

Review 1: Ntozake Shange – Author of “For Colored Girls,” Comes to DePaul

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By: Aleya Crable

Black feminist, Poet, and American writer, Ntozake Shange (pronounced N-TOH-ZAHK-KEH SHUNG-GEH) was invited to speak at DePaul University’s Lincoln Park Student Center February 16, 2011, at 8 p.m.

Shange was born October 18, 1948, in Trenton, New Jersey as Paulette L. Williams. In 1966, she enrolled in Barnard College, where she majored in American Studies. During this time, Shange was married and separated from her husband, who was a law student. Depressed over her separation, Shange attempted suicide multiple times. In 1971, having come to terms with her depression, Shange changed her name to Ntozakhe, which means she who has her own things and shange means he/she who walks/lives with lions. Shange earned a master’s degree in the same field from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

Shange, her sister, Ifa Bayeza, and her assistant, Claude, presented and discussed various pieces of work to the DePaul student body including Bayeza and Shange’s collaborative novels, *Some Sing, Some Cry*, *Spell Number 7* and the work that received the most chatter from DePaul students, “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow Is Enuf”.

The Obie-award winning play of “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf,” was produced on Broadway in 1976. In 2010, Tyler Perry created a movie inspired by Shange’s work titled, “For Colored Girls.”

Tyler Perry is a well-known writer and director who addresses culturally controversial and stereotypical topics of African-American life. The film “For Colored Girls” opened in theaters Nov. 5 with a star-filled ensemble that includes Phylicia Rashad, Whoopi Goldberg, Janet Jackson, and Thandie Newton. However, it was noted that Shange was excluded from casting of the movie.

In responding to students’ questions, Shange addressed her working relationship with Mr. Perry, as she called him, during the making of the movie. She made it known “Mr. Perry approached me,” in response to the question regarding the movie’s evolution. When Shange

wrote the original, she did not mention HIV/AIDS because it did not exist during that era. However, in hopes to make up for its absence, she wrote a piece called “Silenced” that addresses the affect HIV/AIDS has on our community.

“One thing we can’t afford is to be silenced,” said Shange.

Shange asked Perry to incorporate the HIV/AIDS piece in the movie; yet, Perry failed to do so. She seemed slightly uncomfortable speaking to the movie “For Colored Girls” and was more interested in discussing “Some Sing, Some Cry,” which is a Mayfield saga written by herself and her sister Bayeza. When addressing each other Bayeza and Shange used nicknames, “Zake” and “Fa”. Some Sing, Some Cry moves through Reconstruction, two World Wars, the Great Migration, and the Civil Rights movement.

Bayeza performed a piece from “Some Sing Some Cry” about a character named Lizzie, who is a single mother with a tragic past. Lizzie redefines herself during the Harlem Renaissance to become a cabaret legend in Paris. Bayeza’s performed piece was filled with humor and commitment to the character.

Through an intense and extensive question and answer segment Ntozake Shange answered each question with boldness and honesty. In the midst of her transparent attitude, she left the audience with a piece of self-reflective truth, “Everything that came out of slavery time is not poisonous. We are from that era and we are not poison.”