

# Violence tackled in 'A Winter's Tale'

Filmmaker Frances-Anne Solomon's Leda Serene Films and sister company Caribbean Tales, have teamed up with The Multicultural History Society of Ontario to make a film about violence in the Black community.

First, however, the script of "A Winter Tale" is being turned into a play, which will run at Toronto's Alchemy Theatre (133 Tecumseh Street), February 1st-5th, 2006, to coincide with the start of Black History Month.

The play and film will feature veteran Jamaica-born actress Leonie Forbes, Peter Williams, Michael Miller, Peter Bailey, Dennis "Sprangalang" Hall, R.O. Glasgow, P. Barrington, Ryan Ishmael, Lucky Ejim, Mike G. Yohannes, Anne-Marie Woods and Valerie Buhagiar.

The story centres on Miss G's West Indian Take-Out Shop in Toronto, which becomes the base for a spontaneously formed support group after a bullet meant for a local street drug dealer kills a nine-year-old boy.

As the story unfolds, social worker Gene Wright begins to work with six Black men of varied backgrounds.

There is DX -- a high school dropout, already involved in the drug trade -- and Ian, an upwardly mobile chef. Doc is an African refugee, Lloyd a charming long-time criminal. Clip is fighting personal

demons and Muslim convert Sibeka is seeking less secular answers.

All are looking, in one way or another, for their own salvation and the redemption of their community. At times bitter and tragic, at other times hopeful and humourous, the play is firmly rooted in the life of the street.

DX is soon revealed as having a great deal more knowledge about the little boy's death than he lets on, as his friend Mickey was shot in the stomach during the same incident.

The stage version of "A Winter Tale" will be directed by Trinidad-born, Montreal-raised -- and now Vancouver-based -- Michèle Lonsdale Smith, who co-wrote the script with Solomon, and helped develop it with the actors through a collaborative workshop process over two years.

The film version will be directed by Solomon.

Christopher Pinheiro, who has worked with Derek Walcott and Peter Minshall -- and with Leonie Forbes almost a decade ago -- will be Artistic Director for both productions.

"The story thoughtfully examines some of the causes and effects of escalating gun violence on our communities, and on the people who live in them," says Solomon.

"The actors have brought their own life experiences to developing the characters and stories, which grounds it in an authenticity true to our present day realities."

Lonsdale Smith, who trained in Theatre Arts at the Lee Strasburg Institute in New York, and in Writing and Directing at the New York Film Academy, is the co-founder and co-artistic director of Vancouver's Lyric Project, which includes the Lyric School of Acting and Lyric Stage Company.

She has credits as a stage director, writer -- her script "The Dinner Party" is in development with Leda Serene Films -- story editor for television and film productions, actor and acting coach.

Solomon was born in England, raised in Trinidad and studied Theatre Arts at the University of Toronto. She then moved to Great Britain, where she worked with the BBC's Drama & Films Division as a Script Editor, Producer, Executive Producer and Director. She launched Leda Serene Films, a film, television and new media production company, which is dedicated to placing people of colour in front of, as well as behind, the camera and to celebrating the diversity of strong personal stories from different cultural perspectives in the global diaspora.

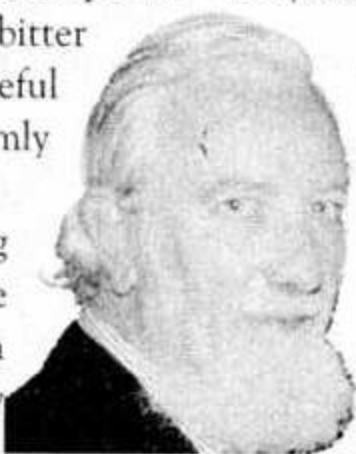
Solomon returned to Toronto in 1999, creating, producing and directing film, television and new media projects, several of which have won awards, and in 2003, was responsible for the groundbreaking TV sitcom "Lord Have Mercy!" Set in a Toronto storefront church, it starred Leonie Forbes, aired on four Canadian networks and was nominated for two Geminis.

Solomon is also the Founder and Artistic Director of Caribbean Tales, the not-for-profit sister partner to Leda Serene Films, which she established in 2004 to produce educational films, videos, and new media celebrating the traditions of Caribbean-heritage storytelling.

For the past three months, the Bravo! TV Channel has been broadcasting the 13-part "Literature Alive" documentary series on Caribbean-Canadian writers, produced as a partnership venture between Caribbean Tales and Leda Serene Films.

The independent feature-length film version of "A Winter Tale" will be shot on location in Parkdale neighborhood, and Solomon expects it to be released in 2006.

"The script addresses the issues with sensitivity and insight," she says. "It lends itself very well to translate across the mediums of film and theatre. "Ultimately, it is a stepping stone for helpful -- and hopeful -- dialogue towards realistic solutions for our city."



Caribbean People  
Colin Rickards