



**FALL THEATRE  
PRODUCTION:**

**Vejigantes  
(Devil Mask)**

**WHEN**  
*Thurs.-Sat., November 16-18, 2017 at 8:00 pm  
Sunday, November 19, 2017 at 2:00 pm*

**WHERE**  
*African Community Theatre (Oscar Ritchie Hall)*

Purchase tickets at 127 ORH or online:  
[www.kent.edu/pas/african-community-theatre](http://www.kent.edu/pas/african-community-theatre)  
Students may qualify for one free ticket.  
Presented by the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY | Department of  
Pan-African Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences

Photo courtesy of Pan-African Theatre Ensemble Instagram:  
[@thepate.ksu](https://www.instagram.com/thepate.ksu)

**Play:** *Vejigantes (Devil Mask)*

**Author:** Francisco “Paco” Arrivi

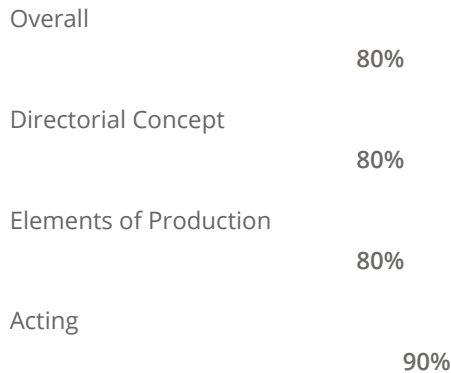
**Director:** D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson

**Theatre:** African Community Theatre

**Theatre Company:** Pan-African Theatre Ensemble

**Performance Dates:** Nov. 16-Nov. 19, 2017

**Run Time:** 1.5 hours



## ‘Vejigantes (Devil Mask)’: A Critical Review

Nov 17, 2017

Words by Ashlynn Thompson

### Summary

Set in Puerto Rico in the mid-20th century, this multigenerational tale follows three women: Mama Toña, her daughter, Marta, and her granddaughter, Clarita. Marta completely rejects her mother’s African heritage and chooses to live only acknowledging her father’s Spanish side. She pushes Clarita, her daughter, to pass as white and marry a white man so she can leave the island for America forever and have a better life without fear of racial discrimination. Clarita, however, has different values; she must decide whether to fulfill her mother’s wishes and deny who she is, or to expose her family’s secret and risk losing her chance to leave Puerto Rico.

### Directorial Concept

Forbes-Erickson says her concept is to investigate how race, gender and sexual violence affect the everyday lives of women of color. She emphasizes the resilience and empowerment of three generations of Puerto Rican women, especially

matriarch Mama Toña, in various scenes of pain and heartbreak. To reinforce this concept, Forbes-Erickson uses video recordings intercut between scenes, which show the actors saying a few important lines of the text in character. However, these actors are in their regular street clothes, which might confuse the audience and distracts from the point. Digital media is a distinctive feature of Forbes-Erickson's productions with the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble, and it is unique, but it could have been executed more effectively. Despite this, the incorporation of Puerto Rican bomba music by cultural icon William Cepeda is a very enjoyable experience. This type of music was a source of community, strength and resistance for enslaved Africans in Puerto Rico, and it is brilliant to include this in the production because it translates perfectly to the struggle of the three women.

## Elements of Production

As mentioned, the sound design is superb, and the set design has some interesting elements. Some of these are a white, circular set piece with white masks placed in its center that hang from the fly, which clearly represent the different masks each character lives with. There is long, white, shredded fabric that covers all the walls on stage, which could signify the sexual violence aspect of the directorial concept. The devil mask makes many appearances and is the most memorable costume piece of the production. However, the setting of the production, both time and place, is difficult to identify mostly because of the costumes. Some of the costumes look very modern, with one-shoulder and off-the-shoulder dresses and a men's ensemble complete with a modern-day jacket and slacks, while one dress worn by Marta looks very much like what an American housewife would wear in the 1950s. Costumes are an integral part in telling a coherent story, and when these are inconsistent with the setting, it weakens the production, and the viewer can become confused.

## The Acting

During the production, it becomes clear to see what "mask" each character wears, the most prominent being shame, resilience and racism. The character distinction in this play is fantastic, and each actor clearly worked hard to portray their character as authentically as possible. Marta, played by Rafaela Clerle, wears a mask of shame, which is physicalized in a turban that hides her natural African hair. Mama Toña, portrayed by Jessica Bryant, wears a strong mask of resilience from her experience with sexual violence. A standout is Alex Burton, who is perfectly cast as Bill, the southern white man who Marta wants her daughter to marry. Burton gives a very convincing accent and truly embodies a southern gentleman who wears the mask of a racist that holds the white supremacist values of his time. In a memorable scene, Clarita, portrayed by Bridgette Martinez, learns the depth of Bill's blatant prejudice and hate for Africans and "race mixing," and the audience literally gasped when they heard him say the "N" word so casually during his dialogue. All scenes with him are similarly incredible to watch and filled with a plethora of emotions from all characters, including fear, shock and loathing. Bryant

must also be commended on the daunting amount of lines she had to memorize for her role.

## Why This is Worth Seeing

This production has some very unique, brilliant elements, as well as great acting. It's very interesting to see the racial social structure of Puerto Rican society, which is very similar to that of American society during this time. It's about time the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble gets the recognition it deserves for its innovative methods and lesser-known, but no less powerful, choices for productions.

## Final Thoughts

Stories about the black experience must be shared, as no one story is the same. Furthermore, on the American stage, not enough stories are told about the experiences of those in other countries, which is part of why this production is so distinctive. Part of the proceeds from ticket sales of *Vejigantes (Devil Mask)* will go toward hurricane relief in Puerto Rico, so stop wasting time, and go see it.

*Ashlynn Thompson is a blogger, contact her at [athomp84@kent.edu](mailto:athomp84@kent.edu).*

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