

ENTERTAINMENT

BROADWAY BOUND REPORT

By Garland Lee Thompson

THE AMERICAN BLACK THEATRE MOVEMENT GOES NATIONAL

It's been a "long time since yesterday," as the P.J. Gibson black woman's play states in its title. And now the first National Black Theatre festival is history, and like I said to Delle Chatman, executive story editor for Tim Reid's series "Frank's Place," (and now she's working on the Reid's new series for CBS), the American Black Theatre Movement has to go "national" if it is to grow and survive in this country.

Delle Chatman and I sat having brunch at the Winston-Salem Stouffer Hotel on the closing morning (August 20th, 1989) of the first bi-annual National Black Theatre Festival. The scheduled Festival "rap-up" session had just been canceled, due to some communication problems (perhaps too much "party" every night during the week of the festival and at the last late night pool party that black theatre director of Bates College, Buddy Bulter and I threw (Aug. 20th, 1989, 2:00AM TO 4:00 AM, Sunday) for all of our old and new theatre friends and "family." The pool was packed and SRO (standing room only) on the poolside, so poor Herman Jones, assistant to the Festival producer, Larry Leon Hamlin, good-naturedly, "went with the flow," when we "invited" him into the hotel pool, white tux, tails, red bow tie and all! The crowd loved it, so we "invited" in a few more poolside fans. Rick Kahn, producer of one of the "hottest" black theatres in the country, Crossroads Theatre Company of Brunswick, New Jersey, gave his "body" for "the loving cause," and went in for the fun and games.

I have never seen so many people from different parts of the country in one space come together, so quickly, to act like "one big happy family." The latest number count is that 25,000 to 30,000 people attended the festival during the course of the week of theatre productions and black theatre panel discussions (I sat on two panels - "Playwrights on Playwriting," Thurs., 8/17/89 and "Directors interpreting and developing new and original scripts," Sat. 8/19/89).

The important thing that we all have come away from the festival (that is the "brain-child" of Larry Leon Hamlin, founder/artistic director of the North Carolina Black Repertory of Winston-Salem), is the urgent need "to network: nationally as a living, growing body of hundreds of black theatre artists. Yes, they live from the Pacific Northwest (Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center and PassinArt Theatre of Portland, Oregon, the Northeast (where Buddy Bulter is directing his touring ensemble at Bates College), Southern California (Inner City Cultural Center of L.A.) and Northern California (Benny Sato Ambush's Oakland Ensemble Theatre and Ed Bullins' BMT Theatre Company of Oakland, Ca.), the South

west (Debi Mason's Black Theatre Troupe of Phoenix, Arizona) to the Southeast (Marsha Jackson and Thomas Jones' Jomandi Productions of Atlanta, Ga., and Linda Parris-Bailey's Carpetbag Theatre of Knoxville, Tenn.)

THE PRODUCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL BLACK FESTIVAL

These are the play productions that I had the chance to see during the festival in Winston-Salem, N.C. (Aug 14-20, 1989)

Tuesday night - August 15, 1989
"Malcolm X," by August Wilson (Pulitzer Prize Playwright, "Fences"). Penumbra Theatre of Minnesota (A one-man show about the life of Malcolm X)

Wednesday night - August 16, 1989

"Dark Cowgirls and Prairie Queens," by Linda Parris-Bailey. The Carpetbag Theatre Company of Knoxville, Tenn (An adventure into yesteryears with the unusual stories of pioneer black women of the Old West.) It was brilliant! I loved it.

Thursday night - August 17, 1989

"Ain't No Use In Going Home, Jody's got Your Gal And Gone," by John O'Neal. The Oakland Ensemble of Oakland Ca. and Junebug Productions. (Vividly dramatizes black experiences in the American military, with music and comedy.) It was too long, but full of good "John O'Neal" rich writing and I loved the classic asian mask sequence.)

Friday night - August 18, 1989

"Sisters," by Marsha A. Jackson, who is co-founder of Jomandi Productions of Atlanta, Ga., and directed by Thomas W. Jones, II. He is also a co-founder of the company. (Its a "conversation at Midnight," between two black women, who have only white athletic shoes in common. a night cleaning woman and an upper-middle class black woman, "a Buppie," or black upper mobile Urban woman executive are stuck in the office building where they work, and have to communicate throughout the night. My problem with the piece is that it lacks "an event" or clear series of action to "drive" the play forward. But it has great streams "one-liners" and endless insight into modern black womanhood.)

Saturday, August 19, 1989

"From The Mississippi Delta," Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland, whose earlier, first play was originally presented (in a reading & critique) by myself, as founding director of the 1989 New York OBIE Award-winning playwrights' theatre; the Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop of New York. The original director of "Mississippi Delta," is Ed Smith, staged at the Negro Ensemble Company of New York. This N.E.C. touring company was mounted for the National Black Theatre Festival, by La Tanya Richardson, who plays several roles that are presented by the three black actresses. Brenda Denmark and Elaine Graham join La Tanya in the hurting, soulful tale of a young black woman's struggle to survive in a racist world.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Lisa Collins

"Lonesome Dove" Leads In Emmy Nominations: Motown's Productions Lonesome Dove mini-series led the pack of recently announced emmy nominees with a grand total of 18, including that of Danny Glover in the category of best supporting actor. "Lonesome Dove" will face off against Oprah Winfrey's "Women Of Brewster Place" in the category of best mini-series, at the annually televised awards, which will be broadcast live from Los Angeles on September 17. Gregory Hines also scored high marks with five nominations for his PBS "Dance In America" special. Speaking of dance, Debbie Allen will square off against Paula Abdul (Tracey Ullman Show) for her choreography of "The Debbie Allen Special". Allen also capped a nomination for best directing (variety or music program) in her ABC special. Other blacks nabbing nominations were Paula Kelly for her part in "Woman of Brewster Place", Cleavon Little for a guest-starring nod on "Dear John", and talk show newcomer Arsenio Hall beat out his competition, while nabbing three emmy nominations. (Johnny Carson only got two)...Meanwhile, if Hall's ongoing feud with Spike Lee appears to be cooling off, his ongoing lawsuit with Beverly Hills NAACP president Willis Edwards is heating up. Edwards filed suit against Hall in January charging that Hall defamed him while accusing him of extortion during a radio show. All this stemming from charges on the part of Edwards that Hall practiced racism in failing to hire blacks in key positions on his nationally syndicated talk show. According to Hall, the ordeal has caused him a great deal of pain. Said Hall, "as long as we (blacks) are fighting each other, we are missing the true enemy, which is oppression...and I don't mean necessarily the white man, but there are all kinds of oppression...even blacks against blacks."

Billy Dee Comes Under Attack: "I think people are getting a little ridiculous", said actor Billy Dee Williams, who believes the criticism of liquor advertisement targeting blacks is overblown. "The whole focus should be not so much on the beer but on how you lead your life". Williams made the statements in response to some black leaders in Detroit, who while citing recent studies (that reveal more alcohol and tobacco-related health problems among blacks than among whites), have become outwardly critical of such advertisements. "I think a lot of people are overreacting," said Williams, who is a spokesman for Colt. "You can't legislate morality".

Three members of LL Cool J's Road Show Will Stand Trial: A singer, band technician and bodyguard were charged with raping a 15-year old girl who wound up backstage at a post-concert party after winning a local radio contest. LL Cool J (aka James Todd Smith) was not involved and has resumed his three-month long national tour...On the home front, Jasmine Guy kept a low profile as she strolled hand-in-hand with her longtime steady at a recent outdoor restaurant festival in Los Angeles. The pair reportedly just bought a home together.

Short Takes: Actor Danny Glover has just wrapped his part in "To Sleep With Anger", the story of three conflicting generations of a modern black family pulled into the beliefs and influences of the past when a mysterious old friend from the Deep South pays a visit. So impressed was Glover with the script that he bypassed his normal fee and was first to commit to the low-budget film at equity wages. The movie also stars Mary Alice, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Vonetta McGee, and her actor-hubby Carl Lumbly (formerly of "Cagney & Lacey")...Meanwhile, Lionel Richie has completed his latest LP, though Motown execs have not yet announced when it will be released. The problem seems to be that Richie submitted so much good material, they are having a hard time determining just what will be released...Next week: Millie Jackson's daughter signs a recording contract.

ON THE MONEY

Prominent Black Businesswoman Dies Suddenly: On The Money had hoped to lead in with a feature on how the women at the reins of the nation's top 100 black businesses were faring, but instead there is sad news to share. The Atlanta business and social community is still in shock and mourning over the death of 48-year old Sandra Thacker, chief executive of the Thacker Corporation, which is ranked as the nation's 20th largest black business by Black Enterprise Magazine. Thacker, who had recently returned from vacation, drowned in her backyard swimming pool, while at home by herself. The accidental drowning took place when she hit her head after slipping into the pool. The Thacker Corporation was founded in 1970 by Floyd Thacker who won the distinction of being the first black in the United States to get a federal contract in highway construction. Thacker took control of the firm, which is headquartered in Atlanta, after her 53-year old husband died in 1986 from a heart attack and complications due to diabetes. While Thacker didn't take the risks her husband did, she was known to be an astute businesswoman, and upon inheriting the chief role, actively went after new accounts. Last year's sales topped \$30 million. Prior to her husband's death, she served as personnel director of the firm which specialized in construction and engineering projects. Reginald Vachon, the company's CEO will act in her stead. No formal statement from the company has as yet been given. Company spokesman, Robert Zimlich, "says he still can't quite believe it. "I keep walking to her office, expecting her to be there". Thacker is survived by four stepchildren and the couple's teenaged son, Russell.

Jackpot For Minority-Owned High-Tech Firms: The value of government contract awarded to minority firms through the Small Business Administration's 8 A program is expected to mushroom, according to an independent consulting firm. Last year alone, over \$3.4 billion in government contracts went to economically disadvantaged firms, with computer and telecommunications firms leading the pack. According to one expert, information technology and computer firms are expected to get an even bigger piece of the pie in years to come...Meanwhile, Joshua Smith at Maxima who spent six years in the 8A program and now heads Maxima Corp., the nation's ninth-largest black-owned business recalls his 8A graduation as "graduation with two footprints on your butt". Smith recently addressed some program negatives, as well as his frustration with the perception that SBA participants shouldn't drive nice cars, make a lot of money or be allowed to sell their businesses without a lot of talk. Said Smith, "it's interesting that only in minority economic development did these discussions take place". Smith also addressed the often fierce competition and backbiting among program participants, adding that he was told that "everytime Maxima's name came up they received 10-15 protests from other 8A companies." Said Smith, "we're only getting two percent of the pie now. Why are we stepping on each other's shoulders? We haven't yet gained confidence in our own success and portrayed that to the black consumer. That is a 250 billion-dollar marketplace of black income out there annually, of which we are getting less than six cents on the dollar".

In Short: Don Anderson, senior vice-president of HBO, Inc. was recently named top man in the new marketing effort to promote its new Comedy Channel, debuting this fall...Danny Glover's latest starring role comes in a film--"To Sleep With Anger", whose budget of just under \$2 million almost equals his estimated salary for his current hit, "Lethal Weapon II". Glover is said to be working for scale on this picture. What's the scale? Well, according to the LA-based Screen Actor's Guild, that's \$414 per day...Next week: find out what the next generations home technology is going to cost you.

GEORGE CLINTON

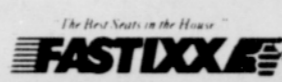
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