

The story begins at the end. Hunter is asleep onstage while the audience settles in, then, like a grandmother warming up for a good yarn, she wakes and begins to tell her tale.

The singer takes us back to 1909, when the spunky 12-year-old runaway lies about her age to get her first singing job in a whorehouse called Dago Frank's. From there, she learns her craft and goes on to become famous in Chicago as the "Sweetheart of the South Side."

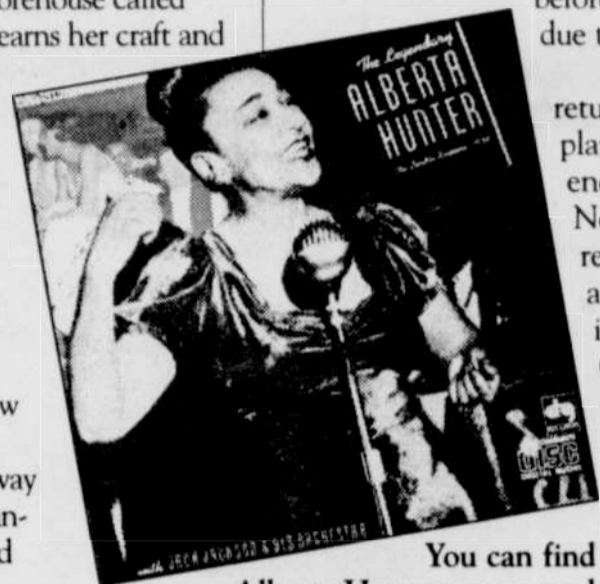
During this time Hunter meets her biggest fan, Lottie Taylor, the niece of famous African American theatrical entertainer Bert Williams. The two become lovers for many years, eventually moving to New York, where Hunter begins an extensive recording and Broadway career. She also writes many standards, including "Down Hearted Blues," made famous by Bessie Smith.

The play handles the relationship between Hunter and Taylor with great sensitivity and reminds us of a time when lesbians weren't considered "chic." The singer struggles with her own homophobia during a time when same-sex relationships were simply not discussed: "It takes so much age," she remarks during the play's introduction, "before we're smart enough to live."

In the '30s, Hunter and her partner travel to Europe, where the performer again enjoys phenomenal success until forced home by World War II. She then embarks on a

USO tour, performing and recording with the likes of Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.

Back in New York, at age 59, Hunter's life takes a sharp turn when she decides to become a nurse after the death of her mother. She works for more than 20 years in that profession before a forced retirement due to age.



You can find Alberta Hunter on upward of 30 albums, including collections, imports and as a featured artist

In 1977, at 82, she returns to the stage and plays to sold-out audiences at the Cookery in New York, as well as recording three new LPs and performing for President and Rosalyn Carter in 1978.

Not only is Hunter's story incredibly interesting, Hall does a superb job of bringing her to life. Her descriptions, vocal

inflections and movements allow the audience to visualize what she describes.

Hunter is a challenge to voice, having had two different speaking voices and three distinct singing voices, possibly because she recorded with a variety of labels under three different names to avoid breaking contracts with major studios.

Hall's voice shifts without missing a beat, from a sassy teen-ager to a toughie doorman at Dago Frank's to a woman who's been around the way a few times. The actress makes it all look effortless.

Alexander describes working hard in collabo-

ration with Hall on stage focus—where to look, who is talking, where the (imaginary) doors should be. "I've never seen someone work so hard and so effortlessly and be able to incorporate all those things," he says. "When I ask people if the play was confusing to them—could they tell who was speaking—usually they haven't even thought about it. It's not an issue."

The creative pair also helped each other with world views. "We did a lot of work on the script, changing some lines and scenes around. Demene could tell me the black woman's perspective, and I could tell her the gay perspective. She'd tell me, 'A black woman would not say that!'"

Because of the diverse richness of Hunter's life, Alexander explains, "There's no way we could cover everything." But, he adds, "certain things were emphasized, like her love affair with Lottie."



Hunter made a remarkable musical theater comeback in her 80s

Alexander, who also serves as the play's musical director, jokingly says he knew enough to stay out of Scroggins' way. "I started to give her notes," he remembers, "and she kinda hunkered down on the stool and said, 'Well, this intro is gonna be whatever I play.' I just gave her the vitals and let her go."

He seems to appreciate the freshness Scroggins' approach gives the show, noting she doesn't use the score but works from her own observations and from interacting with the cast. "She and Demene really talk to each other," he says.

Kudos as well to scene designer Mark Loring, who Alexander says "read my mind a lot of

the time." The sparse stage effectively uses platforms and dressing room barricades combined with lighting to transition from city street to stable to nightclub dressing room to New York apartment with ease.

This is Alexander's first production with ART, and he has nothing but praise for the company, declaring that everyone was "so supportive." Previously, he worked with Stark

Raving Theatre, Northwest Children's Theatre and triangle productions!

"I hope we'll start trying to take a little moment out of our lives and think about a woman like Alberta Hunter and the contributions of all black artists," Alexander concludes. "Here's a very vital style of music that's been around for well over a hundred years in America. It's a truly American forum, and it came from voices like [hers]. I also hope people will have a good time. That's why I go to the theater—to get blown away."

What better time than Black History Month to enjoy a solid production about a black blues legend? See you in the theater. **J**

MY CASTLE'S ROCKIN': THE ALBERTA HUNTER STORY runs 8 p.m. Thursday to Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday through Feb. 17 at Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, 5340 N. Interstate Ave. Tickets are \$16 from 503-241-1278.

KRONDA ADAIR is a book-sellin', coffee-pimpin', theater-goin' entrepreneur who loves to write and sometimes gets paid for it. Write her at ephany@myexcel.com.

**The Fantasy Creature Store**



Gifts from myth and legend

Dragons - Gargoyles - Fairies  
Jewelry - Incense - Celtic

**3106-B NE 64th**  
Near the corner of 64th & Sandy Blvd next to It's My Pleasure

**503-241-8888**

Thurs 12-6 • Fri 12-6 • Sat 12-7 • Sun 12-5

EVENTUALLY EVERYONE NEEDS IT...

**BRAIN SCIENCE !!**

Computer Repair and Consulting



PC or Mac / New or Old

Onsite Repair

Custom Built Systems

Home / Office Consulting

503.730.5185 Ask@BrainSci.net

www.BrainSci.net

**WENTWORTH SUBARU**

**COME IN FOR A NO HASSLE PRICE!**



**IF WE'RE NOT THE CHEAPEST... WE'LL MATCH ANY ADVERTISED PRICE IN OREGON\***

**WENTWORTH SUBARU**

SUBARU. The Beauty of All Wheel Drive.

www.wentworthsubaru.com

\* On an exact MSRP in stock • Expires 2/14/02

107 SE Grand • 4 Blocks South of the Convention Center • 503-232-2000

**Thinking of Buying a Home in 2002?**

Take the fear out of home ownership with a team of dedicated sisters. We work diligently for our clients from the beginning to the end on the journey to home ownership! Remember, with RE/MAX we can help you find a home across town, on the other side of the country, or anywhere in the world! Count on us for friendly, dependable and honest service.



View our website for valuable information and to see our current listings, as well as all homes listed for sale in the entire metro area! Call us to see any property.

**RE/MAX SIGNATURE PROPERTIES**

LINDA WELCH, BROKER/OWNER / LAURIE WELCH, SALES ASSOCIATE

LINDAWELCH@REMAX.NET / LAURIEWELCH@REMAX.NET

503.282.4000 / WWW.LAURIEANDLINDA.COM