

# Simone's Place: The Project



Simon Alleyne.

## The Beginning

I recall the first time I sat down to chat with Marlene Hewitt about the project. It was on a sunny Saturday in Queens Park shortly before my scheduled reading from a recently-published collection of stories as part of the 2012 Bim Lit Fest. My first response after hearing her proposal was to chuckle. Was she serious? The drawn subject, while quite timely and important, was also a controversial one even in our somewhat passive-aggressive social milieu. I was drawn in by Ms. Hewitt's fearlessness and passion for the project and agreed without reservation to put all my creative energy into constructing the imaginary world needed to explore this subject though I knew, going in, that my invention might present a significant challenge to the sensibilities of some.

I returned to New York armed with a proposal which outlined the background, problem statement and the goals. Near the end of the document was the section on Communications Strategy which stated that a Play was chosen as the method of communication because plays can hold up a mirror to society, commanding us to pause and think, and hopefully change our behavior. Reading this, it was hard not to image that wonderful line from Hamlet: "The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

However, given our lack of a strong theater-going tradition, the confidence the project leader seemed to have in theater's power to move and inspire people, or even to unearth their true beliefs appeared to be misplaced; but it was this very optimism which fired my enthusiasm and I shelved whatever else I was working on at the time to begin the process of creating this play.

It did not take me long to devise an approach to the play, and I did not have to look very far for characters either. The short story, **Court Jesters**, in my published collection, **Going Home in Chains**, provided me with both. Most of the characters in Simone's Place jumped willingly from the pages of Court Jesters into the cabaret shelter that is the setting for this play, bringing with them the same charged sexuality, raw human emotion and

humor. The addition of music was the final touch.

## The Play

The play is a story of love, acceptance and the need for connection and belonging. Though it focuses on issues of gender identity, the question of class is ever present. The central character is a transgender owner of the club/bar Simone's Place where she performs Nina Simone jazz standards as Lady Simone. Simone has become advisor/healer to many of the broken souls who drink and hang around the bar; at the same time she is most in need of love and healing herself. The central figure's paradox binds and propels the play as each character struggles with the dilemma of trying to be free in an environment where keeping secrets is the irony of survival.

The first draft of the play took about 3 months. My trusted friend, Icil Philips, read it and provided worthy feedback and clear critical analysis. Her suggestion to accentuate the two-spirit nature of the central character was sterling advice, and proved that my trust in her dramaturgy skills was well-founded. The director, Russell Watson, also contributed a valuable critical eye on subsequent drafts and his ability to pull fragmented scenes together helped to focus the dramatic action. In November of 2012, I flew to Barbados to attend the first public reading of the play. It would take another year and a half before we finally got Simone's Place into rehearsal, but here we are with our shiny mirror just waiting for you.

## The Author

Glenville Lovell has published 4 novels, and a collection of short stories. His short stories can be found in several anthologies, including , and **Queens Noir Best African American Fiction 2010**. He counts his years as a member of the Barbados Dance Theater Company as perhaps the incubation for his creative pivot later on into writing fiction and theater. His dream is to perform one more time with the company. Visit him at: [www.glenvillelovell.com](http://www.glenvillelovell.com) or on **Facebook**.

## Lighthouse teams up with HIV/AIDS Commission for play

### **ABOUT LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION (partnering with) HIV/AIDS COMMISSION to present Simone's Place.**

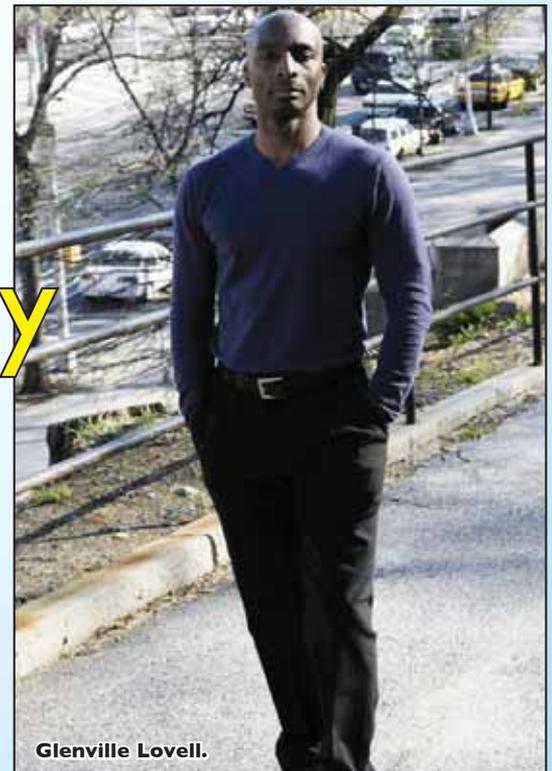
The Lighthouse Foundation Registered Charity No. 863 is a charitable organisation with the mission of building public awareness on major social issues through the performing arts and community based projects. This charity was founded by Simon Alleyne and his wife Suzanne in April 2011.

The first play it produced was called **Redemption Of Me** which was about a young man who contracted HIV and the impact it had on his relationships and community. It was written by Jason Carmichael and directed by Simon Alleyne. The second production **Girl On Fire** was written by Marielle Oneyche and also

directed by Simon Alleyne with a focus on sex workers, HIV stigma and discrimination. The two productions were staged in association with the National HIV/AIDS Commission with funding through their Civil Society Organisation Grant Fund.

Once again the Lighthouse Foundation has partnered with the National HIV/AIDS Commission to co-produce **Simone's Place**; a play written by Glenville Lovell and directed by Russell Watson. This intriguing and thought provoking play discusses the issues of love and acceptance while taking the audience on a journey through the lifestyle of a transgender person.

Simon Alleyne  
Director  
Lighthouse Foundation



Glenville Lovell.