

NATIONAL POST

"Imaginative and Superbly Tight"

- *The National Post (Toronto/National, Canada)*

THE VANCOUVER SUN

"Blood.claat is a gripping example of how Canada's cultural mosaic is rich with stories"

- *The Vancouver Sun (Vancouver, Canada)*



"d'bi young's infectious spirit energizes this tale about symbolic power of blood"

- *NOW Magazine (Toronto, Canada)*



"young is a charismatic performer who channels her fierce intensity into each of the dozen sharply differentiated characters she plays." ★★★★★

- *Eye Weekly (Toronto, Canada)*



"Powerful Piece... Terrific celebration of the strength and achievement of black women"

- *XTRA! (Toronto, Canada)*

NATIONAL POST

d'bi young is celebrated as a playwright/performer in this feature article of the national post - 2006

the triumph of d'bi young by robert cushman (on d'bi young play blood.claat)

<http://www.financialpost.com/scripts/story.html?id=52b35b57-09f6-4ddd-a944-e151a8e57f30&k=44327>



d'bi young's play 'benu' (part 2 of 'the sankofa trilogy') takes the cover of montreal's alt.theatre magazine - 2010

Accountability, integrity, and benu: An interview with d'bi.young by holly luhning 2010

http://www.teesriduniya.com/8_1.pdf

word! sound! powah!: the sankofa trilogy part 3 by d'bi.young

plank cover 5/5 *****

<http://www.plankmagazine.com/review/word-sound-powah-widsom-and-beauty-delivered-high-energy>

Art & Culture Maven

arts and culture maven cover 5/5 *****

In word! sound! powah!, the third installment in monodramatist d'bi.young.anitafrika's incredible matrilineal saga that started with the Dora award-winning blood.claat, anitafrika offers a distinctly different perspective.

<http://www.artandculturemaven.com/2010/08/word-sound-powah-part-of-summerworks.html>



the way i see it theatre cover 5/5 *****

d'bi.young's play, theatrically, politically and poetically, is an invigorating and inspiring triumph; don't miss it!

<http://www.twisitheatreblog.com/2010/07/word-sound-powah-yes.html>

the more the merrier cover 5/5 *****

As benu, young is representative of disenfranchised youth responding to the absolute lack of choices, jobs, and opportunities promised by politicians and those in authority.

<http://tmtmshow.blogspot.com/2010/07/fringe-festival-review-wordsoundpowah.html>

'best dubpoet and storytelling actor. she calls herself a storyteller but who cares about titles when you're so mesmerized by the heartfelt truths she communicates.' - jon kaplan, now magazine



now magazine 4/5 nnnn

Defining characters by voice and physicality, shifting among them with ease, young creates a vibrant blend of dub poetry, politics and a veneration of the ancestors.

<http://www.nowtoronto.com/stage/listings/listing.cfm?listingid=38924&subsection=&category=&criticpicks=&date1=&date2=&locationId=0>



eye weekly 4/5 ****

d'bi young is an exquisite performer and this play is a political, poetical wonder.

<http://www.eyeweekly.com/article/94881>

d'bi young graces the cover of xtra to talk about life and her new play 'she' being featured at rhubarb theatre 2010

Rhubarb star d'bi young inspired by Rihanna by chris dupuis

http://www.xtra.ca/public/toronto/rhubarb_star_dbi_young_inspired_by_rihanna-8216.aspx



cover article - aesthetics now magazine vol 7 - jamaica 2010

http://aestheticsnow.com/catagories.php?cat_id=7



music feature - article the coast - halifax 2010

d'bi young's words by sean flinn

<http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/dbiyoungs-words/Content?oid=2011177>



feature article - the manitoban on a new play by d'bi young 'she' about the status of women in canada - 2010 theatre as transformative action by noleen mae ritsema

<http://www.themanitoban.com/articles/33965>

'young incorporates all these issues [race, class, gender, sexual orientation, social transformation] fusing personal and political voices with artistry and conviction.' - t'cha dunlevy, the montreal gazette



feature article jamaican star - jamaica - 2009
some of the greatest stars you've never heard about by blakka ellis
<http://www.jamaica-star.com/thestar/20070815/cleisure/cleisure1.html>



cover article who's who in black canada - canada 2010
profiling excellence every day - d'bi young anitafrika
<http://www.whoswhoinblackcanada.com/2010/08/11/d'bi-young-anitafrika/>



cover article montreal mirror - quebec - 2010
bloodlines: d'bi.young continues her exploration of family, generations and lineage in benu at the Festival Voix d'Amériques
by neil boyce
<http://www.montrealmirror.com/2010/020310/theatre.html>



cover article sway magazine - toronto - 2009
d'bi young features on the cover of sway magazine power issue alongside Pinball Clemons, Hon. Margaret Best, and Austin Clarke
<http://www.hermannaudrey.com/sway-magazine>



cover article herizons - canada - 2005
passion for revolushun inspires dub poets by sheila nopper
<http://www.herizons.ca/node/193>



cover profile university of guelph - guelph - 2009
a pact with the universe by rebecca kendall
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/atguelph/10-02-24/profile.shtml>



cover article ottawa xpress - ottawa - 2010
Walk the bloodline by Jeremy Mesiano-Crookston
<http://www.ottawaxpress.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iidarticle=19428>

'it's all in the eyes. when dubpoet d'bi.young looks at you...the divine madness in her gaze reveals information far beyond what can be expressed through the limited palettes of speech and movement.' - chris hoile, eye weekly



feature article - the montreal hour - 2010

d'bi young's benu along: along bloodlines by mj stone
<http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?ilDArticle=19249>



art on black by d'bi.young book review

Young's multi-genred brilliance as a dub poet, actor and theatre creatrix lights any space she graces on fire.
<http://www.rabble.ca/books/reviews/dbiyoung226etms-revolution>



feature interview - eye weekly - 2008

Motherhood has always suited d'bi.young: teaching a writing workshop at the YWCA while breastfeeding; conducting this interview while musing about a broken breast pump.
<http://www.eyeweekly.com/interview/article/47836>



feature article - inside toronto - 2008

d'bi.young is an award-winning dub-poet, writer and theatre practitioner. The antiAFRIKA! dub theatre is an initiative born out of two years of professional development work with dub artist ahdrí zhina mandielá.
<http://www.insidetoronto.com/article/60782--local-theatre-open>



extra gleaner

Award-winning dub poet, writer, teacher and theatre practitioner d'bi.young has taken her passions for performing and community involvement one step further with the launch of her new arts initiative, anitAFRIKA! dub theatre.
http://www.gleanerextra.com/pub_display_note.asp?periodId=25&NotelD=271&SectionId=1

'to write about her stirring artistry makes anything i say about [d'bi.young] sound like hype since i feel compelled to at least hint at a comparison to bob marley...i don't mean to say that she sounds like him but that she channels the innovative spirit of his music and takes it into the 21st century.' - ron sakolsky, beat magazine



© Samuel Lalonde / d'bi.young performs *benu*

ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY, AND *BENU*: AN INTERVIEW... / by Holly Luhning 11

Dub poet and storyteller d'bi. young brought her play to Montreal's Théâtre La Chapelle this past February as part of an international tour. along with her plays and , is part of her Wombanfestro trilogy. *benu* tells the story of Sekesu, a woman who has recently given birth in a Toronto hospital. The birth triggers a series of physical and mental ailments in Sekesu, which unfold through a biomythographical narrative that parallels the mythology of the Egyptian predecessor to the phoenix—the *benu* bird. I attended a performance and talk-back session (d'bi holds them nightly with her audiences) and had the opportunity to speak with her about and the development of her work.

Holly: In Sekesu's sanity is questioned and/or perhaps compromised by the Toronto hospital to which she's admitted. Is that environment inhospitable, particularly with regard to concerns around birth, and lineage, women, and children?

d'bi: i don't think any place can be inhospitable to life. if we look at those places in the world that are defined as cosmopolitan, they're defined that way because the city is made up of a meeting place of cultures. and whether or not those cultures intersect or overlap is irrelevant for me. the fact that they are there, the fact that they exist, is enough for them to be acknowledged. so that whatever toronto is, i see it from a very specific perspective, as a black, queer, african jamaican, canadian, caribbean mother. a part of my framework—which is an oppression-awareness, intersectional framework—challenges me to acknowledge my privilege in the grand scheme of things, being an able-bodied woman, a working woman, an artist who gets a lot of support for her work, someone who speaks english. so the toronto that i know is so complex in terms of all the people who are there [...] i like feel my responsibility, my accountability is to name a toronto that in fact is quite broad and deep and filled with all kinds of perspectives so that my characters can exist there and engage with themselves, as well as engage with a legacy of colonialism, imperialism, shadeism, classism, racism, ablism, etcetera. any place on the planet that we exist as people has got to be open to dealing with us and all that we come with. because otherwise, i feel like i might continue to play into this idea that some things can't be done here, some things can be done there, when happiness really is as much [...] about environment [as it] is also about the individual, and an individual's own negotiation with self, which is where i'm at right now.

i feel like i've gone full cycle. black nationalist, feminist, deeply insecure about how i look, self-loathingist, i feel like i've run the gamut in terms of trying out all these external ways in which to know myself. i can talk about my society and my social conditioning [...] but how much room do i have to take to come back to a place of responsibility for my own self-perception? so i think that whether we're talking about toronto, montreal, south africa, jamaica, as an individual i've got to locate myself. there are parts of me that would be hard-pressed to survive in jamaica. there are parts of me that would be hard-pressed to survive in toronto. because that's how complex we are.

Holly: So you focus on an individual choice of how and what you know?

d'bi: yes. for example, everywhere you go, because we've become so violent as a species, violence is everywhere. i'm learning that i've got to create

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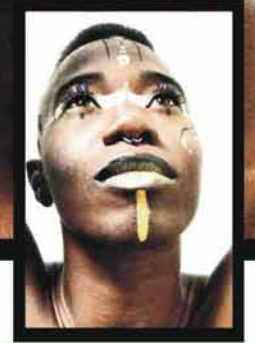
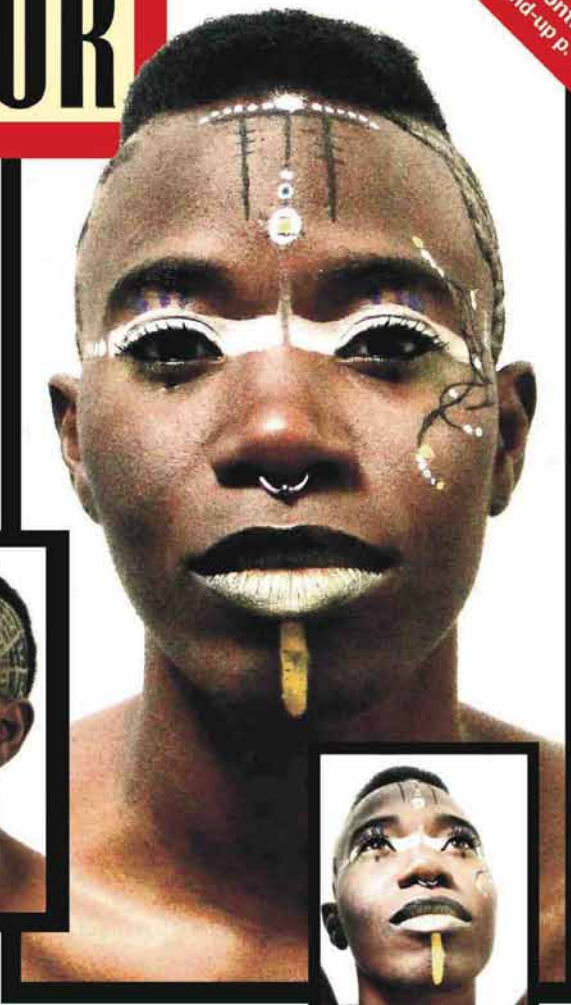
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MIRROR

Asking and telling
QUEBECOR

DUB WARRIOR

d'bi.young leads the charge
at Festival Voix d'Amériques
with her one-woman play *benu*
BY NEIL BOYCE



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A PASSION FOR REVOLUSHUN

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dub poet d'bi young

A New Generation of Word Warriors

A PASSION FOR REVOLUSHUN INSPIRES DUB POETS

by Sheila Nopper

nah-ee-lah and d'bi young are creating sparks with their word sounds. These second-generation dub poets—who are also noteworthy playwrights and actors—rhythmically fan those sparks into flames of resistance against injustice as they burn new pathways toward social liberation.

The roots of this poetic uprising were planted back in the 70s by nah-ee-lah and young's foremothers, who include Lillian Allen, Afua Cooper and ahdri zhina mandiel. Through their own artistic endeavours and community activism, these 'elder' dub poets inspired people of diverse cultural origins to stretch the boundaries of their creative expression. They took their rebelliously empowering art to the people by reciting their poems in the streets and in schools, as well as at protests; they confronted the Eurocentric gatekeepers of the art world to demand that their art form be taken seriously; and they helped develop the creative talents of aspiring poets, all the while finding an affinity with a wide variety of radical artists, musicians and community activists.

Allen and Cooper were the driving force behind the first International Dub Poetry Festival in 1993, as well as its June 2004 sequel, which featured an intergenerational range of women and firmly established Toronto as an epicentre of the "word sound power" movement worldwide. It was at this latest festival that I first encountered the stimulating performances of nah-ee-lah and d'bi.

Several tracks from nah-ee-lah's 2002 CD *Free Dome*—which received an award from the Urban Music Association of Canada—incisively expose the multi-layered and intertwined levels of white supremacy and sexist programming. One example is

"i c u too," in which she critiques the white male tendency to view black "womyn" as exotic creatures and, correspondingly, the wannabe kids who try to "dress like who they think i be."

On the track "real evolution," she reminds us of our individual responsibility to bring about change. Over the simulated sound of an old scratchy record, nah-ee-lah proclaims, "real evolution will not be covered packaged or broadcast/ in lies/ real evolution/ true revolution/ begins on the/ inside."

nah-ee-lah graciously explains that she is putting some of those ideas into practice in her personal life by learning "to listen a bit more and change how I speak to people." This, she explains emphatically, "is expanding the possibilities of my relationships and my ability to love." A recent example of that shift occurred when—despite her disappointments with academia, and bolstered by the encouragement of people she respects—she decided to persevere toward completing her master's program in Fine Arts (Theatre—Playwriting) at York University. Her critique of such so-called "institutions of higher learning" will no doubt be cleverly infused into the script of her thesis play, entitled "No Knowledge College." She expects she may one day be teaching at a university herself.

In a similar vein, nah-ee-lah has designed multimedia workshops on culture and language that examine the role of the dominant culture in repressing the creative expression of those it marginalizes. She is also enthusiastically preparing to launch a new production company that will coincide with the release of her next CD.

Born in Jamaica, d'bi young, a self-described "blackbushoomaan," grew up watching her mother,



FERNANDO MORALES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The poet, playwright, actress and AIDS activist, photographed on Roxborough Avenue in Toronto. A large tattoo of a thick snake runs from her shoulders all the way to her buttocks. 'It's part of my rebirth as a woman.'

THE HAMPSON INTERVIEW D'BI.YOUNG.ANITAFRIKA

A playwright with a new identity



What's in a name? For d'bi.young.anitafrika, SARAH HAMPSON writes, it means new beginnings and yet another way to shed a horrific past



I'm a woman! I'm biased! I love women. Women are amazing. Women have the children. And children are the future. I don't know how you can deny women, how you cannot love women. What do women do? We held society together!

On why her work focuses on feminist issues

From the age of 5 until she was 13, she was sexually molested by her aunt's husband. She only spoke about it to the women in her family when she was 13. "My family believed me," she says with a wide, childlike smile, adding that often there's so much denial that children's stories of abuse are dismissed. "It was the beginning of the knowing-myself process," she says. She is now 28.

For anyone who saw her Dora-nominated performance as a sexually abused teenager in the hit play *da Kink in My Hair* in 2004, it is not a surprise to discover that she knew the fear and shame of her character's experience. She outshone everyone in that play with monologues of compelling authenticity.

It was part of her effort to turn her pain into empowerment. "Doing a play like *da Kink* propelled me to such a place of healing," she explains. "And I'm really interested in that. I want to look at the ways in which our experiences shape us in to the people we are becoming. We have the chance to use those experi-

ences, not to foster bitterness and hatred, but to really focus on a complex understanding of humanity, how humanity works."

Dressed in colourful clothes and adorned with dangling grape-like earrings, a dramatic necklace, a silver ring in her nose and a curly mass of orange-dyed hair pulled on top of her head, she speaks in long, passionate passages. When I have to interrupt her, she shifts her to a different subject or ask for more explanation of something, it's like trying to stop rain or change the direction of wind. Her answers feel like purges.

"Make no mistake," she says at one point. "I am an angry person." When she tackles the subject of sexual abuse, she purposefully implicates herself, she explains. "I've learned that when you implicate yourself in the work, then there is not a hierarchy between the storyteller and the people you are talking to. For me to do that, it keeps me grounded in order to create the art, in order to have integrity with the art."

Young anitafrika grew up with

storytelling. Her mother, Anita Stewart, was a well-known dub poet in Jamaica in the seventies. Dub poetry is considered a branch of reggae music, using dubs or copies of existing music tracks as background to politically charged storytelling in the Jamaican dialect. When she was 4, young anitafrika started theatre school. She, too, is a dub poet, and is working on her fourth CD, *Kyky*. She has also published a book of poetry, *art on black*.

When her parents immigrated to Canada, they left their only child behind with her grandmother and aunt. At the age of 16, young anitafrika begged her mother to let her come to Toronto. She attended Jarvis Collegiate in downtown Toronto and later set off to study theatre and English literature at McGill University in Montreal. But she left the program after a year. She entered Concordia University, but dropped out of that institution as well. "I just wanted to get involved with the work [of writing], and I felt I was distracted by all the other stuff I had to do as a student," she says, throwing her head back with a laugh.

Convention has never been her strong suit.

For six years, she shaved her head as part of an exploration about society's and her own views on beauty.

Asked why, she laughs again, exclaiming, "I have issues, Sarah! We all have issues! I had this ugly-duckling syndrome when I was growing up. I had to purge it. I shaved my head because I had to strip down. Being bald is intense. People make all these assumptions about you, about your sexuality, your health, and it's different how you are treated. But I realized that people see what you emanate, both physically and spiritually, and I needed to grasp that."

Her decision to have a child on her own was also frowned upon. "People said, 'Oh, your career is taking off. You'll be limited.' But it's completely the opposite," she says. "My son has made me into the woman I am becoming."

Young anitafrika is interested in evolution. She is all about becoming. Her work has helped change her, but she looks for other ways to shed the past.

I ask if she has undergone any other personal rituals of exorcism, similar to her years of baldness. She laughs and swivels in her chair to show me her back. A large tattoo of a thick snake runs from her shoulders all the way to her buttocks. "It's part of my rebirth as a woman," she tells me, turning serious again. "Every seven years, cells change. I had this done just before my 28th birthday. It marks a new cycle of my humanity."

She laughs loudly again, slapping the table lightly with the palm of one hand. "Look," she says. "This idea that if you're political you have to be a certain way is not right." She grimaces, waving a hand in the air to dismiss any notion of doing what society dictates. "You have to enjoy your work. You have to have fun."

She draws a deep breath and looks out at the street. "On a daily basis, I think there's so much to be angry about," she says, apropos of nothing. Like what? "A look, a negation of some sort," she offers. A racial thing? "Or, you know, just my nose ring. Oh, people have trouble with this nose ring, Sarah!" she hoots. And so why did she put it in? "Because," she says with childlike exuberance, surprised I would even ask. "It's really, really beautiful."

blood.claat opens at Theatre Passe Muraille on Aug. 29 and runs until Sept. 10 (416-504-7529).

NATIONAL POST

TO20

TORONTO

NATIONAL POST, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2006



ON STAGE

The triumph of d'bi young

At 29, she exerts complete command



ROBERT CUSHMAN

Way to make a male theatre critic feel inadequate. Of the two shows before us, one, *blood.claat*, begins with a 15-year-old girl menstruating, and ends with the same girl giving birth. The other, *Menopause Out Loud*, is about what its title says it's about. So they might be said to be bookends. They are polar opposites in another respect. *Blood.claat* is astonishingly good. *Menopause Out Loud* is almost unbelievably bad.

I am writing about *blood.claat* in

the present tense since even though it isn't playing at the moment, it will unquestionably return. (It had a brief run this year at Theatre Passe Muraille, during which I was away, and it has just completed a two-week return season at the same house, of which I was able to catch only the penultimate performance.)

It's a one-actor play, written and performed by d'bi young, who also sings and, with extraordinary grace, dances. The principal setting is one of the poorest parts of Jamaica. The title refers to a cloth used for mopping up menstrual blood, something the heroine, mdugu, finds herself regularly doing, while dreading being upbraided by her grandmother for messing up her sheets, and lamenting the lack of "tampax tampon" available to richer people, especially those living in "foreign." "Foreign" to mdugu means especially Canada, which is where her mother is living and working, and which she calls "almost as good as foreign manhattan new york." (To be honest, I find all this lower-case stuff a pain, but it's how young writes, and if people from e.e. cummings to kd lang can get away with it, then so can she.)

Young plays about a dozen differ-



And then there's the incredibly bad *Menopause Out Loud*, which some people seem to find fun.

ent roles in the course of a short evening, and one of the most pungently entertaining is that of a Canadian immigration officer subjecting the mother to what the printed text calls an *interrogation*, and switching hilariously from suspicious inquiries about education and length of stay to routine inquiries about guns, drugs and perishable produce.

Mdugu herself is nearly as vocally versatile as her creator; she goes to "champion [actually Campion] college" where they teach her to talk like a British lady, and she changes in a mocking blink from Jamaican patois to the black BBC English that's practically the new cockney. She is a funny, highly intelligent young woman in a community that seems set, in varying measures, on supporting, oppressing and shaming her. Her grandmother is strict but loving. She has an evangelical aunt, violently opposed to her having a boyfriend, and an uncle who sexually abuses her. (This echoes the monologue in *Da Kink in My Hair*, which young hypnotically performed, but didn't write.)

The boyfriend, a wannabe DJ who dreams of touring Japan, is affectionate except that he won't touch her when she's "unclean." The linking theme is blood, and it has violent manifestations; the stammering driver of mdugu's school bus, wild with frustration, lashes out with a machete. It also has benevolent, even redemptive, manifestations, which the author links to Jamaican history and African myth.

Here, intellectually, she loses me; all the same, these scenes provide some of the evening's most powerful sights and sounds. The play's gesture is to take the shame off the fact or idea of blood, or to take the curse off the curse.

It's the contemporary scenes in Jamaica (and briefly in Canada) that live in the mind as they do on the stage, written and performed as they are with pinpoint precision. Young's pathos can be terrifying, and her warmth is enchanting. She has, at 29, complete command of her physical medium and of her audience. The only doubt there can be about her at present concerns her ability to connect with other actors, since in what we've seen so far she hasn't had to try. She does, though, connect magnificently with her accompanying drummer and singer, Amina Alfred, whose contribution is invigorating and incalculable. The direction, by Weyni Mengesha, is imaginative and superbly tight. When the show comes back, don't, as I so nearly did, miss it.

Menopause Out Loud is about four female stereotypes in a New York department store. An actress (small-time), an executive (stressed), a hippie (ex) and a housewife (lowan) meet up in Bloomingdale's (go, product placement) and discuss, or rather trade one-liners about, the changes wrought by the change. There is no discernible sequence to the subjects they mention, or even to the floors they visit; they seem to be going up and down in the elevator like yo-yos. This is

that awful modern mutation: the Revue with a Theme. (Let's hear it for the Upper Case.) In other words, it has neither plot nor characters, and it keeps making the same joke.

Actually it has two jokes; the other one is musical. The characters, and the target audience, are Baby Boomers, and the show puts new lyrics, staggeringly forced and feeble, to hits from the '60s and '70s as if this were hilarious in itself. The wittiest it gets is "In the guest room or on the sofa, my husband sleeps at night." Far more typical is the disinterment of *Puff the Magic Dragon* as "puff, my God, I'm draggin'." For some reason, Irving Berlin's *Heat Wave* (1933) is allowed in (as, you guessed, "I'm having a hot flash").

Anyway, after an hour and a half of kvetching, the characters suddenly go affirmative on us, the pretext being that the three urbanites have introduced the out-of-towner to vibrators. Talk about a climax. This leads to an ensemble anthem called *Girl Friend* (to the tune, perplexingly, of YMCA). The ladies in the audience are invited, or ordered, to get up on stage and join in, and they do. And since they seemed, both then and earlier, to be enjoying themselves, the show has obviously found its target audience, and who am I to deny them their fun? (*Blood.claat* is a niche show, too, but with a more restorative effect on non-members.)

The professional performers — Alana Bridgewater, Jayne Lewis, Nicole Robert, Rose Ryan — are very professional, at least in the musical bits. Their spoken words sound

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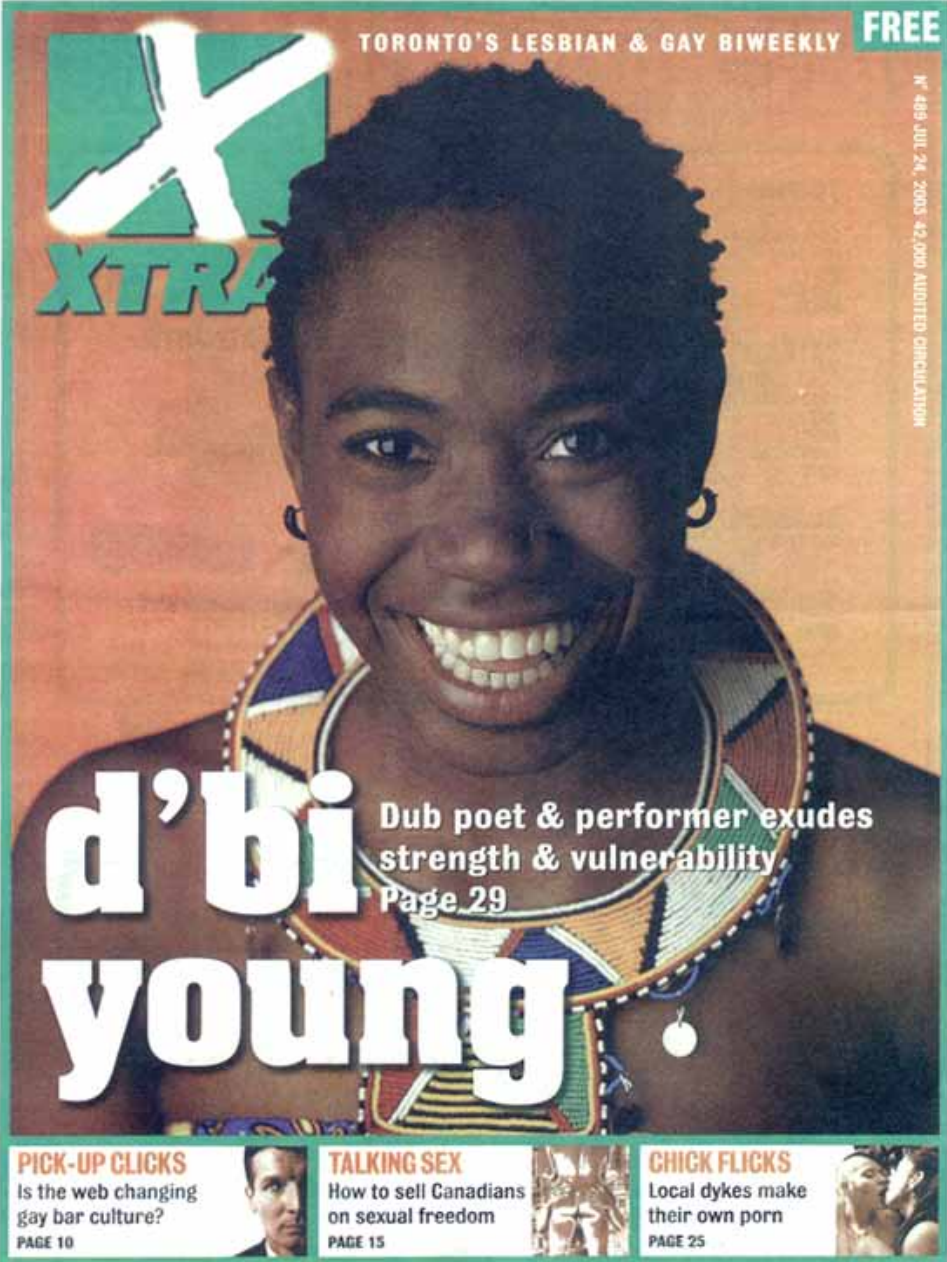
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d'bi young
Dub poet & performer exudes strength & vulnerability
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XTRA! TORONTO'S LESBIAN & GAY BIWEEKLY

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS



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Star Gazing

Spellbinding no matter how you spell it



Rita Zekas

d'bi young is a unique talent.

She is a show stopper in *da Kink in My Hair* at the Princess of Wales Theatre even though no one in the audience can understand a word she is saying.

OK, a slight exaggeration. If you speak Jamaican patois, you're in the loop, young is a dub poet from Jamaica and you are not.

When she stands up there in her little pleated skirt and delivers her monologue as young schoolgirl Stacey-Anne, relating the horrific tale of being sexually abused by her stepfather, the audience is spellbound.

Kink is set in Novelette's hair salon, where the local women come and let their hair down. The show has been so embraced by Toronto audiences, it has been held over until March 13 and may very well be extended again.

Jamaican-born young is just 28 and new mother to 9-month-old son **moon**, who is never far from her at the theatre. She is over the moon about moon, whose name had nothing to do with **Frank Zappa**.

"I named him moon because of the necessary balance with feminine energy, its relationship with the sea and moon," she explains, in regular English. "I felt like I named the child years ago; I wanted a child a long time ago."

If her child were a girl, she would also have named her "moon."

Her mother named her **Debbie**, in the conventional spelling, after two friends — one flamboyant, the other a bookworm — but young adapted it to its present spelling herself.

"I changed it a couple of years ago," she says. "The spelling 'd'bi' reminds me of Africa, the African phonetics."

young came to Canada when she was almost 16. She studied English literature at McGill and theatre at Concordia. "I come from a storytelling family," she explains. "My mom is one of the premier poets in Jamaica. I started theatre school at 5 years of age and did dub poetry at 13."

Stacey-Anne's Jamaican patois was originally written by **trey anthony**, the author of *Kink*.

"What you hear is a translation and what I do depends on the audience every night," young explains. "I will translate the piece so people will understand. I'll round out different sounds, but the monologue is so committed to my body, that I can do it on the sly. Sometimes the decision won't be made

until one-third of the monologue.

"I'll make the choices to make the story understandable and true to this woman, who is Jamaican-born and but raised in Canada so she slips back into the language. It gives me room to play without discrediting Stacey-Anne. What they don't get linguistically, they understand emotionally."

A monologue on child abuse is emotionally wrenching, she concedes. But it is also empowering.

"Each night, it is really a transformative experience for me," young insists. "It's so honouring of women. The piece allows me to come through the journey even where Stacey-Anne is not safe. The audience expects me to carry them and I expect them to carry me. I am cradled always by the audience; I have never felt left out or unheard."

"The audience understands what it means not to have a voice and be robbed of your innocence through a lover or friend. In the monologue's transition to pain, there is solidarity and the theatre becomes a village where everyone is related. The experience unifies people in an emotional and spiritual way."

That said, young acknowledges that she experiences a frisson of fear every time she delivers the monologue.

"The newness and rawness of the material make it a fearful event but I've seen how I've grown and changed: I continue to work on the process of becoming a storyteller. There is an air of risk and that's necessary. At the end, there is a catharsis, an incredible journey. It would be different if we left her there but we heal, man."

young also plays the role of Claudette, who is diametrically opposed to Stacey-Anne. Claudette is Novelette's niece and supposedly helping out in the shop. She is sexy, sassy and flamboyant. Stacey-Anne has a shaved head, Claudette is a bold and brassy blonde, sucking on a lollipop and dispensing attitude along with shampoo. A man magnet.

"I love Claudette," young laughs. "She is my alter ego. That's who I would be if I stayed in Jamaica. She's incredibly in touch with her sexuality — a dance hall queen in touch with her body. Claudette would be happy in a dance hall, not being a hair washer in a salon."

The lollipop was a piece of business director Weyni Mengesha came up with. When young put the wig on her shaved head, the character fell into place. But something was missing.

"I was really missing my mouth," young says. "Claudette is very oral. Could I have some gum?"

"You so need a lollipop," Weyni said.

The shaved head has become young's signature. "I had dreads for awhile but I've had a shaved head for five years. I shaved my head because I had self-esteem stuff and needed a little bit of a

kick in the ass. One day I said, 'This shit has got to go. I'm hiding behind it.'

"When I shaved my head, people were calling me 'sir.' If you're not super feminine with earrings and makeup, people will think you are asexual. Or I'm a lesbian or butch. I really dig it; I like how people treat me. I find people take me really seriously without me saying anything. I enjoy being bald and they worked it into the play."

In the sitcom *Lord Have Mercy*, young, who was then billed as **Debbie Young**, played another schoolgirl, Crystal. But the only thing she shared with Stacey-Anne was her baldness.

"I was Crystal, who is 16 and thinks she is bisexual," young recalls. "She is crazy, outgoing, rebellious, brilliant and selfish as they come. She writes her own music and wants to be lead in the choir but her idea was to talk about how bad Christianity is. Then she got pregnant and had an abortion. She's not cotton candy." Or a lollipop either.



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d'bi young and her son, moon, play in the lobby of the Princess of Wales Theatre.

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