



GOOD ALWAYS BEHAVE LIKE THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THEM BY DINORAH DE JUSÚS RODRÍGUEZ

ZORA's QUASQUICENTENNIAL

Celebrating 125 years of a literary life.

By Penny Dickerson

Author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston would have celebrated her 125th birthday on Jan. 7, 2016. That means that for nearly a century, she has served as an iconic voice in the canons of African-American literature.

In the continuum of a tradition that has celebrated its most famous citizen for 25 years, the historic town of Eatonville, FL, will commemorate Hurston's contributions and her local associations in a multidisciplinary, yearlong program titled "ZORA! Festival 2016—Reflection on the Global

Legacy of Zora Neale Hurston: Celebrating Her 125th Birthday."

As a precursor to the 12-month celebration, *Introducing Zora Neale Hurston, an Exhibition Developed From the Archives of the Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts* opened last year and will run through Jan. 15. It includes books by and about Hurston, ZORA! Festival-related materials, and memorabilia from the 2003 release of the official Zora Neale Hurston stamp.

A special reception, Happy Birthday, Zora, will be held at The Hurston on Jan. 7, but the bulk of the festival takes place from Jan. 23 to Jan. 31. This includes perennial favorite events, such as the Outdoor Festival of the Arts (Jan. 29 to 31) and the HATitude Brunch (Jan. 30), as well as new events, including Dinner by Zora (Jan. 23) and performances of *Spunk and the Harlem Literati*, an adaptation of Hurston's play *Spunk* (Jan. 21 to 31).

Multifaceted ZORA!

The exclamatory, four-letter moniker that has reigned as the festival's all-caps title is representative of Hurston's extraordinary diversity. A theatrical entertainer and playwright, she was a formidable essayist and novelist who embraced folklore in her writing as often as her ordinary colloquial with quips like, "Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life ... I do not weep at the world. I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife."

Hurston the folklorist breathed the narrative of rural Southern life with a distinction yet paralleled and gave apt homage to the value of racial heritage. The Harlem Renaissance would not exist as a complete era without Hurston's due inclusion,

and her catalogue of influential 20th-century novels continues to serve as a posthumous example of how fiction penned with an underbelly of truth creates a masterpiece.

From her first critically acclaimed novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), to her most renowned title, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston established herself as a notable writer and woman of wit who personified the triumphant spirit.

As an anthropologist and a 1937 Guggenheim Fellow, Hurston conducted ethnographic research that spanned the cultural boundaries of Jamaica and Haiti, where she introspectively investigated the mystique of voodoo and oral exchange, resulting in the novel *Tell My Horse* (1938). In fact, another addition to this year's programming includes a special trip from April 10 to 17: Tracing the Caribbean Footsteps of Zora Neale Hurston: A 125 Commemorative Cruise. This also serves as a fundraiser for the sponsor of ZORA! Festival, the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (PEC), a nonprofit historic arts and preservation organization whose mission includes enhancing the resources of Eatonville—the oldest incorporated African-American municipality in the United States and Hurston's hometown.

Rollins Roots

A woman of resourceful means, fiery intellect and colorful intrigue, Hurston "loved her Florida" but traveled extensively—including to the Northeast, where she earned a degree from Barnard College—but few people are aware that she also lectured and performed in Central Florida during the 1930s at Rollins College.



PENNY DICKERSON



COURTESY PEC

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE: A work from *The Encounter: Baalu Girma and Zora Neale Hurston*, an exhibition at UCF by artist Eric Gottesman and other artists; Zora Neale Hurston; HATitude Brunch attendees

Her movements abroad have been carefully archived and preserved via correspondence, performance programs and reviews from Rollins' student newspaper, *Sandspur*. Collectively, they create a palpable record of Hurston's culturally significant journey through life.

Integral to that journey was Edwin O. Grover, Rollins vice president and the United States' first "Professor of Books." An advocate of interracial relations, Grover interceded on Hurston's behalf with publishing projects and served as a mentor. In an excerpt from a letter dated December 22, 1942, Grover stated to Hurston: "Your creative genius is your divinest gift and the world is waiting for what you have to give it."

According to Professor Wenxian Zhang, head of Archives and Special Collections at Rollins, a small collection on Hurston exists in the college archives, as she came to Winter Park in the early 1930s to give two performances on African-American folklore at Rollins' Recreation Hall. *From Sun to Sun* was presented by Hurston as cited by *Sandspur*: "The program of Negro folklore presented by Zora Hurston on Friday evening, January 27, in conjunction with the directors of the Museum, a group of Rollins students, was one of the most effective productions given at the college this year."



Edwin O. Grover

Exhibitions and Festival Highlights

From Hurston's award-winning short-story-turned-dramatic play, *Spunk*, to the HATitude Brunch, to collaborative art exhibitions and panel discussions, festival events invite patrons to break bread and live it up, Zora-style.

Spunk and the Harlem Literati, an adaptation by Be Boyd of Hurston's play *Spunk*, runs Jan. 21 to 31 at the UCF Theatre.

Dinner by Zora at the Holy Trinity Reception & Conference Center in Maitland features a menu by Fred Opie, Ph.D., author of *Zora Neal Hurston on Florida Food*. Tickets for the Jan. 23 event are \$75 and include the dinner, a copy of the book and a Hurston poster.

An opening reception and gallery talk for *The Journey Projects: Eatonville* commences Jan. 26 at The Hurston. The exhibition features pieces by artist Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier and the intergenerational work of Eatonville residents. It will be on view through July 29.

Get a peek at another unique art exhibition on Jan. 27 when a program at UCF highlights *The Encounter: Baalu Girma and Zora Neale Hurston*. Co-curated by Boston-based conceptual artist Eric Gottesman and UCF Art Gallery Director Yulia Tikhonova, the exhibition shows work by several contemporary artists who revisit Hurston's and Girma's legacies and place them within today's racially charged context.

Highlights include work by Linnemeier, a site-specific dance performance by Brooklyn-based



Art by Charles Bibb



choreographer Reggie Willson, and art by UCF faculty as well as students. "Because of our exhibit, UCF was invited for the first time to be a collaborating venue for the ZORA! Festival," Tikhonova says. "I am very excited to be a part of this nationally regarded event, and to articulate my vision for our gallery as an essential contributor to the cultural dialogue in Orlando and in the state of Florida."

On Jan. 28, take a ride on Zora's Cosmos Mobile Tour: Eatonville and Beyond, to visit sites of significance to Hurston. Reserve your spot by Jan. 16 for this bus tour, which costs \$75 and includes lunch, a copy of Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and more.

Jan. 29 kicks off Education Day, which is free and open to the public. Hurston will be honored at Rollins College during "In Conversation: The Zora Neale Hurston I Remember." Led by Dr. Ben Brotemarkle, executive director of the Florida Historical Society, the panel discussion will feature Hurston's nephew, Dr. Clifford Hurston Jr.; her niece, Vivian Hurston Browden; and Ella Augusta Johnson Dinkins, the daughter of Hurston's Eatonville friend, Addie Gramling Johnson.

Meanwhile, the ZORA! Festival Academic Conference in Eatonville features concurrent sessions of academic papers and special programs for students in grades kindergarten through 12th.

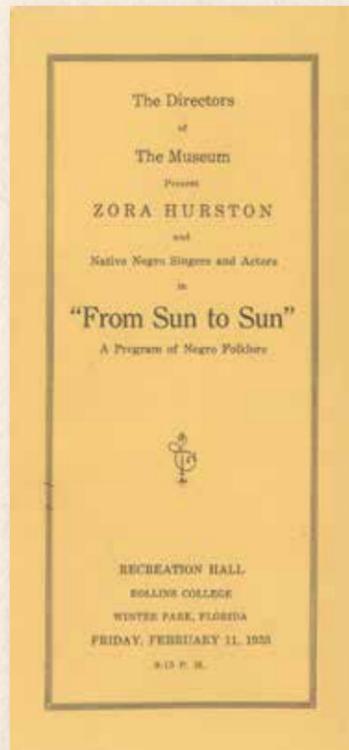
On Jan. 30, Zoraphiles don their finest chapeaus

OPPOSITE PAGE: A playbill for a folklore program put together by Hurston, who sometimes performed at Rollins College; The Outdoor Festival of the Arts, which takes place from Jan. 29 to 31 in Eatonville, includes vendors selling everything from traditional fabrics to (this page) original artwork and southern fare.

for the HATitude Brunch at the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando Downtown.

No matter where your interests lie, 2016's year-long tribute to Central Florida's leading literary lady offers something for everyone. To learn more about, log on to zorafestival.org. **oam**

Penny Dickerson is an award-winning writer.



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PENNY DICKERSON (3)

More ZORA!

March 19
 Women's History Month Film Screening:
You Belong to Me: Sex, Race and Murder in the South
 12 p.m.; \$8
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April 10 to 17
 Tracing the Caribbean Footprints of Zora Neale
 Hurston: A 125 Commemorative Cruise
 866.632.8724

June 13 to July 15
 Third Annual ZORA! STEM Summer Program
 Grades 1 to 8