

Entertainment

Enter Laughing At "The Colored Museum"



Brenda Phillips



Neal Thomas



Shirley Nanette

by Stephen E. McPherson
Special Correspondent

Black theatre is alive and doing quite well here in the City of Roses, thank you. Last summer, Garland Thompson staged the artistically successful "Simply Heavenly" by Langston Hughes. Drawing from much of that same cast, Director Al Jamison has synthesized a winning team into a comedy, "The Colored Museum," the likes of which have not been seen since "Purlie Victorious."

George C. Wolfe's "Colored Museum" has enjoyed critical acclaim wherever it has been presented, but here in Portland it is something very special because of the manner in which it showcases the versatility of several local people. This ensemble is so effective that one is inclined to suggest that they become a permanent repertory group.

"The Colored Museum" opened Friday night at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center located at 5340 N. Interstate Ave. between Killingsworth and Portland Blvd. If there is a particular upbeat and jolly mood in the city this week, one might attribute it to the tons of laughter that this very, very humorous but satirical piece of drama produced.

"The Colored Museum" displays eleven events in Black culture with a sardonic tongue in cheek. Persons from the larger community might need a Black companion to enhance their enjoyment with the necessary annotations. But for Black people, just as with "Purlie," the message is quite clear.

The show opens with inveterate Nyewusi Askari portending the message from our deep roots in African

culture. Soon thereafter Denise Williams bounces onto the stage in airline flight attendant manner to announce with irreverent regard to the inner passage that:

"You must wear your shackles at all times until the Captain turns off the 'fasten your shackles sign'. And remember, no drums allowed." From that point forward, one perceives that no sacred cow will be left unattended. Miss Williams ends her parody with "Just think of what you are going to mean to William Faulkner."

Miss Williams later assumes equally consuming roles as a suave model in a photo session whose only challenge is to smile. Next she is verbally attacked by two wigs. In the soap opera she becomes a woman's libber and finally assumes a role as country bumpkin who lays a dinosaur-sized egg.

"The Colored Museum" leaves nothing holy or immune to attack. There is the inevitable stalwart Black mother who despite all of the social ills of the world is concerned only that her offspring adhere to the rules of her home and that they wipe their feet before entering. That little vignette evolves into a clever musical treatment of the same subject.

Pivotal to the success of "The Colored Museum" is the deftness with which the players make transitions to the several different characters that each portrays. They do it so well that often one is left with the illusion that a completely different person is taking the part.

Neal Thomas is first seen as the ghost of a war-crazed Viet Nam soldier turned executioner, next as the mannequin in a magazine photo session, then as the narrator of a soap opera and finally in a tragi-comic episode in which he declares that, "Being black is too emotionally taxing, therefore I will be black only on weekends and holidays."

Gregory Donovan is excellent in roles as the revolutionary son of a traditional Black mother and is almost completely unrecognizable as a gay hippie adorned in modish drag.

Brenda Phillips comes across quite well in song and dialogue as a television cook, as the soap opera mamma and finally as a wig in a hilarious cameo that spoofs Black people's obsession with the texture of hair.

Shirley Nanette does a splendid parody of Josephine Baker that ends with an adorable scene with nine year old Afi Reid and Louise Moaning.

"The Colored Museum" certainly is excellent entertainment and it is something that the Black community really needs to take the entire family to see. It will be running for the next five weeks and will include school performances and a short tenure at the Winningstad Center for Performing Arts. Reservations and ticket information are available by calling 243-7930.

Behind-The Scenes

by Lisa Collins

Eddie Murphy Sets Out In TV: In spite of two separate copyright infringement lawsuits filed against Paramount over "Coming To America," Eddie Murphy's production company plans to go ahead with a sitcom version of the hit movie for CBS, which could be on the air by midseason. Murphy is expected to make a cameo appearance in the first episode. Another Murphy project for CBS, "What's Alan Watching?" is slated to go into production this month. The hour-long pilot, which is being tagged a comedic commentary on television, stems from an idea that Eddie had along with some of his former Saturday Night Live colleagues. In the pilot, slated to air on February 27 at 8 p.m., Eddie will play both James Brown and Mike Tyson. The pilot stars Barbara Barrie and former Webster co-star Corky Nemec. More of Murphy's TV projects, including a syndicated Christmas movie for 1989, will be announced soon.

It's On Again For Robin & Mike: Despite the rumors, the lawsuits, and the tabloid tales, it appears that there still remain some sparks between Robin and Mike Tyson. The couple reportedly began dating again over the holidays, and according to a source close to Givens, Tyson is all over her. Meanwhile, professionally-speaking Givens will find herself at the mercy of a homicidal maniac who was once her childhood best friend, in a Steve White production titled "Penthouse" which was scheduled to begin filming in Vancouver, B.C. last weekend. The made-for-TV movie will air on ABC later this season. The telepic also stars Robert Guillaume in the role of Givens' father.

Temper, Temper! A nasty argument with a friend and a little too much to drink apparently resulted in the arrest of "Matlock" co-star Kene Holliday for vandalism and drunk driving, over the holidays. Seems a quarrel led the 39-year old actor to smash out windows of a friend's home, before getting into his car and crashing into a parked vehicle.

Short Takes: Stevie Wonder and the Temptations will be among those inducted into the "Rocki N' Roll Hall Of Fame" this week in star-studded ceremonies at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City.

In Other Entertainment News: Matt Williams, executive producer and creator of the hit TV series, "Roseanne", walked off the set last week. Williams, who is Black, had long been experiencing creative tensions with comedian Roseanne Barr, who had made a stake for creative control of her own character. According to one source, things had gotten so bad between the two that they weren't speaking. A spokesman for Williams has said that he will not return to the show, but will instead pursue other projects.

NBC To Launch Daytime Serial To Feature Blacks In March: March 27 has been set as the premiere date for NBC's Generations, a new daytime serial which will parallel the story of three generations of two Chicago families—one black and one white. Actresses Joan Pringle (formerly of "The White Shadow," and Lynn Hamilton have been tapped to play

the lead black roles. According to a staff writer, this soap will differ from other soaps who now feature blacks, in that in other soaps—"the characters seem to go off to a kind of limbo instead of home ... you don't get to know anything about their lives." Production on the half-hour serial is slated to begin March 6. The network is allowing two year for the soap to catch on, while affiliates will be given the option to run the show at noon or 12:30 p.m. EST/PST.

Jackson Makes Radio Debut: Bob Dockery, president of "Syndicate It Productions" has announced that The Rev. Jesse Jackson will return to radio with "The Jesse Jackson Commentary," beginning on February 1. The twice-daily, 90-second vignettes will be heard over 120 stations throughout the country. The show will key in on issues that affect the nation's blacks. A similar show was suspended in 1987 when Jackson began his campaign for the presidency.

Tis The Season For Award Shows: Don Cornelius has announced that Dionne Warwick and TV sports commentary Ahmad Rashad will co-host his 1989 Soul Train Music Awards. The two-hour nationally syndicated special will be telecast live on Wednesday, April 12th, from the Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium. Nominees were selected by eligible recording artists, radio station personnel, and retail outlet representatives.

Whoopi Goldberg to play producer? With her recent acquisition of the book Major Taylor, one may assume that Whoopi Goldberg's next big credits may come under the category of producer. For those of you who don't know, Major Taylor, a bicycling champion, was one of the country's top black athletes at the turn of the century.

New Marley Recordings?: Record industry veteran Danny Sims has formed independent Slam Records, and announced that he will release 150 previously unheard tracks reggae legends Bob Marley and the Wailers. The Marley recordings will be released on five LPs, which will be overseen by reggae historian Roger Steffens. The tracks were recorded between 1967 and 1972.

Short Takes: While no date has been set, it looks like wedding bells for Miami Vice's Olivia Brown, who just recently got engaged to recording artist Tomi Jenkins ... Musician Lenny Kravitz has signed a very lucrative record pact with Virgin. The music is a mixture of psychedelic, rock, and gospel, but everyone including mom (actress) Roxie Roker and wife, (actress) Lisa Bonet are crazy over the music ... Recording artist Vesta Williams is happy about her part in the much-talked about film—"Mississippi Burning." And while, Williams, who has done some acting, was not seen in the film, she can be heard in an updated version of the gospel hymn—"Try Jesus," which is part of the soundtrack for the Orion film release. Williams is coming off of her single "Sweet, Sweet Love," which climbed to number one on the nation's R&B charts ... Eddie Murphy and heavyweight champion Mike Tyson made some kind of dynamic duo as they hung out together in Los Angeles recently.

BROADWAY BOUND REPORT: by Garland Lee Thompson

RHYTHM & BLUES SINGING STAR, RUTH BROWN HOSPITALIZED IN NEW YORK

It was just about two weeks ago that we saw "That Rhythm, Those Blues," an hourlong documentary film that chronicles the life of R & B singers Charles and Ruth Brown, here at the Northwest Film and Video Center. Film-maker, George Niernberg, told me after the screening (Jan. 14th, 1989) of the news of Ruth Brown's illness in New York, while she was in rehearsal for a new show about Rhythm & Blues. Ruth Brown's contribution to early rock 'n' roll, unbreakable color barriers, her help in the establishment of Atlantic Records (known as "The House that Ruth Built") and film footage of her sixtieth birthday party at the famed Harlem nightclub, the Baby Grand, are just a few of the topics featured in the historical documentary.

Shot in color with every piece of actual performance film in vintage black and white that he could find, the film-maker succeeds in giving us Ruth Brown, her place in history, the diva, artist (who once leaped offstage to kick some woman's ass for throw a glass of beer at her on stage for not singing a request prompt enough).

I am waiting for an update on her condition (please call the office) and we all wish her a speedy recovery. "Write on, Ruth." (The landmark, Baby Grand Lounge is on 125th Street and Nicholas Ave., between Mary Bruce's Dance Studio and the Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop in Harlem.)

TALE OF DEAD DOG FILMING COMING OUT OF HOLLYWOOD
My son, Gariand Jr., a 26-year-old developing film technician, called me from Los Angeles, all excited about his receiving a eleven weeks crew assignment on Handmade Film's, new film, "Cold Dog Soup," scheduled to shoot in Los Angeles this month. Thomas Pope adapted (and co-produces) and Alan Metter directs, novelist Stephen Dobyns' bizarre yarn of a young man whose passion leads him on an all-night quest to bury a

dead dog. It's hopeful to hear of a young Black technician getting a chance to work in the tough and nearly "closed shop" and market of big-time Hollywood film industry circles. He could receive his union card (which is very difficult to do, Black or White) on this production if things go well. "Write on, Gar Jr."

BLACK ACTOR, SHABAKA RETURNS TO TOWN FOR SHOW AT PORTLAND REP.

I met this past week, with talented Black actor, Shabaka, who just returned to Portland to rehearse and open a new play, "I'm not Rappaport," at the Portland Repertory Theatre. His last appearance in town was

in the title role in the New Rose Theatre production of "Life Of Galileo," last season at the Winningstad Theatre. We talked about his recent successful trip to perform again with the San Francisco Mime Troupe on tour in Germany, a film and his current exciting new project; the founding of the new Black Theatre Artists Workshop at the L.A. Theatre Center in California. The Workshop's new play readings and acting showcase, according to my friend, Shabaka, is being attended by a host of Hollywood's Black professional actors, playwrights, directors and producers of in the film industry and theatre scene.

THE GODFATHER OF SOUL GOES TO JAIL FOR SIX YEARS

Another great R & B star named Brown, suffers a crisis. James Brown, "the Godfather of Soul," received a six-year prison term and \$1,000 fine this week in Augusta, Ga., after pleading guilty to an array of misdemeanor weapons and traffic charges. Brown, who just hit the "double nickel" (55) in years, was over the speed limit, under the influence, packing his piece in a two-state car chase last September. It sounds like a movie to me. We hope and pray for his return. "A lot of people would like to see me fall, but you can't make a winner a loser," he said. "Write on, J.B. If actor, Stacey Keach (busted in England on drug charges) can do it, so can you.

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