

REVIEW

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom entertaining

Presented to the National Playwrights Conference of the O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut as a workshop piece in 1982, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom catapulted August Wilson into the literary arena. It has allowed him over the course of the twentieth century to share with us his explorations into the heritage and experiences of Black America.

Anger and violence, ignorance and racism, love and passion are the emotional building blocks for this August Wilson masterpiece. Maybe not what you expect from the title "MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM," but what you get when experiencing any one of August Wilson's lessons in life.

In this play, the latest report on his explorations into the African American experience, he focuses on the music industry. He chose Ma Rainey, born Gertrude Melissa Nix Pridgett as his entrance into another door of emotional upheaval.

The show opens with her white manager, Irvin played by Michael Horvath and his counterpart, Mr. Sturdyvant, played by Robert Dale Blomgren, record company owner discussing Ma Rainey and how "She marches in here like she owns the damn place...." Those words of Sturdyvant set the pace of this elevating drama. Robert does well as the "do I have to touch her" kind of guy. August Wilson has a way of peeling the emotional layers and allowing us to peek into their very beings. So when Sturdyvant says "I want to get her in here... record those songs on that list... and get her out", he represents the feelings shared by the majority of his industry counterparts during that period.

The set is soon joined by the band, made up of Cutler, Toledo, Slow Drag and Levee who take a slow ride into the tunnels of confusion and despair.

Much of this play is spent in the locker room where the band rehearses before recording. Here is where that Wilson style allows the audience to peep into the souls of each character through his literary magic.

The band was a good casting choice by director Walter Mason. Cutler, played by Rick Davenport



ALEXANDER MERVIN

though not as sure of himself as a couple of performances will make him, held his own.

Slow Drag played by musician Ivan Williams was the only character to actually play an instrument, this was good because it made up for what he lacked in acting ability. It was the interpretive acting of Earl Harrison, who played Toledo, that showed his feel for the character and his potential for Toledo's full development. The performance of Levee played by Alexander Mervin became the focus of their existence. The energy of Mervin was electrifying. His mannerisms were planned and characteristically executed. He gave the band that push they needed to carry out their assignments. Though I could not find MA RAINEY in his credits, I did find FENCES, which tells me by his performance, that he knows what the August Wilson mission is all about.

Let us not forget the topic of this discussion, MA RAINEY played by actress Barbara Fair. With a strong melodic voice, she soothed us, but she failed to reveal the tyranny of MA RAINEY. "...you better tell this man who I am!" barks the rambunctious Ma Rainey, is how we meet MA RAINEY. Even though she was the greatest female blues singer at that time, she still needed her white manager to legitimize her. That opening line was the first layer of her emotions peeled by August Wilson. Dussie Mae played by Katherine Wingfield was a key player and didn't know it. Dussie Mae might have been "cutsy" but she was a hard-core

opportunist, carrying on an open relationship with Ma and baiting Levee as well.

August always gives us the opportunity to exhale, and Sylvester played by local comedian Kahlil doesn't let us down. His antics and bouts with stuttering allow you to take a breather from the escalating intensity.

The set was designed by G. Vaughn Lowther, and constructed by a local company, Scenic Technologies, which made a good backdrop for this show. The lighting and sound was a little choppy but let's attribute that to opening night OOPS! The costuming was adequate but I can't help but feel

(See Ma Rainey, Page 16)

Jazz

(Continued from Page 8)

jazz orchestra, will live it up on Sunday, Sept. 29 at Artemus Ham Hall. The 30-year-old blind musician, a former member of Wynton Marsalis' quartet, is said to possess a style full of boastful rhythms, idealistic blues, a step of ragtime with a jazz foundation. Roberts grew up in Florida and was introduced to music through the church.

His career has been marked by his personal signature versions of popular classical songs including his most recent release, Portraits in Blue, a tribute to George Gershwin.

Tickets are available only at the Artemus Ham Box Office. For more information call 895-3801.



Saturn of West Sahara • Saturn of Henderson
and Westside Federal Credit Union

present

Membership Drive "96" Contest

- GRAND PRIZE** — Pair of Tickets
Chicago Bulls vs Seattle Supersonics
Thomas & Mack Center • Sat., Oct. 12th
- FIRST PRIZE** — \$200.00 Cash
- SECOND PRIZE** — Two One-Year
Memberships at Family Fitness
- THIRD PRIZE** — Dinner for Two

The drawing will be held this Saturday, September 21st,
at the credit union, 418 W. Madison Ave.

No purchase necessary • Winners need not be present to win.

FREE FOOD & BEVERAGE

Hosted by Rob Riley • Earl White (Promotions & Marketing Team) • 252-8900

For more information call 648-4626

PACIFIC TOWING SERVICE

"You Have A Friend"



PSC #7076



L.C.

Jim Carter "We don't pull, we carry" L.C.
Bus. 474-2910 • Cell. 378-3611

Lock-Outs • Tire Service • Road Service • Batteries Jumped



Saturn of Henderson
Valley Auto Mall • (702) 558-8888

Saturn of West Sahara
5325 West Sahara • (702) 252-8900

SATURN

A DIVISION OF THE FINDLAY AUTOMOTIVE GROUP