

# DAILY NEWS

\$1.00

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

## A 'Day of Reckoning' for gifted playwright

After her Uniondale junior high staged a full production of "The Marriage of Figaro," playwright Melody Cooper knew she was meant for a life in the theater.

"I may not have chosen theater, because I was studying at the Dance Theater of Harlem," said Cooper, who is now staging her own full-length play in Manhattan.

**BY LAURA WILLIAMS**  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

But Ida Nelson, her audacious French teacher at Turtle Hook Junior High School, "had this very ambitious idea" that her young charges could handle Mozart's opera, Cooper said.

"We did the whole recitative and all the arias - in English - from top to bottom," she said. "The junior high orchestra played the music. We had the painted set. Went to a costume shop for full costumes, with bustles and white-powdered wigs."

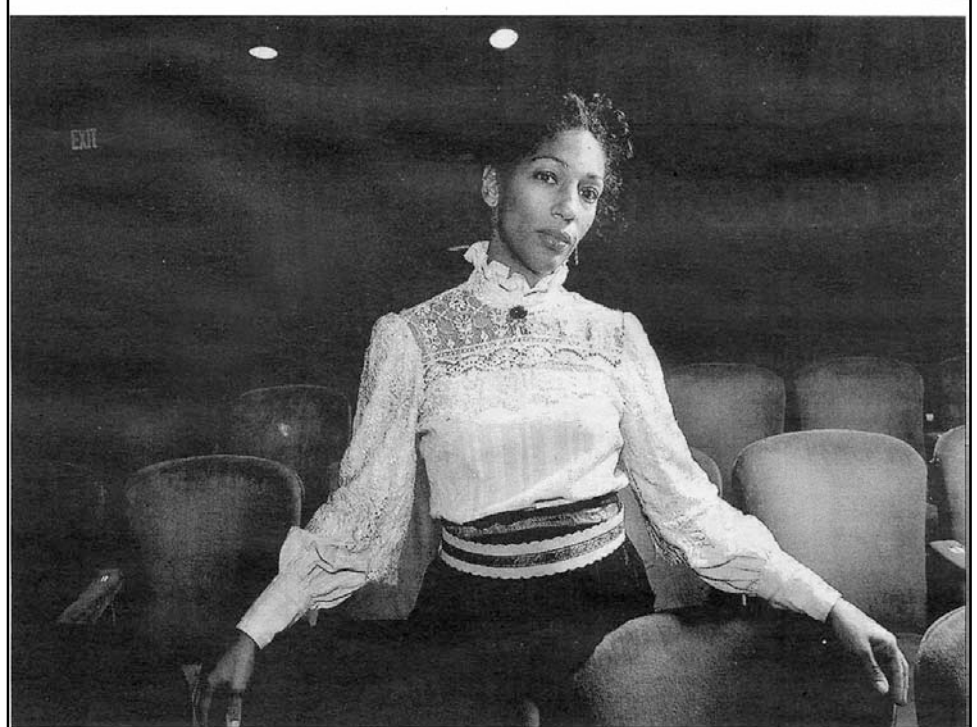
Even more impressive is the fact that the kids pulled it off, Cooper said.

She continued to act, and started performing monologues at Uniondale High. She landed a full scholarship to Adelphi University, where she snagged lead roles in many plays and wrote cabaret songs with fellow student Jonathan Larson, who went on to create the hit musical "Rent."

On Feb. 4, the curtain will go up on Cooper's own award-winning play, "Day of Reckoning," in which she plays the lead. The two-act work is being staged at the All Stars Project on W. 42nd St. and produced by Five Points Presents.

"Day of Reckoning" is based on a true story about a former slave named Lucy who married Albert Parsons, a white veteran of the Confederate

### ACTIVIST COUPLE REMEMBERED



NEIL SAMSON KATZ

Melody Cooper, whose first experience with acting was at Uniondale Junior High School, wrote and stars in "Day of Reckoning," which will open at All Stars Project on W. 42nd St. Feb. 4.

Army. Intermarriage was illegal, but the couple settled in Texas.

The Parsons moved to Chicago after the Ku Klux Klan shot at Albert. And that's where the two became influential labor organizers, leading thousands of workers in marches to demand an eight-hour workday. Their activism eventually led to authorities hanging Albert.

"Everyone knew who Lucy and Albert were in their day," Cooper said. "They were all over the newspapers."

But Cooper first came across Lucy's story on the Internet.

"I was fascinated," she said. "I'd never heard of her in class or in history books. It's a part of lost history."

So she spent two years researching and writing the play to recover this

piece of the past. The play has won two awards, the 2003 Jane Chambers Award and the MultiStages New Works competition.

Cooper - whose mother taught English at Turtle Hook and whose dad was a science teacher in Roslyn - said Lucy Parson's story resonated with her because of her own political activism.

"My parents were very active in the civil rights movement, and it's something I carry on with my kids as well," said Cooper, who lives in Westchester. "We've been on several marches, peace marches. That's a connection I have with Lucy and Albert. It's on a different level, of course. They put their lives on the line."