

# Dramatists Guild

2009-2010

## FELLOWS



MASI ASARE conceived and wrote music/lyrics for the spy musical *Sympathy Jones* (Brooke Pierce, bookwriter), published by Playscripts. She also co-authored Anonymous Ensemble's rock project *The Best*, and several children's musicals. Masi holds degrees in performance studies from Harvard and NYU Tisch. [www.masiasare.com](http://www.masiasare.com)

One of the really great things about the Dramatists Guild Fellows program is that it brings together both playwrights and musical theatre writers to work on their material side by side. During my year at the Guild, I worked on writing the book as well as music and lyrics for a new project. It was my first time tackling bookwriting, and I was terrified. I'm so glad there were playwrights in the room to give feedback!

*Dry Wind In Pennsylvania* is inspired by stories of my West African grandmother, who died in Ghana in the 1950s. In the piece, the grandmother character—Valentina, a spirit—travels to the land of the living to deliver a startling message to her mixed-race

descendants. The below sequence takes place early in the show. We start in the spirit world with Auntie Gladys, Valentina's longtime friend. Later, we hear from Akos, Valentina's granddaughter.

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## Two

*AUNTIE GLADYS appears. Behind her is a cloth draped as over the entrance to a dwelling. She dances as she sings.*

### AUNTIE GLADYS

SISTER, COME  
COME, HURRY UP-OH  
SISTER, PACK YOUR BAG AND COME ON  
YES, YOU'RE LOOKING VERY PRETTY  
YES, YOU LOOK PRETTY TO ME

IF YOU WANT GO MAKE A JOURNEY  
AND THE PLACE IS FAR AWAY  
BETTER COME  
COME, HURRY UP-OH  
SISTER, COME, COME, COME

*VALENTINA enters, through the cloth doorway. Auntie Gladys helps her arrange her head-wrap and stole.*

### VALENTINA

As for you, anyone will think you are not an educated woman. Singing these songs.

### AUNTIE GLADYS

Don't trouble me. I speak the Queen's English.

### VALENTINA

Are you sure about that?

### AUNTIE GLADYS

I went for classes at Presby Training College. When I go to overseas, everybody will say—Eh! This African woman. She speaks our language better than our own people. Now come on, Tina. You're looking so beautiful, I'm telling you—let's go!

### VALENTINA

Oh, I beg you. The road is not going to run away.

*She goes back through the cloth doorway, then brings back a hand mirror. She examines herself. She likes what she sees. She puts the mirror aside and begins dancing.*

### AUNTIE GLADYS + VALENTINA

IF YOU WANT GO MAKE A JOURNEY  
AND THE PLACE IS FAR AWAY  
BETTER COME  
COME, HURRY UP-OH  
SISTER, COME, COME, COME.

*SPIRIT ELDERS enter, with stately movements. They wear elegant, fantastical clothing made of wax print cloth. They wear half-masks and carry linguist's staffs.*

### SPIRIT ELDERS

THE DAY IS GOING BY  
THE SUN WILL EAT THE SKY  
THE MOON WILL SOON BE HERE  
MY DEAR, MY DARLING  
COME ON, COME ON, COME ON  
COME ON, COME ALONG!

*Thunderous drums, then silence.*

### SPIRIT ELDERS

The king has arrived.  
The king and his advisors will listen to your case.

*Valentina moves downstage to address Nana, the invisible King of the Spirit World. The party atmosphere is gone. We are now in a serious council session.*

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**VALENTINA**

NANA, I BRING TO YOU MY REQUEST.  
NANA, I BRING TO YOU MY CONCERN.  
NANA, I BRING TO YOU,  
AND TO YOUR ADVISORS,  
MY SITUATION;  
I WILL FOLLOW WHAT YOU SAY.

MY STOMACH IS FULL  
BUT I AM HUNGRY ALL THE TIME.  
MY EYES ARE DRY  
BUT I AM WEEPING ALL THE TIME.  
I WALK IN A DREAM  
BUT I NEVER CAN FALL ASLEEP.

**SPIRIT ELDERS + AUNTIE GLADYS**

WHAT IS THE REASON?  
WHAT IS THE REASON?

**VALENTINA**

MY SPIRIT IS STRONG  
BUT IT IS BREAKING ALL THE TIME.  
MY BODY IS GONE  
BUT STILL IT PAINS ME ALL THE TIME.  
MY VOICE IS A DRUM  
BUT A WHISPER IS ALL IT MAKES.

**SPIRIT ELDERS + AUNTIE GLADYS**

WHAT IS THE REASON?

**VALENTINA**

THIS IS THE REASON:  
BEYOND THE LAND AND WATER

**SPIRIT ELDERS + AUNTIE GLADYS**

THE WATER AND THE LAND

**VALENTINA**

I HAVE A SON WHO HAS TWO DAUGHTERS

**SPIRIT ELDERS + AUNTIE GLADYS**

IT IS THE DAUGHTERS OF HER SON.

**VALENTINA**

EACH DAY, I LOOK BEYOND AND BEYOND.  
EACH DAY, I SPEAK BUT THEY DO NOT HEAR  
EACH DAY, I REACH OUT BUT  
I CANNOT TOUCH THEM.  
YET THERE IS SOMETHING I MUST SAY.

NANA, YOU ARE KING,  
AND SO I BRING TO YOU MY REQUEST  
ALLOW ME TO TURN  
FROM A SPIRIT INTO FLESH  
I HAVE WORDS IN MY MOUTH  
TO SPIT OUT IN MY GRANDDAUGHTERS' EARS.

*The Spirit Elders turn away and buzz among themselves. They reach a resolution.*

**SPIRIT ELDERS**

VALENTINA, WE HAVE HEARD YOUR REQUEST  
VALENTINA, WE WILL GRANT YOUR REQUEST  
GO AND SPEAK TO THESE DAUGHTERS OF YOUR SON

But Valentina, remember the time of year. A strange time to travel.

*Valentina is confused.*

**AUNTIE GLADYS**

*whispers*

It is almost Harmattan. The dry season—

**VALENTINA**

But, why? They don't have any dry season in that place.

*The Spirit Elders confer among themselves again. They turn back to Valentina.*

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### SPIRIT ELDERS

VALENTINA, GO AND COME.  
VALENTINA, GO AND COME.  
BUT I TELL YOU, IF YOU GO:

The journey will exact a price from you.

*Thunderous drums, then silence. Blackout.*

#### Three

*Early morning. A bedroom in a small Brooklyn apartment. Akos, wearing a robe, folds laundry, putting some of it in a backpack. She moves reluctantly.*

### AKOS

YOU CAN PICK OUT YOUR CLOTHES,  
YOU CAN PAINT YOUR NAILS.  
YOU CAN BUY EXPENSIVE MAKEUP,  
YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR HAIR,  
BUT THE ONE THING YOU CAN'T CHOOSE  
IS WHERE YOU COME FROM.

YOU CAN PICK UP AND MOVE  
TO A WHOLE NEW STATE,  
GET A FANCY EDUCATION  
AND SOME HIGH-HEELED SHOES,  
BUT THE ONE THING YOU CAN'T LOSE  
IS WHERE YOU COME FROM.

YOU CAN LEARN TO SAY:  
RACE IS JUST A CONSTRUCT,  
IT CANNOT DEFINE ME!  
BUT THE THING IS,  
A PLACE IS NOT A CONSTRUCT,  
IT'S A PLACE.  
WITH AN ADDRESS  
AND A ZIP CODE  
AND A PICKET FENCE  
WITH PEELING PAINT

AND A BIG, EMPTY FARMHOUSE  
WHERE MOM IS WAITING.

*She puts two train tickets into the backpack. And a small bottle of pain-killers.*

I COULD SIT DOWN AND CRY,  
I COULD GET PISSED OFF.  
I CAN'T SHAKE THIS OBLIGATION  
TO THE ONES I LOVE;  
TO THE ONE WHO'S STILL STUCK THERE  
BACK WHERE I COME FROM.

SO I PICK UP THE PHONE  
AND I SAY: OKAY,  
I CAN COME HOME FOR THE WEEKEND, MOM,  
BUT JUST THREE DAYS.

*Fully dressed and packed, she heads out.*

AND I WONDER THE REASON,  
EVERY TIME.  
AND I FIGHT WITH MY SISTER  
ON THE TRAIN.  
AND I HOPE THINGS ARE DIFFERENT,  
JUST THIS ONCE,  
GOING HOME—  
BACK WHERE I COME FROM.

*She is now on the train platform. She checks her phone. It's getting late. No messages.*

### LOUDSPEAKER

Now boarding on track thirteen, the 6:25 Pennsylvanian to Pittsburgh, making all stops...