JESSE B. SIMPLE



ALIVE IN HARLEM

Press Materials

Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project

May 10 2010

Summary

Langston Hughes' Jessie B. Simple Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project

Members

Anthony Thompson Artistic Director (347) 984-0477 africangrove@hotmail.com

Renaldo Davidson Visual Arts Multimedia Director (917) 600-2203 renaldorii@gmail.com

Lori Payne Production/Media Coordinator (347) 225-5341 loripayne999@gmail.com

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COVER IMAGES: Artwork by Renaldo Westend NYC for "Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem"

Photos by Frank Stewart for Wynton Marsalis Jazz at Lincoln Center World Premiere "Jesse B. Simple Suite."

Organization Description

- Solo performer Anthony Thompson is seeking support from the community of Harlem to celebrate Langston Hughes' Simple Tales and his legendary character, Jesse B. Simple, by presenting LANGSTON HUGHES' JESSE B. SIMPLE ALIVE IN HARLEM COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT. The production is adapted for the stage and performed by Thompson in collaboration with other artists in a mixed media presentation. Blending creative resources their work represents a unique and engaging effort to discover new directions in their work while exploring their own social, political and social concerns expressed through Hughes' Jesse B. His new adaptation preserves Hughes' narrative text with the dignity and integrity in which worked.
- An African-American poet, novelist and playwright, Langston Hughes chronicled the experiences of ordinary African-American people, contrasting the beauty of their souls with the oppressive circumstances of their lives. He made his mark as a major writer of the Harlem Renaissance who came to be seen as the most representative of African-American writers and certainly the most original of African-American poets. However, despite his success in poetry, fiction, drama and other fields, for most people the single most inspired creation in his considerable body of work is Jesse B. Simple, whom literary critics, scholars and Hughes' readers regard as the most famous character in African-American fiction.
- On February 13, 1943, Hughes introduced Jesse B. to the readers of his weekly column in the black-owned Chicago Defender, depicting him as an ordinary Harlem resident who over a glass of beer expresses his views on religion, politics, social issues and being black in America. This winning character became so popular that in 1950 Hughes edited selections from his columns and published them in book form as Simple Tales. Jesse B. Simple, who had endured the horrors of Jim Crow in the South before migrating to Harlem, did much more than survive racism and oppression in America. He became an African-American everyman, the voice of Harlem, a man with racial pride, dignity and respect. As a child, he felt that he belonged to nobody because he was "passed around," but despite his despair Jesse B. Simple becomes a hero. He tells his tales with humor, but sometimes they hit as sharp as the corns on his feet. His straightforward views and solutions to the world's problems have won him recognition as a repository of African-American wisdom.
- Literary scholars and critics suggest that Hughes' Simple Tales are still relevant today. People still enjoy reading them and often remark that there is a Jesse B. in their community. Doctor Donna Akira Sullivan Harper, author of Not So Simple: The "Simple" Stories by Langston Hughes, traces the evolution and development of Jesse B. Simple from his first appearance in 1943 in the Chicago Defender to his 1965 farewell in the New York Post. Of Anthony Thompson's solo performance of Jesse B. during the mid 1980s and the response of his audiences, Harper comments, "Actor Anthony Thompson says that individuals from his audiences seek him out after performances to marvel over the appropriateness of Simple's remarks for their own tales about being black in America. . . . Hughes effectively preserved Simple's timeless complaints." Regarding the celebration and popularity of this much-loved man, she writes, "The Simple stories have not been unanimously celebrated. However, from as long ago as the 1940s Simple has attracted ardent fans and promoters who promised that he would become a classic, an immortal fixture in literature."

Anthony Thompson and Renaldo Davidson present the Premiere Performance of the Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project

A new collaboration of live performance and mixed-media in Celebration of Langston Hughes' timeless character Jesse B. Simple at the Dwyer Cultural Center in Harlem on June 5.

- NEW YORK, New York, April 30, 2010 Acclaimed solo performer, veteran theatre artist and creator of *Tales of Simple* Anthony Thompson, has partnered with master photographer and media artist Renaldo Davidson to create the Langston Hughes' Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project. The premiere performance of this collaboration will take place Saturday, June 5 2010 at Dwyer Cultural Center, 228 St. Ncholas Avenue, New York, New York.
- Actor, director Anthony Thompson AKA Adeagbo Mwai Mudo and visual artist and master photographer Renaldo Davidson, who's work is known to reflect the Africans' experience in America, come together integrating their mediums in a collaborative adventure. The performance is an interweaving of visual arts exhibition, photo slide presentations, dance, music, literature and theatre, creating a multimedia performance giving life to the voice of Harlem, the everyman Langston Hughes' legendary character Jesse B. Simple.
- Anthony Thompson made his New York debut as Jesse B. Simple at the Wynton Marsalis Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra world premiere of *Jesse B. Semple Suite*. His history as Jesse B. Simple spans 26 years with performances across the nation, including Morehouse College, Carnegie University and Brooklyn Historical Society. Thompson has worked in Harlem since 2009 to spread the word about Jesse B. Simple, giving free performances at community centers and local venues to bring Hughes' timeless character to today's Harlem community.
- Renaldo Davidson is a veteran portraitist and master photographer whose stylized portraits have garnered reviews in the *New York Times*, *Time Out New* and other major publications. His work was also featured on NBC Nightly News Weekend Edition with Lester Holt. In addition to gracing the cover Kevin Powell's *No Sleep Till Brooklyn* and a collection of Jessica Care Moore's poems, Davidson's work includes freelance photography with Lincoln Center for the Black Rock Coalition celebration of Nina Simone.
- The performance combines Anthony Thompson's dramatic adaptation of The Simple Tales with a multi-media presentation of Renaldo Davidson's photography and mixed-media portraits of iconic images inspired by The Simple Tales. The collaboration is borne of a mutual respect for the work of Langston Hughes. To Davidson, Jessie B. Simple is "more than an abstract character." Davidson says he feels a cultural connection to Jessie B. Simple, and that he identifies with Simple's character traits as he would with someone in his own family. Anthony Thompson says that "What has been alive in Ade is now being revealed to Harlem. Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple is alive in Harlem because he is alive in Ade."

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The presentation reintroduces Langston Hughes' character to the community of Harlem and celebrates the Simple Tales. It also provides an opportunity for local organizations to collaborate with the artists to present cultural programs to their community. Through an evaluation process that includes presenter, audience, and post- performance discussions, the project will assess the relevance of Hughes' Simple Tales for our times. The project also gives community organizations an opportunity to expand artistic activities, providing local audiences and artists access to creative expression and works that reflect the history of Harlem as well as fostering a greater appreciation for Hughes and his Simple Tales.

The premiere performance of this project will take place on Saturday, June 5 at Dwyer Cultural Center 258 St. Nicholas Avenue, New York, New York.

"Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem," is sponsored by SAGE Harlem (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders)

www.sageusa.org

with support from Citizens Care, College Language Association, Langston Hughes Society, John Bowie, Theodore Samuels, James Ellis, Helen Satterwhite, Lori Payne, Renaldo Davidson, Adeagbo Mwai Mudo, and Harlem the community we serve.

EVENT SCHEDULE

7:00pm Multimedia Presentation of Renaldo Davidson's Jesse B. Simple Series 7:30pm *Simple Tales* featuring Anthony Thompson 9:00pm Artist Q & A

<u>TICKETS</u> \$20 General Admission \$15 for Senior and Students

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Anthony Thompson and Renaldo Davidson Join Creative Forces to Form Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project

Master artists form a new organization, to celebrate the work of Langston Hughes

- NEW YORK, New York, April 25, 2010 Acclaimed solo performer, veteran theatre artist and creator of *Tales of Simple* Anthony Thompson, has partnered with master photographer and media artist Renaldo Davidson to create the Langston Hughes' Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project.
- The partnership forms a creative alliance between Thompson and Davidson, and reinforces the pertinence of the Simple Tales. Many scholars, critics and readers suggest that Hughes' Simple Tales are timeless and remain relevant today.
- Anthony Thompson, AKA Adeagbo Mwai Mudo, made his New York debut as Jesse B.
 Simple at the Wynton Marsalis Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra world premiere of *Jesse B. Semple Suite*. His history as Jesse B. Simple spans 26 years with performances across the nation, including Morehouse College, Carnegie University and Brooklyn Historical Society. Thompson has worked in Harlem since 2009 to spread the word about Jesse B.
 Simple, giving free performances at community centers and local venues to bring Hughes' timeless character to today's Harlem community. On April 8, 2010 Anthony Thompson received the Langston Hughes Award for his work as a Humanist, Artist, and Steward of the Langston Hughes Legacy at the College Language Association Convention's National Langston Hughes Society Luncheon.
- Renaldo Davidson is a veteran portraitist and master photographer whose stylized portraits have garnered reviews in *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York* and other major publications. His work was also featured on NBC Nightly News Weekend Edition with Lester Holt. In addition to gracing the cover of Kevin Powell's *No Sleep Till Brooklyn* and a collection of Jessica Care Moore's poems, Davidson's work includes freelance photography with Lincoln Center for the Black Rock Coalition celebration of Nina Simone.
- The Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project combines Anthony Thompson's dramatic adaptation of The Simple Tales with a multi-media presentation of Renaldo Davidson's photography and mixed-media portraits of iconic images inspired by The Simple Tales.

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- The Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project combines Anthony Thompson's dramatic adaptation of The Simple Tales with a multi-media presentation of Renaldo Davidson's photography and mixed-media portraits of iconic images inspired by The Simple Tales.
- The presentation reintroduces Langston Hughes' character to the community of Harlem and celebrates the Simple Tales. It also provides an opportunity for local organizations to collaborate with the artists to present cultural programs to their community. Through an evaluation process that includes presenter, audience, and post- performance discussions, the project will assess the relevance of Hughes' Simple Tales for our times. The project also gives community organizations an opportunity to expand artistic activities, providing local audiences and artists access to creative expression and works that reflect the history of Harlem as well as fostering a greater appreciation for Hughes and his Simple Tales.

The premiere of this project will take place on Saturday, June 5 at Dwyer Cultural Center in Harlem, New York.

FOR BOOKING INFORMATION Anthony Thompson: (347) 984-0477 | africangrove@hotmail.com

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Anthony Thompson Receives the Langston Hughes Award from the College Language Association Langston Hughes Society

Thompson is honored for his work as a Humanist, Artist, and Steward of the Langston Hughes Legacy

- NEW YORK, New York, April 24, 2010 Acclaimed solo performer, veteran theatre artist and creator of *Tales of Simple* Anthony Thompson, was honored with the Langston Hughes Award from the College Language Association Langston Hughes Society on April 8, 2010.
- The award was presented during the College Language Association Convention's National Langston Hughes Society Luncheon in Brooklyn, New York, where Thompson had given a performance of his stage adaptation of *The Simple Tales*.
- The award was presented by Dr. Dellita Martin-Ogunsola, former President of the Langston Hughes Society.
- Anthony made his New York debut in April 2009 as Jesse B. Semple at the Wynton Marsalis Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra's world premier of *Jesse B. Semple Suite*, set to a composition by trombonist Vincent Gardner.
- Anthony Thompson is the Creative Director of the Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project, in which he is collaborating with master photographer Renaldo Davidson to create. The Project combines Anthony Thompson's dramatic adaptation of The Simple Tales with a multi-media presentation of Renaldo Davidson's photography and mixed-media portraits of iconic images inspired by The Simple Tales. The premiere performance of this project will take place on Saturday, June 5 at Dwyer Cultural Center in Harlem, New York.

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Performance Overview

On February 13, 1943, on the black-owned Chicago Defender newspaper, Langston Hughes introduced to the readers of his weekly column one of the most memorable and winning characters in the annals of African-American literature—Jesse B. Simple, who is still alive and justly regarded as one of the most inspired creators in the rich writing career of Langston Hughes. Eventually, in 1950, Hughes would edit selections form the columns and publish them as books, with Jesse B. Simple as their modest but endearing hero: Simple Speaks His Mind, Simple Takes a Wife, Simple Stakes a Claim, The Best of Simple, and Simple's Uncle Sam.

Simple tells his tales over a glass of beer in high humor, but sometimes they hit as sharp as the corns on his feet, which he is known to complain about. Behind his amusing, vibrant front, one can glimpse the loneliness of the uprooted and the dispossessed. Although Simple sometimes edges toward despair, he is always saved in the end by his passion for life, laughter and his people.

While a resident artist with the Neighborhood Arts Center Anthony development his characterization of Hughes' Jesse B. Simple and his adaptation of the Simple Tales. Anthony Thompson's performance places Jesse B. where his creation by Hughes first took place, at "Paddy's Bar," a café in Harlem. His characterization of Jesse B. Simple has won him much acclaim as a well-polished solo performer. Through Thompson, Simple expresses his concerns regarding politics, religion, and being black in America.

Adrian McCoy, critic for the Pittsburgh Press, wrote in her review of Anthony's performance: "He is well cast in the role of the talkative and opinionated Jesse." Capturing the gentle soul of Simple, the success of this actor's performance is linked to his passion for Hughes's literature. His ability to capture the gentle soul and emotions of Simple is one of artistry grown out of his commitment of the preservation of the works of Langston Hughes.

Actor, director Anthony AKA Adeagbo Mwai Mudo and visual artist, photographer Renaldo Davidson who's work has known to reflect the Africans experience in America come together integrating their mediums in a collaborate adventure interweaving a visual arts exhibition, photo slides presentations, dance, music, literature and theatre creating a multimedia performance giving life to the voice of Harlem, the everyman Langston Hughes' legendary character Jesse B. Simple.

Project and Artistic Goals

Project Goals

- The Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project reintroduces Langston Hughes' character to the community of Harlem and celebrates the Simple Tales. It also provides an opportunity for local organizations to collaborate with a local artists to present cultural programs to their community. Through an evaluation process that includes presenter, audience, and post- performance discussions the project will assess the relevance of Hughes' Simple Tales for our times. The project also gives community organizations an opportunity to expand artistic activities, providing local audiences and artists access to creative expression and works that reflect the history of Harlem as well as fostering a greater appreciation for Hughes and his Simple Tales.
- Sponsors/presenters will provide performance space and assist the artist with promotions and audience development. Organizations and churches may schedule a performance for their members only or include the general public. Sponsors will meet with the artist to discuss date and time of presentation, performance requirements, and the evaluation process. The performance requires only one small table and two chairs, and it is directed to adapt to any space. It has taken place in classrooms, lecture and banquet halls, outdoor patios and the stage. The artist is responsible for props and costumes.

Artistic Goals

The project will challenge the artists to explore new directions in their work and expand their creative vision by placing Jesse B. Simple in the community where he was created. While sparking the artist's desire to learn and grow, it will provide opportunities to develop professional relationships and public exhibitions while polishing his characterization of Jesse B. Simple. The project's evaluation process and post-performance discussions will broaden the artists' and the audience's perspective of Hughes' Simple Tales while enhancing their acquaintance with cultural arts traditions in the community of Harlem. The project will also provide the artists with an opportunity to collaborate with the Harlem community in continuing to preserve the works of Langston Hughes and African-American culture.

Production History

Anthony Thompson in The Simple Tales:

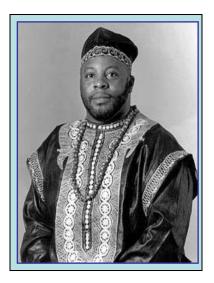
Georgia State University University of Georgia Atlanta Clark University Emory University Morris Brown College Neighborhood Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia Morehouse College University of the South, Tennessee Duke University University of Pittsburgh **Carnegie University** Carlow College Pittsburgh Community Colleges Karamu House Cultural Center, Cleveland, Ohio Paul Robeson Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia Wilkinsburg Arts Theater, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Langston Hughes Library Cultural Center Queens Boro Libraries Columbus, Ohio Libraries National Langston Hughes Festival, Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, Tennessee Brooklyn Historical Society and a host of art festivals and community centers.

Member Biographies

ANTHONY THOMPSON

Artistic Director (347) 984-0477 africangrove@hotmail.com

Anthony Thompson received his training from Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Theater Arts. He has trained with such renowned artists as Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Phillip Hayes Dean, and Sam Art Williams. His years of theatrical experience includes arts administration, production management, and arts in education, director, and actor.



Anthony has served as artist-in-residence with Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Fulton County Schools, Georgia; Duke University, Morris Brown College, University of Pittsburgh's African Dance and Drum Ensemble, Neighborhood Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia, and Atlanta Public Schools. Also in Atlanta he has worked as an administrative assistant for Theatre of the Stars, administrative assistant and school arts coordinator for Just Us Theatre Company, and program director for the Paul Robeson Theatre. In Cleveland, Ohio he served as director of Karamu House Cultural Center's Drama Theater Youth Programs, performing arts consultant for Neighborhood Centers Association's School's as Neighborhood Resources and director of Collinwood Community Center's Youth Services Programs. He is founder / artistic director of African Grove Performance Ensemble Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

While a resident artistic director for Wilkinsburg Arts Theatre he received rave reviews for his direction of Langston Hughes' "Black Nativity". Other accomplishments included having three productions listed in the best top ten shows in the year roundups by Pittsburgh critics. His direction of Douglas Turner Ward's "Day of Absence" was voted best ensemble work of the year by Pittsburgh Art Magazine. Other directing credits include; "Happy Ending," Sty of the Blind Pig", "A Love Song for Miss Lydia."

Anthony creates original work that reflects the history and culture of African-Americans. His spirited and soulful style can be seen in such works as; "Swing Low Sweet in the Mornin", which made its debut at The Three Rivers Art Festival, "We've Come This Far By Faith" produce while in residence with Morris Brown College, "Africa Explains" a touring production for the Karamu House art in education program, "On The Lord's Path" an original folk tale written by Thompson which tells the story of an African enslaved who is caught reading, "Good Morning Revolution Sankofa," and "Soul Looks Back and Wonders," both produced by African Grove Performance Ensemble and funded by Heinz Art Endowment.

Anthony made his New York City debut as Jesse B. Simple in Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra's World Premiere "Jesse B. Simple Suite." As an actor, his most enjoyable roles have been his portrayal of the eponymous main character in "The Wiz," Bilbo Baggins in J. R. R, Tolkin's "The Hobbit," narrator/preacher in Hughes' "Black Nativity", and Langston Hughes' character, Jesse B. Simple which has won him much acclaim as a well polished solo performer.

Member Biographies

RENALDO DAVIDSON

Visual Arts Multimedia Director (917) 600-2203 renaldorii@gmail.com

Renaldo Davidson is a British-born, New York-based expressionist painter and photographer. He possesses a matchless ability to convey the essence of icons of the African Diaspora that places him in a class all by himself.



Davidson is social realist painter and photographer inspired by a love and appreciation from everything from film, literature, music, history and current events with emphasis on what is unique about each subject he captures. A Josephine Baker, the James Baldwin, Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali), photographer Richard Avedon, the great Jimi Hendrix and Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks, just to name a few. Self taught, Renaldo has been creating works of art since grade school. Oil pastels with vibrant color and graceful strokes that seem to float above the canvas. His creations have been compared to Jazz improvisations, good soul music and freestyle hip-hop.

Renaldo's artwork has garnered notices in Time Out New York, prominent reviews in The New York Times and other major and local publications. He has created cover art for In Defense of Mumia Abu Jamal; Donna Hemans River Woman for Washington Square Press; the poetry of Jessica Care Moore; anthologies of Ras Baraka and a variety of articles over the years. Davidson has collaborated with playwright Arthvr Alleyne on Scribblin' at the Automat, the play about the friendship of James Baldwin and Richard Avedon. His pieces have also been featured on BET network, along with features on FOX 5 New York, Eyewitness News Channel 7 New York and nationally on NBC Nightly News Weekend Edition with Lester Holt. His most recent exhibit in partnership with the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership at the 395 Extension located on Flatbush Avenue in the borough of Kings drew rave reviews. In addition Renaldo has had numerous shows at private institutions, cultural events, fundraisers, and restaurants over the years here in the metropolitan area.

During the historic 2008 Presidential Campaign Renaldo had the opportunity to show his current collection – a retrospective on President Obama-- at a pre-inauguration event in D.C. sponsored by Chestnut Law Firm. His photo graces the cover of No Sleep Till Brooklyn: New and Selected Poems by Kevin Powell. His work also includes freelance assignments for Lincoln Center for the Black Rock Coalition celebration of jazz icon Nina Simone. He is currently visual arts and documentary photographer for Langston Hughes Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project. Renaldo's work with the Jesse B. Simple Alive in Harlem Community Arts Project will be placed in the Langston Hughes Society archives to be used for educational research for African American Literary Scholars. Renaldo serves as visual arts multimedia artistic director in collaboration with with actor / director Anthony Thompson to create a new work which explores the life of Hughes' legendary character Jesse B Simple. Renaldo is currently the distinguished instructor for art at Kippstar College Prep Charter School in Harlem and the James Baldwin high school in Chelsea in NYC.

Member Biographies

LORI PAYNE

Production/Media Coordinator (347) 225-5341 loripayne999@gmail.com

Lori Payne is an artist who works to learn. Her purpose is to express as art the complex nature of human kind through the wit and eloquence of the common man. She is a multi-talented creative professional with a pointed ability to seek out the essence of an expression. This allows her to carry out work with great efficiency and focus through the completion of every project.



Lori's experience encompasses writing, directing and acting. Her written dramatic works include: *Catherine Street, Bling!, Sach'Elays,* and *Last Call at the Miracle Grill,* the one-act trilogy entitled *Ulterior Side Dishes, Tulsa, Black Peet on the Eve of Emancipation* and two work for hire screenplays. New York production credits include: *Bling!,* at the Producers' Club as a semi-finalist at the Strawberry One-Act Festival, and at The American Theatre of Harlem; *Ulterior Side Dishes* at the Nuyorican Poets Café; and *Catherine Street* as part of Manhattan Repertory Theatre's *Summerfest. Ulterior Side Dishes* was produced as a radio drama by the WBAI producer and journalist, Dred Scott-Keyes.

Lori's directing credits include: *Evening Gloves*, by Helen Hill, *Catherine Street*, which she also wrote, *Family Matters* and *Soiled Wings* by Michael A. Jones, and *Black Peet On The Eve of Emancipation*, her original work which was commissioned by the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum.

New York acting credits include the role of Gabbi Foss, in *Bling!*, by Lori Payne; *SWAP*, by Melanie Maria Goodreaux, for which she received positive mention in *Time Out* magazine for her role as Tabitha; Gussie Lee in Anthony Harper's *Stolen Waters Are Sweet;* Lorraine Oraline Donna Jean Johnson Ponce in La Reina's *Barriolesque*; and Gullah Elder Storyteller with the *KowTeff African Dance Company* at the Miller Theatre of Columbia University.

After earning a B.A. in Drama and Communications from the University of New Orleans, Lori wrote for local and regional publications, choosing to document stories that focused on the arts, activism, and local history. Her articles have appeared in *Where Y'at* Magazine, *Survival Digest Monthly*, where she also worked as arts editor, and *The Louisiana Weekly* in New Orleans, Louisiana. Lori has gained further editorial and marketing experience while working as an editorial assistant at *The Village Voice*.

Lori currently serves as Poet-In-Residence for Dred Scott Keyes' *The Cutting Edge* radio program, Vice President of Marketing for La Reina del Barrio Productions, and Production/Media Coordinator for Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple Alive In Harlem Community Arts Project.

Contact

BOOKING INQUIRIES

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MEDIA INQUIRIES

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