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Afro-futurism Comes to Boston as Local Playwrights Share New Work

BOSTON, MA – In the last few years, Afro-futurism has been seeping into the public consciousness. The artistic aesthetic, which combines science fiction and fantasy storytelling with sharp commentary on the state of the African diaspora, has produced several high-profile successes. Between big budget releases from film studios, new premieres from up-and-coming writers, and Jordan Peele’s creepy duology, audiences are starting to realize what Black creatives have known for years: imagining the fantastical can help contextualize the real and the current. The next wave in the surge of Afro-futurist narratives comes in the form of an experimental theater piece from local poet-playwrights Porsha Olayiwola and Marshall “Gripp” Gillson.

Their show, titled *SPIRIT* and funded by The Boston Foundation, is intimate. An all-Black cast of four performers—Ashley Davis, Dzidzor, Tamara St. Hubert, and Cheyenne Harvey—will perform two stories. The first, *Exonerate*, follows a makeshift family in a dystopic future as they embark on a quest to find healing from generations of violence, while the second, *Regrow*, takes place in an alternative history as a community reacts to newcomers who don’t understand their values. But though the premises are simple, the writers warn audiences to come with an open mind. “The show is weird,” Gillson offers. “It’s futuristic. It’s surreal. But our goal is to remind the audience that the strangest things about the worlds we create are the things they share with our own.” As part of each show, the two playwrights will host a discussion forum, to encourage people to consider and synthesize what they’ve just seen.

Though each has a prolific background, the show’s two writers are new playwrights. Olayiwola, an internationally recognized performance poet and Boston’s newly coronated Poet Laureate, took her first foray into theater last year with a one woman-show. “Afro-futurism is about using radical imagination,” says Olayiwola. “*SPIRIT* is a narrative that reimagines a future where the power of healing and the power of community are transformative.” Gillson meanwhile, a computer programmer-cum-filmmaker, draws on his background in both tech and artistic communities to imagine strange and unexpected worlds for his stories. This July, his first short film brought a techno-horror fantasy to the Roxbury Film Festival and earned him the Kay Bourne Emerging Filmmaker award. The two writers’ work intersects not only to explore oppression and marginalization as they currently exist, but as an invocation toward a world where they do not.

SPIRIT will premiere on October 10 at 7:00PM in Calderwood Hall at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. A second show will take place on October 11 at 7:00PM in the Codman Academy Black Box Theatre. The play will complete its opening run with a show on October 14 at 7:00PM at The Strand Theatre. For tickets and more information, visit <http://spirit.land>.