

## Phenomenal Caribbean People

**Joanne Kilgour Dowdy**

By

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*"Between Me and the Lord 2"* is a telling of one woman's life in the midst of living it - but not just any woman. This woman is an actress, a dancer, a thespian, an alumnus of one of Trinidad and Tobago's top high schools, a graduate of one of the most distinguished Performing Arts Institutions in the world, a Professor, an author and editor of at least 6 books to date, a mentor - the list is endless.

Dr. Joanne Kilgour Dowdy's one woman performance is a treat of honesty. Few can reveal of self without reservation but she does it with the laughter, pain and ponderings bared and bold, daring you to flinch.

*"I had made a promise to myself that every ten years I would perform "Between Me and the Lord", each time adding in the growth and maturity that I earned during those years. I lost my father and sister since my last performance so this telling means something a little different to me."*

She continues, *"This work would not be possible without the active love and support of many people living and dead. It is intended as a salute to the life that is evolving even as we try to frame it in a still picture for this fleeting moment. Take the story with a grain of salt, and then go home and write your own autobiography. That is the only proof to all of us that the effort was not in vain."*

Dr. Kilgour Dowdy's journey to this place in time began in St. James, Trinidad. Even in her tender years she showed the promise and ambition to become everything she could be and was on stage and television by age ten. After graduating from Holy Name Convent POS, she joined the Banyan Television Workshop. At twenty three she left the country to train at the Boston Conservatory of Dance and Music - Dr. Derek Walcott, Nobel Prize winner, having sponsored this opportunity. In 1983 Joanne was accepted to the Julliard School's Theatre Department in New York and a scholarship. She completed her Ph.D. work at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and currently teaches in the Literacy Studies Program of the Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies Department at Kent State University, Ohio.

Living life  
is one  
thing.  
Living life  
in the  
Public Eye  
is some-  
thing else  
entirely...



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In 2000, Dr. Dowdy first performed *“Between Me and the Lord”* at the University of the West Indies at the St. Augustine campus. It was directed and produced by yet another artistic powerhouse, Rhoma Spencer. Says Ms. Spencer *“In Between Me and the Lord, there is no pretense, illusion or make-believe... Joanne brings to the boards an instrument she wields with taut precision and timing, so at the end of this journey we either celebrate with her or ‘mauvais langue’...”*

*“Between Me and the Lord 2”* was staged at Kent State University earlier this month. Like its predecessor, it opens with the age old Caribbean children’s song *“Brown Girl In A Ring”*. The original production offered four chapters, now, with another decade of living to explore, Dowdy performs five chapters – from the memory-tugging poem by A. A. Milne *“Have You Been a Good Girl?”* to *“Death Be Not Proud”* by John Donne. *‘Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so...’* – a tribute to the passing of her sibling and father – delivered in soft yet determined tones. Dowdy’s delivery of *“Lady In Green”* by Ntozake Shange (from the Obie Award and Theatre World Award winning play *“For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf”*) rang out raw and unequivocal, leaving the audience nodding in approval. *“No Ring, No T’ing”* written by Dowdy herself was a hilarious storytelling of *making style* on the advances of gentlemen callers.

The music for the performance was provided by eclectic musician Walter Gershon. He has played for such varied artists as tabla player Badal Roy, Poet Laureate of Port of Spain (Trinidad) Eintou Pearl Springer and Persian pop star Mansour. Gershon is an Assistant Professor at Kent State University.

During the preparation of this article it was announced that Dr. Dowdy was recognized by the esteemed **American Educational Research Association** for her book, *“Ph.D. Stories: Conversations with My Sisters.”* She is the recipient of the 2009 American Educational Research Association Narrative and Research Special Interest Group’s Outstanding Book Award – a pre-eminent recognition. Her book is a collection of interviews with tenured, African American female professors in Northeast Ohio and their experiences in obtaining a Ph.D. and working in academia.

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy is working on her latest book commemorating her life’s work. *“In the Public Eye”* is due to be released in 2010.

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