

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

THEATER

A powerful tribute to black womanhood

FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF

By Ntozake Shange

Directed by Oz Scott, choreography by Paula Moss

Featured actresses: Trazana Beverly, Laurie Carlos, Aku Kadogo, Janet League, Paula Moss and Seret Scott

"I found god in myself and I love her fiercely."

On this note Ntozake Shange concludes her powerful tribute to black womanhood, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, which is scheduled for a nationwide tour in the 1977-78 season under the auspices of the Theatre Guild.

The play, which played to full houses on Broadway for an entire season and won several prestigious awards, is both a consciousness-raising experience and a collective biography, in which the playwright records the pain and triumph of black women in the dual struggle for identity as blacks and as women.

The opening episodes deal with girlhood encounters with the glories of the black past and the realities of the present. A black teenager flees her home in New Jersey for the salsa halls of the South Bronx and a culture with which she can identify. An eight-year-old bookworm discovers "my first black man"—Toussaint L'Ouverture—in the adult section of the neighborhood library. Book in hand she leaves her integrated block, neighborhood and school and sets out for Haiti,

only to discover among the debris of the Louisville ghetto another Toussaint—Toussaint Jones—who orders her to follow him to the docks.

As the characters cross the threshold of womanhood, Shange introduces the second major theme of the play: the conflict between the need for sexual fulfillment and the difficulty of creating satisfactory relationships with black men. (This conflict is also at the heart of Shange's new novel, *Sassafrass*, Shameful Hussy Press, 1976.) "Women lose all personal rights in the presence of a man" one of the characters in *Colored Girls* says.

During the next section, Shange explores some of the ways women allow themselves to be used in exchange for the transitory pleasure of sexual fulfillment. There is an amusing tale of courtship via poems and plants. There is the "passion flower of L.A.," who ends her nights of pleasure demanding that her guests leave before dawn. (It's her policy to sleep alone and record her impressions in a journal.) Climaxing this section is the sinuous dance of Sechia, mythic goddess of the Nile and the incarnation of Mississippi River love.

"Colored girls have no right to sorrow" but they do have a right to pain, to their own bitter tears, to the "stuffs" that make up the fabric of their life and identity. It is the assertion of this right that sets them on the path of liberation. There is a sequence where the characters mimic favorite male excuses, the funniest being, "But baby, you know I was high." In a more serious vein,

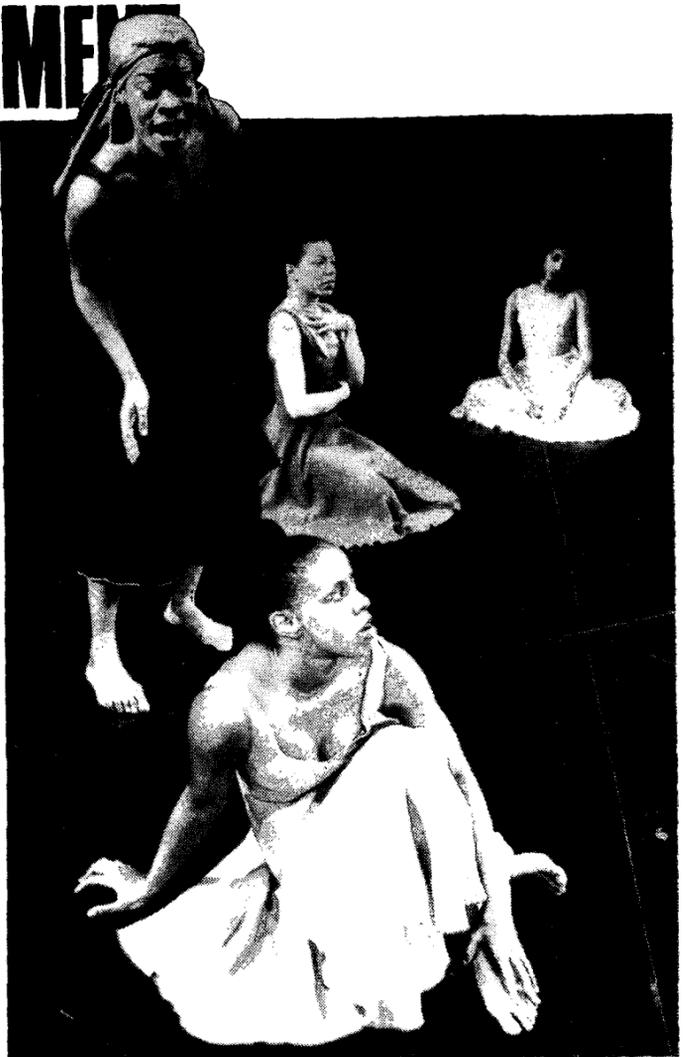
they defy their "lowdown, no account" brothers to be themselves rather than what society expects them to be.

What finally leads to catharsis and unity among the characters is the recognition that the values of phallic power breed physical and emotional death. In the searing monologue, based on the poem, "a nite with beau willie brown," a 22-year-old Vietnam veteran, crazed by the war, the responsibilities of a family and no money, flings his two children from a fifth-floor window while their mother looks on. The harrowing narrative draws the characters together. In a laying-on of hands, they affirm their solidarity and new-found strength as women independent of men.

Splendidly acted, directed and written, *Colored Girls* has broken important ground in the American commercial theater. It was the only play on Broadway last season that spoke seriously to the black experience, and the only one to address the problem of women fashioning new roles for themselves. Hence its broad appeal.

In *Sassafrass*, Shange's protagonist dreams of creating "new images for blk folks," "new worlds" that will vindicate "all the african and indian dieties/ disgraced by the comin of the white/ man" and "make present our beauty." With *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, the writer makes good her promise.

—Lynn Garafola

Lynn Garafola writes regularly for *In These Times*.

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learn how to govern their own future.

—Barry Commoner
author, *The Poverty of Power*

ART

Boston artists boycott show

Making artists pay for the chance to show their work is "antidivine," says Harold Tovish, a well-known sculptor and member of the Boston Visual Artists Union. "To use a stronger word, it's exploitation."

Thirty years ago, Tovish sent a large sculpture to a competition in Kansas City, paying \$5 to enter and \$17 for shipping, at a time when he was earning \$2,100 a year. "I thought it was ludicrous," he recalls, "and I never did it again."

Hundreds of art competitions and open exhibitions across the country have discovered that charging artists entry fees is easier than seeking government or corporate funding. Frequently, artists whose work is rejected subsidize cash awards to those whose work is accepted. Actors and musicians would be outraged if they had to pay for the privilege of auditioning; yet many artists consistently shell out fees they can't afford, under the illusion that "as long as it's exposure, it's justified."

The practice of charging entry fees is not limited to small operations. It is also used by such prestigious institutions as the Worcester (Mass.) Art Museum, which this year solicited entries for a juried biennial exhibition to be hung June 11 to August 7. Any artist in the state was welcome to deliver two objects, along with \$4 per entry, for "The Massachusetts Open." The works would not be insured by the museum. No liability of any kind was assumed. The museum would retain a 20 percent commission on sales of work chosen for the show and would dole out \$4,250 in prize money.

The conditions of the competition drew fire from the fair practices committee of the Boston Visual Artists Union (BVAU), which represents nearly 1,000 artists. When the museum administration refused to drop the entry fee, to provide insurance, or to meet with committee representatives, the BVAU and the 30-member Worcester Artists Union took their protest to the sidewalk. During

the five-day entry period at the end of May, artists bringing work into the museum were politely confronted by colleagues with picket signs.

Carol McMahon of the BVAU fair practices committee believes that several hundred artists stayed away from the Worcester competition because of the protest. Only two BVAU members submitted work. "We tried to reach artists in other parts of the state, but weren't always able to," she says. Some who brought their works a long distance were reluctant to turn around and take them back. But McMahon estimates that about 60 who got as far as the museum steps decided against crossing the picket lines.

The museum's public relations director Jean Connor claims that 1,752 works by 1,040 artists were submitted despite the protest. (If so, the museum collected about \$7,000 in entry fees.) Connor justifies the charge on the grounds

Continued on page 23.

NEXT WEEK IN THESE TIMES

Diana Johnstone from Israel's view of Carter; David France on the movement against nuclear power; Harry Boyte on the Citizen's Action Movement; David Mandel on

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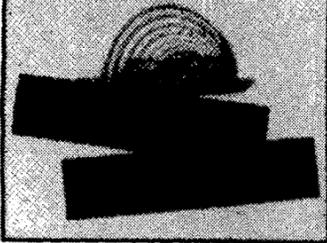
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Recommended Records

THE BEATLES AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL



THE BEATLES AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL
The Beatles
Capitol Records

The successful release of an album in 1977 made from tapes of Beatles concerts in 1964 and 1965 is testament to a number of things: the nostalgia that many people feel for the days of their innocent youth; the quality of the Beatles' music; the press-fanned desire for a Beatles reunion; and last, but not least, the venality of George Martin and Capitol Records.

There's no doubt that this album delivers what a lot of folks are buying it for—fond memories, a rush of recognition. Anyone who was a Beatles fan in the mid-'60s will get a warm feeling from hearing the screams of thousands of ecstatic teenagers at these concerts. Together with the photographs and other memorabilia included on the dust jacket and album cover, some of the ambience of Beatlemania has been successfully recreated.

Musically, however, there is little reason to listen to *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl*. Although the album proves the oft-stated (though not particularly important) opinion of rock critics that the Beatles could perform well before a live audience and were not just a studio-bound group, few of the songs are improvements on the old studio cuts. Most are, despite the valiant efforts of '70s technologists to restore tapes made in the unsophisticated '60s, not very clear, though I suppose there is some historical value in hearing only John Lennon's low harmony and not Paul McCartney's higher lead vocal on "She Loves You."

The cuts which impressed me most were, surprisingly, two of the ones not written by Lennon and McCartney. The version of Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven" features very strong George Harrison guitar work, and Paul belts out an extremely powerful vocal on "Long Tall Sally," the Little Richard song. And it goes almost without saying that John is as witty as ever, and Ringo is still a mediocre drummer. But overall, about the nicest thing one can say is that this album shows that the Beatles had a lot of energy when playing before an excited and adoring crowd.

Despite the fact that Capitol Records has been making a bundle by re-releasing the old Beatles albums and new packages of Beatles singles and has launched a huge publicity drive designed to recreate Beatlemania, George Martin has the chutzpah to claim in the liner notes that he worked on this album as "a labor of love." And Jimmy Carter has never told a lie to the American people.

Don't get me wrong. I love the Beatles. But since their old albums are still available, *The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl* is of

interest primarily to the stockholders of Capitol Industries-EMI, Inc.

—Bruce Dancis

Bruce Dancis reviews regularly for In These Times.

THE BEATLES LIVE! AT THE STAR-CLUB

Lingasong Records

Live at the Star Club was recorded when the Beatles were still an unknown pub band, wearing sleek black leather and entertaining small crowds with endless repetitions of other peoples' musical compositions. The group would sometimes travel from their home base of Liverpool to play in Hamburg, and one night in mid-1962 they were recorded on a home tape recorder that utilized one microphone. All four sides of this collection are poorly recorded, but still retain vitality and importance for any rock afficianado.

Live at the Star Club documents the debt the Beatles owed to black American rock and roll artists like Chuck Berry. They cover four of his songs and George can be heard stumbling over the first few chords to the opening of "Roll Over Beethoven" while the band wheels through the tune with a reverent ferocity. Rockabilly in the music of Carl Perkins is present, and so are Phil Spector, Little Richard, Ray Charles and Lieber and Stoller. This was the music that the Beatles fed on while preparing their own unique voice and contribution to contemporary music.

The album is interesting for its defects. I'm not referring to the recording quality. That's a small price to pay for the rare chance of catching the group at such an early stage of its career. But this is the group at its most distant and jarring, before they cleaned up their act and conquered the world; the quintessential punks, proud of it and of their music!

It displays the jagged sounds of a group still stuck in the black-board jungle mystique. They understand where they're coming from but haven't quite figured out their final destination. You can hear members groping for a unique sound that occasionally flashes out in the beautiful harmonies of "Mr. Moonlight." This is the quality that affected the Beatles' music throughout their history and contributed to their power as innovators.

Fifteen years later it still shines through.

—Joe Heumann

Joe Heumann reviews regularly for In These Times.



GOD SAVE THE QUEEN/DID YOU NO WRONG
The Sex Pistols
Virgin Records (import) 45 rpm

During the week of Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee, the #1 hit in England was "God Save the Queen"—but not to the tune that

was ripped off for "My Country 'Tis of Thee." This anthem, claiming that the Queen is "no human being" and calling for an end to the "fascist regime," is performed by Rock's latest outrage, the Sex Pistols.

Even before this timely release, the Pistols had got plenty of notoriety. They invented the safety-pin-through-the-cheek genre of punk chic and have inspired widespread revulsion the likes of which hasn't been seen since the Stones wore dirty sweatshirts on the Ed Sullivan show.

The Pistols' first single, "Anarchy in the UK" has been banned from every TV and radio station in the country. Their music has been kicked off BBC. And they are now the Hottest New Thing. A number of record companies, however, have found the Pistols too hot to handle and dropped them before they could produce an album.

They were finally picked up by Virgin Records, who released "God Save the Queen"—the only Pistols pressing available as an import, which you should try to lay your hands on at all costs.

In all the brouhaha, the Sex Pistols' detractors and defenders have ignored the crucial element of any band—the music. And the Pistols, let there be no doubt, are one hell of a band. The energy in lead singer Johnny Rotten's howling vocals explodes off the grooves in an uncontained, uncontrollable attack against whatever it is you've got, while the group slashes and pounds behind him.

"Queen" is a bit too calculated as an insult to be spontaneous and is burdened with "meaningful" lyrics. But "Did You No Wrong" is an all-out assault, reminiscent of the early Velvet's "White Light/White Heat" and a defiance that recalls the Who's "My Generation" (a group also widely reviled in its heyday for the wanton onstage destruction of equipment during performance).

In spirit the Pistols are closest to Iggy Pop (known to be capable of anything as long as someone finds it obnoxious) and as of this writing the Pistols' next single is scheduled to be a version of the Stooge's classic, "No Fun."

As rockers like the Sex Pistols push the limits of tolerance to a new edge, reaction to them grows in violence. Johnny Rotten, whose blunt-axe haircut and ripped-up suits held together with pins and staples, have captured the hearts of second-generation punk-rockers, was recently surrounded in a parking lot and knifed in the face by a band of royalist Teddy Boys, intent on teaching him respect for the Crown.

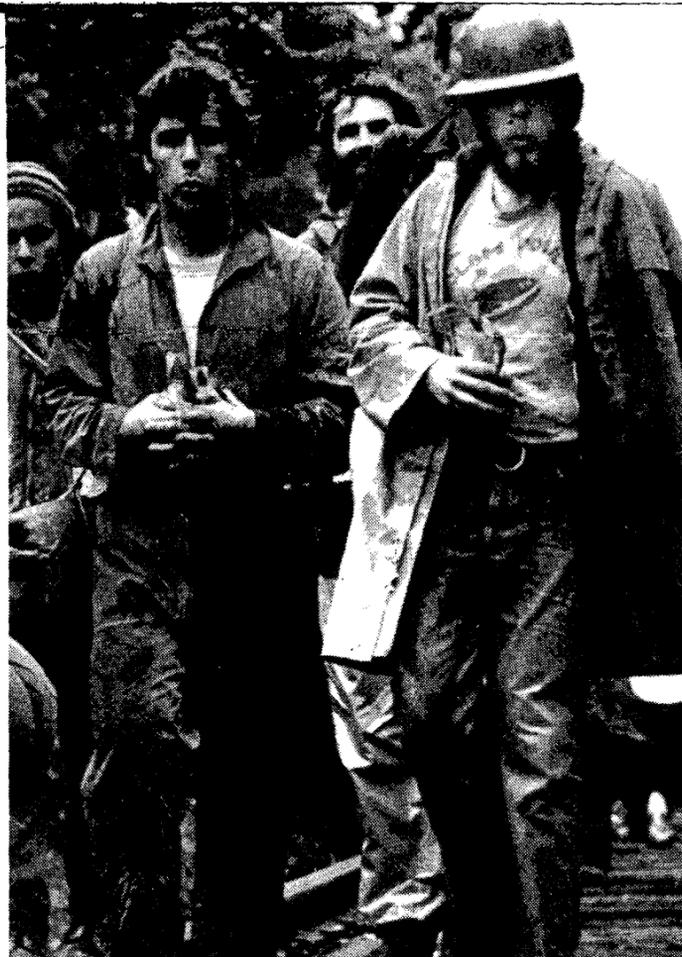
On the other hand, acceptance may be just around the corner. British designer Zandra Rhodes has introduced the "punk look" in haute couture—strategically torn frocks held together with jeweled pins—price: \$500 and up. What hath Rotten wrought?

—P. Hertel



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