

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

## Dallas Children's Theater set to open *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*

BY PEGASUS NEWS WIRE

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When a great African King desires a wife; the best maidens in the land are invited to meet him. **Dallas Children's Theater** proudly presents John Steptoe's, *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, a gorgeous Caldecott Award-winning Cinderella tale adapted for the stage by Karen Abbott at El Centro Theater from February 8 – February 24, 2008.

Mufaro's pride and joy, his two daughters of very different dispositions, travel across a river and half a day's journey to go before the King. As they encounter the forest, each experiences a rite of passage. DCT's Executive Artistic Director and director of the play, Robyn Flatt, explains, "Mufaro says to Nyasha, 'This is a mysterious forest. Stay close to me daughter.' The forest acts as a spiritual place mirroring what the girls are on the inside. Each daughter's inner spirit is revealed in her reactions to those she encounters. This wonderful folktale celebrates virtue and kindness of the heart. "

A favorite among children and adults, this African story from Zimbabwe was inspired by a folktale collected by G.M. Theal, and published in 1895 in his book, "Kaffir Folktales". Award winning children's author/illustrator

### **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters**

- **When:** Friday, Feb. 8, 2008, 7:30 p.m.
- **Where:** Arena Theater (El Centro College), 801 Main Street, Dallas
- **Cost:** \$12 - \$21
- **Age limit:** All ages

[Full event details](#)

John Steptoe always focused on the African American experience in his work, but *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* required him to research African history and culture for the first time. It was published in 1987, and was acknowledged by reviewers and critics as a breakthrough because it inspires African American children to respect their ancestral origins. Mr. Steptoe hoped that his books would help all young people to feel pride in who they are.



Every culture has its rendition of the Cinderella story, but this one's notion of "beauty" is more than skin deep. Mufaro's daughters, named Nyasha and Manyara, have very different temperaments. The names of the characters are from the Shona language: Mufaro (moo-FAR-oh) means "happy man", Nyasha (nee-AH-

sha) means "mercy" and Manyara (mahn-YAR-ah) means "ashamed". Nyasha, the Cinderella character, is beautiful on the inside and out. With energy and color, the story is told through clear narration, African dance, drumming and song. Playwright Karen Abbot has carefully drawn out each important moral point, and children will easily follow along.

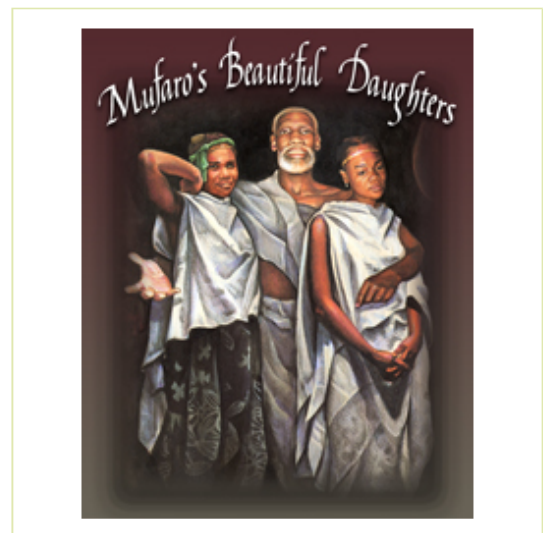
Mufaro, a dignified and caring African villager, has two beautiful daughters. When he leaves for the hunt and the sisters are alone, Manyara is always angry, while Nyasha is positive and kind. A messenger brings word that the Great King is inviting all of the "Most Worthy and Beautiful Daughters in the Land to appear before him" so that he might choose his Queen. Mufaro is very pleased that both of his daughters should be selected and agrees to accompany them at sunrise. That night, Manyara, believing herself better and prettier than her sister, sets out alone so she can be presented to the King first. What will happen to each girl as she responds to

hooting owls, enchanted laughing trees and the hungry boy she encounters along the way?

Ms. Flatt has assembled a dynamic artistic team to bring a sense of authenticity to the story. Costume Designer Barbara Cox brings expertise and flare for colorful African dress. Scenic Designer Randel Wright has created an abstract African terrain with sculpted spirit poles, which glide on wheels to transform the setting from an open space to a lush forest. Lighting Designer Linda Blase conveys the shadows, heat and energy of the land. Combined with drumming and music the splendor of Zimbabwe will burst onto the El Centro stage with power, majesty and grace.

Helping to pull all the visual elements together is choreographer Jennifer Hobson-Benton, who makes her DCT debut with

*Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. Ms. Hobson-Benton has over 25 years of dance training, over 15 years of professional teaching experience and a Master of Arts in Dance Education. In addition, she has a keen personal interest in African American Studies. Ms. Flatt states, “Jennifer’s knowledge of African dance and culture has been instrumental in the development of the production, extending well beyond the choreography. Her enthusiasm is contagious and her experience is invaluable.”



A strong ensemble cast brings *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* to life. DCT welcomes Major Attaway as happy Mufaro, Chimberly Carter as Manyara and Tristin Raquel Bunting as Nyasha. Returning to the DCT stage is local and commercial broadcast actress, Phyllis Cicero as the Storyteller who

assumes several roles. Also playing multiple roles are Charli Armstrong and Kenne Sparks.

Don't miss the vibrant flora and fauna of the stunning Zimbabwe region. With traditional chanting and African song, celebrate a great culture along with goodness, generosity and love!

Purchase tickets [online](#) or by calling 214-740-0051.

*Posted by Shawn*



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