

ENTERTAINMENT

BROADWAY REPORT



by Garland Lee Thompson

LOST "RAISIN IN THE SUN," SCENES RESTORED IN NEW FILM

The word coming out of "LA LA Land" in California is that the filming has just been completed on the first production for next season's "American Playhouse" series on PBS, a new three-hour version of Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun," to be broadcast in January. My son, Garland Jr., visited the "closed set," and received a "warm hug and hello" from producer Chez Schutz before "paid goofers" asked everybody to leave. The television production, starring Danny Glover, Esther Rolle and directed by Bill Duke (who likes to be mysterious), will include scenes written by the late Ms. Hansberry 30 years ago but never seen in any production of the play. I did the West Coast production of the play as an actor in Hollywood in 1961. That production starred Juanita Moore.

When "A Raisin in the Sun," was first presented on Broadway in 1959 starring Sidney Portier, Diana Sands, Claudia McNeill ("Fences" and "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" on Broadway), it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as best play of the year. Its portrait of the conflicts within a black ghetto family in Chicago contemplating a move into an all-white neighborhood stirred both black and white audiences. Under Director Richards' careful eye and hand, the play had been significantly abridged by the playwright who, according to sources close to the scene at the time, was given "special assignments" as to just what scenes to re-write or cut during the rehearsal process in New Haven, Conn., before the Broadway opening.

Lorraine Hansberry died of cancer in 1965, and it was not until the 25th anniversary production of "Raisin," in 1986, first at the Round-about Theatre in New York and later at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., that audiences saw some of the omitted material in a major new production of the play. But two scenes will be seen for the first time in the television version.

The original producer was Robert Nemiroff who was married to Ms. Hansberry at the time. He is acting as executive producer of the \$1 million PBS film. He hopes the production will succeed as a film rather than as "just a record of the play," although its budget was very small by today's Hollywood film standards. The play was produced successfully as a musical on Broadway also, several years ago, and made Debbie Allen (later of "Fame TV") a star.

Esther Rolle, who plays "Momma Younger" in the this new film, thinks the play speaks more to people now than it did in 1959. "Today kids curse their parents,

hit their parents, even kill their parents. This play may bring them back to love, respect and pride in family, and that pride is what can help young people to resist drugs and other self-destructive influences." Write on!

BETRAYED

A new film by director Costa-Graves who made the movie "Z" a few years ago, opened in New York this week and is quoted in the New York Times as being "indeed grim and unsettling," and is one I think should be worth checking out.

When a widowed Midwestern farmer named Gary Simmons (Tom Berenger) falls in love with a demure young newcomer named Katie Phillips (Debra Winger), he wants her to know everything about his world. So he takes her camping and hunting, but these prove not to be ordinary recreational outings. The campsite is at a white-supremacist outpost in Montana where vacationers dress in Ku Klux Klan robes and burn crosses as they gather to sing "Amazing Grace." At the hunt, which takes place at night and employs vicious dogs and live ammunition, the prey is a terrified black man. Yes, perhaps this one bears watching, my brothers and sisters. Write on!

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Ken Page was in California when he was approached about rejoining the original cast for a Broadway revival of "Ain't Misbehavin'." His first reaction was uncertainty—why take a chance with something that had been a great success 10 years ago?

He then said that Nell Carter ("Gimme A Break" TV fame), who was also in the original cast of the show, invited him to dinner and served paella and apple cobbler and that was it. "She got me at my soft spot," he said. That, he added jokingly, is why he's back in the show. If it ain't on "the Page, it ain't the state" of "Ain't Misbehavin'." Go for it, Ken? Write on!

"CHECKMATES" AND BUDDIE LOVE

Ron Milner's new Broadway play "Checkmates" opened at the 46th Street Theatre, Aug. 4, starring my old friends, Paul Winfield, Ruby Dee, Denzel Washington and newcomer, Marsha Jackson, and directed by another friend of mine, Woodie King Jr. (founder of the New Federal Theatre in New York and partly responsible for my staying in New York during the '70s and founding the Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop). The play deals with, of all things, Young Black Urban Professionals (Buppies) trying "to make sense of marriages, when all the things they thought kept them from having a solid relationship have been removed."

Black playwright, Ron Milner, author of "What the Wine Sellers Buy," and "Who's Got His Own," shifts from the militant focus of the '60s to the "Me" generation and the '80s. It's a great cast. Write on, Ron!

SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN "RAISES THE ROOF"

"Sarafina!," the music of liberation, starring a talented group of black South African teenagers, written and composed by Mbongeni Ngema and Hugh Masekela (who is coming to Portland with Miriam Makeba on Friday, Sept. 2, at the Schnitzer Concert Hall) continues its long run during the long hot summer on Broadway at the Cort Theatre in New York. Free Nelson Mandela and black South Africa! Write on!

BEHIND-THE-SCENES



by Lisa Collins

Call her Jackee: 227's Jackee Harry has taken to using just one name as of late, preferring to just be called "Jackee." NBC is developing a pilot for the one-name actress to air during the 88-89 television season. Word has it Jackee was dating Blair Underwood, but she wasn't with him the other night to pick up an award at the Annual Black Emmy Nominations Dinner. The affair, put on by a select group of successful U.S. black businessmen on the eve of the televised award ceremonies, honors those blacks nominated for Emmys, with beautifully carved Tree-Of-Life award statues. Among the nominees honored were veteran actresses Beah Richards and Ruby Dee, Ray Charles, Danny Glover (who wasn't on hand because he's on location filming a sequel to his last box office smash 'Lethal Weapon II', actress Alfre Woodard, and actor Tim Reid. Reid, who was moved by the affair, noted "you will always find black people of Frank's Place treated like ladies and gentlemen." The night's hosts were Madge Sinclair and Robert Guillaume, who's wife Donna is five months pregnant. (It will be the fourth child for Guillaume, who is well into his 50's). Others in attendance were Jayne Kennedy (who is almost back down to size and is now spokeswoman for the National Council of Negro Women), Ros Cash, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Denise Nicolas, Eric Laneuville, Bernie Casey and actress Lynn Whitfield, who can't wait to get back into production next month on the series "Heartbeat."

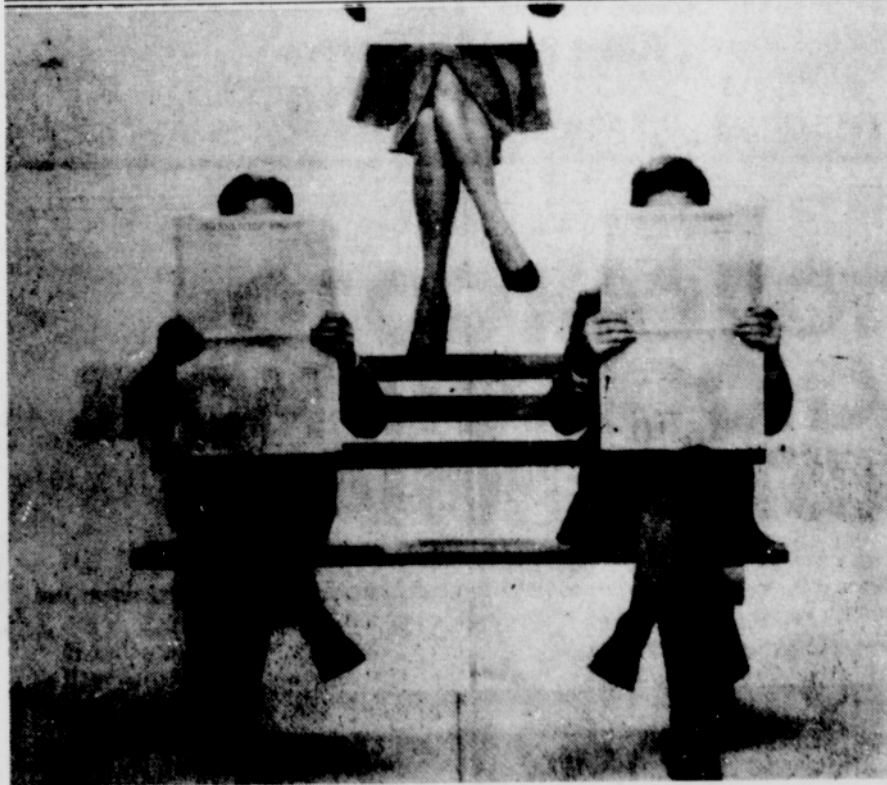
The Temptations' Otis Williams calls Patti LaBelle a liar? Read it for yourself in the latest celebrity kiss-and-tell—this one by Otis Williams, one of the remaining original Temptations. Appropriately titled "Temptations," Williams talks about his numerous love affairs, including one with Patti LaBelle, while chronicling life with the celebrated group. However, by Williams own admission, the book is mild. Fact is, the crooner was quoted as saying, "I got enough dirt to fill another book, but I like sleeping at nights."

Actor Howard Rollins pleaded innocent to charges of possession of cocaine, driving while intoxicated and speeding, but Rollins was not in the courtroom to make the plea. Instead, the judge allowed the 37-year old actor's attorney to make his plea. A trial date has not been set.

Whoopi Goldberg will join Lily Tomlin, Marlo Thomas, and Kermit the Frog in "Free To Be ... a Family." It's the first variety special broadcast jointly in the USA and Soviet Union. And speaking of the Soviet Union, Quincy Jones just firmed a partnership deal with the Soviets with the first of at least three pictures to be a film dramatizing the life of famed Russian writer Pushkin.

Michael Jackson to perform in China with Bubbles at his side? While the Chinese government is more than entertaining the notion of Michael Jackson performing in China (where 200,000-300,000 copies of "Bad" have been sold), they may have trouble accommodating him. Turns out the superstar has a list of demands—including facilities and hardware for a live international satellite concert broadcast and allowances for an entourage of 300, including his pet chimp Bubbles.

Lou Gossett hunt for mystery is solved: Production delays, due to the strike, have hurt the start of the all-new ABC Saturday Mystery Movie starring Peter Falk, Burt Reynolds and Lou Gossett. A rotating adventure series, each of the three will alternate shows, with Gossett starring as an anthropologist hunting for mystery.



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Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela Reign In Portland Artquake



Miriam Makeba

Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela are a formidable team both on the performing stage and in the political arena. They are once more touring the United States after an absence of more than a decade. She became persona non grata back in the dark ages when American foreign policy was supportive of the South African apartheid effort. And even given the enlightened attitude about apartheid and its intractable denial of basic human rights, Americans once more were almost denied the right to witness this stellar artist in performance. Only after intervention of persons in very high places was she granted a visa at the 11th hour of her departure.

It is very fitting that the tour should begin in Portland where she and the great Hugh Masekela headline the Artquake Festival in performance at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Miss Makeba's smooth black velvet voice, her elegant manners and undying fight for freedom of her beloved Soweto and all the other occupied territories of her native land is an assuring commentary to all Black people who struggle for justice. Perhaps no artist since Giuseppe Verdi has been forced to endure such vicissitudes because of political beliefs. She can be likened to the noble heroine who sings the title role in Verdi's "Tosca."

The two hour non-stop performance in Portland was a showcase that alternated with Miss Makeba, who was backed up by three African beauties and the flamboyant, but talented, Mr. Masekela who pitted the command of his flugel horn in mocking bird-like obligatto against his Afrikaan clarinetist. Of the latter, the only thing white about him was his skin. The sweetness of his licorice stick and the purity of

his art is all soul, through and through.

Mr. Masekela is the complete artist, both in instrumental and vocal talents. He brought the audience to its feet in a standing ovation after his rendition of "Simela," a Proustian-like reminiscence of a Black gold-miner's yearn in to be with his family after hearing the late night whistle and rumble of the train that took him away from his wife and children. The vocalization that musical instruments could not supply, Mr. Masekela improvised.

In an equally impressive set, Miss Makeba sang the lovely ballad, "Meet Me At The River," which was written by her daughter on the occasion of her exile from her native land.

The entire program was fast-paced and well-balanced with both traditional music and the popular South African style of jazz. It was interesting to observe that the band was augmented by several Black Americans who played with the same fervor and dedication as the native musicians. This observation would seem to support the contention that music is the universal language that has kept Black people united throughout the ages.

Miss Makeba has written an autobiography about her experience during the more than quarter century she has been banned from her native land. In it, she talks about how all of her energies have been devoted to the struggle to free her homeland.

Later in a post-concert reception at the Heathman Hotel adjacent to the concert hall, Miss Makeba spoke about the set of circumstances which led to the denial of her permanent residence status in the United States. This act was unprecedented in that she was married to an American at the time. Perhaps our government did not agree with her choice of a husband. He was the political activist, Stokely Carmichael.

She expressed the desire to return to her native land where she intends to give a concert in Soweto Stadium. It is very possible that Miss Makeba will satisfy that desire in the near future. This writer wants to be sitting in the front center row of the orchestra section when that happy day moment arrives. Certainly that is going to be one of the most glorious days in the life of all Black people.

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