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Clark Alum Presents “Ten Blocks on the Camino Real”

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It was the fall of 1973, and sophomore David Kaplan ('76), was preparing for his first college production at Clark University – the Tennessee Williams drama “Suddenly Last Summer.” The play received mixed reviews, with The Scarlet saying, “When it was good it was very very good and when it was bad, it was horrid.” However, it ignited a spark that would last a lifetime for Kaplan, as he quickly progressed to directing award-winning plays by Williams across the world.

It’s hard to say if Kaplan could have imagined himself, forty-four years later, sitting back in the seats of Atwood Hall’s auditorium and watching another one of his uniquely-interpreted Tennessee Williams creations.

Directed by Kaplan and performed by Ghanaian theater company, Abibigroma, “Ten Blocks on the Camino Real” arrived in Worcester from the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival on Thursday evening.

Several groups and individuals from around Worcester, including the Worcester Cultural Coalition and Ken Asafo-Adjei (on behalf of the Ghanaian community), joined together to sponsor the event, which had showings at Clark and the Worcester Common Oval.

The 1946 classic is only one act long, with individual episodes, or “blocks,” but its themes of love and heroism are bursting with energy and depth. The story follows Kilroy (played by Isaac Fiagbor), a big-hearted idealist, who falls in love with a gypsy’s daughter (Joycelyn Delali) and remains faithful to her even after death. These shorter scenes were designed for outdoor marketplaces where onlookers could stop by for a just a few minutes and easily be enticed into the storyline. Although written by an American, this “block” technique was originally influenced by German theory and Chinese acting, Kaplan said. Despite an already varied background, the play was brought to new and unexpected heights in this production thanks to Abibigroma.

“I thought it might demonstrate diversity in unexpected ways,” Kaplan said of his adaption.

Abibigroma is the resident drama company of the National Theatre of Ghana, and has been performing for over twenty-five years. They focus on developing a mix of music, dance, and movement based in spiritualism and folklore. This past year, they performed an English version of “Oedipus Rex,” along with several Ghanaian plays.

Kaplan’s interpretation certainly achieved a fresh perspective with its setting (originally written as a Spanish-speaking town) in a Ghanaian village. Songs, names, and phrases that were in Spanish in the script were translated to Ghanaian, and the blue guitar used for music that carries the entire play was swapped for blue *djembe* drums.

Kaplan is well acquainted with “Ten Blocks,” and this is not his first production of it. In 2012, he adapted the play to be performed in Uruguayan marketplaces, and he also worked with other Tennessee Williams dramas in places like Hong Kong and Russia.

He listed Clark as one of his many inspirations during his lengthy career in the theater industry.

“What I learned at Clark emphasized...the simplest means to share a play’s depth,” he remarked. “[It] has become a goal of my practice as a director.”

Kaplan also recalls his 1975 Clark adaptation of “Punch and Judy” as an influence for this version of “Ten Blocks.” He explained that this college comedy, in which humans acted as puppets, was full of laughter and shenanigans. “The same silliness runs through ‘Ten Blocks,’” he said.

Thursday’s show was indeed full of humor as actors danced through the aisles and interacted with the audience.

As the curator and co-founder of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, Kaplan has spent the last ten years directing and coordinating shows in locations including South Africa, Ghana, and Uruguay. The festival is currently emphasizing Williams’ connection with Shakespeare, and Kaplan recently finished directing a version of “Antony and Cleopatra,” which appeared in open-air markets in Provincetown, Mass.



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