

# Stage Door



## John



WHEN ONE IS "Marquee-shopping on the Las Vegas Strip or Casino Center, or on any theatrical row in the world, and the names of Negro artists are emblazoned in brilliant neon, again and again, in prideful advertisement of an array of Negro stars appearing in person at plush Supper Rooms, in Concert, in a Motion Picture, or on the Broadway stage, it is difficult to believe that the Negro entertainer, also, struggled against great odds and obstacles for acceptance in expressing his talents and making his contribution to the performing arts.

In Ebony Magazine's special issue of September 1963, commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Alan Morrison, a brilliant Negro newspaperman, reported a saga of Negro Entertainment for the past 100 years in which he pointed out the "Rate of progress onstage reflects general race struggles".

As Mr. Morrison states "The vitality of the Negro's influence on American music, dance and drama has been irresistible, its impact profound and lasting", but as Morrison painstakingly traces the history of the Negro performer from the year of 1821 to the present, the reader may find himself somewhat surprised and even shocked at the realization that the Negro performer's struggle for recognition, for dignity, and opportunity was as heartbreaking and frustrating as it has been for the Negro in any other field of endeavor.

ONE MIGHT EXPECT that the average Negro performer today may not know of the derision and ridicule to which the Negro entertainer was subjected a century or even a half century ago. It is highly possible that present day Negro artists are not acquainted with the tragic stories of the struggle and heartbreak of the great Negro stars of yesteryear; but, unless he is a child prodigy, the present-day Negro star knows from personal experience that the stature he enjoys today and the general all-around recognition and acceptance of him both as a person and as an artist is of very recent date.

Certainly he hasn't forgotten the days when he had to play before segregated audiences; that he could not socialize or live in the swank hotels where his artistry was in demand. Because the breakthrough is not yet complete, he's got to recall the reluctance of the Broadway Stage, the Motion Picture Industry, and the more recent Television Media to recognize, employ and present the vast and varied great talents of Negro singers, actors, dancers, composers, dramatists and musicians.

But from the actions of some of our Negro entertainers, you sure can't tell they remember any of these things. Far-sighted and clear-thinking individuals engaged in the struggle for attainment of full integration of the Negro in all facets of American life, were always aware that full integration would wreak a hardship on the Negro in some areas, but who would have believed the Negro performer in attaining the recognition he sought would penalize his fellow Negroes?

The feeling is growing stronger every day among many of us who have supported, encouraged, and fought for recognition of Negro performers' talents that many of these "stars" have just gotten carried away with their present day acceptance. They live white, talk white, socialize white, and wouldn't be caught dead on the "other side of the tracks" in any town where they are playing. Perhaps that last remark needs elaborating on, or rather correcting, because if they are caught dead, five will get you fifty, that most of them will be buried from the "other side of the tracks" because in most cities white Undertakers don't bury the darker brethren, and most cemeteries have a segregated space for laying them in their final resting place.

MANY OF US REMEMBER that here in Las Vegas, before Negro artists could live and play where they worked, those Negro artists always had their feet under the tables of some of their friends here on the Westside, and they (out of necessity, it is now realized) patronized the Ne-

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gro places of business. Not any more, brother.

What really took the rag off the bush, and prompted this indictment of some Negro artists was the manner in which they snubbed the Las Vegas VOICE's Benefit Party last Sunday.

If anybody thinks the VOICE staff took exception to the disdainful and supercilious attitude assumed by some Negro performers currently appearing here toward our Benefit on Sunday, they are so right.

We take exception because Negro newspapers everywhere have ever waged a continuing campaign for equal opportunity for Negroes in every walk of life-- Because Negro newspapers have given liberally of their space to publicizing the professional activities of the Negro artist, and it is our profound feeling that when a Negro newspaper sponsors a benefit affair for a needy Negro family, it is not too much to expect some kind of cooperation and consideration from Negro artists, and if those performers are too cold and uncaring to care about the plight of one of their own race, one would think that consideration would be due a newspaper out of respect and gratitude for the community service rendered by that paper.

BEFORE WE GET DOWN off this horse we're riding, we'd like to offer one specific "for instance" in this case. Bob Bailey, Chairman of the State of Nevada's Equal Rights Commission, and a performer of no little note himself, personally requested singer Brook Benton, and Fats Domino to attend the affair. He gave them all the facts in the case, and used all his powers of persuasion to prevail upon them to just make an appearance so that their many Negro fans could see them, even if they didn't want to perform. They weren't the slightest bit interested.

However, we're happy to say many great and wonderful performers did turn up and made the Benefit Party one swinging affair as is reported elsewhere in this issue of the VOICE.

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