



A Separate Sun

Joseph P. Blake

Theater, 90 minutes

Philly Fringe

[Click Here for Showtimes](#)

- [Show Description](#)

It is the triumphant story of a woman's struggle to overcome abuse, drugs, and depression through music and song. It stars Barrymore Award winner Joilet Harris. Music is by Emmy Award winner Bill Jolly. The script was written by playwright and journalist Joseph P. Blake.

▲OPTION



Bill Jolly wrote the play's music score.



1 of 2

[View images](#)

[More Entertainment >>](#)

Posted on Wed, Sep. 1, 2010

Addiction drama 'A Separate Sun' debuts at the Fringe

By JONATHAN TAKIFF
Philadelphia Daily News
takiffj@phillynews.com 215-854-5960

THERE'S A little something for everyone on the theatrical edges of the 2010 Philadelphia Live Arts Festival/Philly Fringe, getting into gear this weekend through Sept. 18 - from the, um, "karaoke debauchery" of "Zombies Are Forever" to a new beach blanket musical, "Destination Summer," to a staged presentation of old-time radio dramas, "Hear Again Radio Project."

But playwright Joe Blake thinks it's time to get real, people. He believes that 2010 audiences crave something more attuned to the world we live in, something that's "pressing the envelope, more sensitive to the times."

And he's got just the goods to satisfy: an urban drama with music called "A Separate Sun" which has its world premiere Saturday at The Arts Garage on Ridge Avenue as part of the Fringe. (The Fringe welcomes any and all to present their work, and Live Arts participants are selected by festival producing director Nick Stuccio.)

"Sun" stars Barrymore Award-winning actress/singer Joilet Harris as Ansonia, a woman struggling to overcome abuse, drugs and depression who finds salvation through the power of song.

Blake, a former *Daily News* reporter who covered news and entertainment, writes with obvious personal knowledge and sensitivity for his subject.

For musical scoring, he found a kindred spirit in Bill Jolly, one of Philadelphia's most seasoned R&B, jazz and theatrical music arranger-composers, Blake shared in a recent conversation.

Q: Will "A Separate Sun" be your debut at the Fringe festival? And what inspired it?

A: This is my second time participating. The first was with a piece called "Muralista," about a mural proposed for a gentrified neighborhood. My inspiration was a piece I did for the *Inquirer*, in which I complained about a mural I didn't like in an urban neighborhood. It had these idyllic images [and] reflected nothing of the stress that the community was under. Murals were invented as a political tool by artists like Diego Rivera to incite revolution and change. They were supposed to represent anything but being happy and digging in the garden.

"A Separate Sun" came out of teaching a writing class for a group of recovering addicts. A friend who was teaching asked if I could fill in for two sessions. At first I was resistant, didn't think I could accomplish anything. I wound up staying for three years.

As a playwright, these people opened up a world that I never knew existed. We all know someone who's recovering, or someone who knows someone who is. But to hear their challenges firsthand, their stories, it's fascinating. It's like an alternative universe. And I was so inspired by them.

This play is about a woman who's a recovering addict, who made it through with song. The thing is, with a recovering addict, music becomes a different kind of addiction for them. Junkies can only cure themselves with family or music or spirituality, with something that fills the void - the crack that's left behind.

Q: Is the character of Ansonia based on someone you met and worked with?

A: A lot of the words are composites of stories they told me. One thing I found out that was not unusual with recovering addicts, most of them have been dead at least once. They OD'd, or somebody beat 'em up so bad they had to bring them back, resuscitate them. But I couldn't fit that in, because it would have taken away from other things, maybe seemed too preachy. So I'll use that somewhere else.

Q: You're rather critical of a lot of the content in the Fringe, aren't you?

A: There's so little for African-American people, though my experience with "Muralista" was that people will really come out if you give them something of value. While other shows couldn't attract five people, literally, and had to cancel performances, we never played to less than 25. And one of our performances for "A Separate Sun" has already sold out. (The theater space holds 100.)

Some artists who're participating in the Fringe fest are not really trying to be cutting-edge, just gimmicky. That stuff might have worked four or five years ago, but now what they [audiences] want to see in art is different, and you need to be aware of that tone and be sensitive to the times. To the economic meltdown. And our perceptions of immigration and of color.

Heavy, heavy stuff has been going down. It's like a throwback to the '50s. So to come out with lightweight pieces that don't try and say anything . . . Come on, we're smarter than that.

Q: What can you tell me about Bill Jolly's score, and your lead actress?

A: Bill's done a wonderful job. The story ebbs and flows between recovering and going back again, her backsliding. And the music just flows with it. When she's recovering it's upbeat. When [she's] backsliding, it's something else. It builds to a crescendo.

I don't want to give it away, but she does overcome.

This isn't just instrumental music, it's songs with lyrics. Jazz, bluesy, R&B and gospel, all mixed in.

Joilet is an accomplished actress and singer, the only African-American to win the Barrymore Award [Philadelphia's version of the Tony Awards]. She just came out of a Pittsburgh production of "Sarah's Song," in which she played [jazz singer] Sarah Vaughan.

She's always working. She was in "12 Monkeys" with Bruce Willis. She was a regular on "The Wire," did several episodes of "Law & Order." And she has a singing voice that will make you cry. She's that good.

Q: What does it take to get a show into the Fringe? Do the organizers pay you to participate? And how do you pull it all off?

A: No, no, there are no subsidies! In fact, it's expensive to participate. You have to pay a festival fee. You pay to get a picture with your listing in the guidebook. You have to get insurance, to be bonded.

Page: 1 of 2 [View All](#)

[1](#) | [2](#) [Next»](#)