What's Happening

'Leadbelly' movie set cold, muddy in Texas

By Ida Peters

Last week, the AFRO got an invitation to visit the movie set of "Leadbelly" being shot around Austin, Texas.

Tuesday, we reported on our research about Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter a guitarist-singer-creator of blues and work songs like "Cotton Fields", "Rock Island Line" and "Good Night Irene".

He was born in 1885 near Caddo Lake and Mooringsport, La. near the Texas-Louisiana line, 30 miles from Shreveport, La., on the Kansas City Southern Railway. He died a pauper in a ward in Bellevue Hospital in NYC.

We arrived in Austin, Texas last Wednesday and were met by Producer, Marc Merson and Dr. Jim Barringer, Paramount's manager in charge of Special Markets. A briefing was held at Holiday Inn, South where Paramount Pictures had the entire 12th floor.

Dr. Barringer has been with Paramount Pictures since 1973. He is a former professor of literature and language at Delaware State College and Virginia Union. He is a graduate of Lincoln University and Temple and got his doctorate at U. of Holland, Amsterdam.

Briefing

On this press tour were representatives of The News, New York Age, ABC-TV and Encore Magazine.

The movie "Leadbelly" has been on location around Austin, Texas since

This is how Roger E. Mosley as Leadbelly looked in filming in Austin, Texas.

September 30 and completes production this weekend.

It's a $2-million movie, directed by Gordon Parks Sr. We were told we were just in time to catch a prison scene. We boarded buses at the hotel at 6 p.m. and were driven to a pitch black-site 30 miles out of Austin.

The film biography will cover Leadbelly's life from his early 20s to his 40s, many years of which he spent in jail and where he wrote some of his most memorable songs. "Leadbelly was a man who possibly gave us our first sign of the black man's protest," Parks states. "He was using music as his weapon. His dislike for certain situations was voiced through his music. He couldn't verbalize or write down what he wanted to say. When he was trapped in a situation, he had to sing his way out of it. That was his weapon."

There has been a resurgence of interest in Leadbelly's life in recent years.

John Hammond of Columbia has gathered together an extensive collection of his recordings, many from the Library of Congress. Among Leadbelly's songs to be included in the film are such standards as "Take This Hammer," "Silver City Bound" and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine."

"Leadbelly was a victim of prison life," Parks reflects. "Once he had established himself as a fairly rugged individual, everybody wanted to shoot him down to get the credit. He had a great deal of dignity, just as his father did. He was a man of strength and dignity."

Prison Scene

The bus driver let us walk to the shooting site. Extras were huddled around wood fires. The setting was a Job Corps center, former army barracks.

Gordon Parks Sr. in a heavy sheepskin coat with pipe in his mouth directed the setting of lights, camera ... and rehearsed Roger E. Mosely playing Leadbelly and Peter Harrell III, Ally George.

We just stood around as the damp muddy ground chilled our bones. The prop men painted the doors, set the scene, the prisoners rehearsed and the actors got directions.

Making a movie is long and tiresome. Two scenes were shot in the four hours we stood around in the cold. In this prison scene, Leadbelly, in leg irons is picked on by a white boss and is given a severe flogging. He is taken back to his bunk by Peter Harrell III where he swears they won't break him.

There are more than 12 black crew members ... so I moved around the set, from wood fire to w... ... getting mini interviews and by the time the scene was finally set, and shot, I could care less.

The next day, we had lunch with Roger E. Mosley, who the night before as Leadbelly, played the prison scene half naked in 30-degree weather; Gordon Parks Sr. the director; Art Evans who plays Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Marc Merson the producer. Lunch was in a private club in downtown Austin.

Since most of the press people were thoroughly chilled shooting of the next scene was moved up and shortened the next night. The idea was to watch the scene where Leadbelly is escaping from a sheriff, fights with a yard bull and hops an open box car.

The bus drove the press to a quarry with a spur line for these scenes. The idea was to have us eat outdoors with the crew and actors.

We watched Roger Mosely hop off the box car. Then as it got colder and colder we watched the next scene being set up, the fight for two hours. The NAACP-TV gals for the N.Y. show "Like It Is!" interviewed various crew people.

The technicians constantly moved the trains, focused lighting, shifted cameras and Director Parks rehearsed the actors as the heavily bundled script person moved around.

We all finally nixed the outdoor supper and our lesson in "How To Make A Movie in Austin, Texas" was over.

Space is so short, that during the next year as "Leadbelly" is processed we'll give you our interviews and reactions.

Hopefully, the next time they make a movie, I'll get asked to Burmuda, Germany? or just plain Hollywood.

Metropolitan Opera star Shirley Verrett, clad in a black diamond mink and leopard coat, is shown leaving a limousine as she arrives for her 1973 Coppin State College concert escorted by music department chairman Henry N. Freeman.

And now a word about...

Warner Bros. flew in some 150 members of the press to Chicago and housed them on three floors of the Bismarck Hotel for the premiere of "Freebie and the Bean," starring Valerie Harper, James Caan and Alan Arkin. Film opened the 10th Chicago International Film Festival. "It's a tasteless "Comedy" about two dumb cops breaking the law," says Variety.

• • •

A good example of why top film companies invest in black films is the report of Allied Artists Pictures Corp. which has reported first quarter net income of $248,000, more than 1,000 per cent higher than the net reported in the first quarter of the previous fiscal year. The money was earned on gross revenues of $5,523,000 and attributed to four of Allied's big fixtures: "Papillon," "Three the Hard Way," "Cabaret" and "The Internecine Project."

• • •

Antonio Fargas and **Jac Emel** are playing a couple of Cajun hoodlums in "The Drowning Pool," the First Artists Presentation for Warner Bros. Now filming on location in Louisiana, the film starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, will start shooting interiors in the Burbank Studios in late November. Fargas can currently be seen in "The Gambler," with James Caan.

• • •

The annual Image Awards program of the Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch of the NAACP is scheduled to be held Jan. 18 at the Hollywood Palladium. Bob Jones, publicity manager for Motown Record Corp., is chairman of the show. Sid Sheinberg, president and chief operating officer of MCA, Inc. is honorary chairman.

• • •

"The Wiz," the black musical treatment of "The Wizard of Oz" is a hit out of town and due to open in New York on Dec. 17 after previews Dec. 11-16. It has played Baltimore and is now in Detroit. But Broadway exposure may now be in another theatre than scheduled Winter Garden where "Gypsy" is now playing. Latter was scheduled to close on Nov. 20 but arrangements are now for an indefinite extension.

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Cleavon Little opens in Washington with previews of "All Over Town" a new comedy by Murray Schisgal and directed by Dustin Hoffman. It opens at National Theatre on Nov. 26.

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After the football season, **O. J. Simpson** has signed for another movie, this one "The Delegate," in which he plays a black diplomat in Russia. Meanwhile, his first feature film, "The Klansman," opened in L.A. on Nov. 13 and in NYC on Nov. 20.

• • •

"The Klansman" producer, Bill Alexander now in Rome with Richard Burton, Charlotte Rampling and Robert Mitchum where director Terrence Young has started shooting "Jackpot." And it's said Alexander, who has to be the top black film money-raiser, has closed a deal with Tom Jones to do a picture on the life of the Italian artist, Cellini.

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The Pointer Sisters scored a rare coup for a group by recording their latest hit, "Fairytale," in Nashville. It has become a country chart topper.

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Flip Wilson reportedly signed by Paramount to play Louis Armstrong in the movie of Satchmo's life with Cicely Tyson probably playing Lucille, his wife.

Music Notes

COPPIN

Mezzo soprano Shirley Verrett of the Metropolitan Opera will present a program of songs and arias at Coppin State College on Sun., Nov. 24, at 3:30 p.m.

"A voice that can do practically anything" wrote the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera after one of Shirley Verrett's La Scala performances. This remarkable statement pertains not only to the performance level for which the diva is acclaimed at all the important opera houses in the world, but also to the enormous range of her repertoire.

Miss Verrett is as much at home in the dramatic soprano field as in that of the mezzo-soprano and contralto. Her roles range from Carmen and Delilah to Queen Elizabeth in "Maria Stuarda" and "La Favorita;" from "Orfeo," Azucena and Anneris to Princess Eboli, Adalgisa in "Norma" and Selika in "L'Africaine."

Being a true exponent of the art of bel canto singing, it is not surprising that she is in demand the world over and that opera companies, whether the Metropolitan, La Scala, the Vienna State Opera, The Bolshoi, Convent Garden, the Paris Opera or the San Francisco Opera — mount special news productions of operas for her.

BOWIE

The Department of Music at Bowie State College will present Brenda Ellis in a Senior Voice Recital on Sun., Nov. 24, at 4:00 p.m. in the MLK Communication Arts Center Recital Hall.

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Brenda, who will graduate from Bowie State this December, is a soprano who is aiming at a career on the concert stage. She was the recipient of the Gino Panzeri Opera Prize for achieving the highest level of excellence in vocal performance in 1972 and the Charlotte Bronte Memorial Award for the outstanding music major at Bowie State in 1972 and 1973.

As a member of the United States Choir in 1972, Brenda participated in the Third International Choral Festival held at the Kennedy Center in D.C. and at the Lincoln Center in New York.

• • •

"South Pacific," a production of The Burn Brae Dinner Theatre Co., will be presented at Bowie State College on Friday, November 22, at 8:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the MLK Communication Arts Center.

• • •

Sponsored by the Bowie Fine Arts Society, Inc., "South Pacific" marks the beginning of this organization's five-program season.

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"HAMMER OF GOD"

The McKenzie report

Donald Byrd and Blackbyrds

By Yashti McKenzie

What's the best way to break into jazz these days?

Go to Howard University, take a course taught by jazz great Donald Byrd and if you're good ... and lucky ... tour with him on the weekends.

That's exactly what five young men are doing and are making it big all over the country.

They are, The Blackbyrds.

"Do It Fluid" is their hit. Their first album bears their name. Their new one out is "Flying Start".

Donald Byrd, The Blackbyrds and jazz flutist Bobbi Humphrey will be appearing at the Lyric Theater in concert on November 23, 8 p.m.

The five young men are all full-time students. They not only tour with Byrd on the weekends but also do concerts with such artists as Richard Pryor, Mandrill, Sly Stone, Gladys Knight and the Pips and Herbie Hancock.

The Blackbyrds

The Blackbyrds are: Kevin Toney, keyboard man and composition major from Detroit; Orville Saunders, guitarist and guitar major from D.C.; Keith Killgo, drummer and percussion, education major from Baltimore; Joe Hall, bassist and bass major from D.C.; and Wayne State student Jay Jonas, sax and flutist who'll be attending Howard this spring. He's a psychology major.

It was Donald Byrd teaching at Howard that initially drew my attention to Howard," said Toney, calling in from D.C.

Toney and Saunders started doing little things around town with Byrd and as students came to the school, they were incorporated into the band."

He said the group has been together for over a year.

Byrd

Byrd, just about the best jazz trumpeter around, is chairman of the Black Music Department. He teaches four classes each semester and accepts concert and lecture engagements ... flying his own jet no less.

He's just completed his first year of law school as well as created a course at Howard called "Legal Protection of Literature, Music and Art".

Byrd's last two albums "Black Byrd" and "Street Lady" are the best selling jazz albums in Blue Note Record's 30-year history.

His recent concert at New York's Philharmonic Hall with The Blackbyrds resulted in two sold out performances.

"Since he had good students working with him," said Toney, "he decided to help us out.

"He has a production company (Blackbyrd Productions, of course) and we all participate in it.

"We're artists and writers and through that connection, we got our break, a recording contract.

"It was his whole creation."

College Tours

Toney said in addition to all that, The Blackbyrds just finished recording the sound track for the movie "Hit The Open Man". It will be released February, 1975.

"Keith, our drummer, is singing the title song "Corn Bread", said Toney. "He does a lot of our singing. You've heard "Do It Fluid"? He sang that."

The Blackbyrds also tour many black colleges and universities giving clinic and lecture demonstrations. They've been to Payne, Benedict, Fisk, Spelman and Howard.

There seems to be a blend between two worlds here ... the world of the performing jazz artist and the academic world.

"We're into both aspects of it, said Toney. "We feel it is important.

"We feel it's important to play other colleges and show students what they can accomplish.

"College students don't get the chance to perform professionally and go to school at the same time. They don't get the experience."

The Blackbyrds will go on after graduation to get their doctorates.

Byrd has been called a academician, cultured researcher, humanitarian and teacher. Torch bearer should be added to the list, because he is indeed passing the torch to the young.

He's taken five excellent students under his wing and is teaching them to fly, not only in jam sessions but in the classroom as well.

Fly on Blackbyrds, fly high!

'Sizwe Banzi Is Dead'

By Jack Gaver

NEW YORK (UPI) — Two black actors from South Africa give moving performances in a drama about apartheid in their part of the world in "Sizwe Banzi Is Dead," now playing at the Edison Theater.

It is an uneven work, but it does hold interest more often than not. Largely due to the skills of the players. However, it is a message play, and playgoers merely seeking entertainment are not likely to appreciate it.

The work is described in the program as having been "devised" by well-known South African white playwright Athol Fugard, who also directed, and "the two black actors. It is something they worked out together while experimenting with the sperent players of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth.

The long opening portion is actually a monologue by Kani, who is called Styles.

A free-wheeling commentator on many current topics, including the restrictions of blacks in South Africa.

This Segues into the real drama, which deals with one Sizwe Banzi, played by Ntshona, who faces the prospect of having to go back to the bush because he doesn't have a properly endorsed identity book that will permit him to stay in Port Elizabeth and seek a job.

His friend, Buntu, shows him a way out when they discover a dead man in the street whose passbook is in order. It takes a lot of persuading for Sizwe Banzi to give up his name and assume that of the dead man, but eventually he does so.

This is a Royal Court Theater production from London, presented by arrangement with the English State Company by Hillard Elkins, Lester Osterman Productions, Bernard Delfont and Michael White.

A companion play, "The Island" opened Tues., Nov. 19.

First Choice has sure winner

The First Choice are seeing considerable pop action with their latest Lp release "The Player." Their current single is the title song of the album and is steadily making its way up the charts.

Pretty impressive for a trio of lovely women who banded together in 1971 while in their senior year at Overbrook High School in Philadelphia, Pa. Especially considering the fact they were named Best R and B Female Vocal Group of 1973 by both "Cash Box" and "Record World."

The First Choice is comprised of Rochelle Fleming, lead singer; Annette Guest, first soprano; and Joyce Jones, who sings alto and is the newest addition to the group. All three come from religious families and each girl started singing in church.

"Believe it or not, our professional career was officially launched when we were listening to the radio one day.

A song came over the radio and we knew that we could sing as well, if not better, than what we were hearing," commented Rochelle, who acts as group spokeswoman.

"So we went down to radio station WDAS and asked radio personality Georgie Woods if he would listen to us. He consented, and was so impressed he contacted producers Norman Harris and Al Sullivan.

"Before we knew it, we were in the studio recording our first single which Norman Harris wrote for us called "This Is The House Where Loved Died."

It was Norman Harris who introduced us to Stan Watson, who is our manager and has been the force behind the other successful acts like The Dolfonics.

Stan paid for our first recording session even though he had never heard us sing. Also, it was Stan who named us The First Choice."

"Although our first single didn't do that well on the American charts (it did better in England), it was our next one 'Armed and Extremely Dangerous,' that proved to be the turning point. It led to our first album called 'The First Choice — Armed and Extremely Dangerous,' a headline appearance at the Copacabana in New York, and a European tour with The Temptations."

When The First Choice performs they are indeed a sight to see. The girls generally take turns singing lead on stage, although Rochelle is the lead singer on all of their records. All three can do impersonations, and exhibit a real flare for comedy.

Since "Armed and Extremely Dangerous," The First Choice has had a string of successful singles, including "Smarty Pants," "Newsy Neighbors," and currently "The Player." The renowned MFSB Orchestra backs The First Choice on the album.

Gilbert Loren Stafford as Carrasco and Carl Pist at Baltimore Museum of Art sponsored by Children's Theatre.

TV Notes

By Yashti McKenzie

The hows and causes of the world food shortages — as well as possible solutions — will be explored in a one-hour NBC News White Paper, "And Who Shall Feed This World?" Sun., Nov. 24.

"Cotton Club '75," a black revue set in a contemporary recreation of the famed Cotton Club of the 1920's and 1930's will feature established artists and showcase young, professional talent when it is colorcast as a weekend, two-night 90-minute special on Sat., Nov. 23.

Guest stars include Aaron and Freddie, Frankie Allaye, Jonelle Allen, Ray Charles, Billy Daniels, John Dankworth, Clifton Davis, Redd Foxx, Goldfinger and Dove, Rosey Grier, Cleo Laine, the Lockers, the Nicholas Brothers, Buddy Rich, and Jimmy Walker.

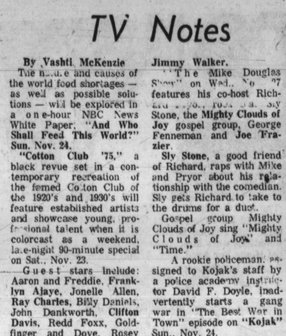
"The Mike Douglas Show" on Wed., Nov. 27 features his co-host Richard Pryor, Joe Simon, Sly Stone, the Mighty Clouds of Joy gospel group, George Fenneman and Joe Frazier.

Sly Stone, a good friend of Richard, raps with Mike and Pryor about his relationship with the comedian. Sly gets Richard to take to the drums for a duet.

Gospel group Mighty Clouds of Joy sing "Mighty Clouds of Joy" and "Time."

A rookie policeman assigned to Kojak's staff by a police academy instructor David P. Doyle, inadvertently starts a gang war in "The Best War in Town" episode on "Kojak" Sun., Nov. 24.

If you sleep more then 15 minutes a night, perhaps you are getting too much sleep. Nova explores this question in "The Secrets of Sleep," on Sun., Nov. 24 on stations of the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting.



Billy Daniels turns over to Mayor Tom Bradley during taping of "Cotton Club '75" to be aired Sat., Nov. 23.

Rufus Mayflower (Tierre Turner, cq) tries the patience of Mr. Remmington (Ralph Hoopes), the druggist, when he questions the high cost of toothpaste in "The Toothpaste Millionaire."

Morgan calendar

December 1-20 — Morgan Art Gallery — "The Haystack Encounter Summer 1974" (Black and white craftmen meet). The exhibition is co-sponsored by the Pi...

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December 4-8 — Morgan Drama — Murphy Fine Arts Building "The Blacks" by Jean Genet directed by Marmon Watson.

• • •

December 12 — 8:15 p.m. Student Union — Faculty Lecture Series — "Steppin' Fetchit Revisited: Origins of Racial Stereotyping in American Movies." Thomas Cripps, department of history.

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Enoch Pratt

November 30)

Sun., Nov. 24

"Jack Johnson," film at the Central Pratt Library, Wheeler Auditorium, 2 p.m.

Mon., Nov. 25

"Aretha Franklin, Soul Singer," "Black Music in America," and "Roberta Flack," films at the Pratt Library's Clifton Center, 6:30 p.m.

"The Ascent of Man: Music of the Spheres" (Part 5), film at the Central Pratt Library, Wheeler Auditorium, 7:30 p.m.

Tues., Nov. 26

"The Ascent of Man: Music of the Spheres" (Part 5), film at the Central Pratt Library, Wheeler Auditorium, 2 p.m.

"The Real West" and "The Western Hero," films at the Pratt Library's Gorsuch Avenue Center, 4 p.m.

Sat., Nov. 30

"Great Expectations," film at the Central Pratt Library, Wheeler Auditorium, 2 p.m.

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