

Time Out

New York

January 8, 2014

COIL Okwui Okpokwasili

In *Bronx Gothic*, the writer-performer explores the dark side of urban childhood.

Okwui Okpokwasili has become a fixture of New York's performing-arts scene, having worked with luminaries like director Julie Taymor and choreographer Ralph Lemon. Now, she's delving into her preteen years in *Bronx Gothic*, an interdisciplinary solo piece that explores the burgeoning sexuality of kids growing up too fast.

What was the basis for this piece? I grew up in the Bronx in the '80s, [and there were] these notes that my friend and I used to pass between us in grade school. Some of them were really florid and dirty. How did we have that information? Was there ever a moment of innocence? It was really interesting to me. Maybe it also had to do with the fact that I was pregnant [when I was writing the piece], and I knew I was having a girl.

So is it partially autobiographical? The piece starts off with one particular note from my childhood. And it's very sexually explicit—talking about blow jobs and anal sex. This is not stuff that people think of children knowing about. How are we supposed to deal

with children that have that kind of awareness at 11 years old?

Where does the gothic come in?

There was a largeness to the Bronx—there were corners and alleys and dark places that you weren't supposed to go to. There was a kind of horror, for me. When I was 12, I had an 11-year-old friend who had a 15-year-old boyfriend.

We would have these really intense talks about whether she would have sex with him or not—and I had never had sex, you know? So the gothic comes from the darkness that lay beneath these girls and their knowledge.

You were also influenced by West African griot storytelling.

Griots are holders of cultural histories, and they pass these things down; and I'm telling a partially true history. But it's also an anti-griot thing, because griots tell stories of exalted people, not little kids who are doing things they shouldn't have been doing.

—Interview by JS

***Bronx Gothic* is at Danspace Project (pss122.org/coil) Tue 14, Jan 16–19, 28, 30–Feb 1; \$20, festival pass \$75–\$122.**



Dance

Critics' picks



HEATHER KRAVAS

In a quartet, which explores ballet vocabulary and folk dance, the choreographer searches for ways individuals work together to build a community. ▶ The Kitchen; Thu 9–Mon 13

MORIAH EVANS WITH SARAH BETH PERCIVAL

American Realness 2014 presents the U.S. premiere of *Out of and Into* (8/8): *STUFF*, in which the dancers explore "connection through expressive and repetitive play" ▶ Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement; Fri 10, Sun 12

BALLETNEXT

Artistic director Michele Wiles unveils her company in an evening of works by Brian Reeder. ▶ New York Live Arts; Tue 14–Jan 18

OKWUI OKPOKWASILI

Danspace Project teams up with P.S. 122 to present the enchanting Okpokwasili in her solo *Bronx Gothic*. ▶ Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery; Tue 14–Feb 1

REBECCA PATEK

The choreographer reprises her subversively bewitching *ineter(a)nal f/ear*. ▶ Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement; Tue 14–Jan 16

