legal precedent, in the States at least, by agreeing that persecution because of sexuality is grounds for granting political asylum.

While heralding the decision to give this man some protection against potentially violent situations as a victory for lesbian and gay men, activists were keen to point out that being a lesbian or a gay man does not automatically mean that one would be granted asylum and that discrimination is still as fierce and as rife as before.



national and international news

Mexican gay and transvestites document harassment cases

A Mexican group of gay men and transvestites, Transvestis de Culiacan has collated a number of statistics that outline an alarming campaign of violence and harassment aimed at them by the state police.

Transvestis de Culiacan have said that there has been an escalating rise in the number of raids on the homes of members of the group as well as at the meeting places for transvestite sex workers.

It has been reported that transvestites are, more often than not, arrested and detained for lengthy periods without formal charges. Some have testified that they have been assaulted or raped while in custody, while others face heavy fines or extortionate demands from the police. According to the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission some of these men have also had HIV test forced on them. The press in Sinaloa often publishes both the names and addresses of those detained. In addition to this documentation of the harassment that these men experience from the police, the group also has evidence of at least a dozen murders of transvestites.

Occur make it happen

The Japanese gay political and social group has been awarded a little under £2 000 when it successfully charged the Metropolitan Government of Tokyo with discrimination. It took almost thirty six months for the courts to come to a decision.

The court case began in 1991 when the group was refused the use of a recreation centre owned by the Tokyo Board of Education. The group was told that it would not be allowed to make use of the space as the centre had "a duty to promote the sound development of young people". It was felt, by many in Occur, that this was just another example of the discrimination that lesbians and gay men in Japan have to tolerate, face or challenge on a day to day basis.

While it is not illegal to be either lesbian or gay in Japan, social pressure to stay in the closet is usually so powerful that many lesbians and gay men lead unhappy or unsuccessful heterosexual lives.

Occur will continue to monitor discrimination against lesbians and gay men and last year was involved in lobbying Amnesty International at its Yokohama conference where Amnesty International agreed to include lesbians and gay men as prisoners of conscience. It is also hoping to convince the government to lift the ban on people living with HIV or AIDs from entering Japan.

Malaysian camp?

The government of Malaysia has banned effeminate men from appearing on any of the country's television programmes. Datuk Mohammad Rahman, the Information Minister, said that men who talk and act like women would not be allowed to appear on television. "When a man behaves like a woman, we fear he will become non-productive later. We want our people to be strong, to work hard. When you're a man, show you're a man," he said.

However he made it quite clear that this was not a blanket ban on all gay people from appearing on television. For the government it is merely seen as a way to carry out the country's industrialisation policy, which it has called Vision 2020. This decision has not been received by everyone as being negative. Some people believe that this could, in fact, be beneficial in that a more rounded picture of gay men will appear on television, whereas previously all representations of gay men were stereotypically effeminate.

Although homosexuality is still against the law in Malaysia, carried over from British colonial times, there are several gay bars in the capital. The government also supports a HIV prevention organisation run by openly gay people

info Capital Gay

BLGC chit chat

I just wanted to introduce myself and to have a little chat with you, to bring you up to date with the goings on at the centre, behind the scenes. The good news is that the BLGC, with the heavenly help of Savi Hensman as chair of the AGM, elected a management committee of seven women with two male observers.

On the 13th of March, I am quite proud to say that I was part of a delegation that went before the Equalities committee in Southwark, after five months of lobbying. We were supported for the first time with over two rows filled with Black lesbians and gays, including three members of the Lesbian Avengers. It was probably the first time that Southwark Council saw so many of us. The deputation included members of the management committee who spoke on our behalf. We need to thank Clarence, Ted, Ayah, Diann, Sharon and the back benchers for taking part and making our first historical approach to Southwark. As we returned to the centre that night, it was with renewed strength and a determination to "SAVE THE CENTRE"

Thursday the 23rd of March we met at the Unity Centre on Peckham High Street, we had contacted the membership and the Black lesbian and gay community to come and give support and ideas particularly around fundraising. If you know you never heard of these events then I would ask you to call us and give your name and address so that you can be included in our next mailing. The outcome of that meeting was the decision to "SAVE THE CENTRE, BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY"

Now I know that the Black lesbian and gay community has had a lot to say about BLGC in the past, particularly since the move to Peckham. We have

heard all the negative criticism pertaining to personalities, politics, and the condition of the space, ie. noise of the trains etc. We need to look beyond that and see that the centre is able to be self-sufficient and independent financially. That is the key.

There have been times I've been in the centre and thought I was the only Black lesbian in London, yet I've also seen Clarence heading for the door as the centre erupted in noise, laughter, and discussions. The Black lesbian and gay community have many issues that must be tackled. Many of these issues are sensitive and will bring up painful experiences that are difficult to face, but we must.

For example, someone said to someone else that "BLGC just won't die." Now you could possibly assume that that is a negative statement, but then you wouldn't understand Black Talk. Part of our historical experiences of racism, our ancestors thought that the best way to prepare children to deal with racism and survive, was to make sure they were the first to say to little Black children, all the things they would eventually hear as they grew up and were confronted with racism. Our parents thought that if they were to say these terrible things first, we would get used to it and thereby protect us. In other words, things were said to us to make us hard, in order to survive.

So now if someone were to say that to me, I would say "thank you" what a nice compliment. For myself, I find that it's a miracle that we have existed for ten years and it is to those very few people who have stayed with the centre through the rough times that have made it possible. That BLGC just won't die is a testament to the soul of Black people who have historically fought for change with little or no money at all, yet we continue to survive.

In April we call to the Black Lesbian and Gay community to put aside the stress of racism, homophobia, the economic distress and come to the centre with potluck, energy and music to clear the garden so we can have barbe-ques throughout the summer.

In June we will have a seminar dealing with violence in the Zami community. This is a difficult issue and there is hardly any information around to guide us, yet we have a responsibility to ourselves and to other lesbians to make each other feel safe and support those that want to grow.

Hopefully from this seminar we will decide to have a Zami III conference.

Also in June the Black Lesbian and Gay Arts Forum will make their debut at the Brixton Shaw Theatre.

Unity Centre on Peckham High Street will be used by BLGC as a fundraiser event every Thursday. The last Thursday of the month is a women-only social. A film night is also planned. That leaves two Thursdays open for suggestions and volunteers to take on.

All these events need your support and ideas, please contact the centre. We are open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Well, I'm glad we had this chat and already I do feel better, don't you? It's really good to talk and there's so many things I would like to share with you, unfortunately, the press must go to print and I just wanted a quick word. The next issue could be your turn, as I've gone on a bit and I know you might want to respond. After all that's good communication, when we give each other a chance.

Eleanor Hope

P.S. How about a problem page and personal ads for the newsletter?

Southwark Council refuses BLGC grant

On 13th March 1995 at a meeting held at the Town Hall, Southwark council Equalities Sub-committee refused to approve a £13,000 grant for BLGC, a sum that it was hoped would ensure that the centre remain open, even if not initially employing paid staff. The centre originally asked for £60,000 but the figure was reduced just over £13,000. In spite of this there was huge commitment and unity showed by all management members, staff and supporters in the face of adversity, which mounted to a fierce determination to continue to keep the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre ALIVE.

We know we are a viable and valuable service, providing the only Black lesbian and Gay Centre in Europe. Get involved!

Letters

A letter came to our centre from a Black gay brother who is in prison in the States. He wishes to make contact with other Black gay men. We have reproduced an edited version. We do not know why he has been imprisoned and felt that this was not the issue here as he wrote to us as an isolated Black gay man. We feel it fair not to make assumptions on his crime and leave that up to those who write to him to find out that information to establish if they wish to communicate with him.

If anyone wishes to write to him please send your letter in a sealed envelope to BLGC marked J.V.A. and we will send them to him.

Dear BLGC,

I read about your centre in Boyz magazine. A guy here gets them and passes them on to me. I am reaching out to a friendly soul to communicate with and hope that

you will be able to help. Let me tell you a little about myself to help you decide if you will be able to help me. I am a 32 year-old gay African American. For the past 7 1/2 years I have been confined on Texas Death Row.

On June 6 1994, I was told I tested positive for HIV. It has been hard enough dealing with having a death sentence that has carried me through years of appeals, now I have been given a death sentence that I simply cannot appeal. As you can probably imagine, the gay community here on Death Row is very small - almost nonexistent. I have no one I can really talk to. Many try to sympathise with what I am going through but none are able to empathise. To top it all off, the last two lovers that I had both tested negative for the virus. At this point, I am uncertain as to how I was

infected. My emotional state at this point is a mixture of confusion, disbelief and loneliness. I don't have anyone to turn to. The administration here hasn't done anything for me other than tell me the test results. The little information that I have received on the virus has come from a doctor friend of mine in Dallas and from magazines. I could really use a friend; someone knowledgeable on this subject who can tell me what to expect, what I need to do in regards to diet, exercise, etc. I could really use someone just to talk to. I haven't told my parents. My mother has basically disowned me due to our religious differences. She is a staunch Jehovah Witness so doesn't approve of my lifestyle. I don't know of any other organisations or support groups here in the States. Those I have come across in magazines only list telephone

letters

numbers (we're only allowed one phone call every 6 months).

Please, would it be possible for you to post my letter on your bulletin board and if someone is so compelled, it is my hopes that they would write to so I can have at least one friend to talk to. I certainly would appreciate anything you are able to do. I've never felt so helpless before in my life.

Alone and afraid.

J.V.A.

Dear workers and volunteers,

I have read with interest the article "Save haven" and since it published your address I feel almost compelled to let you know my point of view for what is worth [sic].

I feel that local authorities throughout the country should withdraw all financial support for organisations like the BLGC. All around us libraries are closing down, sport centres are threatened by financial cuts, council tenants are forced to bear the cost of repairs and general maintenance, pavements are not being repaired and the overall standard of public services is declining. Under the circumstances and when resources are scarce, a sense of priority should be the only criteria adopted in the allocation of

funds.

Sadly, many local authorities place their political agenda before the needs of the whole community. That is the sole reason for the existence of centres like the BLGC, which are usually staffed and coordinated by opportunists and careerists, very knowledgeable about the most recent developments of the PC debate, but with a good eye for cushy jobs and 'upward mobility'. Hypocrisy, hypocrisy, hypocrisy.

I hope you might have to close down very, very soon.

Yours faithfully,

J BROWN

P.S. ...and no! I am not a middle-class white gay man either.

Spring is here:
rebirth,
new life,
RENEWAL

see page twenty-nine

Review D. D. Reviews
Reviews
Reviews Reviews Reviews

 maya berry
let the dead bury
their dead
urban dreams
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 b-boy blues
100 days from now
 a visitation
 of spirits
final bell
 ...freedom
 just as i am

b-boy blues

B-Boy Blues is one seriously sexfunky book about Black on Black love, desire, sweet kinky lust and hard pumping sex. And what is even more fierce is it's written by a Black gay brother.

For those of you not down enough to know what a b-boy is Hardy gives us a *too* real description of these fine looking brothers.

"They are the boyz who dress to thrill. Their heads - clean, close cropped, or in a funky fade - are wrapped in bandannas, scarves, stocking caps, or sports caps, which are usually worn front, titled downward, loose or backwards on the head for full effect. They style and profile in their baggy jeans or pants falling somewhere between their waist and knees, barely holding onto their behinds, their undergear pulled up over their waists..."

I have three words: **Take me now!**

The story - Hardy's debut as a novelist - centres around Mitchell Crawford, a twenty-nine year-old, out and successful journalist, who spends every waking and sleeping hour thinking, or dreaming, about his hip-hop loving, street-strutting, crotch-grabbing, black gay man. And Crawford finds him in Raheim Rivers. He is twenty-one years-old, six feet tall, 215 pounds of solid mocha-chocolate muscle. (Yum, yum, yum.) Mitchell expects to be taken on a roller coaster ride of sex and sexual gratification. And he *is* taken to another plane(t).

Mitchell thinks he has found happiness

in this man who he enjoys cooking for, cleaning up after, watching him do his daily workout, being fucked by him. Despite Raheim's bad habits of leaving the bathroom in a mess and putting empty cartons of juice back into the refridgerator, it is, Mitchell justifies, these little idiosyncrasies that make Raheim a true man and Mitchell's man.

However, nothing is ever so easy and

Hardy's book explores the themes of attraction based on gay perceptions of masculinity and what is believed to be 'down', about gay prejudices of the roles that are adopted. It explores the nature of relationships and the hypocrisy that exists within these relationships if the couple take on assumed roles. While Raheim, for example, can do the nasty grind with his ex-lover in front of Mitchell or wear

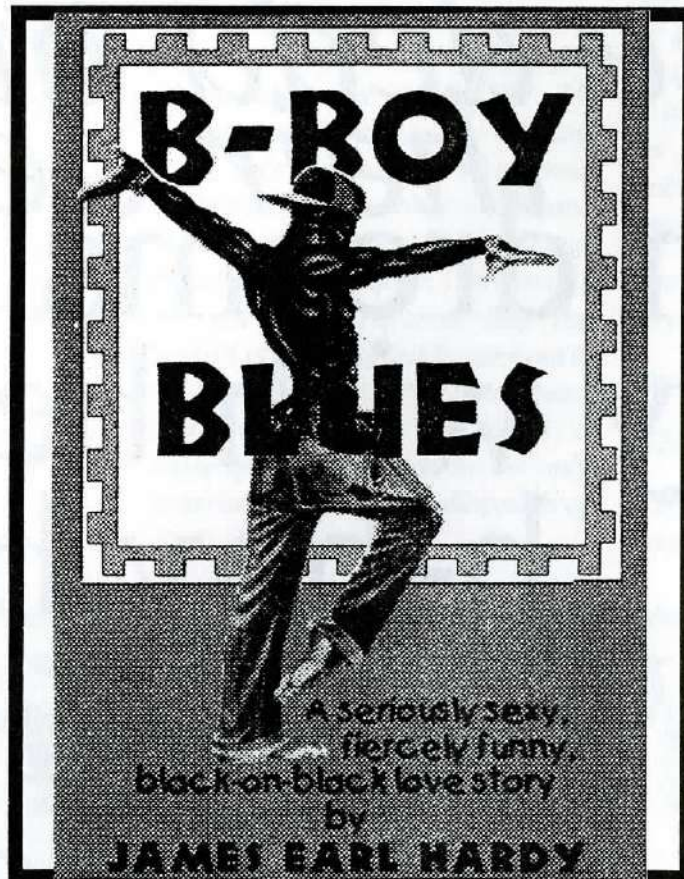
nothing but a pair of orange swim trunks and a smile at the New York Pride parade (warm in here isn't it?), Mitchell is cussed out for wearing lycra cycle shorts or sexlessly dancing with another man at a b-boy jam.

Sexual roles are also under scrutiny, roles of sexual top and bottom and how they set people up to become inflexible. Lastly the book examines the theme of love, of Black gay men being so afraid of it that we run a mile before admitting we want it, need it or are able to feel it. Alternatively we are so wrapped up in our own mess that we cannot feel love when we are in it and need the outside input of others to open our eyes. The book also includes issues such as

homophobia, both familial and at work, bisexuality, gay parenting and racism. But beyond this it is sexy sex sexy.

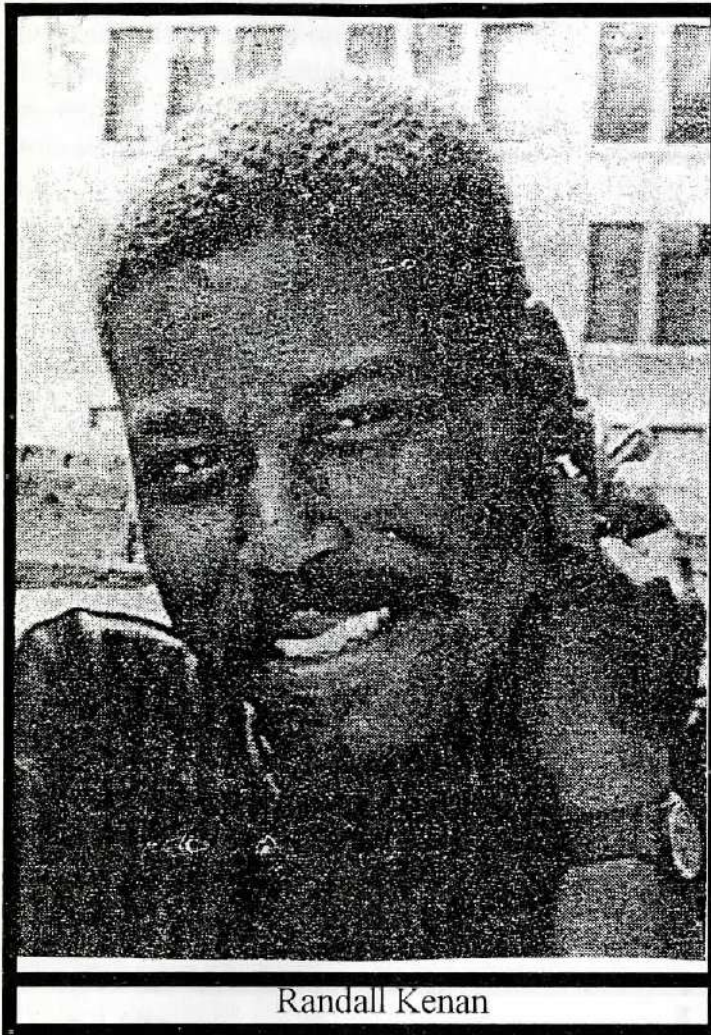
It really is refreshing to read about Black gay on Black gay love that does not shy away from what scares so many homophobes. Homophobes only see the first three letters of our sexuality and allow themselves to be threatened it. This book does not apologise for its celebration of enjoying gay sex. And what is even hotter is all the sex is safer.

We deserve more books like this.



the two argue over a number of arguably minor incidents that escalate into such huge rows that the two men part company. During this separation Mitchell questions whether he was being unreasonable, begins to reassess what he felt for Raheim during their time together, gets feedback from his friends and his family about his ex-lover. It is not until an incident involving a mutual friend that Mitchell and Raheim *really* speak to each other and decide how to lead their individual lives.

let the dead bury their dead



Randall Kenan

Coming after the powerful *A Visitation of Spirits*, *Let The Dead Bury Their Dead* is a collection of a dozen short stories that are as diverse in their style and plots as the individual protagonists of each of the tales. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. called Kenan "a fabulist for our times" and in the collection Kenan weaves a magical spell with his words, creating timeless worlds and characters that are bizarre enough to make us feel uneasy yet not so outlandish that they become unreal.

The first story, *Clarence and the Dead*, is not given a time in which it is set. It could easily be rural America in 1994 or it could be placed forty, fifty, even sixty, years ago. It explores the beliefs and the superstitions of a town, whose inhabitants begin to worry when a young boy, Clarence, having not

spoken a word in his life, starts, on his third birthday, to talk in complete sentences. While this in itself is remarkable, the frightening thing for most of the habitants of the town is that the boy is gifted with the ability to predict the future and also has the capability of knowing things long since past, that he should not know. Kenan manages, without belittling these people's views which are for

them very real, to introduce little references to the ways of these people. He writes, "Folk who said he [Clarence] didn't have a belly button just don't know what they're talking about, cause we saw it knotted." In one sentence he manages to let us know that some people in the town thought the child inhuman. It is this conciseness that makes the short stories

Corn silk is interesting in that it explores the consenting, incestuous sexual relationship of a brother and his sister. It, to a degree, even justifies the relationship, or, at least, has the reader sympathising with the character. It is written with alarming clarity and objectivity, plainly without bias (although it could be argued that it is with a bias towards consensual inter-

familial sexual relationships) that gives the reader a view that incest is not always exploitative or manipulative. In this case it was mutually beneficial to each person involved. It forces us to reassess whether our views about such relationships are based on knowing the full truth or whether they are lead and fuelled by a society that scorns any sexual relationship - except between two consenting adults of different sexes and different families. An interesting if not controversial notion

One of Lena's stories is told in *What Are Days?*, in which Lena, a middle-aged woman has a sexual relationship with a young man called Shang. He is one of the boys who stood on the street corners, "giraffe-tall, earth dark, shamelessly young, dressed in their loud runningshoes and kangol hats and gold chains and red sneakers. Their talk had the quality of a prayer meeting, full of "uh-huhs", "yeahs", and nodding heads". In this story there is a poetry to the words that is so pure that it echoes the sensuality of the passionate love-making between Lena and Shang, moving to the rhythm of Al Green singing "Let's Stay Together". It speaks of another forbidden desire, the love of the older for the young or vice versa, and the boundaries that we impose on ourselves when we deny ourselves love. Surely Lena would have been happier if she had stopped worrying about her age and Shang's youth and merely began to enjoy the experiences and very pleasurable ones as well. What is interesting, in that it is fascinating, is the comparison Lena makes between her new lover and her late husband, Cannonball. Lena enjoyed sex with her husband but gets a different pleasure with Shang. While Cannonball was big and swarthy and his "behind had been his namesake, bunched-up black metal, solid as a train wheel", Shang's "cheeks were

round like dishes and soft to the touch, smooth". Lena describes sex with Shang as "rosemary leaves and coriander and thyme and clove and bay and cardamon, garlic, cinnamon, and fresh-ground black pepper." It is a very sexual piece.

Run, Mourner, Run tells of a white racist land developer's plan to take over valuable land, land belonging to a Black man, Ray Brown. The property had been in Brown's family for many years. The plan was to get a pretty young white man to seduce the Black, bisexual man, take photographs and consequentially force Brown to sell by using threats about exposing him to his wife, Gloria.

The Strange and Tragic Ballad of Mabel Pearsall tells the tale of the eponymous woman and her life and its ability to bear down on her to the point that she feels weary

The story *Let The Dead Bury Their Dead* is my favourite. It is an imaginatively written piece, penned

"by the Right Reverend James Malachi Greene" about the history of a town called Tims Creeks. Kenan adopts an approach often seen in school history books, giving credence, by footnotes, to events that seem implausible, verifying the story with references to 'facts'. Truth and fiction become blurred. This account itself is dated 2005, so he is talking of the past from the future, as if the present has already happened. Any account that begins "On March 12, 1998, the Reverend James Malachai Greene died in a car accident on the way home..." cannot be read with a passive eye. Kenan mixes the spoken words of Ezekiel Thomas Cross and Ruth Davies Cross, with extracts from letters, diaries and discourses on natural history, which given that they appear, at times, misplaced, forces the readers to think. This is not for the lazy reader. It is very clever writing.

The other stories have their separate appeal. *Things of Their Own* explores the apparently petty

disagreements of townfolk that can often have quite deep, lasting effects. The tale also has one of the most mysterious characters in literature. *The Foundation of the Earth* uncovers the hypocrisy and stupidity of fundamentalism. *The Origin of Whales*, on a superficial level, seems to be about nothing at all, but actually is a very tender tale of a boy's love for his aunt and how close they are to each other. *This Far* tells the life story of Washington Booker and how he managed to improve his life. *Ragnarok! The Day the Gods Die* recalls the funeral of Sister Tate and all the memories she invokes in those at the ceremony. *Tell Me, Tell Me*, in the vein of Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart*, has a woman called Ida haunted by the spirit of a Black boy she (thinks she) knocked over and killed while driving home.

Let The Dead Bury Their Dead is a great piece of literature.

maya berry

Pamela Sneed's *Maya Berry* is a piece about three Black women from three different generations: a thirteen year old who people think is too dark-skinned; an older lesbian, with a perceived drink problem, who sees the young woman as being very beautiful; and a blues singer, working in a nightclub.

The performance is set in the fictional town of Lynchburg which is infamous for killing more Black people in the year before slavery and desegregation than any other town in its proximity. The town weighs down on each of these women but does not break them, and they share the common factor of surviving a system that permanently puts them down.

The lesbian character spends much of her time in her house, listening to her gramophone sending out blues and jazz tunes into her living room. The music takes her off into reverie and she remembers good times: the tenderness exchanged between her and her mother, the moment when she first laid eyes on a woman she found attractive; the feelings that that gave her. She recalls bad times: her father beating on her mother; the anger she felt at her and her mother's impotence; the fury when a young man insulted her verbally then went that step too far and laid his hands, uninvited, onto her body; anger unvented for so long erupting from her so potently that she beat the man so severely that she earns the reputation of a virago.

She drinks neat whisky to remember and to forget, looking out of her window watching the town of Lynchburg move along its daily existence. From time to time she sees the young woman playing outside with her friends, but most often the girl plays alone.

Very dark skinned and with tough, nappy hair the Black town folk think this teenager unattractive. Consequentially her confidence amongst her peers is affected, but she dreams passionately about escape from the town. So powerful is her dream that she determines to do it, not just to prove to others that she has worth but because she knows, that deep down within her, that she can do

whatever she sets her mind to do.

Initially the blues singer is seen through the eyes of the lesbian recluse, who the latter finds attractive. On a small stage in a smoky club she bewails the plight of not finding a man good enough for her, which fuels the reclusive woman's desire. The singer, deep-voiced and masculine, sings songs that move both herself and her audience.

This woman sings her sings about the experiences of sexism, rejection, mistreatment. It is about her defining herself for herself and not about another person doing that for her. The three nameless characters are woven into a poetic monologue about Black women existing at a time where positive role models for themselves are few, where they have to create themselves.

If there was to be a criticism, it would be that these characters were not as clearly defined as they could have been that their individuality often got lost and confused with each other. Without a doubt there are common factors that unite these women. They are all ostracised by members of their communities. They find themselves on the fringes of society. They share similar pains. Yet they deserve to be more sharply defined. Maybe this was the intention, that is to say, to show that one Black woman's struggles are to be shared by all Black women, otherwise life is futile too difficult. Maybe

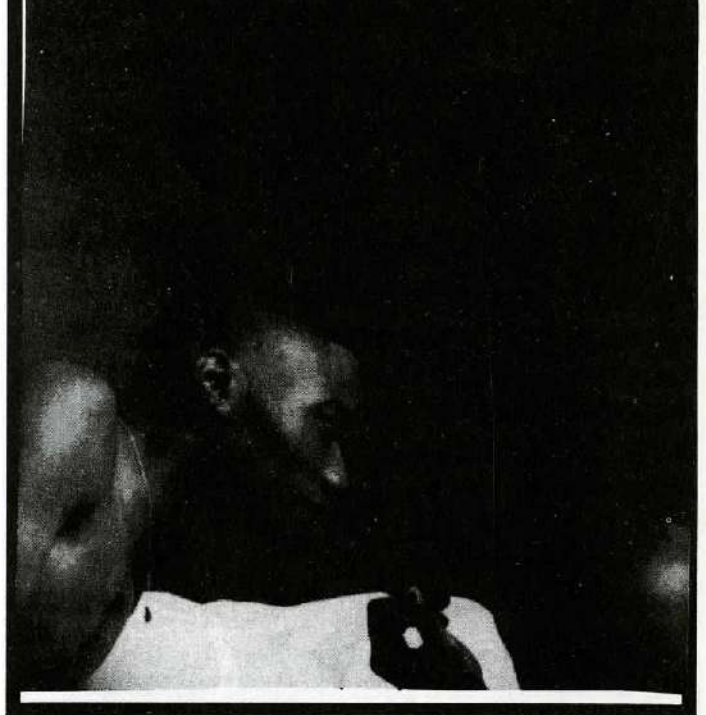
Maya Berry is a piece that you have to see to make up your own mind.

Clarence Allen

boy with beer

boy with beer

'ask when first a brothers mouth kissed a brothers lips'

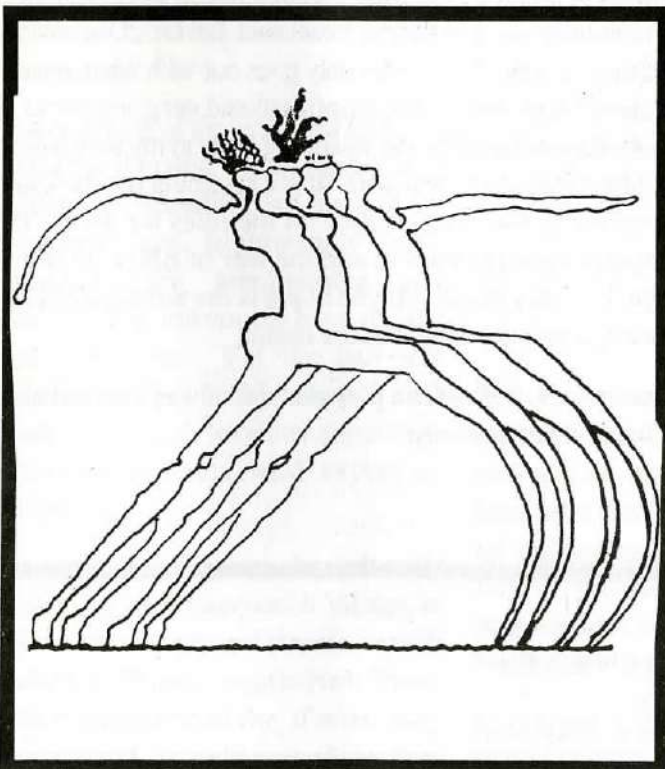


Every time I see Paul Boakye's *Boy With Beer* I get something more out of it. This time I saw it at the Oval House after it had been given a rewrite which included an extra scene.

The piece is a brave and ambitious attempt to raise and confront the many personal, societal and political pressures that are involved in a Black gay relationship. The play is based around the home of Karl, a talented and successful photographer, who after meeting Donovan at a club, invites the latter to his house. From this time on the two men work hard to find the equilibrium between voicing their lusts and their fears.

The character of Donovan, played with alarming realness, is streetwise, confident, flirtatious and, he admits, has a steady relationship with a woman. Yet he is not afraid to have sex with a man - as long as he fucks and does not get fucked. This machismo, to a degree, gets in the way of his being able to get close to Karl.

Karl, on the other hand, is confident about his sexuality, has had successful and unsuccessful relationships with Black men, as well as white ones, and has no problem with this. He has now reached a point in his political and personal development where he wants to find a Black partner with



whom he can find, establish and share common ground. Karl is prepared to deal with, and try to work through, many of the issues that arise for Donovan, just to ensure that he has a meaningful and worthwhile relationship with another Black man.

The setting at the Oval House is quite large yet the actors manage to dispel the problems around the size and make the layout seem as claustrophobic and stifling as the relationship between the two men. The play tackles issues such as institutional racism and institutionalised homophobia, has the men arguing about commitment to each other as well as who is to clean the house and sees the men practices hot, intense sex.

The writer manages to introduce the theme of HIV early in the play by having the characters practice safer penetrative sex and includes an arguable forced line about Black men and women dying of the complications from AIDS because they thought only white (gay) people contracted HIV.

The re-write worked for me as, in the original, I felt that Donovan was completely powerless and all the control was held by Karl. Karl had a disposable income while Don lived from hand to mouth; Karl had a good job which he enjoyed whereas Don did odd jobs here and there; Karl was sure of, and confident about, his sexuality but Don hides behind a mask of bisexuality; Karl has his own house, Don doesn't; Karl is able to vocalise his concerns and worries, Don was inarticulate and shy about feelings; Karl had accurate information about HIV and AIDS. All Don had was the fat cock that hung between his legs. However in the rewrite, and credit is due to the director, Stephen Luckie, and the actor John-Lloyd Stephenson, the character, Don, still has all these factors against him but he is not so impotent. Don is likeable, despite his contradictions, and is able to make Karl fall in love with him. Although inarticulate, Don is far from unintelligent. And he has a laid-back sexy charm. This dramatically changed the dynamic of their relationship. Don's cockiness cannot disguise his very real insecurity beneath the surface of arrogance. Under this veneer he is sensitive and vulnerable. We feel that he is not naturally like that but has had to adopt this role to survive in a hostile world. It is this that stopped the audience from hating Don throughout the play.

However I have a major problem with a particular twist in the play.

During a climatic scene when Don learns of his HIV status, Karl to comfort him, holds him close and tight, and the couple end up making love, and having unprotected penetrative sex. I cannot find a good reason why the writer decided to put this scene in. Karl, an educated and empowered Black gay man, aware of the issues around HIV made a choice to practise unsafe sex with Donovan. Arguably in the midst of shock during so dramatic a revelation, safer sex is not always paramount, but I would imagine neither would sex, period. A friend suggested that it was a complete show of dedicated love. Surely Karl's love would best be shown by protecting himself from HIV infection or his lover from any disease he may have that could impact on Don's HIV status. I am not saying that Boakye is irresponsible but it does make me think about the self-destructive nature of a Black gay man who the audience was lead to believe was informed, choosing to risk infecting himself. If a man in Karl's position cannot make safe decisions, what hope is there for those Black gay men who are not in his privileged, informed position? It made me think that Karl did not value himself enough to believe himself worth protecting.

While not looking for (super)heroic perfect Black gay role models, in art or real life, I am looking for ones that are happy with their race and their sexuality, who have no desire to suffer or apologies for being Black and gay, and who love themselves to see that they are the most important thing in their life and that they are worth loving.

Boy With Beer, apart from that scene that threw me, is without a doubt a powerful, passionate and amusing piece. It is humorous and sharp, cruel and fierce. Donovan's referring to a Black guy who only goes out with white men as a "slave" was classic. It is emotional and very, very sexy. I doubt if I was the only one squirming hotly in my seat as Karl and Don flirted on their sofa. It is a rejoicing of Black gay sexuality as well as a critique on the roles we adopt, the stereotypes we pander to and the fear of Black on Black love. It is very brave. Maybe brave is the wrong word but honest, which is so much more useful.

I feel *Boy With Beer* is a play that will always come back. When it does be ready.

the final bell

What happens when the world welterweight boxing champion comes out on live national television? What happens to his Latino lover, whom he outs without informing him of the decision? What happens when this boxer becomes heralded as a hero by the lesbian and gay communities and hated by the reactionary right wing journalists and conservatives wanting to keep boxing straight.

The answers to these questions are what keeps *The Final Bell* readable. It could be argued that the whole scenario is infeasible and ridiculous given the machismo that surrounds most sports. However, in light of the decision by the Canadian Olympic boxing medallist, Marc Leduc, to disclose his sexuality, this scenario may not be as implausible as we imagine.

Stormy Rhodes is the boxer, born and raised by his mother in Harlem, who, on receiving his title as world champion, calls his unsuspecting lover, Carlos, into the ring to celebrate his victory and then consequentially tells the television audience about his love for the man beside him.

The reactions of those around him is at times predictable, even slushy, and questionably unrealistic but some of the reactions are frighteningly real, especially the homophobia and violence that the couple have to face and overcome. Yet the pair still manage to find much needed, and greatly received, love and support in places they would least expect to uncover it.

The story is set against a backdrop of the boxing ring, Greenwich Village, in particular the bars and streets, as well as the Gay Pride parade in New York, where an unwished for, if not totally unexpected or unimagined, violent

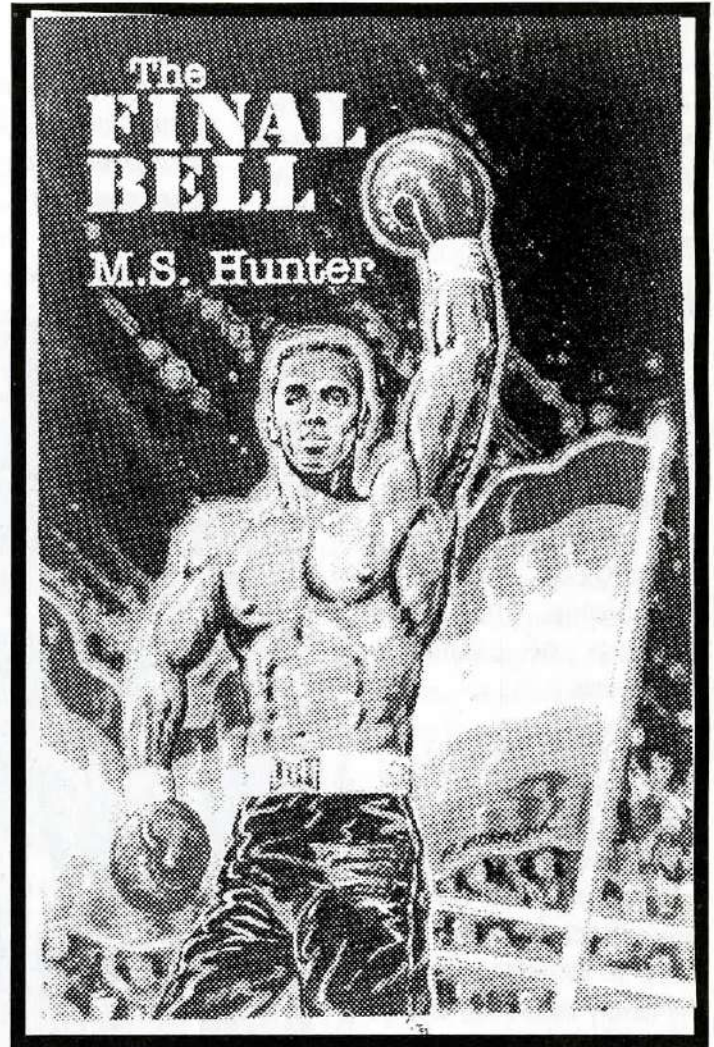
incident sets the scene for the rest of the book.

The character of Stormy, a muscular ten-stone African-American, who shocks the world by coming out, rocks the world further by publishing a book of poetry, which his manager decides to cash in on, given that America is talking about Stormy. He pushes the book as lesbians and gay men will buy it, as well as boxing fans of Stormy's and also the curious or cynical who want to see Stormy fail.

The book explores the theme of familial acceptance of one of their members homosexuality; covers, or at least suggests at, the large number of gay men within the arena of boxing; from the boxers themselves through trainers etc; challenges, to a degree, concepts and perceptions of masculinity.

What is interesting is this story could have been interchanged with any of the popular sports and the issues would have been similar. I do not think Hunter set out to change the way people think but to get people to question the assumptions that they make based on traditions and appearances.

It is a not a difficult book and very



readable, made more so as Hunter obviously knows something about boxing, which is clear in his writing. It is even better because we get to see a rounded, together Black gay couple who have integrity and a passion and love for each other.

Call me romantic, but why can't they be Black gay Mills and Boons?

100 days from now

This is Steve Corbin's third novel, following on from *No Easy Place To Be* and the enjoyable, readable and successful, *Fragments That Remain*. *One Hundred Days From Now* deals with a scenario familiar to Corbin's work, that of male on male relationship and the difficulties that arise within these.

The principal characters are Sergio Gutierrez a successful self-made business man of Mexican descent and Dexter Baldwin, and African American struggling yet successful writer who find themselves in an often mutually destructive relationship, that has its moments of passion and tenderness.

Possibly the difficulty stems from the different levels of 'outness' which causes tensions within their relationship. Dexter is confident and out in his professional and private lives, while Sergio is closeted to all of his family including, strangely, his twin brother with whom he shares an indescribable bond. What unites the two men is their AIDS diagnosis, although Dexter is asymptomatic and Sergio is symptomatic.

The story deals with Sergio's decision to attempt an experimental bone marrow transplant that might improve his health, a treatment that will take one hundred days to determine the treatment's success or failure.

While the principal themes appear, superficially, as AIDS Corbin manages to intertwine many issues. In a powerful scene where Dexter and Sergio have their first row, on the way to a party, Corbin writes:

'...And I've had my ass kicked by

black guys because I'm white. So don't tell me-'

'I'm not denying you that, Serge. I'm only saying that to be black and male in this country is lowest level on the totem pole. And you know it's true. Your racist experiences are not comparable to mine. I have to deal with racism every day of my life-'

black hole, do not exist in isolation and that they are all intrinsically and intricately linked.

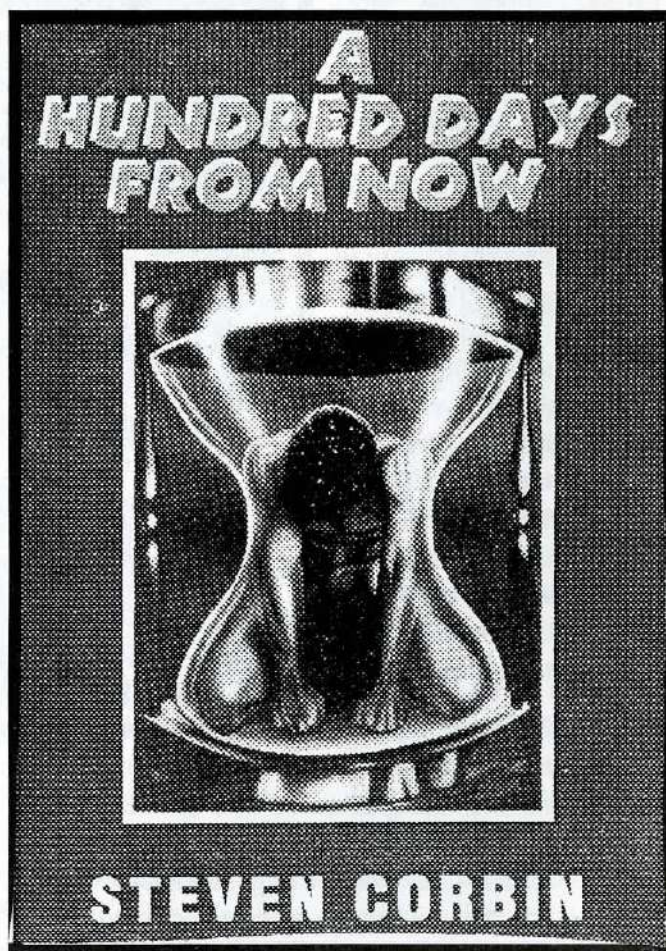
However in the book Sergio's treatment of Dexter is often so awful that I wondered why he would stay with him and take such abuse. Being denied to Sergio's family, being treated as a servant and a cleaner, and supporting both Sergio and his relations, all without praise or thanks, are some of the mistreatment that Dexter had to bear. He becomes physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually exhausted. But love is strong. However is sit love for Sergio that drives Dexter or motivated him to continue to care for someone, or is it a sense of duty mingled with severe feelings of guilt. I would have like Corbin to have delved deeper into Dexter's character to uncover the true and hidden feelings about staying with Sergio. How strong is love or commitment to Sergio? It remains to be seen.

Corbin in this book seems less fluid with his pen. He breaks scenes and chapters in what would appear to be unusual places, yet he still manages to create a unique whole that brings together many different but interconnecting themes. It is not an easy book to read and demands more than a passive perusal, as Corbin drags you into a personal relationship with the characters. It would be a hard person who fails to have any reaction to it. I suggest that you read it to see if you agree.

'I think you're a little too angry-'

'People like you, who enjoy every racial and societal privilege there is, always think people like me are too angry-'

Racism and all its related ills (tokenism, treating Black people as exotica, exploitation) are all shown and explored in the book. As well as abusive relationships, love and understanding, commitment, respect and coming out. Corbin shows us that these issues do not exist in an apolitical



urban scenes/creole dreams

David Rousseve is Black, gay and gorgeous, stunningly so. And his work is even as stunning as he is attractive. His piece *Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams* was shown as part of the South Bank Centre's *American South* season, a piece he wrote, directed and choreographed with the dance company, Reality.

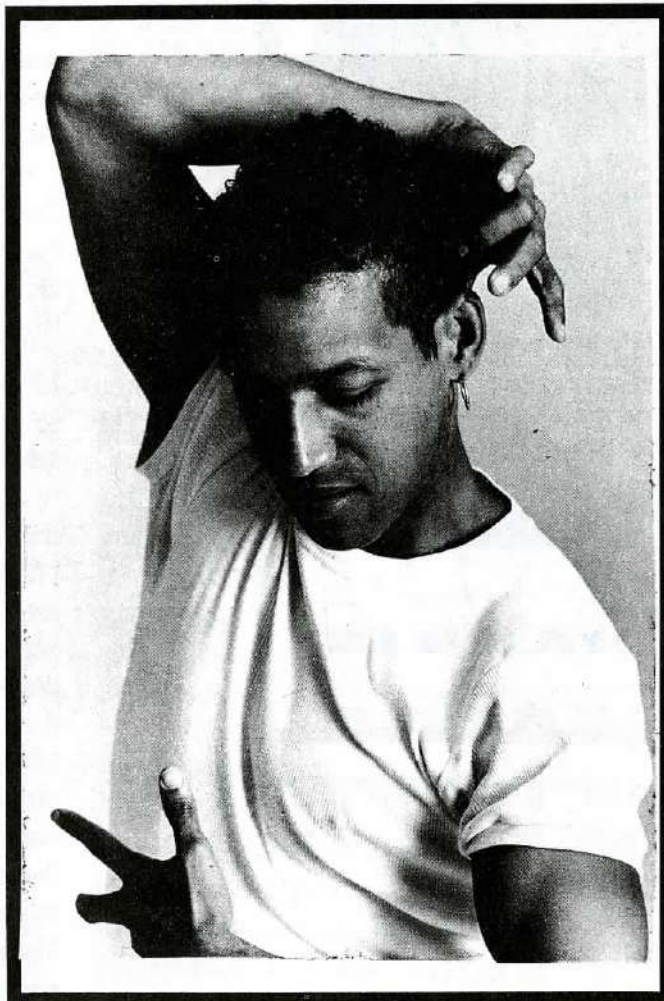
Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams is the final of eight segments of the series *Pull Your Head To The Moon...Tales of Creole Women*. The latter was shown at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, as a twelve minute film directed by Ayoka Cheniza, in March 1994. It is a piece of work inspired by the lives of Thelma and John Arcaneaux, Rousseve's grandparents, which follows a creole woman's life, from her childhood in Lafayette, Louisiana, to her death in Houston.

Urban Scenes/Creole Dreams is a brave, innovative and imaginative mix of dance and performance art, fused with traditional and pop culture of African America. This melange many would envision not working, but it is able to speak in the language of hip-hop or gospel as well as in the terms of experimental and contemporary dance.

With all very professional and competent dancers, accompanied by the gospel diva B.J. Crosby and the (recorded) voices of a gospel choir, Rousseve tells a tale of racism, sexual oppression and loss. It follows on from *Pull Your Head Up To The Moon...Tales of Creole Women*, which further united Rousseve with his grandmother, when she was able to understand her grandson's feelings of the loss of a loved friend to AIDS, as she recalls how, due to southern racism and

violence, a white landowner raped one of her best friends, causing this friend to die inwardly.

It is a powerful message delivered with compassion and humour, using vibrant dance movement, song and the spoken word. It is filled with such theatrically that it breaks down the established



distinctions between dance, theatre and popular music. It criticises social ills severely but does not alienate anyone by using dance, hip-hop and African-American culture. He brings hard-hitting social issues into the dance arena.

The piece tells tale that need to be told. As well as Rousseve's coping with the loss of his friend, and his grandmother supporting the woman whom a man raped, it includes an account of his

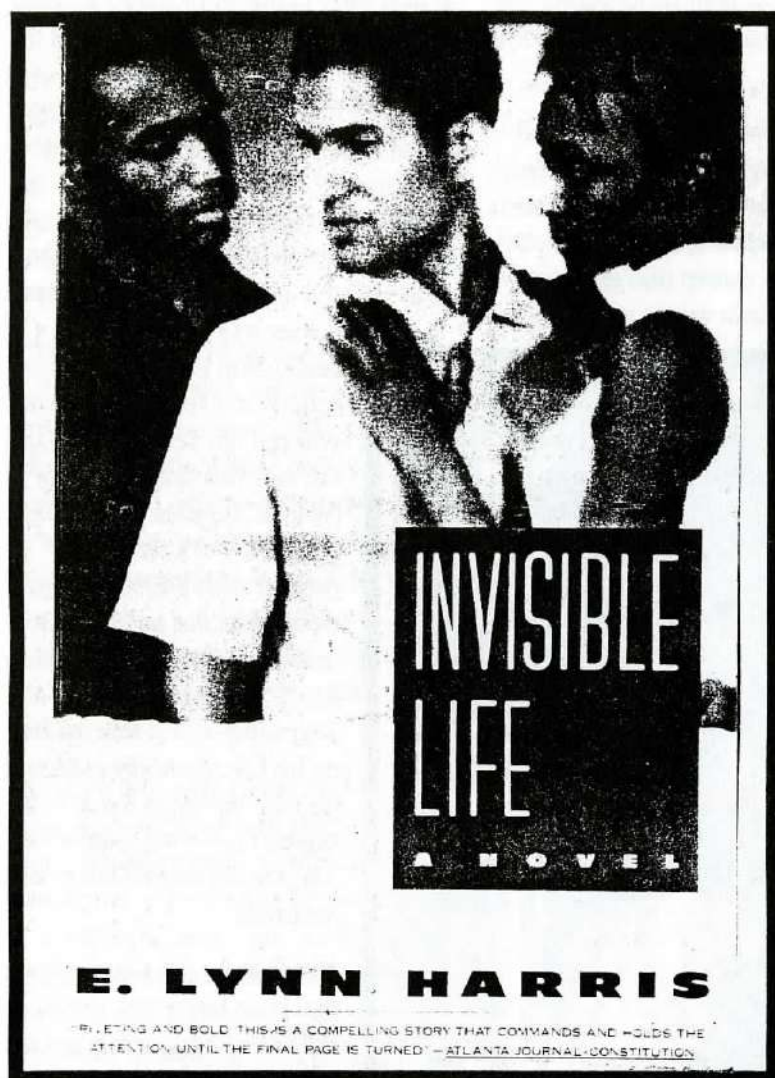
grandfather being so proud of his new job at the rail road and how proud his grandmother was of her husband. However he was no more than a porter, called to carry the luggage of unthankful white folk. When, one day, the grandfather forgets his lunch, wife and grandson, dressed in their best clothes so as not to shame their relation, went to deliver it to the work place. On seeing him bent over below a mighty valise the couple left without his seeing them and did not mention anything to him. It typifies how Black people work together to protect each other. Far from being upset that he had not told them the full truth, they were more concerned about the degrading effect this job had on his life, especially as he and his wife moved to Texas in the hope of bettering themselves. This racism caused him to lose his pride.

Yet despite the sense of loss that is undercurrent, the piece is filled with copious quantities of hope and spirituality. The spirit of the survivor of the rape rises up to the sky, liberated and with a formidable energy. Her friends follow this spirit to their actual liberation by pursuing it out of the cornfield of the south. The piece ends

with the figure of the grandmother, ubiquitous throughout the piece in slippers, housecoat and winged glasses, being released from the restrictions of her attire and her age by belting out *Amazing Grace* with such power, passion and perfection that you could not help but by moved.

Seriously powerful stuff.

invisible life



Bisexuality fascinates me in that I do not really understand it, although I would like to comprehend its subtle nuances. I have, I suppose, prejudiced views that make me imagine bisexual people doubling their chances of scoring, by keeping all options open, and only encountering problems when they disclose their sexuality to their sex or emotional partners. So it was with some relish that I plunged into *Invisible Life*, recommended to me by a man I had spoken to on a telephone, which according to the Richmond Times-Despatch is a "bold and riveting look into the minds of bisexual black men". I hoped that this would explain (what is certainly for me) the enigma of bisexuality. While I know many gay

others well enough to ensure that they remain emotionally close to him.

While at university Raymond meets and is seduced (quite unconvincingly) by Kelvin another Black man, who is also bisexual although many of the women he dates are ignorant of this. This seduction ignites a curiosity about his sexuality that was previously extinguished by satisfactory sexual and emotional relationships with women. It is from this early stage in the book that we begin to follow Raymond on his self-centred mission to understand, and consequentially accept, his sexuality, whatever the consequences.

Harris introduces us to Sela, an educated and beautiful Black woman

men who love men and women they make love only to men. So I began the book.

The novel centres around the Black bisexual male protagonist Raymond Tyler and his search for, if not personal happiness, an ability to understand his own sexuality and be able to explain this to significant

and Raymond's childhood sweetheart, whom everyone expects him to marry; Kyle, a truly fierce ruling diva and an out and very proud Black gay man who loves Raymond but has problems with Raymond's sexuality ("Chile, these confused boys give me fever" is a line that sticks in my mind; Raymond's father, a successful and self-made lawyer; Raymond's mother who acts as a peacemaker for the men in the family; Nicole Springer, a successful singer and actress who has a relationship with Raymond, and Quinn, another Black, bisexual man leading an 'invisible life', married with children, who has a relationship with Raymond.

If I had to identify any faults with the book it would be the indecisiveness around the issue of bisexuality, but that really is not a genuine fault or a fair criticism. The character of Raymond, I feel, at the end of the novel, had not really come to terms with his sexuality and none of the other bisexual men in the book gave me any reason to like them. None of them showed any honesty or personal integrity that distinguished them from other characters in the book. This might be because the often insular and conservative Black communities scorn bisexual people more than lesbians and gay men.

Perhaps this was the author's intention, that is to highlight, that even for bisexual people themselves, their issues are rarely cut and dry. He would have succeeded if this is his desired effect. He is also successful in producing a very enjoyable and readable book

just as i am

Just As I Am begins where *Invisible Life* ended, with the lawyer Raymond Tyler being our principal character. What is interesting is that the story is told, chronologically, between Raymond and Nicole, a woman with whom Raymond has had a relationship. Each chapter alternates between the voice of Raymond, still struggling to accept, fully, his sexuality, and the voice of Nicole, also struggling to understand Raymond for whom she has a great affection, personifying the reasonable face of the Black community.

In a way not dissimilar to *Invisible Life*, Raymond meets and has a relationship with Black men whose true (bi)sexuality is hidden away from the public. In particular is the character Basil, a professional football player, who has sex with men yet, under his macho persona as football star, is ridiculously contemptuous of self-defined or overly effeminate gay men. This causes Raymond major problems, especially as he ends up representing Basil who has assaulted a gay man who tried to chat Basil up. The lust-hate relationship that Raymond feels for Basil adds a dramatic twist to his dilemma.

Nicole on the other hand, is now seeing a white Jewish man called Pierce, which brings in the questions of, and issues around, cross-racial relationships. Why is she dating him? What is behind their attraction? Is he the right person for her? These issues break up the story and reminds us that we do not live in a one-problem vacuum. Racism, homophobia, bi-phobia, sexism and heterosexism all exist at the same time and they are difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

Just As I Am, however, for me, failed to enlighten me of what actually makes

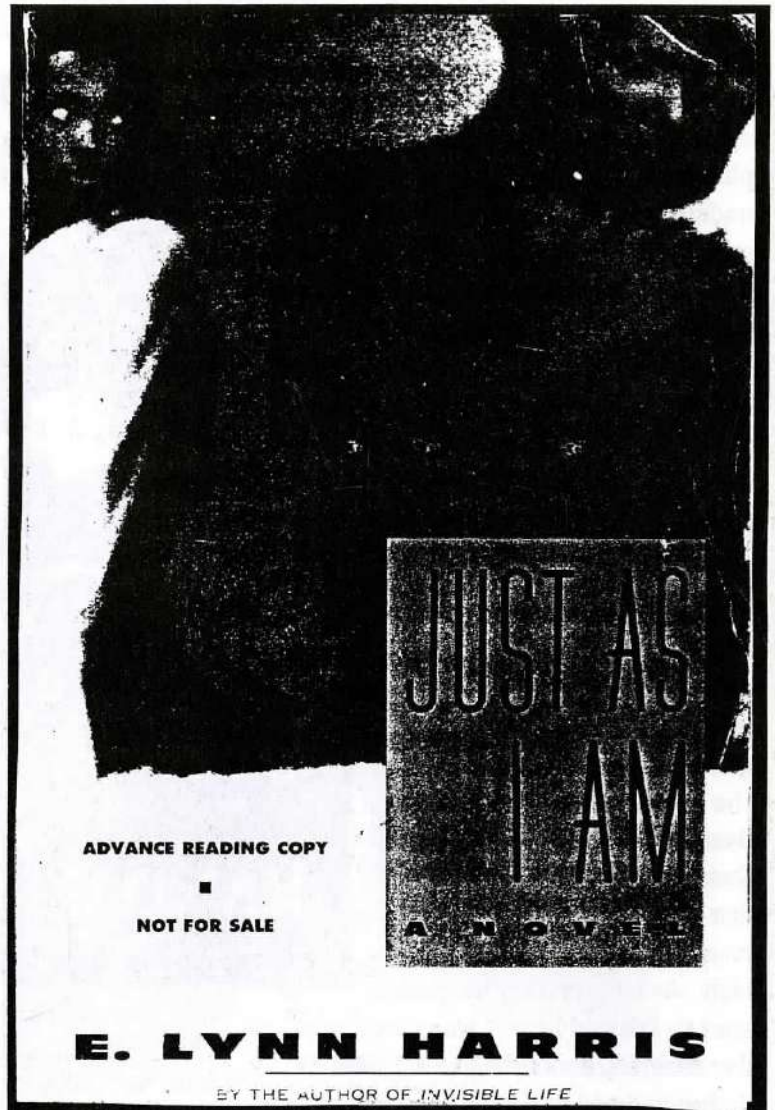
a bisexual man, of what makes him work and how he actually feels about being a bisexual man, whether he sees himself as gay but has relationships with women or whether he sees himself as heterosexual but has the occasional relationship with men, if that is how bisexual men see themselves at all. But I forget that this is a novel and Harris

never once professed that it was to be an essay or dissertation on a sexuality. I could re-read *Bi Any Other Name* if I wanted critical views.

So back to the review. The novel is unashamedly romantic and for a number of people alien to their experiences. All of the characters are well-off, if not simply wealthy, have good jobs which they enjoy doing as well as strong networks of supportive friends. Despite this Dallasty-esque unrealness, it nevertheless does not fail to make you feel warm and attached to these fictional li(v)es. We would be hard not to feel the dilemma that is affecting Tyler or feel moved by the

event that secures Nicole's and Raymond's lifelong friendship. It is well-written, clear and not sensationalist.

One moan though, if it is a moan, what is it about Harris that so loves Black people who are light skinned ("honey-coloured") and have light coloured eyes. This is not the only type of beauty that Black people have. Still a long way to go I suppose.



a visitation of spirits

Randall Kenan's first novel is a complicated and riveting account of the lives of two men, Horace and James. It is complicated in that it does not follow a chronological plot nor does it adhere to traditional notions of continuous style, with poetic prose mixed with minimalist accounts, and several scenes are written in the style of a play. It is riveting as it recounts two stories that are doomed to failure due to the power of fundamentalist religion.

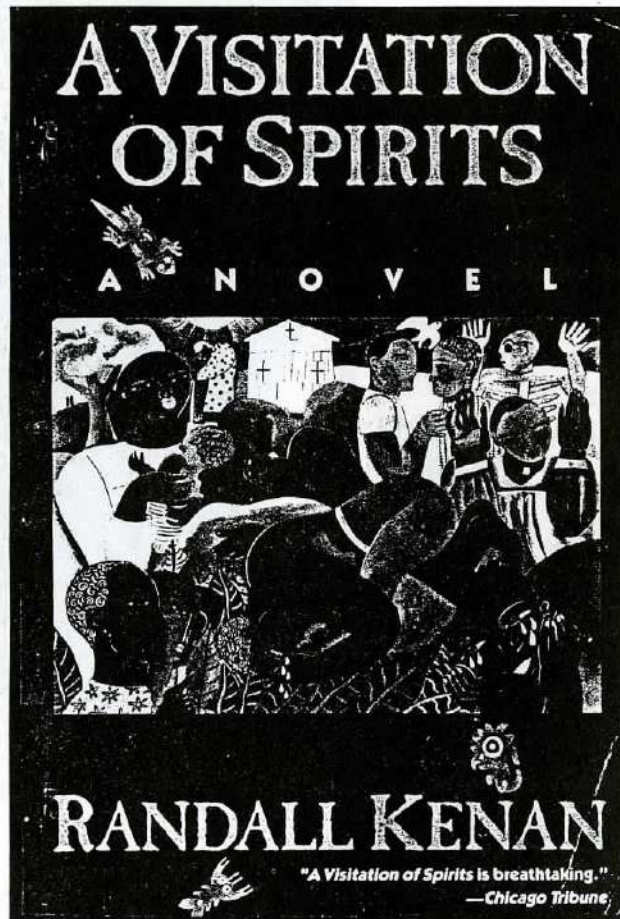
Horace was raised by stern pro-Black aunts, Ruthester and Rebecca, after the death of his mother. He lacks any real or strong male role models in his life. Indeed the men in the book are quite pathetic people, ruled by the law of women who themselves are ruled by the law of their god. Horace used to be a first class student, the only Black man in his class with grades so high. As he gets older his grades start to fall and he becomes prone to day dreaming about things spiritual and demonic, used as a way to escape his gay feelings.

While at school, he shows a violent contempt for Gideon, a camp and effeminate school mate, who uses his effeminate as a defence mechanism, Horace cannot but help feel attracted to John Anthony, the school dreamboat, exuding an "aura of bullish manhood".

James (who appears in Kenan's *Let The Dead Bury Their Dead*) was also an excellent student, who, having passed many examinations and struggling through a racist college, manages, now, to earn his living as a preacher. James, though not gay, gets accused of being a "faggot" by his partner, Anne, because he did not try to

take sexual advantage of her and she has to make the first move. When they

was religion that made them.



"He [Horace], just like me, had been created by this society. He was a son of the community, more than most. His reason for existing, it would seem, was for the salvation of his people. But he was flawed as far as the community was concerned. First, he loved men; a simple, normal deviation, but a deviation this community would never accept. And second, he didn't quite know who he was."

Religion had set them up to fail. "Then I remember the day," Horace thinks, "I realised that I was probably not going to go home to heaven, cause the rules were too hard for me to keep. That I was too weak."

It would seem that Kenan has produced a diatribe against fundamentalism because the anti-religious sentiment is so strong. In spite of this,

do get to the bedroom he is impotent. For him, sex has become something merely for procreation and, as a result, he is unable to enjoy sex, equating it with something dirty and nasty, if not quite bestial.

Both men have been affected by the fundamentalist religion that raised them. James tries so hard to be good and righteous that he becomes a lifeless soul, lacking any notion of fun, unable to break out of the rigidity that his religion demands. To a degree he seems quite comfortable with the restrictions that allow him not to have to think or feel for himself. Horace, on the other hand, cannot escape, no matter how hard he tries, the indoctrination of the church. He is unable to quell his homosexual feelings, which his religion condemns with a vehemence. But it

fundamentalism does show some positive qualities. It unites that Black community to fight against a common oppression. There is a tremendous amount of support for individuals within the community, given that they do not rebel. The church acts as focal point from which people radiate, cushioning, if not totally protecting, them from the blows of racism and other ills.

A Visitation of Spirits, like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, can be read over and over again. There will always be something new: the lyricalness of some of the prose; Kenan's ability to use *le mot juste* at the right time; his brilliant precision. The list could go on, believe me.

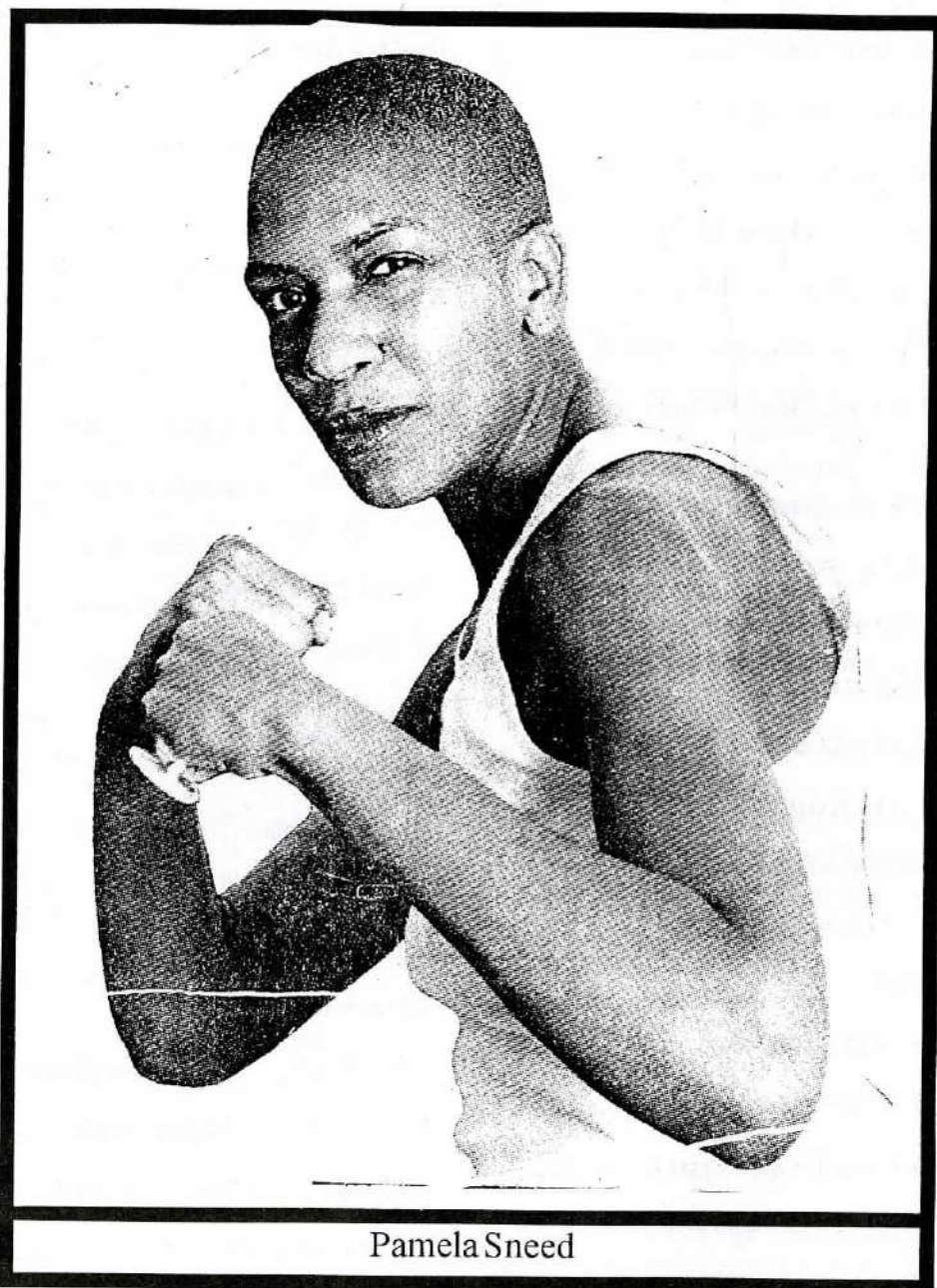
So when are you going to get it?

imagine being more afraid of freedom than of slavery

The magnificent Pamela Sneed swooped into London to perform two of her solo pieces: the critically acclaimed *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom Than of Slavery* and the premiere of *Maya Berry*.

Freedom has played around the country but this was my first sight. It dealt with one woman's personal quest for liberation, both from the trappings of a destructive relationship with her lesbian partner and from the self-defined prison of her lesbian identity. Within the play there are parallels to the life and struggles of the lesbian freedom fighter, Harriet Tubman, moving against all odds to her personal liberation and ensuring the freedom of many of her contemporaries. The performance recalled the struggles of Black women to keep their families together and the strength and yet the impotence of Black women in heterosexual relationships. The audience is told of how a husband beat his wife, much to the horror of the children watching, yet the wife stays faithful and dedicated to her man. She forgives her man his atrocities and underplays the gravity of her bruises to her children; yet with a wisdom beyond her hurt she encourages her daughter never to let anyone treat her in a similar way. With humour (especially funny were her attempts to find a counsellor), irony, impetus and passion the audience is moved along her personal individual search for her identity, lost along the path of her life, as well as her search to regain confidence taken away from her by unsupportive and unsympathetic lovers, from seeing her mother held back in their vision by a despotic husband.

Freedom's full title itself sums up the pieces major theme, that of being so



Pamela Sneed

often trapped by a fear of the unknown or what is different to the usual that people remain in unhappy situations. And this is made very real by Pamela who makes us laugh at her (character's) weakness yet which forces us to examine our own lives. Do we really need therapy, meditation, friends or whatever mechanism to identify our self-destructive natures. Ultimately we are aware of what is happening in our lives and no-one but ourselves is aware

of these feelings. No-one is more sure about how painful a trapped life can be except the person involved. In the end it is only this person who can end, or call for an end, someone controlling their life and destiny.

Freedom is a play that I am sure will be around again. It really is one that you should see.

creativity

abuse parts one, two and three

one

You said you loved me
and I believed you
because I wanted you to
love me as I loved you
I thought we were happy
And that was all we needed
Now your love for me is twisted and
troubled
You try to comfort me
saying you didn't mean to hurt
You didn't mean the words you
flung at me
fired with an anger that
I did not comprehend
thrown so carelessly
I could not understand
BUT...
You said you loved me
and I believed you
because I wanted you to
love me as I loved you
At times you acted
a total stranger
ignoring me
forgetting me
as you danced cheek to cheek

two

Breast 2 Breast
Thigh 2 Thigh
And gettin' high
Clinging to that other woman
Knowing
I'm complaining
Knowing
I'm hurting
AND AFTER...
You said you loved me
and I believed you
because I wanted you to
love me as I love you
How many times
have I got wise
to the constant pull and tug
and useless toying
with my body. My head. My heart
like you just want to pull me apart
like you just want me to fall apart.
And as I weep the tears
of a love hurting
You say you love me
and I believe you
because I wanted you to
love me as I love you

three

Just one step too far
One tear too many
Is there love in the fist
clenched in rage that had once
caressed this skin
Is there love in the fist
hard as hammer when I remember
those fingers once tender
Is there love when
you open that hand and I know it's not
over
Is there love as my lips
splits and my ears ring
As a lover's caress
takes on a new meaning
your hand swings fast thru' air
too fast to notice
too fast to stop
Over before it had begun
Tears mingle with the blood
And inside I break DOWN
As my love for you lies BLEEDING
As my love for you is beaten out from
within
I realise that I must lose you
As you realise with violence you can't
win
You swear it won't happen again
AND..
You say you love me
and I don't believe you
because you will never
love me as I once loved you

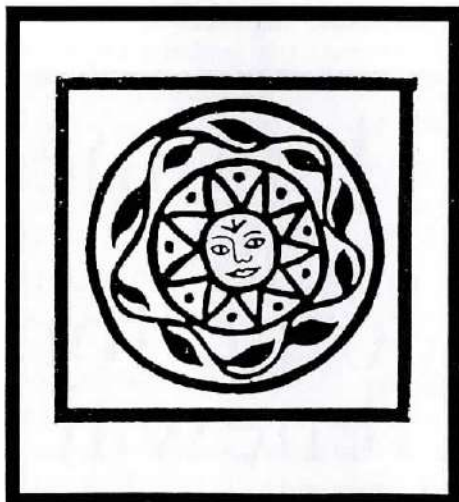
steel magnolias (extract)



kissing air bubbles

recall the time, remember a moment when hot bodies sweated beyond pleasure, sticking together, sweet sex sweat sex sexy sex funk, cum drying on a towel, swollen condom, filled with proof of emotion, kissing alcoholic-breathed good night, tonguing stale-breathed good morning, sharing movements that were equal, licking lashes wet, sucking toes clean, touching with warm breath, behind ears, the end of a nappy hairline, humming a thank you and eyes shedding tears of love, brushing away salty rivers gently with the back of a hand. can anyone deny this? then you said: "I'll call you."

Clarence



A phone rang.

"It's over," said a voice.

"Again?"

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing."

"Yeah, right. But I couldn't take him no more."

"Why?"

"You know. Things he did."

"You mean things he didn't."

"Don't get messy"

"Well, what things?"

"You know. *Things*."

"Well I'm sorry but I thought he was good for your sad ass."

"But he was so tired."

"Read reliable, honest and caring, right?"

"Too right, baby."

"Black gay men! Lord, I don't understand us."

"You'll get over it!"

"Will I?"

"Yes."

"What is it about so called rough trade?"

"You mean you, of all people, don't know?"

"Don't get cute. I get sick and vexed with all my friends leaving good Black men because the men treat them right."

"That's *not* why we split up!"

"Love, stop me when I start lying but unless he literally and figuratively fucks you up, won't let your dick within a metre of his cute ass because he is 100% pure active, sleeps with other men though you agreed on a closed relationship, sells your cd collection to pay for his drug habit and never meets you on time, *you* can't be happy."

"That's not true."

"It ain't? How many times has your process reverted in the rain because that man with the fine bubble butt forgot that you were supposed to go to the cinema?"

"Hush."

"No I won't. I call it as I see it and you know I ain't *lying*."

"You don't understand."

"I understand too damn well that you hate yourself enough to think that you don't deserve happiness. Honey, you are better than that."

"But I know what I like."

"But is it good for you?"

"I suppose you're right."

"You *know* I'm right, chile."

"Listen, let's change the subject, okay?. Why don't you come round? We've still got to watch *Steel Magnolias* together."

"Okay. I'll see you about eight."

"See ya later, doll."

"This conversation ain't over. See ya."

Alan

creativity

sexual identity

Tell me, Tell me, What am I to do
I keep getting this feeling surging through
I am at a crossroad of my life
I went to take a road
But which one, tell me which one
Really I do not know
I don't want to stand still
I want to go forward and find me that's real
It happened before but I pushed it back
It happened again stronger this time
But I pushed it back
Again it came with so much strength
Again I pushed it back
Now its come again accompanied with so much force
My strength weakens and I do not know if I can push it back
I am not sure if I want to
I remember being accused of being a lesbian
Of denying this
But wanting it to be true
I remember finding the courage to approach a woman friend
But even that plan fell through
I remember holding my girlfriend at school
The feeling it gave me lingers to this day
I remember holding, loving, touching, kissing and caressing my spiritual friend
And the sense of belonging I gained
But even that fell through
So tell me, Tell me, Please what am I supposed to do

Nyami Enyako 14/10/92

my dear sister

The depression you feel, I feel
The dark cloud that hangs over you
That traps you and makes you short of breath
The one that blocks out the light, and makes you feel you will never see again
Use that darkness to seek out your light
Your light is the strength that carries the world
You as a Woman
As an individual Woman
As the universal Woman have the strength that holds up the world
You the Woman that is the Mother Earth
That carries forth life and protects and guides
You, the one that can truly experience
For you give unto others without return
This my Sister takes strength
A strength which brings forth so much light
You share your life with gladness
Sometimes you feel you can't go on but you can, and you do
You bring a smile to a stranger's face, and you have changed the world
With wisdom you say a statement, and you change the world
Only you my Sister have that power
Because you are Woman
Have courage to see your strength
Use your strength to replenish yourself
Mother earth needs you, I need you, you need you
I give you my strength for your thanks, and I give you my thanks for your strength

Go forth my Sister and be strong

I LOVE YOU

Nyami Enako February 1993

precious life

PRECIOUS LIFE
GOODBYE MOTHER GOODBYE
THERE'S PAIN IN MY HEART
AND I WANT TO CRY
SO GOODBYE MOTHER GOODBYE
YOU WATCHED ME GROW
FROM THE TIME OF BIRTH
YOU WATCHED MY SMILE
AND YOU LAUGHED WITH ME
YOU WATCHED ME CRY
AND YOU FELT MY PAIN
I ONLY WISH
YOU WERE HERE AGAIN
IF WE COULD GO
BACK THROUGH THE YEARS
I'D GIVE YOU NO PAIN
YOU'D SPILL NO TEARS
THEN AGAIN
THAT WOULD MEAN
I WOULDN'T BE ME
AND THAT WOULD MEAN
YOU WOULDN'T BE YOU
SO LET IT STAY THE SAME
AND ALL OUR MEMORIES REMAIN

Nyami Enyako July 1987

The time
has
come for
renewal

see page twenty-nine

creativity

the connection

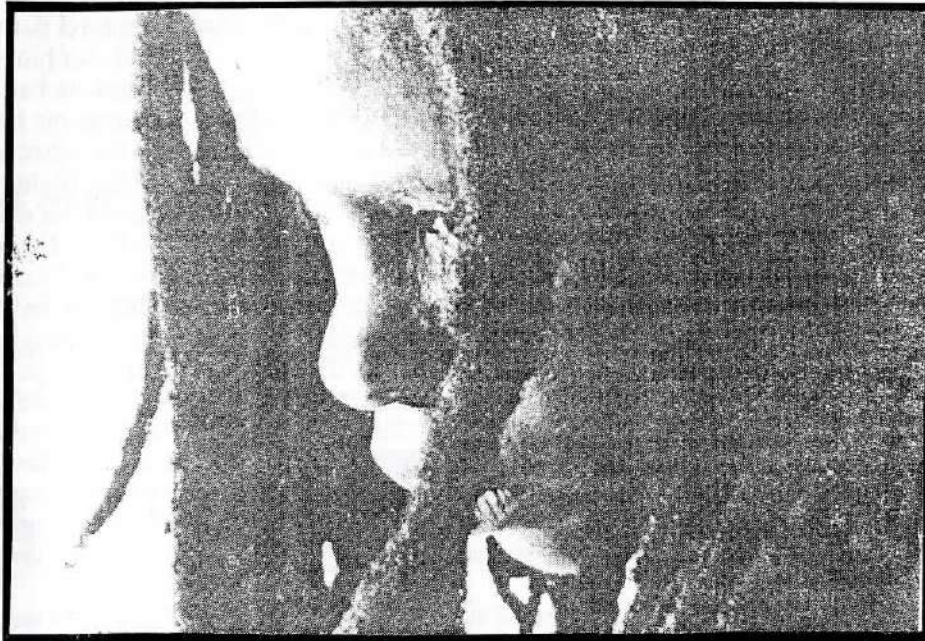
"Do you mind me doing your dreadlocks first?" came the whisper.

Her fingers pick my favorite strand, pressing it moving up and down, her other hand remains wide on my forehead. The oil slides down each lock of hair, separating each one, sometimes with a slight pain, she approaches each tangle with a certain gentle appreciation and caresses each one like the love made the very first time.

Sometimes all her fingers press my scalp, softly massaging the roots of my wild forest. Then sliding all her fingers down to the ends. Next she moves towards my neck sweeping the rest of the hair to one side. At last tenderly she touches my flesh. Her soft hands mould and knead me like a dough. Stroking the side of my neck to my shoulders and down my arms. She touches my neck just where the hair grows, applying her fingertips to the tension, untying the tiny knots. I wish for her fingers to slip as she glides down my shoulder, to touch my breasts. Healing hands touch my soul, I am her patient. I am without power.

I want to moan softly as she touches a deep well inside me, the soft force of pleasure travels down into my purple indigo, brown lips splashing into silver fragments falling below my feet. The essence of almond oil travels up my nostrils, her energy absorbs to the pit of my stomach. I welcome her touch to linger, I want to reach her. She gildes her hands down my posterior towards the back of my legs, it tickles. She moves quickly over my sensitivity. Her two index fingers run along my spinal cord toward my neckbone, good hands, limbs loose, I take a deep breath my whole body is rested.

In silence my hour ticks away without stalling. Soon it will be time to leave this heaven. Outside it is cold, a cold November morning, people in coats and woolly hats. Cold weather means, cold faces grey and beige people going somewhere. Here the heat keeps in, the smell of jasmins and almond oil fills the air, soon another body will enter from the



cold, take their clothes off and surrender to the healing hands for an hour, no sliding scale hangs on the door. I want to stay to catch her smile, to ask her name. I want this all over again, this time with soft music and equal passion,

to release the soft moans kept inside, pleasure for her ears. I want to give her my soft warm indigo brown lips, I want her to say, "that's good baby, do it again."

Her timer buzzes, the last five minutes is for me alone to rest, to gather my thought before I leave, while she washes her hands and breaks the silence. A polite exchange of words about the weather or sometimes nothing, last "Thank you". I lay conscious of my nakedness, I want to fall asleep until next week, until its time for her to mould me again.

Today as I dress she watches me. My long locks are oiled for another week. I am pulling my socks on as she smiles her dark brown eyes come to light as she is pulling the blinds. She is letting light into the room, usually the next person is buzzing the door bell, just as I am paying her. Today has an edge of finality, time to break, out to lunch, siesta. She is looking directly at me while her hand reaches the bright African wrap around her head, pulling it exposing her thick glorious locks. Strands of hair fall into her face and down her back. My heart beats faster as I balance on one leg trying to find my other shoe. My eyes move down as she gently opens her mouth to speak - "Would you oil my locks, - in exchange for the massage?"

Today we shall no longer remain strangers, I warm my hands with the essence of almond oil. It is my turn.

Shazia Ali

creativity

aftermath

The door opened on to the familiar hallway, with the tilting coat-stand by the staircase and posters of various struggles on the walls. I half-expected Uncle to surge forward, enfold me in a bear-hug and give me his opinion on some international event or the latest cricketing controversy. When I was little, he would make faces at me or crack an awful pun. Then when I started to giggle, he would whisk me into the kitchen to "see what Auntie's cooking and ask her if you could have a taste." But Uncle's funeral had just taken place, and the hall was quiet.

In the living room, relatives and friends sat, subdued, reminiscing. My mother hovered concernedly around Auntie. Though Auntie was the younger of the two sisters by several years, her hair was grey and her face deeply lined while my mother seemed fresh, almost youthful in comparison. This was not caused by her recent widowhood or even Uncle's lingering last illness; she had aged long before. Indeed the air of nervousness which she had almost perpetually worn, like someone always on the edge of calamity, had gone; she seemed more nearly at peace than she had been for quite a while.

I settled at one end of the ancient sofa, avoiding by long practice the protruding spring, and tuned into what Uncle's friends were saying. "When he first came to this country", one of them recounted, "he ended up working for this horrible man, Morris or Harris or something he was called. I was there too, and all of us were scared of the boss; he might have been a prince or even a god, the way he was treated, not the owner of one grotty sweatshop. Sure enough, after less than a month, Deva got into an argument with this man. 'If you don't like the way I do things round here,' the boss said, 'you can go somewhere else.' 'I wouldn't have thought you wanted a fuss,' Deva said, 'with inspectors and goodness knows who else poking around to make sure you weren't doing anything you shouldn't.' 'I've never had any trouble before,' our tinpot dictator said, but you could see he was worried. Deva just shrugged and walked away,

and do you know he never got hassled again!"

"Deva was one hell of a guy," another chimed in. "He used to be my shop steward. We nicknamed him Red Deva - if he wasn't giving the management grief he was on about black power or the Vietnam war or something. They wanted to buy him off, so the head of personnel decided to sound him out, asked if he'd ever considered using his talents in a management job. 'That's a thought,' Deva said. 'I've read a lot about how industry could be run and I could try out some of the ideas.' They never got round to offering him that job."

It's gloomy in here, someone else remarked, and switched on the standard lamp by the window. I was reminded with a jolt of the first time I had seen the other side of Uncle's character. My parents and I had dropped in one evening to pick up a video Auntie had promised to lend us. It had been a hit at the time, with catchy songs and a romantic theme and I had been keen to see it, though even at that time I was secretly found movie heroines more attractive than the heroes.

When we had arrived I had known at once there was something wrong. My cousin Arul had let us in. Uncle had been sitting in the living room, unusually quiet, drinking whiskey. The lamp had been knocked over and the bulb was smashed. Auntie had come downstairs, and I had seen her face was bruised. My dad had asked her what happened, but she had just shaken her head. As we were leaving, she must have seen I was upset and confused, because she had hugged me and told me she hoped I would enjoy the movie, though real life was seldom as straightforward.

Oh, I wouldn't hurt her today or tomorrow or next month, but I don't know what I'll be like in years to come. I've got a temper, too, you know. That's why I left home." He had stormed out a couple of years before - my parents had picked up his books and clothing for him - and had only

returned during Uncle's final illness. I had met him from time to time, and I knew he had remained in touch with Auntie, but he had never fully explained to me what had caused him to leave. "That night my father was in a foul mood; he'd had a run-in with a racist gang on the way home and almost got into a fight with them. He started shaking my mother and slapping her and calling her names. I grabbed his arm and pulled him off. He looked stunned - I don't think he'd really noticed that I'd grown up and was as strong as he was. I felt like hitting him; I was so angry I could have killed him. My mother was begging me to calm down. I went away that night.

"I'd felt I was letting my mother down by leaving her alone with him, not that I'd been much good at protecting her before. But she told me she'd rather I went away now than that I did something drastic: she didn't want to have to visit me in prison! I also felt guilty once in a way about my father; I could remember the good times; his generosity and sense of fun. But then I'd remind myself of what he'd done.

"When I moved in again earlier this year, he was like a different person. His health had been getting worse and worse and the doctors had finally told him there was nothing they could do for him except give him painkillers. He told me with tears in his eyes that he'd missed me. He kept telling my mother how good she was being to him and how sorry he was about the past. He even sent me out to buy flowers for her once."

He stood up and stretched. "I suppose I'd better put in an appearance downstairs." We went down together.

"What happened to you then?" one of Uncle's friends greeted Arul as he entered the living room. "Surely you could show a little respect on this occasion, even if you couldn't behave like a son when he was still alive!"

"Leave it," urged my father, who had arrived while I was upstairs. Arul was silent.

**THERE MAY BE TROUBLE AHEAD.....
BUT WHILE THERE'S MUSIC AND MOONLIGHT AND LOVE AND ROMANCE.....**

THE DREAM

ONCE UPON A TIME,

I stood on a bridge and witnessed two tragic car accidents. Something about the total chaos made me uneasy as though there was more to come.

I remember speaking to a group of people and saying to them that as long as we played music we could keep this crisis away.

Later Sandi and I are walking. It's late at night and a monster like person flies over us and we start running. We run into a shop-front, there's a woman looking out the window. We force our way through the door and up the stairs. She runs behind us to put us out but Sandi goes into this dub poetry, beating a

bottle against the table, saying if they don't let us stay, if we go back outside we'd be in trouble.

I think they can hear that something's not right out in the street and I tell them as long as we play and drum we'll be safe.

By the next day, people knew that something had happened and I went on the radio and said what I had said before that at night people need to connect together and not stay alone and that they should play sing and drum to get in touch with the spirit



LET'S FACE THE MUSIC AND DANCE..... AND DRUM

AT BLGC SUNDAYS 5PM-8PM

ALL BLACK WOMEN AND CHILDREN (5-12) WELCOME

creativity

aftermath

(continued from page 26)

"You broke your father's heart," the man persisted. He seemed a little worse for drink. "He pined away after you left. He toiled for years to give you the chances he never had, and that was all the thanks he got. You'll never be half the man he was!"

Arul broke through the hush which had fallen. "I hope you're right. I hope I'll never be a man in the way my father was, or even half of one. I admired a lot of things he did, and I loved him. But I don't want to be treated as a hero for fighting for justice and equality while I act like a tyrant at home. I don't want the ones who love me most to go around with long sleeves in summer or sunglasses in winter to hide the bruises I've left, or after I'm gone out drinking with 'the boys' to cringe when they hear my key in the door."

"A man can be provoked, you know," one of Uncle's cousins remarked. "You'll understand when you're married yourself." My mother glared at him.

"'A man can be provoked,'" Arul quoted softly. "Perhaps someone says that every time a striker is sacked or a black youth is beaten up in a police cell. It's a useful excuse for those in charge when soldiers shell a clinic or shoot into a crowd: 'They reacted spontaneously, it couldn't be helped, it's only natural they should act like that.'"

"Your father was a fine man and a good friend to us," another mourner bristled, "and we won't have him insulted in this way." He looked around at his companions for support.

"If you really care about him," Arul retorted, "you should have told him what he was doing was wrong. It mattered a lot to him what other men thought of him; maybe he would have stopped. I don't mean you," he added more gently to Ron, a peace movement activist with straggly blond beard whom Uncle had improbably befriended years before; "I don't think you knew. Nor you, and he turned to

my father. "I know you asked him to stop once, and he broke your wristwatch; he told me afterwards. Though perhaps you could have kept trying."

"Perhaps," my father murmured thoughtfully

I noticed Auntie hovering by Arul's shoulder. She said nothing but looked desperately anxious. I found it difficult to believe that she had once been the laughing young woman with sparkling eyes I had seen in family photographs. A firebrand, her parents had called her with a mixture of pride and disapproval; she had stood undaunted on picket lines as abuse was shouted at her, designed leaflets and cranked them out on an old duplicator, sung in a clear high voice at parties while people sat riveted. "Whatever happened to the girl I once married?" Uncle had asked once in a maudlin mood; but if anyone knew the answer he did.

Arul looked up at his mother. "It's all right," he told her affectionately; "I've said what I had to say." Not long afterwards, the gathering began to break up and people left for home.

That evening I leafed restlessly through the papers, then turned on the television and flicked from channel to channel. I ended up at Take Your Partners, a woman's pub. I was hoping that Caroline might drop by; even if she did not, there was bound to be someone with whom I could exchange a few words or play pool, setting aside the feelings which churned inside me.

There was no sign of Caroline, and part of me was relieved: I was not sure I wanted her to see me until I had regained my balance. I perched on a bar stool and sipped a mango juice; one of the things which I liked about the venue was the unusual selection of drinks, bar snacks and music on offer.

As I tried in vain to remember the name of the song which blared from the juke box, Denise and Surekha entered hand in hand. Denise was as usual soberly, rather elegantly dressed - she made

many of her own clothes; a wisp of hair escaped from one of her braids. Surekha was wearing a patterned waistcoat and rings sparkled on her fingers. She liked brightly-colored clothes; I was still trying to pluck up the courage to go out in a strikingly flamboyant kurta which she had once given me. She was in an exuberant mood. She embraced me warmly, asked if I wanted a drink then plunged across the room to a group of women who were waving at her. Denise lingered.

"You look knackered," she said. "Are you all right?"

"More or less," I answered. "It's been a long day."

"I'm sorry, I clean forgot! It was your uncle's funeral, wasn't it? How was it, and how are you? Or would you rather not talk about it now?"

I found myself telling her about the sense of unreality I had felt that morning as if I were in a play, how I had momentarily mistaken a stranger in a bus queue for Uncle until my brain pointed out the absurdity, the feeling of finality as the body was laid to rest. I cried for a moment and Denise offered me a packet of pocket tissues.

"I'm getting bored here!" Surekha announced, passing us slightly unsteadily on her way to the toilets.

"Will you be okay?" Denise asked me.

"Yes, thanks," I told her. I saw the concern on her face, and noticed abstractedly that she was wearing more eye-shadow than usual. She had once told me of her excitement, as a child, when she first discovered a range of make-up for darker skin, how she had given it up on coming out, thinking it was unfeminist to wear it, and gone back to it when she had decided it was not.

Then it clicked. There was a bruise around her left eye which she was trying to conceal. I breathed in sharply.

The first time I had noticed a slight cut on her cheek, I thought she had had an accident. Later I had wondered naively if the scratches and bruises which sometimes marked her had been gained on a sporting field, though as far as I knew she only played tennis, or

creativity

through some ritual of which she had never told me because she feared I would disapprove. At last I had plucked up the nerve to ask.

She had confirmed what I had suspected but had not wanted to believe, then tried to lessen the shock. "She only goes for me once in a while, and she's usually sorry afterwards. It could be a lot worse. And to be fair, I know I can be very irritating sometimes; I can understand why she gets wound up."

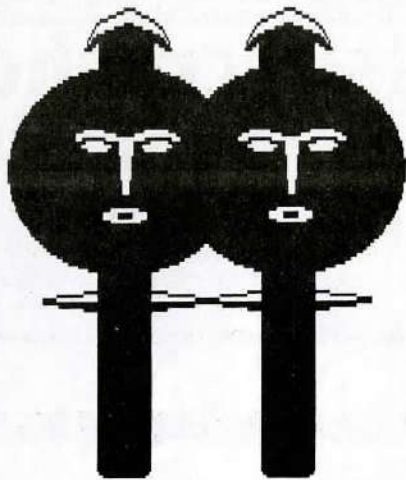
"Most people can be irritating some of the time," I had said. "That's no excuse for violence." She had agreed hesitantly and changed the subject.

A cheer rose from across the pub; I think it was somebody's birthday. Next to me a woman was complaining about the price of her cocktail, which had gone up since her last visit. The bartender sympathised, talked of how the rising cost of living affected her too, placed the offered coins deftly in the till. Surekha reappeared. "We're going," she told Denise.

"Just a moment," Denise turned to me. "You can ring if you need to talk, you know that, don't you? And why don't you come round for a meal some time soon?" She squeezed my hand. "Are you planning on staying here all night?" Surekha demanded. "Come on!" Her voice conveyed impatience, a hint of anger.

I wondered suddenly what the future might hold for them both and, in the picture of what might be, where I myself would appear. I felt uncertain and ashamed. It seemed wrong that I should say and do nothing, but I was at a loss. As I struggled to find the right words, Surekha and Denise went out into the night and the door swung shut behind them.

Savitri Hensman

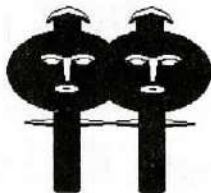


RENEWAL

You know who you are. If you haven't renewed your subscription, do it now! Don't you know that we need you to be committed to the centre now more than ever.

If you have received a letter with this newsletter asking that you renew your membership, please do. Otherwise you won't get the next newsletter and BLGC will be your money short.

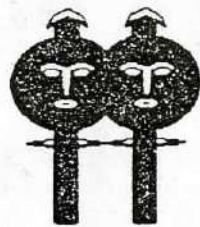
It's not much to ask, is it?



MEMBERSHIP FORM

I/we wish to join BLGC as:

(please tick one box below to show which type of membership you want)



full, unwaged £2.50

full, waged £8.00

full, group £15.00

supporting, individual £10.00

supporting, group £25.00

Name

Address

Tel no

Contact person (if group)

I/we enclose £

(cheques payable to BLGC; donations welcome)

Volunteering: please tick one box

I/we are interested in volunteering

I/we cannot volunteer at present

Signed

Date

editorial policy

The BLGC Newsletter is published bi-monthly and aims to provide information on international news, as well as events and campaigns nationally, of interest to Black lesbians and gay men. News items, articles, letters (all written in simple language) or photographs and cartoons are always welcome.

In line with BLGC policy, we will not publish material that is racist, sexist, ableist or assumes readers are without childcare responsibilities, or of a certain social class, cultural/religious/British-born background. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the BLGC. Volunteers for the production of the newsletter are always welcome.

**BLGC needs a creche worker.
Two hours on a Sunday.
Please call the centre for details**

Ayiah Johan
Wholistic healer
Crystals, reiki, tarot,
kinesiology, massage,
counselling, art
0181 365 9421

Colin Howell
ITEC massage,
AIPTI.
J. Ellicott School of
Reflexology
Tel: 0171 738 3686

hairbraiding by
jade
resonable rates.
tel 0171-635-6315

Jackie.
Black lesbian offers
massage, on sliding
scale.
tel:0171 701 0822
to arrange time/
place

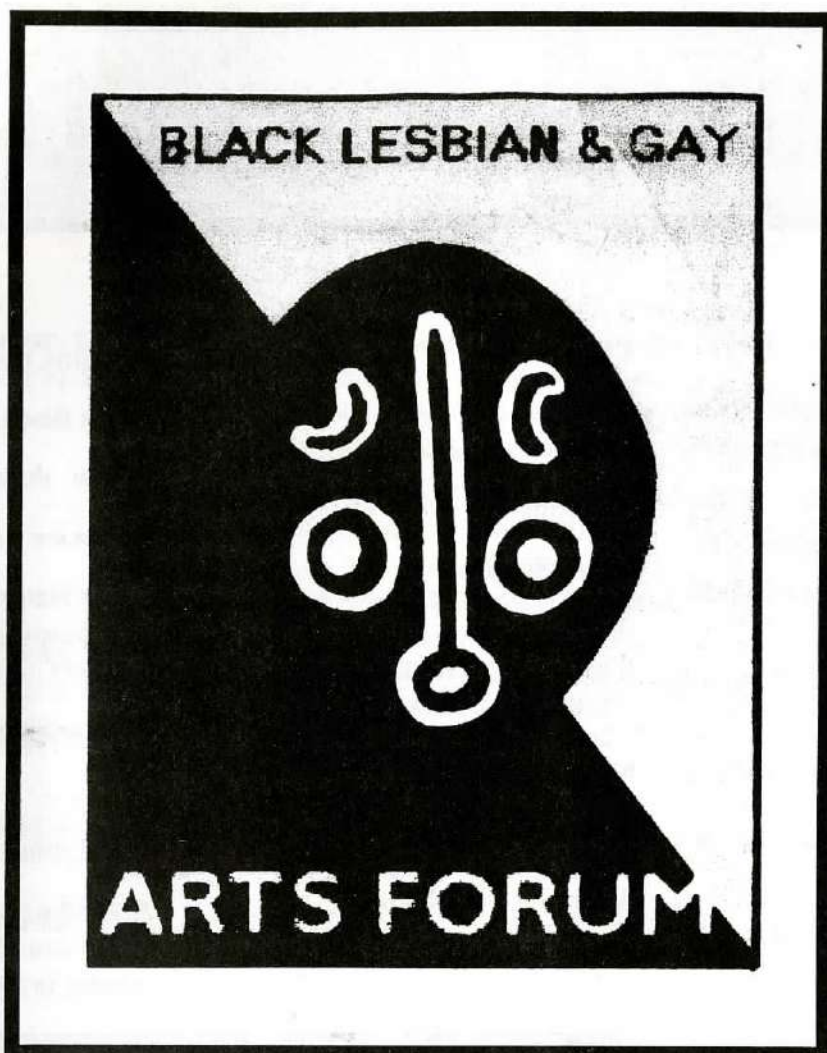
The Black Lesbian and Gay Arts Forum

has now been established and is inviting artists to submit

proposals of their works to be considered for a week event to be held at the Brixton Shaw Theatre.

The dates of events are scheduled to take place the week beginning 29th May and in order for the event to be programmed, proposals are required **urgently**.

This will be an opportunity for Black Lesbian and Gay artists and their supporters to promote and show their works free of charge in a prestigious and reputable venue. Artist can benefit from being involved in this event, as it will attract a lot of publicity and we would urge you all to take part and help make it a success for our community.



Volunteers who have experience in administration and the technical side of the arts also **urgently** needed. Please get in touch.

All efforts are currently being made to raise funds for this event and subsequently any suggestions to

further this would be greatly appreciated. At present we anticipate that artists will receive a percentage of the box office for the nights they perform. It is important that artists bear the current financial situation in mind when submitting proposals.

This will be a week platform for Black Lesbian and Gay artists, but the Forum's aim is to continue the work of the Forum after the Shaw Theatre events.

Please send you proposals to:

Black Lesbian and Gay

Arts Forum

c/o The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre.

diary diary diary diary diary diary

Every Tuesday

Support group for South Asian, Turkish, Arab and Irani women who have sex with women.

Social activities, support and information on sexuality, safer-sex, safer drug use, HIV and sexual health.

at the Naz Project, 241 King St, London W6

1.00-3.00pm

.....
Above the Rim at the Lowdown, Falconberg Mews W1

10.00pm-2.00am

Every Wednesday

Dost a group for gay men from Asia, Turkey, Arabia and Iran who have sex with men.

Contact Kim 081 563 0205 (day) at 7.00pm

at the Naz Project drop-in space 241 King St, London W6 9LP

Every Thursday

Interaction at Substation South, 9 Brighton Terrace, Brixton SW9.

Upbeat, predominately house/garage

10.00pm-2.00am £3.00 all night

.....
Nwangi at the Market Tavern, 1 Nine Elms Lane, SW8

10pm-3am £3.00 with flyer

Every Friday

Silk at Lowdown, Falconberg Mews, W1

10.30pm-4.00am £5.00

Every Sunday

Shugs' Place at the Brixtonian Rum Shop, 1 Dorrel Place, Brixton, SW9

.....
Sisters of Sense run Drumming Together in Unity - voice and drumming workshops.

Cooperation, consideration, appreciation

of drums, people, feelings and space
At the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre.
5-8pm donations welcome

.....
Queer Nation at the Gardening Club, The Piazza, Covent Garden, WC1

10pm-2am £4.00 with flyer

New

Arab Lesbian Network

A social, support and discussion group. If you would like to meet other Arab women, or know someone who would,

UNITY. **DANCE.**

WOMEN OF THE WORLD.

WOMEN'S CENTRE

NORTH

Come to Chill Out

Let's Time to Unite

DJS.
SPINNING FROM NORTH
KT = ALMA (MARRIED)
BUTTERFLY = RAGGAD (LEICESTER)

DJS.
MIXING & BLENDING FROM SOUTH
VEE (LONDON) LEV (LONDON)

ALL KINDA MUSIC.
• 3 UNWAGED
• 4 WAGED

TRANSPORT GOING FROM LONDON CONTACT DJS

AT 16TH APRIL '05
30 CHANCER ST, NOTTINGHAM (NEAR TRENT UNIVERSITY)

• 10 TILL U DROP
• CENTRE OPEN FROM 8
• FOOD & THINGS ON SALE

diary diary diary diary diary diary

please contact: The Arab Lesbian Network, London Friend, as discreet (or as public) as you wish

For your diary

Friday 31 March

Talking Black.

A panel discussion featuring Valerie Mason-John Anne Hayfield, Linda Bellos and members of the Black Male society.

at Carlton Hall, 1 Bernays Grove, SW9. Behind Morleys.

7pm. £2.00 no concessions

Monday 3 April

A black and white dialogue. A lively and informed dialogue about our differences and our common experiences as black and white lesbians and gay men.

Discussion featuring a panel: Valerie Mason-John, Cherry Smith, Linda Bellos, Clarence Allen.

at the Unison Offices, 1 Mabledon Place, WC1

6.00pm-8.30pm

Monday 5 April

SPYCE (Birmingham Black lesbian and gay support/meeting)

Monthly meeting to be held at 146 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham B5

7.00pm-8.30pm then off to the Village

Friday 7 April

London Black Bisexual group meets the 1st Friday of every month at London Friend (see panel page 35) 7.30-10pm

The Write Thing presents Maxine Clair's 'Rattlebone'. A hot new novel from the States, Rattlebone tells the story of a Black town (of the same name) in 1950 Kansas USA. The novel gives an exciting and intriguing insight, as seen through the eyes of adolescent Reenie Wilson and her best friend Wanda. The interview will be hosted by Rianna Scipio.

at Carlton Hall (see Friday 31 March)

7.00pm

Saturday 8 April

Introductory course to a long term counselling support group

1pm-4pm

Using reevaluation co-counselling skills to set up a support group. Involves looking at oppression and internalised oppression, by theory, practice and demonstration.

1pm-4pm. Sliding scale £3-£15 at BLGC

Call to book/for creche

Friday 14 April

Black Erotica Night. Erotic extracts from black literature. Hosted by Claudia Patric with prominent guests reading extracts from their favourite books. Advance booking recommended.

at Carlton Hall (see Fri 31 March)

7.00pm

Saturday 15 April

Women of the World (see advertisement page 32)

Friday 21 April

After Dark Poetry.

Hottest new poets on the circuit and introducing 'Comedy Poetry'. Hosted by Gary Coley.

at Carlton Hall (see Friday 31 March)

7.00pm

Monday 24 April

Lesbian History course begins at London Women's Centre, 4 Wild Ct, WC2

6.30pm-8.30pm Fee: £85.00/£28.00 concessions

Info call 0171 631 6674

Wednesday 26 April

Open Door a group for young women questioning their sexuality.

Advice, support, pool table, workshops, information, t.v., videos, computer, outings, activity room, photography.

More information tel 081- 698 6675/ 9453

Friday 28 April

The Write Thing presents Will the real black man please stand up!

Presenter Pauline Miller will moderate a panel discussion, with the United Male Forum and other surprise guests, this promises to be a lively debate. Audience participation encouraged.

at Carlton Hall (see Friday 31 March)

7.00pm

regular groups

Lesbians and gay men

SHAKTI LONDON - South Asian lesbian and gay network. The group meets every 2nd Sunday of the month from 3-6pm at : LONDON FRIEND, 86 Caledonian Rd, London N1 (wheelchair access, nearest tube Kings Cross). Disco with bhangra music on last Friday of month from 10pm-2am at The Dome, Tufnell Park. For more information tel: 071 837 2782

SHAKTI also runs groups in: Birmingham, Leicester, Bradford and Manchester

MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP - Meetings 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at Manchester Gay Centre.

SHAKTI MANCHESTER can be contacted at Manchester Gay Centre Further info on both groups from: Manchester Gay Centre, PO Box 153. Manchester M60 1LP.

ORIENTATIONS - Chinese and South East Asian lesbian and gay group meet at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti).

CYPRIT LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP meets on the 1st Sunday of the month 2.30pm-5pm at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

IRANIAN LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP meets at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

LEICESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP- For details write to c/o Michael Wood Centre, 29 NewWalk, Leicester LE1 6TE.

BIRMINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP (KOLA) - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Tel: Friend on: 021 622 7351 - 7.30pm - 9.30pm

SHAKTI BIRMINGHAM phone West Midlands Friend (see above) and ask for a SHAKTI contact

BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS AGAINST MEDIA HOMOPHOBIA (BLAGAMH) - For more information write to BLAGAMH, FREEPOST, London SE8 5BR. (No stamp needed.)

MOSAIC - a group of Mixed Race Lesbians and Gay Men holds discussions every month and runs socials. For further information contact MOSAIC c/o BLGC

BRISTOL BLACK LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL GROUP (SAFAR) - Meets the first Tuesday of each month. For more information Tel: (0272) 639 789 (men), 427 731 (women) or Bristol Switchboard (0272) 425 927.

Lesbians

CAMDEN BLACK LESBIAN GROUP runs socials discussions and workshops for Black lesbians. For details contact CLC/BLG, 54-56 Phoenix Rd, London NW1 1ES (wheelchair access, minicom, creche available; tel: 071 383 5405).

LAS DIVINAS - Latinamerican Lesbian Group, for details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group).

YOUNG BLACK LESBIAN GROUP at Lewisham Young Women's Project meets the last Wednesday of every month 7-10pm at Lewisham Young Women's Project, 308 Brownhill Rd, Lewisham. For further details ring 081 698 6675 and ask for a contact for the group

NOTTINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN GROUP - Meets first Friday evening of the month in Black Lesbian Room, Nottingham Women's Centre, 30 Chaucer Street, Nottingham, NG5 1LP. Tel: 0602 411475.

ZAMI Group for Afro-Caribbean lesbians meets last Sunday of month at Camden Black Sisters, 2C Falkland Rd., London NW5 2PT. Tel: 071 284 3336.

ZAMIMASS (group for working class Black lesbians) - For details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group) or BLGC on 071 732 3885.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURAL WORKERS COLLECTIVE - For black lesbians producing cultural materials, from sculpture to hats to music. For details contact Zamimass.

OLDER BLACK LESBIAN GROUP (over forty) meets 1st Sunday of every month between 3-6pm at West Hampstead Women's Centre, 55 Hempstal Rd, NW6. Tel: 071 328 7389.

ZAMI (MANCHESTER BLACK YOUNG LESBIAN GROUP). To get Black women together so that they are not alone. Advice, counselling and support. For more information tel Lesbian Link on: 061 236 6205 Mon, Tues or Thurs 6-9.30pm.

LEEDS BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP. c/o Harehills Housing Aid, 188 Roundhay Rd, Harehills, Leeds 8.

ZAMI BIRMINGHAM NETWORK, meets fortnightly on Wednesdays 6-8pm. For more info write to: Zami Birmingham Network, c/o 172 Edmund St, Birmingham, B3 2HB or call: 021 235 4598

Gay Men

LET'S RAP - Black gay men talking to Black gay men. Activities or social/discussion on the third Sunday of each month. Tel: 071 737 3881 or BLGC office.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE BLACK GAY MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP - is no longer running, but please contact 091 233 1333 before 6pm or 091 261 7768 after if you would like to help start the group again.

LONDON BLACK MESMAC GROUP - for young black gay and bisexual men no longer meets; but please contact: 071 831 2330 for details of any new groups

LEEDS BLACK GAY MEN'S GROUP - for African, Asian and Caribbean and other black gay men, meets fortnightly on Thursdays 7.30pm onwards. For further information contact David/Michael on 0532 444 209, David/Jon on 0274 395 815 or write in confidence to Yorkshire MESMAC, P.O. Box 172, Leeds, LS7 3BZ

KALI group for Asian and African-Caribbean men who have sex with men meets every Friday at 7.00pm at 4 Duke's Street, Bradford, BD1. Telephone 0274 395 815

SAD access code

A PARKING 1-Outside entrance 2-Less than 50 yards away 3-More than 50 yards away

B PUBLIC TRANSPORT 1-Tube 2-Bus 3-Rail 4-Less than 50 yards 5-More than 50 yards 6-More than 1/4 Mile

C ENTRANCES 1-Level 2-Ramp without rail 3-Ramp with rail 4-Steps without handrail 5-Steps with handrail 6-Steep steps 7-Shallow steps 8-Curved steps

D DOORS 1-Width 2-Heavy 3-Light 4-Revolving 5-Opens inwards 6-Opens outwards

E INSIDE BUILDING 1-Level 2-Steps without handrail 3-Steps with Handrail 4-Steps steep 5-Steps shallow 6-Steps curved

F LIFT 1-Dimensions 2-Controls high 3-Controls low 4-Controls flush 5-Controls protruding 6-Handrail 7-Seating 8-Smooth 9-Jerky 10-Doors automatic 11-Doors manual heavy 12-Doors Manual light 13-Doors concertina 14-Doors straight

G TOILETS 1-Dimensions 2-Doors open inwards 3-Doors open outwards 4-Rails 5-Air driers hand operated 6-Air driers foot operated 7-Air driers automatic 8-Taps hand operated 9-Taps foot operated

H DIMENSIONS OF PREMISES 1-Large building 2-Small building 3-Corridors

J FLOOR SURFACES 1-Smooth 2-Carpet 3-Slippery

K LIGHTING 1-Bright 2-Dim 3-Flexible(eg. movable)

L SEATING 1-Hard 2-Soft 3-High 4-Low 5-Plentiful 6-Static 7-Movable

M HEATING 1-Warm 2-Cool 3-Variable

N PARTICIPATION 1-Braille 2-Tape 3-Large print 4-Signers 5-Induction loop. 6-Finger spelling 7-Lip speakers 8-Note takers

P HELPERS 1-Transport 2-Meeting & escorting. 3-General help.

Q CRECHE 1-Run by men 2-Run by women 3-Run by both sexes 4-Facilities for children with disabilities 5-Under fives only 6-Up to 12 years only 7-Girls only 8-Mixed

R FOOD & DRINK 1-Drinks only 2-Vegan 3-Vegetarian 4-Non-vegetarian 5-Self service 6-Table service 7-Licensed bar 8-Specific alcohol free areas 9-all space alcohol free

S SMOKING 1-Not allowed 2-Allowed 3-Specific areas 4-Specific times

T STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES 1-Formal meetings 2-Informal 3-Continuous 4-Frequent Breaks

U TELEPHONE 1-In an accessible area 2-Private phone 3-Call phone

Access Codes for centres:

BLGC

A1. B2,5 no's 12, 37, 63, 78, 312, P2, P12. B2,6 no's 36, 36b, 171, P13. C4 steep. D1 entrance and two internal doors 35" D3, 5, toilet 29" D3, 5, back door 29" D2,6. E1. Fnone. G1 42"x61.5", G2. H1. J2 in front, bare concrete floor in back. K1. L1, 2, 3, 4, 7. M3. N2, 3 BLGC publications, 4 advance notice needed, 5. Q-none, child care costs provided. R-light refreshments. T1, 2. U1, 2

CLC/BLG (Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group)

54-56 Phoenix Road London NW1 1ES

A single yellow line outside entrance B1, 3, 5 nos 14, 14a, 18, 30, 73 stop on Euston Rd, near Shaw Theatre. C1. D main door 32.75", 3, 5, fire exit door 31.5", other doors 31.3". E ground floor building, 1. F none. G two toilets - door to 1st 30.5", 3 dimensions 5.75'x4.5', turning distance 3', door to 2nd 29.5" 3 dimensions 3x5.5', turning distance 2' H2 front door to meeting room 8', meeting room to office 7', meeting room to large WC 11.5', meeting room to other WC 22', meeting room to creche 18' creche to fire exit 13.5. J1. K1, 3 in meeting room, creche & office. L1, 2, 4, 5, 7. M3. N8 some info on large print & tape, BSL stage 2 communicator, minicom. P3. Q2, age limit 11, 8. R non alcoholic drinks available. S3. T1, 2, 4. U1,2, minicom in office

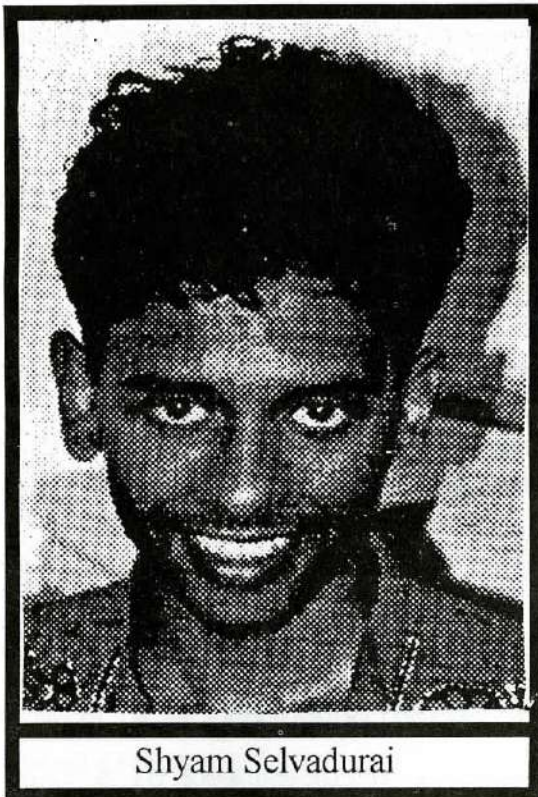
LONDON FRIEND

86 Caledonian Road, London N1
Tel: GENERAL 071-837 3337 WOMEN'S HELPLINE
071-837 2782

ACCESS CODES

A1 B1-Kings Cross-, 5 B2-no's 17 & 221, 4 B3-Kings Cross, 5 C4/7(1 step) D1-90cm E3/4 - one set of 2 steps, 3, 4 one set of 13 steps, 3, 4 Fnone, ramp for ground floor access only G1/4-one toilet 214cmx207cm with two handrails + sliding door, 8 one toilet 87cmx207cm, 2, 8 H2,3-one corridor 312cm J1-kitchen, toilets & entrance vinyl floor, 2-remaining rooms & corridor K2 L1, 5, 7 M3 Nnone P3-if prior notification is given Qnone-contact them as arrangements may be made R1+crisps S2 T2-but structured U2-not for general use

Look out for...



Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* his first novel from a young Sri Lankan Tamil. It blends the personal and the political, telling a tale of a large affluent family in Colombo, related through the eyes of Arjie, a young boy, struggling to come to terms with his own homosexuality and the racism of the society in which he lives.

H. Nigel Thomas' *Spirits in the Dark*. The first novel from this author deals with a Black gay man, struggling with his identity and his shame at not acknowledging his African heritage. It explores the protagonist's life and his journey of self-discovery and enlightenment

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A Small Gathering of Bones by Patricia Powell. A novel that explores the effects of HIV and AIDS on a group of gay men in Jamaica. It explores the issues of homosexuality and the reaction of family.

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Black is...Black Ain't is an experimental documentary by the late Marlon Riggs. Before he died, Riggs, was in the process of completing this experimental, semi-autobiographical documentary that explores issues of identity within the Black community. The non-profit, PBS film probes the paradox of contending, even self-cancelling definitions of Blackness throughout African American history, and prominently features the perspectives of those who have at times been silenced within the race because of colour, class, regional background, sexuality, physical appearance, gender, even speech.

Set in Mississippi, New Orleans, Texas, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, South Carolina, New York and Washington, D.C., *Black is...Black Ain't* features frank discussion with a cross section of African Americans as they grapple with issues of personal and communal identity.

Also featured in the documentary will be interviews with cultural critics: Angela Davis, bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Barbara Smith, Cornel West, Molefi Asante, Lyle Ashton Harris, Bill T Jones, Maulana (Ron) Karenga and Essex Hemphill. An integral thread tying these diverse stories together will be Marlon Rigg's own story of ostracism from the Black community because of his own "difference," - speech, sexuality, class and now AIDS.

**Deadline for
contributions
for next
newsletter:
Monday 1
May 1995**