



Special edition features inside

'City of Roses'



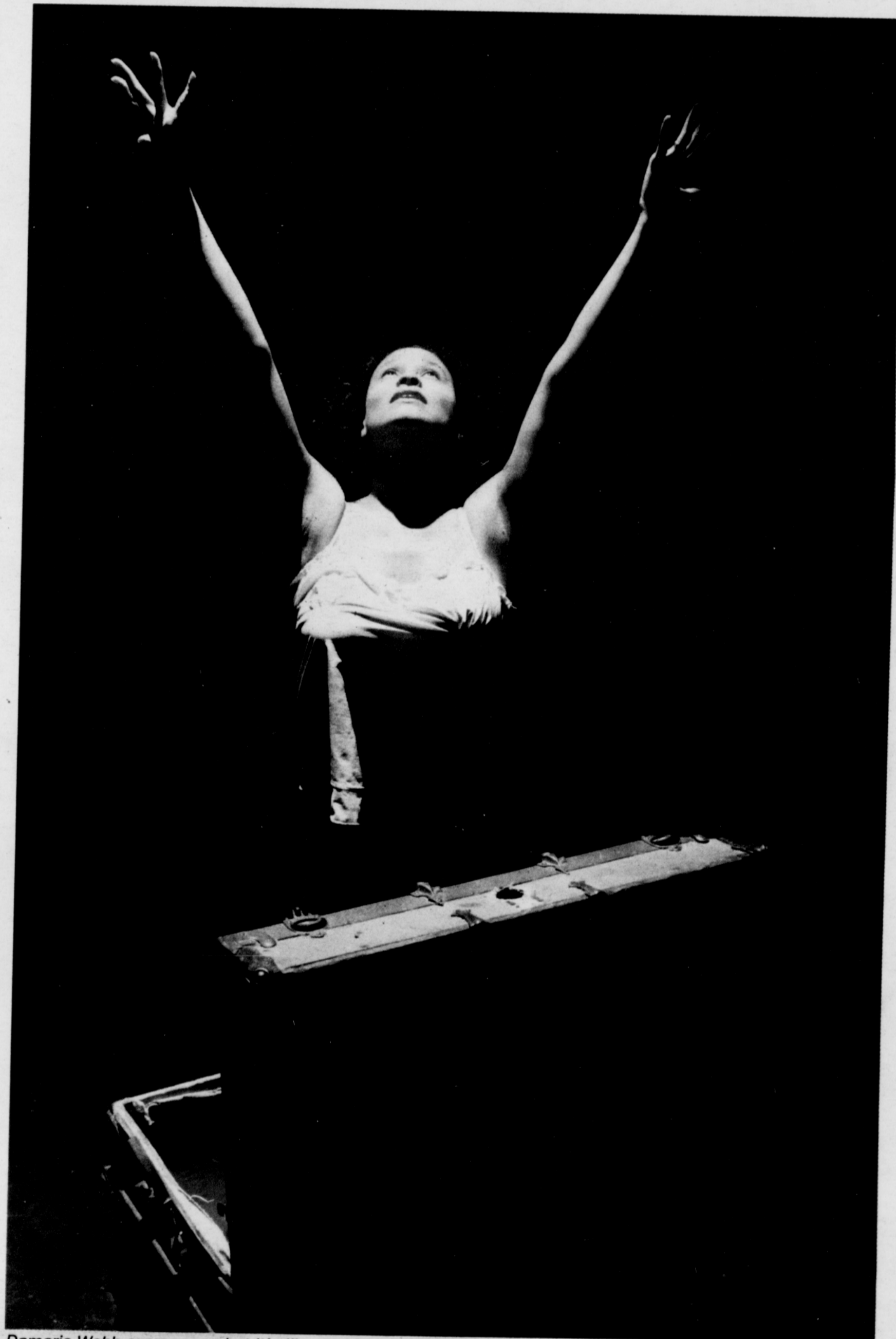
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Identities of Color

Past shapes future for performing artist

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

After her mother died, Damaris Webb longed to leave New York where she and her husband had lived for the past 26 years, and return home to her family in Portland, especially to be close to her 87-year-old father.

Coming back to the old neighborhood things looked different. "Portland has changed so much since the 1980s," said the former Jefferson high school student who moved east not long after she graduated and has just moved back.

Recently earning her Masters of Fine Arts in contemporary performance at the Buddhist-founded Noropa University in Boulder, Colo., Webb has perfected an original play that she is excited and deeply proud to share with the public.

In the production, Webb traces her childhood memories growing up in a mixed race family in Portland during the pre-Huxtable era of the Jefferson's TV characters, in a solo performance entitled, "The Box Marked Black: Tales from a Half-frican-American growing up Mulatto." The play is now showing though Sunday, Feb. 23 at the Ethos Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center in north Portland.

With just herself and a giant steamer trunk for props on stage, Webb uses her body and spoken word to create a life narrative as a child raised by a white mother and a black father.

A story about race wasn't Webb's original intention when she began developing the piece from a previous grad school project.

"This story is my story growing up in a family, and within that, there is the theme of race, identity and cultural differences," she said.

Webb says the show is an investigation of memories and events in her past that have shaped who she is. Research required asking others, close family members, to unveil her mother and father's journey as well as her own.

Webb's mother, who is of Finnish origin and born in Minnesota, moved to Portland in the 1950s. Her father, born in eastern Tennessee to Baptist missionaries moved to Portland's Montavilla neighborhood in the 1930s.

As a little girl, Webb moved with her family from Portland to Africa, where her father worked in Tanzania and Bosnia as a U.S. aid worker for the newly independent governments. It

Damaris Webb expresses what it's like growing up mixed race in her Black History Month performance at the Ethos Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center in north Portland.

continued ▼ on page 2