

# ENTERTAINMENT

## BROADWAY BOUND REPORT

by Garland Lee Thompson



### "The Diary of Black Men"

At last, at the Portland Masonic Temple, we saw the core potential of an emerging Black community audience that came out, fashionably dress, to see what the producers, MACEBA AFFAIRS, INC., said is "not just a play, it's an experience." "The Diary of Black Men ... How Do You Love A Black Woman?," written by Thomas Meloncon, is directed by Clarence Whitmore, who also plays the roles of "the Militant/A Husband and vocalist. Yes, he was busy in this production.

It was a "one night stand" performance in what has to be one of the worst performing halls for theatre in town, "the pits," in the old downtown Masonic Temple. It was difficult to hear, see and no air-conditioning at \$18.50 a ticket!



Cast Members: Dairy of Black Men...

The show, a "bare-bone bus and truck" operation, starting almost an hour late (8:55 p.m.), gave us practically "zip" sets, with only chairs, tables, a small bar, platforms, or a pulpit for the church scene. The lights were just, "up and down," with a follow-spot on actors, who opened the show (finally), introducing the six "archetypes," "the Player (Lee Stansberry), "the Worker," in hardhat (Byron Jacquet), "the Militant" (Clarence Whitmore), "the Intellectual" (Franklin J. Anderson), "the Muslim" (Alex Morris) and "Slick" (Melton "Guy" Martin), who was indeed "slick" and "write one!"

The one and only "Actress/Dancer," who had no lines (poor baby), was played by lovely, Constance Jones. Her role was "the every black woman," against all these "every black men types," as she appeared mainly as "a prop," when the playwright needed a female as "a foil," to appear as "a single black woman, girl friend or wife." Was she a hold human being or what, who knows?

**IS THIS "COLORED BOYS, WHO HAVE NOT CONSIDERED SUICIDE, WHEN THE RAINBOW ROOM (THE BAR) IS ENUF?"**

This piece is obviously a veiled reference to poet, Ntozake Shange's original hit piece, "for colored girls." And the playwright, Meloncon, in the program, even refers to his piece, like Ms. Shange, as "a Choreopoem (misspelled in the program as "chorcpeom"). The "Diary of Black Men," in celebrating its fifth year running, since starting as a workshop in Houston, Texas, does appear to be his "Colored boys," answer to "Colored Girls," which "devastated" Houston theatre circles (like everywhere else), when it played there successfully, a few years ago. Several such works have appeared

around the country (in New York, L.A., etc.) after Shange's poem play "hit the scene," on Broadway, nationally and made such "heavy statements" on the never-ending struggle of the male/female relationship.

One of the few places that approaches a real "dramatic moment" in the show, "an agit-prop-type theatre piece (agitation propaganda Theatre), comes in the first scene of the second act. The scene, entitled, "You Deserve What You Got," pits a "Preacher" (Alex Morris) against "a Husband" (Clarence Whitmore), who is irate (and showing us he can act) at the sermon given in the presents of "His ife" (Constance Jones), who appears to have been "stolen" by the bold black preacher's charm, who makes "no bones about it" and does not intend "to give her back!" The two bristle and some "sparks began to fly" here and that was "real theatre!"

The comic "burlesque set-up" of the two former old friends in Act II, scene 3, entitled just, "question marks" (????), got a big laugh from the audience (largely women who seem to make up the majority of the black theatre-going audience in this city) when the used-to-be, "last of the great hot stud lovers," turned out now to be homosexual, played "effectively by Alex Morris (who got not credit for that one!), with Melton "Guy" Martin as his surprised, "oldformer buddy." There was one other "put-down" reference

## Donnie Ray Albert dominates Tosca in Opera opening (A review)

The Portland Opera opened its 24th season in the Civic Auditorium last Saturday with Puccini's venerable "Tosca." It was a gala that could have taken place wherever good opera is presented. All of the leading characters were in excellent voice with special plaudits to Heather Thomson who assumes the title role and to Donnie Ray Albert who portrayed the role of the villainous Baron Scarpia, the Rome Chief of Police.



Donnie Ray Albert

Mr. Albert is no stranger to Portland. He took the male title role when "Porgy and Bess" performed in Portland last season with the famed Houston Opera company. Opera is not a new career for Mr. Albert. He made his debut in that endeavor 13 years ago, but baritone is a change of voice for him.

Previously he was a basso. Having heard him sing both voices, this writer feels that the new voice injects an added dimension to a tremendous set of vocal chords with a three octave range. Mr. Albert truly dominated the stage with his elegance, his arrogance and the utter usurpation of a hapless Tosca. The second act is dominated with such intense emotions when Tosca pleads for the life and freedom of her beloved, Mario and Scarpia employs every subterfuge to satisfy his lust for such a beautiful creature.

It is quite difficult to understand why the critic from the local daily was not impressed with that particular scene. I have seen Renata Tibaldi and Leonard Warren do that scene and have listened to recordings of it for more than 40 years. I don't think it is humanly possible to extract more tragedy and pathos from that act than emoted from the stage of the Portland Opera. One cannot un-

derstand why the other critic was so callous and obdurate. There is a line from another opera that might explain his predicament, "is it weakness of intellect ... or a tough little worm in his little inside?"

One also suspects the dear man to have had a second agenda which made it necessary to pan both male leads in order to make his point. I would like to venture to say that music is universal in it character. Piano player's are not necessarily good critics. Critics should leave their petty biases and prejudices at the door.

Donnie Ray Albert is a Black man. Miss Thomson is a white woman. It might have grieved certain white male egos to have to witness the abuse she was made to endure at the behest of a Black man. "Othello, the Moor" could be portrayed only by white men and until recently, that was the only role Black men could hope to play in grand opera. It is very encouraging to observe that the musical director of the Portland Opera is enlightened enough to go beyond race when selecting who shall play what role in the operas he includes in the company's repertoire.

Plaudits also go out to the functional scenery that was created for this current production. Congratulations also are in order for the orchestra which was conducted under the baton of Maestro Bruno Aprea. Mr. Aprea made his debut with this performance. The orchestra always was melodic and vibrant but never intrusive.

Opera buffs are going to love this production. It is truly grand opera.

After the Opera, all of the attendees were treated to a sumptuous repass in the lobby of KOIN Tower where they had a chance to linger and to speak with members of the company and the guest artists.

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