

# BEAH RICHARDS

## Beah Richards— Actress and Playwright GWENN MITCHELL Two Days Older Than 'Shaft'



BEAH RICHARDS

Gwenn Mitchell has been acting for three years, and is now playing the leading female role in what is essentially her motion picture debut, the role of Ellie, the girlfriend of the title character in "Shaft."

Miss Mitchell is an apt choice for a girl who runs a boutique as a means of making her own beautiful way in life, as Ellie does; a boutique symbolizing for Miss Mitchell the idea of selection, of freedom, and well, yes, "liberation" not only in clothing, but by extension, life and its role playing.

Miss Mitchell plays well, in her personal and professional "Immaculate Misconception" at New York City's Cherry Lane Theatre. Since then she has made guest appearances in soap operas, and played a junior fashion editor in the ABC-TV special, "The Best of Everything."

Although she was offered a term contract with Universal Pictures following her brief appearance in the still unreleased film "Recess," she chose not to accept the deal because there was no guarantee of parts, "especially good parts."

Beah Richards has added the title "playwright" to her list of distinguished credits.

Yes, it's the same Beah Richards, Academy Award nominee, actress, NAACP Image Award winner for 1971 and audience favorite on stage and screen.

With Beah in a crowd, had it world premiere with Los Angeles' Inner City Repertory Theatre Company in May, 1971. Crowd is simultaneously a taut suspenseful drama of revenge and regeneration and an intensely lyrical study of the black man's struggle for self-understanding.

Crowd is her first professionally produced play, but the role of writer is not new to Beah: she has written and performed her own poetry on stages throughout the country.

Just as important as her writing is her acting. She cannot remember when she did not want to act.

Beah was born and raised in Mississippi. The church became her first theatre of communication. Following college, she studied dance with Serge Okruinski and drama with Craig Noel at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, appearing in numerous productions there as well.

First Role

Lorraine Hansberry's prize-winning play, A Raisin in the Sun provided her first Broadway vehicle as standby for the role of Mama. A part she later reprised in Inner City Repertory Theatre Company's definitive 1968 production. In New York, Beah played featured roles in The Miracle Worker, and in Mike Nichols' all-star production of The Little Foxes, at Lincoln Center.

Motion picture auditions

have cheered her memorable performances in such films as "Hurry Sundown," "In the Heat of the Night," and "The Great White Hope." (She played James Earl Jones' mother.)

She received an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actress for her portrayal of Sidney Poitier's mother in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." She will appear in the forthcoming Walt Disney film, "Moreover."

Beah has repeatedly earned plaudits for her performances whether on stage with Inner City Repertory Theatre Company as a sultry Lady Macbeth or a grief-stricken Mama in Raisin whether reading her own poems in her one-woman show; or whether starring in such TV programs as "Room 222," "The Bill Cosby Show," "Ironside," "It Takes a Thief," and "Hawaii Five-O."

Teaching, Too

Although her performance schedule is hectic, she makes time to teach twice-weekly classes in acting at Inner City Institute, joining such artists as Godfrey Cambridge, Donald McKayle, Lou Gossett, Margaret Bonds and Marlon Fallo who provide instruction and inspiration for students at Inner City Repertory Theatre Company's official school.

Beah professes that her most rewarding stage experience came with the discovery of Frank Silvera's Theatre of Being and her role as Sister Margaret in its production of The Amen Corner.

She created the role here in Los Angeles and also starred in the New York production.

With the premiere of her own play, Oae Is A Crowd, chances are that more rewarding experiences may be coming Beah's way, both as actress and playwright.

Her measurements are 34 23/34-1/2. She weighs 113 lbs., and is 5'3-1/2" tall. And on doctor's orders, to maintain her energy and weight, she must eat four meals a day. "I love it," says Gwenn.

"That's why I feel good about the role in 'Shaft,' says Gwenn. "It's a good part and I can be seen. And it's a Black film, with a situation where I don't feel like a token Black. Not that I'm knocking token lives, "And all of them liberating," says Gwenn. As it has been with Gordon Parks, director of "Shaft," each role has been developed as something to fall back on in case one of the other roles/talents/endeavors did not work out.

The young actress (primary role at the moment) was born in Morris, New Jersey, but raised in Yonkers, New York, where she lived through high school. She began modeling shortly after high school, but with her sights set on ultimately becoming a professional actress.

She started as a member of the advanced workshop of the Negro Ensemble Company, where she studied under Lloyd Richards, currently the head of N. Y. University's Drama Department. She appeared in the fall of 1970 in "The Blacks. It's just that it's good not to be one, for a change.

Miss Mitchell tested for the role of Ellie in California, and had to wait two months to learn that she had won the role. While waiting, she wrote her first novel, a murder mystery entitled "Pigs Feet Plus Cavalry Equals Murder."

She also sings, and is studying with anticipation of an eventual singing role. She currently is acting with Uta Hagen. And even before Barbara Loden made such a directorial mark for herself with "Wanda," Gwenn had decided that she would one day, too, direct her own film.

Miss Mitchell is, astrologically, a Cancer, born on July 6th. "Two days older than Richard Roundtree; would you believe?" Richard Roundtree plays the title role of the black private detective, John Shaft, in her current film.

Here's a vacation driving tip from the PORTLAND TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMISSION: Inspect your tires carefully before leaving or on a trip. Make sure your spare is inflated to ... and carry a small block of wood or two for blocking your wheels, just in case.

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GWENN MITCHELL

## Wilson Pickett Version of Chatanooga Riots

### Manager Relates Singer Not at Fault

New York, N.Y. - "I wanted to go on, I was there and I wanted to go on to stop anything from happening," so spoke the frustrated Wilson Pickett during the aftermath of the Chatanooga riots in which nearly everyone including singer James Brown has tried to place the blame on Pickett.

James Evans, of New York, Pickett's manager told this story in defense of his artist:

Wilson arrived at the Chatanooga airport ten minutes to five that afternoon. The band drove in their own bus and got to town at 3:00 p.m. One of the promoters, Ross Fields, took Wilson to the auditorium and he was there well before the 8:30 show time. Both of the other groups, the Impressions and the Intruders were late.

not perform either and they would return the people's money unless the other two acts arrived. In essence he wanted the show to go on as scheduled, or not at all.

"During this conversation," Evans continued, "he was constantly calling Wilson 'boy' and otherwise aggravating him.

Then, according to Evans, the Arena Manager went on stage to tell the audience the two opening acts would be a little late, and that Wilson, who was as Evans related, waiting in the wings at all this time, would not appear at this time. This further inflamed the crowd, who began yelling that they had come to see Pickett and wanted their money back if he would not perform.



WILSON PICKETT

"Even though Wilson was heading off, he could go on first since the other acts were so late and the crowd was becoming restless. The promoter agreed this would be a good plan, and Wilson stated he would stay on 2 hours if necessary, until the others came.

"Mr. Hawkins, the Arena Manager did not agree to this however, he felt Wilson should

with this Hawkins said they could have their money back and that started the stampede," Evans related.

Evans refused to give Pickett's whereabouts, nor would he allow us to speak further with him "Wilson is annoyed and aggravated, the allegation that he precipitated the rioting is not true. He has said everything he intends to say about the matter.

Meanwhile 22 year old Leon Anderson lays dead and many other people are injured in Chattanooga.

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