



Claire Armistead

WHEN Winsome Pinnock was small, she planned to become a part-time nurse. For the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, nursing was a respectable aim, a step up from the factory work that was her mother's only option. Where the writing came from, she's not really sure, she always *knew* it was her vocation. "I remember someone asking me if I had some sort of contingency in case it didn't work out, and saying 'no, because it's going to work out'."

It was a confidence not to be confused with arrogance. While her classmates went out dancing, she sat at home and imagined and wrote, encouraged by the teachers at her north London comprehensive school. Hard graft, she says, was something she knew all about as the daughter of a mother who — typically of her generation of Afro-Caribbean parents — left home at sun and seldom got back before 10.30pm. Far from creating a generation of delinquents, the example instilled a "Victorian" work ethic in her children.

For Pinnock, now in her early thirties, the work has paid off. She has a new play pencilled in for the Royal Court next summer, and just as importantly, she has also achieved the rare distinction of having one of her old plays revived by the National.

Leave Taking, a story of generational conflict in a Jamaican immigrant family, is a George Devine award-winner originally produced in 1987 by the Women's Playhouse Trust. It goes out on the road this week under the mantle of the National's education department, before joining the Cottesloe repertoire.

On the other side of London, at the Bush, another daughter of Jamaican immigrants has just opened a new play, Raising Fires, about a black girl who falls victim to the fears and prejudices of villagers in 19th century Essex. Nottingham-born Jenny McLeod also seems to be on a roll, with a second play taking shape at the Tricycle in Kilburn.

Meanwhile, a third writer, Bonnie Greer, whose play Dancing On Blackwater was recently premiered by the Black Theatre Co-operative, is one of four black and Asian women writers who have contributed to a season of short films for BBC's *Sixen Voices*, due to be screened over Christmas.

Does this mean that the tide is turning for a chronically under-represented sector, black women writers? And why should they have anything more in common than, say, white male playwrights?

One answer is that they are a minority, uniquely placed to deal with questions of race, gender and nationality that strike to the heart of this country's new multicultural identity. Yet it's a question that 31-year-old McLeod answers dismissively. Like Pinnock, she was born in England to parents who arrived from Jamaica in the fifties. Her father worked for Nottingham Transport, her mother is a nurse and she abandoned her A-levels to write her first play which was taken up in Bolton. "I wake up in the morning and I think, I've got to eat and pay the rent. I don't think

Winsome Pinnock. 'In the novel people are writing interestingly about the way cultures are changing. In the theatre that doesn't exist' ALAN FREWELL

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