

Director Finds Theater Work Exhilarating

By Michael Chung
Staff Writer

For some people, work is simply a way to make money.

But for Dawn Monique Williams, who recently directed the Cal State East Bay production of "Children of Eden," work is her passion.

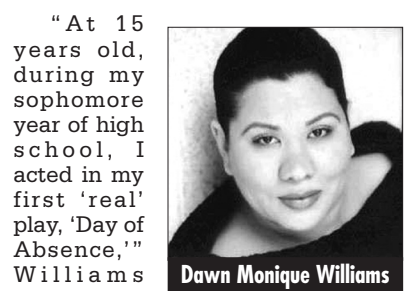
Williams compares her love for theater to how an athlete might feel on game day.

"I just get this insane rush, a natural high," Williams said. "It is just an incredible thing to tap into emotions that we do not use every day or that we so often repress."

Williams, who has directed several CSUEB productions, including "Madea," "Trojan Women," "Creon," and "A Christmas Carol," said being a director is "more intense" than performing onstage.

"I get a tremendous sense of pride in watching something that was once a vision come to life on the stage," Williams said. "Working with talented and generous actors is so rewarding because I am able to help them tap into something and collaborate with them to create something that is all at once a part of us and outside ourselves. And, of course, affecting an audience (is also rewarding). Getting them to tap in to something, laugh, cry or even storm out of the theater means I am doing something right."

Williams, who was born in Oakland and attended school in Berkeley, said she began her career in show business by taking dance lessons and joining the choir during elementary school.



Dawn Monique Williams

"At 15 years old, during my sophomore year of high school, I acted in my first 'real' play, 'Day of Absence,'" Williams said. "The next year, I took advanced drama and the teacher let another student and I direct one-act plays as our final (exam). We did a real evening performance for an invited audience, and from then on, I was hooked."

Williams attended San Francisco State University after graduating from high school in 1996, but eventually graduated from CSUEB in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in theater arts with an option in directing.

Williams said her goal is to become a professional director.

"I want to earn a living doing what I love," Williams said. "Ideally, in five years I will be working professionally. In 10 years, I will hold a faculty position at a college or university where I can be a beacon of light for a student like me."

Williams said she credits the CSUEB theatre department as the springboard to her career as a director.

"The (department) has been tremendously generous to me, providing me with invaluable experiences like traveling abroad to participate in International Theatre Festival, and opportunities to teach and direct," Williams said. "The professors have put so much faith in me that I know I am indebted to them for all my successes. I heard a proverb once that goes something like, 'every blade of grass has an angel in its ear whispering, grow, grow,' and I have had several."

As Williams progresses in her career, she said that being a young black woman who has a child, a unique and specific voice, and theatrical aesthetic, is an asset and obstacle.

"Being a black female presents obstacles in that it is hard to 'place' me," Williams said. "As a director, my sensibilities are, for the most part, untouched in American drama. This is also an asset because it means that my voice needs to be heard, needs a place, and it won't be the same redundancy that makes people turn away from theater because they think it is boring. I bring something new to the cannon."

Williams said that Julie Taymor, Mary Zimmerman, Richard E. T. White, and Tina Landau are among her favorite directors. The director also said that she loves working with student actors and actresses.

"I honestly enjoy working with students because the interaction is about an educational experience and not just work or a business dealing," Williams said. "Students come with something to learn, and it becomes the director's job to equip them with not only the knowledge, but the tools to get it on their own in the future."

Williams added that the women in her life inspire her to achieve her goals.

"From my mother to my daughter, and my professors and colleagues," Williams said. "I like to deal with women's issues in my work. I like to make women's issues global issues. I am also inspired by survivors and people that go for their dreams."

Williams said "Children of Eden," which premiered on Aug. 12, was a success.

The director also plans to produce and direct a production of "Hands Around" in the spring and co-direct a production for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival next summer.

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