

# Designing istas

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Premiere Issue

*Highlighting the creative works of African American women in the arts and design*

## ***Nadine Patterson***

on her book “*Always Emerging*”,  
creating media and her  
upcoming feature film

***Tango Macbeth***



# Action!

## 03 Creative Innovator

Nadine Patterson is an award winning independent producer/director. Her training in theatre, immersion in documentary film, and intense study of world cinema enable her to create works grounded in historical contexts, with a unique visual palette. Over the past 20 years she has taught video production at West Chester University, Temple University, Arcadia University, Drexel University, and Scribe Video Center. She has curated film series for *Through the Lens* for WYBE-TV (now MIND-TV) in Philadelphia as well as for the Trenton Film Series. She recently published her first book *Always Emerging*.

Some of her films include :

**"I Used to Teach English"**, Winner Gold Apple Award 1994 National Educational Film/Video Festival, Oakland, CA;

**"Anna Russell Jones: Praisesong for a Pioneering Spirit"**, Best Documentary 1993 African American Women in the Arts Film/Video Competition, Chicago, IL;

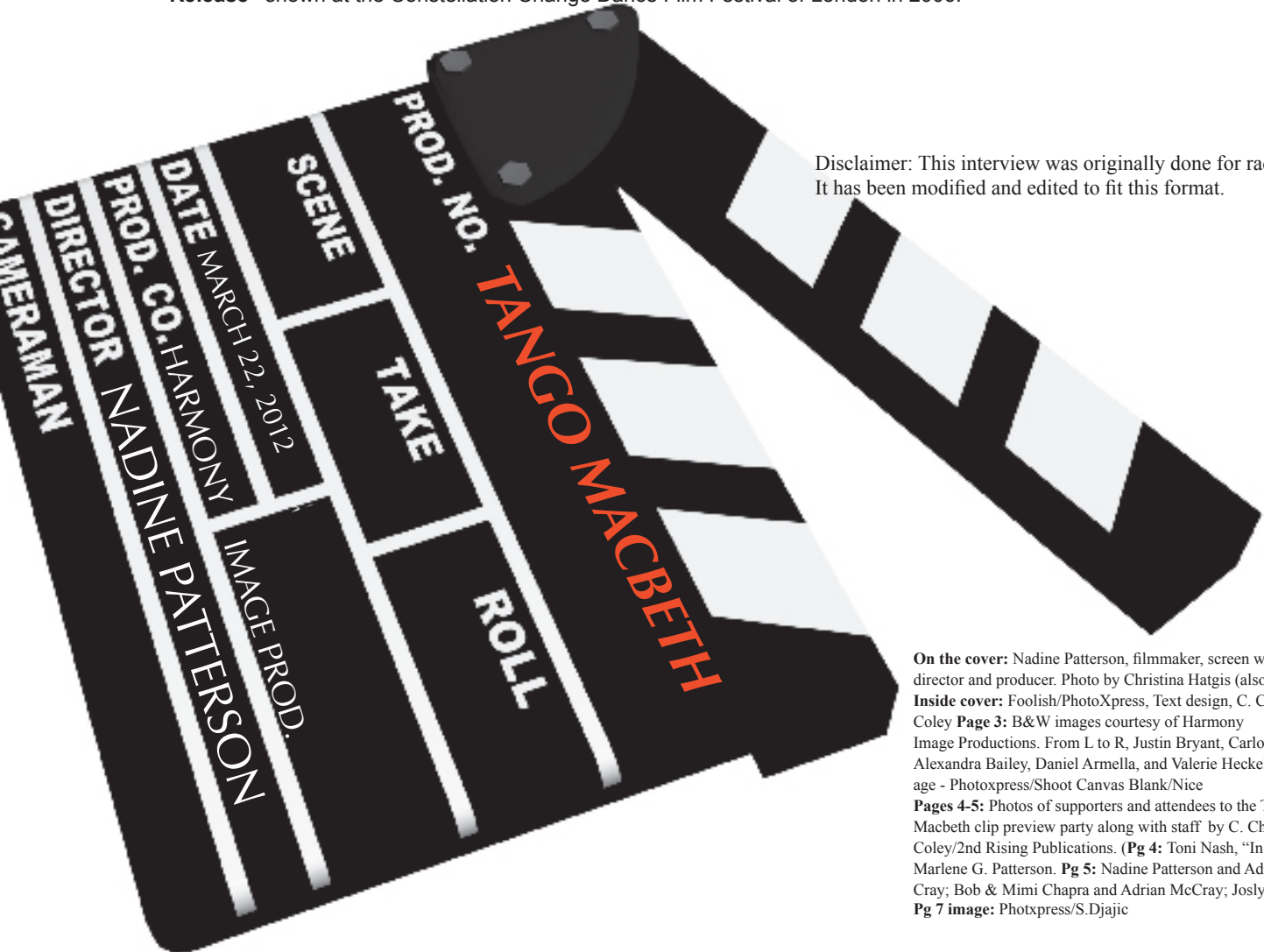
**"Moving with the Dreaming"**, Prized Pieces award from the National Black Programming Consortium in 1997;

**"Todo El Mundo Dance!"** selected for the 2001-2002 Council on Foundations Film and Video Festival.

**"Shizue"**, screened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1991;

**"Release"** shown at the Constellation Change Dance Film Festival of London in 2006.

Disclaimer: This interview was originally done for radio. It has been modified and edited to fit this format.



**On the cover:** Nadine Patterson, filmmaker, screen writer, director and producer. Photo by Christina Hatgis (also on page 6).  
**Inside cover:** Foolish/PhotoXpress, Text design, C. Chekejai Coley  
**Page 3:** B&W images courtesy of Harmony Image Productions. From L to R, Justin Bryant, Carlo Campbell, Alexandra Bailey, Daniel Armella, and Valerie Heckel. Reel image - Photoxpress/Shoot Canvas Blank/Nice  
**Pages 4-5:** Photos of supporters and attendees to the Tango Macbeth clip preview party along with staff by C. Chekejai Coley/2nd Rising Publications. **(Pg 4:** Toni Nash, "In 5" rolldown, Marlene G. Patterson. **Pg 5:** Nadine Patterson and Adrian McCray; Bob & Mimi Chapra and Adrian McCray; Joslyn Duncan)  
**Pg 7 image:** Photoxpress/S.Djajic

# Nadine Patterson

## *Creative Innovator*

**I**n an interview on the Designing Sistas portion of the Homebound Love Project on WPEB 88.1 FM in West Philadelphia, Award-Winning independent filmmaker, producer, screen writer, author and creative innovator Nadine Patterson shared some insights on community, job creation, independent filmmaking, her first feature film, *Tango Macbeth* and ways to effectively give the community voice through media.

**Chekejai:** Welcome back to our program and thank you so much for joining us on WPEB 88.1 FM in Philadelphia. We are about to speak to Nadine Patterson... I am so glad that she decided to join us on the *Designing Sistas* portion of **The Homebound Love Project** tonight to talk about her film – her upcoming project – *Tango Macbeth*. (To Nadine:) It's due out soon, correct?

**Nadine:** Yes, The Philadelphia sneak preview screening of *Tango Macbeth* will be at the Painted Bride Art Center on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. That is a Thursday. By making a donation you can get a pass for the preview. We are having two screenings – Thursday night 7 pm and 9 pm. The website is [www.Tangomacbeth.com](http://www.Tangomacbeth.com)

**Chekejai:** We want to hear about your career. I know you from Temple University. You had a group of women filmmakers – a film collective called “Image Weavers”.

**Nadine:** That was in 1994, I co-founded Image Weavers with Aisha Shahidah Simmons, a wonderful filmmaker and speaker on women's issues and Tina Morton, an excellent documentarian.

I was working at the public television station, WYBE, now called MIND TV and I had just seen about 210 short films and I was curating a “Through the Lens” series. I was thinking at the time, “*you know, we need a black women's or a women of color film collective in Philadelphia because the Latinas and the Asian sisters and the Black sisters, we... are not represented in American mainstream media – at all – unless it is in an overly sexualized way or in a negative way.* So I wanted to create an organization for filmmakers and visual artists. We had one member – Barbara Kigozi – who was a photographer and then we had people who did radio production. It was just a very eclectic mix of forms but they all had the commonality of creating authentic representations of women of color.

**Chekejai:** Absolutely, and I think it's missing now. Image Weavers was mid 90's?

**Nadine:** 94, 95, 96.

**Chekejai:** It was an awesome collective. I remember being at one



of the film screenings.

**Nadine:** ... Always sold out film screenings. We had one at the CEC (Community Education Center in Philadelphia) and one at the Painted Bride Art Center.

Chekejai: I remember the one at the Painted Bride. It was special at that time to see such a collaboration. I don't think that that type of collaboration exists anymore.

**Nadine:** Not in film. What happened was, several years later, Riva – A member of Image Weavers – was a part of that and she went on to work with the Jazzy Fat Nasties in creating Black Lily and so I feel that the energy of the film collectives spilled over into the music collective of the early 2000s. Which was incredible. Maori

Holmes (a founder of Black Lily) worked on creating a fusion of the music and film scene for the Black Lily Film and Music

Festival a few years later. I think that the issue is that we have to be multi-cultural. We have to reach out to people across lines of sexual orientation, which is what Image Weavers did, and we have to reach out across generational lines. Toni Cade Bambara was our mentor... and we have to reach out across class lines. So that's a lot of divides but when you make a film it's so labor intensive. There's so much money that's required to make a film. We're talking a micro budget of \$50,000. That's the price of a really nice car that will go very, very fast. Now a writer or a painter – they're happy with that for a year. I need that for a two-week shoot.

Chekejai: So we're getting a crash course in film budgeting

**Nadine:** Exactly! So it's a very collaborative art form and I don't think that we can afford – as filmmakers – to segregate ourselves according to race, gender, identity, income or whatever ... especially right after the financial crash. Unless you're in the top one percent or top .5 percent of wealth in America, we're all in the same boat. We are all...white people, Black people, Latino people, Asian people, Native Americans – we're all in the same boat.

Chekejai: So the playing field has been leveled?

**Nadine:** It has been leveled. The good thing is that Black folks know how to create art – amazing art on a tight budget. We've been doing it since we got here right?

Chekejai: Absolutely

“Black folks know how to create... amazing art on a tight budget.”

**Nadine:** Of course, so for me it's important to just continue with that message and hopefully some day we will have

a revival of something like Image Weavers but it may include men and it will embrace... teenagers. It will embrace people who are senior citizens who want to tell unique, wonderful stories ...authentic stories but based in the American experience. The total American experience.

Chekejai: It was really special and it's still very special. For me it has a lingering effect. It resonated... from the 90s to 2012. It left such an impression. If it left one on me I am sure that it touched other lives...The concept alone touches other lives. Especially because of what you said about African American women not being represented well in the mainstream... it's ridiculous at this point. ...When does mainstream understand





that we are whole people? ... It [negative images] under-develops a lot of our youth who are watching these things. It's really putting us in a space where we are not moving out of. We've laid into that impression. So, with you being here – this is really special because of what you put out there and because you represent the progression.

**Nadine:** I represent the progression and the continuation of the... I am going to get deep on you. I am... my family has been in America – we can trace back seven generations. My grandfather's people come from Maryland. My grandmother's people come from Augusta, Georgia. Harmony Image Productions is based on a place that my grandfather came from – my maternal grandfather came from Harmony, Maryland so our company is called Harmony Image Productions because it's our roots as well as representing the concept of harmony in terms of all of the art forms coming together in cinema.

**Chekejai:** That's beautiful.

**Nadine:** My mother came up with the name of the company so she gets the credit for that.

**Chekejai:** She gets the credit for a lot of things. She's helping to produce *Tango Macbeth*.

**Nadine:** She *is* the producer of *Tango Macbeth*. I got a grant from the Independence Foundation. It was an arts fellowship in 2010. *I love them! Thank you very much Independence Foundation! You're beautiful!* I was the only filmmaker to get that grant that year but it was seed money and it enabled me to purchase a ...camera... which we shot a lot of the film on. It also enabled me to spend time on research and development on *Tango Macbeth* and to see plays and understand Shakespeare and to meet with my collaborators. Lenny Seidman is my composer,

Zan Booker is the choreographer for *Tango Macbeth* along with Marlene Patterson and my production designer John Roberts. For a year we were talking about this before we shot it. A year – looking at plays together, looking at dance performances together, watching films together and [talking] about how we would create the multi-cultural, multi generational vision of Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth* and why that was so important to have something that was open and fluid and represented the best in American theater and film. *Thank you to the foundations that support emerging artists and undiscovered talent or artist who have been working in the field for a long time – like myself.* It's important to get that support. But my mother is the producer, the key producer so she has wrangled her friends, our family, our neighbors. I have been trying to wrangle my contemporaries. I must say that people who have given the most have been retired. So I think that my mother's generation, 60 and over, they understand the importance of art and culture in the struggle of African American people. They don't see film as commerce. They see film as part of the... social-political struggle. As you were saying, needing these images – positive images – and authentic, I want to use the word “authentic” as opposed to “positive” because... black people should be represented as villains as well as victors.

**Chekejai:** It is what it is.

**Nadine:** But authentic portrayals and by “authentic” I mean “complex” because so often Hollywood only wants to see us if they can understand the story. And their version of the black story is ... ‘young man - grew up in the ghetto - he's talented but he's trapped - how can he get out? - we're going to tell that story.’ You know, that kind of thing. All the time and America is more complex than that – especially the African American experience. It's more complex than that.

**Chekejai:** It is and even though I agree that the portrayals should





be as villains and victors I think there needs to be more balance. We've been on the left and the down side for so long that it's at a point now where it's ridiculous. It's like "okay, can we hear another story?" We're bombarded with it. It's the news, it's entertainment. It's the (stereotypical) "angry black woman."

**Nadine:** Can I read from my book? Oh I have a passage from my book, *Always Emerging* -

Chekejai: Before you start... (directed to the listening audience) Nadine, along with being a film director, [screen] writer & producer she's also an [author]. She recently wrote her first book called "Always Emerging." It really breaks down media in so many different ways and I am hoping that she'll give us some ideas of some of the chapters. I've read through some and... the chapter titles alone - if you'll just read off some of the titles.

**Nadine:** I will read off some of the titles for you! Chapters from the book include: "Yes You Must Be Crazy To Pursue This As A Career", next chapter "Money Is The Last Thing You Need To Make A Film", that is true believe it or not, it really is. And "For Colored People: Why Selling Out By Perpetuating Negative Stereotypes And Making Bank Is A form Of Cultural Suicide."

Chekejai: Those are awesome titles and they are [thought-provoking]. You really want to look further in, especially if you are ... just wanting to make a film and you are deterred by the money. Then you begin to think, "okay how am I going to do this without the money?" (To the listening audience) In Nadine's book, *Always Emerging*...she explains how you can go about this without trying to deplete your bank account or go bankrupt or ruining all of your credit. Those are key points in there. (Online at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com))

**Nadine:** I've made the mistakes that too many filmmakers have made of running up on the credit cards. I've done it - don't do that. Really...save - start saving. If you know that you want to

make a film start saving money now. Save 5, 25, 50, 100 dollars a month for your own personal film fund. Or if you're a good writer, a good grant writer...I'm a good grant writer so I write grants and proposals so every-now-and-then I get grant money and basically, you don't owe it back, it's free, all you have to do is finish the project. And I believe in asking people for help. Tell them what you need. But what I wanted to say about the film business is that in American culture we need to be aware of our history. In America - this is from the book - "*In America success is often based on how far we distance ourselves from our community. I don't know if people from other ethnic groups have to make the same sacrifice but this is definitely true for many African Americans who are on the moneyed path to success. In the realm of cultural production there is an especially painful trade off. My heroes - warriors like Eartha Kitt, Muhammed Ali and Paul Robeson - have taken political stands that have not endeared them to the dominant society. Therefore they suffered a loss of income and access to resources in the prime of their life and careers. Others have seen how the 'defiant ones' are treated and they have modified their behavior either consciously or unconsciously. Silence becomes the defacto setting. They say 'I will focus on my craft, my sport and keep silent when it comes to issues that affect working class Americans or people from my community. In the film business this is taken to another level. Performers and filmmakers of color are not only coerced into silence - they are often asked to portray and create demeaning portraits of their own people for mass consumption. Many do it because they need the money. We all have to eat right? Yes! We have to eat. But do we have to Sh&# on our ancestors graves afterward? Because that is exactly what we are doing when we misrepresent our people and our culture.*" So that's from the book and that's how I feel.

We in Philadelphia have a wonderful history of race pride going back to Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and...the... African Methodist Episcopal church here in Philadelphia and the free



African society and the abolition movement...the self-help movement and the women's suffrage movement. Black people – men and women – were at the forefront of those movements from the very beginning of our country... That's our history as Philadelphia people. So those are the people whose shoulders I stand upon. So how can I – being the beneficiary of over two hundred years of struggle – how dare I take the knowledge that I've obtained and use it only to make money? Only to obtain fame and fortune? That would be sinful. So I use it to educate people – I use it to uplift people. I use what I can to inspire others to do what they have to do for themselves and for their community.

Chekejai: That is rich and it's powerful. I personally appreciate it.

**Nadine:** ... I want to thank the Tower Premiere Concierge for hosting the party – on 3<sup>rd</sup> street – and shout out to Derek and Alexandra Bailey for hosting that wonderful party. We as a people – we are an entrepreneurial people. I am going to put something else out there... I have been underemployed for a long time like too many of us. I have two Master's degrees... Many of us... are educated, trained and it's very hard to get a job. I decided at the end of 2010 that I'm going to create a job for myself and... for others. When you fund the film – make a donation to Tango Macbeth – you're not just helping me make my dream come true you are also helping Gary Smalls the wardrobe artist make his dream come true. You are helping Zane Booker – the choreographer make his dream come true. You're helping so many people who worked on this film ... Alexandra Bailey, Brian Anthony Wilson, Eric Suter. So many people have had their dreams come true through making of a feature film. It's so hard to get access to professional equipment, to professional talent in this industry... I felt that I needed to share what I've learned, share what I have with others... Some people came to the set not knowing anything about sound... production and after two weeks they know how to operate a boom (mic) they know how to operate a digital sound recorder. They are trained. They learned how to operate a light board. So it's important that people don't just see funding Tango Macbeth as a artistic-cultural endeavor it's also an economic endeavor. So if I can make this film – in the most excellent way – with all the bells and whistles – then I can get funding for another film and hire more people and train more people.

Chekejai: And you actually have training in your background. You've worked at Scribe (Video Center) – which WPEB is a project of Scribe... you've done some training in film there.

**Nadine:** I took my first class there in 1989 with the wonderful Toni Cade Bambara (who has since passed away)... since 1991 I've been a facilitator at Scribe and instructor at Scribe, a mentor to people so that's been like twenty years now... over – that's a long time that I've been affiliated with Scribe Video Center and I just believe in its core mission [...to explore, develop and advance the use of electronic media, including video and audio, as artistic media and as tools for progressive social change]. So many others that have these media arts centers. There is the privileged filmmaker who goes out into the community and tells the story of the people in the community and they shoot them and they interview them and they go back to their studios and they cut and

edit and treat the piece. Scribe goes to people in the community and says, "here's the camera. Here's the "on" button. Here's the zoom button. This is how you do 3-point lighting. This is how you edit. This is how you do sound..." Scribe teaches people how to do their own media and how to tell their own stories. That is so unique... It is old people, young people, Black people, Latino, Asian... – everybody comes through Scribe to learn the tools of the trade... [And] It's my volunteer effort to empower others to be able to participate in our democracy to create their own media.

Chekejai: We are going to get onto Tango Macbeth (the film) while we have a few minutes left. I would love for our listeners to hear more about Tango Macbeth. I can't get enough. I've been on Hipcinema – that's your website?

**Nadine:** That's my company website and there's www. TangoMacBeth.com. Hip Cinema has a channel on Youtube. If you go to www.Youtube.com/Hipcinema you can see the trailer for Tango Macbeth. It's about a theater company and they're rehearsing Macbeth. A documentary crew is filming the rehearsal process. Occasionally during the rehearsal process the actors become lost within Shakespeare's world. It's like they go on a mind trip of how the scene would play out in its most opulent, fashionable setting and clothes, in the most intense and powerful way. "Tango" is a metaphor for partnership. In the film you see how some partnerships work and how some partnerships fall apart. And you learn a lot about how men treat women... how society views art and artist and you get to see the inner workings of the creative process. You see the director – which is me – and you get to see the choreographer's interplay with the actors. You hear the backstage gossip and banter. For me it's a magical, creative, endeavor. I have a wonderful editor – Sharon Mullally – who cut the film. She is a documentary filmmaker – that's her background – like mine. This is my first feature film. We approached it like a documentary. ... We had hours and hours of footage and we found the story in it and it was just amazing. There have been a lot of stories about actors and acting but this is truthful. It feels real.

Chekejai: Thanks for joining us on the *Designing Sistās* portion of *The Homebound Love Project* on WPEB 88.1FM. We look forward to the sneak preview of Tango Macbeth on March 22nd at the Painted Bride Art Center.

**Nadine:** Thank you!

You can visit Nadine at [www.hipcinema.net](http://www.hipcinema.net) or at [www.tangomacbeth.com](http://www.tangomacbeth.com)

