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funded

HISTORY OF STAUNCH

THE STAUNCH POETS AND PLAYERS have established themselves as one of the more innovative and committed groups of performers in the U.K. It's audiences since it's inception in 1980 have diversified significantly both in number and in culture.

The Company is formed around a core of actors, poets, musicians, writers, dancers and directors who aim to achieve a distinctive style of performance. The history of Staunch Poets and Players begins when Don Kinch and a group of community players discussed the need for quality dramatic material detailing the Black experience in contemporary and historical contexts.

From the discussions came action, a multi-disciplined production called *'Reflections'* which utilised poetry, music, dance and drama to present a kaleidoscope of the Black experience past, present and future.

Within the ambit of the discussions which set up S.P.P. was a feeling that Black historical figures have been summarily dismissed in Great Britain and so there is little chance for young people to know of the significant contributions Black people have made throughout history. It was therefore logical that Staunch's next production *'Prophet Without Honour'* was based on the life of Marcus Garvey a milestone in the evolution of Black consciousness and awareness.

Staunch received critical attention which spring-boarded the Company into devising a full length production. *'In Transit'* was conceived by author Don Kinch as an epic piece portraying the triangular journey that Black people have made between Afrika, the Caribbean and Britain. The piece used dance, music and drama to augment certain points of departure, arrival and lifestyle. A preview of *'In Transit'*, aired on B.B.C. Television increased Staunch's audience substantially.

Lois Rodgers of the Times wrote of S.P.P. **"The lucid and the articulate are not the preserve of white classes". "The essential elements of cooperation and effort are attracted to quality not good causes. And the players believe and persuade"**.

'In Transit' also gained significantly from the creative input of director (American) Joseph Mydell whose experience in the musical form speeded the organic development of the Company.

There then came a few studies of the Black experience in Britain. Two plays *'Coming Up For Air'* and *'Compound Images'* also by Don Kinch, explored the involvement of Blacks in contemporary Britain.

"Don Kinch is a very fine writer. He deserves a big stage" Time Out. "Coming Up For Air is a taut, witty, brutally honest pot boiler". City Limits. "Excellent, witty and assured". The audience was left asking for more". Caribbean Times.

The Company now felt secure enough to take on the work of new playwright Frank McFields *'Downside Up'* an exploration of the elements in the past that return to haunt a family and the conflict created by the situation. Very much a piece which explored language and imagery.

"West Indian culture is brilliantly demonstrated in this soul searching analysis of emotions and their relation to social and economic deprivation". Caribbean Times.

All roads converging to *'The Balmyard'* and *'Gather In Your Name'* both written by Don Kinch which finally established Staunch's commitment to developing performances which move away from the current one-dimensional portrayal of the Black experience in the theatre.

"It was a moving performance by Staunch using all available Afrikan theatre traditions to achieve the desired effect". "The singing was exceptional and spiritually uplifting". Caribbean Times.

STAUNCH POETS & PLAYERS



Photo by Rudy Atwell

PRODUCTIONS

A. Full Length Production:

CHANGING THE SILENCE Black people make up 3% of the British population and yet 25% of the population in mental institutions, 40% of the population in Borstals and 23% of these spending life sentences in jails?

Why is there a 78-90% unemployment of Black people in Great Britain? Are Black people inferior?

B. Double Bill:

JOURNEY

A one-woman show which explores the black American experience through the eyes of a young Black girl in her quest to understand herself. Journey moves at a compelling pace driven by intricate percussion, poetry, song, dance and folklore, finally erupting in unity with the audience through song.

IMAGES IN BLUE

Was devised in workshops with four performers, director and writer. The sketches focus on aspects of black peoples' lives back home in the Caribbean, and in Britain. Familiar characters and experiences are presented with perception and humour. True to Staunch's style developed over the past five years, the revue fuses drama, music and poetry.

IN SERVICE WORKSHOPS

The STAUNCH PLAYERS bring a wide range of expertise into the collective spirit of the Company. Our inservice workshops are aimed at providing a forum for sharing techniques, methods and ideas with fellow artists and theatre groups in order to explore areas of mutual interest and to develop new approaches and perspectives.

Staunch custom designs these workshops based on the Company format of work and our Pan-Afrikanist perspective in accordance with the ideas, needs and concerns of your group.

The following are some of the areas which Staunch is prepared to focus on:

DIRECTING

- ★ How to get more out of your actors.
- ★ Staging techniques.
- ★ Creating sets & costumes with minimal resources.

GROUP DYNAMICS

- ★ Developing a mutual language for rehearsal among actor, director, and stage manager.
- ★ Problem solving.

PROGRAMMING

- ★ Planning and executing projects.
- ★ Long and short range goal setting.
- ★ Role of Black Theatre in community and society.

PLAYWRITING

- ★ Collective script development.
- ★ Creating a character.
- ★ Dialogue development.
- ★ Shaping and filling a scene.

ACTING STYLE & TECHNIQUES

- ★ Exploring a text.
- ★ Character development.
- ★ Relationships between Afrikan traditions and the stage.
- ★ Utilizing life experiences within the acting process.

MUSIC

- ★ Exploring sounds as a response to text and action.
- ★ Exploring action as a response to sound.
- ★ Creating a musical scene.

GENERAL

- ★ Integrating different art forms within the theatre.

OFFERS

WORKSHOPS

Staunch workshops are 1 to 4 hour sessions in which company members engage participants in activities geared to exploring of the topic in accordance with the needs of your group. These workshops are formulated along Pan Afrikanist/collective lines, representative of the overall structure of the Company. Staunch is offering the following workshops topics for the 1985-86 winter season.

1. **VOICE** – The ability to communicate in a clear and effective manner is valuable both on and off stage. This workshop focuses on breathing, vocal production, vocal tone/quality and vocal expression. The workshop is made up of exercises using music, scripted materials, non-verbal sounds and improvisation.

2. **MASK/MIME** – Creating and working with masks releases inhibitions enabling one to explore actions and reactions of our bodies. Mime further enables one to communicate stories, feelings and situations through physical representation.

3. **IDEA INSPIRATION** – Or: methods and skills for generating ideas. This workshop uses a series of activities to stimulate our creative thinking process and to focus it on finding new perspectives; new ways of solving problems or reaching goals and new ways of approaching situations.

4. **MEDIA WORKSHOP** – How does the media (print, radio, TV) influence what we want, what we do and how we see ourselves? The workshop concludes with the creation of media messages which strive to address an issue of concern in a positive manner.

5. **THEATRE GAMES** – A series of activities designed to develop skills used in the theatre that are useful in daily life. The workshop explores group cohesiveness, creative problem solving, personal expression and awareness of environment.

6. **ACTING TECHNIQUES** – This workshop is approached from Staunch's belief that anyone can act. Acting requires commitment, sincere exploration of self and environment and free use of body, voice and emotions. Through this workshop Staunch seeks to develop the following areas in the participants:

- (a) Group interaction and communication through improvisation.
- (b) Exploration of the senses; (sight, hearing, touch, smell) to heighten of responsibilities to ones environment.
- (c) Exploration of text.
- (d) Development of characters.
- (e) Techniques in breathing, voice production and movement.
- (f) Stage presence – ability to relate and be comfortable before an audience.

7. **STORY-TELLING** – In Afrikan and Caribbean oral tradition, moral lessons, beliefs and life mysteries are handed down through generations by the Story-Teller. Methods include:

- (a) Narration.
- (b) Using elementary mime.
- (c) Physically acting out the characters.

Through this workshop Staunch seeks to develop the Story-Teller in all of us while exploring the role of Story-Teller in our lives today.

8. **HUMOUR** – What do we consider funny and why? The humorist can approach sensitive issues without using negative stereotypes by developing a character and using exaggerated perspectives within a cultural framework. This workshop examines the nature of humour in different cultures from telling of stories to pun on words, to slap-stick to racial or scapegoat humour. Techniques are explored in creating and presenting humorous material.

9. **DIRECTING** – The success or failure of a production depends largely on the ability of the director to:

- (a) Grasp the concept of the piece.
- (b) Design a method of giving this concept a physical life and
- (c) Evoke this life from the actors.

This ability stems from strong creative impulses and effective communication skills. This beginning directing workshop is designed to apply the participants creative abilities to the staging of simple materials. In accordance with Staunch's collective spirit all participants will serve as both actors and directors in turn.

10. **POETRY**: This workshop sets out to explore and expand our definition of poetry as a means of expression in relation to our lives and the world around us. Participants create poetry by using various materials.

11. **PROSE**: The focus of this section is finding creative means of developing prose writing skills. Basic techniques in writing, composition and structure as well as in originating content are presented through a theatrical orientation.

12. **PLAYWRITING**: Basic elements in conceiving and structuring a script are presented in this section.

13. **MUSIC**: Music appears in every part of our lives and is a vital part of the Afrikan tradition. This workshop offers a look at the role of music in our lives, culture and society and an opportunity to create music using various materials.

14. **MOVEMENT**: Movement is a responsive expression of the body and feelings to some inner or external rhythm. It is integral and indicative of Afrikan cultures throughout the world. This workshop fuses various techniques and forms of dance and movement in order to allow participants to experience movement in individual expression as well as in group action.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

STAUNCH POETS AND PLAYERS are a professional performing arts company, committed to the highest artistic quality with a Pan Afrikan perspective.

It is the group's firm belief that the arts have a vital role to play in the education and development of their community/society. Black people may deepen their sense of who they are, and white people are exposed to accurate information rather than propaganda about Afrika and the Caribbean.

As a subsequence of this belief, Staunch's programmes and productions are developed in line with the interests and concerns of the Black diaspora. Staunch's productions reflect the human experience particularised by the Black experience.

Outlined below are our general objectives:

1. To present to the general public as broad a range as possible of Black creative arts past and present and to work to increase knowledge and appreciation of these.
2. To act as an information point and resource for the creative activity of the community.
3. To work, especially with children and young people assisting and encouraging their participation in creative activities.
4. To assist in all ways possible the work of the creative artist, especially those just beginning their careers.
5. To provide the general public with a social environment conducive to the above aims.

Unlike long theatre traditions which have their ethics and aesthetics in line, there is a dislocation between these two in Black British Theatre. Black Theatre has yet to develop a clear definition of strategy and purpose in which a vital meaningful tradition can be rooted and grow.

What is Black theatre? What should it be doing? What principles guide the Black theatre movement? To what extent are those artists involved in Black theatre loyal to their people, representing them truly and upholding certain principles?

Staunch will continue to ask these questions, strive to achieve the means of answering them and at all times aim for the highest standards in their continued exploration and building of Britain's Black theatre tradition.

COST (NEGOTIABLE)

WE RECOMMEND SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES:

I. FULL PACKAGE DEAL

- 2 ½ Hour performances.
- Max. 4 Hour workshop combination.
(Longer residences can be arranged on request).

COST: £350

II. PERFORMANCE ONLY

- 2 ½ Hour performances.

COST: £250

III. WORKSHOPS ONLY:

- 1-4 Hour workshop combination.
(Max. 4 topics with additional sessions negotiable).

COST: £150

BOOKING

Fill out and return the following REQUEST FORM to be received by STAUNCH at least **4 weeks** prior to date requested. Confirmation will be made by phone with subsequent contract and deposit to be received at least **2 weeks** prior to date confirmed.

Staunch Poets & Players Ltd
Manor House
58 Clapham Common North Side
London SW4 9RZ
01-228 2015

Parminder Vir OBSERVED BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE
GLC
1981-1986
Working for London
archive.parmindervir.com

ABOUT THE COMPANY

DON KINCH: Born in Barbados. Came to Britain in 1965. In 1979 he launched and edited *Staunch* magazine and set up the Company. His writing is committed to re-establishing contact with his peoples cultural heritage from Afrika and the Caribbean. His plays have been performed in London Fringe venues and to many communities throughout Britain. His plays include: *'Reflections'*; *'In Transit'*; *'Coming Up For Air'*; *'Compound Images'* and *'The Balmyard'*. He is currently working on two new plays and a film.

ADRON McFARLANE: Born in Britain, parents from Jamaica. Adron performed nationally and internationally with *Staunch* in *'Gather In Your Name'* and *'The Balmyard'*. He believes in the power of theatre to act as a catalyst and a mirror in the freeing of the spirit of Black people. He has lead many workshops in schools and community centres.

JACKIE HUTCHINSON: Born in Britain of Jamaican parentage. Jackie is a vocalist and creative writer, composing songs using guitar and piano. She has appeared in two productions with the 'Activists' Youth Theatre at The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs and has also worked at 'The Cockpit Theatre' appearing in *'Crocodile – In Defence of those who come to Power by Crime'*. She is currently working on her first full length play to be performed by *Staunch* in the future. Jackie is committed to re-awakening Black peoples' spiritual awareness which she feels has been repressed during the historical transition from Africa to the West.

CECIL GOULSTON: Born in Grenada, came to Britain in 1965. Studied at Mountview Theatre School, also with the Negro Ensemble Company in New York later studied at the London School of Contemporary Dance. Worked with Temba and at the Keskidee and was a founding member of *Staunch*. Cecil is committed to the development of Black Theatre that directly addresses itself to socio-political and economic struggles effecting Black people's lives.

TRACI HALIMA WILLIAMS: Was born in Washington D.C. and received her training at Oberlon College, Ohio and the National Theatre Institute in Connecticut. American audiences have seen her in *'For Colored Girls....'*; *'Taming of The Shrew'*; *'Shout Across The River'* and others.

Halima has also written and directed for the stage and video productions. She is the creator of *'Journey'* which she performed at the London International Festival of Theatre. She joined *Staunch* for several performances of *'Gather In Your Name'*. She is dedicated to creating a unique style of performance designed to address the needs, lives and history of Black people.

DEREK ANTHONY RICHARDS: Parents from the Eastern Caribbean, Derek has lived in Great Britain all his life. He is an experienced percussionist and sound technician. Derek has developed an interest in jazz as well as Brazilian rythms. He accompanied *Staunch* in the production of *'Images In Blue'* and *'Gather In Your Name'*. Derek sees Black Theatre as a fusion of dance, music and drama. He is committed to bringing Black Theatre down to earth to reflect the material struggles of Black people.

MAXINE RICHARDS: Born in England, parents from Jamaica. Maxine trained with 'Dance de L'Afrique' African dance company in Birmingham. She performed in 'Dark Movers' production of *'The Balmyard'* written and directed by Don Kinch. Maxine is devoted to presenting material that goes beyond gimmicks and trivia to deal with the complicated realities facing Black people.

REQUEST FORM

WE ARE REQUESTING STAUNCH PACKAGE No.

INCLUSIVE OF:

PRODUCTION No. TITLE:

WORKSHOP(S) No. TOPIC:

..... TOPIC:

..... TOPIC:

..... TOPIC:

FOR:

DAY DATE MONTH YEAR

AT:

ORGANIZATION NAME

NAME OF CONTACT

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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From:
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To: