

British Theatre Guide

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In the Continuum

Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter
The Perry Street Theater, New York
(2005)

Perhaps the most heartbreaking moment in *In the Continuum* is when a nurse announces, "Drugs - we don't have those here". To an AIDS patient in Zimbabwe, this is the equivalent to adding a course in torture to their death sentence.

This play is unusual in many ways. Like the writers of [Matt and Ben](#), seen here two years ago, Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter are talented, young character actresses who have written and performed their own piece, which they developed while still students at NYU less than two years ago.

The reason that *In the Continuum* is so powerful is the pairing and counterpointing of what might have been two interesting solo shows looking at the impact of this fatal disease on individual women in different cultures and, by extension, on millions of others.

Nia is a nineteen year old American living in LA. This sometime poet has already had trouble with the law but is the envy of her friends because she is dating Darnell, a gorgeous basketball player who seems destined for fame, fortune and maybe even the Lakers.

Zimbabwean Abigail could hardly be more different. She is an upwardly-mobile newsreader for ZBC (or dead BC as it is colloquially known). She is happily married to a successful businessman, Stanford, and they have an intelligent little boy.

What brings these two women together, at least theatrically, is a commonality of experience. Both have unfaithful men, they get pregnant simultaneously and disbelievingly discover that they are HIV positive. This occurs in a memorable scene that crosses continents and, with its perfect timing, owes much to clever direction from Robert O'Hara.

In addition to the protagonists, the actresses play many parts, including family and friends, colleagues and - perhaps most significantly - the nurse in Zimbabwe and Nia's irritatingly philosophical probation officer.

Where the writer-performers score most highly is in Nia's and Abigail's reactions to the devastating news and later developments. Both are initially shocked and angry once the information has sunk in. They also go into a strange kind of societal denial, where even though neither has done anything wrong, they cannot publicly come out and announce their affliction.

When they do so, they also have to admit that their wonderful men are not paragons but have been sleeping around without protection and probably knew that they were infected. The consequence for these women and their unborn children is terrible but one imagines neither man felt any great remorse.

In some ways, the play's tone is reminiscent of the work of another African-American, Dael Orlandersmith particularly in *The Gimmick*. That show made it across the Atlantic, becoming a big hit in Edinburgh and British audiences would welcome this play, if they get the chance.

It could also be an inspiration to young writers and to producers there, as the idea of new graduates getting a professional production of their play is almost unimaginable in Britain.

The multi-talented Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter, as Abigail and Nia respectively, deserve to win best newcomer awards for this Off-Broadway production, which has transferred from Primary Stages at 59E59.

The pacing is not always perfect and one or two superfluous characters take focus away from the main storylines but *In the Continuum* is a powerful and important piece of political theatre that combines serious drama with comic moments and should be seen.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)