

# BLACK HISTORY

The Portland Observer

## Alexander Pushkin: Russia's Great Black Genius Of Literature

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

We have it from Gleb Strove, noted translator of Russian literature: "While a great many Russian may still argue about the relative merits of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky or of Gogol and Turgenev, they are practically as one in looking upon Pushkin as 'the' national genius of Russia" (1799 to 1837.)

Two white school teachers from Eastern Oregon stopped by to get some material for Black History Month. (I made many lasting education contacts when doing U.S. Forest Service Diversity Seminars throughout the Northwest). When they finally pried themselves away from my library section on "great African Innovators on the European Continent," they could only remark: "Bill Cosby was right; if they had been thieves or killers, every American school child would know their names -- white and black."

Prof. Strove continues in the foreword of his book (Russian Stories: A Dual Language Book, Dover 1961). "...One is therefore justified in taking Pushkin as the true starting point of the short story in Russian literature. Pushkin is, generally speaking, the fountainhead and epitome of Russian literature." Russia now joined England and France in stature.

Some readers may remember that several years ago when McDonald's opened their first hamburger palace in Moscow, Russia, I remarked here that the location was the city's famed "Pushkin Square". And that directly across the street in one of the most beautiful parks in the world was a huge statue of the Russian's beloved literary giant (African features and all).

In fact, throughout this vast land

are to be found every type of institution and icon imaginable named for this national hero. The vast Pushkin Museum in Moscow houses the famous "Trojan Collection" of King Priam's Treasure discovered by noted archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemer. In the Portland Oregonian newspaper fur farm; mink fox and sable.

And then there are the vast hinterlands of Russia which Andrei Bitov - "one of the Soviet Unions most gifted stylists" -- describes as "physical, moral and philosophic landscapes of Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy....beyond "Pushkin Pass", where the biblical landscape of Armenia begins to give way to the warm, moist breath of Georgia." Russia took the black Pushkin to her bosom in the same enthusiastic manner that France embraced her African sons, the Alexander Dumas triumvirate.

The English National Opera guide says that "it is a Paradox of Russian culture that Pushkin, that recklessly ironic poet and master of the subtle and swiftly moving scene, should have proved so popular a source for opera. And what a source for opera indeed was this dusky genius, Alexander Pushkin, for his narrative poem "Eugene Onegin" became, under the gifted composer Tchaikovsky, the world famous opera of the same name. There follows one of Pushkin's gentler excursions into the human condition, "The Muse."

*In my childhood she loved me  
And handed me the flute of seven pipes,*

*Smiling, she listened to me,  
And gently touching the sound holes of the hollow reed*

*With my weak fingers, I played already then,*

*Both solemn hymns inspired by the gods*

*And songs of peaceful Phrygian shepherds,*

*From morn till evening in the groves' mute shade*

*I heeded diligently the secret maiden's words;*

*And rejoicing me with unexpected favour,*

*Having brushed the curls back from her sweet brow,*

*She herself took the panpipes from my hands.*

*The reed was animated by divine breath*

*And my heart filled with sacred enchantment.*

--Pushkin the Muse

But the Russian people also adored him for another side of his passionate personality, his reverent revolutionary rhetoric -- fiery, reckless polemics in defense of liberty for the masses of peasants. At times he was imprisoned or exiled and only last minute interventions saved him from the Czar's executioners. But this great man died at age 37, killed fighting a duel in his wife's honor.

What heights were reached by this great grandson of Abram Hannibal one of the hundreds of black Africans brought into Russia "as novelties in the sixteenth century." Hannibal became General-in-Chief of the Russian Army under Empress Elizabeth. Pushkin's descendants have married into the royal families of Germany, Russia, Luxembourg, Italy and England. Almost all of the Coat-of-Arms bear African likenesses (see "Sex and Race" Vol. I & II, J.A. Rogers. Our children know not who they are!

## Mandela and de Klerk featured on Showtime in february



Sidney Poitier (left), Tina Lifford (right), and Michael Caine (playing de Klerk) star in Mandela and de Klerk.

Featuring month-long programming schedule to salute African-Americans including the Showtime Original Picture *Mandela and de Klerk*, and short films by African-American filmmakers

The Showtime Original Picture, *Mandela and de Klerk*, starring Sidney Poitier and Michael Caine, will serve as the centerpiece program for Black History Month and will premiere on Sunday, February 16 at 8:00 p.m. (ET/PT). Shot entirely on location in South Africa, the film tells the story of Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk, two men who changed the future of South Africa. Mandela and de Klerk depicts the pivotal events that occurred in the final years of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment to his inauguration as the democratic leader of South Africa.

As part of a continuing commitment to develop and support up

and coming African-American filmmakers, Showtime Networks Inc. also selected five short films from the Showtime Black Filmmaker Grant program to air on the network in February. Additionally, Showtime Networks Inc. will award one of these up and coming filmmaker a \$30,000 grant to make a short film that will have its exclusive premiere on Showtime.

The five finalists films will begin airing on Showtime on Monday, February 10 through Friday, February 14:

- *Fortunate Son*, February 12 at 7:30 p.m. (ET/PT)

- *One Red Rose*, February 13 at 7:30 p.m. (ET/PT)

- *Spark*, February 14 at 7:00 p.m. (ET/PT)

Showtime's month-long Black History Month Celebration will also highlight such theatrical hits as "Devil In A Blue Dress" starring

Denzel Washington. "Moonlight & Valentino" with Whoopi Goldberg and "Othello" with Laurence Fishburne.

Showtime Networks Inc. (SNI), which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Viacom Inc., owns the premium television networks Showtime, The Movie Channel and Flix, as well as Showtime Satellite Networks. SNI operates and manages the new premium television network Sundance Channel, which is owned by SNI, Robert Redford and PolyGram Filmed Entertainment. SNI also manages, through a joint venture, All News Channel. Showtime en Espanol, a separate audio feed of Showtime, is also available for the Spanish-speaking audience.

Showtime Networks also markets and distributes sports and entertainment events for exhibition to subscribers on a pay-per-view basis. [www.showtimeonline.com](http://www.showtimeonline.com)

## Ovation celebrates Black History Month

February programming includes music and dance, commemorates African-American heritage and artists throughout the world

The Arts Network celebrates Black History Month throughout February with a programming lineup focusing on African-American artists. Masters of opera, jazz, blues, soul, rock, reggae and modern dance are honored, incorporating influences surrounding their lives and work. Profiles of artists, playwrights and musicians cap off the month's tribute. Additionally, Ovation's Cable in the Classroom schedule will be dedicated solely to Black History Month in February, airing every week on Tuesdays from noon-2 p.m. ET.

"We are delighted to celebrate

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Black History Month through our programming and to recognize individuals who have contributed so much to the arts in the U.S. and abroad," said Ovation Chairman J. Carter Brown, also Director Emeritus of The National Gallery of Art.

Among February's highlights:

- *Operatic stars Barbara Hendricks, Jessye Norman and Shirley Verrett relate experiences and recognize those that have shaped their careers in The Three Divas, a three-part series profiling each.*

- *Jazz and blues greats and B.B. King and Carmen McRae perform for audiences and show off their legendary talents in B.B. King-Live at the Apollo and Carmen McRae Live.*

- *The documentary Curtis*

*Mayfield: Darker than Blue profiles Curtis Mayfield, who is considered the father of soul music.*

- *Voodoo Chile: The Music of Jimi Hendrix remembers the late, great innovator with performances by Vernon Reid of Living Colour, Jack Bruce of Cream and Jazz singer Cassandra Wilson.*

- *The Darker Side of Black documents views of reggae icons Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, Monie Love, Brand Nubians and Ice Cube on such topics as violence and the perception of women in rap music.*

- *The Stack Up and Cry are performed by the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, and Bill T. Jones' critically acclaimed production Still/Here, as staged for television, confronts the subjects of death, terminal illness, and their effect on those left behind.*

- *Biographies Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask and Josephine Baker--Chasing a Rainbow will air, tracing the lives and careers of Fanon, influential theorist of 20th century anti-colonial movements, and Baker, an American dancer and film star who found fame as one of France's brightest stars.*

Other stories of personal struggle, triumph and historical discovery from the U.S. and abroad are presented, such as August Wilson, a profile of the playwright, including his exploration of the American Dream from an African-American point of view.

"The fact that we offer high-quality arts programming of interest to diverse communities has resulted in Ovation's rapid growth and positive response from audiences and prospective viewers," said Dr. Harold E. Morse, President and CEO of Ovation and founder and former Chairman/CEO of The Learning Channel.

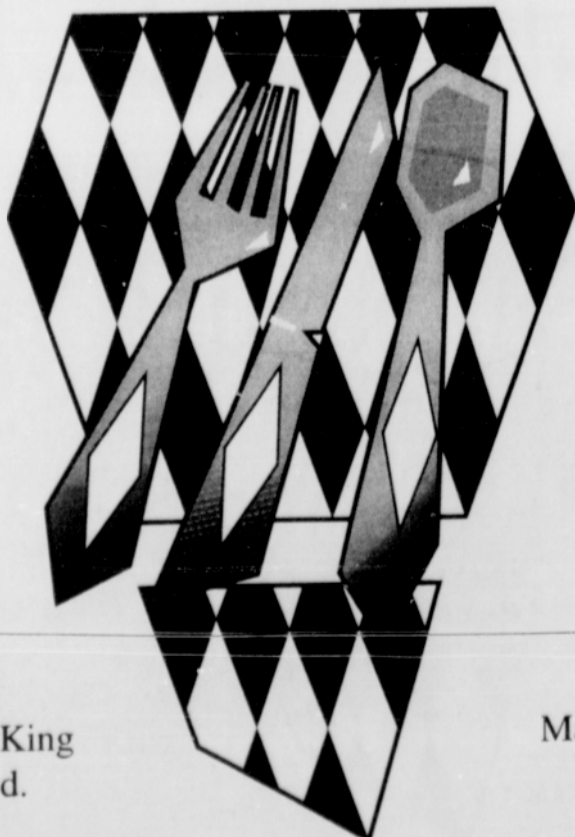
Ovation airs seven days a week, 20 hours a day (7 a.m. to 3 a.m. ET). Ovation has joined forces with many of the most prominent cultural organizations, national and international broadcasters (PBS, Channel 4 (UK), NHK, ARTE, BBC) and arts-oriented production companies (NVC Arts, RM Associates) both to secure and co-produce it programming.

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