'Doors' is child's view of divorce

By Darryl Elwood Owens
AFRO Staff Writer

Perhaps the most painful experience that a child in his formative years can go through is the divorce of his or her parents. The soul-ripping event often leaves the child wondering what he did or could do to stop the break-up.

"Doors," by Suzan L. Zeder, is a play told from the perspective of a child facing his parents' eminent divorce. The play is a poignant look at the family tragedy aimed at children in grades three through eight.

The play is part of the Kennedy Center's Education Department's Programs for Children and Youth (PCY), which in its 13th season continues to present free public performances for metropolitan school children in order to develop new works for kids and to teach basic skills in the performing arts.

LaFontaine Oliver, a sixth grade student at DC's Ann Beers Elementary School, stars as 11-year-old Jeff, who on a late summer day fleshes out the turbulent times leading to the divorce by acting out a series of fantasies with his best friend Sandy (Justin Lenderkin) in Jeff's bedroom.

You see and hear Jeff's parents Ben (Harry Tate) and Helen (Pamela Armstrong) through their bedroom door. You also see the pent-up anger and sense of helplessness build-up in Jeff.

He demolishes a prized model he had worked diligently on. He turns on the television and radio to full volume to drown out the shouting and yelling.

Jeff figures if he can't hear it, it isn't happening.

"Doors" takes Jeff and the audience through the stages of divorce from Jeff's initial denial to his eventual sad acceptance.

Tate stressed "Doors" is "an honest and real portrayal" of divorce but even so it is a "pretty picture of the truth because it goes deeper still. It's (the essence) there, but it's not there."

Armstrong added "Doors" "really portrays the beginning as down the line it (divorce) gets real messy."

While his parents never divorced, Tate, a Largo, Md. resident, said he brought the experience of having "lived this play" in terms of having lived through the fighting and bickering parents endure.

"I kind of had to relive what went on when I was growing up ... As an actor I had to figure out how to best show the emotions and obstacles that can block communication and lead to divorce ... There's a wall there ...."

What is truly intriguing about "Doors" is the reactions of the youthful audience.

Although divorce is more common today — an estimated 50 percent of marriages end in divorce — the experience still engenders mixed emotions and confusion in children who must cope with anger, sadness, guilt and fear of the unknown which is a mindboggling brew for anyone — especially a youngster.

"It's interesting with different age groups," said Armstrong "kids ages six or seven are more sympathetic to what's going on. Older children learn to mask a lot of their feelings. They have learned to be mini-adults."

Melanie Patterson, a PCY coordinator, added "you never tell them (the children) how to watch the play because it's (divorce) such a serious subject that they react (according to how they feel)."

While the play was not conceived for a black cast Armstrong noted people will "read racial aspects into the play."

"We have not had strong role models in the past. To be part of a family was something you didn't strive for," she said.

But, Armstrong added despite the play's depressing theme the play has positive points.

"They (the parents) care deeply about their son. He is the line linking them together. That is a real positive point in the play."

"Sometimes people get up and leave because they hate each other and can't even stand to face their own kids. But, in the play they want him to survive.

"DOORS", a play about children who have to deal with the crisis of divorce

(Especially) because it's a black family they want him to survive," she said.

In the end, "Doors" is about listening and talking. Parents, children, teachers — everybody — must learn to confide in each other and by doing so open the "Doors" which lead to a corridor of better communication and understanding.

"Pumping up" the volume won't make the problems fade away.

—Jordan

(Continued from Page 3)

Rolling Stone, Downbeat and Guitar Player.

It earned him two Grammy nominations (Best Jazz-Fusion Instrumental Performance, Soloist, and Best Jazz-Fusion Instrumental Performance, Vocal or Instrumental).

The follow-up album **Standards,** he said, explored another dimension, celebrating the music he'd grown up with through the multi-stylistic possibilities of jazz.

Jordan was classically trained in piano from the age of six in his home town of Palo Alto, California. He picked up the guitar at 11 and by 16 had begun developing his ear-catching touch technique. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from Princeton in 1981.

The husband-and-wife team of Tuck & Patti — Tuck Address is the guitarist, Patti Cathcart the singer — have earned the highest praise for their debut album **Tears of Joy**. The San Francisco Bay Area couple has been lauded for what one reviewer called "pure music at its unpretentious best."

Performing without unnecessary electronics, added amplification, etc., the duo achieves a clear folkloric jazz, simple and clean.

Tuck & Patti have been partnered in music for a decade, having met in an audition for a show band that never got off the ground. "It was musical love at first sight," Patti says. They married in 1981. Performing at first at small clubs, they rapidly became a sensation on the California Peninsula.

They gradually worked their way up to larger Bay Area houses and settings that included the Monterey Jazz Festival and concerts in Europe and Asia. They have performed with Ramsey Lewis, Joe Pass, Sara Vaughan and Woody Herman, among others.

In a review of **Tears of Joy** last September, Musician magazine said Tuck & Patti "generate an elegant excitement sure to please anyone at home with both real jazz and smart pop."

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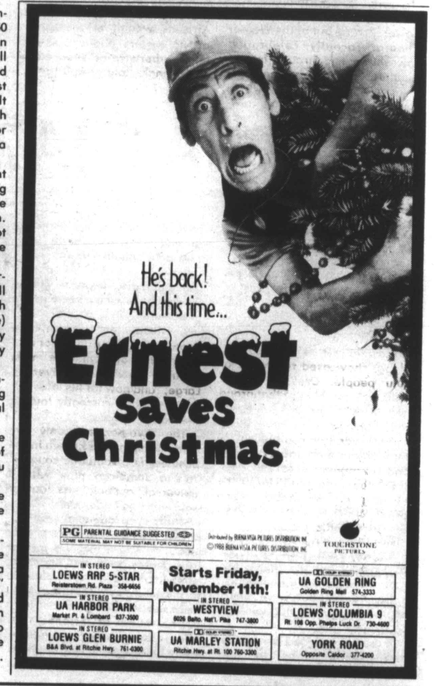

New musical 'Gospel Truth' is a must-see!

Major talent overwhelms minor imperfections

By Penny S. Demps
Friday Plus Editor

Gospel musicals in the Baltimore area can be likened to steamed crabs: They seem to be everywhere, some are better than others and it's a taste of heaven when you 'luck up' on a good one. Trust me, you're in luck.

"The Gospel Truth," a lively but still wet-behind-the-ears production can best be described as a rousing vehicle of star-quality entertainment, a true diamond in the rough. The cast is generously studded with top talent, Tramaine Hawkins, Johnny Brown, David Whitfield, Peggy Burch and Herbert Rawlings and features a supporting cast well worth their salt.

Director Cliff "Rocky" Roquemore, a likeable and easily approachable sort, explained that while the talent was tops, the time was short and he was forced to wear many hats as director. No apologies intended, or expected.

The minor technicalities or "kinks," as it were, are really normal for a fresh productions and most are easily smoothed out as cast and crew slowly merge to form a tight-knit company. At times the lighting and sound were uneven with the actors' lavaliere mikes (usually worn hidden under clothes) clashing during hugs and an ultra-bright spotlight that seemingly moved to a beat of its own leaving many of the solo stars in the dark. But, as they say "that's entertainment" and the show must go on.

"The Gospel Truth" is now in its final weekend and is deserving of much more support from Baltimore's communities than it has received. Clear voices and magic music transcend the flaws enough to move audiences from smiles to shouts. Current themes and family problems hit home and more than once dry eyes were scarce. The actors do their job, and that's hard work any way you put it.

JOHNNY BROWN stars in "The Gospel Truth" now in its last weekend at the Lyric Opera House in Baltimore.

The production will move from Baltimore to Chicago and then Philadelphia. Broadway producer Ashton Springer expects to open in N.Y.C. sometime in February of '89. A memorable show with family appeal, it should thrive and succeed in any town. Keeping the faith works, and that's "The Gospel Truth."

The Beat of Soweto

By Olive Vassell
AFRO Staff Writer

They sang the songs of South Africa, a country rich in music, and art that cannot be stifled by the bonds of Apartheid.

"The Indestructible Beat of Soweto," rang out at the Warner Theatre recently celebrating township music through four of South Africa's traditional groups.

The evening traced the cultural and language groups of the country. First up on the musical journey across South Africa, was Notembi and The Siblings of the Ndebele — a people who are said to be one of the few group still practicing their culture in its purest forms.

Notembi, a talented musician, resplendent in her colorful apparel, delighted the audience with her singing and dancing, performed with the help of her able and enthusiastic three "Siblings."

Sipho Mchunu, formerly of Juluka, who performed worldwide with singer Johnny Clegg, showcased the music of Zulu people. Dressed in the feathers and skins of that proud people, Mchunu and his band, called Savuko sang and danced — with admirable athletism — through more an impressive set and subsequent encores.

But the undoubted star of the evening was Malombo — and especially its founder member, guitarist, Philip Tabane.

Nicknamed "The African Chuck Berry," Tabane teased the panting audience with songs mixed with the rhythm of blues and sounds of South Africa's rural hinterlands, including one dedicated to South African exiles, called "They are long gone."

The evening was organized by Woza Africa, who brought the current broadway hit, "Sarafina" to the U.S.

The organization's purpose is simple; to provide artistic and material support to South Africans wealth of musicians, artists, writers, and actors, who might otherwise be silenced by the strangle-hold of apartheid.

'Friends' centers around universal theme

By Olive Vassell

Jamaica has eight theaters venues. Not enough for the burgeoning crop of playwrights producing plays on the island according to Patrick Brown.

And he should know.

Brown is one of a new spate of young playwrights whose writing is capturing a wide audience both at home and in place far afield.

A civil engineer by trade, he is known throughout the island as the writer of Jamaica's most popular TV-Sit-com "Oliver-At-Large," and now for his latest effort "Friends," currently touring the US.

The "two-hander" (only two characters), as it is known in the business is a romantic comedy. "It's a Jamaican play with a universal appeal," its author said.

There is no language problem, Brown insisted, "the dialect is not obscure. There may be one or two words that are signature pieces to remind you that you're talking about Jamaicans in Jamaica."

The theme of "Friends" is a universal one. The story centers around the honeymoon of a young couple during a hurricane on the island. Trapped together, they reveal details of their past lives and loves, that cause much angst (and many a laugh) before the storm abates and they finally make their peace.

MARRIED LIFE is not going well for newlyweds Hilda and John Charm in "Friends."

Brown said the play has been warmly received. "We've had standing ovations wherever we've been." Friends has played in Canada, Jamaica and made a brief stop in D.C. last month.

The main roles are played by two young actors. Bertina Macaulay, (who plays Hilda Matilda Charm) said she has always had "acting in my blood. I was in every school production, everything!"

Born in Free Town, Sierra Leonne, 24-year-old Macaulay moved to Jamaica in 1981, and attended the Jamaica School of Drama from 1982-85. Over the years since graduation she has earned her living working in entertainment — not an easy feat anywhere, never mind a small Caribbean island.

She said of her role as the young bride, "you're on stage from beginning to end, so you have to work much harder. If you're coming on stage for two hours your character has to be well developed."

Glen Campbell plays her husband John. Born in England and schooled in Jamaica today he is one of the island's top comedians, with a long list of theater, television and radio appearances to his credit.

His motto of "dare to be different and follow your own star," has made him continue despite the odds in his profession.

The team is completed by director Patrick Brown, and executive producers, Lloyd G. Anderson, and CPA and Vincent V. Lewis.

The group realizes that the world is their oyster as far as their aspirations are concerned, and plan to take the production to Europe.

For now, though it is concentrating on raising enough funds to finance the plays American tour (Eastern Airlines is picking up the travel tab).

Travelling across the US and indeed the world, is not only an artist endeavor, but a diplomatic ones for the group, who is "We are determined to show off Jamaican talent, across the world," Brown said.