

## Creator's Notes – Ebony Noelle Golden, *125<sup>th</sup> & FREEdom*

Ebo is the Yoruba practice of sacrifice or offering. Ebo is offered for many reasons including health, initiation, abundance, love, and honoring of family, orisha, paying spiritual debt, etc. In essence, 125th & FREEdom is ebo, cultural ebo. In my understanding, cultural ebo is the way in which folks activate their art and cultural practice in service of community, justice, or another collective goal. Recently, I've become more intimately connected to sharing my work with this concept as a motivating force. In the case of making 125th & Freedom, my core reason is to offer time, resources, and creative energy in the service of our collective understanding and practice of self-determination, remembering, and loving.



On the journey however, this work has blossomed into a community offering. Over 80 people's hands and hearts have touched this work. I have received thousands of dollars in free rental space, food, social media support, and various types and in-kind support from friends, family, and colleagues. Ultimately, the ritual is a love offering for, to, and with folks who care and are concerned about the unfolding and ever-evolving and destructive practices of capitalism that privileges profit over people. In the midst of all of this, our communities exhibit an immense amount of power and fortitude.

125th & FREEdom takes these collective actions into consideration not just as practices of resistance but as practices of resilience and “generative apocalypse” which I am learning more about through the work and service of Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Adrienne Marie Brown. Generative apocalypse is a practice that urges us to consider a future that will be born as the liberation we are working for takes root and manifests. In doing so, we are pushed to think about what must die so that freedom can live. Indeed, I am working in alignment with this idea as an emergent social justice strategy and core element of my art process. This performance approximates the liberated afro-future not as distant reality but as an on-going, iterative, liberatory approach to world-making.

125th & FREEdom is legacy work. Informed by the visionary practices of sistering, mothering and daughtering of my matrilineal bloodline and our shared cultural mothers. Inclusive of these people

are my mother Dr. Betty Ann Sims and her mother Bertha Lee Sims and her grandmother Pearl Glover and her great grandmother Rebecca Adams. Additionally, this piece would not possible without the subtle acts of radical mothering and world-building taught to me by my step mother Nelma Hicks and my godmother Cheryl Chevalier. I am also deeply indebted to my mentors Mama Nia Wilson, Dr. Anjail Rashida Ahmad, and my spiritual godmother Dr. Nana Anoa Nantambo. There are many others.

I consider Dr. Teer one of my cultural mothers, although I never met her. I believe her hands are guiding this work and I surrender to this ancestral guidance. My current knowledge of Teer's Technology of Soul and the Pyramid Performance Process have been invaluable in the development of my spirit and my creative work. The piece is deeply informed by Teer's work rooted in the "nigga cycle".

The piece asks us where we are in the cycle and what we can do to unshackle ourselves from the systems pre-determining our lived experiences on this land. Teer's methodology and the legacy of street ritual performance at NBT allows us to shed light in public on these cycles, perform them, get inside of them, surrender to them, move through them, and question them with our sweat, song, breath, dance, prayers, dreams, and collaboration.

Just so it's crystal clear, I'm an abolitionist and I believe in and work for diasporic black liberation. This piece isn't a social justice project it's an emancipation project. In the work will lift up the everyday secular and spiritual practices of diasporic blackness that have served as our magic, our medicine, and our methodology since the beginning of time. These rituals are found in our dance-form buck jumping to the bantaba. These rituals are found in our music from Trane to Trap. These rituals are found in our talk, our walk, our food, our everything.

Written in the blues and jazz theatrical tradition<sup>1</sup>, 125th & FREEdom is a multi-site specific, immersive, ritual dance performance <sup>2</sup>comprised of choreopoetic<sup>3</sup> rituals staged along the 125th Street Corridor from the East River to the Hudson River. The piece can also be staged in large

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<sup>1</sup> Coined and amplified by Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Theatrical Jazz is an artform rooted in jazz principles of ensemble—the break, the bridge, and the blue note. I first learned of theatrical blues while directing Sharon Bridgforth's *dat black mermaid man lady* at Pillsbury House Theatre. The work, described as a performance novel, is rooted in the emotional arc of the blues and is informed by the ethos and storytelling of this artform.

<sup>2</sup> This piece is rooted in ritual poetics and dance. The "script" should be seen more as a score than a play and is written as such. Movements are described at the top of each beat. The narrative is written as prose and free verse poetry instead of lines of narrative. Songs are italicized. Stage directions and titles of songs and choreographic notes are capitalized and italicized.

<sup>3</sup> Choreopoetry is a contemporary literary and performance genre popularized by Ntozake Shange. The most recognized example of the choreopoem is *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. The genre is characterized by performance work that blends dance, music, performance poetry.



indoor spaces where audiences and cast members can move unencumbered by a proscenium stage or stationary seating.

125th and FREEdom is not a play. It's a ritual performance rooted in the ancient and futuristic everyday ways of diasporic black folks. The performance lifts up the ways in which we worship, mourn, love, lust, live, and overcome. It is created to immerse participants, cast and witnesses, in a shared process of walking to and laboring for freedom, a procession many people worldwide have been forced to undertake.

It is interactive and requires a dissolving of the line dividing cast from everyone else. We are all artists. We are all strategists. We are all the ensemble, the tribe. There is no audience at 125th & FREEdom. Of course, we can't force anyone to participate, but it is expected that all who participate are willing to lend their hands to liberation.

The ritual is durational. The sojourn takes approximately five hours to complete, but just think about the time it took for Harriet to walk to freedom. Five hours is a breeze in comparison. The piece requires the ability to walk and stand for long stretches of time. The environmental/street performance iteration takes place rain or shine. Shows are canceled in case of lightning. There are two intermissions. The second intermission happens before the dream ritual.

In order to safely stage the environmental/street performance version of this work, it is important to collaborate with businesses along the route. This ensures there are places for people to relieve themselves or take a break if necessary.

The piece travels time. It takes place in the past, the recent past, the present, and the distant future. Geography and time are woven together as kin. We know what time it is based on where we are. The earth knows.