

# LISTEN & BE HEARD

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# URBAN BUSHMEN THE SOUL OF VALLEJO

by martha cinader

Listen & Be Heard Weekly has been bringing you good news for a year now. We hope that you have already marked our Anniversary Celebration in your calendar on Friday, November 19, at the Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum, from 7-10pm. In this past year we have continuously striven to bring to you news about what's going on in our very diverse community. We

have been blowing the horn for everybody involved in some way in the arts and announced everyone's events in our calendar. We have attracted professional writers, and given emerging writers a place to work on their craft, and an opportunity to be published.

We believe that we've been keeping it real folks, and we intend to continue in the same fashion. So, of course, when planning our party, we wanted to be sure that all the groups who will perform for You, represent in some way the spirit of Listen & Be Heard Weekly. Our headliners, the Urban Bushmen do that in a big way. All residents of Vallejo, each of the members of the band has extensive professional experience. Each of them is very serious about their craft. I had the opportunity to meet with the band this



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Cover Image: The Urban Bushmen,  
who will play on Nov. 19 at the L&BH  
Anniversary Celebration



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## FATHER DAUGHTER EQUATION

by paula mc connell

"Proof," written by David Auburn, directed by Hector Correa, opened on the Harbor Theatre stage at 720 Main St. in downtown Suisun on November 4th. The play originally opened on Broadway in 2001 and quickly received international acclaim, winning three Tony awards along with the Pulitzer Prize for Best Play. It is a compelling story taking an intimate look into the life of mathematical genius, madness, family dysfunction and sibling rivalry.

The work allows an audience to witness a valiant effort by a female math genius to quell her own demons. It too is a portrait of a young girl hopelessly devoted to her insane father. Moreover, it is a story about death, and dying, and about hope and rebirth.

That said, it is important to note that the work is brilliantly written, filled with subtle humor and heartfelt passion.

This performance features four strong actors/actresses including its producer George Maguire, who is Artistic Director at the Solano College Theatre. Also featured are Megan Biolchini, a graduate of the Solano College Actor Training Program, and ACT's summer program, along with Katie Lynn Winchell. Rounding out the cast is Tim Johannis Andrews, a second year student of the Solano College Actor Training Program. Andrews has also been seen in "Some Devil Whisper" earlier in the year, a Darkroom Productions.

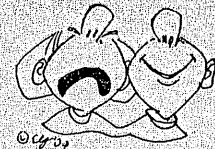
Hector Correa, who is the artistic director of Pacific Alliance Stage Co., does a mag-

nificent job as director, getting full use of the stage. The eye never tires and his blocking (placement of actors on stage) averts boredom.

Maguire, who is usually matchless in his abilities, delivered lines a little too staccato, and seemed mechanical at first entrance, but he arrived at a strong, balanced stride as the play progressed.

Megan Biolchini was natural and unflappable, but there were noticeable differences in her delivery depending upon whom she was playing opposite. Both Winchell and Andrews remained in character and were unflinching in their delivery. Winchell played the part of Catherine, a big city, self-righteous sophisticate with believability. Andrews made a transition between student

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## urban bushmen

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past weekend, and discovered that this is a very down-to-earth group of guys, motivated not by big bucks or fame, but the Love of Music. When you hear them play it is obvious that they love what they do.

Back in 1987 Kenny Wilson used to look out the window and see a guy at night without a shirt, and carrying a stick. "Man he looks like an urban bushman", he said, "that's what we should call our band". The Urban Bushmen, a high energy, crowd pleasing act are: Kenny Wilson, guitar, Damon Williams, lead vocalist, Christian Houston, keyboards, Brian Lake congas and percussion, and cousins Greg McGriff, drummer and Alton McGriff, bass. All residents of Vallejo, Greg, Alton and Brian grew up here and went to high school together.

When I asked the band to describe what they play Damon said he "would describe it as a gumbo. Kenny has a way of blending different styles of music into a show that people enjoy. We're really strong in Blues and Funk, some of the Hip-Hop of today. We're a cover band with a different twist. We don't just play top forty stuff. We hear stuff like 'I don't like blues, but I like it the way you guys play it.'"

Alton McGriff, who works with troubled teens in Contra Costa County added, "One thing about us is that we're really in to the music. We love to see the people dance, but we want to be real musicians, authentic. We've been playing a long time together. Greg was a drummer and I played saxophone in a high school band. We want real fingers moving. Real sweat. I call it traditional learning. Play something and make a joyful noise. That's what we're about." Alton said he's "always been a star." He "stayed out of trouble" with sports and music, and was the recipient of athletic scholarships. "Always into kids" he's now a teacher at Community Day School.

Kenny Wilson, the leader of the band has lived in Vallejo since 1994. He was raised by his grandparents in Arkansas. There he attended a small southern Baptist church that featured some of the "most downhome gospel singers in the area." Even as a child his uncles brought him along to Juke Joints where he heard Lightnin' Hopkins, Albert Collins, B.B. King and many others. After his grandparents passed away, he spent most of his teenage years on the move, and played at any club that would allow a teen to perform.

Kenny came to Vallejo for the construction work and discovered that he "happened to come to a small town where it

seemed like every person I ran into played an instrument. Pops was looking for a haircut, came home and said his 'barber plays bass. He's looking for somebody to jam with'. So I met Alton. He told me about how Sly was from here, and pretty soon I ran into to John Lee Hooker's family. I played with his nephew Archie Lee Hooker for a couple years. I got to meet John Lee Hooker. That was a lifetime, one in a million chance, to meet a guy, go over to his house, who I actually grew up learning licks from, hanging out and playing with him. So that's pretty amazing for being such a small town."

Brian Lake grew up seeing Sly Stone a n d Confunkshun and all the different and famous people who came out of Vallejo. "When I was younger, there were a lot of talent shows, dance shows, reviews, live music, guys in outfits doing steps and singing with live bands. I was a child in the sixties and seventies." From the fifth grade he played the trombone. He was in a choir at Solano Junior High School, played cello, violin, viola, upright bass and even glockenspiels. He also claims that both music and sports kept him out of trouble.

"Kenny is the leader of the band", said Lake. "Our philosophy is that music is one of the solutions to life. We know that kids who are involved with violence have a hard time solving problems. We know that through music, it goes all the way back to the Bible. We're God's musicians. This is happy music. Love music. It's been fun playing with the group. I like to play good funky music. I like to see people dance."

While Lake was playing all sorts of instruments in high school Greg McGriff just played the drums, and still does. The "most seasoned" musician of the group he remembers Rosie Gaines, from Prince's band and Ron Perry as local musicians

who also "went somewhere".

Greg claims that Kenny drew him to the Bushmen. "I love what Kenny does. That blues feel. Getting back to the name Urban Bushmen. He signifies the name of the band. He goes back to the roots music, and then at the same time, has an urban sound too."

Kenny continued by saying "we do hip-hop too. I heard we do it pretty authentic, even though we don't wear our

**"We do hip-hop too. I heard we do it pretty authentic, even though we don't wear our pants around our knees or anything like that. We do it with live instruments. And that's something we want young people to see too. It's not all about programming keyboards and programming drum machines. Learn an instrument first. Start at the roots, and then you can do anything you want."**

pants around our knees or anything like that. We do it with live instruments. And that's something we want young people to see too. It's not all about programming keyboards and programming drum machines. Learn an instrument first. Start at the roots, and then you can do anything you want."

The Urban Bushmen certainly do anything they want. With a repertoire that includes "Erotic City" by Prince, "What's

the Matter" by Kansas Joe, "Aint Too Proud to Beg" by the Temptations and "Step" by R Kelly, you can expect that they will combine the unexpected in a way that only they know how to do.

You just have to come out to hear it for yourself. The Urban Bushmen will take the stage at about 9pm, upstairs at the Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum on November 19. Before they take the stage, the Howard Wiley Trio will start the evening's entertainment at 7pm.

They will be followed by an awards ceremony. Listen & Be Heard Weekly will honor our volunteer writing staff for their contribution to the success of the paper. We will also present the first annual Goodie award, named after Cleven "Goodie" Goudeau, who has not only contributed his talent and wisdom to the development of this newspaper, but has done the same for countless young artists. The Goodie award, designed by Herb Bennet, will be presented to a

writer who has made an important contribution to the arts community in the last year.

Following the awards ceremony we will hear from local poets Luis M. Syquia, Q.R. Hand Jr., Dominique Jones and San Francisco poet and Listen & Be Heard columnist Annabelle A. Udo. Strictly Dance, a local dance group will also perform.

That's a lot of value for \$5 admission wouldn't you say? Our goal is not to make a lot of money. Our goal is to celebrate! We hope that you will join us.

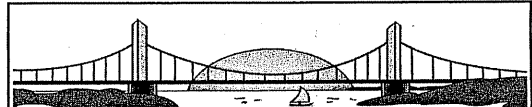
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### listen & be heard theatre review

#### Proof

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"nerd" and adult suitor with sufficient aplomb.

Perhaps the real star of this show is lighting designer Christopher Studley. With the use of subtle lighting, gobos to effect trees shading the house, and wonderful transitions from dusk to morning, Studley created a provocative mood for the entire presentation. Studley is a creative powerhouse. Compliments should also be extended to set designer Darcia Tipton. Tipton effectively created an exterior back yard by using realistic touches. She provided a relatively realistic set using the rear of a tattered house (complete with a squeaky screen door), benches, tables and garden supplies. The illusion never faltered. A few leaves on the ground would have been a nice touch though, since the play is set in autumn within the city of Chicago.

Overall, this production is a major and worthwhile bit of theatre. It is moving, haunting and riveting. The piece gives an audience pause for personal reflection and sparks the imagination to consider multiple possibilities in contemplation of life's choices.

When George Maguire is an on stage actor, however, he should have someone else do the final money pitch. After the curtain call Maguire stepped forward with a bit of advertising for upcoming Solano College shows. Somehow, just somehow, that broke the final mood of suffusive make believe.

Tickets for the performance are as little as \$14.00 for adults, students/kids \$10.00. For reservations call (707) 864-7100. There is some abusive language, so the college rightfully offers the caveat of 'parental discretion advised.'

the urban bushmen, from left to right: greg mcgriff, damon williams, alton mcgriff, brian lake, christian houston. seated, kenny wilson.

