



# MUGSHOT

GOAPELE + DANA DANE + WHEAT BREAD + CALM PETE + MED + DAY BY DAY

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"Basically there's enough for us all so why can't we somehow figure it out? I've been waiting restlessly for the words to a song that could change it all..." - Goapele ("Change It All")

## Wide Angle **ANGELA KARIOTIS**



Angela Kariotis is easy conversation. She's funny, frank and proudly front-phobic. "I am against saying things [if] you do not know what they mean," she explains via phone from her New Jersey stomping grounds. The 26-year-old Irvington, New Jersey, native name checks philosophers, breaking them down into digestible compounds for share, not show. She's already got two degrees, a B.A. in communications from Rutgers and an M.A. in performance studies from the University of Texas at Austin, but they're just another "language" to add to her fluencies in Greek-American culture and hip-hop. "I give up no one way for any other," she pronounces, "but I juggle it all." As a first-generation Greek American born into a predominantly African-American and Latino community in the late 70s, Kariotis shuffled multiple allegiances, including one to hip-hop culture which, she insists, was "not something that I chose to be involved in or a decision that I enunciated for myself verbally. It was just an aesthetic that permeated the neighborhood. It was there before I got there, and because it helped foster me, it naturally influenced my voice and my prose at the same time."

Kariotis' distinctive voice and droll prose take center stage with *Reminiscence of the Ghetto & Other Things That Raized Me*, a solo performance piece exploring identity and place. Conceived while Kariotis was away in school, *Reminiscence* provided a platform for the performer to talk about where she was from. "Where I'm from makes all the difference as to how I am," she says, "and I want to celebrate that." The play showcases Kariotis' "massive phraseology" but also incorporates hip-hop's predilection to sampling: "I sample throughout the play. I sample my family members. I sample my friends. I sample in the same way that we sample the first four bars of a song and loop it. It's the same as being inspired. It's taking something and creating something else from it." And in "silent tribute" to hip-hop culture, Kariotis opted for the phonetic spelling, raized, in the play's title. "In terms of writing, we spell words out the way that they sound. I give props to the hip-hop aesthetic for doing that."

*Reminiscence* has been in heavy circulation throughout

the country and was recently selected for inclusion in New York City's annual Hip-Hop Theater Festival. After a recent performance, one of Kariotis' friends declared the play "fucking funny as hell," but the educator and activist isn't interested in just making people laugh. She wants to shift perspectives, a process that begins each performance when Kariotis steps onto the stage. "When you think of *Reminiscence of the Ghetto* and I come out onstage, it's not what you expect," she says. "People who are of color are just as surprised as people who are not of color. I think that's something. I think that matters because, well here is this story. I live there too. Who owns the ghetto? No one. Whoever thinks that is being limited."

Kariotis structures the frenetic performance into bite-size segments, one of which is entitled "Dandelions." She offers an alternate take on the common weed through movement and the animated embodiment of multiple characters from her community. Kariotis treats the dandelion as a flower, "a flower that is so beautiful, it's something we don't even have to work for it," she whispers, notably overwhelmed. "That's how resilient it is, the strength of a dandelion. It is irrepressible and it's a blessing, and what are blessings except something that you had that you didn't have to work for."

"My yard is filled with dandelions and I'm blessed because I have flowers. I have no green thumb. What if we could do the same thing with people, neighborhoods, and anything? What if you just changed the way you looked at something and then you change its entire meaning, not only for it but for you as well." Kariotis isn't just waxing philosophic; a committed teacher, she's taken the parable of the dandelion to the classroom to contest what she sees as an "obsolete and outdated" public-education system that "cannot stand the weight of today's young minds." Whether onstage or in the classroom, Kariotis' imperative is just "offering a different story." "My activism starts with perspective."

[www.angelakariotis.com](http://www.angelakariotis.com)

By Jalylah Burrell

Photos courtesy of Angela Kariotis