What initially inspired you to write a play about the Lost Boys of Sudan?

- It was Peter Brosius and Elissa Adams at Childrens' Theater in Minneapolis, one of my favorite towns. The theater was commissioning me to write something, along with New Dramatists in New York, which had set up the dialogue among us, and we were all mesmerized by an article in The Times Magazine picturing a Sudanese boy on its cover, the boy having just landed in Fargo in February at night! It was 90 below zero and the boys had just come from the Sudan where it's 115 in the shade! Talk about cultural and meteorological shock!

How has it evolved on its way to VG?

- We did a production at Childrens' in their new theater for plays appealing to kids 15 and up, meaning everyone up to centenarians and beyond. (There's lots of longevity in my family.) We also had done several workshops in New York, Minneapolis and one telling one at Howard University in D.C. where we found the incomparable Sam Roberson, who continues as T Mac Sam in this VG production. From that production we also have the inestimable Namir Smallwood reprising his role (or maybe we're switching him, I can't remember!). But now we have this extraordinary chance to revisit and are we ever! Too many exclamation marks! So many changes, surprises, Elaborate Entrances, I can barely imagine!

Lost Boys continues your successful trend of writing stories distinctly outside your cultural experience. What would you say to one who argues that writers should "only write what they know"?

- Can't recall who said it first, not me, alas, but that old saw is basically malarkey. One should write about what one OUGHT to know.

Many people in this country are unaware of the recent history of Sudan. Is there anything specific to the Sudanese experience your audience may need to know to understand the piece?

- You just need to be alive, by which I mean that you know that much of Africa is teeming with wars which are not about religion, although they may mask themselves as such, but about money – diamonds, gold, manganese, did I say OIL?

The story of the Lost Boys has been told before in different media – in newspaper articles, documentaries, and novels, to name a few – what about the story particularly suits it to adaptation for the theater?

- To my knowledge, this has not been covered in the theater before. But even if it has, it's our particular view of this astounding story. We have the most wonderful cast, people I've worked with a lot – Nambi Evelyn Kelly, the premiere presenter of my work, and a terrific playwright; Ann Joseph, brilliant in my "Wheatley"; Sam and Namir, mentioned aforesaid; Kenn E Head, one of our huge and ageless talents; Adeoye, a

newcomer to me and a stunning talent; Leticia Seiko and Leslie Anne Shephard, both new to me and dazzling young women.

Your writing style has been described as a "word dazzle," and your plays as "language-drunk." Do you feel your work with language captures something specific about the manner of speech of the Lost Boys, or the experience they go through in the play?

- I don't know how to answer that. I write as I hear things, for better or worser. The Boys (and Girls) speak as I'm guessing they would. I can't do better than that.

In recent years we've been seeing the rise of hip-hop theater, with plays like *Breaking the Cypher* and *Scourge* achieving critical and commercial success. Do you see your plays as related to this emergent genre? Do you think that exposure to other such language-driven work has affected audience perception of your own?

- I don't have a clue as to how audiences perceive my work. I love the hip-hop stuff to which you refer. I wish hip-hop and rap relied less on easy rhymes and half-rhymes and even false rhymes, but that's the just the traditionalist in me. Generally, the rappers are splendid, if they can the misogyny and homofobia. But they do concentrate on The Word, and what could be better than going back to the Logos (pardon my Greek! Is Nick Petricca reading this?) Perhaps pertinent is that the other night I re-wrote the entrance of a character Kookorookoo and directly referenced the Daddy if not the Granddaddy of HipHoppe, Gil Scott-Heron, the man to whom we should all listen and listen up real good because the revolution will NOT be televised or blackberried or TiVO'd

Lost Boys concerns itself primarily with the lives of a group of war-traumatized adolescents and teenagers. What are the practical challenges of casting a show about kids in this type of situation? Were you looking for a particular type of actor?

- Jim Corti, my omniscent director, said early on that we find the best eight actors (and four understudies) we can and do the Ensemble Thaing. That's what we're about to do.

This play originally premiered at a theater with an audience primarily of young adults, but it deals with very serious, psychologically difficult situations. Were there any aspects of the story you chose not to present to a young adult audience that you may wish to explore at VG?

- I think I've in a way answered this already, but let me say it differently. The original script, and certainly not his version, pulls no punches and didn't before. I never "wrote down" and I certainly haven't now.

Tell me about how you named your characters. The principals all have traditionally Western names (Josh, Oliver, and Sam), and their nicknames are all drawn from American basketball icons (Allan Iverson, Kevin Garnett, and Tracy McGrady). A few of

the smaller characters draw their names from European or American history as well. What was the inspiration behind that?

- Somewhat whimsical. Basketball is global. In '98 I was in Hong Kong and I saw a youngster speed by on a bicycle into a mosque – I ain't kiddin', like the only mosque in HK, I presume – with a basketball in his grip and a Michael Jordan tee shirt sweating to his frame. I also wanted to reference Americans – Crispus Attucks (as a child I listened to the Indiana State high school championships and Crispus Attucks H.S. was always at the top. Lots of stuff.).

The structure of the piece is very episodic and varied, the episodes taking place in many different places, with many different characters. When you wrote the piece, did you have a vision of how it was to be staged, or particular images you wished to evoke in the staging?

- I dig episodic, but I also dig flux, which maybe is the same thing. Lots of stuff will change in the next couple of months. I know Jim C is cha(o)mping at the bit. He'll get it all.

This play won't be opening at VG for another few months – what will be happening with it during that time? Are there any directions you want the play to move in during that time?

- I always want clarity. In theater, in my life. I'm going there.

What is next for you?

- Couple of other projects coming fast and furiously before "Lost Boys". "Two Great Oceans" written with my great friend Sherry Shephard-Massat, whose work has also been produced at VG. I can't quite get anyone to be convinced this is a terrific work. It's about Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and we think it's dynamite and absolutely up-to-the-second, one hundred and forty years later! Also "Hawking"coming up in December at the Playwrights' Center before Christmas, about the last day on earth, before he goes to Mars, of Stephen Hawking. Enuff said?