

WATTS VILLAGE THEATER COMPANY

Los Angeles Legend Lynn Manning Leaves Legacy of Inspiration



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CoFounder and Artistic Director of Watts Village Theater Company Passes Away at Age 60 After Private Battle with Liver Cancer

Lynn Manning, the co-founder and artistic director of the Watts Village Theater Company has passed away after a private battle with liver cancer. In addition to his work with the WVTC, he was an award winning poet, playwright, actor, and former World Champion of Blind Judo. Manning accomplished all of this after being shot and blinded by a stranger in a bar in Hollywood, at the age of 23. Originally a painter, he turned all his energies to literary arts and has been recognized widely for "painting with words."

As an athlete, artist, poet, musician and activist for the underserved you could count on him to give all he had, whether it was his time, talent, knowledge or money. He was there.

DOROTHY RAYBON, MANNING'S SISTER

Manning was diagnosed with liver cancer almost a year ago, but kept his struggle quiet so his supporters would stay focused on his artistic mission to produce plays of relevance to the underserved community of Watts and South Los Angeles. He also used WVTC as a platform to promote Literacy through arts education.

He passed away at his home at 11:53 a.m. Monday, August 3rd. Aware of his shortened life expectancy, Manning was working closely with his team at WVTC to ensure a transition would be in place.

The Board of the Watts Village Theater Company has released this statement:

"Lynn had a radiant passion and talent for theater. The WVTC community is grieving with deep sorrow. For some time, WVTC has been working with Lynn through this difficult period to ensure that we continue his legacy. Los Angeles has lost a gem and one of Watts' finest."

The front page of the LA Times featured an article about Manning's life several months ago, [Tragedy Shapes A South LA Playwrights Artistic Life](#), in which he expresses how losing his eyesight lead to new creative paths.

"In the absence of that vastness, that visual feast, I came to recognize the overwhelming distraction that sight had been. I had never noticed that sound moves the way it does, or feels the way it does. And what about this pulse, this radiation that flows from all things? And the smells! Good God! The smells! Who knew such sensory lushness existed in this more immediate realm. Blind people knew."

Blind people had to have known all along." Lynn Manning

Manning was preparing for the upcoming production of RIOT/REBELLION beginning August 14th in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Watts Riots. He co-founded the Watts Village Theater Company in 1996. In 2011, it received the "American Theatre Wing National Theater Company Award" noted as one of the top ten most promising theatre companies in the Country, and the "Second District Human Relations Award" for its productions focused on intergroup conflict and relations.

Just two weeks ago, Manning was recognized by President Barack Obama at the White House celebration for the American with Disabilities Act, due to his "tremendous contribution and impact on the disabled community."

Though Manning had a terminal diagnosis, he and those close to him were under the impression that he would have much more time with us. His passing was unexpected, and his family is the process of working on funeral and memorial arrangements.

"Lynn was an inspiration not only to his family, but to friends and perfect strangers," said his sister Dorothy Raybon. "We all admire his strength and determination. As an athlete, artist, poet, musician and activist for the underserved you could count on him to give all he had, whether it was his time, talent, knowledge or money. He was there. He was a genius and a survivor, who was deeply loved by all."

Manning's family asks that those who want to honor his memory buy his book, [Private Battle and Other Plays](#), the proceeds of which go to the WVTC, or to donate directly on the [website](#).

[Click here for a link to full resolution photos.](#)

About Watts Village Theater Company

WVTC serves the Watts and South LA population providing arts and arts-education to a population with little or no other access to live theater. WVTC's earliest endeavor was to conduct acting and performance workshops for at-risk youth in Watts' housing projects, culminating in public talent shows. Eventually WVTC started producing original full-length productions which received critical acclaim for examining cross-cultural relations between Latinos and African-Americans in Watts. For more information visit www.WattsVillageTheaterCompany.org.

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