

Bloodlines

d'bi.young continues her exploration of family, generations and lineage in *benu* at the Festival Voix d'Amériques

by NEIL BOYCE

She's a dub poet, author, actor, playwright, teacher and social activist. But d'bi.young insists, "It's all storytelling."

For the Jamaican-Canadian artist, there's enough cooking on every burner—and enough hats piled on her endless creative endeavours—to make the rest of us look like hopeless slackers.

She's performed throughout Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America and Europe, and has already produced a wide catalogue of work in print, film, drama and dub poetry recordings. She's been on HBO's Def Poetry Jam and on Cuban television, appeared on stage in London for the touring production of *Da Kink in My Hair*, was featured in *Lord Have Mercy!* (the first ever Canadian black sitcom), and recently opened her own "dub theatre" in Toronto, where she teaches her craft to the youth.

All in all, not bad for someone just past 30.

d'bi was here last in 2008 with her Dora Mayor Moore-winning "one-oomaan" show, *blood.claat*. She returns for the Festival Voix d'Amériques, where she'll perform her latest multi-character solo piece, *benu* (the second in a trilogy entitled *sankofa*), at Théâtre La

Chapelle. As she prepares to embark upon a new, global phase in her career (South Africa is the furthest point on a busy tour so far), we spoke about work, dreams and magic.

Mirror: It's close to two years since we last talked. You were doing *blood.claat* at MAI and bouncing your baby boy on your knee after the performance. How's life going?

d'bi.young: I'm a mummy of two now! You know, I was pregnant during that performance in 2008 and I asked the production team not to say anything—I didn't want to tell people so they'd be worried for me, watching me on stage jumping around. They'd be thinking more about the stunts I was doing as opposed to concentrating on the show.

M: So this new show is a continuation from the last?

DY: Yes, *benu* is the second of a trilogy that began with *blood.claat*. It looks at the daughter born at the end of the show—she's grown up, and it starts with her having a baby of her own. I'm trying to look at three generations of women because I'm obsessed with lineage and passing on the bloodline—and what happens with each generation. It's about death and rebirth,

physically and metaphorically. The *benu* is the predecessor to the phoenix bird, its Egyptian ancestor. You know, as an artist, you begin to create and you really don't know where it's going to end up—you might think you have an idea, but as you grow, the piece also grows. So much of my work happens when I'm on stage with the audience—that's where you get pushed and challenged and encouraged as a storyteller, right? It has to happen on stage.

M: You seem to be working everywhere and on every kind of project. What occupies your attention and imagination these days?

DY: You know, for me it all factors around storytelling. Remember when you were growing up, the fascination you had when somebody told you a story? That kind of awe and wonder? I feel that as we grow up, one of the things that happens is that we lose our belief in magic. I don't think life ever ceases to be magnificent. There's always something to be amazed by and my work is an attempt to uncover that in the



SECOND COMING: young

day-to-day, to remind myself that it's actually a phenomenal thing to be able to breathe and love and laugh. It's an incredible thing we

lose sight of.

M: If you do lose sight of it, what brings you back?

DY: It's the breathing, it's really about the breath—about being able to stop and say, "Okay what is the focus? What is the point in being here?" Is the point trying to cause no further harm? Is it being on a journey of enlightenment, is it learning how to love? Often I ask myself that.

Most recently, my passion is about food, food energy and how we eat—whether we eat with the idea of where food comes from. If it's plant-based or animal food, what happens to that plant or animal, what is the process? And, am I connected to the greater life force? I don't think that's too esoteric or philosophical. We have to think about those things. We are energy, consciousness and matter—and sometimes as human beings we think we're above all that. But we're not: we are it. If we don't treat our planet and ourselves properly... well, we are all witnessing the repercussions of the choices we've made.

M: Having children gives you an even stronger connection to that.

DY: My God, I'm telling you... Children are like a perpetual mirror: reflecting all of the things you want to become and all of the things you're not. ■

Say, say, say

Festival Voix d'Amériques celebrates nine years with their usual mix of unusual performances



GUEST OF HONOUR: Ursula Rucker

by NEIL BOYCE

We're approaching the decade mark for Festival Voix d'Amériques, the main event put on by "text in performance" organization *Les Filles Électriques* (aka "LFE") and helmed by interdisciplinary artist D. Kimm.

They throw a wide net at FVA from Feb. 5–12, as all kinds of performers, styles and acts that defy categorization make the pro-

gramming much more than whatever your idea of poetry/performance is. Here, at the largest spoken word festival in Canada, anything where the marriage of word and voice are predominant is fair game.

For 2010, LFE bring back a ringer to Voix d'Amériques in one of the most powerful spoken word/hip hop performers around, **Ursula Rucker** (Feb. 5., Sala). Her face is all over the place on FVA posters and publicity as the fest's Guest of Honour. Soft delivery over beats is the candy that coats her hard-edged rhymes and take-no-shit attitude. Judging from her previous fest appearances, this'll be the killer show of the week.

Many will have noted the recent passing of beloved Montreal musician Lhasa de Sela. Her sister **Sky de Sela**, a circus artist based in France, brings *Maintenant* to Sala on Feb. 7., a meditative and autobiographical piece on the life of a clown and trapeze artist (with some musical back-up).

Dynamo Coleoptera stretch the mandate of FVA with their experimental Japanese pop-rock stylings. Even the lineup retains a wonderfully Captain Beefheart-like quality, **Maya Kuroki** on electric guitar, vocals, keyboards... and theatrical performance. **François Girouard** on drums, keyboards, bass and musical saw. Completing the obscurantist group is poet **Bhagavad Goalle**, dancer/performer **Tomomi Morimoto** and "respectful bicycle

gardener" **Ian Christopher Goodman**.

Feb. 9 at Casa, the fest launches the audio-book *Passagères: Voix de changement*, featuring the voices of women who have spent time at Passages, a shelter and community resource for women at risk. More than 40 women contributed to the anthology, which is in French, including residents, ex-residents and their caregivers.

Songwriter and one-man orchestra **Fred Fortin**, joined by guitarist **Olivier Langevin** and drummer **Justin Allard**, hits Sala on Feb. 10. From his early material and up to his recent release, *Plastrer la lune*, Fortin's got that great Québécois-carefree-folk-trash-poet thing down cold, and is a blast to see live. ■

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TRUE TO LIFE: Sky de Sela

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