

THE LOVE PROJECT

A Performance Piece by Pearl Cleage, Zaron W. Burnett, Jr.

With Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones

Directed by Harriet Schiffer-Scott

Pre-show video:

There should be a large video screen behind the playing area. As audience enters, there should be selected music tracks playing to correspond to a series of visual images from the lives and careers of Jones/Ackamoor. Stills and video can be utilized.

[The stage is separated into three performance areas. Upstage two dressing rooms are suggested. Each has a large mirror with a frame of lights, a small dressing table and two straight back chairs. There should also be a clothes rack in each room with various costumes hanging in a row.]

RHODESSA

Rhodessa enters. She is carrying a large leather bag which she tosses on the dressing table as she makes a cursory examination of the room. She reaches out and touches the costumes on the rack lightly and is satisfied that everything is where it should be.

She turns on the lights around the dressing mirror and looks at herself with the critical eye of someone who has studied her image dispassionately in a thousand mirrors as part of the life she has chosen. She frowns slightly and gently smooths the lines around her eyes as women often do after a certain age when no amount of moisturizer and much deserved rest can erase the story of a life that is written on their faces.

As if she just remembered something, she reaches into her bag and takes out some snapshots and postcards, which she quickly places around the mirror. These are the things

she has been carrying around for years to quickly personalize the dressing rooms that are always as impersonal as this one. She is satisfied with the placement.

RHODESSA

Idris? Is that you?

IDRIS

Who else would it be?

He continues to play as they talk. She listens closely to the horn, her words almost seeming to be in response to what it is saying.

RHODESSA

Are you sure?

IDRIS

I'm always sure.

RHODESSA

About doing the show about love in wartime.

IDRIS

I'm sure.

*He continues to play softly.
Rhodessa listens to the music.
Finds the answer she was waiting for.*

RHODESSA

Okay. Just checking.

IDRIS

You're not having second thoughts, are you?

RHODESSA

The thing is, this is wartime and that makes love beside the point, which is probably why we should be talking about it the most. Talking or marching around the White House with a sign that says, 'what part of get out of Iraq don't you understand?'

You know, like old school. Make Love not war! Love and war. War and Love! As I see it, those are pretty much the only options open for a thinking person these days.

IDRIS

I'm not sure I agree!

RHODESSA

See? That's what I mean. Different planets. *He's* telling *me* it's wartime and *I'm* the one who has been raving about Iraq and Afghanistan and Darfur and Gaza and New Orleans for months.

IDRIS

Yeah, I know you're just worried about the war. We're all worried about the war, but that doesn't change what we do. It just means we have to do it the way we would in wartime. The way we would if we were hunkered down somewhere with the bombs falling outside.

Actors STAND together on platform...then say...

RHODESSA

The way we would if we were living in Baghdad...

IDRIS

Scared to go to the market....

RHODESSA

Scared to send the kids to school. The way we would if we were living in Darfur...

IDRIS

And rape was a fact of life...

RHODESSA

More certain than fresh water or a place to sleep in safety. The way we would if we were living in Afghanistan...

IDRIS

And there was no way to feed the family...

RHODESSA

Since women can't go out alone. [A beat.]

RHODESSA AND IDRIS (Together)

And all the men are dead in one war or another...

RHODESSA

You're right! It is time to talk about love. Talk about Art & Love & War. A kind of collaboration.

IDRIS

Yeah...Collaboration! That's it! Collaboration is like making love. It's something that you can do with a lot of people. Sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's very good. But once or twice, in your life, if you are very lucky. It's *great*. Better than sex. Always was. Always will be. That's me you Rhodessa. We both know it. We might not be from the same neighborhood, but definitely the same planet. I'm right about that, no matter what you say.

RHODESSA

So we better talk about love before we forget what it looks like, sounds like, feels like.

IDRIS

Exactly. [Starts to play again.]

RHODESSA

So where are we supposed to start this love story?

*Lights change. We hear a
Count down 5,4,3,2,1....*

*Idris walks to musician area and begins playing
A theme song....Images of Rhodessa and Idris Ackamoor
Are projected.*

RHODESSA

Welcome to the Love Project! That place where love, art, music, politics, food and culture intersects to encourage interactive community participation. I am Rhodessa Jones, your host...your scout...your guide...and if any shit jumps off I am your soldier! I suppose I can really answer my own question. You don't start a love story. One day you realize a love story has started around you and by the time you notice that it's started, it's already wide open. Then if you have good sense, good timing and good fortune, you open up and let the love story swallow you whole... Tonight I invite, insist that we all jump in as if our very lives depend on it! Cause you know what? Let's be swept away, baptized in

love's many streams- yes with both feet, hands heads, and hearts! Jump in! Where is the love? Let's keep our clothes on...open our minds... expand our hopes. Extend ourselves to know, to feel, to remember others in the name of love! Let's end the war in our homes, our neighborhoods our schools, our churches. Lets flow tonight! Flow into a sea of redemption as we reclaim our unions, our children, our elders, our cities, and our communities. Let's get jiggy with understanding in the face of so much misunderstanding! Can we conjure forgiveness for all those who have trespassed against us? Where is the love Ya'll? Let's rock love like the first time again, tonight!

*Lights change and Idris
and Rhodessa begin
A duet... Idris on
piano and Rhodessa
On vocals.*

“Human Wilderness”

Composed by Idris Ackamoor & Cheryl Scales

Lyrics by Ackamoor, Rhodessa Jones, Cheryl Scales, and Hariett Schiffer Scott

Arranged by Fred Harris & Ackamoor

RHODESSA (SINGING)

(1st verse)

I just want to be with you
Share the evening too
Talk to you
Of things that you
Might decide are true
Guide you through the wilderness
No! Your not dismissed
Come together be with me
On this love journey

(2nd verse)

All the feelings that we share
Will just clean the air
Close your eyes so we can see
All your fantasies

Learn to sing the songs we know

Just to feed our soul

Come together be with me

On this love journey

(3rd verse)

So you work illegally

Get no sympathy

Hunger on the street you see

Makes it hard to breathe

Rage inside no place to go

Now its time to flow

Come together be with me

On this love journey

(Chorus)

Oh me oh my oh no

A shoe will drop

The blood will flow

Oh me oh my oh no

This ain't TV

It's you and me!

Oh me oh my oh no

It's time to live

It's time to love!

We're just ordinary people!

*Idris takes a sax solo and at the end
Of the performance he bows and lights change.*

RHODESSA

Ladies and Gentlemen! Give it up for sax man Idris Ackamoor our co-host and bandleader! He is my friend, my partner in crime...my brother...one of my great loves, and our first guest.

Idris bows and walks over to join Rhodessa at the couch.

RHODESSA (conts.)

Thirty years! We are definitely survivors!! (Both laugh) Surviving love and war with others.

IDRIS

Love and war with each other.

RHODESSA

Then back to love! (*Rhodessa begins singing, "When I'm happy and Idris joins in for a few bars, they giggle at the end"*) When Idris and I first met, he already had a vision that featured a glowing distant horizon and a challenging path to it across the human wilderness. I did, too. [She looks at him.] You remember when we first met, you had a chance to go to Europe and your band was a little shaky about making the trip and I said, *I'll go.*

IDRIS

They weren't shaky. They just couldn't see as far as I could. But you shared my vision. You could see it through your own eyes!

RHODESSA

Ladies! This is the man that advised me to quit my day job so that I could be a working performing artist.

IDRIS

Without knowing all the reasons why - at the time it all made sense to me. I knew even then that performing across the sea in unfamiliar lands before people anxious to experience and share humanity, just like I was, was right up my alley.

RHODESSA

But my mama warned him, "Before you go, if she starts to drive you crazy...and she will, bring her back to me without hitting her. That's all I require. Now get going." That's what she said. And we've been going and getting ever since...

IDRIS

I figured I could not be driven any place I didn't intend on going. And hitting her? Anybody who knows Rhodessa knows that would just not happen! It's a question of my self-preservation!! Anyway, hitting people most definitely gets in the way of experiencing and sharing humanity. I mean completely in the way.

RHODESSA

Speaking of hitting. Remember that time in Austria? We were doing our Ike and Tina Turner piece and in the middle of the fight scene a woman came up on the stage to help me and you chased her off with the sax? You made the sax sound like an elephant.
[He does it and they both laugh.]

IDRIS

That wasn't the only time my horn saved the day! I know you remember the Midnight Train to Munich!

RHODESSA

AHhhhhh... (*Reminiscing in her mind*) The Midnight Train to Munich....

*Lights change as the audience is slowly
transported into the story. We here
A very low train sound...
Idris gets up and becomes part
of the story...*

RHODESSA (cont.)

Talk about Love and War and loving strangers! In 1989 Idris and I had just finished a tour of Austria ending in Graz, Austria...home of Arnold Swartzeneger. And we are preparing to return home to America. We had to take a train to Munich, Germany to make our connection. So, I'm sitting on the train in our compartment with all my bags...bags filled with costumes, instruments, and of course clothes from shopping. You have to go shopping in Europe, of course!

IDRIS

It was my job to go and get the smoked fish, water, cheese, chocolate, bread.

RHODESSA (cont.)

While I'm sitting there these people pass my door. Very dark people like gypsies. And, I smile feeling very international, "Hi!" So low and behold, they come back. They

step into my compartment. They sit down. They start gesturing with bright red passports. I can't figure out what they're talking about.

IDRIS

Meanwhile, I return. We're sitting there and the kid, who's about 12 years old...whips out this Albanian English dictionary and attempts to communicate that they've been trying to get into Germany for over six months.

RHODESSA

Being Americans, we don't quite get the picture all the time, and we're saying, "Don't worry about it. You've got your passports. Cool man. It's gonna be fine. No problem. You're gonna get in!" They're saying, " You don't understand. We're from Albania. This is an Albanian passport! We want you to help us!" So Idris and I are looking at each other like, "Help you?" And the little boy says, "Well, would you hide us? Hide us?" We look at each other, and he says, "Please help us...hide us!" and the lady says, "Smuggle...smuggle..." (Look).

At first visions of these Gestapo like commandos descending on us and carting all of us away in handcuffs went through my mind...cause these passport security agents do not play. But what are we suppose to say, "Get the hell out of our compartment!" And by now Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Oskar Schindler, Simon Wiesenthal, John Brown, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King are also gathering and they're demanding, "WELL!" So we hide them.

*Idris peels off to stand
behind Rhodessa facing upstage*

We hide 2 adults and one child! We put the mother under one seat and the boy and the younger woman under the other. Quickly we take their bags and mix them in

with ours. We're left with two extra satchels and all of their coats. In the scramble I decide to *lie down* for the entire train ride to Munich! I had Idris place the satchels on my belly and cover them with our many coats. I say to Idris, "When the controllers come in you tell them that I am your wife and that I am pregnant and very sick, OK?"

Have you ever smelled fear? I had never experienced the smell of fear before. I can tell you tonight fear smells a little salty...it's greasy...it's dusty...and it leaves a very nasty metallic taste in the back of your mouth...the whole compartment reeked of fear. I was hoping the controllers wouldn't come in with their knee high, spit polished, goose stepping boots and full length black leather coats bringing their dogs.

And thank God for Idris. Another fashionable globetrotter: Picture Idris in his pork pie hat, ala Lester Young, a burnt orange pork pie hat at that *tilted just so*, and wearing a black and gold striped waist coat cradling his golden saxophone in his arms. At every stop he created this picture that graced the doorway to our compartment. We dazzled the Gestapo to the point they sometimes forgot to stamp our passports, but truly enjoyed listening to and discussing jazz with Idris Ackamoore.

We crossed Europe and arrived in Munich close to midnight. The Albanians crawled out from under the seats overjoyed! They took pictures with us. They were so happy to be in Germany! They gave us presents...henna for my hair...a ballpoint pen...a cigarette lighter. And they are thanking us...thank you...thank you...thank you... They get off the train. They fade into the night.

And Idris and I to this day laugh that somewhere in Albania or Germany the urban legend goes: that if you ever need help...look for the jazz man...the jazz man in his burnt orange porkpie hat and his very sweet, accommodating wife. As we waved goodnight I knew it was the right thing to do. I felt such relief...such power! It has

deepened and enriched this journey I'm on...the journey with Idris... our journey through the human wilderness.

Idris performs his signature tap/sax routine playing "Round Midnight". After the end of the routine Rhodessa comes out and goes into the audience. She creates an audience interaction section in 4 major blocks.
Block 1: People are strangers
Block 2: Hey you came! Give me a hug!
Block 3: Turn to your neighbor and give them a hug of peace! How does a real man hug?
Rhodessa then goes back to the stage

RHODESSA

During this part of the show I always think about my grandmother. My grandmother, Anna Edwards, she would come and visit us and she was fire and brimstone and I thought she was just this amazing prophet cause she would just get filled with the fire and throw her hands in the air and she would say, "You know, I won't live to see it, but someday blood will run the streets like water, a plague will fall upon the land, and nations will be against nations, father's against sons, mother's against daughters, and man will become a lover of himself. I won't live to see it but watch what I tell you. And she said, "someday a women will turn to her sister and say, girl, today girl, I saw a man! A real man!"

Idris enters from offstage

IDRIS

When I first started to think seriously about love, I realized that in order to do that I had to think seriously about manhood because real love requires a real man. Once I realized that, the only relevant questions were, what is a real man and how do you get to be one? The definitions I observed were more instructive as to what kind of man not to

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be. For example, nobody had anything good to say about any man who was trifling. And when I say nobody, I mean women and men whose opinions mattered. And trifling included irresponsibility, a lack of punctuality, an absence of industry, an absence of maturity, an absence of seriousness, a chronic shortage of money, a chronic shortage.

So trifling was out. But what is the opposite of trifling? Reliable, punctual, industrious, mature, serious, fiscally sound and fully engaged in an age appropriate way in everything around you. That's worth exploring.

Nobody had anything good to say about so called ladies men. Even the people who laughed it up with them at the card party or the cabaret. As soon as he left everybody talked bad about him at the same time. The fact that you couldn't believe one single word that passed his lips was agreed upon by acclamation. And anyone who did believe him was too big a fool to be bothered with, as in: *if you go off with that no-good ladies man, you deserve whatever you get*. So ladies man was out. One lady at a time, which took me right back to the love thing.

Everybody knew somebody, was related to somebody, went to school or church with somebody who knew a miracle man. This man could make miracles on an every day level. The kind of miracle that employs an unemployable son in a career that he can work at until he retires. The kind of miracle that delivers a truckload of coal on the coldest day of the year with no mention of payment. The kind of miracle that can get a message to your incarcerated family member at any time. The kind of miracle that made the 4th of July barbecue a carnivore's paradise.

Everybody wanted to know somebody who knew somebody but nobody wanted to know the actual somebody. The man who made miracles. This shady, dangerous-

feeling man who actually accomplished these miracles was welcome virtually nowhere. So I scratched Miracle Man off my list. I'd make do.

I considered the kinds of men there are to see which one I was. Everywhere I looked I saw nobody who was like me. And the longer I looked, the more I realized something else. Nobody was like anybody else!

So I was back to me. I decided to be a free man. I had never really seen one single free man my whole life! A really free man. Free to allow whatever was bursting to get out to get out. Free to travel the world as a free man open to everything of interest this great world has to offer.

The freeman that grew out of these decades of adventure, industry, art and travel learned the definition of love. Every kind of love. The boyfriend-girlfriend love that burns like a sexual wildfire. The artist-collaborator love where you share the stage, and your thoughts, and your fears, and your desires and your true self with each other in front of a room full of invited strangers. The love that follows the sexual wildfire with a sexual campfire that everybody has to learn to sit around and enjoy the heat. The love that cannot abide a single word passed as untruth. The love that wraps itself around in a way nobody can describe to you and that is unmistakable in the totality of its presence.

This is much easier said than done in a country where your silent, still exterior alone determines freedom or bondage. History had left pretty much everybody with an idea about the limits that be placed on my freedom.

Rhodessa joins Idris in this segment of rhythm tap and chants as they begin a low rumble chant. It picks up in intensity and rhythm. At certain times they recite together, other times, round robin, and other times separately.

RHODESSA/IDRIS

Do this. Don't do that. Don't ever do that. Don't even look at that. That's not even possible. Don't even think about that.

After a short time Idris steps out and tells the story of the argument of the worker who took a long lunch break. (Scenario 1)

IDRIS

You're late again from lunch!! The phone's been ringing off the hook! Your clients are looking for you. I'm writing you up this time!!

RHODESSA/IDRIS

Do this. Don't do that. Don't ever do that. Don't even look at that. That's not even possible. Don't even think about that.

After a short time Rhodessa steps out and tells the story of the argument with a Government authority. (Scenario 2)

RHODESSA (Scenario #2)

"Get in line.....move over there...etc

Idris breaks in Scenario # 3....

IDRIS

Son, do not wash your penis in the bathroom sink!! The whole family has to use that sink son!

RHODESSA/IDRIS

Do this. Don't do that. Don't ever do that. Don't even look at that. That's not even possible. Don't even think about that.

After a short time Rhodessa steps out and tells the story of the argument of Parental authority. (Scenario 4)

RHODESSA (Scenario #4)

Young lady you get back in here....

*Immediately after
Scenario #4 Rhodessa
steps out and tells
the story of the crying girl friend. (Scenario 5)*

RHODESSA (Scenario #5)

Why are you talking to her?

RHODESSA/IDRIS

Do this. Don't do that. Don't ever do that. Don't even look at that. That's not even possible. **Don't even think about that.!!!!!!!! (to the audience)**

*This section ends as Idris taps out!
Rhodessa listens, then addresses the audience.*

RHODESSA

Who you saying don't do this to? Who's saying don't do that to you? Are you telling anybody that it's impossible? Well, that's just the same old tune until they tune you out! We need to be singing a different song to each other.

RHODESSA

We might not have a favorite food or a favorite color, but everybody has a favorite love song. The one you made out to in high school. (The Supremes "Where did Our Love Go") The one that was playing softly on the radio or the eight track the first time you had sex. (La la la la la The Delphonics). The one blasting from the speakers of a passing car just as he was having the orgasm of his life with the window open and the breeze blowing on his naked behind. ("Cowboys to Girls") Your wedding song. (Luther)

For people my age, most of these were songs we could sing, not well, but recognizably. They lent themselves to the slow, intimate rhythms of sex and romance and

were suitable for whispering into the ear of the beloved during extended grinding sessions in the dark corners of neighborhood house parties. The problem is, I think all that may be changing, which is not necessarily a good thing.

Hip-hop is good at some things, but when it comes to love songs, I'm not so sure. I mean, I don't demand Cole Porter or Smokey Robinson ("Ooh Baby Baby") every time, but I don't see how you can croon "Whomp that trick! Whomp that trick!" to somebody in twenty years and share a romantic moment with your sweetie about how lovely it was when you first fell in love and you were both so young, so young, so young, and that was your song.

I think we're losing the essence of what a love song is all about and that, to my mind, would be a tragedy. If we lose the song, we'll lose the feeling and then where will we be? You know how love songs take you back? You hear the opening words and you remember. You hear a chord, a few lyrics..you see it...smell it...feel it...taking you way back there. You got a love song? What's your love song?

Rhodessa enters the audience asking couples and singles what is their favorite love song. Once she gets a lot of participation she invites several up on stage to sing the songs. Briefly as the people rehearse the songs. She continues with her dialogue. At some point the selected audience members sing their song. The audience selects the song that the whole audience will sing.

RHODESSA (cont)

OK!! We're going to sing now! Let's also admit that sometimes we are reluctant to sing along with others in public without rehearsal. Especially when we haven't been drinking. Don't be nervous. I remind you of Sly Stone's admonition to a less than lusty chorus of Woodstock attendees' way back in 1969. It was late and he was trying to get

the crowd to sing along (*Sing “I want to take you higher, boom shakalaka...”*) and they, for whatever reasons – too tired, too high – were reluctant to do so, and Sly said: don’t be ashamed because some might call this a sing-along and that sounds so old fashioned. If it was good once, he said, it’s still good. And he was right.

Later that same day, Country Joe and the Fish were singing an anti-war song and the crowd, once again, was not rising to the occasion. (*Sing 1,2,3,4 what are we fighting for...”*) Joe, a little less patient than Sly had been, stepped up to the mic and said: Listen, you fuckers, you’re gonna have to sing a whole lot better than that if you want to end a war. And they did, so they did, and he was right, too.

The audience sings here. At the end of the song Rhodessa continues...Rhodessa also teaches the audience to sing OUR love song.

RHODESSA

And sometimes we’ll be standing next to someone waiting to cross the street, or standing in line at the post office waiting to mail a package home, or volunteering at the shelter, or wondering if anybody else is coming to the demonstration this afternoon and we’ll hear the sound of our song. (Sing, a few bars of “When I’m Happy”) We’ll realize that the guy beside us on the train is humming it. Or the cashier at the grocery store is singing it under her breath. Or the mailman is singing it as he comes up the walk with a package we weren’t expecting...and we’ll remember....everyone in this room...This is our love song!

Rhodessa introduces Idris who comes out and plays a composition that introduces the cooking monologue. He begins coming out playing his guitar and singing...

IDRIS

Ah the tastes of love
Ah the tastes of love
The taste of love on my plate
The taste of love on my face
The taste of love on my lips
The taste of love on your hips
Break
The taste of love in my belly
The taste of love I love jelly
The taste of love in my nose
The taste of love to your toes

IDRIS

Welcome to the Taste of Love! Yeah! Love, taste, food! They all go together.

And the challenges are often so similar. Loving to much ...putting to much seasoning in a dish...loving too little...not enough seasoning...not loving...staving yourself. Yes, love is a lot like cooking. Getting the right ingredients is a life long pursuit for me!

But I've discovered that food is the common denominator. Ah....the tastes of love. When I was a young man I didn't care nothin' about food. Oh I eat it, but I definitely had no interest in cooking!! Anyway I couldn't cook!! I learned how to cook being with the women I've loved.

Now there was Saunya. Some of the best times we had were spent in and around the kitchen. Saunya made these fantasy breakfasts that were completely hedonistic. We're talkin' lobster with eggs and mimosas, fried catfish, grits and eggs, ackee and saltfish, greens and dumplin's etc. I learned a lot about cooking just watching her move and grove around the kitchen. And what did she leave me with? Salad dressing!! Yeah, salad dressing. Now I do my own salad dressing. Get a clove of garlic and chop it up

really fine. (Assistant roles out kitchen board with materials). Pour equal amounts of extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar into a small container. Shake in some lemon pepper, a little salt, some chives, add the garlic and mix it all up. Wham, bam, jam! Salad Dressing! And we ain't talkin' Paul Newman!

Now all you need is some pre-washed mixed greens (yeah I know they say you don't have to wash them but I do!). Put the greens in a large salad bowl. Add a sliced up ripe avocado, some of those sweet baby tomatoes. Oh yeah, I almost forgot...put in some of those canned mandarin slices. That was a special Saunya trick and I like it!! Add the dressing. Toss it! And wham, bam, jam! Now you got yourself one hell uv a salad!

Before Saunya was the empress of the kitchen, Rhodessa Jones. Now you talkin' about burnin'. Rhodessa would say it's not a party or an event if you don't have a delectable spread of food! I would spend days watching her make magic in the kitchen. All that watching couldn't help but have something rub off. What rubbed off? My special broccoli dish! Start by heating up some extra virgin olive oil. Take your minced garlic and sprinkle it in and watch it sizzle. Make sure it doesn't burn because burnt garlic makes everything taste bitter. Now take your freshly washed and cut up broccoli crowns and drop them in the pan mixing it up with the garlic and oil. Cover and let steam. Half way through sprinkle in a little soy sauce, mix and stir again. Then let it steam to perfection! Cook it just enough so that the broccoli is firm as well as tender. Serve and enjoy! Make sure that special lady gets some of that garlic too cause you don't want nothing to come between a good dinner and what may happen afterwards!

And remember all you no cookin' brothers out there Essence Magazine conducted a poll and found that 83% of it's readers are looking for a man who knows his way around the kitchen!!

Ah the tastes of love

Ah the tastes of love

The taste of love on my plate

The taste of love on my face....

*Idris sings as he leaves the stage. Rhodessa leaves
The stage as well. A video comes on entitled, "On The Road
With Rhodessa and Idris: A Live Reality Show".
The video begins with Rhodessa and Idris heading
For the airport and it continues with images of South Africa,
San Francisco jail residencies, and
Trinidad and Tobago.
At the end of the video there is a still
Of Rhodessa and Idris in green suit dancing.
Idris Enters.*

IDRIS

Rhodessa and I are not a romantic couple. Yes, we travel belly-to-belly, hip-to-hip, 24-7, 365. Although we were once a romantic couple, we haven't been so for many years. But guys who want to get with Rhodessa always ask her first, "What about the brother?" And then some of the ladies I try to flirt with don't want to give me the time of day in deference to Rhodessa.

Alternating between sister and Idris

"Cynthia, me and Rhodessa don't sleep together".

"That's so dysfunctional! How can you do all that you do together and not sleep together."

"Dysfunctional?" *(Said to the audience)*

How does one make that transition from sleeping together to life partners? Well, it ain't easy, but we both are better for it that's for sure. The tendency when you split up is to part mad, angry, don't want nothin' or anything to do with that person. Well, that might make you feel good for a minute, but it would have left me alone for a lifetime without my best friend. We didn't choose that route. Instead we chose to learn how to hold on to the parts that work. I find that it helps if I agree with everything Rhodessa says about the break-up.

IDRIS (*Alternating between being Rhodessa and himself*)

“We broke up cause the apartment we lived in was too small.”

“That's the truth!”

“We broke up cause I got way too busy with my Medea Project”

“That's the truth!”

“We broke up cause Idris couldn't keep his dick in his pants”

“That's the truth!”

In fact the truth lies somewhere in between all this. And the truth is that we had too much to do on this earth to be mad at each other or want to be out of each other's life. Rhodessa once said to me, “I'm not giving up on the company or you, and you better get over it!” Well, I'm glad she didn't and I'm glad I did! So join me here! My life long partner, my artistic twin, my best friend, and one of the loves of my life, Rhodessa Jones!

RHODESSA

We might have broken up because you love your saxophone more than anything or anyone! (Honey, we fought and often!) I like to fight. He doesn't. He would storm out. I learned that if he took his horn- it could be over! But I also knew that he loved my

cooking, so I would fry the chicken, Sautee broccoli, mash the potatoes, and melba the peach and wait..... Thirty pounds, thirty years later we are still sharing our tables. Anyway I give good business!

IDRIS

And I take great advice! (Idris leaves to get his instruments)

RHODESSA

When I think about our break up I realize that we didn't break up...We broke Through.... (*lights dim and focus on Rhodessa*) But God bless, Idris Ackamoor, who would always be there holding the lantern,- ready to go; whenever and wherever art as social activism took us out into the world! Hell, Idris and I might have broken up because I got way too busy giving birth to the Medea Project - working with women in lockdown! Sent to wade out in the dank, dark murkiness of the human wilderness. The jails were a swamp of displacement and pain brimming with bodies and souls of broken women. I find that selfhood is my only life line.....sometimes just holding on leaves me with nothing more to give.

*Lights change and Rhodessa begins Forrest
In the Ghetto.*

(singing the refrain)

e e e e e e e e dom dom dom de way (repeat)

It's like a jungle sometimes

It's like a jungle sometimes

It's like a jungle sometimes

It makes me wonder how I keep from going under

(Wolf howl followed by bird cry)

Put your hands in the air like you just don't care

(Smokes some pot)

Want to hit this”

(Wolf howl)

It makes me wonder how I keep from going under

You feel me?

But I’m just trying to keep it real though

(Smokes some pot)

You know what I’m saying. I’m just trying to keep it real

(Puff)

Girrl....CPS took my kids, girl! CPS took my kids, girl!

“Oh naw bitch! Naw bitch! Naw bitch! Naw bitch!

You gave your kids to CPS!!!!

I’m just trying to keep it real!~

(Puff)

My momma do!

(singing the refrain)

e e e e e e e dom dom dom de way (repeat)

(Pantomime love making having a baby)

You got a baby boy!

And then the father said to his son.

Come on boy...give me the gun son. Give me the gun.

And the young man said,

Daddy...you don’t understand. Daddy you don’t understand.

I need this gun to feel like a man!

(singing the refrain)
e e e e e e e dom dom dom de way (repeat)

Shut up bitch! Shut up bitch!

I'll drop you where you at bitch!

Naw bitch! Naw bitch!

You ain't gonna leave me!

Naw bitch! You ain't gonna leave me, bitch!

I'll blow you're motherfucking head off!!!

(Rhodessa improves out)

Oh no..no..no....no

I'm just keeping it real

Just keeping it real through!

Cause y'all don't want me to get mad!

You don't want me to get mad!

Cause if I get mad...if I get mad I might..

SCREAM!!!!

Shut up bitch! Shut that baby up!

Not in front of my kids! Not in front of my kids! Not in front of my kids!

What cha gonna do about the kids?

Oh fuck all that!

(Puff)

CPS took my kids, girls!

Come on girl, keep it real!

You gave your kids to CPS!

It's like a jungle sometimes

It makes me wonder how I keep from going under

Shut up bitch!

I want my moma! They killed my momma!

But I'm just trying to keep it real!

(Go to audience and BLOW OUT CANDLE)

BLACK OUT

*Lights up and Rhodessa is in Audience. This begins the **Audience interview** section.*

RHODESSA

Forest in the Ghetto. Thank You! In Trinidad, Idris and I led community workshops in Port of Spain where crime, poverty and violence has become overwhelming. (Sounds familiar?) They wanted us to give them tools to rebuild families that were in crisis! Can you help us? Once again Idris and I looked at each other. Wow!! Help you??

(Enter piano) So, there in paradise we gathered and shared stories of yesterday, perused nightmares in a place called now. Honored dreams realized and deferred, in an attempt to conjure hope in a community not unlike the streets of America. (Out Piano)

I tease the question: Do we love our communities? What does a love like that look like? On the plane ride coming out to the Bride I was reading Essence Magazine. Essence comes up a lot does't it? Must be a Black Thang! There was an article about the deaths of young black men in your city...the city of brotherly love. I'm from the West Coast and I know something about young people dying young. I lost two nephews to the

violence in the streets. When that happens the accusations arise. “They must have been in gangs or dealing drugs!” When I hear that in my gut I say what does it matter what they were doing. These are still young people whose lives have been cut short!

*This is a musical tone poem
(The Way Forward on Piano)*

Loving our children somehow.

Love the miracle of them

right down to the knuckleheaded exasperation

that comes with rearing teenagers!

How do we love our children

who stand so sullen, apart and, yes, even disappointing;

- as they attempt to scale the walls of this big world!

Our world. A world of hardened hearts.

They’re living with circumstances today

that would have 20 or 30 years ago

broken any of us!

Yet *they’re* expected to stand up, move on...move around it!

Where is the love?

As friend Harriet would say,

“How can they give something they’ve never been given?”

Let’s bless all the children.

The children in the streets. In the schools. In the jails. In the grave. In the war.

Children that are lost at sea. All the children.

God bless Cannon....God Bless Johnny.....etc

After the tone poem Rhodessa says

RHODESSA

How can we in this community right now transition from breaking up to breaking through? The breakthrough comes with a knowing that love like happiness is better shared.-

*The community section begins here with
Community members participating.
Questions that are asked as Rhodessa goes
Into the audience include:
What was missing?
What could have been done?
What was needed?
What was missing?
What was done right?
What have we done with what we have done?*

RHODESSA

Small stones whisper words to the dead;- signaling that they/we remember. In the face of violence, death, and desperation can we be made ane? I believe we can. But you know what? In this hard-hearted world the only way forward is *through* a broken heart. So let's sing out!

*The song "Love Theme" begins
and plays under this to the end.*

Sing your song of love in the hard times; let it carry you in the good times. Share your song with others. Open up the compartment of your heart and let the strangers in. In the words of my mother the late great Estella Jones. Love one another. Forgive one another. And even ask God to forgive you.

I send you each a kiss. And you can put it wherever you like. Goodnight!

THE END