

Kitchener-Waterloo

Waterloo students fight tears, feel inspired after seeing play about Trayvon Martin

'We must learn ... and carry those stories with us,' says student Lin Chen

[Carmen Groleau](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 08, 2023 7:00 AM EST | Last Updated: March 8



Makambe K. Simamba plays as a young teenage boy named Slim in her award-winning play, *Our Fathers, Sons, Lovers and Little Brothers*. The play was inspired by the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. (Joey Senft/Prairie Theatre Exchange)

Teens filled the Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts in downtown Kitchener last week as part of a class trip to watch the award-winning play *Our Fathers, Sons, Lovers and Little Brothers*.

The show was written and solely performed by Toronto's Makambe K. Simamba and inspired by the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012. Simamba's play imagines the afterlife of the teen, who is introduced to the audience as Slim.

"I'm pretty speechless to be honest. It left me just in such a reflective state," said Sara Terier, a Grade 12 student at Laurel Heights Secondary School, after the show.

"She shares such a powerful story," said Terier, noting it had her fighting tears throughout. "You're looking at this teenager and I'm thinking about my own self and I'm also 17."

“We must learn ... and carry those stories with us”

- Lin Chen, Grade 11 student, Laurel Heights Secondary School

Close to the end of the play, Slim lists dozens of people who have been victims of white supremacy or police brutality, with some even dating back to the 1800s.

That part resonated the most with Grade 11 student Lin Chen.

"Seeing this story and understanding how every person that has died had their own life, their own goals that they wanted to achieve and then hearing all those names — the names of victims that have died because of police brutality — is just seeing how many dreams were ruined because of this action," he said.



Lin Chen and Sara Terier were among two classes from Laurel Heights Secondary School who attended the play last week. (Carmen Groleau/ CBC)

Play written for youth

The play won the 2019 Dora Award for Outstanding New Play for Theatre for Young Audiences, and Simamba wrote the play intentionally for youth and teens close to Martin's age because she's watching that generation become involved in and push for social justice.

"I wanted to create an experience where ... Slim tells his story to his own age mates because this is the generation that's going to take over," she said.

"I feel really inspired and blown away by young people and the work they do and the way they are embodying care and the ways their activism is showing up."



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Makambe K Simamba on honouring Trayvon Martin in new play

Makambe K Simamba's new play, *Our Fathers, Sons, Lovers and Little Brothers*, is inspired by Trayvon Martin, the Black teenager who was shot to death in Florida in 2012. It's been described as "a loving epitaph for the countless Black men and boys violently taken from their families." The award-winning Canadian playwright and actor joined Tom Power to tell us why she sees her work as more of a prayer than a play.

For Chen and Terier, knowing the play was created for an audience their age is recognition of their passion and role in their community.

"To be able to focus on youth and trust youth to take these vulnerable stories and do something about it is important," Terier said.

"Youth have a lot of responsibility to help shape a better for future generations ... we must learn all these things and carry those stories with us," Chen added.

The boy who inspired BLM

Simamba and local equity educator Tenille Warren held a Q and A session for students after the performance.

In that session, Simamba also told students about Martin's story and the circumstances around his death and the movement that followed.

"Trayvon has influenced our conversations about Black life for the past 11 years so significantly."

- [Trayvon Martin's parents pen book on 5-year anniversary of teen's death](#)

"By the time it went to trial and [Martin's] killer was found not guilty, Alicia Garza tweeted, 'Black Lives Matter' and that is the beginning of the language with which we

are articulate the movement of Black liberation today and Trayvon is often called the boy who launched the movement."

The play is a co-production between Tarragon Theatre and Black Theatre Workshop. It's in the midst of a four-city national tour, with performances in Kitchener in partnership with Green Light Arts.



(CBC)

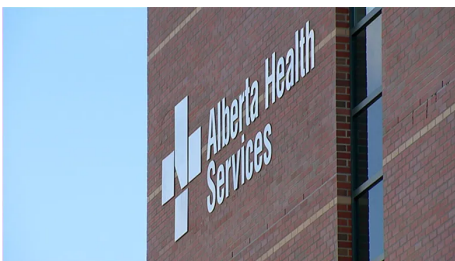
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