

## ENTERTAINMENT

# Actor O'Neal captivates audience with masterful storytelling

By Tammy D. McMahan  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Junebug Jabbo Jones has stories to tell.

Junebug is the creation of playwright/actor John O'Neal. The character is the masterful storyteller of the production "Don't Start Me to Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know," held last week at the Black Mountain Recreation Center in Henderson.

A quote from Junebug sets the mood for this production: "I'm a storyteller, not a liar. It's a heap of difference between a storyteller and a liar. A liar covers things over, mainly for his own benefit. A storyteller uncovers things so everybody can get something good out of it."

Junebug's stories recall the trials and triumphs of African-Americans in the rural south. The first story concerns the first Junebug, the grandfather of the grandfather of the Junebug character.

The first Junebug was born to a slave mother. Early on, she notices her son's defiance — foreshadowing his role in contributing to his early death — and hands him over to Bill, a former slave who lives in the swamps.

Freed from slavery, Bill became an observer and storyteller. He encourages young Junebug to observe

him, teaching him how to read and "figure."

When Junebug reaches manhood, he sets out to help others. Though slavery still exists, Junebug skillfully moves from place to place, sowing the seeds for great social and personal change among his people.

In another story, Junebug rehashes the tragicomic circumstances of rural African-Americans who eked out an existence picking cotton in the 1920's and 1930's.

Junebug is one of these cottonpickers. However, he refuses to let circumstances strip him of his dignity. Like his ancestors, he tries to make the best of the situation for himself for others. To that end, he forms a "union" of sorts to bargain with the cotton field owners for top wages, figuring his formidable negotiating prowess would serve him well.

However, one cotton field owner collaborates with an overseer in an attempt to cheat the workers by rigging the cotton weighing scales.

Junebug informs the owner that he is aware of the scheme. The devious owner pleads poverty and tells Junebug that he can't possibly pay the men the wage Junebug asks. Junebug and the men refuse to continue to

work.

In a sad finale, Junebug solemnly recalls how one man comes to him and tells him that he has to return to that field because his wife and 14 children are hungry. Despite the disappointment that Junebug feels, he conveys his sympathy for the man and indicates that he will continue to fight for what is fair. The other stories are similarly as compelling. One tells about a caring, responsible man who marries a preacher's daughter after she is raped by a spoiled, teen-age boy and abandoned by her disgraced father.

Junebug's wit and wisdom is evidenced again in a story about his trip to New Orleans as a young man.

In an incredibly hilarious rendition, Junebug describes how he sauntered up to a white lunch counter, ordered some food and promptly got thrown into jail. Junebug is no fool though. He had squandered his money and ate up all the food that his mother had packed for the trip so he purposefully arranged to get thrown into jail for shelter and food.

O'Neal so captivated the audience with his storytelling that many audience members were convinced that he was really from the rural South and lived some of the experiences of which he

spoke.

O'Neal's work is wonderfully interactive. He occasionally prompted audience members to chime

in with their thoughts. The most ringing endorsement for this man and his work is that he sent strong messages that any individual can effect

positive changes in his community and every human being should refuse to sacrifice their personal dignity.

## Report: Aretha Franklin in debt

DETROIT (AP) — Despite earning millions from her 40-year career as the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin continues to be dogged by debt, according to a published report.

Since 1988, more than 30 lawsuits have been filed against Franklin, with the total sought just over \$1 million, the *Detroit Free Press* reported Monday.

Some cases were settled, and some Franklin paid only after being taken to court, most recently in January. She occasionally ignored court judgments, forcing creditors to seek liens on homes or assets, according to the *Free Press*.

Franklin, her lawyer and her publicist refused to be interviewed for the article.

Some creditors say Franklin — whose hits include "Respect," "Think," and "Freeway of



ARETHA FRANKLIN

Love" — is just a spoiled diva.

But friends say she distrusts outsiders after a difficult experience as a teenager starting in the music business, a failed first marriage, and the loss of her father, brother and a sister, who all died in the 1980s.

"She's a wonderful artist who shouldn't be handling her own business, but she does," said Wayne County Judge Harvey Tennen, who represented Franklin in the

1980s. "People have taken advantage of her, her whole life." Franklin keeps her income private. She signed a \$1.2 million book deal in 1995 for an autobiography and a \$10 million record deal the following year.

Many claims against her are for \$4,000 or less. State and federal officials have also levied \$1.2 million in liens, but she paid off nearly all of them, the paper said.

Some of her creditors said they were reluctant to bring lawsuits because they were fans and admired Franklin's contributions to music and to Detroit.

"She did a lot of charity work, and I didn't want to embarrass her," said Frank Winton, a caterer who sued Franklin in 1988 over a \$2,300 bill for four parties. He put off suing for months and hesitated to mention the debt at social functions.

## Judge dismisses gangsta rap foe's defamation suit

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A judge dismissed a defamation lawsuit filed by a gangsta rap critic against two news magazines for their reports on her earlier lawsuit against the estate of slain rapper Tupac Shakur.

U.S. District Judge Ronald L. Buckwalter threw out C. DeLores Tucker's lawsuit against *Time*, *Newsweek*, writers for those publications, and Shakur estate lawyer Richard Fischbein.

Buckwalter ruled that Tucker, a former Pennsylvania secretary of state, was a public figure in the eyes of the law.

That means she had to prove that *Time* and *Newsweek* wrote the stories with "actual malice," knew they were inaccurate and would "embarrass and humiliate" her and her husband, William.

The Tuckers did not meet that burden of proof, Buckwalter ruled.

"There is a vast difference between being annoyed and/or embarrassed on the one

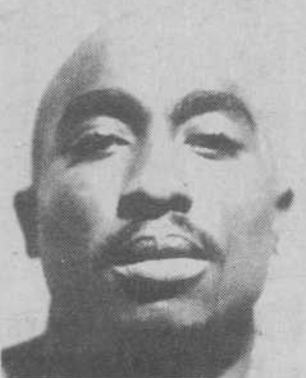


C. DeLORES TUCKER

hand, and being disgraced and ridiculed to the extent that one's reputation is harmed in the estimation of the community, on the other," the judge wrote in a ruling issued last week.

The Tuckers' \$10 million lawsuit against Shakur's estate said the rapper's lyrics, in which he rhymed DeLores Tucker's name with an obscenity, caused emotional distress that led to "a loss of consortium."

A subsequent article in *Time* referred to "claims that lewd remarks made about her ... caused her so much distress that she and her husband have not been able to have sex." A



TUPACK SHAKUR

*Newsweek* article referred to claims that the lyrics "iced their sex life."

Tucker said the "consortium" complaint had nothing to do with sex.

The Tuckers' lawsuits are still pending against dozens of news outlets, including *The Associated Press*, that carried stories on the initial lawsuit.

Buckwalter last month threw out the lawsuit against Shakur's estate, ruling that the references to Tucker on Shakur's "All Eyes on Me" album were "unpleasant at best and vulgar at worst" but not libelous.

Shakur was shot to death in Las Vegas in 1996.

## This Week on Channel 10

Record Row: Cradle of Rhythm & Blues  
Saturday, Feb. 20 at 11 p.m.

African-American History Challenge  
Sunday, Feb. 21 at 2 p.m.

Second to None: The Larry Doby Story  
Sunday, Feb. 21 at 11 p.m.

Paul Robeson: Here I Stand An "American Masters" Special  
Wednesday, Feb. 24 at 9 p.m.



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