

ENTERTAINMENT

'Fences': Thoughtful work audiences won't forget

By Tammy D. McMahan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Fences is one of the Pulitzer Prize winning works of August Wilson, one of America's preeminent, contemporary playwrights. This play concerns one man's inability to escape the harsh racism of his past and the unresolved pain of his difficult childhood and accept love and deal with change.

Fences is the story of Troy Maxson (Sly Smith), a frustrated garbage man and former Negro League baseball player, who had dreams of playing professional baseball.

His dreams were dashed by racism. As a result, Troy became further embittered about life. Troy had already been hardened by his mother's abandonment and his father's unrelenting abuse.

These experiences leave Troy "mentally blind" to the good changes wrought by the burgeoning civil rights movement and the love and patience generously given by his wife Rose (Martha Watson) and their son Cory (Cameron Miller).

Troy unleashes his frustrations upon Rose and Cory as they all make their way in the industrial North of the 1950's.

The cast of characters is rounded out by Bono (Alexander Mervin), Troy's friend and a fellow garbage man, Lyons (Leain Vashon), Troy's musician son from a previous marriage, Troy's brother Gabriel (Steven McKenzy) who suffered a debilitating head injury during World War II, and Raynell (AnSherae Devine), Troy's love child with his mistress Alberta who is never seen in this play.

Sly Smith powerfully portrays the complexity of Troy Maxson's life. Smith shows Troy's destructive anger, sly wit, sense of duty and vulnerabilities. Smith's ominous words, threatening tone and imposing stature in various scenes throughout the play establish that Troy can be a cruel, dictatorial human being.

Troy invokes fear when he tells his son Cory that he's about to strike out when Cory argues that he should be allowed to play football and when Cory defends his mother.

With equal skill, Smith shows that Troy has a lighter side. Smith gives Troy a sense of humor and a love for telling tall tales which rivets the audience.

Troy clings to his dignity.

The actor creates an African-American brand of stoic duty forged in the crucible of prejudice; that is, Smith portrays a man who is determined to be honorable, even if the honor lacks compassion, despite the indignities heaped upon him. Smith credibly portrays Troy's weaknesses.

Here is a man surrounded by love, yet he doesn't appreciate it. A man who makes tragic mistakes such as denying his son the chance to get a football scholarship and betraying his devoted wife with another woman because he feels that life has cheated him.

Mervin delivers a fine performance as the thoughtful, jovial Bono.

Like Troy he suffers from past and present bigotry and a broken family. However, he is not wholly consumed by the pain. In a subdued, but sincere manner Bono celebrates the victories, large and small, of African-Americans.

Mervin makes Bono authentic when the character reveals that he was tempted to be a roving womanizer like his father, but he wisely decided to eschew that destructive lifestyle when he

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Gumbel

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Few people, including Zucker, claim any insider knowledge about what Gumbel will do.

"I think he's got a big decision to make," Zucker said. "Bryant's not going to be pushed into it no matter how much the media speculates or people talk about it. He'll do what's best for him, as he should. At the end of the day, he's also a very loyal company man and he'll do what he's asked to do."

Two years after he was in huge demand, Gumbel, 50, is in a peculiar sort of limbo: making millions to bide his time. The talent that helped him rise from local sports reporting to the rarified air of network star—particularly his ability to conduct a tough, live interview—is in mothballs.

His status as highly-paid benchwarmer is a natural flashpoint for resentment, especially since he works for a network run by Mel

Karmazin, an aggressive cost-cutter.

There appear to be few other options for Gumbel at CBS. The network has already renewed its three prime-time newsmagazines for next season, and he has worked for none of them. There's no room for Gumbel's "Public Eye," which received lukewarm ratings and reviews before being canceled. Dan Rather isn't going anywhere, and Gumbel has said he isn't interested in anchoring the evening news, anyway.

Gumbel has been working with Dunbar Productions, his syndication company set up as part of his deal with CBS, although none of its projects has been revealed. He continues as host of "Real Sports" on HBO. And much of his time the past month has been spent running a charity golf tournament.

If he says no to the morning show, the next step will likely be negotiations to buy out his CBS contract.

Act hopes for chance and stardom

Sharon Y. Savage
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Chance is defined in Webster's dictionary as, "the random existence of something happening; a gamble or a risk." Hence, the name of the new R&B group, By Chance, aptly describes how the talented twenty-something quartet came together and how they were discovered while playing basketball at famed Shoup Park in Michigan.

The new singing sensation chose Las Vegas as the back drop to launch their debut release album *Great Things Happen By Chance* on Persona Records.

The listening party, held on the 21st floor of Mandalay Bay, included libations, hors d'oeuvres, a breath-taking view of the city and the mellow sounds of the guests of honor.

The group made their grand entrance and were greeted with a champagne toast and the video premiere of their second single, "Gotta Get That Lovin'".

Chance: "The random existence of something happening; a gamble or a risk."

— Webster's dictionary

Terry Rice, Elquine Rice, Rodney Sultan and Gary Neal, the members of the group, were wooing the guests with their charm, style, and down home nature.

They actually have very humble beginnings as they started their career doing local talent shows and singing in church, as with many artists in the industry.

In just two months, By Chance has completed their first album. They've co-written five songs and worked with an impressive array of producers and industry hit makers. The credit for collaboration is a who's who list of the entertainment industry, featuring such noted talents as singer and comedian, Jamie Foxx and William "Big Dutch" Campbell, who has written hits for Dru Hill and Ice Cube.

They describe their sound as a "new-age Stylistics-Dramatics" vibe and feel their

purpose is to bring back "old school" style, which they describe as "real music, singing and love songs."

The album is filled with ballads and mid-tempo grooves. Each song reflects the diverse backgrounds of the group members. Terry calls himself the "falsetto of the group, the first tenor, or anything that requires screaming through the roof."

Elquine's style is more "gritty", the "strong part" of the group's sound. Sultan describes his contribution as "laid back, not bass heavy, and more on the lyric side." Neal's been perfecting his "Sam Cooke kind of vibe" on this LP. Whatever your musical palate delights in, the 14-track disc has something for everyone. If you get a chance, pick up By Chance; perchance you'll like what you hear.



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Study

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Jamshed Bharucha, a psychology professor and associate dean at Dartmouth. "A teacher's high expectation of students can lead to those students realizing a higher expectation of themselves."

And the improved math scores may be related to enhanced self-esteem from the students' music learning, cautioned another

psychology professor specializing in learning factors, Robert A. Bjork of UCLA.

"Students who choose to take piano and music lessons are going to be different than those who do not wish to do so. These students are probably going to be highly motivated," Bjork said. "Thus, the piano training might identify students who are more motivated and organized."