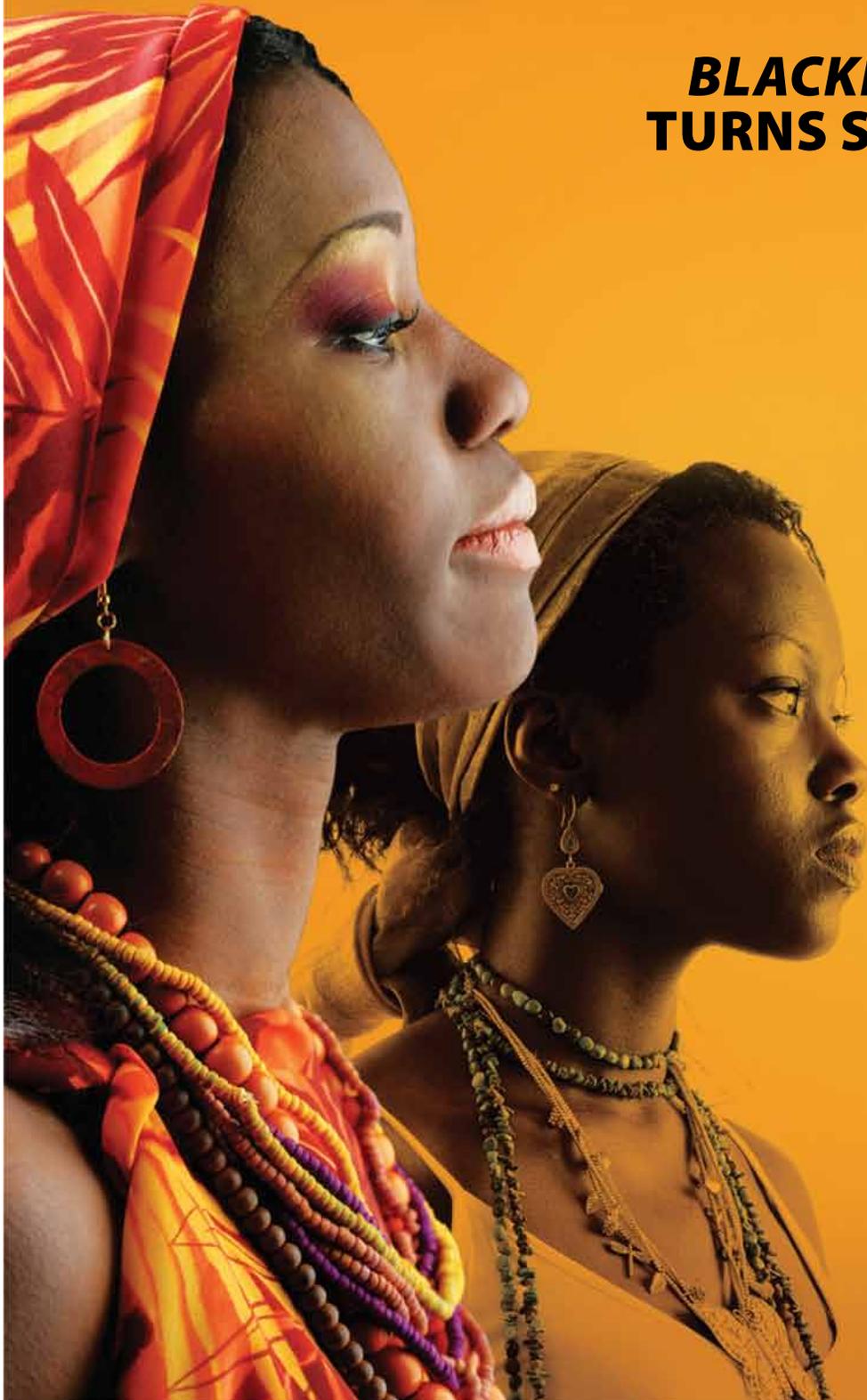


Carla Duren

BROADWAY'S BLACKFOLKROCKSTAR TURNS SERIOUS ABOUT THE CONGO IN *RUINED*

After garnering the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Obie Award for Best New American Play and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play; Lynn Nottage's play *Ruined* comes to La Jolla Playhouse beginning on November 16. San Diego's production co-stars the kind and spirited Carla Duren. Duren opened up to *The Rage Monthly* about how *Ruined* is changing hearts and minds, her role as Sophie, and her hometown roots.





The Rage Monthly: What is the premise of *Ruined*?

Carla Duren: *Ruined* is an important piece about women in the Congo and how the women there are raped and being used as weapons of war. Culturally it is not spoken about. The behavior is not accepted, but it is not challenged either. This play allows people to hear. The women have a voice, it humanizes their situation. I am excited to be a part of this show, to make art about a subject that is scary and not really talked about. It is important to bring this to light. The play is really a call to action.

Rage: What kind of action has occurred as a result?

CD: Leaders from the Congo have seen the play and it is changing the way they are looking at their women. The play isn't just changing lives, but saving them. *Ruined* is filled with love and humor and beautiful music. Audiences will not come and walk out crying and depressed and upset at the state of the world. But with eyes open, it's heartwarming and filled with hope.

Rage: Tell me about your character.

CD: Sophie has been ruined. She experienced a violent rape with a bayonet. Most ruined women are rejected from the community, but Sophie sings, so her uncle brings her a safe haven, a brothel. She finds refuge there. She cannot be a prostitute so she sings for guests. She is also educated, went to the university, so she is able to help with the bookkeeping. It's better there than out in the streets. Here, women have control over their bodies.

Rage: Have you played a dramatic, real-life role like this before?

CD: This is a first for me, a serious role in a straight play. I had a role in a play last summer that was heavy. My character's mother was killed, I was shot at. Ghetto situations. For me, this piece is a lot deeper because I am telling real life stories. The playwright interviewed women in the Congo. It's helpful to me as I get into character, knowing that it is real.

Rage: What homework have you done for the part?

CD: I've done some research on the Congo. I'm excited, we'll see documentaries, see the way they live, their environment. Obviously we can't hop on a plane and go to the Congo. We will see stories of women that have experienced being ruined and documentaries about the soldiers.

Rage: Our greater theatre community is known for giving back. Do you know if this production will be giving funds back to agencies that offer care, support or educational opportunities to women survivors of war?

CD: I haven't heard yet. I can tell you that I am sponsoring a woman from the Congo through Women for Women International (womenforwomen.org). They help women survivors of war to rebuild their lives. As her sponsor, I help her with financial aid to learn job skills and I write letters to her.

Rage: May I respectfully ask your age? I ask because you've played a number of teen/youthful characters in *110 in the Shade* and *Little Inez in Hairspray*. But based on your experience, I'm guessing you are not high-school age.

CD: (laughs) May I respectfully decline to answer? I don't share my age because people form an expectation. I'd like to ride the road as long as I can; until somebody says, "okay you gotta get off." But I have a funny story about that. One night after a show, I was outside the back stage door signing autographs. A little girl came up and asked me if I was fifteen. I told her, "No, I am not fifteen." She turned to her mom and said, "See, I told you, she's sixteen!"

Rage: (laughter) How cute is that? Where did you grow up and how did you get the acting bug?

CD: In the Midwest. Peoria, Illinois. I came to New York to follow the big lights and be an entertainer. Looks like a naive decision coming from a place surrounded by corn-fields. It's not too big a city. I didn't take any acting classes until I came here (New York) and realized I was going to be doing this for a living. Fortunately, I've worked with a lot of amazing people. Really, that's the best way to learn. When someone who has been in this business for twenty years says something to me, I listen up. I say to myself, "This is the most valuable information in the world, coming at you right now."

Rage: Tell me about your singing career, your CD *BlackFolkRockStar*.

CD: It is all self-composed and self-produced. I wrote while playing guitar, taught myself to play. I am not formally trained. What I love about it is the response. People tell me it is inspiring, that they identify with the songs. The lyrics are simple; straight forward. It's easy to sing along to. If they need inspiration for the day, they put on my CD. I desire to be the soundtrack to people's lives, for a road trip or just for this day.

Ruined runs November 16 – December 19 at La Jolla Playhouse. For tickets and more information call 858.550.1010 or LaJollaPlayhouse.org.