

• 'In This House' receives NEA funding!

By Greg Moniz - Courtesy of the Trinity Tripod - Issue date: 2/2/10 Section: News

Professor of Theater and Dance Judy Dworin was recently awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to help finance the latest collaborative arts project by her non-profit organization, the Judy Dworin Performance Project (JDPP).



The project, entitled "In This House," will be a mix of dance, song, and spoken word explaining the historical and racial significance of one of Connecticut's oldest standing houses, the Joshua Hempsted House in New London.

The house has a dynamic history dating back to its construction in 1678. Since then, the story of the house and its residents have been indicative of the highs and lows of the African-American struggle. In 1727, Hempsted

purchased Adam Jackson, a black slave who lived with the family in the house. Until his death, Hempsted kept incredibly detailed journals that chronicled both his and Jackson's daily life.

In 1758, Jackson was freed when Hempsted died. Subsequent Hempsted generations became active abolitionists, establishing a school for black children in the frame house, advocating on behalf of the Africans on the Amistad, and assisting in the publication of an anti-slavery newspaper. The neighborhood surrounding the house is now integrated and interracial.

Dworin intends to tell the story by making the house the narrator and by incorporating Hempsted's writings. "On a set that suggests the house, projected angled views of the actual Hempsted house and pages of the rare and beautifully preserved diary of Joshua Hempsted will be juxtaposed with images that evoke the tensions that slavery and racism have produced in our culture for generations," Dworin said.

Dworin hopes to shift the focus of race struggles from its historically Southern base to an area closer to home, the small port city on the Southeastern Connecticut coast. "Often the perception is that slavery in this country was a Southern phenomenon. This was not the case and "In This House" reveals that as it examines the relationship of Joshua Hempsted and Adam Jackson," she said.

Assisting Dworin will be the musical director of Women of the Cross, Leslie Bird. The Women of the Cross is a group of gospel a cappella singers. The project will also feature a variety of guests from the regional African-American community, including residents of the neighborhood surrounding the house.

The award is the first national grant that the JDPP has received and comes from one of the most respectable and esteemed arts agencies in the country.

Dworin hopes to use the money for both the construction of the project and for getting its message out into the community. "The grant award will allow for the research and development of the piece and especially supports its outreach to underserved populations," she said.

Though the focal point of the project is a house that is over 330 years old, Dworin sees the story as something rooted in modernity, a piece of a history of a people and a struggle that is still being felt. "It is a story that echoes and reverberates within our present reality as we experience a historic surge forward with our first African-American president," she said. "In This House" seeks to provoke discussion and deeper understanding of how we can evolve from the base and immoral roots of slavery to a world in which we can, in fact, bridge the racial divide."

Dworin is currently on sabbatical as she develops the project, which is scheduled to premiere in April 2011 at the Charter Oak Cultural Center in Hartford. In addition to the scheduled five performances, Dworin hopes to take the show back to its true roots in New London, Conn.

• Upcoming Residencies

JDPP's Moving Matters! Residency series is in full swing for 2010!

- Kinsella Magnet School - JDPP teaching artists are working with a group of 6th-8th grade students on their own version of *Dreamings*. The project will culminate with a performance on May 27th.
- Parkville Community School/M.D. Fox Elementary - This is our 14th year in residence at Parkville School, and we are joining with M.D. Fox for the first time. This year's project, *The Skin You're In*, is a celebration of difference. The culminating performance will take place at the Koepell Community Center at Trinity College on May 5th.
- Children of the Incarcerated - Expanding on the pilot program from last year, JDPP is collaborating with Families in Crisis, York Correctional Institution, the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy at CCSU, and Charter Oak Cultural Center to bring voice and visibility to this at-risk population. The project will start on April 8th, and continue through the end of June.
- Community Partners in Action Resettlement Program- JDPP is partnering with CPA to continue our work with the women at York CI as they re-enter society. This project will culminate on April 27th.

• Welcome, Barbara Washer!

JDPP welcomes its newest member, Barbara Washer, our new Director of Community Outreach & Programming. Barbara comes to JDPP with an extensive background in theater and education. She will oversee JDPP's performance and residency bookings and other outreach programs. Contact her at Barbara@judydworin.org.

• JDPP Mentee Travels to Haiti for Photo Documentary



Photographer Lena Stein will be traveling with the Connecticut Haitian American Organization in March to document the groups' mission to bring medical and basic supplies to the people of Haiti. After reviewing her photos, the group was convinced that she was the "right person to travel with us to document this extraordinary mission. Your photos capture something special of the subjects and portray a positive image." More information about Lena and her work can be found on our website, in the "Reaching Out" section.

