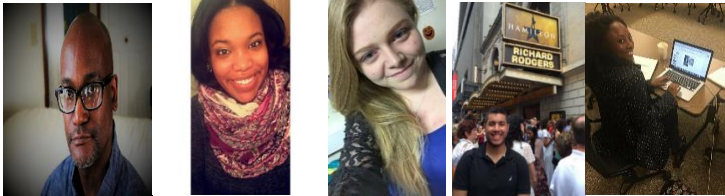




**The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble
Presents**



***Vejigantes*
by
Francisco “Paco” Arrivi (1915-2007)**

**Directed by D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD
African Community Theatre, Oscar Ritchie Hall, Room 230, Department of
Pan-African Studies, Kent State University, Nov. 16, 17, 18, 2017 –8pm & Nov.
19, 2017 –2pm
Talk-Back on Saturday, November 18, 2017
Produced by special arrangement**





The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble PATE Membership

The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble is currently seeking active members from Kent State University and the community with a passion for Black theatre and performance, an interest in cross cultural experiences, touring opportunities, role-playing, training, and professional advancement. Meetings are held bi-weekly outside of season, and at least twice a week when in season.

For further details on PATE membership, please email D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD at dforbese@kent.edu or call (330) 672-0028 (office).



From 2016-2017 Theatre Season



Welcome to the African Community Theatre

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Pan-African Studies, and the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble at Kent State University, I would like to extend a warm welcome to everyone attending tonight's performance in our African Community Theatre. It is my hope that this experience will enhance your understanding of Pan-African theatre, cultures, and the importance of theatre in our lives as a community and in society.

I hope you will continue to support theatre in the African Community Theatre, Department of Pan-African Studies, and home of the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble. Let us be immersed in the rich theatre legacy and cultural heritage from the Pan-African world.

Welcome!

Artistic Director of the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble
D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD



Welcome to the African Community Theatre

For tonight's performance, please pay attention to the following:

- No photographs
- No filming
- No recording of the play-audio or visual
- No food or drink in the theatre
- Turn off all cell phones for the duration of the show.
- Welcome to parents with toddlers and infants. If your little ones become a little fussy, please take them to the auditorium so that actors will not be distracted.

Thank you for your cooperation, and do enjoy the show.





**The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble
Presents**



***Vejigantes*
by**

Francisco “Paco” Arrivi

Artistic Director, D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD





**The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble
The PATE**

Inspire - Community – Research – Performance

*“A people without knowledge of their history, origin and culture is
like a tree without roots.”*

Marcus Garvey



Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911)

Coined by Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) in 1897, the term “Pan-African” refers to all-African, which is a call for unity among Africans and peoples of African-descent here and abroad around issues of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, nationhood, and the disparate impact experienced by Black peoples worldwide.

The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble (P.A.T.E.) was established in the fall 2016 by D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD as a theatre practice-as-research project for pedagogy, scholarship, and for directing inspiring theatre seasons from a repertoire of African and African Diasporic plays and performances. Research includes audience reception theory, memory, masquerade, performativity, and representations of race, gender and sexuality in Black theatres and performances.





Efua Sutherland (1924-1996) and Pan-African Theatre

Through the legacy of Ghanaian playwright Efua Sutherland's vision for a Pan-African theatre and cultural activism, the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble strives to bring together emerging and established theatres and performances by Africans on the continent and peoples of African descent – a call for *all*-Africans or *Pan*-Africans.

Tonight's performance of *Vejigantes* by Francisco "Paco" Arrivi is the first in the series of Latin American and Caribbean plays for research with the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble exploring the play's location of Loiza, Puerto Rico, known as "Little Africa" for its large Black Puerto Rican population, and its rich African folk and cultural history.

Heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the cast and production team for their enthusiastic support and extraordinary talents throughout the production process, including Jessica Bryant, Rafaela Clerle, Bridgette Martinez, Alex Burton, Ricky Ortega, Taylor Bryant, Abdul Bangura, Peter Gould (a.k.a Peter Fields), Christine Harmel, Alexandra (Alex) Heffner, John Howell III, Autumn Stackhouse, Ginger Staniel, María Manu Pérez-Viscasillas; and to Liza M. Henríquez Rosa, President of S.A.L.S.A. (Spanish and Latin Students Association) at Kent State University.



Part of the proceeds from ticket sales will go towards hurricane relief in Puerto Rico. Please also contribute to our donation box at the door. These donations will also go to Puerto Rican hurricane relief.

Artistic Director of the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble
D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD



Photo from Spring 2017 production, *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks





The Pan-African Theatre Ensemble

Inspire -Community –Research –Performance

“A people without knowledge of their history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”

Marcus Garvey

For more information and portfolio on D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson and research with the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble (P.A.T.E.), please go to www.the-pate.com

If you are interested in volunteering or becoming a member of the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble – The PATE in the African Community Theatre - onstage, backstage, and marketing, please contact Dr. Forbes-Erickson at dforbese@kent.edu and (330)672-0082

Students may elect to take the following Pan-African Studies (PAS) courses for opportunities in theoretical and practical projects:

1. *Practicum in African Theatre Arts*
2. *African Theatre: Nigerian Theatre*
3. *Black Theatre and Performance Studies: Trinidad Carnival*
4. *African and Caribbean Theatre*
5. *Caribbean Theatre & Musical Arts (Study Abroad to Trinidad and Tobago May 21-June 8, 2018)*

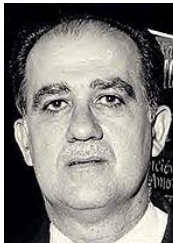


Directorial Concept:
Staging Black Feminist (Re)Memorials
D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD



In this production, I am investigating how the confluence of race, gender, and sexual violence affects the everyday lives of women of color, especially Afro-Latina and African Caribbean women in the play. I have staged a Black feminist (re)memorial which is the restaging of the past as present happenings on stage, to center and memorialize the Black matriarch, Mama Toña, in the play. Through staging with digital media, performance art, and Black embodiment, I reveal how in moments of incredible pain and loss, the three generations of Puerto Rican women in *Vejigantes* can seize empowerment over the masks of sexual violence, racism, and sexism that had shamed their bodies and silenced their voices.

Puerto Rican Playwright
Francisco “Paco” Arrivi (1915-2007)
“Father of Puerto Rican Theatre”



Francisco Arriví (June 24, 1915 – February 8, 2007), a.k.a. Paco, was a writer, poet, and playwright known as "The Father of the Puerto Rican Theater." Arriví received a Rockefeller scholarship in 1949 to pursue a master's degree in Radio and Theater from



Columbia University in New York, USA. In 1951, Arriví wrote, the first television program transmitted in Puerto Rico called *Ayer y Hoy* (Yesterday and Today). Over the next two years, he wrote the script for *El Niño Dios (The Child God)* and *Luis Muñoz Rivera*. By 1958, Arriví presented *Vejigantes* in the First Festival of Puerto Rican Theater, and received an award from the Institute of Literature. The late Errol Hill translated tonight's English language version, published in *A Time and a Season: Eight Caribbean Plays*, University of the West Indies Press (1996).

**Puerto Rican Poet – Known for Afro-Antillean Poetry and the *Negrismo* Movement,
Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959)**



Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959) was a Puerto Rican poet who used African Caribbean words with Spanish to create a unique genre called “Afro-Antillean” poetry. Matos was at the forefront of the *Negrismo* Movement in the early twentieth century, and wrote poems about social issues in Puerto Rico and the African Diaspora. Below is one of his most iconic Afro-Antillean poem *Majestad Negra (Black Majesty)*, celebrating rhythm, sensuality, Afro-Latina, and African Caribbean women. Below are the Spanish and English translations of *Majestad Negra* that capture Matos’s rich language. Puerto Rican musician, William Cepeda arranged Matos’s poem to bomba music, being used here for the character, Mama Toña, in the play, *Vejigantes* by Arriví.



MAJESTAD NEGRA
By: Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959)

Por la encendida calle antillana
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba
--Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula---
Entre dos filas de negras caras.
Ante ella un congo--gongo y maraca--
ritma una conga bomba que bamba.
Culipandeando la Reina avanza,
Y de su inmensa grupa resbalan
Meneos cachondos que el congo cuaja
En ríos de azúcar y de melaza.
Prieto trapiche de sensual zafra,
El caderamen, masa con masa,
Exprime ritmos, suda que sangra,
Y la molienda culmina en danza.
Por la encendida calle antillana
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.
Flor de Tórtola, rosa de Uganda,
Por ti crepitan bombas y bámbulas;
Por ti en calendas desenfrenadas
Quema la Antilla su sangre ñáñiga.
Haití te ofrece sus calabazas;
Fogosos rones te da Jamaica;
Cuba te dice: ¡dale, mulata!
Y Puerto Rico: ¡melao, melamba!
Sus, mis cocos de negras caras.
Tronad, tambores; vibrad, maracas.
Por la encendida calle antillana
--Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula--
Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.



Black Majesty

Translated by Paquito D'Rivera

Down the scorching Antillean street
Goes Tembandumba of the Quimbamba*
Between two rows of black faces
--Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula.
Before her, a congo band thumps
A bombastic conga—gongos and maracas.
Steatopigously the Queen steps up
And her immense buttocks with drums collide
So that seductive wiggles slide
In curdled rivers of sugar and molasses.
Brown-skinned mill of sweet sensation,
Her colossal hips, those massive mortars,
Make rhythms ooze, sweat bleed like blood,
And all this grinding ends in dance.
Down the scorching Antillean street
Goes Tembandumba of the Quimbamba.
Flower of Tórtola, Rose of Uganda,
For you the bombas and bambulas crackle.
For you these feverish nights go wild
And set on fire Antilla's ñáñiga blood.
Haiti offers you its gourds;
Jamaica pours its fiery rums;
Cuba tells you, give us what you got, mulata!
And Puerto Rico: melao, melamba!
Get down, my black-faced love-crazed rascals.
Jangle, drums, and jiggle, maracas.
Down the scorching Antillean street
Goes Tembandumba of the Quimbamba
--Rumba, macamba, candombe, bámbula.

*Quimbamba: The chimerical region (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic & Cuba).



Bomba Music Since the 1680s in (Afro) Puerto Rico

Bomba music emerged on Puerto Rico's colonial sugar plantations by enslaved Africans and their descendants dating back to the 1680s. Musical elements in bomba music can be traced back to the Akan and Yoruba peoples in West Africa. Bomba's lyrics reflect the anger, tragedy, and sadness about enslavement in Puerto Rico. However, bomba was a source of community, strength, survival, and resistance through song and dance.

Puerto Rican Musician/Folklorist William Cepeda



Our production features Puerto Rican bomba music by cultural icon, **William Cepeda** who was born and raised in Loíza (“Little Africa”) in Puerto Rico. Cepeda arranged Luis Palés Matos’s poem *Majestad Negra* (*Black Majesty*) to bomba music, and featured in tonight’s performance of *Vejigantes*.

William is the son of Rafael Cepeda, the “Patriarch of Afro Puerto Rican Music” - Bomba and Plena. Grammy-nominated William Cepeda has received numerous awards for his Afro Puerto Rican folk music and dance, and for his innovative Afro-Rican Jazz, including the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture, “Meet The Composer” Award, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Music Fund at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, American Composers Orchestra, American Composers Forum and the Association of Hispanic Arts.



Educated at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico, and the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, Cepeda earned a master's degree in jazz performance, and two BA degrees including Jazz Composition and Music Education. As an artistic visionary, Cepeda is a passionate cultural activist and researcher on Afro-Puerto Rican music, dance, and culture.

Music

- *Majestad Negra* (Poem by Luis Palés Matos) – Music by Afro Boricua CD, Director William Cepeda.
- *Afro Boricua* - Music by Afro Boricua CD, Director William Cepeda.
- *San Tomás* - Music by Afro Boricua CD, Director William Cepeda.

Production: Vejigantes by Francisco “Paco” Arrivi (1915-2007)

Act One

- Village of Loiza on the Feast of Santiago – Early 20th century

Act Two

- Drawing room in a house in San Juan – 45 years later
- On the beach in Luquillo

Act Three

- Drawing room

List of Characters

Toña/Mama Toña -----Jessica Bryant
 Marta -----Rafaela Clerle
 Clarita -----Bridgette Martinez
 Bill -----Alex Burton
 Benedicto ----- Ricky Ortega

Production Team

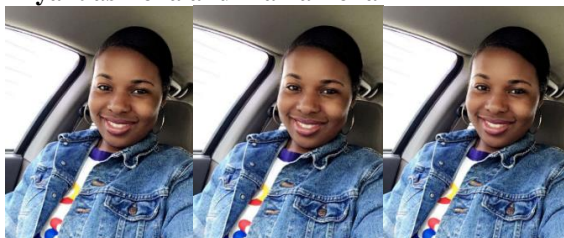
Graduate Assistant -----Taylor Bryant
 Stage Manager ----- Abdul Bangura
 Artistic Director ----- D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson
 Projection Designer -----Peter Gould (Field)
 Lighting Technician -----John Howell III



Set Designer -----D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson
 Scenic Painter -----Christine Harmel
 Scenic Painter -----Alexandra Heffner
 Costume Designer -----Autumn Stackhouse
 Costume Assistant -----Ginger Staniel
 Costume Assistant -----María Manu Pérez-Viscasillas

Cast Bios

Jessica Bryant as Toña and Mama Toña



Jessica Bryant is a senior in Speech Pathology and Audiology at Kent State University. Jessica is passionate about theatre, and have always participated in various productions growing up. She is very excited about playing Toña and Mama Toña in *Vejigantes* because these roles reflect great life lessons about self-determination and acceptance. Jessica strongly believes that this play shines light on issues that happen every day. She understands how important it is to express herself playing Toña and Mama Toña as the Black matriarch in the play.

Rafaela Clerle as Marta



Rafaela Clerle is a sophomore Musical Theatre major at Kent State University. Rafaela has been performing in theatre since she was five years old in her home country of Brazil, and has always dreamed of pursuing an acting career. Rafaela is delighted to be part of this phenomenal production of *Vejigantes* because it has an



important message about race and acceptance. Tonight, Rafaela plays the role of Marta, Mama Toña's daughter.

Bridgett Martinez as Clarita



Bridgett Martinez is a sophomore English as a Second Language student at Kent State University. Bridgett has always been involved in theatre since high school, including several productions. Her favorite role was playing “Paulette” in *Legally Blonde the Musical*, and “Ruth” in *Pirates of Penzance*. Bridgett enjoys acting and singing, and intends on pursuing theatre throughout her career. She is so thrilled to be part of this amazing production of *Vejigantes*, and hopes everyone enjoys the performance as much as she does in her role of Clarita, Mama Toña's grand-daughter.

Ricky Ortega as Benedicto



Ricky Ortega is a sophomore History major at Kent State University. Ricky is very excited to be playing the role of Benedicto in *Vejigantes*, and is passionate about this Latin America and Caribbean theatre selection for the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble. Past acting roles include “Algernon Moncrieff” in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* and “Aldolpho” in *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Ricky is incredibly grateful to his S.A.L.S.A. (Spanish



and Latin Students Association) family for supporting his return to the stage.

Alex Burton as Bill



Alex Burton is very excited to play the role of Bill in *Vejigantes* because of its poignant message about race in Puerto Rico. Alex is an exploratory student at Kent State University, and is very happy about his KSU debut in *Vejigantes*. Alex has been acting for five years, and would like to pursue his passion in theatre. Alex's favorite roles were "Cosmo Brown" in *Singin' in the Rain*, "Gomez Addams" in *The Addams Family Musical*, and "Robin Hood" in *The Somewhat True Tales of Robin Hood*. Alex would like to thank Kris Hadesty, The Kittle Family, Eric Burton, and Lori Honnold for all their support.

Production Team

**D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson, PhD –
Artistic Director & Set Designer**



D. Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson is the Artistic Director for the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble, an Assistant Professor of Pan-African Studies at Kent State University, and a specialist in African and African Diasporic plays and performances. Born and raised in St. Andrew, Jamaica, Amy-Rose is a proud Caribbean (West Indian and Antillean). She is passionate about theatre as masquerade, and very



excited to direct *Vejigantes*, the first in the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble's Latin American and Caribbean selection this season. Amy-Rose has designed and directed several productions in the USA, UK, and the Caribbean; and holds a doctorate in Theatre: Performance as Public Practice from the University of Texas at Austin. Selected production credits include Sophocles's *Oedipus The King*, Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, and Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus*. Amy-Rose is a member of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), the Black Theatre Network (BTN), the Mid-America Theatre Conference (MATC), and the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR).

Taylor Bryant – Graduate Assistant in Pan-African Studies (Theatre)



Taylor Bryant is a Graduate Assistant in Pan-African Studies for theatre in the African Community Theatre. Taylor is pursuing a MA in School Counseling to graduate in May 2019. Taylor is originally from Columbus, Ohio, and graduated from Miami University in 2015 with a BA degree in Psychology and Social Work. She is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.. Taylor has enjoyed her time as a Graduate Assistant in Pan-African Studies, and looks forward to working on future productions with the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble.



Abdul Bangura – Stage Manager



Abdul Bangura is a senior in Political Science at Kent State University. Abdul is making his debut as the Stage Manager for this production, *Vejigantes and in the Practicum in African Theatre Arts*. Abdul is excited to be part of the production team. He enjoys Stage Management, and will continue his development with the Pan-African Theatre Ensemble.

John Howell III – Lighting Technician



John Howell III was born in Campbell, Kentucky on March 29, 1953. Mr. Howell graduated from East Technical High School in Cleveland in 1972, and later studied Telecommunications at Kent State University later in the fall 1972. Mr. Howell is passionate about theatre with over thirty years of professional theatre experience on stage and back stage, including working at the Cleveland's Karamu House in 1973-1975 where he began his acting training. He proudly participated in the first Black theater in the Department of Pan-African Studies at Kent State University under the tutelage of Dr. Edward Crosby. Mr. Howell performed in several plays, including *Seven Principal* and *Claris Old Man* directed by Lois McGuire from Cleveland's Karamu House. Other plays include *Day of Absence* and *The Indian* directed by Alandis Walker. In 2009, Mr. Howell retired, but still spends his time participating in



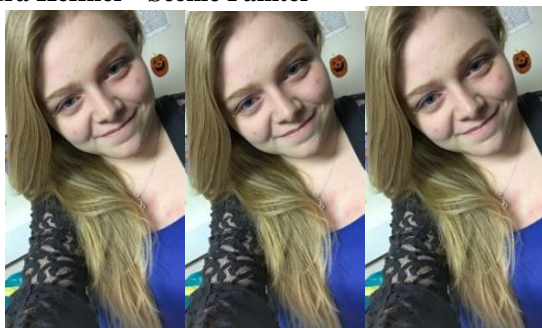
the theatre. Mr. Howell is serving as the Lighting Technician for our *Vejigantes* production.

Christine Harmel – Scenic Artist



Christine Harmel is thrilled to have the opportunity to be involved with the production, *Vejigantes* (Devil Mask), and to work with the African Community Theatre as the Scenic Artist this fall 2017. Christine is pursuing a BFA in Theatre Design and Technology with a concentration in scene design at Kent State University's School of Theatre and Dance. Her credits at KSU as a scenic artist include *Intimate Apparel* in the Wright-Curtis Theatre, and *Little Women* in E. Turner Stump Theatre.

Alexandra Heffner - Scenic Painter



Alex Heffner is a scenic painter from Lorton, Virginia. She holds a high school Advanced Diploma from Hayfield Secondary school in Virginia. Alex is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Studies, with a concentration in Design and Technology at Kent State University. She is very happy to be working on the Pan-



African Theatre Ensemble's production of *Vejjigantes* in the African Community Theatre as a Scenic Painter this fall 2017. Alex's credits with Kent State University include the Annual Haunted House 2016 and 2017 in the Wright – Curtis Theatre, *Intimate Apparel* in the Wright – Curtis Theatre), and *Little Women* in E. Turner Stump Theatre.

Peter Gould a.k.a Peter Fields – Projection Designer



Peter Anthony Fields's ten-minute play, *Burden* was produced at the 2013 “Fade to Black” Short Play Festival held in Houston, Texas in June 2013. His short play, *The Interview*, premiered on November 19, 2015 at Kent State University's Student New Works Festival in Kent, Ohio, and was one of four plays selected for performance at Western Reserve Playhouse's 80 Minutes Play Festival in October of 2017 in Bath, Ohio. In April 2016, Fields' one-act play, *About Michael* premiered at the Student Theatre Festival at Kent State University. *About Michael* made its London, U.K. debut at the LOST Theatre, on April 7, 2017 off West End as a selection of the British Theatre Challenge Act II, produced by the Sky Blue Theatre Company. His ten-minute play, *The Visit* (a sequel of the play *The Interview*) was selected for performance at the “Fade to Black” Readers Series in January 2018 in Houston, Texas. His one-act play, *This is a Safe Space!*, premiered on November 6 and 7, 2017 as part of the Black Box Series at Kent State University. Fields, who is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, recently completed work on another one-act entitled, *Citizens Loyal*, a satirical thriller.



Autumn Stackhouse – Costume Designer



Autumn Stackhouse serves as the Costume Designer for *Vejigantes* and is part of the Practicum in African Theatre Arts. Autumn is from Dillon, South Carolina, and a Fashion Merchandising major, with a minor in Costume Design and Technology at Kent State University.

Ginger Staniel – Costume Assistant



Ginger Staniel is a sophomore Fashion Design major, with a minor in Art History at Kent State University. Ginger is a member of the Honors College, and an Honors Freshman in the Florence program last fall 2016. She is a visual designer, and a secretary of the Association for World History of KSU. Ginger is a proud member of the Kent Intramural co-ed soccer team, the Stolo Huskies. She is an avid fan of history, theatre, and historical dramas,



and have participated in numerous production prior to arriving at Kent State University. She is looking forward to helping with historically-based productions.

Thank You!

Thanks to the students from the *African and Caribbean Theatre* course - Sydney Sheets, Delresea Mornes, and Lauren Lockett, who each completed practical projects for the production.

Thanks to students from *the Practicum in African Theatre Arts* course – Abdul Bagura (Stage Manager), Peter Gould (a.k.a. Peter Fields) (Projection Design), and Autumn Stackhouse (Costume Design).

Special thanks to all our friends and volunteers in *Vejigantes*, including costume assistant, María Manu Pérez-Viscasillas, S.A.L.S.A. members, and to Liza M. Henríquez Rosa, President of S.A.L.S.A. (Spanish and Latin Students Association) at Kent State University.

Many thanks to all staff and faculty of the Department of Pan-African Studies for their generous support.

Heartfelt appreciation to you all for attending tonight's performance.
Enjoy the show!

Upcoming Productions & Opportunities

The Purple Flower (1927) by Marita Bonner (1899-1971)

Thursday-Saturday, March 8, 9, 10, 2018 at 8pm and Sunday, March 11, 2018 at 2pm.

Auditions: Monday, January 22, and Tuesday January 23, 2018 at 5:30pm

1st day of Rehearsals - Wednesday, January 24, 2018 at 5:30pm

Rehearsal Schedule – Monday/Wednesday at 5:30-8:15pm



New Black Plays Series

Event dates: April 12-15, 2018 (During the Pan-African Festival and Conference – April 12-15, 2018).

New Black Plays is an invitational calling, playwrights, theatre artists, and enthusiasts to write and produce new plays about “the Black experience.”

- An open invitation to all playwrights, theatre artist, and enthusiasts - regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability and other intersectional identities – to write and produce plays about Black issues, themes, or cultures - during the Pan-African Festival and Conference, Spring 2018 – April 12-15, 2018.
- *New Black Plays* will run during the Pan-African Festival and Conference, Spring 2018.
- Play categories: monologues, 10-minute plays, spoken-word poetry, one-act and full-length plays.
- Deadline for new scripts and proposals – **Monday, January 22, 2018.**
- Final selections of 6 plays, 6-8 monologues/performance poems – TBA & TBD
- **For more information, email at dforbese@kent.edu and (330 672-0028 (office)).**



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“A people without knowledge of their history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.”

Marcus Garvey



Special Tribute to the late Professor Emeritus in the Department of Pan-African Studies, Halim El-Dabh (1921-2017)

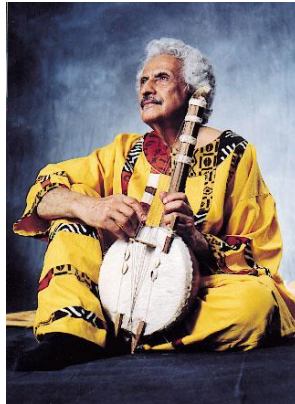
Copied from the New York Times – Sept. 8, 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/arts/music/halim-el-dabh-dies.html>

Halim El-Dabh, Composer of Martha Graham Ballets, Dies at 96

By MARGALIT FOX

SEPT. 8, 2017



Halim El-Dabh in an undated photograph. Credit Bob Christy/Kent State University

Halim El-Dabh, an Egyptian-American composer best known for the haunting, Eastern-infused ballets he wrote for Martha Graham, died on Sept. 2 at his home in Kent, Ohio. He was 96.

His death was announced by Kent State University, where he was university professor emeritus of music, specializing in composition and African ethnomusicology.

Mr. El-Dabh, who began his professional life as an agricultural engineer before succumbing to his passion for shaping sound, settled in the United States in 1950. In the years that followed, he was a vigorous presence on the East Coast new-music scene, which included composers like Otto Luening and Alan Hovhaness.

But Mr. El-Dabh's music, critics agreed, was unlike anyone else's. Hallmarks of his style included melodic fragmentation, rich sonic layering and lyricism combined with judicious dissonance; rhythmic complexity; unusual instrumentation; and strains of the music of Egypt where he was born and reared, and that of sub-Saharan Africa where he did extensive fieldwork. Mr. El-Dabh, who composed hundreds of pieces, including symphonies, concertos, chamber music and vocal works was also known for compositions that combined Western instruments with Eastern ones, notably the darbuka, a goblet-shaped drum on which he was a skilled performer.

He was also in the vanguard of electronic composition, creating pieces in that medium as early as the 1940s.



Writing about Mr. El-Dabh in 1975, The Washington Post called him “a modern composer of stature and accomplishment.”

Mr. El-Dabh’s most famous composition is almost certainly the score for “Clytemnestra,” one of four ballets for which Ms. Graham commissioned him. The only full-evening-length dance she choreographed, it is widely considered her masterwork, spanning more than two hours and reworking the mythic Greek tragedy of murder and retribution.

“Clytemnestra,” with scenic design by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi and with Ms. Graham dancing the title role, had its premiere in 1958 at the Adelphi Theater in Midtown Manhattan. It played on Broadway in 1960 and has endured as a foundation stone of the modern-dance repertoire.

Reviewing the premiere in The New York Times, the dance critic John Martin called it “a rare experience.” He praised Mr. El-Dabh’s score, which fused orchestral lines with half-sung chanting, as “enormously effective,” adding, “For once a composer has had no end in view for his music beyond making it an inseparable element in a theatrical collaboration.”

Mr. El-Dabh’s other ballets for Ms. Graham are “One More Gaudy Night” (1961), “A Look at Lightning” (1962) and “Lucifer” (1975).

Although the young Mr. El-Dabh never anticipated a career as a composer, he had carried out his first acoustic experiments as a youth, in the service of insect extermination — or, as he more tenderly put it, insect discouragement.

The youngest of nine children, Halim Abdul Messieh El-Dabh was born in Cairo on March 4, 1921. As a child, he was captivated by the liturgical music of his family’s Coptic Christian tradition. He also studied Western music, including the piano, at the Szulc Conservatory in Cairo.

As a teenager, he fashioned literal sound sculptures out of scrap metal: Their windblown clangor, he hoped, would keep insects from his family’s crops. “Through agriculture, I learned how to create noise,” Mr. El-Dabh said in a 2016 interview. “I had the feeling that noise would make them discouraged, and they would stay away from the plants.”

After earning a bachelor’s degree in agricultural engineering from what is now Cairo University, he combined vocation and avocation, traveling to outlying Egyptian villages to assist with agricultural development and, while there, soaking up traditional music and dance. Increasingly fascinated by the possibilities of manipulating sound, he borrowed a wire recorder — an early, unwieldy ancestor of the tape recorder — from a Cairo radio station and took to the city’s streets, recording folk songs, religious rites and vendors’ cries.

That experience gave rise to an early electronic composition, “The Expression of Zaar.” It was born of Mr. El-Dabh’s recording of the zaar, a traditional exorcism ritual, which he manipulated in the studio to yield echoes, reverberations and other distortions.

“I was carving sound,” he told The Christian Science Monitor in 1974. “I used noise like I would a piece of stone.”

“The Expression of Zaar” received its premiere at a Cairo gallery in 1944. That work, later released as “Wire Recorder Piece,” together with Mr. El-Dabh’s writing for the piano, became the catalyst for his full-time composing career.

After moving to the United States, Mr. El-Dabh studied at the University of New Mexico, where his teachers included the Austrian atonalist Ernst Krenek, and later





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*“A people without knowledge of their history, origin and culture is
like a tree without roots.”*

Marcus Garvey

