



Review: The adventures of  
a black girl in search of God

## Description

### A review of Djanet Sears' latest production at the Centaur

By Byron Toben

Back in 1932, G. Bernard Shaw penned a short story called "The Adventures of a Black Girl in Her Search for Her God". In 1962, the then experimental London Mermaid theatre presented a dramatic version of Shaw's work, which focused on rejections of different versions of God and generated many parodies of the piece (more on that at the end of this review).



The wonderful production of Djanet Sears's very similarly titled. "The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God" is in no way a parody or updated take on Shaw's theophilosophical novella. Indeed, her alternate title might well have



been 'A Black Girl In Search of Herself'. The girl in question is Rainey (grippingly played by Lucinda Davis), who is separated from Michael (Quincy Armorer), the local preacher. Rainey, mourning for the loss of their baby daughter to meningitis, blames herself, becomes despondent, and self punishing, questions the beneficence of a God who, despite all, she still believes in. The two live in Negro Creek, a tiny enclave in Ontario which was given in thanks to some soldiers of African descent who fought on the British side in the war of 1812 (Canada didn't exist yet).



The present day local authorities, perhaps trying to be politically correct, are seeking to rename the place. However, even though the term. Negro had by now acquired an antiquated, even pejorative connotation, it was *their* heritage and recognition of the black residents of the area. The resistance involves an amusing plot by Rainey's father, retired jurist Abendigo (Walter Borden) to forestall this change by "liberating" black lawn jockeys and seizing an 1812 uniform from a museum. In this, he is joined by a coterie of septuagenarian friends (Barbara Barnes-Hopkins, Lili Franks, Jackie Richardson and Rudy Webb). His eventual on stage death brought tears to some members of the opening night audience. The activities of this lovable gang would be a sort of senior citizens' gang heist film were it not for Ms Sears' decision to wrap the whole with 14 other "ancestors" dancers and singers (many of whom have starred in major roles elsewhere) to also portray the creek itself, a church congregation and an overall "texture" which lifts the presentation from clever repartee and individual conflicts to, well, a real integrated work of art. The African harmonies (à la "the Lion King" and methods of non verbal story telling work well to blend history and culture with modern settings.



Some individual notes: Mr Borden, who appeared in the original Canadian production in 2002, appears not to have lost a step. Tristan D. Lalla, here appearing as one of the sort of Greek chorus, actually played God in “Jesus Jello” in 2010. Ms Davis, here searching for God – or herself – also played God in Arthur Holden’s “Book of Bob” at the Centaur last year, and replaced Mr Lalla in a remount of “Jesus Jello”. Ms Richardson, a famous blues and gospel performer, really belts them out in this performance. The entire show, a co-production with the Black Theatre Workshop and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, moves to Ottawa to be performed at the NAC there from October 21 to November 7.

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Oh yes, back to Mr Shaw, whose title inspired Ms Sears. Parodies piled up: The White Girl in Search of God, The Brown Girl in Search of God, even God in Search of Mr Shaw.. Shaw was castigated in some circles for suggesting that future generations would become coffee coloured. Someone should put on a dramatic reading of Shaw’s original. story. I for one, would attend.

The Adventures of a BlackGirl in Search of God continues at the [Centaur](#) until October 18, 2015. Info: 514-288-3161 or [www. centaurtheatre.com](http://www.centaurtheatre.com)

Buy [tickets here](#).

*Image : courtesy of Andrée Lanthier*

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1. Art | Culture
2. Review

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1. Byron Toben

### Date Created

September 2015