

# Sounds of a Slave

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By Jim Kershner  
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**H**ere's a world premiere theater event that deserves to be announced with a drum roll, please.

That's because drumming – African drumming – will play a key part in "York," a one-man play about William Clark's slave on the Lewis & Clark expedition.

It opens Friday in the Spokane Civic Theatre's Firth J. Chew Studio Theatre. David Casteal will play the role of York and all of the other characters in this original script by the Civic's playwright-in-residence, Bryan Harnetiaux.

Casteal also created the play's musical score, which consists entirely of drumming, some performed live and some recorded.

"In some ways, the drum is York's way of communicating with the Native Americans," said Casteal, a sixth-grade teacher at Cooper Elementary School and an experienced African drummer.

"It's also a way for him to discover himself and help him to realize that he was, in fact, African."

Incorporating drums into the show was not based on historical considerations;

IF YOU GO

## 'York'

Opens Friday and continues through May 20 in the Spokane Civic Theatre's Firth J. Chew Studio Theatre, in the lower level of the Civic, 1020 N. Howard St. (entrance off Dean Avenue). Curtain times are 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. on Thursdays and 2 p.m. on Sundays (no show Sunday because of Bloomsday). Tickets are \$12, by calling 325-2507 or through TicketsWest outlets (325-SEAT, 800-325-SEAT, www.ticketswest.com).

Harnetiaux said there is no evidence that York was a drummer. Instead, it is a theatrical device stemming from the particular talents of Casteal.

Harnetiaux said that he had long been pondering a Lewis & Clark project.

"When the smoke cleared, I found nothing that interested me in the expedition except York," he said. "So I called my friend and great actor David Casteal and asked him if he would be



Actor David Casteal worked closely with playwright-in-residence Bryan Harnetiaux to develop the story of "York."

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## 'York': Story begins when he served as childhood companion

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interested in collaborating."

Casteal worked hand-in-hand with Harnetiaux in developing the story. The official credits read: "Written by Bryan Harnetiaux (book) and David Casteal (drums)."

Harnetiaux said the subject presented a challenge because little is known about York, the only African American member of the expedition. He is mentioned only briefly in the journals and he left no personal account, since he was unable to read or write.

"We essentially tried to create in this play his journals, his spiritual

journey as a slave," said Harnetiaux. "It's pretty clear he experienced enormous freedom on the expedition. And then he returned to the suffocating atmosphere of slavery."

"York" covers his entire life, beginning with his years as a childhood companion and as manservant to Clark on his Virginia plantation. The centerpiece, however, remains the expedition.

"No one really knows, but most people believe that his role expanded," said Casteal. "He was integral in securing horses. Several of the Native American tribes became quite interested in him. He

was quite skilled as a hunter."

The set in the intimate, "black box" Studio Theatre is abstract, representing many of the settings on York's journey. Susan Hardie is the director.

Harnetiaux said he still considers this short, 85-minute play a work-in-progress. He hopes that it can be performed in other venues as the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial proceeds.

The Spokane attorney is a nationally recognized playwright whose "National Pastime" is now playing in Pasadena. That play also had its world premiere on the Studio Theatre stage, with Casteal playing the lead role of Jackie Robinson.

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