



EchoBrown

Critically Acclaimed Writer & Actress

CONTACT

📞 917-538-7934

📍 Oakland, California

✉️ brown.echo@gmail.com

🏠 helloechobrown.com

ACCOLADES

- **2016:** TEDx Peace Plaza Speaker (San Francisco)
- **2016:** Featured on the Cover of Business Heroine Magazine
- **2015:** Nominated for Outstanding Solo Production by Theatre Bay Area Awards
- **2015:** Named one of the top ten best shows of 2015 by the SF Chronicle KQED.

ECHO'S BIO

A break out star in San Francisco's thriving theater scene, Echo Brown has been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Oakland Tribune, and KQED. After her mega-hit one-woman show, *Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters*, which played to sold out houses in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland for 2 years, Echo attracted the attention of casting directors, literary agencies, and international audiences in Dublin, Ireland and Berlin, Germany.

ABOUT ECHO'S ONE WOMAN SHOW

Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters is one of the highest grossing San Francisco theater productions of the past 5 years, generating over \$200,000 in revenue during its 2 year run. The show was named one of the top ten best shows of 2015 by the San Francisco Chronicle and KQED.

The show offers an incisive and side-splitting ride through the maze of race and romance in "colorblind" America, giving the audience an unfettered look at what it means to be a black woman attempting to find love in 21st century America. This high impact, dynamic show covers a range of topics including sexual assault, black femininity, gentrification, the prison industrial complex, racism and sexism.

PRESS QUOTES

"Not since early Whoopi Goldberg, have I been so moved by a performer's narrative."

—Alice Walker, author, *The Color Purple*

"Powerful & Dazzling." —KQED

"A Bay Area Blockbuster." —Oakland Tribune

"One of the best shows of the year." —SF Chronicle



EchoBrown

Technical Specifications for
Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters

CONTACT

📞 917-538-7934

📍 Oakland, California

✉️ brown.echo@gmail.com

🏠 helloechobrown.com

LIGHTING, MUSIC, PROPS

LIGHTING

BLACK VIRGINS ARE NOT FOR HIPSTERS has been performed in a variety of venues including: conference rooms, small black box theaters, large theaters with hundreds of seats, bookstores, and concert venues. The show is versatile and works in multiple platforms and can be performed with minimal tech capabilities.

If available, the show uses the following lightening cues that are rotated throughout the show:

- **A main wash lightening set-up:** Stage should be well lit and feel warm and inviting.
- **A dim wash lightening set-up:** Stage should be dimly lit and still feel warm and inviting.
- **A bar scene lightening set-up:** Stage should feel more sultry and dark, like inside a bar.
- **A tight white spotlight:** A stark, focused center light, used primarily downstage.

If the above lightening capabilities are available, Echo will provide a script that includes lighting and sound cues, which can be forwarded to the technical director ahead of time. Prior to the show, Echo will need about 3 hours to run through the cues. This can happen on the day of the show or one day prior to the show.

MUSIC

There are approximately 8 sound cues that are played during the show. Echo can provide MP3's of the music via email and/or she can also bring a backup CD or thumb drive with the music on the day of the show.

PROPS

The only props used during the show are a small table and chair. The table remains stationery throughout the show, but Echo needs to be able to lift and carry the chair around the stage throughout the show.



EchoBrown

Workshops Offered by Echo

CONTACT

- 📞 917-538-7934
- 📍 Oakland, California
- ✉️ brown.echo@gmail.com
- 🏠 helloechobrown.com

WORKSHOPS

Ignite the Creative Fire Within: A Writing Workshop

This workshop that combines writing exercises, creativity/spiritual awakening exercises, partner exercises, and group discussions. The workshop provides students with tools to help them reconnect to their own internal creative spark, dismantle creative blocks, and identify the difference between ego and genuine inspiration in creative work.

Transforming the Stage: An Intensive Performance Workshop

In this intensive performance workshop, Echo introduces her unique approach to live theatrical performance. The workshop combines writing exercises, performance techniques for the stage, creativity/spiritual-awakening exercises, and in class performance exercises to help students develop dynamic and moving performance pieces. This workshop is for those wanting to add power, vulnerability, and depth to their work or beginners seeking a starting point for their creative expression on stage.

Writing Trauma: A One-Day Writing Workshop

This workshop is an opportunity to investigate emotional wounds through writing and sharing in community. The workshop combines writing exercises, partner and group sharing, and community building activities to help participants reclaim and reframe traumatic experiences.

The Art of the One Person Show

This workshop combines writing exercises, stage techniques, and in class performance exercises to help participants work toward developing engaging and vibrant performance pieces centered on their own life narrative. Topics covered in this workshop include creating and performing believable complex characters, finding your narrative voice for the stage, and developing a dynamic story plot.

Workshop Specifications: Most workshops can be taught as a 1-day, 4-week or 8-week course. Number of participants per workshop varies by workshop.



EchoBrown

Inspirational Talks & Coaching
Offered by Echo

CONTACT

- 📞 917-538-7934
- 📍 Oakland, California
- ✉ brown.echo@gmail.com
- 🏠 helloechobrown.com

INSPIRATIONAL TALKS

Choosing the Unknown: How Irrational Choices Lead to Unexpected Success

Through story, reflection, and insight, Echo discusses how several seemingly “irrational” career choices led to the incredible artistic success of her first one woman show, *Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters*, which ran for 2 years to sold out crowds in San Francisco. Despite the fact that Echo had no previous acting or creative writing experience, the show grossed more than \$200,000 and was hailed by critics as “One of the best shows of the year.” Echo attributes her artistic success to specific choices she made throughout her life, that seemed irrational at the time, but ultimately set her on an unexpected, yet deeply fulfilling career path of becoming a well-known storyteller and writer.

Dreaming from the Sunken Place: The Challenge of Rising Above Institutional Obstacles

In this talk, Echo discusses how close she came to not achieving her dreams due to unimaginable obstacles including poverty, racial discrimination, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Echo examines the factors that allowed her to transcend these obstacles, while so many of her peers, including her own two brothers, could not. Through her own personal experience, Echo reveals that achieving our dreams is not a solo endeavor, but a community effort that often depends on others recognizing our talent and potential and guiding us in the right direction.

Talk Specifications: Talks can be expanded or condensed to fit 15 min, 20 min, or 1-hour format. Talks can also include workshop activities such as partner sharing, group discussing, and writing exercises.

COACHING

In addition to workshops and talks, Echo also offers individualized coaching sessions (in-person or virtually) on the following topics:

- Re-awakening creativity
- Developing stage presence
- Reclaiming personal power
- Building a business around your art
- Public Speaking
- Audience engagement strategies

STAGE PHOTOS

Echo Brown Critically Acclaimed Writer & Actress



HEADSHOTS

Echo Brown Critically Acclaimed Writer & Actress



THEATER REVIEW

Audience left wanting a 2nd date

By Robert Hurwitt

If you've come for the sex, you may find that things are a little more complicated, perhaps richer than your expectations. If that sounds like a near-universal formula for human intimate relationships, the formula works like magic in "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters," Echo Brown's delightfully intriguing debut solo show at the Marsh. There's a great deal more thought-provoking substance in her artfully told autobiographical tale than the sex implicit in the title.

Written by Brown, and developed with Marsh solo-show



Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters: Solo show. Written and performed

by Echo Brown. Directed by Scott Plate. Through June 6. \$20-\$100. The Marsh, 1062 Valencia St., S.F. One hour. (415) 282-3088. www.themarsh.org.

maestro David Ford, "Virgins" opens with the beguiling jitteriness of a young woman anticipating a big date — Brown, as her 23-year-old, Dartmouth-graduate, independent self in New York, in a dither because a handsome "Brooklyn hipster from Portland, Ore., is coming over to deflower me." As Brown segues through a host of characters — her date, college best friend, fiercely protective mother and many more — under Scott Plate's capably light-handed direction, the piece evolves ever more enticingly into some unexpected, energizing wrestles with racial, class and other weighty matters.

Brown leads us into deeper waters with a deceptively buoy-

"Virgins" continues on E4



Alexis Keenan

Echo Brown performs in her solo show, "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters."

'Black Virgins' a conversation about race as well as sex



Alexis Keenan

Echo Brown performs in her solo show, "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters," at the Marsh.

"Virgins" from page E4

ant graciousness. An instantly attractive and engaging performer with a knack for slipping quickly into sharply drawn characters — even if some verge on caricatures and a few accents are slipshod — she casually plants the seeds of her more serious subjects even as she has the audience roaring with laughter through her frantic calls to her unhelpful friend, her mother's warnings about men (all men), the perils of Craigslist dating, the black-

culture borrowings of her date's hipster friends and, most of all, her own insecurities. She has us eating out of her hand well before she gets everyone up and dancing to illustrate (with a little help from Beyoncé) why black women shouldn't dance with white men until at least after marriage.

A darkly comic sequence about her day job — investigating cases of police brutality against people of color — seems like a momentary detour at first. A segment about men, black even more than white, instilling deep

insecurities about her dark skin and African facial features, is poignant and unsettling, leading into bracingly candid talk about the ongoing war for survival those black men face just trying to grow up. In its most pointed moments, "Virgins" is the conversation about race we say we want to have, instead of the conversation about having it.

Darker and more disturbing material will follow, with Brown playing three characters at once in an artful retelling of a traumatic event. If

some aspects of the show could be a little more finely tuned, the serious material is ably and irresistibly served up with comedy and the pleasure of Brown's company. When it finally comes, the question of the consummation of that date is handled with dancier grace. And afterward, you feel you want to get to know Brown better in the future.

Robert Hurwitt is The San Francisco Chronicle's theater critic. E-mail: rburwitt@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: @RobertHurwitt

San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM | Thursday, April 30, 2015 | PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER \$LOO ★★★★★

PERFORM

If you go

Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters: 8 p.m. Thursdays, 8:30 p.m. Saturdays. Through May 9. \$20–\$100. The Marsh San Francisco Studio Theatre, 1062 Valencia St., S.F. (415) 282-3055. www.themarsh.org.

'Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters': Marsh helps develop solo show

By Nirmala Nataraj

Race, online dating and ruminations on the multidimensionality of the black female experience coalesce in Echo Brown's new solo show, "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters." The seed of the story is Brown's retelling of her experience "losing my virginity to a Brooklyn hipster from Portland, Ore.," but her storytelling encompasses everything from dating experiences abroad to poignantly relived memories of growing up in an impoverished area of Cleveland.

Although Brown initially intended to write a "fun little piece about online dating in the Bay Area," her ultimate story (which took two years to develop with the Marsh's solo-performer maven, David Ford) contains traces of other stories and memories that aren't as lighthearted. The piece opens with Brown about to lose her virginity to a hipster she met on Craigslist, but as she oscillates between a series of conflicted experiences, we discover that her decision has more than a few implications.

"I ended up shedding light on other deep personal issues," Brown explains. These include experiences with police brutality ("it might be hard to imagine how I unpack that through the lens of romance," she quips) and ruminations on being a black woman traveling outside of the United States.

The idea for a one-woman show evolved from Brown's work with Challenge Day, a national nonprofit that creates experiential programs for youth and their communities. Brown would travel the country and tell her life story as



Alexis Keenan

"I think you have to give people a healthy dose of humor if you're going to introduce heavy topics," Echo Brown says about her autobiographical one-woman show.

part of the process. With the stewardship of Ford, Brown — who is new to the arts scene — developed her craft as a writer and performer. "I learned a lot about being an artist," she says. "David is patient, brilliant and thoughtful, as he's worked in solo performance for 25 years, so his perspective was invaluable."

While Brown is already at work on her next show, she admits that the two-year process of creating "Black Virgins" was more intense and rigorous than she thought it would be. "Two years is a relatively short time for this

kind of project, but I had no idea what I was doing — I didn't know the creative process would entail so many rewrites, revisions and previews of the work over and over again," she says.

Brown notes that although she took some license in re-creating her stories, the show is completely autobiographical. "When people have strong opinions, it can feel very personal. But I have to remember that they are critiquing a piece of art I have created — not my actual experiences."

While the piece touches

upon trauma, Brown describes it as generally hilarious. "I think you have to give people a healthy dose of humor if you're going to introduce heavy topics," she says. "Overall, by presenting some challenging subjects in a different and surprising way, I want to challenge stereotypes about how we think about black women — whether that's seeing them in an oversexualized way or perpetuating the myth of the strong black woman."

Nirmala Nataraj is a freelance writer. E-mail: 96hours@sfcronicle.com

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

RAY AREA NEWS GROUP ■ 27 MILLION READERS IN PRINT & ONLINE
200

MONDAY, JULY 6, 2015

247 COVERAGE ONLINE: WWW.CONTRACOSTATIMES.COM ■ \$1.50

Theater review: 'Black Virgins'

Oakland resident turns her life into a hit stage show

Her cautionary tale of interracial romance is extended at 'The Marsh'

By Karen D'Souza

kdsouza@mercurynews.com

Echo Brown bursts out some "dirty Beyoncé style" dance moves in her hit solo stage show, "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters." The fierce dance sequence, a twinkling bit of titillation, always proves to be a showstopper.

Ironically, it was one of the hardest parts of this steamy tale of sex, love and race to pull off. Brown felt so touchy and awkward about the bit that she didn't even practice in front of her mentor and script developer David Ford. The Oakland resident waited until the one-woman show, which deconstructs notions of black identity, was in previews at The Marsh in San Francisco before let-

Echo

Continued from Page 1

ting everyone see it.

"It's very revealing and I felt very vulnerable doing it," says the warm and candid 31-year-old actor-writer, who adds that the bit brings out "some sensitive things about black identity."

"It's as if you get on stage and share your deepest, darkest secrets. Putting my sexuality out there in front of people can make me feel very exposed."

Baring her soul in the autobiographical story was almost as hard. Only the adrenaline of being in the spotlight could help her battle her fear. "On stage I can do anything," she chuckles. "On stage, I could lift a car."

In "Black Virgins," a cautionary tale of interracial romance in the age of OkCupid, Brown reveals her personal experience of online dating, losing her virginity and coping with insufficient Brooklyn hipsters. Her bravery has paid off. Critics have hailed the show as "magic," "spellbinding" and "irresistible," and The Marsh has extended the work through Sept. 12.

Brown leaps through a myriad of parts, including herself, her mother and var-



ALEXIS KEEMAN/THE MARSH

Echo Brown performs her solo show "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters" at The Marsh in San Francisco. The actress/writer's show has been extended through Sept. 12.

ious clueless hipsters during the hour-long whirlwind of a piece.

"What a powerful story she has to tell," says Stephanie Weisman, executive director of The Marsh. "It is a story of our times, specific to her, relevant to us all. She is a beautiful performer. She is not only absolutely present every moment on stage, she is like a magnetic light. And she is very generous, giving her all at every single performance."

Brown leaps through a myriad of parts, including herself, her mother and var-

Mind you, Brown is not your typical solo show artist, endlessly gazing into her own navel at center stage. The actress/writer became interested in this sort of stage show only recently, and she comes to the craft with a background in political science and investigative journalism and a lifetime of pondering the nature of black female identity in America. The upshot: There's far, far more to black women than Beyoncé-

style body-shaking.

"The over-sexualization of black women has very much impacted me and my development as a person," says Brown. "It's very hard to find multidimensional portraits of black people in the media while white people can represent the full spectrum of behavior."

Growing up poor in Cleveland, where many of her friends and family members turned to alcohol and drugs to numb the pain of

ECHO BROWN
Age: 31
Residence: Oakland
Occupation: Monologist
Current project: "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters" at The Marsh, San Francisco (www.themarsh.org)
Quote: "Poverty gets into your brain, it gets into your bones. People ask me how I overcame it, but I'm not sure that you ever do."

their circumstances, she became fascinated by the way people construct a sense of identity. She also grappled with her own depression and stress caused by her hardscrabble childhood.

"Poverty gets into your brain, it gets into your bones," she notes wistfully. "People ask me how I overcame it, but I'm not sure that you ever do."

Brown has a steely determination, and she focused all of her energy on getting past her childhood suffering. She was the valedictorian at her high school before heading to Dartmouth College and Columbia Journalism School. From there she got a job investigating cases of police brutality in New York.

The experiences taught her that racism is pervasive in American culture from coast to coast, a topic that

continues to grab headlines in the wake of recent events from South Carolina and Baltimore to Ferguson.

"At Dartmouth I had people calling me (the n-word) while I walked across the green," she says. "That doesn't happen in California, but in some ways it's harder because at least on the East Coast, you know where people stand. Here it's more of a Jedi mind trick."

She thinks one of the biggest obstacles in the country's racial discourse is denial, which she feels is pervasive in the liberal Bay Area.

"Let's not pretend," she says. "Racism is in the air that we breathe. You can't get away from it, so we have to try and face it head-on."

That's precisely what she hopes to achieve with her show. She says she's been told some audience members are so moved by her honesty that they can't speak afterward.

"I dive right into the deep end," she says. "It's really cathartic for people to know they are not alone in what they feel."

Contact Karen D'Souza at 408-273-5772. Read her reviews at www.mercurynews.com/karendsouza, and follow her at Twitter.com/karendsouza.

See ECHO, Page 8

The Examiner SAN FRANCISCO

SFEXAMINER / May 7, 2015 / By Robert Sokol



An echo is defined as “a close parallel or repetition of an idea, feeling, style or event.” In “Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters,” San Francisco storyteller Echo Brown creates a theatrical parallel of events in her own life rich with ideas, feelings and more than a bit of style.

How close a parallel? “I would say it is completely autobiographical. All of the events I present actually occurred. I just have changed the

dialogue and the order a bit,” says Brown, who opens her solo show this week at the Marsh.

The show originally was intended as a whimsical observation on the complexities of dating from a black female perspective.

“I was going to read some of the ridiculous online messages I received, but when I started writing the show, all of these other personal experiences emerged and I realized that’s where the creative pulse of the show lived. I hadn’t intended it to be this personal, but I didn’t stop it,” says Brown, an Ivy League graduate from Ohio whose career has included facilitating workshops on communication.

Ultimately the online dating angle became what she describes as a tool: “a lens to unpack ... other significant experiences” including an early childhood trauma and her brother’s entanglement in the legal system.

The focus moved to providing what Brown calls “a multidimensional view of black women and challenge [to] the flat one-dimensional stereotypes of the overly sexualized Jezebel or the ‘strong black woman’ myth.”

As counterpoint, Brown puts her own vulnerabilities on the line. While she admits there definitely are elements of sexuality in the show, they’re just a smart part of the picture among many views.

SF WEEKLY

SF WEEKLY / May 4, 2015 / By David-Elijah Nahmod



What happens when a 23 year old black virgin makes a date to lose her virginity with a white hipster she meets on Craigslist? Is her color, or his, truly irrelevant in our post-Obama, "colorblind" society? The answer to this loaded question might be found in ***Black Virgins Are Not For Hipsters***, Echo Brown's one woman show, which she performs at the Marsh on Thursday, May 7 and Saturday, May 9. The show promises to be a side-splitting ride through the maze of race and romance — it may have you asking some very tough questions in between the laughs.

Brown spoke to *SF Weekly* about *Black Virgins Are Not For Hipsters*, and about herself.

Tell us about your performance background.

I'm new to theater. I don't have a performance background. I majored in political science at Dartmouth, briefly attended Columbia School of Journalism, worked in DC briefly, and was initially going to pursue law.

What brought you to the Bay Area?

I moved to San Francisco in 2011 to work as a program facilitator for Challenge Day, an award winning non-profit working to make schools self and welcoming for all students. I found out about Challenge Day through a documentary styled TV show that chronicled their work on MTV.

I became interested in theater and storytelling through my work at Challenge Day. As part of the program, each facilitator had to tell part of their life story. I saw the impact of storytelling and that I was really good at it. I started looking for other outlets and found my way to the Marsh.

What is your life story?

I am from Cleveland. I grew up in a very impoverished area that had a 40% graduation rate. I am a first-generation college student and have had to deal with all the challenges that come with growing up in poverty: family members in and out of prison, constantly fighting for access to resources and opportunities, and being the only one in my family who "made it out". All of these experiences inform my artistic work.

San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM | Thursday, July 2, 2015 | PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER | \$1.50 *****

THURSDAY

THEATER



Alexis Keenan

Echo Brown in "Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters."

'Black Virgins' a lot more than just comedy

A capable, very funny and charming Echo Brown makes her solo debut, using the comedy of sexual anticipation — and second thoughts, and third — to entice us into thought-provoking material about race, class and, yes, sex in America. Brown brightly limns many characters as she nervously prepares to lose her virginity to the white hipster of her title, ruminating on matters that range from her job, her mother's warnings about men — all men — and other topics, and gradually drawing us into deeper, darker waters. At its most pointed, this is the conversation about race we say we want to have, framed with grace and disarming comic skill. After this first date, you just want to get to know her better.

— Robert Hurwitz

Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters: 8 p.m. Thursday, July 2. \$20-\$100. The Marsh, 1062 Valencia St., San Francisco. (415) 282-3055. www.themarsh.org.

San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM | Sunday, December 27, 2015 | PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER | \$3.00 *****



Our San Francisco
The city of the future is rising now. **F1**

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



Datebook

▶ Pressing rewind on the 2015 arts season.

Insight

▶ Triumph, tragedy and turning points. **E1**

Style

▶ The year of the social-media celebrity. Plus, the year in photos and 10 trends that resonated. **J1**

Travel

▶ The most bizarre travel tales of 2015. **P1**

Food + Home

What's left that's safe to eat? **K1**



COVER STORY

Top 10 operatic events of 2015

(in chronological order)

- 1. "Where Angels Fear to Tread"** (Feb. 7): Opera San Jose presented the world premiere of this potent and well-made adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel by composer Mark Lanz Weiser and librettist Roger Brunyate, and gave it a splendid mounting.
- 2. "Dead Man Walking"** (Feb. 21): Jake Heggie's maiden opera, based on the memoirs of Sister Helen Prejean, has held up well since its 2000 San Francisco premiere, and this slimmed-down production by Opera Parallèle demonstrated the piece's versatility and lasting power.
- 3. "Middelmarch in Spring"** (March 20): Composer Allen Shearer and librettist Claudia Stevens deftly mined George Eliot's novel for a sunny, ingratiating and altogether effective piece of musical theater at Z Space.
- 4. "The Marriage Contract"** (April 15): The Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and the San Francisco Opera Center joined forces for an uproarious and beautifully sung production of Rossini's comic one-acter.
- 5. "The Grand Duke"** (April 26): The last and most easily overlooked of *Opera continues on page 17*



Top 10 plays of 2015

- 1. One Man, Two Guvnors:** Opened May 15, Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Dan Donohue headed a brilliant comic cast in director David Ivers' perfectly tuned staging of Richard Bean's tight adaptation of a classic Goldoni farce, an anything-goes combination of high, low and hilariously bad-taste humor.
- 2. Blithe Spirit:** Opened Jan. 21, Golden Gate Theatre, San Francisco. Angela Lansbury's charismatically commanding dotty old mystic danced away with the show in her justifiably turn in director Michael Blakemore's captivating revival of Noël Coward's much-loved comedy.
- 3. Tartuffe:** Opened March 20, Berkeley Rep. Rapacious religiosity has never appeared so seductively reptilian as in Steven Epps' lead performance in his and director Dominique
- 4. Eurydice:** Opened Aug. 27, Shotgun Players, Berkeley. Riveting performances by Megan Trout and James Carpenter anchored director Erika Chong Shuch's propulsive, grunge-lyrical take on Sarah Ruhl's rich retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, from her point of view.
- 5. Between Riverside and Crazy:** Opened Sept. 9, American Conservatory Theater, San



Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Angela Lansbury (left), Charles Edwards, Sandra Shipley, Charlotte Parry and Simon Jones in Noël Coward's "Blithe Spirit."



- Francisco. Carl Lumby headed a strong cast as a grumpy, suspicious but warmhearted ex-cop, battling the city and his landlord, in Irene Lewis' tight production of Stephen Adly Guirgis's well-deserved Pulitzer winner.
- 6. Disgraced:** Opened Nov. 13, Berkeley Rep: A second-generation Pakistani American lawyer's long-rejected Islamic heritage bursts back into his life with a vengeance in Ayad Akhtar's taut, explosive, thought-provoking drama of varied ethnicities in conflicting degrees of assimilation.
 - 7. Fred's Diner:** Opened Sept. 25, Magic Theatre, San Francisco. England's Penelope Skinner made a memorable

Bay Area debut with Loretta Greco's production of her sharp, well-observed dark comedy of low-wage workers in a roadside diner, a mystery meal that dug into deeper, gripping, even creepy matters beneath a workaday surface.

8. Stage Kiss: Opened Nov. 21, San Francisco Playhouse: Carrie Paff excels in a wide variety of kissing situations and shifting layers of reality and advice in Sarah Ruhl's sparkling and thoughtful back- and on-stage comedy.

9. Love and Information: Opened June 17, ACT's Strand Theater, San Francisco. Caryl Churchill's disjointed, engrossing performance anthology of short vignettes about how we communicate, a perfect opening to show off the resources of a new Strand venue, but its resonance keeps growing upon me.

10. Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters: Opened May 8, the Marsh, San Francisco. Echo Brown's delightfully intriguing debut solo show, developed at the Marsh, proved an artfully told, comic, multicharacter autobiographical tale that evolves enticingly into unexpected wrestles with race, class and other matters.

— Robert Hurwit

Top musicals of 2015

- 1. Amélie, a New Musical:** Opened Sept. 11, Berkeley Repertory Theatre. A dreamy movie becomes a dream of a stage musical with a sparkling adaptation by playwright Craig Lucas, brilliant songs by Daniel Messé and Nathan Tysen, and Samantha Barks' luminous lead performance.
- 2. A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder:** Opened Dec. 2, Golden Gate Theatre, San Francisco. John Rapson and Kevin Massey lead an exceptional touring company in Robert L. Freedman and Steven Lutvak's smart and hilariously suspenseful musical about a man trying to kill his way into an inheritance, the highlight of SHN's subscription season.
- 3. Ghost Quartet:** Opened Oct. 23, Curran Theatre, S.F. The endlessly inventive composer-librettist Dave Malloy lights up the intimate Curran: Under Construction series with a mesmerizing song cycle of intertwining ghost stories, performed with astonishing vocal versatility by Gelsey Bell and Brittain Ashford.
- 4. Pirates of Penzance:** Opened Oct. 24, Berkeley Rep's Osher Studio. Chicago's irreverently inventive Hypocrites perform a surprisingly faithful, fun-fun-fun version of the wonderful Gilbert & Sullivan classic, as a high-energy beach party orchestrated for guitars, banjo, concertina and even a musical saw.
- 5. Jane Austen's Emma:** Opened Dec. 5, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley at Lucie Stern Theatre, Palo Alto. Love overcomes pride, prejudice and misguided sensibilities in Paul Gordon's buoyantly smart, tuneful and charmingly constructed adaptation of Austen's well-loved classic.

— Robert Hurwit



A Black Virgin, a White Hipster and the Myth of Post-Racial America

By Sam Hurwitt
May 13, 2015



Echo Brown has hidden depths. Her new solo show at the Marsh, *Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters*, seems at first like a bit of light entertainment. Brown plays a version of herself—a 23-year-old African American Dartmouth grad living in New York City. And the setup, as she puts it, is straightforward: “Ryan, the Brooklyn hipster from Portland, Oregon, is on his way over to deflower me right now.” Brown’s stage self is giddy and nervous. She calls her friend every few minutes. The rest of the time she tells all about herself, Ryan and what brought her to this momentous night.

Brown is bright, bubbly and funny, and only gradually over the course of the one-hour show do we find out how hard-won and carefully cultivated that attitude is.

Her shyness with Ryan, her discomfort with compliments and the fact that she's waited this long are all rooted in some serious self-image issues reinforced by the society she grew up in. She's battled with the routine racism and sexism still prevalent in America, the kids who told her she was ugly because she was dark-skinned, the mother who warned her to just stay away from "mens" because they're all no good. When Brown talks about these wounding things, her passion and vulnerability are devastatingly effective.

The rest of the time the show is funny, with wry observations about, among other things, hipster culture and the racial politics of dancing. (There's some audience participation involved in the latter bit.) Describing her Craigslist date's beard and plaid shirt aesthetic, Brown says, "Ryan's definitely a lumbersexual, and it really turns me on."

Brown is a magnetic performer, both as her effervescent self and in the personae of the often hilarious characters who pop up in her story. The character of her mother is insistent and larger than life, while Ryan is amusingly plodding in his speech. Her roommate is blithely chatty with a girlish interrogative lilt.

Brown's day job could be a play in itself — she investigates police officers charged with misconduct. The dismissively recalcitrant veteran of the force that she embodies as an example shows how difficult it is to make a dent in the entrenched police culture that's been much in the news of late.

There are one or two awkward moments that could be ironed out — most notably the most gut-wrenching scene in the play, a major revelation that gives us a whole new understanding of how important this night is to Echo. At first it's unclear what's going on or how we got there from the previous scene. The end of the scene packs a tremendous wallop; it's just that it takes a little while for the viewer to catch up.

But there's so much powerful ground covered in the seemingly lighthearted setup of preparing for a date that it's pretty dazzling how smoothly Brown makes it flow (with the aid of monologue maven David Ford and director Scott Plate). *Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters* is an alternately intoxicating and sobering whirlwind of a show that's well worth weathering.

Realer than Real: Echo Brown and 'Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters'

When she talks about how racist the Bay Area is, compared to NYC or Cleveland, her observation seems perfectly aligned with the Bay Area's glacial coolness and assumed superiority that goes with occupying this stunning bit of heaven.



5 out of 5 stars - 'Outstanding - Starkie!'

The Berkeley Marsh

Written by Echo Brown

Developed with David Ford

themarsh.org



BY **CY ASHLEY WEBB** - 03.28.2016



Echo Brown is in-your-face like your best friend on a good night. Catching her might be one of the most important things on the Bay Area theatre calendar.

She's incredibly bright, and funny, and sharp and embodies a dynamo of energy that beams out in a punctuated rhythm of self-irony, but most of all she is so deafeningly real, your brain will be bouncing like a ping-pong ball.

She'll confirm what black girlfriends say about how much easier it is to be a black woman in Europe, and a 1,001 other things that

don't get heard, despite this perpetual conversation about race we always seem to be having.

“Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters tops anything I’ve seen this year.”

When she talks about how racist the Bay Area is, compared to NYC or Cleveland, her observation seems perfectly aligned with the Bay Area's glacial coolness and assumed superiority that goes with occupying this stunning bit of heaven, you start to wonder if the two are intertwined. “Voting for Bernie Sanders doesn't make you less of a racist,” she posits.

However, I'm getting ahead of myself here. Echo Brown's one-woman show *Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters* first opened at the San Francisco Marsh back in April 2015, drawing rave reviews. After multiple extensions, it's currently at the Berkeley Marsh through April 23.

To call this story of a tender-sweet Craigslist hookup a critique of hipster culture, that culture of privilege told in a false narrative of poverty, makes it sound lamely tedious. Brown is a funny, funny performer, riffing off everything from flannel-shirted lumber-sexuals to corporate whores and tech startups.

However, something else is afoot. Brown works her audience, gathering the energy and focusing it before bringing it down with stories like the one of her brother's parol hearing that had many in the audience in tears. You'll want to linger after, to decompress while she tells you a bit about the work, developed out of a class with the Marsh's David Ford.

Black Virgins Are Not for Hipsters tops anything I've seen this year so far. You'll feel a little more connected to the universe after seeing this and even maybe a little less alone.

1 BUSINESS heroine

AUGUST 2016

HOW TO HAVE
SERIOUS FUN AND
STAY PLAYFULLY
YOU IN BUSINESS

WHY YOU ARE
ALREADY A GREAT
MANIFESTER

7 WAYS TO
WRITE INSPIRED
[AND CONSISTENT!]
CONTENT

THIS OR
SOMETHING
BETTER:
HOW TO
SURRENDER
TO LIFE

ECHO BROWN

EXPLORES CONTROVERSY
THROUGH THE HUMOR AND
PAIN OF THE STAGE

