

# A life of many hues

By Robbyn Mitchell  
rmitchell@tampabay.com

It's been an interesting year in race relations for America. In just over 10 months, there have been communities violently protesting loss of due process, NBA owners losing their teams over racist remarks and anti-immigration zealots blockading school buses full of brown children because they were presumed to be foreign.

It's a climate — not of change, as was promised by the election of President Obama Obama, but of an overwhelming dedication to fight change.

"People believe in race so strongly they're faithful to it. Race is like a religion to us," said Fanshen Cox DiGiovanni, writer and performer of *One Drop of Love*, a one-woman multimedia show coming to the Straz Center for the Performing Arts Saturday night.

As a woman with parents who identify themselves as different races — her father is black and her mother is white — Cox DiGiovanni says she has had the privilege to move between two different spheres of American society and decide for herself how she would be defined.

"The way I identify myself is as a culturally mixed woman searching for racial answers," she said. "I care about justice and that's more important than racial identity."

Her feelings are 44 years in the making — and her personal story is a large reason that her one-woman show came to be. Cox DiGiovanni spent the first seven years of her life in Washington D.C., until her parents separated and she moved to Boston with her mother and siblings. It was in high school in Boston that she met Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, the show's executive producers, through her brother and theater, respectively.

"Matt and I decided the we were pretty serious about being actors at that point so we got into theater and we'd always agreed

that if any one of us made it, we'd help the others out," she said.

Cox DiGiovanni was finishing a master's in fine arts when she decided to tackle her heritage for a thesis project in 2013. She wanted to reach out to her father, who had become estranged after her marriage, and find out the real cause of the breakdown in her family.

Her father, steeped in the Pan-African movement and finding his roots on the continent, was not pleased with his daughter's European finance.

"We even had the wedding in Jamaica,

because my family lives in Jamaica, and he didn't come," Cox DiGiovanni said. She wondered why this relationship was strained by a construct like race, so she set out to do interviews with her family and research on the history of race to clarify the feelings. What Cox DiGiovanni discovered was damning.

"I have a section of the show where I pose as a Census worker and I look at people in the audience and assign them a race because that's how it was done — a person would look at you and determine your race based on the categories they were given and that's just who you were," she said.

Her professors encouraged Cox DiGiovanni to change course from a documentary to a stage performance since her master's was in theater. With the interviews assembled, she took to the stage and has performed in 10 cities across the country this year. She named the show after the "one drop rule," instituted during slavery, which stated that one drop of black blood made a child black. It wasn't until the 2000 U.S. Census that mixed race people could identify as such.

Exploring issues like separation and hatred drive Cox DiGiovanni's show, but the seriousness of the sub-

ject doesn't mean it will be a dour night.

The only things one needs to fully experience *One Drop of Love* are an open mind and some company, Cox DiGiovanni said.



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## One Drop of Love

The show is at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in the Jaeb Theater at the David. A. Straz Center for the Performing Arts, 1010 N.W.C. MacInnes Place in Tampa. Tickets at \$37.50 and can be purchased at [strazcenter.org](http://strazcenter.org).

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Hillsborough County  
Daily 101,500  
November 7, 2014