

# ENTERTAINMENT

## BROADWAY REPORT



by Garland Lee Thompson

### LANGSTON HUGHES MUSICAL IS "HEAVENLY," SAYS LEADING PRESS CRITIC

Yes, well, hello back, "Hicksville!" Theater reviewer Bob Hicks of the Oregonian, said in his Saturday, Aug. 27 review of the Langston Hughes/David Martin musical, "Simply Heavenly," (just opened Thursday, Aug. 25 to Sept. 11), "In a town addicted" to revivals of musical-comedy chestnuts, here's a revival of one you've probably never heard of—and it's worth getting to know. (He, no doubt never heard about it before, either).

"Poet Langston Hughes' 1957 show 'Simply Heavenly,' Hicks wrote "is standard boy-meets-loses-and-wins girl". But it generates a genuine joy in life—in this case, life in Harlem (New York City) at a cozy neighborhood bar called Paddy's." (I'm certain he has never experienced such a place in his life-story).

### EXCITING NEW TALENT DEBUTS IN SHOW

"Director Garland Lee Thompson has assembled some fine talent for this all-black show, which shines through some ragged staging. The show is choppy and under-rehearsed and has actors of variable talent and experience." (Are these other code-words for, ... well, it is black, local and sub-standard to Hicks' experience in this town, or what?) "But when it's good—which is a lot of the time—it sizzles, catching the syncopation's and humor of Hughes' tall tale most winningly," he continues (So it does work, right, Major Bob?)

"Yes, 'Simply Heavenly,' is the story of one Jesse B. Semple (Neal Thomas, playing his first title leading role in a classic musical), a happy-go-lucky everyman who has to get hold of his life (Doesn't everybody?) and take care of some business—most seriously, scratch up enough money to pay for a divorce from his long-gone wife (Isabel)—before he can settle down with his sweet, pure sweetheart, Joyce (played by Denise Williams)."

Mr. Hicks continues: "We (As in 'the royal we') can be forgiven for wishing Semple would stick to his low-down ways" (Oops, another code-word?), which seem a lot more fun and rewarding (To whom and what you mean, 'Key-mo-saab-be?'): So, you think the character, 'Joyce,' seems to have all the life starched out of her" (Even though she tells 'Simple' that he's "The gate-keeper of her castle—which is in her heart. Their bricks are made out of love and their foundations are strong. No waves is gonna beat them down. No wind (Or bleeding-heart-liberal critics) is gonna blow them apart.

So, Hicks liked the character "Zarita," the good-time-gal (played by Jeanette Russell Brown, in a sterling performance), because she's much more vibrant. Far from being stereotyped, her story seems the most real and poignant in the show (How many sophisticated black New York women have you known?).

"True, Hughes does inject some message into his easy, but almost flippant book." (It's far from it). And it's no surprise that you like the line about blacks "cannot use race as an excuse forever, and newspapers still treat black culture as little more than murder and drugs (Have you read your newspaper lately, since you've returned from your recent honeymoon, to drug fever in 'gangland,' P. O.?)."

Hicks also thought 'Simple' "has a very funny fantasy about being America's first black general, sending white Southern troops to the front in World War III." (However unreal it must seem to your 'baby-boomer' mentality, right?)

"I do agree that our seasoned veterans, Michael Holiday (Watermelon Joe), Brenda Phillips (Mamie) as a fruit vendor and his reluctant lady, and Steve Lee (Ananias Boyd) as Hughes' alter-ego, are among the standouts in the cast," but Hicks left out, among others, Paulette E. Davis (Madame Bulter, the voice of Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Caddy), deserves to be called "the rookie of the year," in my book, for what she is doing with this show is "Simply Heavenly," along also, with Paul Jones (Hopkins, the bartender) "Gimme-a-break, Master Bob ... and the boys," instead of "the Willies," will you?

\* Code-word - A word used to convey hidden or subliminal meaning.  
 \*\* The Willies - A local theatre award for best performances presented by a Portland weekly newspaper.

## BEHIND-THE-SCENES



by Lisa Collins

**Prince's new love under wraps:** Rumors are flying that Prince is in love, and while he's being secretive about the whole affair, word is the lucky lady is an actress, who was recently a regular in a hit TV series. Meanwhile, tickets to Prince's concert in Madison Square Garden on Oct. 2 sold out in 48 minutes. With his European tour winding down, he's all set to open his first full-scale U.S. tour in nearly five years Sept. 14 in Minneapolis. His high-energy tour, featuring Sheila E., won't raves in Europe ... So where then does Prince get the time to pen a rap tune for Chaka Khan. Well, he did, with the legendary Miles Davis coming to his aid on trumpet. The tune, "Sticky Wicked," will be featured on her upcoming Warner Bros. LP, due to be released this fall.

**Cosby hobnobbing in style:** Bill Cosby is still vacationing with his family on the French Riviera at the \$1,000 a night Hotel Du Cap. And in good company, too. He and wife Camille were seen lunching with Frank Sinatra and Roger Moore (and their respective spouses). Additional reports have the Cosby's spending time with Prince Rainier of Monaco.

**Kareem Abdul-Jabbar speaks too soon:** When 41-year old Lakers captain Kareem Abdul-Jabbar announced he would pursue an acting career after this, his 20th and final NBC season, he added that he had an option on the book 'Bloods' (chronicling the impressions of a Vietnam War correspondent) to produce as a feature film or TV special. But 'Bloods' author Wallace Terry denies the report, stating he is negotiating with several parties. He went on to say Jabbar's claims on the property were detrimental to those negotiations ... Speaking of negotiations, word is Fox Broadcasting is seriously thinking of

shutting Arsenio Hall UP! Indeed, Fox may be considering legal action to prevent former Late Show star Arsenio Hall from hosting a syndicated talk show in January. Fox reportedly has a first-look contract with Hall.

**Hollywood "Black Pack" member Keenen Ivory Wayans makes his directorial debut** in "I'm Gonna Get You Sucka," a spoof on every type action-packed blaxploitation film ever made. He was inspired by the film "Airplane," and the success of "Hollywood Shuffle," a film he co-wrote. He also produced and co-wrote Eddie Murphy "Raw." Said Wayans, who also stars in the film, "I grew up watching all those blaxploitation, kung fu, and other wild action films of the 1970's." Other key cast members include Jim Brown, Anne-Marie Johnson, Dawnn Lewis and Kadeem Hardison.

**Luther Vandross & Anita Baker are teaming up** for a 20-city tour that opens in Landover, MD on Sept. 30 and winds down mid-December in Detroit. Baker is developing quite a reputation as a diva. She was all set to perform at Jack the Rapper's Family Affair in Atlanta a week or so ago but pulled out at the last minute. She did, however, make an appearance. Other stars on hand for the 12th annual meeting were New Edition, Bobby Brown, Al B. Sure, Keith Sweat, Vanessa Williams, and Miami Vice co-star Michael Phillip Thomas, who's hoping to score big with his new Atlantic LP, titled "Somebody."

**Diana Ross has fifth child:** Superstar Diana Ross gave birth to a baby boy, was the word from her L.A. publicist. It's just the second for the 44-year-old singer and current husband, multi-millionaire Arne Naess. **Whatever happened to Fred Williamson?** Former pro-football player, Fred Williamson made his film debut in MASH and went on to star in over a dozen blaxploitation movies including "Three The Hard Way" and "Black Caesar." Today, he still has his P' Boy Productions, but gets the bulk of his work in commercials and filmwork overseas.

**Lionel—A No Show:** Superstar Lionel Richie did not show at the office of a deputy DA to discuss the June attack of his wife on Diane Alexander. Brenda Richie (who did show) was warned to steer clear of Miss Alexander and, while it was recommended that charges not be pressed.

## Feeling It Jam '88

by Dante Che

"Feeling It Jam '88, an event that will be forthcoming Labor Day weekend, is a free opportunity to check-out some of Portland's hottest local funk, R&B bands.

Produced by Eden Inc. in conjunction with Music Millenium and Portland Music Co., 'Feeling It Jam '88' is a community-oriented affair geared to the appreciation of having a good time without the element of drugs or alcohol.

A family event to be held September 3, at Cathedral Park under the St. John's bridge.

The day's format will include activities for children, speakers and entertainment.

Among the speakers are KGW's Sharon Mitchell; Ray Leary, Youth Enhancement Program; Vedi Simington, Anti-Gang Task Force; and Dr. Steven Bailey, Naturopath and writer.

Musical entertainment will be provided by Shock, Romeo, Cliche, Cover Boy and Rapper's Hard Cold Members.

Feeling It Jam '88 producer Danny Bell also indicates that involvement from corporations is being solicited to address the needs of youth at-risk.

Further information may be obtained by calling 288-0033 or 283-5520.

## FEELING IT JAM '88

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## "The Tragedy Of Othello"

The I.F.C.C. is proud to welcome an exciting production of William Shakespeare's Othello, directed by Tom Laswell and co-produced by Rick Jones and Joel Morello. The Actor's Co-operative, made up of some of Portland's finest actors, expects this to be the first of many experimental works to be produced.

The cast of Othello will include Rick Jones in the title role, Trisha Todd as Desdemona, Joel Morello as Iago, Sarah Lucht as Emilia, Eric Johnson as Cassio, Enrique M. Arias as Roderigo, Kamden Sisco as Montano, Gretchen Savage as Bianca, and Mark Twoby as Lodovico.

This production will lend a newperspective to the timeless and universal themes of love, jealousy and revenge, and will be accompanied by an original score written by John Mansfield.

**WHERE:**  
Interstate Firehouse  
Cultural Center  
5340 N. Interstate Ave.

**WHEN:**  
September 16 - October 16  
Friday, Saturday at 8:00 p.m.  
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**FOR RESERVATIONS:**  
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**TICKET PRICE:**  
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