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# National Theatre of Ghana, P-Town Festival to Tour Tennessee Williams' TEN BLOCKS ON THE CAMINO REAL

by [BWW News Desk \(/author/BWW-News-Desk\)](#) Aug. 30, 2017

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vn Festival to Tour Tennessee Williams' TEN BLOCKS ON THE CAMINO  
article/National-Theatre-of-Ghana-P-Town-Festival-to-Tour-Tennessee-Williams-TEN-BLOCKS-ON-THE-



The Provincetown Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) Theater Festival (September 21-24) is excited to welcome a new touring production of the Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) play Ten Blocks on the Camino Real, directed by Festival Curator David Kaplan (/people/David-Kaplan/) and performed by Abibigromma, the national drama company of Ghana.

This 1947 one-act play, which eventually became Williams' full-length drama Camino Real in 1953, is a thrilling phantasmagoria about a big-hearted hero lost in a ruthless world. It's the story of Kilroy, a boxer with a "heart as big as the head of a baby," who falls in love with a Gypsy's daughter - and remains faithful even after death.

The big-hearted production, which brings vibrant music and West African flair to Williams' story of love and heroism, toured marketplaces and outdoor venues in Accra in April 2016, and continues to tour throughout Ghana. Performed in English, the 75-minute show retains Williams' text, yet resonates with Ghanaian culture.

This September, Ten Blocks on the Camino Real comes to Provincetown as part of a multi-city U.S. tour, hosted by the Festival in partnership with the Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) Festival St. Louis, the University of Michigan in Detroit and Ann Arbor, the Georgetown University Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics in Washington, D.C., and Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

In Provincetown, the show performs at the "bas relief," the green park behind Town Hall at the foot of Pilgrim Monument, September 21-24.

### Williams Around the World

Since 1993, Kaplan has staged plays by Williams in Russia, Hong Kong, Uruguay, and throughout America, most recently the 2016 Rooming House Plays in St. Louis. Since the early years of the TW Festival in Provincetown, Kaplan says, the full-length Camino Real has struck him as a show that could be performed outdoors with a small ensemble of actors. "From the beginning," he says, "I thought of it as a street theater performance."

The idea led to Festival collaborations with director Sarah Michelson - whose revelatory version of Camino Real with the five-actor troupe Brooklyn on Foot played Provincetown in 2007 - and with director Davis Robinson, whose Boston company Beau Jest Moving Theatre (/people/Moving-Theatre/) performed Ten Blocks on the Camino Real with actors and marionettes in 2012.

The following year, Kaplan staged an outdoor production of Ten Blocks on the Camino Real with Raul Rodríguez Da Silva and his Taller de Teatro in a public marketplace in Paysandu, Uruguay. For that show, the team chose bright colors for the costumes and outsized gestures for the actors, so that the show resembled a circus act.

"The audience is meant to recognize these stock characters at once," Kaplan says. "We put up banners that had the names of the characters on them, like fortune-telling cards. And because the story is episodic, the audience didn't have to see everything to know what was going on. You could get something out of it just from walking by."

The play speaks across cultures, Kaplan says, in its lyric writing and its folkloric images of love, greed, and bravery. It evokes Bertolt Brecht (/people/Bertolt-Brecht/) plays from the early twentieth century about sinister cities, as well as commedia dell'arte, the Italian street theater tradition established in the sixteenth century.

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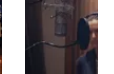
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It also resembles Concert Party, a style of West African popular theater that evokes Italian commedia's stock characters and musical storytelling style. It's the heritage of Abibigromma, which was established in 1983 at the University of Ghana at Legon and became the resident troupe of the National Theatre of Ghana in 1991.

Ghana has a history of creatively appropriating European theater. During the decades-long struggle for independence from Great Britain, live performances relayed the rebellion's successes, unreported by the colonial government.

Ghanaian Concert Party began in the early 1900s, and still continues. Today, Abibigromma has developed a rich blend of music, dance, mime, movement, and dialogue with a strong social, spiritual, and folkloric base.

### Rehearsal, Far and Wide

Kaplan connected with Abibigromma and visited the company in Accra for three weeks in the spring of 2016, during which time the group developed its Ten Blocks on the Camino Real and performed in marketplaces and outdoor venues around the country. Since last year, most rehearsals have been held online, via video conference.

The resulting show, Kaplan says, sits at "the crossroads of world theater. It combines commedia and Brecht with African theater traditions. From the moment rehearsals began in Ghana, we were laughing at the same jokes as actors and audiences in America and Uruguay."

"I have so much respect for Abibigromma's craft," Kaplan adds. "The company has trained to travel, to perform, to teach, and to be involved in varied communities throughout Ghana, and now in America. They put into practice the power of the group. It's been a privilege to work with them."

Ghanaian actress Abena Takyi, who plays the courtesan Marguerite, spent much of her childhood in Manhattan and Queens, then returned to study theater and music at the University of Ghana at Legon. She joined Abibigromma last year.

"Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) is brilliant," she says, "and Camino Real is really a depiction of life. I've never played such a role before, but in this show, everyone is a star - everyone gets their shining moment."

In the past year, she says she has grown closer to her Abibigromma friends with each successive show: "Playing together all the time gives you such good chemistry."

When performing outside in public spaces, Takyi says, "the shyness factor has to go out the window." There's no room for stage fright when "we're playing inside the audience, just like in the markets. We have a lot of interaction with them before the show, in costume, to get them to laugh and empathize with us. We get to know the type of people we're playing for."

In addition to her role in Ten Blocks on the Camino Real, Takyi appears in this year's Festival production of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra - also directed by Kaplan - as one of several performers playing Cleopatra.

While the two plays were written hundreds of years apart, Ten Blocks on the Camino Real and Antony and Cleopatra both resonate powerfully today, says Kaplan. "If we're all going to die someday, then in the interim, let's enjoy life and love for a while. Asking that question of what it means to love, knowing that you're going to die soon, is a very Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) aim, and it feeds our production of Antony and Cleopatra as well."

### 2017 U.S. Tour - Ten Blocks on the Camino Real:

Sept 7 - 11 Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) Festival St. Louis

Sept 12 - 18 University of Michigan Ann Arbor, with performances in Detroit

Sept 21 - 24 Provincetown TW Theater Festival

Sept 25 - 27 Georgetown Univ. Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, Washington D.C.

Sept 28 - 29 Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts

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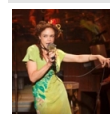


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The Provincetown Tennessee Williams (/people/Tennessee-Williams/) Theater Festival was founded in 2006 in Provincetown - the birthplace of modern American theater - where Williams worked on many of his major plays during the 1940s. The TW Festival is the nation's largest performing arts festival dedicated to celebrating and expanding an understanding of the full breadth of the work of America's great playwright. Each year, theater artists from around the globe perform classic and innovative productions to celebrate Williams' enduring influence in the 21st century, hosted by venues throughout the seaside village. For more details, visit twptown.org (<http://twptown.org>) and follow the Festival on Facebook.

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