

WOW

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Caroline Taylor
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CHARTING HER COURSE IN LOCAL THEATRE

CAROLINE TAYLOR

By Roslyn Carrington

In another life, Caroline Taylor would have been a circus juggler, keeping half a dozen balls in the air at all times. She is a writer, editor, webmaster, and social media maven. These jobs pay her bills. But there are other labels you can attach to her — singer, actress, producer and director of opera and musical theatre — that you could rightly call her vocation.

She studied Performance Studies at Williams College in Massachusetts, a fusion of theatre, dance, anthropology, sociology and art criticism. Such an eclectic mix wasn't actually offered by Williams, but such was her determination that she petitioned them to create the curriculum, and they did. "It was kind of cool. You do something in moment, because you feel it's important for you to do, but I still get emails from students asking me how to do the same thing with a programme they want set up. I charted my own course." Then she adds thoughtfully, "That's always getting me in trouble."

After graduation, she earned an Commonwealth Scholarship to do an MA in Theatre and Performance at the University of London, Goldsmiths. Taylor also has a certificate in Art Education and has studied at the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York, learning method acting and performing for film and TV. Stepping outside of the bounds of conventionality, she spent time with the La Mama Experimental Theatre Company in New York, stretching her limits beyond conventional theatre fare. "It was fun, you learn to use your voice and body in non-conventional ways." She would love to take her education further at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, "But I don't have RADA time or RADA money."

One of her most noteworthy stage performances was a one-woman show that she wrote, produced and performed herself, both in New York and the UK. "The whole premise was challenging people's conceptions of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, everything." This was in the context of a post-9/11 world, where, as she put it, it was the responsibility of everyone who was non-white to prove themselves and represent their ethnicity. "But I can't represent every experience in Trinidad."

Because of her decidedly exotic features, she presented a conundrum for a northern audience. "I kept being pulled aside in airports. People thought I was either a Latina prostitute smuggling drugs, or a Moroccan terrorist. I got tired of questions like, 'Do you speak English in Trinidad?'"

As an aside, she also mentions auditioning in New York for the role of a Trinidadian character, but was turned down because she "didn't look Trinidadian." "I thought, you're going to cast a black American who will do the accent poorly, rather than a real Trinidadian?"

Having spread her wings abroad, returning to a conservative society such as ours presents some challenges for such an unbridled spirit. She has been meaning to update and repackage her performance for a local audience, but isn't sure how it will be received in such a different cultural context. But she has no doubt that the dialogue needs to take place. "We need to talk about race, politics, class, sexuality, and religion, as well as schooling, health care, and conservation. I'm still trying to determine what the fall-out would be like if I did it; whether it would be something I would have to recover from."

Given these challenges, why did she come back? Even though her father is English, she explains, she feels 100% Trin. "These are my people. I get that there are better



opportunities out there, more opportunities for recognition. But I have a problem with the brain drain. I can do better work here than in other places where the work has already been done. I felt that I could not only contribute wherever I could, but it would also be meaningful to me. This is my community."

Her most recent WOW-worthy achievement has been the presentation of Les Mis, put on by the Marionettes. Taylor played a supporting role, in the person of the hilarious, obnoxious, entirely watchable Madame Thénardier, who filled dual purposes as villainess and comic relief.

More importantly, though, as Director of Les Mis, she was the one facing the doubts of a theatre-going audience who didn't think that a performance of such magnitude could be done in Trinidad. Standing on her previous experience co-directing Carmen with her mother, Marionettes Musical Director Gretta Taylor, she plunged forth. "Carmen was a

steep learning curve. I hadn't directed anything other than myself, now we had two alternating casts."

But Les Mis represented not just a new challenge but a dream come true: from childhood, she had always loved the piece.

This is not to say that the stress didn't threaten to make her lovely, dark curly hair fall out. "It was scary! But I upped my meditation and mindfulness practice..." Judging from the resounding success of the spectacular production, it is safe to say that Taylor has added the luxuriously plumed feather of Director to her cap. And we theatre lovers are hungering for more from her. We probably won't have long to wait.

She has her heart set on producing a wholly local opera or musical. "One of the cool things about coming back to Trinidad is that there is so much that is new and so much you can do. I'm happy to say, I don't know much about this, but I will read up on it, make my mistakes, and try."