

# Ghana troupe brings Tennessee Williams to D.C.

---

By [Nelson Pressley](#) September 26

Tennessee Williams would have smiled at the poetry unfolding outside the National Building Museum on Monday night. All the way from Ghana, a lively band of actors played the drifters and dreamers of a hard-luck city, performing on a rare patch of grass at sunset in the downtown din of D.C.

The 75-minute show is “10 Blocks on the Camino Real,” Williams’s florid, philosophical stroll through the human condition. It’s crammed with archetypes: a big-hearted American boxer named Kilroy, the lover Casanova, a gypsy, and some ghoulish street cleaners, played here as cackling figures with skeletal grins. It’s a colorful tapestry of a hard-bitten world.

“Your luck ran out the day you were born,” one character tells Kilroy in a typically weary line.

Outside the Building Museum, the audience gathered as the troupe from the National Theatre of Ghana sang and danced, powered by the nonstop rhythms of drummer Godwin Awador. The acting, we were told, took on a “marketplace” style — street theater. The cast roamed freely among the audience, and the performance style was larger than life. Williams’s language encourages that; how else would you play Kilroy, whose golden heart is as big as a baby’s head?

It’s a metaphor for spirit striving against circumstances, and that was the story of Monday’s outing as the actors competed hard with the buzzy outdoors and a balky sound system. “Camino Real” is a tough play under great conditions. Trying to rise above the industrial air handlers, evening traffic and emergency sirens Monday was sometimes too much.

Even so, the fresh frame was occasionally profound. Globally resonant lines that leapt out included a passage about world currency being “stabilized,” and these questions from the Gypsy: “Do you distrust newspapers? Are you suspicious of governments?”

Abibigromma is the National Theatre of Ghana’s resident troupe, and its folkloric, earthy style translates easily to Williams’s saga. Limber dancers bounced in the spongy grass, and the cast plays the tale against a simple backdrop of posters illustrating each main character and offering a slogan: “This deal is rugged.”

Again, you could picture Williams beaming at the performers’ indomitable attitudes and freewheeling physicality. Isaac Fiagbor is brash and personable as Kilroy; Esther Addo-Scott is a formidable presence as the Gypsy; and Emmanuel Ghartey

radiates lonely cool as a Casanova in an unbuttoned shirt and mirror sunglasses.

“What are you drinking?” Fiagbor’s Kilroy asks Ghartey’s Casanova late in the play.

“The tears of a wasted life,” Casanova replies.

These are lines to savor, but only one high-wire tone was really possible Monday. Better luck may come tonight at 5:30 p.m. on the campus of Georgetown University, and Wednesday at the fountain in downtown Silver Spring. The actors are clearly geared to work outdoors; photos from performances in Ghana show them wearing microphones. The tour is here via Georgetown’s Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, which has the great goal of giving international creative voices a platform in this fractious capital city. That’s a timely mission, and plainly this is a troupe and a show worth hearing.

First Post byline, 1992; covering theater for the Post since 1999. His book "American Playwriting and the Anti-Political Prejudice" came out in 2014. 🐦 Follow @nelsonpressley