Expatriate Misses Black Humor

Crime is not a major problem in Europe, what is missed most is blacks humor—you won't find it on the Continent.

By Ann Williams-Roblow

Expatriate. What makes a man or woman leave behind family, friends and the familiar sights, smells and sounds of home?

What makes a man or woman journey across oceans, continents and mountains to set down roots, learn a new language in a new land?

For some black Americans, those who are sensitive, creative and idealistic — artists, writers, poets, singers and musicians — the movement abroad dates back to the 1920s and probably far beyond.

They have, as expatriates, forsaken the United States of America for the likes of Europe, Africa and Asia.

Few figures exist which can say whether the movement in search of respect, recognization, artistic expression and monetary rewards — so lacking in America back then — has abated in the more liberal times of the 1970s and the 1980s.

Each black American had his or her own reasons for leaving. Undoubtably 50 years ago, the harsh realities of racial prejudice and discrimination played no small part in the decision.

Singer - actress Josephine Baker left for Paris. A Parisian cafe-owner and entertainer, known only to this writer as "Brick Top," was another expatriate.

Jazz musician Dexter Gordon left for Scandinavia. Writers James Baldwin and W. E. B. DuBois chose France, Turkey and the African nation of Ghana as their new homes.

Expatriate. Add another name to the long list of those who have migrated. She is a singer of jazz, pop, classical and gospel music. She is a native of Baltimore, MD, a southeastern commercial and industrial city.

Her name is Betty Dorsey. Germany and Spain are home to her now.

The youngest of 10 children, Ms. Dorsey was born in Baltimore's University Hospital. She is the daughter of the late Roger Dorsey and Catherine Dorsey, who still reside in Baltimore.

She has a twin brother, Gordon.

The Dorseys were a musical lively family in the 1940s and 1950s. With eight brothers and a sister, all of whom played musical instrumentals or sang, there never eas a dull moment in their Cherry Hill household.

Ms. Dorsey's childhood has been described as "harmonious and happy," even though she, her sister and brothers wore "hand-me-down clothes" and were forced to eat in shifts.

Her first musical venture outside of the family was the Methodist Children's Choir. Ms. Dorsey's professional singing career was launched several years later with the group "Fourmost."

Billed then as a "modern vocal jazz quartette," three of her eight brothers rounded out the group.

Betty Dorsey was educated in Baltimore public schools. Talented, she was smart and pretty, too. A 1963 graduate of Eastern High School, she was the class salutatorian.

Four years later in 1967, Ms. Dorsey was graduated from Morgan State University in Baltimore, one of the state's four predominately black colleges. She was second in her class.

Money probably was tight in the large Dorsey family. To work her way through college — she was a history major at Morgan — Ms. Dorsey sang at small nightclubs during the weekends.

They were names familiar mostly to Baltimoreans — Buck's Bar, the Chesapeake Lounge and Marticks.

During her stint with her brothers as the "Fourmost," Betty Dorsey met such musical luminaries as Lionel Hampton, Sammy Davis Jr., Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald and gospel great, Mahalia Jackson.

It was at the urging and encouragement of some of these great performers that persuaded Betty Dorsey to "keep on pushing" at her career.

While still a student at Morgan, she applied for a Fulbright Scholarship to Mainz University in West Germany. She said she thought she would have a better chance there, since most students were applying to English-speaking countries.

Ms. Dorsey's decision to study German in college was made only after she learned the French class was full.

Opera workshops with Joseph Eubanks and her Morgan professors, such as Drs. Benjamin Quarles and Hayword Harrison, were helpful during her college years. After her 1967 graduation, she was off to Germany on scholarship, that to be followed by a fellowship at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Little did Betty Dorsey know at the time, she was embarking on a life as an expatriate. She never returned from Germany to live again in the United States, thus forsaking her UCLA fellowship.

In Europe, she toured with a production of "Porgy and Bess" to much acclaim in 1969. Ms. Dorsey admits she never has had much in the way of formal voice training. Hers is a natural talent.

"None, except I was instructed for my role in 'Porgy and Bess' and the lead for 'Carmen,' " she said.

It also was in the year 1969 love found Betty Dorsey. She said she met Juergen Moebius in a

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Betty Dorsey belts out the tune Cry Out.

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