

# British Theatre Guide

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## Crazyblackmuthafuckin'self

DeObia Oparei

Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

(2002)

Laurence is a serious Shakespearean actor who has been cast as Othello. He is none too happy to be forced to travel from his St. John's Wood home to Peckham to rehearse. To make matters worse, his director wants a streetwise "Yoh-thello" rather than the standard version.

This is only a tiny part of his story. The protagonist, Femi offstage, played by the playwright, DeObia Oparei, is also any number of other characters in his private life. He is a male prostitute with numerous personae in his spare time and though he doesn't realise it, he yearns for a true love that he outwardly spurns.

His world is peopled by wild characters and wilder fantasies. Everyone that he meets from his spunky best friend, Kareema (played by Nathalie Armin) through a judge who is his customer and has a quite odd vision of Little Red Riding Hood and the big black wolf, to his brother, Jerom, have their quirks.

Most of these are sexual and indeed, sometimes the play can seem like nothing more than a series of our hero(ine)'s sexual fantasies. Every imaginable sexual act is described or played out on stage and for those of a prudish nature, this is definitely one to avoid.

Femi's search for his soul leads to much exploration of his sexual nature and inner blackness (an analogue for gayness in him and sexual freedom in others) that everyone has, whether a fellow actor, friend, lover or brother.

CBFMS (the numberplate of the BMW that Femi drives) is packed with enough good jokes and funny lines for about three plays. The sight of DeObia Oparei as a 7ft tall transvestite in red, spangly shoes with 6" heels would be worth the ticket price alone.

The problem is that Femi's search for himself is a real mess. No character able to hold his or her persona for more than a few minutes without another side bursting out as they search for their true "inner black" selves. The writer really needed a stronger director who could have helped him to sort the wheat from the chaff and cut up to half a dozen extraneous plot lines.

The happy ending though, as Femi's real nature comes out, is touching and reminiscent of some of Jonathan Harvey's plays about gay men's voyages of discovery.

The writing often sparkles with wit and the performances, especially from the writer, Jo Stone-Fewings and Paul Ready as Colin, Femi's true love, are good. Oparei has a great sense of humour and the ability to write really well. With clearer thought and a sharper narrative line, his next effort could be a great success.

*This review originally appeared on Theatreworld in a slightly different version.*

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)