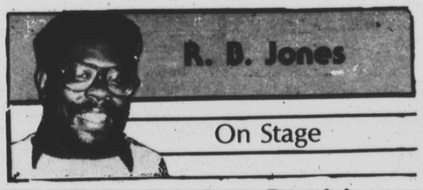

'Portraits of my People' has good intentions

"Portraits of My People" the current production of The Encore Dinner Theater appears to be a production with the best of intentions.

However, a sage once said that "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions," and unfortunately "Portraits of My People" adds a few yards of paving to the highway to Hell.

Even during Black History Month, the teaching of historical lessons must be done in a way that will keep the attention of the learner.

When it comes to history lessons contained in theatrical presentations, the rules of good theater still apply.

"Portraits of My People" contains references to such heroic figures as Shaka Zulu, Madame C.J. Walker, Benjamin Banneker and Jan Matzeliger. Great issues in the history of black people are touched on such as slavery and the development of the black church.

Far too often this play is a preachy history lesson instead of a drama with characters that the audience can care for.

"Portraits..." contains monologues, songs and some dancing. If it had been a church or school production the lack of continuity, uneven pace, and lackluster script would have been understandable.

However this is not a school or church play and in the final analysis, theater is theater. It stands or falls based on the same rules.

The basic plot of the show is that a young girl is taught about her heritage through the assistance of a character known as Sage.

Sage brings to life some portraits of figures who played a significant role in black history. These figures for the most part deliver monologues that are a bit long and often unfocused.

For example Madame C.J. Walker appears on stage, but during her monologue the audience learns very little about this woman who pioneered the black hair care industry.

Jan Matzeliger, the inventor of the shoe lasting machine appears on stage, but we learn very little about him during his time on stage.

The connecting thread of the play is not handled very well either. The little girl and the sage wander in and out of the play, seemingly without purpose. The sage also is continually in motion when she is on stage. This is very distracting and violates the very useful rule that says that movement on stage must always have motivation.

The one time that the production really came to life was when four male actors in the show portrayed Nat Turner, leader of the famous Virginia slave rebellion of 1831, and his fellow conspirators.

Their scene appeared to be excerpted from a full length play and the interaction of the four characters brought the audience to life. It was the one time during the evening that the dialogue and the acting provided some excitement.

Overall the play was too preachy and static, yet at the same time, a minimal amount of historical information was delivered.

A perfect example was a slavery scene where the three women working in a field sing "Amazing Grace" which is neither a spiritual nor a work song. In all probability that song would not have been sung by slaves working in the field.

The service and the food at the Encore Dinner Theater were excellent as usual. If the play "Portraits..." had been written in a manner that interwove the historical facts with a sense of what makes a play a good investment of one's time, the evening would have been totally enjoyable.

As it stands now, "Portraits..." emphasizes too much the notion that the audience is there to learn a history lesson, rather than to experience a well-crafted play.

The production runs every Wednesday in the month of February at the Encore Dinner Theater in the Five Mile House nightclub.

Cast members of Portraits of My People currently playing at the Encore Dinner Theater (front row, l to r) Ed Smith, Jr., Irene Haigh, Beatrice Thomas, Keith Snipes, and Douglass Whitt. Back row (l to r) Pamela Annette, Mitchell Ferguson and Melvin Cooper.

'Bedroom Window' will fill an evening

THE BEDROOM WINDOW, a thriller filmed in good old Baltimore, won't top the list of all-time-great-movies-you-can't-miss, but it still turned out better than expected.

Running approximately two hours, the film spins a tangled, web of intrigue mixed with deception, muddled with romance and riddled with murder. This mildly suspenseful movie would have been more believable had director Curtis Hanson used a different and more able cast.

Steve Guttenberg, Elizabeth McGovern and Isabelle Huppert, star (of sorts), however none can even come close to the mark of exceptional performance. Guttenberg never seems to get comfortable with his role, he smiles too much, is way too gullible and kind of a wimp. McGovern labels him (in the movie) "a romantic fool or an idiot." I agree, on both counts.

But McGovern is also miscast as the sexy bar waitress, able to turn men into lustful fiends. Far be it for me to say that she is not attractive to some, but a vamp, please. Her movements are stiff, her voice is devoid of any erotic overtones and her body is well, a bit on the wee straight and narrow, if you know what I mean, for lack of a better description. I doubt if she has attracted anything more than spa memberships and boy scouts.

Isabelle Huppert is the complete opposite of Elizabeth McGovern, she reeks of sex but also lacks the necessary warmth to pull it off. Her character is unbelievable and her french accent seems overworked. As wife to a seemingly virile, macho and wealthy industrialist, she still somehow prefers preppie Guttenberg in bed instead of her husband. My conclusion: maybe hubbie has an old war injury(?)

At least the familiar sights of B'more look good on film, complete with historic architecture, and landmarks, including Fells Point, Little Italy, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Washington Monument and Mt. Vernon Place. Guttenberg even rides the Charles Street trolley in one scene and drives a stolen Baltimore police car (so much for our guys in blue, eh?).

The jist of the storyline is that Guttenberg and Huppert are backstreet lovers, exchanging glances at parties, engaging in clandestine meetings and hot and heavy breathing. Never do they seem to become friends though, a fact that becomes increasingly evident as the movie moves on.

After a secret session of wine and woo, Huppert hears a scream, gets up, goes to the "bedroom window" and witnesses an attempted assault on a young woman (McGovern). She calls to Guttenberg in the bathroom by now, to come and see what's happening. He rushes in, but the pale, red-headed rapist/murderer has vanished, leaving the battered woman moaning on the street.

But what's an infidel wife to do? Go to the police and confess to seeing the criminal act and the perpetrator from another man's bedroom window at 2 o'clock in the morning? Withhold the evidence and forget it ever happened? Or convince her smitten and native lover to say he was the lone witness? If you chose excuse number three, you're right.

After a lot of lying and hiding in alleys, Guttenberg goes on the stand and gets torn limb from limb by what appears to be the typical Baltimore lawyer, tough, short and Jewish, smiling all the way. Guttenberg's mistake? He wears contact lenses.

This film is not a thriller by normal standards but if you're not picky about details, THE BEDROOM WINDOW will fill an evening. The outcome is routinely exciting with a car chase, fight and other predictable happenings.

THE BEDROOM WINDOW, is rated R, probably because of the insinuated nature of the story and the partial nudity here and there, but nothing to get excited about. Now playing at area theatres.

— Happenings

Continued from page 2

noons and Saturday mornings. For further information, call 467-6484.

THEATRE

'227'

The next production of the Arena Players will be "227" running through February 22. The production is by Christine Houston and was the original production for the current television sitcom which stars Marla Gibbs. For ticket information, and curtain times, call 728-6500.

To have your event listed, send information at least 2 weeks in advance to:

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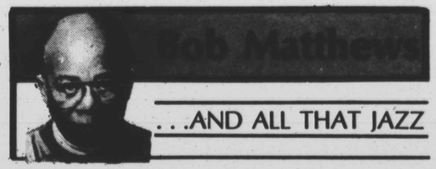

Whenever **Sun Ra** and his troupe are scheduled to come into town, there is always a rush to try to dig up some of the obscure facts surrounding his mystique.

For example, if you try to look him up in some of the older jazz anthologies and encyclopedia, it will be difficult to find his name, unless you happen to know that his original name was Herman "Sonny" Blount.

He first changed his name to **Le Sony'r Ra,** and from there to just plain Sun Ra. He started out in show business with **John "Fess" Whatley's** band in the 1930s, then settled in Chicago.

There he played club dates and worked as an accompanist. He was a member of the **Fletcher Henderson** Band at the Club DeLisa 1946-47, and with **Gene Wright's** Dukes of Swing in 1948.

His own Arkestra was formed in the mid 1950s, and some of his original band members are still in the group. Of course, he is remembered by those familiar with his work in the 70s, as the "Space is the Place" man.

His band still contains singers and dancers, all wear lavish costumes, with gold lame one of the predominant features. Sometimes, there are slides and movies shown in the background at one of his performances.

In other words, he and his group put on quite a show, and they will be here Sunday to open the season for the Left Bank Jazz Society at Coppin State College Tawes Center.

If things run true to form, **Sun Ra** and the Arkestra will play some of the Fletcher Henderson arrangements during the first set. And they are really foot-stomping things which point out why big bands were "the" thing in the 30s and 40s.

Concert goes from 5-9 p.m., and it's a BYOB, and this time they have added, and "bring your picnic basket." Guess that means there won't be Willis' chicken—sigh...!

* * *

Also in town this week is **Frederick Dewayne (Freddie) Hubbard,** who will be the featured performer at Ethel's Place through Sunday night.

It's a quintet this time, which encompasses, as well as Freddie on trumpet and flugelhorn, **Ralph Moore,** tenor sax; **Larry Willis,** piano; **Carl Allan,** drums, and **Mike Formanclo,** bass.

Must confess we hadn't heard of a couple of the side men, but if they are in Freddie's troupe, then you know they are real swingers.

Freddie was born in Indianapolis in 1938, and is another of the Blakey Messengers alumni—of the 60s variety. He's been coming to Baltimore for quite some time.

Can remember when **Henry Baker** had the old club Peyton Place in the 2700 block Pennsylvania Ave., for Freddie was almost a regular at the club.

He has appeared for the Left Bank Jazz Society many times, and established a reputation — he was never once on time for a concert. But, to his credit, once he got there, he made up for it all.

Don't anticipate any such problems with the Ethel's gig, since Freddie will already be in town.

* * *

Over at the Jazz Closet this weekend, Baltimore's musical treasure **Gary Bartz** will be there for his last weekend for a while. Next week, his tour starts, and although initially, it will be in this area, it won't be at Jazz Closet prices.

Next week, he is scheduled into the One Step Down in D.C., and this will be followed by a weekend gig at Ethel's Place. Really can't wait to hear Bartz and the group in the Ethel's setting, simply because the acoustics, ambiance is one of the tops in the country.

Actually, at the Jazz Closet, there is more intimacy, since the limited size puts you into closer contact with the artists, but let's face it, hearing Bob Butta on the grand piano at Ethel's cannot be compared with that venerable upright at the Jazz Closet.

Notice we called Gary, Baltimore's musical treasure, and we mean it sincerely, for Gary is blowing better now than we have ever heard him, and we have never heard a bad performance from him.

Just kinda happy he chooses to come back home every now and then, for we know for a fact, that he could be making it big in New York, California, or Europe. Better check him out before it's too late.

* * *

Saturday, February 21, the **Jazz Heritage Foundation** presents the Public School Jazz Ensemble Festival at 2 p.m.

It will be held in the Dunbar Community High School, and featured will be instrumental and vocal ensembles from Baltimore City public schools.

* * *

Then Tuesday night, February 24, two of the top modern jazz artists on the scene today will be at the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, beginning at 8 p.m.

George Howard, multi-reedman and his group, and **Bob James,** renowned keyboardist, arranger and composer and his quintet will be the featured artists.

With James is **Gary King, Roger Powell, Kirk Whalum, Dean Brown** and **Yogi Horton.** And you can bet they will be featuring selections from their Grammy nominated album, Obsession, which is riding high on the charts.

'Tis shaping up to be a spectacular evening, and if you are a devotee of the high-energy electronics mixed with acoustic sound—then this should not be missed.

B.B. King hosts 'Listener's Guide to the Blues'

"When black migrants left the Deep South for the North, the blues they played went with them. The blues was not so much a musical style as a way of life," says blues great B.B. King, host of "A Listener's Guide to the Blues."

The series of four half-hour programs will be presented on National Public Radio's documentary series "Horizons" as part of a month-long celebration of Black History Month. The series is scheduled to be broadcast on Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.

Each program will focus on a different facet of the blues, with a representative artist featured. The series begins with Son Seals, a practitioner of the Chicago blues style who has deep roots in Arkansas. B.B. King goes on to salute blues-singing women, and welcomes the magnificent Koko Taylor, a woman born in one great blues town, Memphis, who settled in another, Chicago, retaining the driving energy and emotion of each.

Next, the program traces the music westward with singer and guitarist John Copeland, who plays the big-band arrangements and guitar licks that are the quintessence of Texas blues.

California bluesman Lowell Fulson is the focus of the final program. A talented singer and songwriter, Fulson penned "three O'Clock Blues," which was B.B. King's first hit, and "Every Day I Have The Blues," a major success for Count Basie (another Western bluesman) and his Orchestra.

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