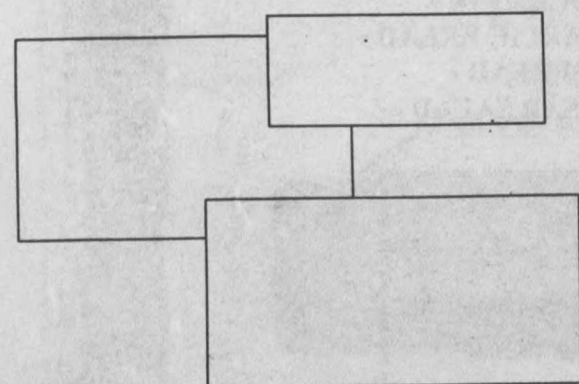




*Charades is directed by playwright and director Dr. John Ruganda whose experience in theatre has taken him all over the world. He brings to the production a combination of professionalism and fresh insight. Ruganda's work in Fredericton has included productions of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Jonson's *Volpone*, Tom Stoppard's *On the Razzle*, Fugard's *The Island and Downtime* by local playwright, David Etheridge. He has worked as dramaturge and director for one of Dawes' plays *In My Garden*, which recently benefitted from a reading at the Montreal Playwrights Workshop. Ruganda led a staged reading of *Charades* earlier this Spring and has been a reader for the play during its creation.*



But the loss of innocence is not only found in the politics of race and class, but in the equally lively and problematic area of sexuality. The

Playing October 17-21, 1990 at Memorial Hall, U.N.B. at 8:00 p.m. each night.

Tickets: \$5.00, \$3.00 (Students).

An intense drama about the politics of sex, class and race

CHARADES

*Distinguishing autobiography from fiction.
A reading of Charades.*

I find it very dangerous writing about a play that I have written largely because it is easy to compel viewers to regard it as purely an autobiographical piece. There is no question that I could not have written *Charades* without going through many of the things that some of the characters in the play go through, however, it must be understood that despite all attempts to be autobiographical (few though they may have been) the storyteller in me could not help but carry the narrative along its own dramatic path; a path which had little to do with a reality that could be termed.

On rereading the play I was struck by the parallels. Indeed, I was involved with a Christian Theatre Company while in Jamaica and I am still very much in touch with their activities. The debate in the play about the validity of theatre as a tool for proselytization is one that I have been involved in for years and one that has shaped the direction of my work. The problems of artistic freedom working against the strictures of faith are issues that I have had to deal with as a writer as well, and while the play *Charades* does not answer many of the questions that the debate vomits up, it does posit the questions in a direct and dramatic way. The internal politics of class and race are common place to anyone who has lived in a society that has experienced the combined forces of slavery and colonialism. *Charades* is rooted in that tradition and therefore locates its characters in a world that is rife with social and political tensions.

For the average Canadian viewer, however, many of the nuances of class and race which are essential to an understanding of the play are easily lost. One suspects that it would be helpful to understand that the Jamaican society is made of an significant mixture of races and each mixture is granted a certain status within the community. In *Charades*, three types of Jamaicans enter the stage and are forced to work with each other on a drama that looks at the issues of race and class. The woman Maureen is a working class Jamaican black who has found some social credibility through education. The second is a woman called Jennifer who is a white Jamaican. This means that she may have some negro blood in her but her racial mix is predominantly white. She is typically, from the upper stratum of society. Her father is a successful politician and quite a wealthy benefactor. The third central character is a man called Wayne. He is middle class brown skinned Jamaican. His family is well educated despite their lesser social status. The father is a well educated University professor who was brought up first as a privileged brown Jamaican and then as a underprivileged brown Jamaican. The complications of their backgrounds are useful indices to an understanding of their place within the society.

It must be understood that while these characters represent certain typical bracketings within the society, they remain mere examples of a very fluid and sometimes inconsistent pattern of class and race relationships. The unique thing about this group of people, however, is that they come together under the banner of Christianity. It is the proverbial common denominator and it gives three people who would probably not live as intimately with each other after high school, together. Their unity is idealistic and it gradually becomes clear that the powerful spiritual dynamic that once held them together is being eroded by the submerged race and class tensions that have never left them. The play is therefore about the loss of a certain youthful innocence which is both tragic and enlightening.



Erroll Williams, Edet Archibong, Clarissa Hurley, Karen Lousion, and Kwame Dawes form the cast of CHARADES

enterprise theatre of fredericton presents

directed by john ruganda

a new play by kwame dawes

combination is explosive. The three are caught in a wonderful love triangle which is rooted in the larger political problems articulated above. Just imagine the painful dilemma of a guy whose two-timing game is revealed when he is alone with the two women who he has been messing with. Imagine that these two women are very good friends who are slowly discovering deeper rifts between them which have to do with issues they have hidden for years. Place all of that within the context of a Christian theatre company with fairly strong moral values and you have a very explosive situation. In the fracas that ensues a curious debate about the role of males and females in the definition of their identities ensues and we watch how the manipulations of human sexuality operate among people.

However, all these issues are dealt with within the context of the larger debate about the whole process of art and its role in society. This larger debate is found in the use of the play within the play device. So that when the play begins we are quickly made aware that this is a dress rehearsal of a show being done by a Christian company. A member of the audience gets very irate about the lack of Christian values in the piece and spends the entire time trying to redirect the piece according to his view of the world. On this level, the play asks some useful questions about the whole idea of message theatre and the role of the artist in the shaping of society. Should art be didactic? Are negative visions necessarily destructive in the long run? What is the responsibility of the artist ultimately: to the work, to the audience to to him/herself?

Charades is a play with many dimensions that intertwine into a play that is very close to my heart. The humour that emerges must never be eschewed and the piece is best understood as working as a large joke. For me, the play is a triumph because in it, I have finally been able to begin the process of dealing with issues that relate to my father and his life in Jamaica and the way that has affected me. Admittedly, that could have happened in many different ways, but through this play and its distinct structure, I have been able to question the very reason for even writing at all. The play has very few answers, but by asking the questions it begins to equip us with the means to answer.