



OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES
BY Kathryn Hall Bogle



(Photo: Ancil Nance)

A PAINTING AND the artist. "Bilalian Odyssey" is the painting. Isaac Shamsud-Din is the artist. It is well-nigh impossible to speak of this painting alone as this particular painting is uniquely a part of the very soul and fiber of its creator. Isaac surveyed his life experiences and found them inextricably bound to racial struggles with the circumstances of his time. So, he painted the history of all Afro-Americans—and it was his own. The painting, a mural, is mounted inside the entrance to the Justice Center building in downtown Portland.

"Bilal was the first Muezzin," Shamsud-Din explained carefully when asked about the title. "A muezzin is a minister of the Muslim religion who is a caller to prayer. He is known for his courage in his unflinching faith and commitment. I used 'Bilalian' instead of 'African' this time—to (underscore) my spiritual commitment to Islam back in 1968," Shamsud-Din said.

The sixth of 14 children born to Isaac and Geneva Allen of Atlanta, Texas, Isaac came to Portland's Vanport housing project in 1947. The memories of many cruel injustices in his own life as an Afro-American man smolder yet. He once told Sid White of the Evergreen State College in Olympia and Jack Eyerly, art authority of Portland,

"I look upon my society as putting me in the position of a warrior. I use my pencil, pen and brush to alter the Afro-Americans' view of themselves. I aim to show the genius, the love, the humor, the resourcefulness and creative accomplishment of the Afro-American people."

At age 44, Isaac Shamsud-Din has been active in the Civil Rights movement since the early 1960's. In Portland, Isaac was one of the leaders of a public demonstration against police brutality in 1963. Currently, he lectures and demonstrates his art in prisons of the Northwest. He has been a lecturer in the early Black Studies program of San Francisco State University and the co-director of an Oregon State supported program for disadvantaged students.

In 1970-71, he was a lecturer in the Black Studies programs for Reed College and Portland State University. In 1977, Shamsud-Din represented Portland in Nigeria at the World Festival of Black Arts and Culture.

An artist since he was a child, Isaac attended the Portland Art Museum Art School when he was 12 years old. At age 14, he attended summer classes of the Arts and Music program at the University of Kansas at Lawrence for three years. He painted his first mural at PSU while he was a student there from 1963 to 1965. In 1982, Isaac won a

\$5,000 award from the National Endowment for the Arts for an oil painting of a child, his little daughter.

In Bilalian Odyssey, a painting made possible through the grant of funds from the Metropolitan Art Commission, Adam York strides forward down to center front. York strong, intelligent, wary and resourceful had been a slave to William Clark back in Missouri. Pictured as a historical and vital member of the Lewis and Clark expedition to the West, York surveys the unknown, uncharted land through which he will help guide the wagon train.

The artist gives prominence to York as a Black pioneer of the West, but the painting reaches farther into the past to depict African slaves being sold on the block in America, their chains are there, and the flag of the Confederacy is there, too. Alongside of these are the Buffalo Soldiers, members of the Black Tenth Cavalry, a legend in the western history of Texas, the Black Bicycle Corps pedaling 1,900 miles in 1897 testing the feasibility of bicycles for warfare. Mary Fields, the famous two-fisted gun-totin' stagecoach driver and pony-express rider, is there too.

The artist also shows Bill Pickett, a star performer in Wild West shows, throwing a steer, and he made room for Beatrice Cannady, the first Black woman to become an

attorney in Oregon. She too, was an activist in her own style. Others depicted are George Washington, who founded Centralia; George Bush of Bush Prairie history; Richard Arthur Bogle and America Bogle, prominent business people of 1865 Walla Walla.

Of the more than 100 historic figures featured by Shamsud-Din, many were represented by friends and relatives of the artist who posed for him for the honor.

Local art authorities who have viewed Bilalian Odyssey have praised it, including Darrell Clegg of the Metropolitan Arts Commission, who termed the mural the largest and most important mural in the state of Oregon. Donald Jenkins, director of the Portland Art Museum found the mural original in its concept and well executed by the artist.

Benny Andrews, a director of the Visual Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, here on a one-day site-visit, made a stop to see the installations arranged by MAC at the Justice Center. Andrews was deeply impressed by all that he saw and expressed admiration for Shamsud-Din's mural, calling it "a vibrant, active, warm portrayal of the Black pioneers," and summing the work as being a "well-integrated expression of a tender social issue in its approach and accomplishment."



Al Daniels, Jr., with his proud parents.

Fifth grader treats parents to 17th anniversary brunch

Al Daniels, Jr., an eleven-year old student, is planning to give his parents a 17th Wedding Anniversary Brunch at the Thunderbird Jantzen Beach, June 10, 1984.

He got the idea of celebrating his parents' 17th anniversary, set toward his goal and then earned the money.

Al is the fifth-grade president at Faubion School, where he is very active in school activities. He is also an active member of Emmanuel Temple Church.

His father, Alfred Daniels, Sr., is

The international boycott against Coca Cola products has been called off due to an agreement reached with the company's plant in Guatemala. 450 workers, at the plant in Guatemala City, locked themselves in to protest the closure of the plant, February 17th, 1984, and what they say is union busting

and harassment of union members. The boycott, initiated by U.S. labor unions, became a major discussion item at the company's annual shareholders meeting in Houston last month. Growing international support for the boycott led to the recent agreement.

Boycott against Coca Cola called off

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