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**PROVINCETOWN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS THEATER FESTIVAL
AND THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF GHANA PRESENT
*TEN BLOCKS ON THE CAMINO REAL***

**Outdoor, drum-fueled production
will tour St. Louis, Detroit, Ann Arbor,
Washington D.C., and Worcester
with Provincetown performances September 21-24**

August 30, 2017 — (Provincetown, MA) **The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival** (September 21-24) is excited to welcome a new touring production of the Tennessee Williams play *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*, directed by Festival Curator **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 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** 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** 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.

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 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 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 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

About the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival

The Provincetown 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 and follow the Festival on **Facebook**.

This Festival is funded in part by the Provincetown Tourism Fund, and is presented by Sage Inn and Lounge.