Shirley Verrett enflames 'Macbeth' at Kennedy Center gala

By Charles Farrow
AFRO Columnist

After more than 540 twenty four hour days and 18,314 performance hours, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, still parading its chic shoulders, is stepping off into its next half of a decade.

Last Tuesday evening, some five years after the formal opening of the Kennedy Center, Sept. 8, 1971, the Edward Durrell Stone marble creation, was blazing with all of its lights on again (because of the energy crisis caused by lack of funds, the lights have been turned down for quite awhile). There was lots of music, a beautifully dressed audience, a lavish buffet with a full moon over head and ultimately the reverberation of the sounds of Teatro alla Scala.

The conditions surrounding the arrival of the company popularly known as La Scala, is certainly book material in case Martin Feinstein, the strong closed fist behind the Kennedy Center operations, is moved to write one.

It was an on again, off again situation, nailed down positively just in time for this bicentennial appearance.

Never letting up on the drama, the opening night performance, scheduled to begin at 7:15 p.m., was almost an hour late. The platform, raised for a rehearsal earlier in the day, could not be lowered back into the orchestra pit.

Nail biting, teeth gritting and interminable pacing aside, a feeling of suspense was built right up to the moment the conductor, Claudio Abbado, flung up his arms and started the orchestra off in a rousing and forceful playing of the national anthems of the U.S. and Italy.

Mezzo Soprano Shirley Verrett

Since the Kennedy Center opened there have been very few black performers in the Opera House or Eisenhower Theatre of really classical performing strengths in techniques artistry to impact those stages. There was only James Earl Jones playing in "Of Mice and Men" and perhaps Judith Jamison somewhere behind, trailed distantly by Pearl Bailey. That was until last Tuesday evening.

Shirley Verrett, an American soprano, who happens to be black, entered the action on the stage and lit a fire under the performance of Verdi's "Macbeth".

She filled the wine colored Opera House with a rich, totally impressive sound, full of the passion and driven emotion required to give meaning to her role of Lady MacBeth.

Ms. Verrett is not a member of the Teatro alla Scala, but she has had singular successes singing in the home of this most venerable opera house in Milan, Italy.

She has sung in most of the major opera houses in the world. The use of this genuinely great black artist to open this visit by the legendary opera company is a stroke of programing genius.

The opera itself is something just short of a miracle in sound, drama and visuals. Set at an inclined angle, the stage thrusts the action always towards the audience, forcefully.

Moving in a primeval glow, created by the subdued lighting and muted colours of the background sets, upon first hearing, this opera, unfamiliar as it is, is a real excitiement.

The settings combined several creatively stimulating scenes, the billowing overhead canopy used to create settings, the witches caught up in a singular covering and the slow procession of the Scotsmen across the stage lamenting their outcast state.

Then there is the posturing, the strong movements, the continual use of the seeming[illegible] miles long train to the constumes of Ms. Verrett and of Piero Cappuccilli who plays Macbeth.

With each turn, as the music heightens the drama, this costuming seems to frame the action of the fierce couple.

The benefactors of the Kennedy Center continue to line up to support this Bagdad on the Potomac. Grants for the Washington performance of Teatro alla Scala came from Washington's Cafritz Foundation.

When a representative was asked was it a secret, how much the Philip Morris Company had contributed. The answer was quick and eagerly supplied, "Oh no, it was one hundred thousand dollars!"

The celebration that was held outside on the river terrace was a sumptuous affair, incorporating the flavor of Italian food (no pizza or pasta) with the straight, non-Italian music by Devron and the presence of the beautiful people like Mrs. Hobart Taylor regal looking in a soft pink rose gown.

It was a perfect night to cut a giant cake created in the model of the Center and to celebrate the anniversary of a building that has left a decided imprint upon American and international performing arts.

What's Happening

By Ida Peters

Editor's Notes: Mrs. Ida Peters is on vacation. The entertainment pages are being managed by Mrs. Vashti McKenzie until her return next month.

The Morgan State University Student Government is presenting a "Black Music Week". (A Salute in Commemoration of the Birth and Musical Contribution of John Coltrane) at the Cold Spring and Hillen Rd. campus Sept. 20-25.

The salute will span the many musical idioms of the black experience including blues, gospel, jazz and blues and jazz.

The salute will include free daily workshops, panel discussions and concerts. Nationally known speakers will appear including Martin Williams, Horace Boyer, Pearl Williams Jones and Phyl Garland.

On the 50th anniversary of John Coltrane's birth, September 23, there will be a dinner and concert in the College Center. The guest speaker is Dr. C. O. Simpkins author of "Coltrane: A Biography". The dinner also includes a concert by Jackie McLean and the Cosmis Brotherhood, and Earl and Carl Grubbs, Coltrane's nephews.

The week's activities will culminate with a concert featuring Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Erland and Nation featuring Haki Mahabuti on Sat., Sept. 25. The panel discussion begin at 10 a.m. and the workshons begin at 2 p.m. They are held in the Carl Murphy Auditorium.

AFRO-AMERICAN columnist Fred Douglass is participating in Saturday's panel discussion of the Left Bank Jazz Society.

For a complete schedule of events for SGA's Black Music Week contact M. Shariff Campbell at 893 3454.

"A New Experience" offers its first dramatic presentation this weekend, Sept. 17, 18 and 19 at the Community College of Baltimore.

"The Sty of the Blind Pig" by Phillip Hayes Dean stars Verna Day, Claudette Allen, Calvin Parker and Benjamin Prestbury as "Uncle Doc.,, The show begins at 8 p.m. and call 484-6593 for ticket information.

"A New Experience" is the creation of Prestbury, an actor of considerable talent, who starred in such hits as "Purlie" and "Midnight Speets" with Raymond St. Jacques and in many local films and on TV.

It's based on the idea that Baltimore's acting talent must be provided with a vehicle in which to develop that offers them monetary rewards.

Prestbury hopes to open his second show in January and another in April. "Hello Dolly" and "A Cabin in the Sky" are being considered.

"The Sty of the Blind Pig" will again be presented Sept. 24, 25 and 26.

The Houston Grand Opera production of the complete original production of "Porgy and Bess" will open on Broadway this Tuesday, Sept. 21.

With a cast of 125, the Gershwin classic makes it's comeback with all scenes and full orchestration for the first time.

The original production in 1935 was hampered by financial limitations and a small orchestra pit. The staging and orchestration was then edited. Subsequent Broadway revivals including the 1959 movie version followed the 1935 pattern.

This 1976 version, the largest legitimate show ever to play Broadway, brings the total number of black shows on Broadway to four. The other's are Tony Award winner "The Wiz," "Bubbling Brown Sugar" and all black version of "Guys and Dolls".

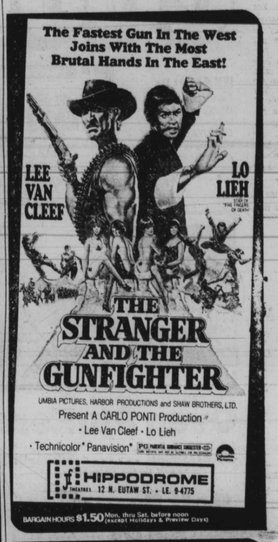
Ben Prestbury is starring in Phillip Hayes Deans's "Sty of The Blind Pig" at CCB this weekend.

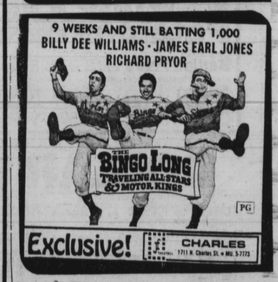
Coming Events

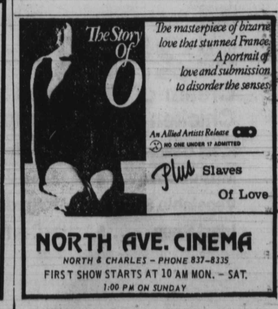
A demonstration-lecture on how to make macrame necklaces will be given by Mrs. George Hubble on Thursday, September 23, at 6:30 p.m. at the Govans branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Bellona Avenue near York Road.

Mon., Sept. 20 "Heritage of the Negro," film at the Pratt Library's Keyworth Avenue Center, 6:30 p.m.

"Our Relations," film at the Pratt Library's Broadway Branch, 6 p.m.







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BAD SEED MAXWELL ANDERSON	DECEMBER 3, 5, 9, 12, 17, 19
NONE TO CALL HIM FATHER MELVIN DeGREE	JANUARY 7, 9, 13, 16, 21 23, 28, 30
IT'S SHOWDOWN TIME DON EVANS	FEBRUARY 18, 20 24, 27, MARCH 4, 6, 11, 13
BILL OF ONE ACT PLAYS SHOES-TED SHINE	APRIL 15, 17, 21 24, 29 MAY 1, 6, 8
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'Joanne'!

By Vashti McKenzie

Robbie McCauley from Hyattsville Maryland has been given the coveted role modeled after Joan Little in Ed Bullins' new play "Joanne" currently in rehearsal. The new drama is scheduled to open early next month at New York's 12 Theater of the Riverside Church prior to its proposed Broadway run.

Robbie is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. McCauley of Rittenhouse St. She attended Howard and New York Universities.

Featured last year as Peggy in Bullins' Critics Prize and Obie Award winning play "The Taking of Miss Janie" last season, she has also worked with the Negro Ensemble Company in New York and for Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival.

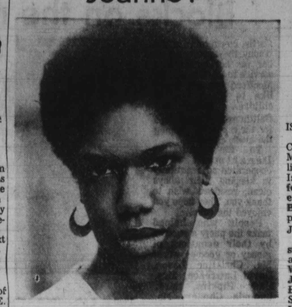
"Joanne!" is the dramatic study of how things might have been that night in the North Carolina jail when Joan Little killed her white jailer.

Miss Little made headlines not too long ago when she was tried for the murder of her jailer. Allgoode. She claimed self-defense testifying she had been forced into a sex act. She won.

Incidently a film version of the Joan Little story is eminent. Ike Jones has made a deal reportedly with Universal and filming the story should begin soon.

Even though Miss Little won her murder case, she is still in jail serving a two-year term for robbery.

Dr. Cos, if you please: Bill Cosby, who recently delved into musical satire on his album "Bill Cosby Is Not Himself These Days, Rat Own, Rat, Own, Rat Own," has earned a doctorate degree in education from the University for Massachusetts. He recently passed the final test, appropriately an oral exam. His thesis was titled: "The Integration of Visual Media via Fat Albert and The Cosby Kids Into the Elementary Schools Culminating as a Teacher Aide to Achieve Increased Learning." Cos earned his Master's at the same school in 1972.


Robbie McCauley

The Temptations are to music what the Ford family is to the automobile industry, and after 14 years in the music industry, it's finally happened, "The Temptations Do The Temptations," their exciting new album celebrating the silver anniversary of The Temptations' " 25 solo albums for Motown Records.

For those of you who don't go all the way back with the Temptations, their very first album was, "Meet the Temptations" (1964), since that time they have left a glittering trail of gold classics, compiling 12 gold albums including their last three, "A Song For You," "House Party," and "Wings Of Love."

* * *

The Commodores, latest super group to emerge from Motown's new corp of stars, has entered the top twenty best seller charts with their newest album, "Hot On The Tracks," and is headed to the coveted number one spot in Billboard, Cash Box and Record World, bibles of the music industry.

"Hot On The Tracks" contains the smash single, "Just To Be Close To You" which was released last week and is expected to skyrocket up the trade publications best selling singles charts.

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Arts and Music

ISLEY BROTHERS

On Mon., Sept. 20, at the Capital Centre Landover, Maryland, Dimensions Unlimited, Inc. presents "The Isley Brothers Festival" featuring The Isley Brothers, Wild Cherry and Black Smoke. Show Time 9 p.m.

JAZZ

Sat., Sept. 18, at Constitution Hall (DAR), 18th and D Sreets, N.W., Wash., D.C. "The Bob James Concert" featuring Bob James and His All Star Jazz Cast and Dexter Wansel Accompanied by Tom Cara. Show Time 8:30 p.m.

* * *

CHAMBER MUSIC

The Park School Music Department opens its 1976-77 season of Sunday Afternoon Chamber Concerts this Sunday with a program spanning four hundred years of English music performed by the players of Early Music. The concert begins at 2:30 p.m. in the school's music room and is open to the public without charge.

Ella Fitzgerald

EVENTS FOR CHILDREN

Tues., Sept. 21 Morrell Park Center: Films — "Time Flies," "The Mole as a Painter" and "The Town Musicians," 3 p.m.

Brooklyn Branch: Arts and Crafts for 6- to 12-year-olds, 3:15 p.m.

Wed., Sept. 22 Broadway Branch: Films — "Science Fiction Highlights" and "Matrioska," 3 p.m.

Isley Brothers

TV Notes

By

The legendary Ella Fitzgerald is the guest performer on "Evening at Pops" Sun., Sept. 19 at 8:00 p.m. on stations of the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting.

First the Pops Orchestra does a sparkling Sousa march and a medley from the Broadway hit "Guys and Dolls." Ella, then arrives to sing "Thou Swell," "Our Love Is Here to Stay," and a glorious Duke Ellington medley.

She continues to work her magic with "I Only Have Eyes for You," "One-Note Samba," Duke Ellington's "Caravan," followed by Gershwin's spellbinding "My Ship."

* * *

COS PREMIERES

Who's giving the bird to whom? The Bird meets the Bird this fall on the new series, "COS," starring Bill Cosby.

Depending upon who gets top billing, the bird is either Fred the Cockatoo who talks to Robert Blake on the network's hit series, "Baretta," or Detroit Tigers pitching ace Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, who talks to baseballs.

Fred the Cockatoo will guest on an early episode of "COS" which premieres Sun., Sept. 19. Then he'll return the following to "interview" the Detroit hurler.

The nature of their plained discussions has thus far not been disclosed. Rumor has it they'll "sing it."

"The Captain and Tennille," (Daryl Dragon and Toni Tennille) will kick off their new series, Mon., Sept. 20, with an hour of comedy and music featuring guest stars Penny Marshall (Laverne in "Laverne and Shirley;", Ron Palillo (Horshack) and Lawrence Hilton Jacobs (Washington) of "Welcome Back, Kotter"; Fonzie's girlfriend, Pinky Tuscadero (Roz Kelly) making her first appearance on TV, and special guest star Jackie Glenson.

* * *

Multi-Emmy Award winner Dick Van Dyke is joined by Emmy winners, Flip Wilson and Chevy Chase (of "NBC's Saturday Night"), his guest stars in the event-full premiere of Van Dyke's return to weekly TV as the star of his first comedy-variety series, "Van Dyke and Company," to be on Mon., Sept. 20.

* * *

Billy Dee Williams enacts a scene from "I Have A Dream" now playing on Broadway, in which he portrays the late Dr. Matin Luther King Jr. on "Today" Tues. Sept. 21.

City Fair Highlights

There's lots of music and fun to be had at the 7th Annual Baltimore City Fair Sept. 17, 18 and 19 just west of the Inner Harbor.

This evening (Friday) at 8 p.m. the legendary Joe Williams will be in concert on the Fair's main stage. Williams' special vocal mastery of blues and ballads has made him an entertainment success for more than 30 years.

The "King of Swing," Benny Goodman and his sextet takes the main stage Sat. Sept. 18 at 8 p.m.

Buddy Rich and his Killer Force keeps things hot and heavy on the main stage Sun. Sept. 19. The drum wonder and his bright young band of 16 swing into action at 8 p.m.

At the 7th Annual Fair's International Village presenting a potpourri of food and cultural exhibits, there will continuous entertainment on the Ethic Stage. Highlights include The Pattaakiman Hawaiian Dancers performing today (Friday) at 1 p.m.; the Polish Trojaki Dance Circle of Maryland on Saturday at Noon and the Junior Hibernians on Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

A new feature at this year's City Fair is a film showing Baltimore's early days and a lively slide presentation of the city today.

The Magnificent City Fair Theater, located in the east side of the Arts and Crafts building at the Fair's center will show "A Perfect Lady." It's a 28-minute film history of Baltimore until the 1904 fire and is shown every hour on the hour.

On every half hour the three big screens in the theater, which seats 100, will flash slides taken of Baltimore by winners in the Citizens Planning and Housing Association's Baltimore Slide Contest.

For the children there will not only be clowns, rides and a petting zoo in their own special area but a stage devoted to children's entertainment.

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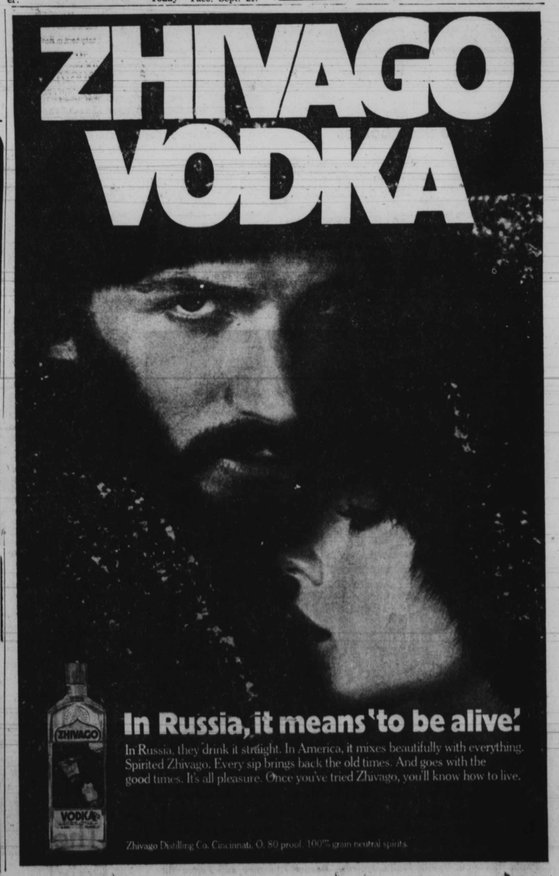

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