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Biography Profile Interview Gallery You were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for your drama Ruined. Could you tell us how you came to write that play? Keys to success — Courage. I was working at the time with my collaborator, Kate Whoriskey, and we were really interested in doing an adaptation of that particular play and began researching various wars that were going on. And the war that was raging on in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And the two of us decided that we were going to set the play there. And when I began reading the newspapers, I found I couldn't find any information about what was happening to women in war. And I said to Kate on a whim, I said, "What if we bought a ticket and we went to East Africa and interviewed women who were fleeing that war?" She was a little frightened, a little worried, but she followed me there. And you have to remember at this moment we were still very interested in doing a modern adaptation of Mother Courage. But when we sat down with women who were fleeing the war, very quickly I realized that the European male frame of the story was not going to be sufficient. The stories that we were hearing from these women were so specific to the Democratic Republic of Congo — it was so specific to African women — that I thought, "I need a completely different paradigm in order to enter this space." And one of the things that really resonated when I was interviewing the women is the way in which they held the word "mother" in their mouths. I always asked each woman, how would you describe "mother courage?" and they'd always take a moment where they'd stop and they'd say, "Yes, mother courage." And in that moment I thought, "I have to somehow capture that emotion," and capture sort of the sadness but the resilience that was inside the way in which they held that language in their mouths. And so Ruined really came out of that. February 10, 2009: Director Kate Whoriskey, actress Saidah Arrika Ekulona, and playwright Lynn Nottage attend the Ruined Off-Broadway opening night after-party at Red Eye Grill in New York City. (Bryan Bedder and Getty Images) There's a paradox in this play, in that a brothel becomes a kind of haven for women fleeing the war. Keys to success — Vision Lynn Nottage: I'm very interested as a whole in morally ambiguous characters. And at the center of Ruined is a woman named Mama Nadi who runs a brothel in the Ituri Rainforest. She at once provides refuge to women who have been victims of gender-specific human rights abuses, but she also exploits them. So I was really interested in that conundrum of someone who is at once sort of savior and exploiter. I think that Mama Nadi would describe herself as someone who understood that in order to save these women, she had to make some compromised choices, and I was interested in that compromised choice and the complexity of that. One of the phrases that I held onto when I was interviewing these women, was "sustain the complexity of the situation." It's really easy for us to be judgmental without understanding the complexities of what it took to survive in that situation. In Ruined, you riveted audiences around the country with a story that the newspapers weren't even really covering. Keys to success — Integrity Lynn Nottage: The decision to get on the plane to go to East Africa really came as a result of not being able to find any information, and that anger and that frustration. When I arrived in East Africa and began interviewing women, I became even more frustrated and angry because I thought, "These stories need to be amplified. How can so many women be experiencing similar levels of exploitation and gender-specific violence and none of us know that it's happening?" If you remember, the war in Democratic Republic of Congo, I think by the time it ended 6.5 million people had died. It was the largest war since World War II, and half of those people who were victims were women who never picked up arms and weren't instigators of the conflict and yet were victims. 2017: Lynn Nottage is the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice. (Nathan Bajar for The New Yorker) What was that like for you, to listen to these stories? Keys to success — Perseverance Lynn Nottage: I think back specifically to some of the stories that I heard. I remember, in fact, the very first woman who we interviewed began telling her story and I was so overwhelmed by emotion I literally felt like my heart was going to leap out of my body. And I thought, "There's no way I'm going to continue." But I realized that if I didn't bear witness, there was a possibility that there wasn't going to be someone else who would listen and someone else who would take the time to really invest in their stories not only being heard but their stories being told. I remember sitting down with the women, and I always began by saying, "I'm not a human rights activist, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a journalist. But what I can do that many of them won't do is that I can listen to your story from beginning to end and I'll do it with patience and I'll do it with compassion." Watching the play is a shattering experience. You showed a lot of courage in taking it to that point, which you knew was going to create a lot of emotion in your audience. Keys to success — Perseverance Lynn Nottage: After I did the initial set of interviews with women in East Africa, I recognized that my journey was not complete, and I ended up applying for a Guggenheim grant to go back and spend more time in East Africa with women fleeing gender-specific human rights abuses. And then after that I went back a third time. And the third time I went back a third time I went back stories, but I want to figure out how do we process the stories in a way that moves through our bodies and leads to some sort of catharsis and healing." It was really important when I was writing Ruined that the audience take a journey, not just through the darkness, but come out at the end with a sense of optimism, and recognize the resilience in these women. I know that I took a lot of criticism when the play was originally produced that I had a happy ending. But one of the things that I remember when I was interviewing the women is how easily they could move from despair to accessing their smiles, and I thought the smiles are the things that permit them to transcend these circumstances, and I wanted the audiences to understand that as dark as the place these women were, they were able to find their resilience. A scene from Sweat at the neighborhood tavern where most of the play's action takes place. (Photo: Joan Marcus) The second of your plays to win the Pulitzer Prize was Sweat, and that also involved a lot of in-person research, didn't it? How did that come about? For me, Sweat really came at the end of my journey with Ruined. It began when I was actually coming back from Chad, where I had just done a production of Ruined there, and I arrived home and I had all these emails in my email box, and one very specific email was from a neighbor of mine who was a very good friend. I opened it up that evening and I read it, and basically she was saying that she had been broke for six months, that she had been broke for six months, that she had been hiding it from her friends, and that when we saw her smiling, that smile was covering the fact that she was in deep despair. She was a mother of two. She's someone who I can attest to always had a smile, and it broke my heart. It broke my heart that I had not recognized the extent of her suffering. I hadn't recognized that she was someone that was in the midst of such a struggle. The next day I called her up and I said, "What can I do to help?" and it also happened to coincide with the very first week of Occupy Wall Street. So we decided that we were going to go to Occupy Wall Street and vent our frustration. We spent about a week walking around Zuccotti Park chanting, being really angry, but at the very end I felt like nothing has happened, and I felt I need to do something much more tangible. I want to understand how economic stagnation is really shifting the American narrative, and how someone like this friend who had solidly invested in the Horatio Alger myth, someone who had been solidly middle class, could be broadsided and find herself on the verge of being homeless. That led me on a journey to Reading, Pennsylvania, which at the time was the poorest city of its size in America. My assumption is that I was going to go down to this city, interview people and interview people for one week, and it ended up being a two-year journey in which I went almost every single week to talk to people and interview people, from the first African American mayor of this city to folks who were living in shantytowns in the village. When I arrived in Reading, I had no assumption of what I was going to hear. I had no expectation that I was ever going to leave with a play. It also happened to coincide with a commission that I had received from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to write a play about an American revolution. And while I was in Reading, I decided I wanted to write about the "de-industrial revolution" because I think that this is perhaps the biggest revolution that has happened in America since the Civil Rights Movement. Lynn Nottage wrote the script for the world premiere musical adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's novel The Secret Life of Bees, with music by Duncan Sheik (left) and lyrics by Susan Birkenhead (right). In May 2019, Tony Award-winning director Sam Gold staged the adaptation of Atlantic Theater Company's off-Broadway production in New York City. Perhaps you could tell us a little of the story of the play. What's it about? Lynn Nottage: Sweat revolves around a close-knit group of friends who work in a steel factory in Reading, Pennsylvania, and it kind of tracks that friendship over the course of the year, from where they're celebrating their prosperity to discovering that they're going to be locked out of their plant. And it really explores the way in which that friendship fractures across racial lines. The alienation among steelworkers and others in the middle of the country is hard for people on the coasts to even fathom, isn't it? Lynn Nottage: It was heartbreaking for me to sit in circles with steelworkers who had worked in factories — in some cases for 40 years, the same factory. They had assumed that their sons and daughters would then move into these jobs, realizing that not only would they never be able to access their pension plans and access their factories again, but that opportunity was gone for the next generation. I remember sitting in this circle of middle-age white men, you know, this black woman, and I'm asking them questions and seeing them not just cry but weep, weep out of frustration, also weeping because they literally didn't know what to do next. And what was surprising is because for so long — and forgive me for using this language — but for so long I think that these particular men saw their opportunity — their whiteness — as a superpower, and that as long as they were white men, they'd always have opportunity. And I think when that opportunity was taken away from them, they became profoundly confused. It's like, "Wait a minute. What do we do? Who are we?" And I watched when I was sitting in the circle as these men were grappling with a sense of identity — of their identity. It's like, "Who are we?" And I watched when I was sitting in the circle as these men were grappling with a sense of identity — of their identity. It's like, "Who are we?" And I watched when I was sitting in the circle as these men were grappling with a sense of identity. New York City. In 2003, the 2-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Lynn Nottage, and PGA and Emmy Award-winning film director, Tony Gerber, founded Market Road Films, a New York-based, independent production company's mission is to bring evocative, visual, and character-driven storytelling to unusual and otherwise untold stories. (Emilio Madrid) Not only have they lost their identity as workers, but they can't support their families. Lynn Nottage: They can't support their families. Lynn Nottage: They can't support their families. Lynn Nottage: They can't support their families. movie. He thought, "I may never be able to go to a movie theater again because I don't have that disposable income." And just the notion of that was quite devastating. You've delved into different media — TV, film — and different ways of bringing theater to people. With Sweat you went out into the community. Keys to success — Vision Lynn Nottage: When we were initially conceiving of Sweat, myself and my collaborator Kate Whoriskey, we always wanted to figure out a way not only to take it to folks who might be very much in dialogue with the issues that were happening on the stage. So we, along with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, raised some money from the very inception to take the play outside of the proscenium and take it into communities. When we moved the show to the Public Theater, we deliberately selected that theater because the artistic director, Oskar Eustis, was very aligned with what we wanted to do with the show. We had originally planned to take it to Reading, Pennsylvania and then tour it through the prison system, but the prison system would not let us in. So after we took it to Reading, Pennsylvania alive, and we came up with this notion of touring Sweat through the Rust Belt, specifically in small towns that were swing towns and voted for Trump. We wanted to go to places where we thought, after the play is done we can actually talk about some of these issues. April 23 2019: Lynn Nottage attends the Time 100 Gala at Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City. She was named a "Pioneer" on the annual Time 100: Most Influential People of 2019. (Taylor Hill/FilmMagic) How did that go? Lynn Nottage: The tour of the Rust Belt with Sweat was phenomenal. It really exceeded our expectations, and I think in large part due to a lot of the excellent work that the Public did to prepare people for what they were going to see. And you talk about the way in which you invite audiences across a threshold is that the Public Theater's advance team spent a lot of time figuring out, "How do we get people who've never seen theater to enter into a space and sit for two-and-a-half hours and watch a play?" When I got there, I anticipated that there'd be a lot of cellphones ringing, that people would be restless, but by and large those audiences sat quiet and rapt and at the end of the play really wanted to engage in robust conversation. You know, I describe it like, almost like a traveling tent show in which the play is the sermon and the people afterwards would stand up and testify. Sometimes we had to turn out the lights to get people to stop talking, but we recognized that there was a real need to talk about what the folks in the Rust Belt were going through. How was the play received? You won a second Pulitzer Prize, but changing circumstances caused some people to see the play in a different light. What was that like? Lynn Nottage: The landing of Sweat was quite fascinating because when we first began the play, America shifted. I remember we — actually on the night that Donald Trump was elected — we were performing, and there was a tangible difference in the way in which the audience responded to the play from the night before. Something had shifted, but this play that was history suddenly became reality and became prescient and spoke to what was happening in America in ways that the media hadn't seen it and many Americans hadn't seen it. And one of the questions I was asked is, "Did you know that Donald Trump." I didn't know that he was going to get elected, but having spent two-and-a-half years in the industrial town, I knew that there was going to be some form of revolution. I didn't know that production with a multimedia presentation called This Is Reading. Could you tell us about that? Lynn Nottage: This Is Reading was a multimedia performance installation that was housed in the Franklin Street Railroad Station in Reading, Pennsylvania. Franklin Street Station had been abandoned since 1981. We decided that we were going to reanimate this space, which was the nexus point between neighborhoods in downtown Reading. It came out of wanting to bring something back to the people in Reading, Pennsylvania. I spent two years there. I had produced Sweat and I didn't like that feeling. I didn't like the feeling that what I had created wasn't benefiting the people in Reading, Pennsylvania. So I thought, "What can I do to bring this fractured city into one space and bring the Reading Railroad Station with the stories of the people in Reading. And the goal was to bring the homeless guy who was on Penn Street and the mayor into the same space, and we succeeded, where they would sit side by side and both recognize that they share the same narrative. That's pretty powerful. Lynn Nottage: It was amazing. It was. For me, This is Reading is the single most exciting piece of theater I feel I've ever created, because it was theater that had immediate impact and was transformative. After we finished the piece, a space that had been abandoned since 1981 suddenly became this very attractive piece of real estate, and now there is a restaurant that has gone in there. And after we did This Is Reading, suddenly the city council wanted to be in dialogue about, "How can we revitalize downtown through the arts?" So it really had impact that exceeded our expectations. What was theatrical about that installation was told in seven parts. The first part was animating the outside of the building with images of the people from Reading, Pennsylvania. So we went around and took these beautiful portraits of the people, which we then projected through projection mapping onto the building. This idea came about because of a jumbotron. We thought, in Reading, Pennsylvania people who feel relatively invisible, how do you make them seen, is you blow their pictures up so that everybody can see them. So that was the first movement involved interviewing the elders in Reading, Pennsylvania and, "Talk about what was Reading like when you were young." And we called that section "Reading Was," which we then brought actors to retell those stories. The next movement was in — God, if I can remember! The next movement was in — God, if I can remember! The next movement was in — God, if I can remember! The next movement was "Reading Behind Closed Doors." One of the things we found is that the people in Reading didn't really know each other that well, and we thought, "What if we bring people inside each other's homes?" So we did interviews with various people inside their homes, which we then projected all over the walls. And then one of the most exciting movements that we had was working with young dancers in Reading, Pennsylvania to tell their stories through their bodies, which was very explosive and very exciting. And then another movement was "Imagining Reading From Above." So we flew drones all over the city so that people in Reading" is to give people different perspectives of their city. So we flew drones all over the city so that we conducted at the very beginning of the piece, that we then used an algorithm while people were watching the show to weave all of these stories on these screens so that they felt like they were one continuous story, even though they were told by ten, 15 people. So the whole idea was, by the end of the piece, to show that despite race, class, that everyone shared one narrative. And the algorithm was really exciting, very complicated to build, but in the end, it worked quite well, and I think that the that again in the future? Lynn Nottage: I would love to do it again, but it nearly killed me. We had to raise, or — "we" I say — I had to raise \$700,000 to make it happen, which was a herculean feat. And I would do it again, but I would need an institution behind me to help me do it. We'd like to talk about your early life, growing up in Boerum Hill in the 1960s. What was that like? Lynn Nottage: Yeah, I was born right in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement. I wasn't born in Boerum Hill, but I moved there when I was five years old, and it was an interesting neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood. I always describe it as a neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood. I always describe it as a neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood between neighborhood. I always describe it as a neighborhood between ne It was an economically diverse neighborhood. When I was growing up on my block, the majority of the houses were boarding houses. There were communists. It was really a very rich place to grow up. What did your parents do? Were they artistic? Lynn Nottage: My parents weren't artists, but they were people who were very invested in the arts. My mother was a school teacher for most of my childhood, and eventually she became a principal at the school. My father was a psychologist who had worked in corrections for a number of years. And unfortunately, when I was young, he had an accident that temporarily paralyzed him. So there was a huge stretch of my childhood in which he was not working, and those were somewhat tough years for my mother, who was raising two children on a school teacher's salary. Do you think it did have an impact for you to be born in 1964? What are your earliest memories of what was going on then? Lynn Nottage: You know, it's interesting, because both of my parents, I would describe them as social activists. I feel like I grew up in a moment in which there was a real consciousness around being black. My parents weren't black nationalists, but they really instilled a deep sense of black pride. One of my early memories, when I was probably five or six years old, my mother and a group of her girlfriends started by Betty Shabazz and Eugenia Clarke, who was the wife of John Henrik Clarke, who was one of the famous African American historians. And one of the reasons that they started this school is they recognized that there was an absence in teaching at the public schools and some of the private schools we as young children were going to, and they wanted to fill those holes with black culture. So I remember on Saturdays and Sundays we'd go to this old storefront and we really learned about African crafts, about African history. I think one of the gifts of growing up in that moment is that my mother delt it was really super important for me to have a sense of ownership of culture. I remember also my mother used to meticulously at night fill in all of my picture books with brown Magic Marker because she wanted me, when I read those books, to see a reflection of myself. I still think about the time that it took for her to go through every picture book that I had and color in the faces brown, and I think that that's a result of growing up in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. What was high school like for you? Lynn Nottage: High school was great. I went to the High School of Music and Art, where I played the piano and the flute. High school was an opportunity for me to travel from Brooklyn up to Harlem in this completely different world. I went to a very small liberal private school that was predominantly white, and when I got up to Music and Art, which was multicultural, and I saw all these beautiful black and brown and white faces, I just really loved being there. Is it true that you wrote your first play in high school? Lynn Nottage: I did. I wrote a play called The Darker Side of Verona in one of my English classes, and I don't even know where it came from other than I felt compelled to sit down one day and write a complete play. I was someone who grew up going to the theater. It was really important. My parents really important to engage with the arts, and the art that my parents really pushed me towards was theater. I grew up going to the New Federal Theatre, going to the Billie Holiday Theatre, and so I think that when I finally was trying to figure out what I wanted to do in high school? Lynn Nottage: When I wrote Darker Side of Verona, I did not win the festival, but the outcome was that I was invited to be part of a new group that they were forming for musical theater artists, and Stephen Sondheim, who was curating this group, selected four young composers to mentor for a year, and I had the good fortune of being one of those four composers. So I spent a year just completely immersed in theater. It was this very sort of rare, beautiful experience. There were two women, two African American women, which is this beautiful old office with a piano, sort of sitting around a piano banging out tunes and learning how to compose musicals. We also had the opportunity to go and see just about every musical that was on Broadway at the time. And as a kid, you know that the tickets are prohibitively expensive, and so Broadway was something that was never accessible to me. So the Young Playwrights Festival really became this window into a world that I didn't know it was possible for me to enter. Was Sondheim an influence? Lynn Nottage: Well absolutely Sondheim was an influence, because he was in many ways this door into the world of theater and he is a phenomenal composer. He's also a phenomenal mentor. What did you learn from him? Lynn Nottage: We didn't spend quite as much time with Sondheim as I'd like, but the show that we were watching him develop when we were young was Merrily We Roll Along. And at the time it didn't go quite as well as he had hoped, and I think that what I learned is that even the greatest artists can stumble, and even the greatest of artists have major setbacks that they have to overcome, and to watch him go through that was really a great life lesson. What did you study at university? Lynn Nottage: When I graduated from high school, I got into Brown University on a scholarship to be a doctor. Even though I have to confess I never really wanted to be a doctor, but I took it. And for my first two years at Brown I took science courses and math courses and just completely immersed myself in pre-med, but at night I'd go home and I'd write plays and produce plays and though that I was going to be a doctor, and I did not get through it, which very quickly ended my pre-med career. I just realized that I was never going to be a doctor, and I then threw myself completely into theater and into African American studies and English. Once I committed to pursuing creative writing and theater, I began to meet professors who profoundly changed the way in which I saw myself as a writer and changed my trajectory. One of those professors was George Bass, who taught me the ritual of making theater, that it's not just about writing a play, but it's actually a ritual of inviting people into a world that I hadn't read plays written by women, but I realized up until that point I had never met a woman who had written a play. She really gave me that extra little push and nurturing that I needed to build my self-confidence and pursue playwriting as a career. What did George Bass mean about inviting people into this world? Lynn Nottage: I think the way in which you invite people across a threshold is super important. For me, I've been thinking a lot about that because one of my frustrations with theater today is that there are so many people who don't feel comfortable crossing the threshold because of ticket prices, because of what is being produced on the stages. So I've really been wrestling with the conundrum of, "I'm making theater in these spaces and yet it's really difficult for me to bring people who I want to see these plays across the barrier, that threshold." So I am trying to create work that's more accessible, and I'm trying to find ways of taking my work outside of the proscenium into communities who might be interested in what I have to write. I can explain more about that, but we can do that later. But I think it's really hard to invite people across the threshold, particularly as an African American playwright. One of my great frustrations when I'm sitting in the theater is that there's so few people who look like me in the audience. That's even true at my plays, and it's a frustration. So one of the things that I'm trying to embed in the work that I do is opportunities to bring different kinds of audiences into the theater, and also opportunities to take the play outside of the theater into communities. One of your first successes, Intimate Apparel was a breakthrough play for me, and I wrote the play just after my mother died and my grandmother had developed senile dementia. When I began the play — which is a play about a seamstress in 1904 who comes to New York and finds herself very isolated and begins looking for love in all of the wrong places. She writes to a man in Panama who returns the letters, and he writes in this very sort of floral beautiful way and she becomes seduced by that voice. When he arrives in New York, she discovers that he's not that man. But the parallel story is that she's also in love with a fabric salesman who happens to be an Orthodox Jew, but they can never consummate that relationship. The play for me really came about wanting to understand my ancestors, because my mother had died and my grandmother had senile dementia, and I realized that, for a really long period of time, that the women in my family had been reticent about their past, and I wanted to understand the nature of that reticence. So I began investigating a woman who would have been like my great-grandmother, a seamstress at the turn of the century. I began plunging into periodicals from the time. I spent about a year and a half at the New York Public Library just trying to resurrect the life of my great-grandmother. Intimate Apparel is a product of that research. It sounds like research is an important part of your process, even if the story is fiction. Lynn Nottage: Intimate Apparel was the first play in which I really expanded the way in which I approached writing the play. Prior to Intimate Apparel, I'd sit down and go deep into my imagination and pull some characters out. I realized with Intimate Apparel that there were people I didn't know and I had to go in search of them, and that research became really vital to the writing of the piece. One of the ways that Intimate Apparel, which is something I do to this day, is I decided that I was going to pick the week that the play began and I was going to research as deeply as I could that week in history. And that week that the play began and I was going to research as deeply as I could that week in history. And that week that the play began and I was going to research as deeply as I could that week in history. I found is beginning my play at one given week helped center me. It helped give me a focus. I could turn to the periodicals and determine what the weather was like, and what was happening on the stock market, and what was happening on the stock market, and what was happening on the local level, and that really informed how those characters were living and breathing. Think about, "Was it a smoggy day when my play began?" It just forced me to think much more deeply about the world in which the characters were immersed. So was Fabulation was a companion piece. I tend to write two plays at the same time; one play, which I describe as a tragedy, and the other play which is a comedy. It's like the yin and yang of Lynn Nottage. A play like Ruined, which took me into the forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo with women who were victims of rape, I found that I needed some place to escape periodically, and so I had to write another play, which at the time was By the Way, Meet Vera Stark, and that became my refuge. When I was writing Intimate Apparel, which was a play that I had written for my mother, which really required me to go someplace very deep and emotional, periodically I needed to escape, and that escape was Fabulation. And Fabulation was imagining the character in Intimate Apparel a hundred years later, if she had had the benefit of the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement. Who would Esther, this lonely seamstress, be a hundred years later? So that's Fabulation. Ruined was your first play to win the Pulitzer Prize, I was literally sitting in my house in my bathrobe in the middle of the day, which I can't explain why I was still in my bathrobe, but I was about women in Africa. I think it was the first time that the Pulitzer in drama was given to a play that specifically did not have an American theme. So I felt an immense sense of gratitude. I was surprised. I was thankful. It's very, very difficult to be a playwright. This is an avocation in which you don't get a lot of recognition and you don't make a lot of money. So to be validated just felt thrilling. You know, we do this because we love it. We know that at the very end of the day there isn't going to be a huge paycheck. You won again a few years later for Sweat. What was it like to win the second Pulitzer Prize was a complete and utter shock, because you don't expect lightning to strike twice. But it also led me to believe that perhaps this is not a fluke. I heard someone earlier today — oh, I guess Peter Gabriel was talking about impostor syndrome. You always think, "Oh, perhaps they are recognizing that the kind of research and work that I'm doing to bring these characters to the stage has some real value." You've worked in other media. What is it that is so captivating for you about the live theater? Lynn Nottage: I think the reason that I gravitate toward theater is because it's communal, it's collaborative, that it's dynamic. It's really dependent on the conversation between the artist and the audience, and I can't think of any other medium that invites the audience to be a collaborator. I can't think of any other medium that I can't anticipate what it's going to be based on the alchemy of the bodies that are in the audience. We interviewed Jeremy Irons who said that a theater audience may think they're just passively receiving this work, but that the audience is absolutely a collaborator in the performances on stage. Any actor who's worth their salt will tell you that their performance is really informed by the energy that is being given to them from the audience. We hear you're working on an opera based on your play Intimate Apparel. How did that come about? Lynn Nottage: I've always wanted to write an opera. I spent many years going to see operas but never expecting that it was an option for me. Then I met a composer named Ricky Ian Gordon, who is a genius, and he said, "You know, what I really want to do is an adaptation of your play Intimate Apparel." And I said, "Oh my God! You know, what I really want to do is an adaptation of Intimate Apparel!" And we just launched into this piece. It's interesting, because I wrote Intimate Apparel at a moment right after my mother died. So I think there's something about this collaboration that brings that emotion into the piece. It's immensely beautiful, and I should knock on wood because I feel embarrassed saying that, but he has done remarkable work, and I feel that it has found its true and perfect form in the opera. Well, keep writing plays and everything else. It's really been a joy to talk to you. Lynn Nottage: Thank lynn nottage sweat script pdf free

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