“If you want to know a black woman, you touch her hair,” says Novelette, as she delves into the tresses and stresses of her clients to reveal their hidden stories.

Set in a Caribbean hair salon in Toronto, ‘*da Kink in my Hair*’ gives voice to eight black women who tell their unforgettable stories in a kaleidoscope of drumming, singing and dance. It is a testament to the challenges and triumphs in the lives of contemporary black women, many of whom are immigrants to North America from the Caribbean. Mixing laughter and tears, revelation and inspiration, the unapologetically intense stories of each woman are woven together in this powerful piece.

The salon is presided over by the languorous Novelette who serves as the catalyst for each woman’s disclosure. Patsy is the epitome of rage and grief as she relives her son’s shooting at a high school dance. Sherelle is at the top of her game in the financial field, wielding power and influence. Under Sherelle’s confident façade lies a loneliness that consumes her. Shawnette finds herself incredulously watching her husband and his posh new wife enjoying a luxurious new life, after supporting his years of study with double-shifts and uncomplaining toil. Closted actress Sharmaine has a stage-mother who has been behind her every step of the way in a hard-fought march toward artistic achievement. But she finds herself abandoned by her mother who cannot come to terms with her sexuality. Canadian winters are an exciting shock to little Staci-Anne, a newly arrived immigrant from Jamaica. She misses her grandmother back home, but she has a secret to tell, and reveals a harrowing tale of incest as she longs for safety but fears expulsion from the country she has come to love. Nia confronts her ambivalent feelings about her recently-deceased mother, who always preferred the sister with lighter skin. Finally, Miss Enid is the widowed septuagenarian who gets her groove back, giving a little sweet potato pie to her neighbour, and getting’ some good lovin’ in return.

**Very, very funny! Infectious music... serious, vibrant, hopeful, joyous!**  
- *National Post*

**The best thing about ‘da Kink is that is gives these women and these stories a rare outing in public life, and rarer still on our stages. Ms. Anthony knows how to structure each monologue... that’s the essence of the play.”**  
- *Globe & Mail*
Production History

'\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' made its first full-length dramatic debut at the Toronto Fringe Festival in July 2001. The play was produced by Plaatime Entertainment (Trey Anthony's Production and Entertainment Company). The "buzz" that this was the show to see caught on quickly and it sold-out every night, with people lining up for hours ahead of the show to get tickets. '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' was hailed by the Toronto Sun as the "Pick of the Fringe!", was recognized by NOW Magazine with both a "Critic's Pick" and the Best Ensemble Cast of the Fringe mention, and also boasted the highest ticket sales of the Fringe.

On the tails of the Toronto Fringe success, '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' was restaged at the Toronto Harbourfront Centre as part of the Black History Kuumba Festival and then at the New York Fringe Festival. At the New York Fringe it was selected out of 196 Productions as "The Pick of the New York Fringe", and the cast was later invited back to New York to perform a private showcase for NBC.

In 2003, Theatre Passe Muraille selected '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' to close its 25th Anniversary season. The play opened to rave reviews, ran for three weeks to sold-out audiences setting record box office sales, and was nominated for four Dora Awards (Toronto's Theatre Awards).

In 2005, Mirvish Productions decided to get Kinky! On January 11 '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' opened at the prestigious 2,000-seat Princess of Wales Theatre, Canada’s largest commercial theatre, making it the first Canadian play to grace that stage. Again, the show was an instantaneous hit playing to sold out houses. Due to demand, the play had to be extended five times.

'\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' celebrated its US premiere later that year at the renowned San Diego Repertory Theater on September 16, 2005. The production garnered four NAACP awards including Best Playwright.

In the fall of 2006, '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' premiered in the UK at the Hackney Empire Theatre, where there is now a full UK tour in development, set to premiere in the 2010-11 season. There is also a Toronto revival production set for 2010-11.

The script of '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' was published in the anthology \textit{Testifyin} edited by Djanet Sears.

And in the fall of 2007, the television series '\textit{da Kink in my Hair}' premiered on Global TV. It is now enjoying a second successful season, and there is talk of the show being picked up for distribution in the US.

\begin{quote}
...I have rarely seen such a response from the audience, with cheers and rounds of applauds throughout the show and a standing ovation culmination...
\end{quote}
- \textit{The Stage, London, UK}
Awards

- **Best Director** – NAACP Award (2005)
- **Best Ensemble Cast** – NAACP Award (2005)
- **Best Playwright** – NAACP Award (2005)
- **Best Sound** - NAACP Award (2005)
- **The Pick of the New York Fringe Award** – New York Fringe Festival (2002)
- **Pick of the Fringe** – Toronto Sun (2001)
- **Critic’s Pick of the Fringe** – Now Magazine (2001)
- **Best Ensemble Cast of the Fringe** – Now Magazine (2001)

- Nominations:
  - **Four Dora Mavor Moore Awards** (2003)

…’da Kink made waves in its native Canada earlier this year, holding over five times at a Toronto theatre [Mirvish Productions]…it’s a thoroughly stage-worthy cavalcade of imagery and social import, riveting our pause onto matters of life and death and back again. Very, very good...
- *San Diego Beat*

Delivered with exuberance by talented Canadian actors...
Critic’s choice: Top 5 plays
- *London Evening Standard*
Trey Anthony, Creator/Writer/Lead Actor

Born in England and trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and George Brown College, Anthony is a Canadian comedian, playwright and performer who launched her career as a regular on the Canadian comedy circuit. She began doing stand-up comedy at Yuk Yuk’s and has performed as well at Second City and produced Canada’s first Urban Womyn’s Comedy Festival, ‘dat girl sho is funny!. She was also a writer for The Chris Rock Show.

Anthony’s first theatrical play was the award-winning critical and popular hit stage production ‘da Kink in my Hair. Other stage productions include the recent hit I Am Not A Dinner Mint and The Crap Women Swallow To Stay in A Relationship, which debuted to packed houses and critical acclaim in the Summer of 2006. Anthony is currently working on a new play entitled Black Mothers Don’t Say I Love You and has just completed a playwright residency at the prestigious Canadian Stage Theatre Company. Critics have referred to Trey Anthony as “The Oprah of the Canadian theatre scene!”

Anthony is also the Executive Producer, Co-creator and Writer of the hit television show ‘da Kink in my Hair for Global Television. In the series she plays the outspoken, wise-cracking, Joy, who has become an audience favourite. As a television producer, Anthony’s resume also includes work with the Women’s Television Network and CTV.

Currently, Anthony is busy writing her first fictional novel, Bastards Eat mint Chocolate Chip Idea Cream, and in January 2009, Trey co-founded the Trey Anthony @ One Centre, a creative wellness centre for women dedicated to nurturing “the whole woman” and celebrating all women’s beauty, both inside and out.

Ambitiously poignant and amusingly elevating, this kink needs no straightening whatsoever.
- Toronto Stage
The Television Series

A one-hour television pilot based on the play ‘da Kink in My Hair’ was produced in 2004 by VisionTV's Cultural Diversity Drama Competition. The pilot starred Sheryl Lee Ralph as Novelette, Shakira Harper as her daughter Michelle, Kim Roberts as Verena, Mimi Kuzyk as Novelette’s friend and client Iris, Trey Anthony as Novelette’s sister Joy, and Ngozi Paul, James Codrington and Richard Chevolleau as stylists working at Letty's.

A half-hour weekly series adaptation began airing on Global Television Network in the 2007-08 television season. The series cast includes Ordena Stephens, Trey Anthony, Ngozi Paul, Richard Fagon, Natalie Johnson and Conroy Stewart.

The show was an instant hit, especially in Canada's largest and most multicultural television markets. CBC Television's Sophie was the year's highest-rated new Canadian sitcom based on national ratings, although in the markets where 'da Kink in My Hair' performed most strongly, it attracted higher ratings than Sophie.

Global announced on March 20, 2008 that the show would be renewed for a second season: “Expect twists at every turn this season. Novelette is romantically involved with Richard, whose ex-wife is determined to fight for her man! Her vivacious sister Joy makes her return to Letty’s Salon, causing havoc and making jokes along the way. The wide eyed beauty Starr is still trying to fit in and her romantic misadventures make her the talk of the salon.” The second season premiered on Global February 12, 2009.

...The energy and the performances can’t be beat. You go, girls.

★★★★ (4 Stars)
- Now Magazine (Toronto)
The best thing about ‘da Kink is that it gives these women and these stories a rare outing in public life, and rarer still on our stages. Ms. Anthony knows how to structure each monologue economically and how to give each woman a language and a character of her own... that’s the essence of the play.

- The Globe and Mail

Delivered with exuberance by talented Canadian actors, these linked monologues of female black suffering and resilience have a charm that’s more inclusive than their subject matter would suggest. Set in a black hair salon, the kink of the title is a metaphor for the individuality of each woman whose locks pass under the hands of the strong, emotionally available stylist Novelette. Writer Trey Anthony keeps up a consistent pattern of narrative throughout, moving from painful confession to hopeful self-assertion.

- Nicholas de Jongh, London Evening Standard
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on Nov. 14, 2006
NATIONAL POST

Very, very funny! Infectious music... the stories resonate for all of us... serious, vibrant, hopeful, joyous! Well worth a visit. I recommend it!

- The National Post

SUN

... the monologues -- which range dark-to-light -- remain the reason to see 'da Kink. Their authenticity of voice, from the Caribbean patois to the frustrations to the "go girl" moments, are the play's soul, and it runs on all cylinders when the women's stories are being told unadorned.

It's not always an easy fit, but the onetime Fringe fest darling 'da Kink In My Hair has made the major-league jump to the cavernous Princess Of Wales theatre with its soul intact and a slightly more grown-up point of view.

The play, about an Eglinton Ave.-based West Indian hairdresser who can access her customers' lives with a touch of their hair, was born of a series of often-dark monologues by comedian Trey Anthony. It opened Tuesday as the first Canadian play ever to be produced at the Mirvishes' mega-barn, complete with dance numbers, songs and production values.

The pumping-up has helped the play in lightening its heart, giving some of the most harrowing stories a tone of celebration with a song.

... There are great sensual moments in 'da Kink's text, including full-bodied Quancetia Hamilton as Shawnette (a character from the original play). Shawnette re-lives a life working as a cleaner to put her man through medical school -- a reminiscence replete with images of sex as a food fantasy ("He'd put his hands on me, kneading chocolate dough") and dreams of the good life -- only to see him end up with a woman better suited to his new position in life.

And these many productions later, the standout remains d'bi.young's aching and wonderfully kinetic portrayal of the Jamaican girl Stacey-Anne, who moves to Canada to rejoin her long-lost mother and her sinister stepfather/benefactor/molester "Missah Brown." ...

- Jim Slote, Toronto Sun

This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on Jan. 20, 2005
STAGE

...I have rarely seen such a response from the audience, with cheers and rounds of applauds throughout the show and a standing ovation culmination...

‘da Kink in My Hair is like a black version of Vagina Monologues and equally powerful with an outstanding cast. The play is a riot of dance, music, song, comedy and tragedy which centres around 12 women who ooze inner strength and sensuality.

It touches on all imaginable issues, ranging from child molesting to gay prejudice, under the overarching female problem of a bad hair day. The play has a universal reach...

The often hear-wrenching monologues are powerful and captivating.

...the actresses are spectacular, vibrant, sexy, funny, real and absolutely believable, engaging the audience to interact with them.

d’bi.young as Claudette is fantastically expressive, Satori Shakoo as Miss Enid is hugely funny and endearing, Lisa Cordington has bags of character, while Quancetia Hamilton as Shawnette is strong yet vulnerable and fabulously at ease with her voluptuous size.

The set, the lighting, the choreography, the music - everything is great and adds to a truly touching and entertaining show that is well worth going to see.

- Irja Uusitalo, The Stage (London, UK)
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared Nov. 10, 2006.

...’da Kink made waves in its native Canada earlier this year, holding over five times at a Toronto theatre [Mirvish Productions]; it’s stormed the fringe circuit and may go to Canadian TV. For now, it’s a thoroughly stage-worthy cavalcade of imagery and social import, riveting our pause onto matters of life and death and back again. Very, very good...
Patsy’s pregnant, and she hasn’t told anybody but her husband and God. The latter, of course, copped to the news a while back. He’s so tight with Patsy that he’s singling her out for another fling at the motherhood routine.

It’s a gigantic windfall, the natural extension of Patsy’s gargantuan, old-timey religious fervour—that and the fact that her firstborn took eight fatal bullets at a high-school dance, for reasons never to be determined. That’s a pretty fair characterization of one of seven instalments from ‘da Kink in My Hair, a U.S. premiere that opens the San Diego Repertory Theatre’s 30th season.

...Once the door to that repository is opened, the monologues follow in profusion. Yeah, their content is largely predictable (they deal with topics like two-timing mates, corporate slavery, elder courtship, gang violence, sexual repression and child abuse), but that content is thus as identifiable as the customers. And while the subjects may strike some as banal, the anecdotes, and their language, certainly won’t.

The author digs deep for the humour and lush allegory that yields Shawnette (San Diego native Lisa H. Payton), who put her ungrateful man through medical school—during the lean times, she clucks, “a can of tuna was an appetizer, a three-course meal and a midnight snack.” Patsy (Karen Robinson) disconsolately figures that her son’s assailants might have been after his brown coat, which even amid its unerring beauty couldn’t stem the wave of blood. And slow-witted Caribbean immigrant Stacey Anne (d’bi. young) routinely struggles to focus on the mental image of her beloved Granny “until [her stepfather] Mr. Brown finishes” exacting the measure of his chilling perversions.

- Martin Jones Westlin, San Diego City Beat
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on Feb. 21, 2006

NOW

What a treat to see a stage full of black women acting up a storm! Trey Anthony’s series of monologues set in a beauty salon, ‘da Kink in My Hair, allows six women the chance to reveal their inner lives, hopes and tragedies. Anthony herself twines it all together as the comic owner of the salon, and those around her deliver monologues from the heart.

...The energy and the performances can’t be beat. You go, girls.

★★★★ (out of five)

- Jon Kaplan, Now Magazine (Toronto)
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared July 12, 2001.
Strong cast tressed to kill

"Black boys are in danger of being extinct," pleads Patsy, a mother whose son has been shot eight times, and one of the seven women whose monologues make up Trey Anthony's poignant 'da Kink in my Hair. Patsy is talking about black-on-black crime, but she might as well be referring to current black theatre in Toronto, where the more exciting work is coming from women, relegating black male playwrights to the bottom rungs of the creative ladder.

‘da Kink itself is a full-scale celebration of the lives of black women on- and off-stage. Its setting is a women's hair salon, its cast is all-female and its issues are not just black-specific but black-women-specific.

Quancetia Hamilton gets the monologues up and running with the story of Shawnette, a woman who put her husband through medical school, only to be left behind. Raven Dauda delivers an emotional ticking bomb as Sharmaine, an actor who recounts her mother's rejection of her life as a lesbian. And so on, touching on issues as diverse as black women in the workplace, sexual abuse and passing for white.

... What brings ‘da Kink to glorious life is a cast of women who are not just supremely talented but made of sturdier stuff.

- Kamal Al-Solaylee, EYE Weekly
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on Jan. 13, 2005. .

Its title notwithstanding, the ongoing success of 'da Kink in my Hair has a whole lot more to do with heart than it does with hair.

... Even though 'da Kink's success has more to do with heart than hair, it turns out that playwright Anthony has used hair, specifically the hair of women of colour, as an avenue to take us into their hearts.

Her story is set in a neighbourhood beauty parlour that caters to the needs of black women. The thing that sets this particular establishment apart from thousands like it, however, is the particular skill of its proprietress, Novelette, played with rather broad naiveté by the playwright. It's a skill that has little to do with lotions and potions, predicated as it is on her ability to "read" a client simply by touching her hair.

As a consequence, each time Novelette touches the hair of a client in her salon, it launches a deeply personal monologue.

It's a simple conceit, but it allows Anthony, the playwright, to take us into the hearts and minds of some extraordinary ordinary women...

The end result is an impressive showcase of an exciting new theatrical voice.
'da Kink in my Hair is good enough -- honest enough – to ensure 'da spring in your step as you leave. And that's pretty damn fine.

- John Coulbourn, Toronto Sun
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on June 14, 2003.

Young Dream Do-right ‘do

‘da Kink in My Hair has lots of soul in lots of ways...

...Set in a West Indian hair salon, Trey Anthony’s series of monologues high-lights black women’s experiences – sexual, racial and social – in their own community and beyond. At the start the shop’s owner, Novelette (Anthony), the red-haired mistress of her domain, explains that a woman stores her emotions in her hair. As the manipulates the locks of six customers, their poetic stories spill out, often starting with a light or comic tone and segueing into more serous territory.

...Ultimately this lyrical, entertaining show is about healing and self-acceptance...

- Jon Kaplan, Now Magazine
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared on June 19, 2003.

THE SHOW: ‘da Kink in My Hair by trey anthony (no caps, please!), a play with music (composed, arranged and supervised by e’Marcus Harper); additional music by Weyni Mengesha

THE SCOOP: Terrific performances, some heart-rending or gut-wrenching stories. This American premiere is a great way to kick off the Rep’s 30th anniversary; they are, indeed, as they claim, “San Diego’s most inclusive theater.”

THE BACKSTORY: A hit at the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2001, the piece made the rounds at the Atlantic Fringe and the New York Fringe. In 2003, it had a successful run at Toronto’s prestigious Princess of Wales Theatre. Director Marion J. Caffey (who brought his own female-centric shows, “Three Mo’ Divas” and “Cookin’ at the Cookery,” to the Rep) saw it and loved it....

THE STORY: Set in a Toronto hair salon frequented by a range of black (mostly Caribbean) women, the play offers an opportunity for each to tell her story. All are struggling with self-acceptance and the recognition of others. The tales emerge when Novelette, the salon owner, touches their hair. She says she can tell what’s going on in their lives, because black women “store all their joy, pain, hurt and dreams in their hair.”
...Then there’s the fascinating subject of “shade-ism,” present in many communities of color, where whichever hair or skin-tone is closest to white is favored. Even this segment smacks of universalism; any woman can relate to a sister who got preferential treatment because she was thinner or smarter or straighter...

THE PLAYERS: Writer/former stand-up comic Anthony pays tribute to her Jamaican heritage in the character of Novelette, who’s brassy and sassy. But she could do more for her beleaguered clients than just listen. She should give them a new hairdo, for one thing, to help them to get a fresh start after they bare their souls and find some healing. Anthony is the only one in the cast who doesn’t sing and dance. In the former category, local vocal knockout Lisa Payton is the standout, and in the dance department, it’s the striking-looking, rubber-limbed d’bi. young (no caps!) who is equally good at hip-hop and African tribal rhythms. Payton does a touching, bluesy turn as Shawnette, who worked herself raw to put her husband through med school, only to be dumped when he’s done. Not a new story, but beautifully enacted. Young’s harrowing tale of stepfather sexual abuse is intense and unnerving.

...Karen Robinson does rich and wonderful work as Sister Patsy, the prim church-lady who’s trying desperately to deal with the senseless, street-violence murder of her young son. Sherelle (Tanya Tatum) is a high-power, over-extended investment banker, straining against a glass ceiling and losing her grip; Sharmaine is a TV star (“The Young and the Heartless”) who has a sexual secret to reveal; and Nia (Abena Malika) confronts her ambivalent feelings about her recently-deceased mother, who always preferred the sister with lighter skin. What shakes the rafters and brings down the house is the only really upbeat story – Satori Shakoor as Miss Enid, the widowed septuagenarian who gets her groove back, giving a little sweet potato pie to her neighbor, and getting’ some good lovin’ in return. “Sweet Potato Pie” is also one of the strongest musical numbers, which are lightly interspersed through the action and range from blues to R&B, reggae to gospel to hip hop...

THE LOCATION: San Diego Repertory Theatre, through October 16.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Best Bet

- Pat Launer, San Diego Theatre Scene
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared Sept. 23, 2005.

NORTH COUNTY TIMES

’da Kink is a buoyant, funny, provocative...entertaining evening of theatre

As Toronto hairstylist Novelette tells it, the secret of a black woman's joys, pain, dreams and sexual fantasies is hidden in the kink of her hair.

Those secrets get a high-energy workout in Trey Anthony's confessional-style play with music, ‘da Kink in my Hair,' now in its U.S. premiere with San Diego Repertory Theatre.

Colorfully staged by Marion J. Caffey and brought to life by Anthony (Novelette) and a terrific cast...

...Anthony premiered ‘da Kink in my Hair in Toronto two years ago, where she works as an actress and comedian. Originally a one-woman play, ‘da Kink has been expanded into a full-cast show with new music by e'Marcus Harper and Weyni Mengesha.

...Although based on the experiences of Anthony and her fellow Canadians of West Indies descent, ’da Kink could as well be the story of black American women. It’s a bluesy and frank look at the challenges these women
face in their everyday lives.

Each client at Novelette's salon has a surprise hiding in the kink of her hair, which the clairvoyant Novelette uncovers the moment she lays fingers to their scalps.

There's Shawnette, who put her man through college only to be dumped for a white woman; Sharmaine, a famous soap opera star who's a closet lesbian; Nia, who can't grieve for the mother who hated her "blackness"; Sherelle, the overachieving corporate executive who's become suicidal; Patsy, the pastor's wife whose teenage son was shot to death; Miss Enid, the 80something granny who's found love late in life; and Stacey Anne, a young girl molested by her mother's boyfriend.

After divining their secrets, Novelette coaxes, counsels and comforts each of her customers, then sends them on their way.

...Karen Robinson gives a devastatingly true performance of grief as the pastor's wife, Patsy, and Tanya Tatum exudes raw pain as the troubled executive Sherelle. But it is Satori Shakoor who provides the evening's greatest delight as the randy granny Miss Enid. With her tottering walk, support hose and gray bouffant, it's giddily hilarious to find out what she's cooking up (besides sweet potato pie) with her widowed neighbor, Charlie. As the dumped Shawnette, Lisa H. Payton has the show's best singing voice and she uses it effectively in a powerful musical solo about the man who done her wrong. And Ashanti Johnson is diva-esque as the lesbian TV star Sharmaine.

Abena Malika oozes festering anger as Nia, a young woman whose late mother always preferred her light-skinned sister. And D'Bi Young is a tightly coiled bolt of energy as the young Stacey Anne. Young also plays the outspoken Jamaican-born salon employee Claudette, and she raps and dances in West African style with amazing fluidity.

- Pam Kragen, North County Times
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared Sept. 21, 2005.

Curtain Up

...The show reminds a little of the divulgences of The Vagina monologues but ‘da Kink in my Hair is much better in that the stories are more rounded, bleaker in places and never mawkish.

Trey Anthony's formula is a simple but effective one. Using the device of a black woman's hairdressing salon, she tells the stories of a variety of woman (and I promise at least one will speak to you) which will strike a note of empathy and understanding. Each woman is accorded her centre stage, her monologue, her chance to put her version of events as they occurred.

‘da Kink in my Hair comes to the Hackney Empire, the London Borough where, now a resident of Canada, Trey Anthony was born. From its beginnings in 2001, it has been a hit – in Toronto, at the New York Fringe Festival and in San Diego. There is a television series spin off currently in production for showing from June 2007. In Hackney the original Toronto cast is reassembled.

There is of course a special intimacy between a hairdresser and her clients. The salon is where confidences take place, where as the hairdresser busies herself, the clients gets one to one attention and is listened to with sisterhood and sympathy. The salon proprietor, Novelette, takes a back seat while the women tell their stories but I watched her reactions, the sincerity, the involvement she shows with the drama of each revelation.
The choreography is vibrant, the mood one of understanding and compassion. The beauty business and the indignities we suffer in the name of beauty are ever present and something most women can relate to and laugh at. There are a few songs to change the pace of the evening and show ends as it began with a celebration of dance and sisterly humanity.

The show opens with some introductory choreography and a history of black women from Diana Ross, via Angela Davis to Beyoncé. There is a chance for the characters to show their moves to the traditional sounding song “Tialo Tiah Leh” and “Beauty” by Amina Alfred.

- Lizzie Loveridge, Curtain Up
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared Nov. 9, 2006.

**Toronto-stage**

**Ambitiously poignant and amusingly elevating, this kink needs no straightening whatsoever.**

It will come as no surprise that the face we put on for others to see often hides the tears of torment that have once slid down our cheeks. This axiom of humanity lingers in the public domain as an incessant reminder of how little we know about the genuine anguish others have lived through.

‘da Kink In My Hair unfolds in a nameless Toronto beauty salon where Novelette (Trey Anthony) recommends the latest trend and offers the odd trim on the house. The omniscient stylist sees all, hears all, and knows all, with the touch of her customer's hair. By means of this clever transition, six of the most daunting monologues of betrayal, corporate slavery, sexual abuse, and family disconnection take shape. The evening’s furious femmes are survivors in the truest sense of the word.

Quancetia Hamilton’s heightened performance of a scorned lover is stifling. She plays the mega jaded Shawnette, a lost romantic that has worked two jobs to send her man to med-school only to be dumped when her partner feels she doesn’t fit into the perimeter of his educated circle. When Hamilton poses the blistering question of why another woman is living her life, you’d swear she has lived the same nightmare.

As Patsy, the mother of a son gunned down at a high school dance, Ordena Stephens splendidly assimilates the downward spiral of a crime victim trembling in the wake of injustice. The actor churns out such unrefined emotion that there’s no escaping the vivid imagery of her aching account.

Proving less is more, Miranda Edwards’ Sherelle makes you beg for supplementary material in what turns out to be the shortest segment of the production that seemingly carries the greatest emotional impact. Her character pays the price for career gain, which serves as a dire warning that being at the top is the loneliest place on earth. Isolation dominates the proceeding scene as the unapologetic Sharmaine, played by the hard-hitting Raven Dauda, finds herself alone having stepped out of the closet. Bidding farewell to friends was a tough pill to swallow but Sharmaine is a wreck after her strong willed mother also abandons her.

What’s not to marvel over d’bi. young’s Staci-Anne? The performer miraculously alters herself into a comical and effervescent schoolgirl that breaks down in her retelling of a shocking episode of molestation. Only a trained ear for thick Jamaican dialect can follow her disclosure, however, the emotional language of her sorrow is universal. She returns to recite a thrilling dub poetry piece, which is the musical apex of the play.
Under the valiant direction of Weyni Mengesha who capitalizes on robust girl power comedy and uninhibited physicality, ‘da Kink In My Hair features some of the finest singing voices and traditional African choreography that you’ll ever experience.

- Steven Berketo, Toronto Stage
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared June 10, 2003

... there’s a ton of heart in Anthony’s play, which is essentially a simple series of monologues tied together by some colourful and often raunchy salon chit-chat.

... Raven Dauda sinks her teeth into her role as a troubled movie star, Ngozi Paul sizzles as a woman mourning the death of her judgmental mother, and Satori Shakoor takes on the new role of the middle-aged widower Enid with sensuality and comic gusto.

Anthony, warmly and with a terrific deadpan stare, reprises her comic part as down-to-earth salon owner Novelette, and the talented ensemble fill up the stage nicely, directed by Weyni Mengesha in often wonderfully theatrical ways.

As in past productions, d'bi.young stands out as the rambunctious Stacey Ann, a girl fresh from Jamaica who gradually reveals her family secrets. This is Anthony’s best-written monologue, and young works wonders playing with our emotions.

- Glenn Sumi, Now Magazine (Toronto)
This is an edited version of the review that first appeared Jan. 27, 2005.
‘da Kink hair-raising hit for Mirvish – Musical is sold out, will be held over for a week

The rest of Toronto may be suffering through the January gloom, but things are looking sunny these days for Mirvish Productions. ‘da Kink In My Hair is proving as big a hit at the Princess of Wales Theatre as it was during the earlier runs at the Toronto Fringe Festival and Theatre Passe Muraille.

In fact, there are no seats available for the remainder of the show’s originally scheduled run through Feb. 26 and so David Mirvish has decided to hold the show over a week through March 5.

“In the commercial theatre, the audience is king,” said Mirvish. “And audiences love ‘da Kink. We rarely extend our subscription shows, but the popular demand for this show warrants it. From the beginning ‘da Kink has been breaking down barriers and it is continuing to do so.”

- Richard Ouzounian, The Toronto Star
This is an edited version of the article that first appeared on Oct. 14, 2007.

NATIONAL POST

Bring in ‘da Kink - Playwright’s therapeutic writing a success story of stage and screen

... Anthony’s play, about a group of women who hang out in a West Indian hair salon in Toronto, is an incredible success story.

Next week, the show – the first she has ever written – will be the debut Canadian play at the 2,000-seat Princess of Wales theatre. “it’s still very dreamlike,” Anthony says during a break from rehearsals.

... Though trained as a dramatic actor at George Brown College and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, she felt pigeonholed as “the funny girl” and decided to write her way out of that particular dead end with a play that would showcase her talents. Drawing on her personal experience, including time spent as a counselor at a women’s shelter, she wrote a series of monologues about a group of black women dealing with tough issues such as sexism, racism and incest.
...what was supposed to have been a small reading of the first draft of ‘da Kink at the Now Lounge turned into a big event when fans of Anthony’s work with local comedy troupe Plaitform showed up en masse. The event sold out, extremely unusual for a reading, and was held over for an extra night. It turned out to be a foreshadowing of the massive appeal of the play.

Since then, ‘da Kink – especially after some comedy was thrown in – has been smashing all expectations. It was the best-selling show at the Toronto Fringe Festival, and a subsequent four night remount at Harbourfront Centre sold out. At the New York Fringe Festival, it won a Cream of the Crop award, and Anthony was invited to present it as part of an NBC showcase.

Last fall, an expanded (and funnier) production at Theatre Passe Muraille had people lining up around the block trying to get tickets. That production earned Anthony a Dora nomination.

At first, it was mainly the city’s black community that supported ‘da Kink. But during the run at Passe Murailler, Anthony came to realize her play was popular with women of all ethnic backgrounds, who kept coming back and bringing their mothers, daughters and friends.

In one of the play’s monologues, a character talks about “shadism,” referring to how her mother favoured her lighter-skinned sister over her darker-skinned self. Anthony was shocked then while women started approaching her after performances and telling her how much they could relate.

“They’d say, ‘It was like you were talking to me – my sisters who were blond were favoured,’ or ‘my skinny sister always got everything,’” Anthony says. ‘It really surprised me.”

In reality and as a symbol, hair has always been fraught with conflict in African-American and Caribbean culture. Malcolm X wrote of straightening his hair with lye in The Autobiography of Malcolm X, while the Barbershop movies have tapped a rich comic vein. As Anthony’s character, Novelette, the salon proprietor, says, “My great-granny always said, ‘If you want to know a black woman, you touch her hair.’ She said that is where we carry everything – all our hopes, our dreams, our pain.”

...’da Kink in my Hair continues to blossom into a bona fide phenomenon. A TV pilot aired this fall, and Anthony is working with CBC and Vision to develop it into a series. There are talked of off-Broadway, but having moved here with her parents from England at the age of 12, Anthony is keen on taking it to London.

- J. Kelly Nestruck, The National Post
This is an edited version of the article that first appeared in 2005.

Caribbean Life
The Most Island and Neighborhood News Under the Sun

Be prepared to laugh, cry and exhale

Hailed as the Black woman’s “Vagina Monologues”, ‘da Kink in my hair has been selected to closeout the 35th anniversary season at Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille, June 12-29. A U.S. tour is being planned by its producers, Plaitform Entertainment, at the end of the play’s Toronto run.
Set in a West Indian hair salon, ‘da Kink in my hair features six black womyn who are confronting issues that are painful, heart-breaking and taboo. Illustrated using uncensored monologues, doses of belly-busting humor and spoken word poetry, ‘da Kink provides an intimate look into the lives of Black womyn, exploring subjects such as incest, sexuality, interracial dating, suicide and more.

... Playwright and comedian Trey Anthony originally conceptualized ‘da Kink as a one-womyn show. She wanted to write a play that would focus on the lives of Black womyn and authentically reflect the joy, hardship, and struggles of their lives.

Loosely based on Anthony’s own life experiences and the “secrets” that numerous women have shared with her, ‘da Kink has become a runaway success.

... Much to Anthony’s surprise, when ‘da Kink in my hair made its first full-length dramatic debut at the Toronto Fringe Festival in July 2001, the buzz on the street screamed “this is the show to see!” ‘da Kink sold-out every night, with theatre goers lining up for hours to get tickets. Hailed as the “Pick of the Fringe!” by The Toronto Sun, the show received a Critic’s pick by Now Magazine and was honored as Best Cast Ensemble. ‘da Kink boasted the highest ticket sales of all shows at the 20012 Toronto Fringe Festival!

‘da Kink’s popularity became evident once more in Jan. 2002 during a four-day run at Harbourfront Centre’s African Heritage Kuumba Festival. All four shows sold out a week ahead of the scheduled performance, receiving standing ovations every night.

‘da Kink hit the road in 2002 when it was invited to participate in the New York International Fringe Festival. ‘da Kink received strong reviews from local critics, including Nytheatre.com. Late last year, ‘da Kink was invited back to New York by NBC to be featured in a PSNBC showcase as one of the five outstanding works of the 2002 New York International Fringe Festival.

- Columnist, The Carribean Life, Brooklyn Staten Island
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