

LEXGO TO THE THEATER

 reprint or license  Print  E-Mail  BOOKMARK 

Play tells story from Lexington's history

By Rich Copley RCOPLEY@HERALD-LEADER.COM

Jim Clark, the president and CEO of LexArts, invited stage writer and director Ain Gordon to come to Lexington to find a story in the city's history to tell.

It is the sort of thing Gordon has done in New York and New Jersey, and Clark has seen how it generated interest and dialogue in the communities where Gordon worked.

"I started walking around downtown and saw all of those historic plaques," said Gordon. "My first reaction was, it's all been taken care of. There's nothing for me to do. This town is covering its history."

But then he started to think about the plaques and how in most cases they couldn't possibly tell the whole story of what happened at each site. He also spotted a place that curiously did not have a marker: 245 South Limestone.

"It was as old or older than many of the houses that had markers, and it wasn't marked," Gordon said. "I thought, 'Why is that? Whose house is this?'"

Through his investigations, Gordon found the 1830s-era house was originally the home of Samuel Oldham, the first free African-American man in Lexington to own his own land and build his own house.

Now, Gordon is giving two unique markers to the house -- which was bought in 2006 by Coleman Callaway III and is being renovated.

First, there's a play, *In This Place ...*, which opens Thursday for a three-night run at the Downtown Arts Center. The one-woman play uses traditional theatrical techniques and multimedia to tell the story of the Oldham House through the owner's wife, Daphney.

Later this summer, a new-concept historic marker will be unveiled at the house. Rather than try to encapsulate the history into a paragraph like the familiar bronzed signs dotting downtown do, the new marker will direct pedestrians to a Web site full of research Gordon did while writing *In This Place ...*. The site will also showcase video from and for the play's production shot by Lexington documentary filmmaker Joan Brannon.

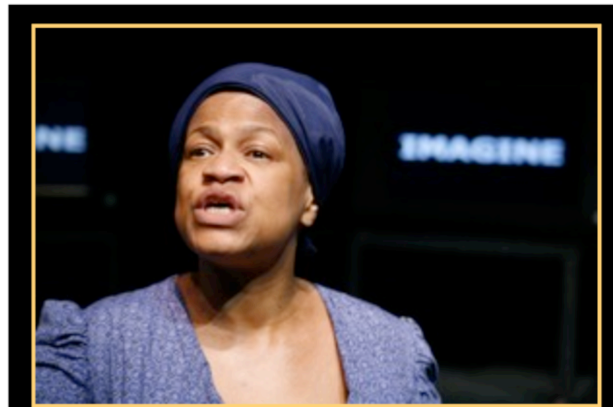
Clark and Gordon see the new-style markers as a way to document the city's history, particularly the stories not included in its first drafts.

When Clark first invited Gordon to research Lexington's "alternative history," Clark thought Gordon would focus on better-known subjects, perhaps legendary madam Belle Brezing or Sweet Evening Breeze, the well-known man who enjoyed dressing in women's clothing. But in the Oldham House, Clark says, Gordon found a story that was very appropriate for his project, which Clark initially envisioned as telling untold history.

"The house was decaying and in danger of being torn down before Coleman Callaway bought it," Clark says. "That's a lot like the history we're trying to document here."

When Gordon began researching the Oldham House, he says, details about its history were not clear and no one ever mentioned Daphney.

"I was collecting different scraps of conflicting information," Gordon said.



David Perry | Staff

Michelle Hurst rehearsed *In This Place*, a one-woman play about the Oldham House, at the Downtown Arts Center Theatre in Lexington.

'In This Place ...' Presented by: LexArts in collaboration with the Pick Up Performance Co. When: 8 p.m. May 22-24. Where: Downtown Arts Center, 141 E. Main St. Tickets: \$15 adults, \$10 students; available at the Downtown Arts Center Ticket Office, by calling (859) 225-0370 or visiting www.lexarts.org.