

me what had become of our radio show and if it would be possible to bring it back. I said we'd rather do a television show which would give wider exposure to the kind of material we shared on our college tours. That was the end of the conversation. I paid little attention to it because I had made that same speech a thousand times in a thousand places, and nothing had ever come of it.

Sometime later, our agent informed us that some people in Texas wanted me to do a television show. When I finally stopped to pay attention to these Texas people, it turned out to be KERA's Bob Ray Sanders and the station's director, David Dowe. They gave us a proposal, and what they said made sense to us. To our great surprise, we found that theirs was a real proposition, a real chance. In short, they made us an offer we couldn't refuse, and "With Ossie & Ruby" was, at last, on its way to becoming a reality.

Since then, things have been a bit frantic at times as we've selected material, written and rewritten scripts and then began production. But I think viewers will be satisfied -- and perhaps a little surprised -- at the results. "With Ossie & Ruby" is a different kind of television series. Each program presents a different aspect, a different view of the American experience. And we're combining many art forms -- poetry, drama, music, dance, comedy -- to entertain our audience.

It has been a special pleasure for Ruby and me, who have always dreamed of having our own television show, to see "With Ossie & Ruby" become a reality. Now that it has, we can at last share with millions of Americans the words, ideas and songs that are most dear to us. All the work and struggle and hope it took to make it happen seem well spent. I think "With Ossie & Ruby" is proof that the American Dream does work -- at least, for those who work for it.



Della Reese, General McArthur Hambrick and the Concord Memorial Baptist Church Choir of Dallas join Ossie and Ruby in a tribute called "Life is..."

## DELLA REESE

Hosts Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee and guest star Della Reese seek an answer to one of mankind's oldest questions -- "What is life?" -- on the premiere of "With Ossie & Ruby." A series of dramatic vignettes portraying folks of all ages and all walks of life offers various interpretations to this age-old question. Children romping on a playground, an old couple moving from their dilapidated rural shanty in the hopes of finding a better life in the city and a voice from the grave provide increasing evidence that there is no single answer to the question of the meaning of life.

In one segment of the program, Ruby portrays a woman whose rich husband brings her to the United States from her native Jamaica, where she quickly discovers that the comforts of wealth do not compensate for the family and friends she has left behind. The

program concludes with Della Reese, dynamic new entertainer General McArthur Hambrick and the Concord Memorial Baptist Church Gospel Choir of Dallas joining Ossie and Ruby for a rousing musical tribute to the joy and spirit of living. The ensemble performs "We Can Make It to the Promised Land," written by Ruby, and "Today Is Ours." Reese also sings "A Stranger Here on Earth."



Actor Clevon Little shows Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee how to add a little humor to their show with his canned audience laughter machine on "Laughing Matters."

## "LAUGHING MATTERS"

It's man against machine as guest star Clevon Little joins Ossie and Ruby for a satirical look at canned audience laughter, the rating game and some other unsavory aspects of television. When Clevon discovers that "With Ossie & Ruby" presents dramatic interpretations of poetry, he fears audiences used to more conventional fare will switch their TV dials in record numbers. He unveils his answer to the problem: the Simulated Nielson Indicator Gigglegenerator with Electro-encephalographic Readout Responder - SNIGGER for short -- a laugh-track machine Clevon says is guaranteed to make "With Ossie & Ruby" a hit.

Convinced they don't need the help of a machine to entertain their viewers, Ossie and Ruby challenge the SNIGGER to a storytelling contest. The result is a laugh riot that is anything but canned. In another segment of the program, Clevon performs his comic interpretation of Modest Mussorgsky's operatic piece, "The Flea."

## "A DAY WITH STERLING BROWN"

The life and works of poet and teacher Sterling Brown are profiled as Ossie and Ruby travel to Washington, D.C., to visit Brown in his home and on the campus of Howard University. Brown, one of the most respected figures in Black American letters, recalls many of the now-famous writers he has known and taught. Also featured is a tour of Brown's home, which houses his vast collection of books, records and memorabilia marking the art and history of Black Americans. Other segments of the program include Brown reciting his own poetry, giving a walking tour through his garden and remembering Ossie as a student at Howard. The program captures Brown's robust appetite for living and shows the humanist's great love for his fellow man.



Kevin Hooks, left, and his father, veteran actor Robert Hooks, join Ossie and Ruby on "Two from Langston"

## "TWO FROM LANGSTON"

Actors Robert and Kevin Hooks -- father and son -- join Ossie and Ruby in the dramatization of two short stories by famed writer Langston Hughes. In the first story, "Thank You, Ma'am," Kevin plays a young man who tackles more than he bargained for when he mugs Luella Bates Washington Jones, played by Ruby, a woman who's stronger than her years suggest. Luella fights off the young attacker, then, twisting his arm behind him, forces him to her apartment. Inside, Luella gives the youth a dose of her own hard-won wisdom, which proves to be the antidote to the would-be mugger's anti-social ways.

In "Sailor Ashore," Ruby portrays a prostitute who offers more than her pleasures to a lonely sailor, played by Robert Hooks. When the sailor laments the injustices he suffers because he's Black, the prostitute, Azora, is disgusted at his self-pity. She challenges him to be a man, the kind of man she is raising her 11-year-old son to be. The sailor has no response to her advice and leaves, only to be called back to learn the truth about Azora.



Humorist John Henry Faulk demonstrates the old art of tall-tale telling to Ossie while Ruby listens in on "Kneeslappers."

## "KNEESLAPPERS"

The old but dying rural tradition of storytelling is brought to life again as playwright/actor Samm-Art Williams, author of the Broadway hit "Home"; fabled humorist John Henry Faulk; Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee dramatize Williams' original teleplay "Kneeslappers." Elrod Tate, played by Ossie, and Judge Percy, played by John Henry Faulk, idle away their hours by telling some very funny and very tall tales. Elrod has retired from serious storytelling competition and is content to rest on his laurels as the greatest storyteller Burgaw, Creek, North Carolina, has ever known. But when Elrod's reputation as the champion liar of the county is challenged by his own son-in-law, a young upstart named Sylvester, played by Samm-Art Williams, the stage is set for some of the most outrageous and funniest tall tales ever to roll from a tale-teller's tongue. Also featured is a guest appearance by Guy Davis, son of Ossie and Ruby, who sings an original composition.

## "SOLO ON THE DRUMS"

The rhythms of jazz and the language of short-story writer Ann Petry merge in "Solo on the Drums," the poignant story of a drummer whose wife leaves him for a piano player who turns out to be his own partner. Pianist Billy Taylor and drummer Max Roach join Ossie and Ruby to tell the story, in music and words, of Kid Jones, a drummer who performs with his piano-playing partner, the Marquis of Brund, even on the day he has learned his wife has left him for the Marquis. Featuring an original score by Taylor and Roach that musically captures the anger and pain the drummer feels, "Solo on the Drums" make clear the connection between emotion and music and affirms the power of jazz to communicate subtle feelings.

In another segment of the program, Ossie offers a touching remembrance of Louis Armstrong, and Ruby performs a tribute to Billie Holiday. Roach and Taylor also join Ossie and Ruby for a conversation about jazz -- where it's been and where it's going.

## "MY DADDY WAS A RAILROAD MAN"

America's romance with the railroads is recalled as Ossie and Ruby remember their fathers, both railroad men, through poetry, folktales, stories and song.

A tribute to all fathers everywhere, the program particularly honors the proud and hard-working Black men who served as porters, cooks, waiters, boilerstokers and track-layers during the heyday of the American railroad. The program offers an overview of the rise and fall of the railroads, their impact on American history and the celebration of the railroad in literature, art and music. Also featured are several profiles of some veteran railroad men who remember life on the tracks during the 1920s and 1930s.



Glynn Turman portrays young Charlie Smith in CHARLIE SMITH AND THE FRITTER TREE, a 90-minute film dramatization of the life of former slave Charlie Smith, a man of remarkable resilience, humor and forbearance.

## CHARLIE SMITH

Charlie Smith and the Fritter Tree, a 90-minute dramatization of the life of a 135-year-old former slave, Charlie Smith, will be broadcast February 22 at 10 p.m., KOAP-TV.

Based on written and videotaped interviews with Smith, the film was conceived by David Johnson, author of the novels, "Faith and the Good Thing" and "Ox Herding Tale."

The drama shows the ups and downs in the colorful life of a man of remarkable resilience, humor and forbearance, who was brought to the United States from Liberia aboard a slave ship in 1854. The program opens in a Florida nursing home, where Charlie (played as an old man by Richard Ward), still vital and eager for youthful company, tells his story for the benefit of a skeptical orderly. Tricked aboard a slave ship with the promise that corn fritters grew on trees ready for picking, Charlie tells the orderly, "I've grown old looking for 'em."

When Charlie (whose real name was Mitchell Watkins) was a young boy, he was bought at auction by a Texas rancher named Charlie Smith. Smith grew to love the boy. Just before he died, Smith asked him to take his name. On his own, the new Charlie Smith became a trail hand, but hard times drove him to rob trains with the Jesse James gang. Charlie turned to bounty hunting and captured a man named Railroad Bill. Together they dreamed up a scheme by which they could share the bounty money.

With the new funds, Charlie Smith started a saloon business in Florida. He soon married and had a child. The good times were short-lived, however, as Smith fell victim to gambling fever and a conniving partner.

## PAULENE MYERS

Three hundred years of Black history and heritage are dramatized in a one-woman performance special, "The World of My America," which will premier Monday, February 16 at 10 p.m., on most public television stations. Veteran actress Paulene Myers creates a pageant of characters for the role, springing from the writings of Frederick Douglass and the works of Black poets Langston Hughes, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Raymond Patterson.

Beginning with the era of slavery and moving through to the present day, Paulene Myers' "World" emerges as she portrays over 30 different characters from all walks of Black life -- a slave girl during the Civil War bidding farewell to her first day at an all-white school -- and many more.

Paulene Myers' career spans more than 30 years with performances in over 100 television programs, in Broadway productions of "Anna Lucasta" and "Member of the Wedding" and appearances on screen in "The Sting," "Lady Sings the Blues," and "The New Centurion."

"The World of My America" was created by Paulene Myers for the stage. The production has been honored with the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and a Scotsman First Award at the Edinburgh Drama Festival. "The World of My America" was produced for television by award-winning writer and television journalist Bruce Franchini. A presentation of KCET Los Angeles; Martha Carrell is executive producer.

## LORRAINE HANSBERRY

"To Be Young, Gifted and Black -- A Portrait of Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words" will be given a Great Performances encore on Monday, February 16 at 8 p.m., on public television stations.

Ruby Dee, Barbara Barrie, Claudia McNeil, Al Freeman, Jr., Roy Scheider, Blythe Danner and Lauren Jones portray Miss Hansberry, the key people in her life and the characters she created. The teleplay interweaves scenes from her works with episodes in her life.

When she died in 1965, the 34-year old Miss Hansberry's works had already brought her national acclaim and her career was on the rise. It had been launched in 1959 with her play "A Raisin in the Sun," which won her the New York Drama Critics' Circle (Play of the Year) Award, and which was made into a major motion picture and a Broadway musical. Ruby Dee and Claudia McNeil starred in both the stage and film versions. Miss Hansberry was also the author of "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window" and "Les Blancs."

## THE BLACK DYAD

Deriving its title from a Greek word meaning "pair", "The Black Dyad" is an Emmy Award-winning drama which takes a witty, knowing look at contemporary male/female relationships, as seen through the eyes of two "dyads."

"The Black Dyad," premiering nationally Wednesday, February 25 at 10:00 p.m. KOAP-TV on public television, uses a series of eight vignettes to explore unresolved conflicts and confrontations experienced by and between men and women. This hour-long drama taped before a live studio audience, has the four actors speak directly to the group, inviting them to share common emotional reactions to familiar situations played out on stage.

Each scene depicts some variation on the themes of love, insecurity, guilt, rejection and commitment. The monologue, "Colette," shows an insecure woman gradually reveal, first with bravado, then poignancy, the truth behind her romantic fantasies. In "The Date," two people going out on their first date together are expecting totally different things. The result is a bitter-sweet commentary on relationships. Women in the audience can identify with the plight of a young woman who, as she waits for the subway, is annoyed by a masher trying to pick her up.

The two dyads in the program are played by relative newcomers to the screen -- Michael Easterling, Khaliga Hassan (in her acting debut), Sharon Hope and LeRoi Shelton. "The Black Dyad" has been a popular staple in various Boston community theaters over the past five years.



Public television pays tribute to the many top-flight Black baseball players who were denied stardom by the color barrier on ONLY THE BALL WAS WHITE. Actor Paul Winfield narrates this 30-minute special documenting the bygone and bitter-sweet era when Black baseball talent blossomed only in the Negro leagues.

## ONLY THE BALL...

In the days of Negro Leagues there was as much pain as pleasure connected with the sport. Recalls Satchel Paige, who pitched over 100 no-hitters in his career, "You couldn't name a town that we didn't play in. Sometimes we even had to build the diamond. Then we'd pass the hat." Jimmy Crutchfield, one-time right fielder for the Pittsburgh Crawfords, amply expressed the sentiments of many Negro league players: "Baseball was our game. We loved to play. When you're doing something you love, there's nothing lousy about it."

When Jackie Robinson walked onto the field with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946 the fans began to desert Black baseball. In one of the most poignant segments of this half-hour film the men of the Negro leagues express their feelings about Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball.

The Negro leagues died in the early 1960s. "Their demise went as unnoticed as their heyday" laments Ken Solari, producer/director of ONLY THE BALL WAS WHITE and an avid baseball fan. He notes the only record can be found in the "memories and stories of those who rode all night to play the game." ONLY THE BALL WAS WHITE is a production of WTTW Chicago.

**Black History Week  
February 15th to 21st.**