

Arts & Life | Local | Maryland | The Arts

The Play ‘Intimate Apparel’ Will Be Presented at Dundalk Community Theatre

March 2, 2022 Caryn R. Sagal



Takira Thompson (left) and Toby Hessenauer star in Dundalk Community Theatre's production of "Intimate Apparel." (Provided photo)

The bright lights are back on Broadway and in theaters across the country following the COVID-19 shutdown.

Locally, [Dundalk Community Theatre](#) will raise its curtain once again from Mar. 4-13 with a production of “Intimate Apparel.” The show will be presented in the John E. Ravekes Theatre on the campus of the Community College of Baltimore County Dundalk, 7200 Sollers Point Rd.

Written by Lynn Nottage, “Intimate Apparel” is the story of a lonely, turn-of-the-century Black seamstress named Esther who lives in a New York boarding house and sews for both wealthy patrons and prostitutes. The play – which premiered in 2003 at Baltimore Center Stage — is based on the life of Nottage’s great-grandmother.

Jmore recently caught up with the show’s director, Tom Colonna, a veteran theater administrator, professor, director and performer, to talk about “Intimate Apparel” and DCT’s return to the stage.

Jmore: Why do you think this show resonates with today's audiences?

Colonna: What is amazing is that the issues discussed in the play — racial, gender, religious and cultural immigrant discrimination — are still in our current headlines on a daily basis.

Director Tom Colonna: “I’ve always enjoyed being in the background making things happen rather than being onstage as a performer.” (Provided photo)



The play deals with these issues in a tender and enduring manner. It is funny, sad, poignant and meaningful. Plus, it has the added bonus of the wonderful ragtime music of 1905 that ties all the scenes together.

And ‘Intimate Apparel’ has a Jewish component as well.

This is a wonderful play by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage, who is African-American. It is set in 1905 on New York City’s Lower East Side, where people of every ethnic, racial and religious origin mingled together to survive hard times in America.

The central character is a young African-American woman who travels to New York to pursue her dreams and becomes independent as a seamstress. One of her favorite shopkeepers is a Romanian Jewish man that she buys fabric from to make the beautiful intimate apparel.

Their friendship grows as they learn more about their religious, ethnic and cultural rules. But they also know the impossibility of a [romantic] match between them. They join the other characters to look for love, respect and a brighter future in America. Overall, they are survivors struggling to make a better life for themselves every day.

Why is it worth the *schlep* to Dundalk to experience a DCT performance?

Driving to CCBC Dundalk actually is very easy from almost any location in Baltimore County, City and beyond. There is free parking and a short, clear and level walk to the theater.

We have audience members from White Marsh, Towson, Lutherville, Glen Arm, Pikesville, Owings Mills, Annapolis and beyond.

Why is it important to support local theater, especially now?

Local theater is the life blood of our arts community. Especially now that we are recovering from the adversity of COVID, our audiences are eager to see live theater again in a safe and supportive environment.

DCT and other local theaters really need your help at this time. Purchasing tickets supports our efforts at recovering financially after COVID and moving forward to a more secure future. Every ticket is another success for survival in these uncertain times.

How has DCT adapted?

We’re still on a restricted audience capacity and we’re following all [Centers for Disease Control], state, county and college requirements. At this time, masking is still required for all audience members and theater personnel.

Our actors are fully vaccinated and tested, and are the only people in the theater without a mask [when onstage]. The CCBC regulations are for our benefit, and you can be assured that the facility offers a safe, clean and secure environment.

What drew you to a career in the theater?

The most exciting thing about a career in theater for me is the process. I've always enjoyed being in the background making things happen rather than being onstage as a performer. Serving as artistic director and manager is ultimately satisfying when the audience is not only applauding the performers onstage but also responding to the process of making great art happen.

I've produced hundreds of productions over the years, and my favorite moment is standing in the back of the darkened theater and watching audiences applaud and cheer to thank the whole cast and crew for how wonderful they made them feel.

How do you balance teaching theater and communication at CCBC while serving as DCT's artistic/managing director?

I've been blessed to have a career that afforded me the security of teaching college and being a meaningful part of the community.

Working in a community-based arts organization like DCT really speaks to the first name of the Community College of Baltimore County. The college has supported our arts initiatives for close to 50 years. We've brought audiences who otherwise never would have visited the campus. But once they see a DCT production, they're hooked! We've always attracted the most talented and dedicated performers, and our audiences look forward to each production.

What else is in store at DCT this season?

We will end our season in mid-May with the dance extravaganza, "A Chorus Line." An exciting cast of 24 talented dancers and actors will weave an inviting storyline of what it takes to perform and why they *MUST* dance.

For information "Intimate Apparel" and other Dundalk Community Theatre productions, visit cbctickets.com or call the box office at 443-840-ARTS (2787).

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based public relations consultant and freelance writer.