

# Company Collaborators Come Out on Top

Two prominent young artists get set for opening THE BLUEST EYE

Great collaborations in theatre often take months or years of planning, but sometimes, all the pieces just seem to fall together. Company One's Boston premiere of THE BLUEST EYE, pairing nationally renowned playwright Lydia Diamond with Company One standout director Summer L. Williams, is one that – although there was no lack of hard work in the setup – was bound to happen.

The Company was long in the waiting for a stage adaptation of the Toni Morrison modern classic, which highlights the effect of racism on one young girl's life. But when that adaptation finally surfaced in the form of a Steppenwolf commissioned piece penned by Lydia Diamond, the company's shot at rights to produce the piece were bleak. According to core Company One member and THE BLUEST EYE director, Summer L. Williams "This is when the stars began to align."

After pursuing the playwright vigilantly to no avail, Williams, who is a Brookline High School teacher by day, embarked on a West coast trip to attend an educational workshop in Eugene, OR. Little did she know that this cross-country jaunt would ultimately complete her quest to contact Diamond and kick off the long-hoped-for collaboration. "One of my colleagues introduced me to another educator from Harvard that had been on our flight and was presenting at the conference. His name- John Diamond. He shook my hand and said, 'You're the woman who's been calling my wife!'"

The two struck up a friendship and Williams, of course, then had an "in" to contacting the busy playwright. Armed with Lydia Diamond's cell phone number, Williams finally got in touch and the two are now forming a close artistic bond. "I love that I can call Lydia and discuss things with her. I'm glad that she wants to be involved and that we, as a Company, are able to work with young dynamic playwrights of color. I am honored to have her as a co-conspirator!" Williams says of Diamond.

The production is a landmark for Williams, who has had several successful directing turns with the company, directing the Elliot Norton Award-winning production of Stephen Adly Guirgis' JESUS HOPPED THE 'A' TRAIN in 2003; Ntozake Shange's controversial SPELL # 7; last summer's wildly popular production of THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT; and several segments of the company's 10-year revival of Anna Deavere Smith's TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES, 1992. THE BLUEST EYE, however, is the first time Williams has had the chance to work directly with a playwright to inform her directorial work. "Lydia obviously knows the piece better than anyone," says Williams, "and that perspective is invaluable."

For Diamond, this production is equally important. Though she's been produced at major regional theatres around the U.S., Company One's production of THE BLUEST EYE is the first fully-produced work for Diamond in Boston. Speaking on this point, Diamond, who considers herself a "Chicago-grown, Boston-based" playwright, had this to say: "It's thrilling. For the first time, people I interact with on a daily basis - colleagues, students and friends - will be able to see what I do. They all know that I'm a playwright, some people have even been able to make the trek to various cities to see my work... but it will be nice to have it accessible to [those in Boston]."

Company One's production of THE BLUEST EYE is the Boston premiere for the piece, which was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Co. and has already been produced by Theatre Alliance, Washington, D.C.; Playmakers Repertory Co., Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Plowshares Theatre Company, Detroit, Michigan and is part of the upcoming season for Hartford Stage and Providence Black Rep.

"Company One is a theatre that I respect," says Diamond, "and it is lovely to know that this play in such good hands. I trust Summer and know that the work will be intelligent and respectful and elegant, because I find her to be all of those things."

*THE BLUEST EYE runs from October 26 through November 17 at the Boston Center for the Arts. To arrange coverage or interviews, please contact Mason Sand at 617.230.6753 or msand@companyone.org.*