



**BONNIE HENDERSON**  
COME A LITTLE CLOSER  
*"A STUNNIG ONE WOMAN SHOW"*

# One Woman Owns 'One Race Woman'

## Dance Review

By LEWIS SEGAL  
TIMES DANCE CRITIC

In assembling an intuitive, feminist, three-hour dance-theater epic à la Pina Bausch, locally based choreographer Winifred R. Harris relies so extensively on spoken texts that ultimately the result needs the services of a visionary director—Julie Taymor, perhaps—more than a maker of dances. Harris creates gutsy, imaginative movement for her Between Lines ensemble, but in this talky project it isn't enough: Her dances may soar but her staging plods, and that turns out to be a fatal flaw.

After a long gestation, and periodic previews as a work-in-progress, Harris' "One Race Woman" received its premiere Saturday at the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre in Hollywood. Beginning with an invitation to "relax and breathe and feel," along with a powerful "Birth" solo by Harris herself, it surveyed a wide range of women's experiences, focusing on childhood conditioning, pervasive notions of beauty and violence against women.

More and more, however, dance expression merely punctuated or visually amplified passages written by Khalil Gibran, Wanda Lee Evans, Luisah Teish, Brian Andreas, Ntozake Shange and 14 others—passages that completely defined the subjects and sensibilities of "One Race Woman" with no real

need for dancing and, moreover, fueled the evening's one indispensable performance. Billed as a guest artist, actress Karen Malina White assumed a variety of roles, speaking in an inexhaustible range of voices and out of them emerging as Everywoman: at once passionate, profound and brilliantly authoritative. Whether detailing sexual abuses in tones of outrage or offering a deft character portrait of a woman remembering her 100th birthday, White simply owned the evening, making the left side of the stage where she usually appeared more compelling than anything happening in the center.

Obviously an audience confused or intimidated by pure dance will find any choreography more accessible if it spells out its meanings in words. Indeed, lots of modern dance artists have strayed into grandiose text-dominated projects weak in dance expression, and at UCLA it has become a cottage industry to precede dance performances with lectures and follow them with question-and-answer debriefings. In the process, the dance itself becomes a kind of pretext for extensive interpretations and explanations that it may never be able to support.

Harris is no academic huckster out to tell us what to look for or what we've missed—even at their most word-saturated, her dances deliver the intensity of their accompanying texts. But nearly all her company dancers are trained for action, not acting, and their

own spoken passages prove hopelessly half-baked next to White's glowing expertise. Harris would never put untrained dancers in front of an audience; why expose untrained actors?

Apart from White's speeches, the highlight of the 16-part evening may have been "Come a Little Closer," a reminiscence of grade-school brutality strongly written and spoken by performance artist Bonnie Henderson, and transformed by the singing of Evelyn Harris and the dancing of Adrian Young and Philein Wang into what should have happened at that grade school but didn't: Henderson's fantasies of love are given the sweetest lyric embodiment imaginable.

Note that Henderson was not forced to dance, Harris to write, or the dancers to sing. Hard-won professional specialization reigned, and with it Harris' multidisciplinary ambitions reached full credibility. In a sense, "One Race Woman" remains a work-in-progress: It doubles back on itself too often, misuses its dancers too frequently and marginalizes Harris' talent for deeply communicative choreography too consistently for her to leave it as is. Nobody active in Southland dance is more accomplished and adventuresome—nobody more ready to tackle women's issues from inside. The sad thing is that "One Race Woman" only tells hard truths; it doesn't dance them.

# 'Vienna' Concert Takes Its Cues From Tanglewood

## Music Review

By RICHARD S. GINELL  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Say this for the California Philharmonic: The orchestra has one of the most gorgeous settings for evening concerts in the area.

The group plays within the Los Angeles County Arboretum in Arcadia, facing a sloping lawn that is divided by a reflecting pool, surrounded by large planted trees, and roamed by some often-vocal peacocks that fancy themselves guest soloists. This is as close to the beauty and ambience of Tanglewood as Southern California gets, and on Saturday night, the Philharmonic even imported some

audience in the thousands in its third season; the lawn was packed with white plastic tables and picnic blankets loaded with catered and do-it-yourself dinners. And while one cannot pretend that the music making is of Tanglewood caliber, it can be rather satisfying in spots, enlivened by the offbeat personality of conductor Victor Vener.

"A Night in Old Vienna" is a staple of pops programming, but in this case, along with the *de rigueur* outpouring of Johann Strauss Jr., Vener devoted half of the program to a pair of Viennese transplants who normally don't turn up in this format. Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 was an uneven affair; the pacing was sluggish in the first

case they would have been within their rights to complain about the truncation of Brahms' Double Concerto. While maintaining an empathetic give-and-take musical dialogue, cellist Waldemar de Almeida and violinist Hubert Pralitz were only allowed to play the first movement, which robbed us of Brahms' greatest slow movement.

Yet the Strauss Jr. second half (with one inevitable interpolation by Strauss Sr., the "Radetzky March") was pretty good, for Vener takes the music seriously, trying to replicate Viennese accelerandos and in the "Blue Danube Waltz," imparting a hint of a Viennese lilt at last. Of course, the



THE LOVE ISSUE: COLOR-BLIND DATING, V-DAY VACATIONS & MORE

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# check it out

BY JENNY PRITCHETT  
AND NYONDO NADI

## WHO'S OUT NOW

Queer insiders have long known about the Sapphic predisposition of Hollywood's Swedish goddess, **Greta Garbo**. What we didn't know, though, was how distasteful the actress found heterosexual sex. Penthouse reported in January that a male lover of Garbo's recalls in his memoir that "their first sexual encounter featured demands by [Garbo] that they make love only in complete darkness. When it was over, he said, she asked him to leave the room."

Turns out poor Maid Marian, if she existed, may also have been shown the door: according to Cardiff history professor Stephen Knight, who studied 14th-century ballads about **Robin Hood**, the leader of England's merry men was probably lovers with Little John, whom the ballads describe as "a jolly bright blade right fit for the trade." Marian, Knight argues, was invented in the 16th-century to heterosexualize Hood's legend.



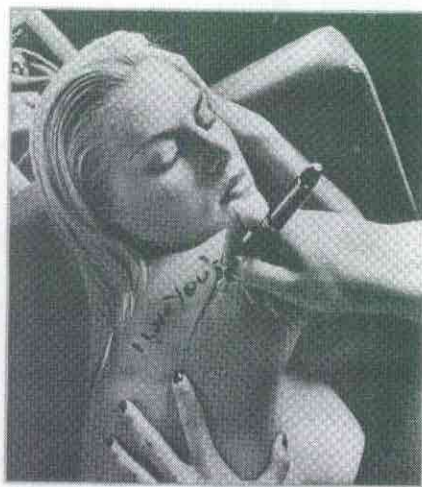
Garbo: lights out on me



Culture warriors  
Dyke Action Machine

## CULTURE FIX

You just can't keep a good woman down, and these two—the high-tech-cum-grassroots tour de force **Dyke Action Machine!** (DAM!)—have been popping up all over New York City for nine years now. Sue Schaffner and Carrie Moyer teamed up in 1991 to "dissect mainstream advertising by inserting lesbian images into recognizably commercial contexts." Their ad spoofs have speared the Gap, Calvin Klein, and Tommy Hilfinger with slick, professional-looking images that the pair—by day, a photographer and a graphic designer and painter—annually wheatpaste along the streets of Gotham. To view previous ad campaigns, plus some Web-only interactive pieces (original answers to the questions we all love, such as "Which one's the man?"), go to [www.dykeactionmachine.com](http://www.dykeactionmachine.com).



Mont Blanc's pen is mightier

## TO MARKET, TO MARKET

We just like the picture. To celebrate the Meisterstück fountain pen from **Mont Blanc's** 75th year, Helmut Newton created a series of "I love you" photographs featuring two women, one penning her devotion on the other's shoulder blade. Newton's series was inspired by tales of the Japanese "pillow book," wherein a woman writes sweet nothings on her lover's body. (Available through Mont Blanc stores.)

Less romantic, but more practical for those spending Valentine's Day with the break-up blues, is **Heartbreaker Comics**. Lose yourself in the postapocalyptic girls 'n' guns adventures of Queenie and the Club Squad. The true fan can order Queenie dolls, Club Squad dog tags, and enamel Heartbreaker pins in the squad's "broken heart" emblem. (For ordering information, write PO. Box 14278, Portland, OR 97293-0278.)

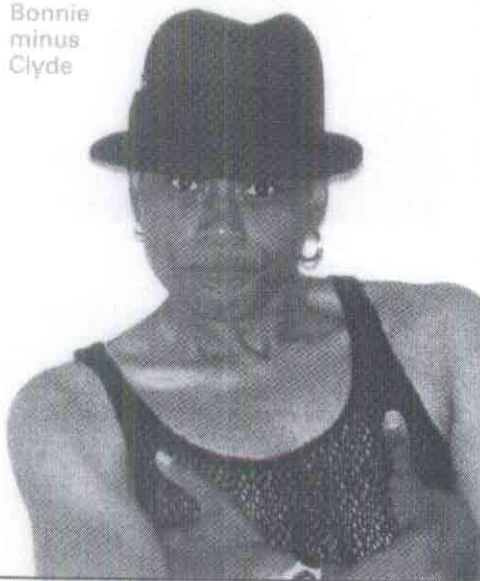
## SEXCESSORIES

Though many sextoys exist to enhance the mechanics of sex, or its safety, one group focuses on enhancing the sensations of sex. For those who are interested in adding a little spice to a vanilla encounter, there are **starter kits** for both sensation and bondage play. Feather, furs, and even costumes are included. Kits that caught our eye this month: the **Bad Girl** love kit, which comes with fishnet stockings and a pair of plastic handcuffs; **Ona Zee's Beginner's B&D Kit** includes all you need to get started, including an instructional video. Bondage beginners should consider **Jane's Bonds**, a set of fabric restraints lined in fun fake fur. (*Bad Girl Love Kit*, \$23.95; *California Exotic*; *Ona Zee's Beginner B&D*, \$109.95; *Doc Johnson*; *Jane's Bonds*, \$28/pair; available through *Good Vibrations*.)

## GIRLFRIEND OF THE MONTH

**Bonnie Henderson** is a strong believer in what she calls the Greater Power of Love. A Los Angeles writer and performance artist, Henderson recently created a one-woman show that is a tribute to the force of love in the face of overwhelming odds. The show, *Come a Little Closer*, celebrates several of Henderson's personal heroes who represent those who crossed color and gender lines in the midst of racism, homophobia, and unreasoning hatred. Henderson's heroes include drag kings, drag queens, and PFLAG activists, in addition to more well-known African American revolutionaries. "I know my life would not be as free as it today," summarizes Henderson, were it not for the 'nigga lovers' of old who risked their own lives to stand with us, to march with us, to prevail through the courts with us."

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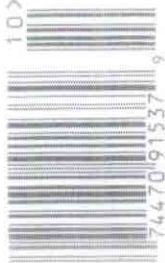
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PLAYWRIGHT / PERFORMER

# BONNIE HENDERSON

STRIVES  
TO BRING  
US ALL  
A LITTLE CLOSER

an interview by  
Lenore M. Rivers

Last May, first time playwright Bonnie Henderson dazzled and touched Los Angeles audiences with her moving one woman show "Come A Little Closer", a telling reflection, 5 years in the making, of our collective lives revealed through the life of the



author. Bonnie's exuberant, provocative, and emotionally charged theatrical autobiography returns September 17th and she, fully supported by her companion of 7 years, Betty Miller, is ready to continue what is clearly a mission for her.

I met Bonnie and Betty several years ago in Los Angeles during a spiritual gathering. My immediate observation of this very beautiful, outgoing, and empowered couple who share a home in the L.A. suburb of Altadena, was that of a majestic couple. I saw two African queens on a journey of spiritual wholeness borne out of deep-rooted love.

From the moment Bonnie told her companion that she wanted to write a play about her life, Betty was supportive. "There were times when I would see her so vulnerable because the writing was so intense and revealing," Betty recalls. "I would try to be there with an extra stroke, a hug, a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes Bonnie had to put the pen down because it was so hard re-living some of the very painful experiences in her life."

But a show called "Come A Little Closer" indeed became a reality, and a reality check. And a celebration, even as it proved to be a revelation. It is a story brought forth from the heart and the soul of an African American lesbian, yet it is a story for and about every-

***"I wrote it because I saw a need in the African American gay community as well as the gay community across racial lines to bridge the gap between men and women. I just never understood it. It's so sad to me...In the gay community it seems like the women socialize with women and men with men. I miss bonding with the brothers!"***

one.

LENORE RIVERS: Bonnie, what brought you to the place where you were ready to chronicle your life story?

BONNIE HENDERSON: I thought about writing my story in 1993, basically to show people that we are more similar than we are different. I noticed that there were so many gaps between men and women, gay men and lesbians, racial gaps, when in actuality we're much more similar than we are different. Even men and women can admit we all experience some of the same emotions. We can transplant a woman's heart or lungs into a man's body so that he may continue to live.

I thought about my life and what I have been through. I know that so many others have experienced some of the same feelings. So if I can help, say, a gay youth feel, 'Okay, I can make it too', instead of feeling like, 'I don't want to live anymore', then I have helped by telling my story.

You know, I shared with Betty that I had prayed to God to 'please tell me what it is You want me to do.' It's interesting how it came about. Two very dear friends of ours were dying. When one of them passed away with cancer I wrote something for her memorial. People commented on the piece, emphasizing how well I captured her essence. When our other friend died I wrote a piece for his memorial as well. There

again was the same reaction. People who heard my writing were so impressed. My sponsor suggested that I take my writing more seriously. I believe God showed me through these people that I should put pen to paper.

Tell us about your show.

"Come A Little Closer" has been a true gift for me. While writing the play a lot of things came up. After each chapter I was convinced that God, myself, and the spirits of friends who had passed on were in my room helping me write. "Come A Little Closer" is a wonderful way of showing people that their story is so much like mine; male, female, heterosexual, gay, bisexual, transgendered, it doesn't matter. Anybody who sees the play will have an opportunity to relive their life and their childhood memories.

I wrote the play because I went through a whole lot of stuff in my life, and if my life story could help anybody get through what I went through then, hey, that's what it is written for.

I wrote it because I saw a need in the African American gay community as well as the gay community across racial lines to bridge the gap between men and women. I just never

understood it. It's so sad to me. I have two brothers and when they found out I was gay our relationship changed and we grew apart. In the gay community it seems like the women socialize with women and men with men. I miss bonding with the brothers! I've had gay men in my life. My best friend Ricky, who [I talk about] in the play, is a gay male. I would like to have gay male friends like I have female gay friends. I wanted the play to tap into that and show that there is nothing to fear. "Come A Little Closer" is a tribute to people. It's a tribute to gay America before Stonewall, during Stonewall, and the courageous gay people after Stonewall.

It's a tribute to PLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) because I so wanted my mother to go to PFLAG when I came out to her. I wanted her to find out who I was, but she refused to go. My mother believed that she didn't need to go to PLAG. We had a strained relationship. I gained a hundred pounds through mother/daughter issues because I stuffed my feelings through food.

How do you perceive your show has and will impact the community at large?

First I'd like to say for the record that Betty and I have put our all into this project. Financially, we are in the hole. Our first two shows sold out. We invested so much money into this and we have not broken even yet. But we believe this is God's





dream and we know that we are not going to be in the hole forever. We are getting a message to people of all walks of life. That is our success. "Come A Little Closer" has brought us closer to a community who has expressed via e-mail, letters, and phone calls, so much: 'I'm not gay but I've experienced the same kind of life you experienced.' 'Thank you for acknowledging that men should be able to cry.' 'Gay people are people too. I was homophobic and had a brother who died of AIDS, and I thought it was acceptable to be mean to gays. "Come A Little Closer" made me feel ashamed of the way I treated my brother as he lived and died with AIDS'. White heterosexual women can say 'this is not [just] an African American gay play, it's a story about life.' Gay men have said, 'Please do the play again so I can invite others, it was such a good production.' And gay women noted 'we are much more similar than we are different.'

impacted their lives. We want to say thank you Los Angeles for your love and support. We are grateful to you for embracing our show.

"Come A Little Closer" re-opens September 17th and 18th at 8 PM at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 South Spring Street, downtown Los Angeles. The theatre seats 320 people. It's an intimate setting. And there is secured parking. We sold out both shows back in May. We're looking to do the show in other states. We did a video taping for promotional reasons; to gain sponsorship and financial support. We will have the press present, and we are very much open to feed back of what we can do to raise funds for our production. We welcome suggestions as to what we can do to make sure the message can be heard all over the world.

I know that spirituality is very important in you and Betty's lives.

Final words?

Yes it is. We pray together. We thank God for our life, our love, and the ability to do God's will. It's God, Betty and me. When we are centered our lives soar, we have so much fun together most of the time. When we have challenges, we pray, we talk with one another, and we walk through the fire together. I think if we weren't spiritual beings, we would just think and react. It would be robotic. But there is a spirit in us that gently touches us and guides us through this path.

I would like to say that it's one thing having done something before and others believe that you can do it again. But Betty had never seen me write a play. I'd never written a play before, yet the moment I said 'Honey, I'm going to write a play' she believed in it. I've never had that happen to me before in my entire life! She knew it was going to be a success. She talked about it with other people. She offered to work two jobs so that I had more time to write (of course because of my love for her I would not do that). I even took a second job so we could keep things going smoothly. This lady has been so supportive. I would not have completed my writing had I not had Betty's help. She has truly been everything that I've needed to succeed in doing "Come A Little Closer". Betty's loyalty, her commitment to our growth spiritually, physically, and mentally has been indescribable.

Give us the particulars on the upcoming dates for "Come A Little Closer."

First I want to say we've literally received hundreds of cards and e-mails congratulating us, asking when we were putting on the show again, and sharings with us how the show