

# DANIEL BEATY

## PRESS PACKET



[www.DanielBeaty.com](http://www.DanielBeaty.com)

# ***DANIEL BEATY is:***

- \* A multiple award winning actor, singer, and writer of critically acclaimed plays currently performing across the nation
- \* Children's Book Author of *KNOCK KNOCK* publication by Little Brown Books, December, 2013
- \* Self-help Book Author of *TRANSFORMING PAIN TO POWER* publication by Penguin, March, 2014
- \* Thought leader behind a nationwide initiative using the tool of storytelling to empower youth and communities to heal trauma funded by the nation's leading foundations including Ford, Kellogg, and Buffett
- \* Youth advocate, mentor, and activist for children of incarcerated parents who has spoken at the White House and keynotes at major conferences
- \* Columbia University Professor

# ***What Celebrities & Critics are saying about Daniel Beaty...***

- “Beaty makes your hair stand on end—truth will do that to you! We must support this important artist.” *Bill Cosby, Legend*
- “Daniel Beaty is AMAZING...his performance is amazing, the writing is fantastic...some of the best monologues you’ll ever hear. It makes you emotional, makes you laugh, stays with you.” *Hill Harper, Best Selling Author & Actor*
- “By the end, I was on my feet shouting like someone in church. I was so moved! Daniel Beaty is brilliant.” *Ruby Dee, Legend of Stage & Screen*
- “Genius...my life is changed. A brilliant piece of work.” *Gospel Singer Tonex*
- “Off the charts. Wow...I wish I had thought of that. Sensational, A plus, I’ve got to give it a 10.” *Melvin Van Peebles, Legendary Filmmaker, Playwright, & Actor*
- “Amazing...the voice of a movement that needs to be heard. I was so moved on so many levels.” *Ben Vereen, Tony Award Winner*

## ***Tell us more about Daniel Beaty...***

- “Such a joy to see...the magical dancing of words. It is I, it is We, it is about all of us.” *Sonia Sanchez, Renowned Poet & Activist*
- “Amazing...it touched my heart. I am blown away by the genius that was shown.” *Donnie McClurkin, Grammy Award Winning Gospel Artist*
- “An incredible work that speaks so much truth on so many levels of artistry. He’s a monster talent...I’m overwhelmed.” *Malik Yoba, Actor & Activist*
- “Astonishing...a thing of beauty.” *The New York Times, Critic’s Pick*
- “A Night to Remember...” *The New York Post*
- “An actor in full command of his instrument.” *Variety*
- “Deeply felt...impossible not to cheer Beaty on his important mission.” *Los Angeles Times*



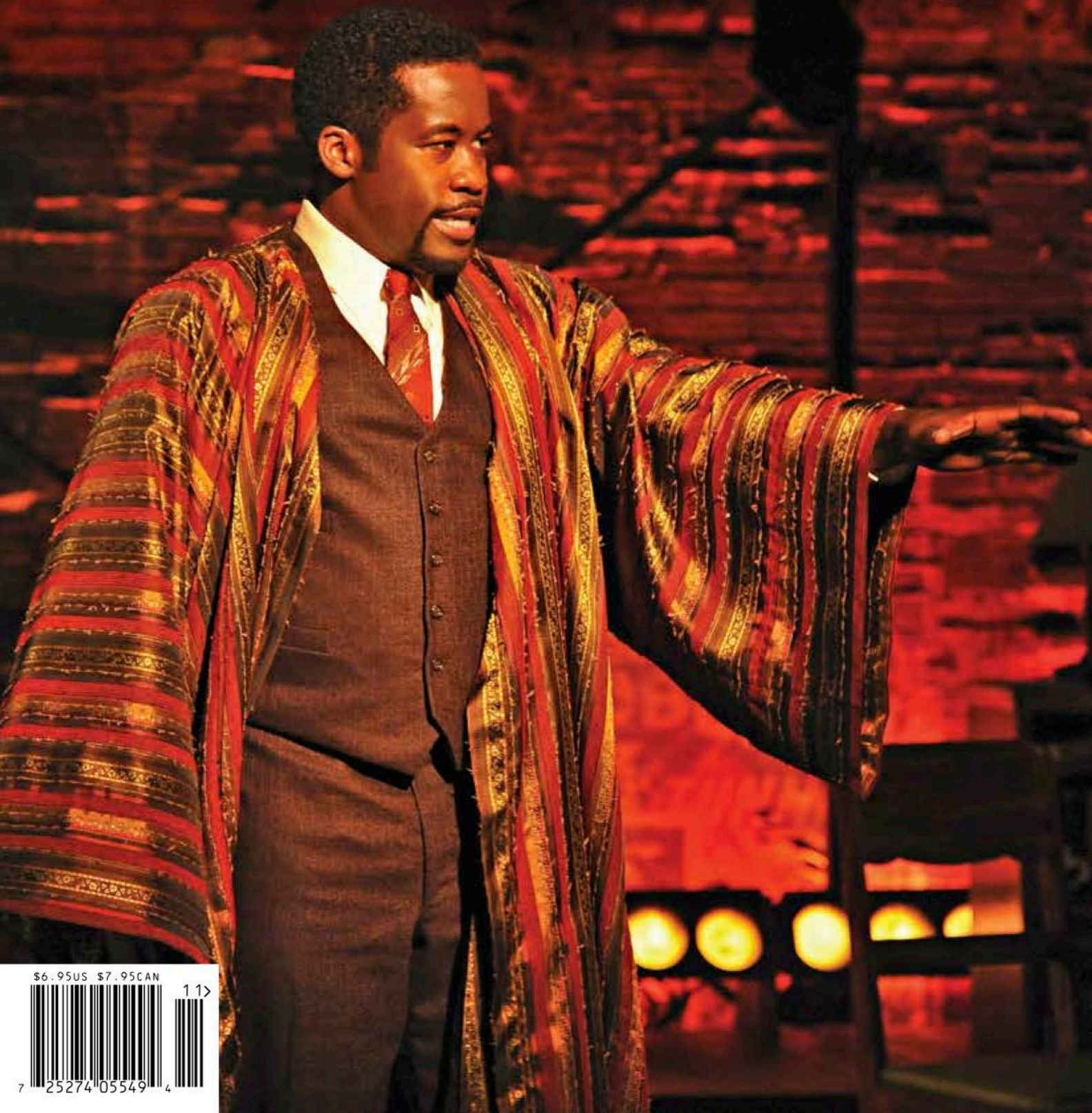
# AMERICAN THEATRE

NOVEMBER 2013 THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

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# Tall Enough to See the Truth

Daniel Beaty and Moisés Kaufman join forces to bring legendary actor/singer Paul Robeson to vivid life

BY CHRISTOPHER KOMPANEK

## AFTER REHEARSAL ONE EVENING IN

early August, as *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* is being readied in New York for its September run at Kansas City Repertory Theatre—to be followed by an October opening at California's La Jolla Playhouse, and engagements in early 2014 at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage and Los Angeles's Mark Taper Forum—Daniel Beaty and Moisés Kaufman pause to talk about the man they've been obsessed with for more than a year, artist and activist Paul Robeson.

Earlier in the day they had met Robeson's granddaughter. "The level of celebrity he achieved, being able to interact with so many people across the globe—and the fact that he was a scholar and an intellectual as well—all that enabled him to see larger systems," Beaty posits. The actor and writer, who plays Robeson as well as some 20 other characters in the piece, speaks with a scholarly precision and a tinge of activist fervor.

"That's it, I love it—larger systems!" Kaufman agrees excitedly. The veteran Venezuelan-born director savors his words while delivering them at a confidently fast clip. "This was a man whose entire project had to do with being an artist. It had to do with race. It had to do with class. It had to do with the colonial people of Africa. It had to do with a certain kind of socialist ideal that he found in Russia. And he was a gigantic star in England, America, Russia—he was really a citizen of the world before that concept was popular, or possible."

The collaborators, who were strangers before the *Tallest Tree* project brought them together, are eager to share their insights, biographical and otherwise, about the figure they're bringing to life onstage. Born in 1898 and raised in Princeton, N.J., by a father who escaped slavery to become a Presbyterian minister, Robeson was one of the first African-Americans to attend Rutgers University, where he excelled at football and was valedictorian of his class. He went on to Columbia University Law School and eventually landed a job at a New York firm, only to be kept out of the courtroom because of his skin color. He quit the job. Disillusionment with the law motivated him to write a letter to Eugene O'Neill that landed him the lead in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, in 1924, launching an acting career that included being the first African-American to play Othello on Broadway.

That was only the beginning for Robeson, who went on to use his fame as a platform to address civil rights and workers' rights issues.

Onstage, Beaty communicates Robeson's visionary posture eloquently with this line: "My height has enabled me to see what most



Kaufman, left, and Beaty in rehearsal for *The Tallest Tree in the Forest*.

cannot." He channels Robeson's boomy baritone with aplomb, giving the sentence additional gravitas.

For Kaufman, delving into the Robeson story has been an eye-opening experience. Often, he admits, the subjects of potential pieces prove "unworthy" early on in the development process and boredom overtakes him. "What's thrilling about this," he avows, "is it always feels like you're trying to grapple with an intelligence higher than your own."

Kaufman's first interaction with Beaty—creator of the widely toured, Obie-winning monologue *Emergency* and last season's Off-Broadway solo piece *Through the Night*—was reading the younger artist's first draft of *Tallest Tree*, which he received last year via the playwright-support organization New Dramatists, where Beaty is in residence.

Kaufman was instantly drawn in by Robeson's story and Beaty's sharp, succinct dialogue. He also noticed dramatic gaps and problems of structure. As a performer, Beaty told him when they met, "My imagination as an actor is often filling in moments of atmosphere that I don't necessarily put on the page." Kaufman, whose own plays include *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and *33 Variations*, could see possibilities in those gaps. Would Beaty be interested in teaming up to work on "a process surrounding the play's structure?"

"Working with Moisés, I've basically written *three* plays about



Daniel Beaty plays Paul Robeson in *The Tallest Tree in the Forest*, at its premiere at Kansas City Repertory Theatre in September.

DON IPOCK

Robeson,” Beaty says today, more than a year after the pair first connected. “What’s amazing is that all of that material has enriched the moments that were ultimately chosen for this play. There was a breadth to choose from—it became the building not just of a play, but of an immensely complex human being.”

#### **SOME OF THOSE MOMENTS CAME OUT OF AN EXERCISE**

Kaufman and his laboratory theatre group, Tectonic Theater Project, use in developing new shows—they call it “moment work.” Early on, Tectonic invited Beaty to a retreat in upstate New York. Kaufman asked the actor to think of moments through which Robeson’s life could be told and to perform those for the group. “One of the things I came in with was Robeson trying to take pills after he had had a stroke,” Beaty remembers. That exercise led to fleshing out the contrast between the many different Robesons we see, from early grade school to the final year of his life, while integrating them into a fluid throughline.

Beaty was particularly excited to work with Kaufman because of the emphasis the director places on crafting “visual beats.” I witnessed the creation of one such moment during the rehearsal of a spiritual, “Steal Away,” which Beaty sings early in the show. In the course of the song, Robeson progresses from preadolescence to high school graduation. “I feel like ‘Steal Away’ is keeping a somber tone when we need something more vibrant,” Beaty suggests with concern.

Kaufman counters with an idea: Can Beaty drop his voice down an octave on the last syllable of the line “steal away home,” thereby encapsulating the transition through adolescence in a single note? The tactic works, simultaneously solving the timeline gap while adding vibrancy.

Over sushi a couple of days later, I remind Kaufman about how well his suggestion played. “The big question I’ve posed in 30 years in the theatre is: How does the theatre speak?” he ventures. “What is the theatrical vocabulary? How do you make a piece that’s so uniquely theatrical that it would take a ton of blood, sweat and tears to make it into a movie? Daniel could write a text that says, ‘Then Robeson went from being 11 years old to being 18,’ but I’m interested in narrative that occurs theatrically.”

The fact is that in Beaty, Kaufman has found a richly communicative partner, and there are already hints of future collaborations. “Daniel is not only a virtuosic singer, he’s a virtuosic actor, as you can see—he can play a myriad of characters, each one conveying truth, history and passion. If you’re given a Stradivarius, you know that with a little luck you can construct something beautiful,” Kaufman enthuses.

**BACK IN REHEARSAL, I WATCH THE FRENETIC BUILDUP TO** the show’s Act 1 finale, which is structured around the spiritual “Great





PHOTOGRAPH BY

Paul Robeson, shown in 1925 (left), and in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* in 1933.

Day.” Robeson has just arrived in Moscow with his wife, Essie, at the invitation of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. They step off the train and are met by hundreds of people of all races. “Look at all the different kinds of faces,” Robeson exclaims to Essie. Eisenstein greets the couple and asks his honored guest to sing for the crowd.

The scene is full of information: Between verses, the couple talks about the three months they spent in Russia, witnessing racial integration and hearing stories from ex-pats who’ve fled discrimination in the States. This is the moment Essie decides she wants to move to Moscow, while Robeson sees the possibility for progress back home and wants to return to be part of it.

“We have to be careful,” Kaufman cautions about the build of the scene. “If we rush, then there are beautiful angels [who join in the song’s chorus] and we’re showing our hand.” The director is bothered in particular by Robeson’s line about fascists: “If we don’t stop them, the world is in great peril.”

“I don’t think he should say this, because it makes him sound super-human,” Kaufman confides to Beaty.

“What if we change ‘we’ to ‘America’?” Beaty suggests.

Kaufman takes another tack. “It feels slightly naïve that he’s looking at Russia for two minutes and envisioning this paradise,” the director observes, and then quips, “Of course, he just came out of Germany, so anything would look like a paradise!” They agree to ax the line and continue.

The play spans various countries and several decades, all funneled through Beaty’s performance—in addition to Robeson, Beaty plays the singer’s wife, father, brother, a college football coach, a law firm owner, J. Edgar Hoover, Harry S. Truman, a Jewish poet and a bevy of reporters.

“Too much talk” is a common pitfall of one-man shows, but with Robeson’s story, it’s almost “too much plot”—Act 2 goes on to detail how, after becoming one of the most popular concert singers of all time, Robeson’s political work led to his being investigated by Hoover and the FBI, being called before the HUAC committee and having his passport revoked. “We keep trying to find a coherent

## A letter to Eugene O’Neill landed Robeson the lead in *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*, launching an acting career that included being the first African-American to play Othello on Broadway.

narrative that isn’t a seven-part mini-series,” Kaufman says, half-jokingly.

“In Robeson’s fight between being an artist and an activist, he really could not negotiate—he had to be in the trenches,” Kaufman notes. “Some of us believe that being in the arts is a way of being in the trenches, but for Robeson that obviously wasn’t enough.”

For his part, Beaty feels a kinship to Robeson’s activist impulses, and currently splits his time between creating shows and working directly with communities. “I’m launching an initiative that uses storytelling to empower individuals to shift the narratives of their lives,” he says of a program he’s currently implementing at the Children’s Institute in Rochester, N.Y. And even when he’s writing, the larger social tie-in has to be evident. “I can only create a historical story if I feel it has immediate resonance today—the activist part of me finds it necessary.”

### BEATY AND KAUFMAN TALK AS MUCH

about the artist’s relationship and responsibility to society as they do about the art itself. “I am curious about how art participates in culture and society,” Kaufman says. “Paul Robeson was a man who, over the course of his life, chose politics over art. You look at someone like Tony Kushner—I’m sure he’s always asking himself when to be an artist and when to be an activist. Daniel and I constantly choose to be artists, and yet we’re telling the story of a person who chose not to.”

Beaty disagrees with that proposition. “As challenged as his professional artistic career became as he went fully into activism, I feel that Robeson remained an artist. He would use his voice as a singer to open people’s

emotions to political impulses the same way an artist would. His mastery of language and stage presence would infuse the way he gave a speech.”

Beaty’s fascination with Robeson began when he was training as a classical singer at Yale and started listening to recordings of spirituals Robeson had made. First enthralled by the deep resonance of his voice, Beaty eventually learned about the breadth of Robeson’s accomplishments. Kaufman, in turn, was drawn in by how many of these achievements have been forgotten—“They really managed to erase him from history,” he says—and points out that Robeson’s career is often summed up as the man who sang “Ol’ Man River” in *Showboat*.

Using the theatre to revisit and reclaim history particularly ignites Kaufman, and it’s at the core of his signature works with Tectonic. “I think the stage is very well set for that kind of journey,” he reasons.

In this journey with Beaty, Kaufman sees his role as “inspiring Daniel to write the play that he wants to write and to flesh out what that play is,” and not to write his own. Nonetheless, the contact high is potent. “Being very close to that creative fire—there are few things in the world like it.” ■

**Arts reporter Christopher Kompanek writes frequently for this magazine.**



Posted on April 21, 2013

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# Improper Bostonian: Daniel Beaty

Posted on April 21, 2013

*Metro Boston's Original Guide  
to Entertainment, Culture  
and Living It Up*

## Features

Soroff On

### Daniel Beaty

The multitasking artist tells us about critics, Bill Cosby and seeing red.

JONATHAN SOROFF



Photographed by Adam DeTour;  
grooming: Joanna Petit-Frere/Visage;  
shots at the Cutler Majestic Theatre

Award-winning actor, writer, singer, composer Daniel Beaty, 37, is currently appearing in his one-man play, *Emergency*, in which he plays dozens of different characters. Since graduating from Yale and studying at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, he's performed with artists as varied as Ossie Davis, Mos Def, Deepak Chopra and Phylicia Rashad. Last year, his play *Through the Night* enjoyed an extended off-Broadway run and earned him Lucille Lortel, Drama Desk, Drama League and Outer Critics Circle award nominations. He received an Obie award in 2007. He has written a "spoken word ballet," *Far But Close*, that'll premiere this season with the Dance Theater of Harlem. He's an artist in residence at Arts Emerson, a visiting professor at UMass-Amherst and an adjunct professor at Columbia University. His first children's book is slated to be released this year.

**JONATHAN SOROFF: WHAT DO YOU DO WITH ALL YOUR AWARDS?**

**DANIEL BEATY:** I keep a lot of them on my windowsill, but I bought a new home and there's an Obie sitting in a box somewhere in a closet.

**PERFORMER YOU MOST ENJOYED WORKING WITH?**

I'd actually say Bill Cosby. He's just an absolute character, and a master of comedic timing and silliness in a way that's just really powerful.

**HISTORICAL FIGURE YOU'D MOST LIKE TO PORTRAY?**

I'm working on it now. Paul Robeson.

**WHAT'S A "SPOKEN WORD BALLET"?**

[Laughs.] Well, I think this is actually a new form, and it's a poetic play that has been set to music and choreographed for dancers.

**BIGGEST SURPRISE ABOUT EMERSON?**

I was actually stunned by all of the gorgeous theaters. Really Broadway-caliber theaters. I had no idea that ArtsEmerson had those types of spaces.

**ANY DESIRE TO MAKE THE LEAP INTO FILM?**

It's a dream of mine. Theater is so expensive for a lot of people, and I see these as stories for everybody. It's less expensive to buy a movie ticket than a theater ticket.

**SO IT'S THE ABILITY TO MAKE IT MORE ACCESSIBLE?**

Partly. I love the size and magnitude the theater has to offer, but I also love the subtlety and specificity that the camera can create. And I love that it lasts.

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT CRITICS?**

I've been very lucky and wonderfully reviewed most of the time, and I understand the role they play. But I think that critics are not writing for playwrights. They're writing for another audience. So I don't read them anymore. I keep a close circle of people whose opinions I value, rather than a critic who doesn't know me or might not understand what I'm trying to say.

**FAVORITE VENUE?**

I actually just got back from Omaha, Neb., where Warren Buffett's daughter, Susie, put me in a 2,000-seat theater to perform *Emergency*. Half the tickets were general admission, and half were underwritten for young people from underserved communities who wouldn't have been able to come otherwise. The beauty of that and the portrait of that audience was one of the most magical experiences of my life.

**WHAT DO GREAT ACTORS HAVE IN COMMON?**

I'd say observation. The ability to listen to life, listen to the world.

**WHAT DO GREAT PLAYS HAVE IN COMMON?**

A specificity of voice. A great play talks about something from a very strong perspective or point of view.

**DOES BOSTON STRIKE YOU AS A RACIST CITY?**

I think Boston, like many cities in America, has unhealed issues regarding race. There's a level of conversation and healing that I don't think ever really happened and still percolates in communities throughout America.

**DO YOU ALWAYS WEAR RED?**

[Laughs.] Well, red is my favorite color. And then there's the fact that I'm very dark-skinned, and I was told as a child, "You're too dark to wear all those bright colors." When I learned to celebrate my uniqueness and the gift of my dark skin, I decided that bright colors accented it, and I bought all the red I could find.

**WHAT DO YOU DO BEFORE GOING ON STAGE?**

I warm up my body, physically and vocally. I listen to great music. And I have a ritual of generally eating something bland enough that it won't upset my stomach, like a grilled chicken sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce, tomato and mustard.

**DO YOU FOLLOW ANY THEATER SUPERSTITIONS?**

Yeah. It's part of our myth. Part of the uniqueness of the tribe. I don't play with the power that is the theater, including those superstitions.

**WOULD YOU EVER DO NUDITY?**

Absolutely not. [Laughs] Would you?

**YEAH. I DON'T CARE.**

Well, having said that, I have considered it. It would have to be really necessary to underline a big moment emotionally in a play?

**FAVORITE CHARACTER YOU'VE CREATED?**

Probably Clarissa in *Emergency*. She's a sassy little black girl growing up in a housing project. She takes fairy tales and rewrites them according to her experience, so *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* becomes *Kinkyhead and the Three Bears*. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* becomes *Black Aisha and the Seven Shorties*.

**DOES A LOT OF CREATIVITY COME FROM PAIN?**

It can. But it can also come from a range of other emotions, from rage to joy. I'm a believer in not using the theater as a therapy session or to work out your demons. But at the same time, telling the truth of experience using the tools of the theater can really be illuminating.

**PERSON YOU MOST ADMIRE?**

My mother. Y'know, there are people in public life or from history whom I admire, but it's not like I know them. I saw my mother day-to-day, her integrity, her commitment.

**WHAT'S YOUR WORST CHARACTER TRAIT?**

Probably that I'm a workaholic. Because I love my work so much, I'd work all the time to the detriment of myself and my relationships.

**WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THE BOSTON ARTS SCENE?**

I think it's amazing. It's burgeoning. There are a lot of artistic leaders doing exciting, adventurous work, like Rob Orchard at Emerson, Diane Paulus at the A.R.T., Peter Dubois at the Huntington. It's a really beautiful, wonderful community.



STAGES

# Slavery comes to the surface in ‘Emergency’

By Joel Brown | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 16, 2013



MICHAEL LAMONT

The premise seems, at first, way too on-the-nose.

A slave ship suddenly surfaces in present-day New York Harbor. Right in front of the Statue of Liberty. “Slave-ologists” call it the Remembrance.

But “Emergency,” Daniel Beaty’s one-man show playing next weekend at the Cutler Majestic Theatre under the ArtsEmerson banner, isn’t as blunt an instrument as that makes it sound. Cross-cutting rapidly among two dozen

characters, Beaty creates an often comic cross section of 21st-century African-American life while digging deep into one family's tragedy.

"People have been so bold as to say we are in a post-racial America, which personally I think is absurd," Beaty says by phone from New York, where he lives. "Certainly there has been tremendous progress and healing, but across races and across differences, there are many conversations that we are still terrified to have and don't have the tools to have as a nation."

The play's first voice is a reporter announcing the startling development in the harbor. Others follow quickly: a profane homeless man; a religious grandmother who understands the slave ship to be a sign from God; a transsexual who mistakes it for a new Carnival Cruise; an academic expert in "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome"; and a group calling themselves the Pissed Off Negroes, who plan to shoot anyone who tries to remove the ship.

Inhabiting them all, Beaty takes his place in a long line of comic chameleons he cites as influences, including Lily Tomlin, John Leguizamo, Robin Williams, and Whoopi Goldberg.

"I was taught early on that observation is the artist's great tool," says Beaty, who won a 2007 Obie Award for the original New York production, when the show was called

## EMERGENCY

Cutler Majestic Theatre,  
617-824-8400.

### Presenting organizations:

ArtsEmerson

**Date of first performance:** March 22

**Date closing:** March 24

**Ticket price:** \$25-\$79

### Company website:

<http://www.artsemerson.org>

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*'People have been so bold as to say we are in a post-racial America, which personally I think is absurd.'*

spent listening and observing and researching. I don't necessarily do a direct transcription of what I've heard. I'm more about getting everything I've perceived to wash over and through me, so when it comes time to create an artistic work, there's a lot of information there."

The heart of the play belongs to brothers Rodney and Freddie and their father, Reginald. Rodney is about to appear as a finalist on the TV show "America's Next Top Poet!" But then Freddie, "a big old queen" with his own problems, calls to tell him that their troubled father, a onetime Shakespearean scholar, has climbed onto the slave ship. Just what damaged Reginald's spirit, what he sees on the ship, and what Rodney has to say when he finally gets on TV are intended to take this play beyond satire.

Beaty readily admits that his many transformations onstage are not just an artistic strategy, and that he knows a little something about family tragedies.

"I have a lot of voices in my head," he says, noting with a laugh that people occasionally ask in post-show discussions if he's schizophrenic. "I came from some very difficult experiences growing up. A father who was a heroin addict and arrested some 58 times. A brother 10 years older who was addicted to crack cocaine and in and out of prison. And I had a lot of years of sadness about my own self-concept and who I could be. And I would escape into my own internal world, and my love of words and characters got me through."

Beaty has spent the season as an ArtsEmerson resident artist, performing various pieces and often meeting with members of the community, talking of turning pain into power.

"He has the ability to take his own life experiences and share them through his creative expression in a way that can heal others," says ArtsEmerson executive director Robert J. Orchard. "We respect him so much on a simply aesthetic level, but we are also eager to have him and his great gifts as an activist in the community. We would love to take this year and build upon it."



the creative pipeline, and perhaps offer another in a workshop format, Orchard says. And Beaty says he's going to be part of a larger ArtsEmerson project about Boston's 1970s busing crisis, a season or two in the future.

"We're not ready to announce anything," Orchard says, "but it's an ambitious project, and we want to have [Beaty] and many others involved."

Beaty notes he has traveled widely for his work, "and what I can say honestly is that many cities have stories of unhealed racial tensions or a situation or a moment that happened that was so traumatic for people, across lines of difference, that the best thing that could happen at that moment was to get through it. Even though the overall landscape of race in a city may have changed, there are wounds that have still not healed. That is true of many cities that I have been to, and that is also true of Boston as it pertains to busing."

Beaty says he's already started his research and hopes "to create a dramatic work that chronicles the experience, but also creates some healing around what that moment was."

*Joel Brown can be reached at [jbnbpt@gmail.com](mailto:jbnbpt@gmail.com).*

# DAILY NEWS

Uptown

## One-man show, 'Emergency!' is serious work for actor/playwright

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2011, 4:00 AM



DAVID HANDSCHUH/NEWS

Actor Daniel Beaty, who wrote and stars in the award-winning play 'Emergency!' He portrays 43 characters in the one-man show.

Imagine this: an 18th-century slave ship rises out of the present day [Hudson River](#), directly in front of the [Statue of Liberty](#).

It's a provocative image, promising intriguing stories behind it. Actor/playwright - and author of said image - [Daniel Beaty](#) doesn't disappoint, mining that tableau to create his multi-award-winning play "Emergency!" (formerly "Emergence-See!")

"What is our greatest symbol of freedom? The Statue of Liberty," Beaty said. "Slavery is our greatest symbol of bondage. A slave ship in front of the Statue of Liberty asks the question of what is freedom and who is truly free."

The play is also a tour de force for the [Yale University](#) and [American Conservatory Theatre](#) graduate, who plays an astounding 43 characters in the one-man show.

"Daniel is one of those special people who come into your life every so often," said [Voza Rivers](#), who first saw Beaty perform the show in 2006 at Aaron Davis Hall.

"[Ruby Dee](#) invited me to see him," Rivers recalls. "She said he reminded her so much of [Paul Robeson](#). He was on stage by himself in a 700-seat theater and you could not take your eyes off him."

You can judge for yourself over two weekends this month as Beaty returns to Aaron Davis Hall at [City College of New York](#) in [Harlem](#) Sept. 23, 24 and 25 in "Emergency" and Sept. 30 through Oct. 2 in another one-man play he wrote, "Through the Night."

Beaty plays 16 characters in the latter play, which he says is about "a group of men and the people who love them who all have a transformative experience one evening because of a gift a little boy gives them."

Rivers, president of the New Heritage Theatre, has collaborated with Beaty on several projects, including a stint as artist-in-residence at the Riverside Theatre in Riverside Church.

"Voza and [Riverside Theatre Executive Director] [Jewel Kinch Thomas](#) have provided me with great producing and mentorship and people to use as a sounding board as whatever I am working on takes shape," Beaty said.

A native of [Dayton, Ohio](#), Beaty has lived in [New York City](#) since two weeks before Sept. 11, 2001. For the past five years, he has lived in Harlem.

"I believe we are on the precipice of a second Harlem Renaissance," he explained. "There are so many exciting new artists in Harlem working with established artists to create new relationships and art."

Beaty, now 35, said that as a child, he "wanted to be President, but [Barack Obama](#) beat me to it."

The youngest of five, he was raised by his mother, [Shirley Magee](#). His father, Daniel, was a crack addict and in and out of prison, and one of Beaty's older brothers was hooked on crack as well.

Beaty found his escape in the world of words. His mother kept a library of motivational and self-help books around the house, and he devoured them. Among the tomes he also discovered a dog-eared copy of "Black Poets," a collection of works by black writers that belonged to his father.

"Even though he was an addict, my father was a scholar," Beaty said. "That book had notes in the margins he had written about each poem. I spent a lot of time with that book. It made me feel connected to my father."

Spoken word moved Beaty even then. He remembers being captivated by a recording of [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.](#)'s historic "I Have A Dream" speech. "Dr. King is my biggest hero," he said.

In third grade, he wrote and performed a speech for his teacher, [Mavis Jackson](#), that he titled, "I Think the Best, I Expect the Best."

The teacher loved it so much that she had him perform it for other classes, then for local organizations like the [NAACP](#). The young Beaty soon found himself traveling around the state and country delivering the speech to adoring audiences.

"Acting for me started as this desire to use words to evoke emotions," he said. "I discovered I had the ability to use voices and to change my body in a way to give both this vivid, emotional life.

"So rather than becoming a politician or an activist in the traditional sense, my activism and way of making the world a better place was as an artist."

His oratory was one reason Beaty had a choice of [Ivy League](#) schools to attend after leaving high school.

He chose Yale because of a good financial package and because "I knew I would be challenged being around many brilliant students who would push me to be the best I could be."

After coming to [New York](#), Beaty taught school in several boroughs, sang opera in [Europe](#), went to auditions and held several other jobs before writing and starring in "Emergence-See!"

He describes his writing as "comedy mixed with social and political exploration."

"I am always community-minded as I write," he said. "The things I choose to write about are often issues that I am wrestling with or that I care deeply about."

For more information about the upcoming play, see the websites [www.theriversidetheatre.org](http://www.theriversidetheatre.org), and [www.newheritagetheatre.org](http://www.newheritagetheatre.org).

For more on Beaty, see the website [www.danielbeaty.com](http://www.danielbeaty.com).

[crichardson@nydailynews.com](mailto:crichardson@nydailynews.com)



May 12, 2010

THEATER REVIEW | 'THROUGH THE NIGHT'

## Black Men in America as Stressed-Out Strivers

By ANITA GATES



“Run, black man, run,” Daniel Beaty says fiercely. “Run to your children — hold them tight.”

It’s not surprising that [Bill Cosby](#) is a fan of Mr. Beaty’s work. It brings to life everything that Mr. Cosby has spoken out about in recent years in terms of African-Americans’ taking responsibility for their own lives. And when Mr. Beaty takes up the topic, it’s not a speech. It’s a poem.

“Through the Night,” which Mr. Beaty is performing with his signature wit, grit and piercing lyricism, is a thing of beauty. Now in a limited run at the Riverside Theater in Morningside Heights, this drama has been described as a look at what it means to be black and male in the United States today, but its deepest meanings transcend race and gender.

Mr. Beaty’s work could be compared to many solo shows in which a performer portrays multiple characters, but his method is different, at least in this play. “Through the Night” has a clear-cut, linear plot that takes shape smoothly and artfully, and builds to a real-life crisis with a jolt of magic realism.

The black men in “Through the Night” are striving, and that is taking its toll, even on 10-year-old Eric, who is determined to develop a magic formula for his herbal iced tea. His father, Mr. Rogers (whose neighborhood is Harlem), is trying desperately to make a go of his health-food store, but people, it seems, would rather clog their arteries with so-called soul food.

Mr. Rogers’s one employee, Dre, is fighting the temptation to use drugs again while he waits for his first child to be born, praying that the baby will, unlike its parents, be H.I.V.-free. Eric’s pal ’Twon has won one battle — he is graduating from high school — but is struggling for the courage to go away to college in Atlanta, to a world that is foreign to him.

’Twon’s mentor, Isaac, a music-industry executive, works long, stress-filled hours, but puts almost as much energy into hiding the reason he’s 40 and unmarried. His father, a successful minister with a congregation of 10,000, is fighting for his life. He weighs 300 pounds, is diabetic and joins Overeaters Anonymous, but still wants creamy, chocolaty HoHos in the middle of the night.

Women are not seen that often, but they are a vital, cherished part of the men’s lives: Mr. Rogers’s long-gone mother, who cleaned offices to support her children (“I never saw you dance”), for instance, and his wife, who toils at a salaried job so her husband can keep his store going. And Mr. Beaty’s gifts are such that when female characters do speak through him, his demeanor and posture change in astonishing ways. I could swear he suddenly has breasts, but maybe that’s a trick of Jacqueline Reid’s lighting design.

“Through the Night,” solidly directed by [Charles Randolph-Wright](#), is punctuated with lines that cut deep and evoke tears of unexpected hope. In ’Twon’s moment of triumph, he announces, “I’m not givin’ another life to these projects.” And Mr. Rogers’s guidance for dealing with middle-of-the-night fears is, “If no one else will hold you, hold yourself.”

*“Through the Night” continues through May 23 at the Riverside Theater, in Riverside Church, 91 Claremont Avenue, at 120th Street, Morningside Heights; (212) 870-6784; [theriversidetheatre.org](http://theriversidetheatre.org).*

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# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

CULTURE CITY

## A Soloist Finds His Company

By PIA CATTON

Updated Oct. 4, 2010 12:01 a.m. ET

In his current New Yorker article "Small Change," Malcolm Gladwell deals a blow to those who think the Internet is the future of social activism. Movements, he argues, are based on strong personal ties—not your phony BFFs on Facebook and [Twitter](#).

Does Mr. Gladwell's argument have application to the arts? Here's a theater-world story that would suggest "yes."



Daniel Beaty warms up before his performance of 'Through the Night' Friday at the Union Square Theatre. Mr. Beaty plays 15 characters in the show, which has garnered ample attention from artists and producers. *Philip Montgomery for The Wall Street Journal*

Earlier this year, actor and playwright Daniel Beaty put up his one-man show, "Through the Night," at Riverside Church near Columbia University. Director Charles Randolph-Wright invited the prolific producer Daryl Roth to the show, in which Mr. Beaty plays 15 characters and illustrates the challenges facing black men in America.

After attending, Ms. Roth decided to present the show, which opened last week in an open-ended run at Union Square Theater. "I knew that Daniel's message had to reach more people," she said.

Ms. Roth then launched two additional ways to make that happen—both of which are based on galvanizing people by way of their personal relationships and professional

networks. First, she created a group of "artistic ambassadors" to get the word out. They include Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; Studio Museum of Harlem director Thelma Golden; actors Bill Cosby, Ruby Dee, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Phylicia Rashad, Ben Vereen, Malik Yoba and Hill Harper; actress and wife-of-Denzel, Pauletta Washington; and actress and wife-of Samuel L., LaTonya Richardson Jackson.

"All of these people have a connection to Daniel, Charles or me," Ms. Roth said. "It's personal."

Said Mr. Randolph-Wright: "Around this piece is a community of artists."

How so? The director counts Mr. Vereen as a mentor and the reason he's in show business. Mr. Gates has served for years on the board of Lincoln Center Theater with Ms. Roth. Ms. Dee hosted a showcase for one of Mr. Beaty's earlier pieces.

One could look at this high-wattage support group with a purely capitalist eye: more buzz means more ticket sales and a brighter career for this 34-year-old playwright.

But the marquee names also give the show a seal of approval that supports a second effort: Shine the Light, an outreach effort to provide students with free tickets to "Through the Night." The program solicits donations from individuals, corporations and foundations to directly underwrite \$25 tickets for students who could not otherwise afford to attend.

"The people that can benefit from this show are younger people who need inspiration. What he speaks about is mentoring. I wanted young people to feel that sense that there is someone who can help you," said Ms. Roth. "Daniel's piece has the power to change someone's life."

"It's about education, mentorship and taking control of your fate, fighting against the bad odds," added Mr. Gates.

Mr. Beaty's play features six central characters—black males between the ages of 10 and 60—who range from an ex-con with a pregnant girlfriend to the owner of a health-food shop in a poor neighborhood. Additional voices come from their partners and their inner monologues. The characters reflect Mr. Beaty's own experiences, as well as research from the National Urban League's 2008 report, "The State of Black America."

While the characters are individuals, the story draws them together into an almost Gladwellian point—or at least a community. "We are more connected than we are disconnected," the playwright said.

Mr. Beaty, who grew up in Dayton, Ohio, knows that inter-connectedness can work both ways. He was 3 years old when his father, a heroin addict, was arrested. His brother was addicted to crack and also landed in prison. He escaped the cycle of addiction and incarceration via a program for gifted children in the third grade. After hearing a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he joined a speech-writing competition that took him to local schools and groups. His speech at the Miami Valley School so impressed the faculty that he was given a scholarship.

From there, Mr. Beaty went to Yale University, where he studied theater and opera. (He's a tenor, with range: "It was always a question: Where should my voice be?" he said. "The highs and lows help me in my storytelling now.")

From New Haven he moved on to New York, where he had stints with the New York Theater Workshop and LaMama. In 2006, his solo play, "Emergency," ran at The Public Theater and won him an Obie. Last month, he began a seven-year residency at New Dramatists, which provides a home and space for new work. Mr. Beaty is one of eight residents—and he was one of more than 300 applicants.

"He has staked out a territory that is really his own," said Todd London, the artistic director of New Dramatists. "He shows the difficulties and the pain, but he is there to rally the troops."

The playwright's personal take is even more direct: "My purpose," he said, "is to transform pain into power."

And the fact is, it doesn't happen by wall posts alone.



THEATER

# Daniel Beaty, a man of character(s)

He's alone on the stage, but the 32-year-old performer's play, 'Emergency,' conjures up a cast of dozens (and not all of them male).

By DIANE HAITHMAN  
Times Staff Writer

**I**N two recent one-woman shows at Westwood's Geffen Playhouse, Carrie Fisher and Joan Rivers seized the opportunity to turn the stage into a therapist's couch, spilling both the secret and not-so-secret details of their lives, loves, addictions and cosmetic surgeries.

So would it not follow that Daniel Beaty, whose one-man show "Emergency" opens today at the Geffen, would head down the same cathartic path — especially since the 32-year-old performer can top any of Rivers' facial reinventions with a childhood saga that includes a father in jail, a brother hooked on crack cocaine and a mom too busy trying to support five children to have enough time to say "I love you"?

No way, says Beaty, who portrays more than 40 characters in "Emergency," but never himself. "I wanted to write a play; I didn't want to write a self-indulgent story of my life," he says. "I've had plenty of drama in my life, which I talk about openly, but I use it to infuse my characters."

Surrounded by a cross-section of humanity including a homeless man, a TV reporter, a female reality show host and a Southern grandmother, Beaty's show tells the story of two African American brothers, one straight and one gay, whose lives are thrown into turmoil when a slave ship rises out of the Hudson River in front of the Statue of Liberty.

After several years of workshop performances, the show, under the title "Emergence-SEE!" and directed by Kenny Leon, premiered at New York's Public Theater in 2006, winning the 2007 Obie Award for outstanding writing and performance.

New York Times critic Charles Isherwood offered that production a mixed review, calling Beaty's central characters "compassionate and precise" but adding, "The notion of a phantom slave ship is provocative and funny, but many in the audience may still feel that on some level they've been there, done that and bought the T-shirt."

For the Geffen, both the play's title and director have changed. At the helm is Charles Randolph-Wright, who met Beaty, a 1998 Yale graduate, while the actor was completing his MFA degree at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco.

Randolph-Wright — who wrote "Blue" and "Cuttin' Up," presented at Pasadena Playhouse, and staged "The Tragic and Horrible Life of the Singing Nun" at Coast Playhouse — says that, along with simplifying the play's title, he and Beaty have worked on strengthening the story and human relationships within the play.

"One of my favorite pieces is Lily Tomlin's 'The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe.' What's amazing about that play is it was *play*, even though she was playing all the characters," Randolph-Wright says.



**LIKE PLAYING MAKE-BELIEVE:** "I thought it would be really fun to see one person become a little girl, a grandmother, a 400-year-old chief, a Republican, a liberal, gay and straight," says Beaty. "There is an energy that connects us all."

Photographs by MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

Of Beaty's play, he adds: "It's uncompromising; some of it could be considered coming from an angry place, but it's not a bitter place."

Beaty also has written a six-character play called "Resurrection," examining the state of black men in America, that he says is slated for performances at various regional theaters. As Beaty describes it, each man represents a different generation, all taken by surprise by a magical occurrence.

## Puppy love

**T**HE actor, singer, writer, composer, motivational speaker and award-winning slam poet who has performed at the Kennedy Center and the White House is not the sort to wallow in his painful past.

"Get out your little violin," he cracks, before he'll tell you the tear-jerker story of Daphne, the German shepherd puppy his mom once gave him in a little Easter basket, named after a character on "Scooby-Doo" because "I thought Daphne was beautiful. I remember consciously understanding what love was through that puppy," he recalls.

"I spent the first years of my life being so unhappy that, if I never have another unhappy day, that's fine with me," Beaty says, clearly reveling in a sunny L.A. day that had begun with an audition for a sitcom pilot. "A lot of artists feel like they have to create out

of drama and pain; I'm interested in creating as much joy as possible."

For that reason, Beaty doesn't read reviews: "I'm hypersensitive, and they hurt my feelings!" he says, with a loud laugh. Besides, even without critical input, Beaty is pretty clear on his own message: "We are all connected."

"I thought it would be really fun to see one person become a little girl, a grandmother, a 400-year-old chief, a Republican, a liberal, gay and straight... There is an energy that connects us all."

That being said, though Beaty chooses to portray individuals of different ages, economic backgrounds and sexual orientation in "Emergency," all of them are black.

"Black American culture, like every other culture, is extremely diverse," he says. "I am very interested in giving voice to characters we have not seen before, and new voice to characters we think we have seen before."

"What is the magic, the possibility, in telling a story that is really authentically told through the lens of an African American experience?" Beaty continues. The goal, he says, is not to "put in some white characters so everyone will be comfortable, or do a stereotypical portrayal so it will be a black story told in such a way that nonblack people will have 'easy access.'"

Beaty wants to challenge the preconceptions and prejudices of black audiences as well.

"I've had people of color say to me: 'You did not just say that up there!'"

And I'm like: 'We have to say that; we have to have this conversation,' he says. "We are taking about issues of race, we are talking about issues of sexuality. Whether we bring them to the forefront or not, it's in our conversation."

One person impressed with the "conversation" is actress Ruby Dee, who, after seeing an early version of "Emergency," produced a showcase performance for Beaty with her late actor-husband Ossie Davis. Dee also wrote to Larry Leon Hamlin, the late former producer of the National Black Theater Festival, who produced the show for the 2005 fest.

Dee, who has performed her own solo show "My Last Good Nerve," says of Beaty, "He's sensitive to the human condition; he's sensitive to the interconnectedness of the events of the history of the country, and human development. He uses his sense of humor to tie things together. My sensibilities are aroused by this person who embodies so many people that we don't usually have the gift to see or acknowledge."

For his part, Beaty says: "I love Miss Dee. Whenever I felt sorry for myself and tried to call her to complain, she would not only remind me about what's special about me, but about who I am in terms of history. The other thing that she reminds me of is importance of being who I am as an authentic artist, my quirkiness, and my humor."

diane.haithman@latimes.com

## 'Emergency'

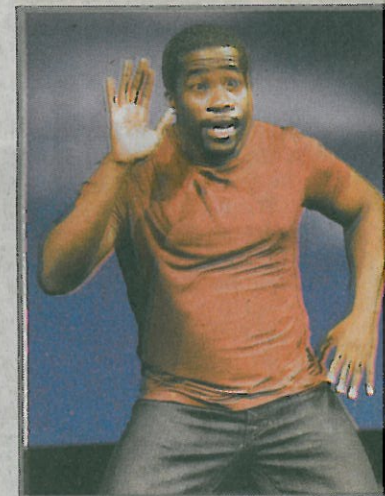
**Where:** Geffen Playhouse, 10886 Le Conte Ave., Westwood

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 4 and 8:30 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays

**Ends:** May 25

**Price:** \$35 to \$79

**Contact:** (310) 208-5454



**A PEOPLE PERSON:** Beaty in his one-man show.



## Daniel Beaty

Playwright of award-winning *Emergence-See!*

by Curt Holman     @Curt\_Holman

One of the most intriguing performances of this year's National Black Arts Festival will be the Obie-winning hit *Emergence-See!*, written and performed by Daniel Beaty. Directed by Kenny Leon, *Emergence-See!* (July 26-29 at the Alliance Theatre) recounts the media event that surrounds a 19th-century slave ship's inexplicable arrival in present-day New York City, with Beaty performing 40 distinct characters. An actor, singer and slam poetry champion, Beaty has appeared on the third and fourth seasons of HBO's "Def Poetry," and NBC's "Showtime at the Apollo."



COURTESY DANIEL BEATY

**In Darfur:** "I had an opportunity recently to see the Public Theater's *In Darfur* at a special one-night presentation in Central Park. The play delves into the current genocide taking place in Darfur in a way that is both artistic and enlightening. What was most powerful for me was that after the performance there was a panel discussion with several activists and artists who are currently working to bring change to Darfur. I truly believe the arts have the power to change the world, and this night was a powerful example of that possibility."

**Andrea Bocelli:** "Andrea Bocelli is in constant rotation on my iPod. Often after a performance, I will lie down, play his music and allow his voice to carry me to relaxation. This brilliant Italian tenor has a freedom and passion to his singing that moves me deeply. I have studied and performed opera, and I understand how challenging the music can be. Andrea Bocelli makes it seem effortless."

**"Grey's Anatomy":** "I have been performing quite a bit and haven't had much time for television. I decided to go to the video store and get back episodes of 'Grey's Anatomy' because I have so many friends who love the show. I'm hooked. I think I watched 10 episodes between performances over the last couple of weeks. The show knows how to laugh at itself and manages to walk the delicate line between having heart and not being sentimental. The characters have wonderful contradictions and humanity. These are all qualities I try to highlight in my writing as well."

**The Colored Museum by George C. Wolfe:** "When I begin work on a new play, I often revisit favorite plays. *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe is my absolute favorite. I love the mixture of farce, social commentary, and heart-wrenching poignancy. As an artist, I also look for new, imaginative ways to tell stories. Rather than be didactic, I like to come from 'off center.' *The Colored Museum* accomplishes this in a remarkable way."

**The State of Black America 2007: Portrait of the Black Male, published by the National Urban League:** "I am currently working on a new play called *Resurrection* about the state of black men in America. I have been doing a lot of research on the issues black men in our society are facing. I found the 2007 *State of Black America* report to be both insightful and informative. The book has statistics, but most importantly, it has several powerful essays by leaders in economics, education, health and other fields who provide practical solutions. As I present *Resurrection*, I intend to offer solutions, and I feel confident that this book will play an important role."

## Arts

## Backstage

## Daniel Beaty's Rousing Call

*'Emergence-See!' Actor Knows Firsthand the Struggles Facing Black America*By JANE HORWITZ  
Special to The Washington Post

In his 20s, poet-actor-singer-motivational speaker Daniel Beaty was a "teaching artist" in New York City schools. The problems he saw among inner-city kids provided "the clarity of the story I wanted to tell" about African American life, he recalls.

In his solo piece "Emergence-See!," at Arena Stage through July 22, a phantom slave ship docks in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. The surreal event forces the 43 African American characters he plays to reconnect with history and rethink their present and future.

Beaty, now 31, means his play to be a wake-up call. "There is a cycle that if we don't break [it] has ramifications for all of America. . . . Because when black America heals, all of America heals," he says.

After the civil rights movement peaked, "the concept of collective progress became less of a priority and . . . there was an intergenerational breakdown in communication," Beaty says. One casualty was a forgetting of history. "To not give an accurate historical context for the current conditions facing African Americans is to suggest that African Americans are inherently less," he says. It is crucial, he adds, "how our young people perceive themselves."

The actor describes his own childhood in Dayton, Ohio, in a family with "tremendous dysfunction." He recalls an absentee father, heroin-addicted and often in prison, and a crack-addicted brother. With his mother working constantly to keep the family afloat, Beaty often was alone and would perform the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., whom he idolized, in front of a mirror. A third-grade

teacher noticed his gifts, he says, and got him speaking engagements at civic organizations. A scholarship to a private high school followed, then Yale and graduate school at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco. Beaty studied opera while at Yale and sang in Europe in the summers. "Arts have saved my life," he says, along with the example of his mother's work ethic.

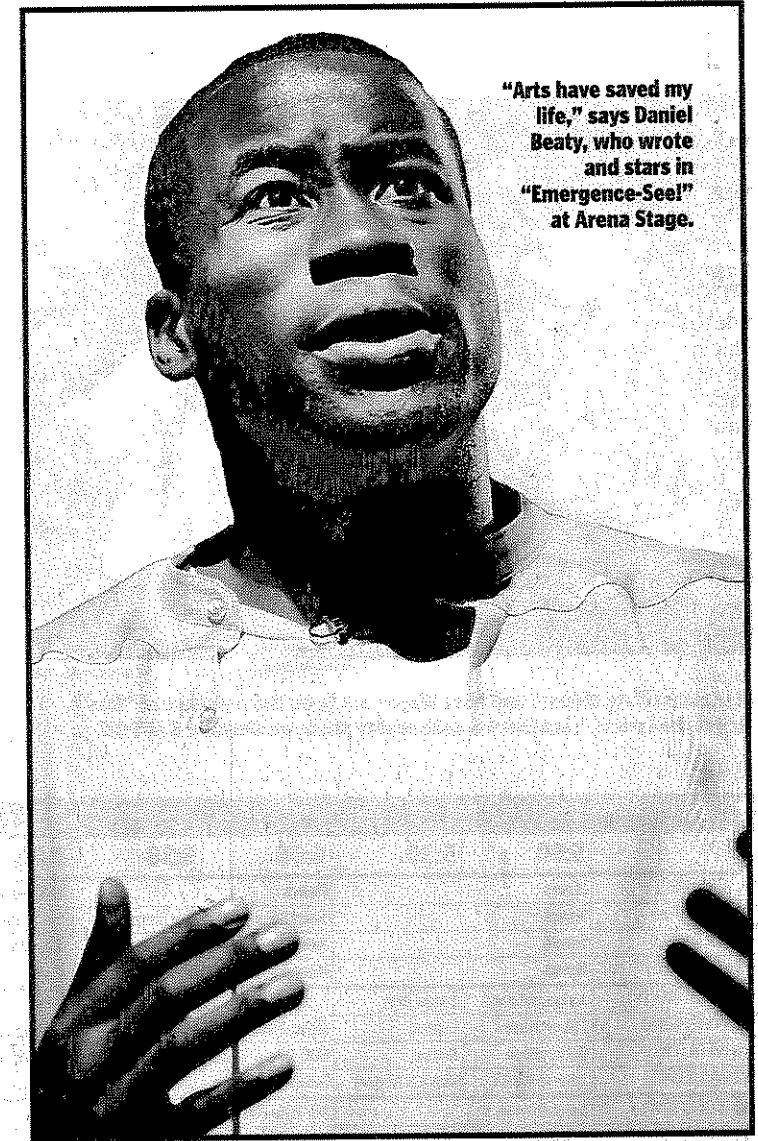
Actress Ruby Dee saw Beaty performed "Emergence-See!" in 2003 at the Urban Theatre Arts Festival in New York and became a champion of Beaty's. "He could be a rapper, he could be an opera star," she says. "I was absolutely fascinated with him as a performer and with the material . . . touching on issues, black identity, for example, children with HIV, the epidemic of missing fathers, that kind of thing." Beaty did the piece at the prestigious Public Theater in 2006

and now performs it internationally. Dee applauds him for "trying to make the facts of life and history mesh. . . . There's a serious mind here, trying to make sense out of things."

Asked whether he considers himself primarily a poet, actor, singer or speaker, Beaty answers, "I just usually say that I'm an artist. I'm clear about what my purpose is, which is to transform pain into power and to underscore our interconnectedness, our need for each other to heal." His tools, Beaty adds, can be "poetry, music, plays, screenplays . . . by any means necessary, in the most joyous sense of the word. I am having the most extraordinary career."

## Follow Spot

■ Washington Women in Theatre is premiering "Astra" — a "super heroine manga comic musical" — by "Batman" creator Jerry Robinson and Sidra Rausch, with music by Tom Boss and Wayne and Dana Wilentz. The show ends its week-long run at Warehouse Theatre on Saturday. Call 703-237-0711 or visit [www.washingtonwit.org](http://www.washingtonwit.org).



"Arts have saved my life," says Daniel Beaty, who wrote and stars in "Emergence-See!" at Arena Stage.

BY MICHAEL DANIEL — PUBLIC THEATER VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

## KEEGAN THEATRE'S NEW SEASON

For its 10th season, the Keegan Theatre ([www.keegantheatre.com](http://www.keegantheatre.com)), which specializes in Irish plays, will present four shows at Church Street Theater and four as part of its more experimental, bare-bones New Island Project at tiny Theatre on the Run in Arlington.

"Glengarry Glen Ross" (Nov. 9-Dec. 8), David Mamet's study of shady real estate salesmen, will first tour in Ireland — an annual tradition with Keegan's fall shows. Jeremy

the early 1800s.

Giving its Irish aesthetic a breather, Keegan's last mainstage show will be "Man of La Mancha" (July 10-Aug. 12).

The world premiere of Eric Lucas's "Last Days of the Killone Players" (March 6-April 5, 2008), about an amateur theater troupe in the west of Ireland, will be staged by Leslie A.

## AMERICAN CENTURY THEATER'S 2007-08 LINEUP

The American Century Theater ([www.americancentury.org](http://www.americancentury.org)), which focuses on rarely staged American plays, will present five shows at Gunston Arts Center in Arlington.

# The New York Times

## A One-Man Rhyming History Slam

By [FELICIA R. LEE](#)

Published: October 1, 2006

THERE are no studies on the subject, but it's probably safe to say that few slam poetry champions have both an honors degree from [Yale](#) and an opera scholarship on their résumés. But Daniel Beaty has a gift for defying convention.



Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Daniel Beaty has performed his own play "Emergence-See!" from Harlem to Europe. Now's he's taking it to the Public Theater.

### Show Details

[Emergence-See!](#)

### Readers' Opinions

[Forum: Theater](#)

At 30, this actor, singer and writer has grabbed the attention of the New York theater and is now poised to open his one-man show, "Emergence-See!" at the [Public Theater](#) on Oct. 10.

"I was head over heels for him," said Oskar Eustis, the Public's artistic director, recalling how he felt after catching a performance of "Emergence-See!" in Harlem. "You see and feel Def Poetry Jam. At the same time it was this old-fashioned evangelical, consciousness-raising aspect to it that set the audience on fire. I thought: This is theater that exists to serve something other than itself."

In "Emergence-See!", a one-act drama directed by Kenny Leon, a slave ship suddenly emerges on the modern-day Hudson River near the Statue of Liberty. Mr. Beaty plays more than 40 characters, including a "militant negro," a "ghetto girl" and a "high-class colored woman." One black character, Reginald, embittered and crazed by the killing of his wife years ago during a robbery, actually swims to the ship, called Remembrance by "slave-ologists."

Another character is Wakeem, who attends a poetry cafe with a theme of embracing "even the most painful part of one's past," not unlike what Mr. Beaty himself has done many times. In a poem to black superstars, Wakeem rages:

*I hold you in poetic detention until you learn this lesson  
Our children will watch BET and buy your CD  
Before they ever think of reading a book  
So as you sip Courvoisier think of the knowledge you took.*

Mr. Beaty, who has close-cropped hair and a dazzling smile, has experienced his own flashes of stardom. He has appeared on HBO's "[Russell Simmons](#) Presents Def Poetry," at the [Kennedy Center](#) in Washington as well as performing "Emergence-See!" across the country and in Europe. In 2004 the Nuyorican Poets Cafe named him the Grand Slam champion. But he remains ardently anti-bling. "A lot of my themes are about redeeming



the past,” Mr. Beaty said, taking a break from rehearsal in an empty theater at the Public.

Too often black characters onstage on one-dimensional, Mr. Beaty said. “I am hip-hop, but I’m also opera. I’m [Ivy League](#), but I’m also the ‘hood,” he explained. “In ‘Emergence-See!’ I’m really trying to paint a portrait of who we are with so many diverse personalities coming through me as one artist and my inhabiting them all.”

He grew up in Dayton, Ohio, the youngest of five children. His mother worked hard as a real-estate agent, but his father was imprisoned for theft, Mr. Beaty said, and his oldest brother, who lived at home, was addicted to crack. That brother has now been drug-free for two years, and Mr. Beaty said he will attend a performance at the Public.

At school, teachers soon identified Mr. Beaty as gifted. In the third grade he began writing speeches and began making them publicly. The first speech was titled “I Think the Best, I Expect the Best.” His talents won him a scholarship to a private high school in Ohio and another one to Yale, where he studied English and music.

“Yale was the time when I came up against the question of am I going to be greater than my past, greater than the black men in my past?” Mr. Beaty said. All his experiences, he said, told him that he was moving in the right direction.

After winning yet another scholarship to Aspen Opera Theater, Mr. Beaty landed a series of contracts to tour Europe. In the summer of 1997 while in Urbana, Italy, he met a group of students from Ghana. They told him that a Negro spiritual called “Lord, How Come Me Here” — tacked on at the end of an evening of European music — had the same melody as a song from their village.

“It had survived the middle passage,” Mr. Beaty said. “It’s what I talk about in this piece. Though we have been displaced and disconnected, the core of who we are cannot be taken away. The consciousness can be taken away, but it’s always there.”

After living in San Francisco, he arrived in New York two weeks before 9/11, obviously not the most propitious time to start a career. He taught in the Bronx and also began making his mark at the city’s slam poetry gatherings, all the while refining “Emergence-See!”

In 2003 he performed it at one of the city’s many Off Off Broadway theater festivals in a nearly empty room. But when the lights came up that Sunday afternoon, a teary-eyed [Ruby Dee](#) was in the audience. She told Mr. Beaty that the world needed to see his play.

Since then Ms. Dee has written letters on Mr. Beaty’s behalf, offered advice and produced “Emergence-See!” at the National Black Theater festival last year.

“I believe him thoroughly when he’s a little girl and when he’s an African prince,” Ms. Dee said in an interview. “He’s an entertainer well-grounded in social, political and economic realities. He embodies to me what actors should be.”



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