

Nothing to Prove

PLAYWRITER Dee Jae Cox, author of *The Rape of Djuna Barnes* and *Letters Home*, had two hits this year: the opening of her wildly popular *Prove It On Me* and the launch of the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Project, a nonprofit organization that aims to create opportunity for women in the performing arts.

Prove It On Me was released at the beginning of 2008 to outstanding reviews. The play tells the story of Georgia, an African American female blues singer living in Harlem in the 1920s. Georgia is in love with a white female socialite and the play deals with the misery of their secret relationship, while also tapping into the larger social issues of the era. Although the play isn't a musical, it is enriched by the original blues score that accompanies it.

Prove It On Me was the launching pad for Cox's second big endeavor—the LA Women's Theatre Project. "We needed something to help establish us, and I had this play I wanted to produce. It was a very good takeoff point for us, it helped to get our name out there," Cox says.

Playwright Dee Jae Cox took on secret love and the LA theater scene this year.

Cox, who began writing plays a decade ago, said she took a few years to finish *Prove It On Me* because she intensively researched each character. According to Cox, Georgia turned out

to be one of the most remarkable characters she has ever created. "There was something about her character that came to me, and wouldn't let go," she says.

Cox says she developed Georgia's character by fleshing out each of her movements and every aspect of her dialogue so that the character would come alive on the stage.



By the time *Prove It On Me* opened, Cox was also primed to help launch the LA Women's Theatre Project.

The organization supports productions with mostly female casts and crews. After the opening of *Prove It On Me*, the LA Women's Theatre Project itself promoted the 20 Percent New Works Festival, which was set up by Cox and her partner, composer Michele Weiss, to help women writers share their work with an audience. The 20 Percent project brought together 70 artistic women—from playwrights, directors, actors and producers to technical crew members.

According to Cox, the festival was named after a statistic released in a 2002 study by the New York State Council on the Arts Theater Program: Only about 20 percent of professionals working in theater are women. Not that Cox is against working with men, just that she likes to put her energy more toward things that are of interest to women.

The small number of women working in theater inspired Cox and Weiss to found the LA Women's Theatre Project. "It is phenomenal," Cox says. "If you think that theater reflects our culture and community... women's voices and their perspective are not being heard."

The LA Women's Theatre Project is currently looking for a venue in Palm Springs, Calif., to present *Prove It On Me* at Dinah Shore Week next year and is using its website, lawomenstheatreproject.com, to get the word out and drum up support for the show. [FERNANDA SILVA] ■

Prove It stars Aynsley Bubbico (left) and Sweet Baby J'ai backstage and on set (inset); Dee Jae Cox (left) at the opening with stars Sweet Baby J'ai and Deborah Keller