70 years of black films good, bad embarassing!

By Ida Peters

Miss Cicely Tyson, fresh from her labors in "Blue Bird" in Russia . . . dressed in severe black suit with pleated skirt topped by black fox stole . . . was guest of honor at a VIP screening and supper at the American Film Theatre at the Kennedy Center, this past Tuesday night.

She introduced a 13-week film-lecture series on "Blacks in American Films" which will be presented at the Kennedy Center on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. September 23-December 16.

Mayor Walter Washington was introduced by George Stevens Jr., director of the American Film Institute who said the film lecture series will show the vital and distinctive contribution made by black artists over 70 years.

Harry Poe, director of the Ebony Impromptu Theatre coordinated the series. Lecturers will include Pearl Bowser, Tom Cripps, Donald Bogle, Harry Poe, Stephen F. Zito and Clayton Riley.

Mayor Washington in his remarks set the tone for the very entertaining and informative evening. Of the films shown . . . some were good . . . some bad . . . some embarrassing but they show how "we have had to fight our way out of the stereotypes."

Films shown included a moving portrayal by Cicely Tyson in "Sounder." From the '40's excerpts were from "Emperor Jones," Paul Robeson; Stephen Fetchit, "Stand Up And Cheer;" and Fats Waller ("Ain't Misbehaving") from "Stormy Weather" with Ada Smith, Bill Robinson and Lena Horne.

From the '50's, there were moving performances by Ethel Waters in "Member of the Wedding" ("My Eye Is On The Sparrow"); Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis in "The Defiant Ones" and Brock Peters in "To Kill A Mocking Bird."

Other films from the '60's and '70's were "Nothing But A Man" with Ivan Dixon; Diana Ross, "Lady Sings The Blues" and James Earl Jones in "The Great White Hope."

The show ended with scenes from "Claudine" and "Cooley High." The final excerpt was a breathtaking tap scene by the Nicholas Brothers in "Stormy Weather."

Guests for the filming and supper included members of Congress including Congressman and Mrs. Charles Rangel. Also spied the Gordon Braithwaites, Fannie Granton, the Belford Lawsons, the Ernest Filands, Dr. and Mrs. Warfield Clark, Dr. and Mrs. David Hinton, Dr. and Mrs. Donald Sewell to name a few.

The Arena Players are presenting "Purlie" at the Community College of Baltimore this week-end. Coming Oct. 10-12, "The Wedding Band."

Ron Townson, graduate of Lincoln University, Jefferson, Mo. and a member of the fabulous 5th Dimension will be feted by the Lincoln Alumni Association when the group plays Shady Grove Music Theatre in Rockville this week-end.

Talked to Ron in California early this week before the 5th Dimensions left for D.C.

Yesterday (Thursday) the group received tributes and honors on their 10th Anniversary from the Congressional Black Caucus on the grounds of the Washington Monument . . . by soaring up . . . up . . . and away in the huge hot air balloon . . . about 100 feet.

One of the first releases, "Go Where You Wanna Go," made it to the Top Ten soon after The 5th Dimension exploded on the scene with "Up, Up and Away," written by a new young songwriter, Jim Webb. They had been introduced to him by their manager, Marc Gordon, who has been an important ingredient of their success story from the beginning. The record, in addition to going gold, won four Grammy Awards for Record of the Year, Best Performance by a Vocal Group, Best Contemporary Single, and Best Contemporary Performance.

Cicely Tyson, member of Board of Trustees, American Film Institute. She is shown in famous role of Miss Jane Pittman.

Ron says he remembers Baltimore as one of his favorite places when the 5th Dimension played the Club Venus and the Civic Center and they used to go to Obyriki's for crabs.

They are in love with the D.C. area where they have a lot of friends and he recalls they were the first pop group to open the Kennedy Center.

Ron says he has recovered from a recent operation for gall stones and he's lost a little weight . . . about 36 pounds.

The 5th Dimension's new album, "Earthbound," produced by Jim Webb on ABC Records, shows a whole new funky aspect of the group.

Luckily for music lovers everywhere, Fate destined the meeting of Billy Davis, Jr., Florence LeRue Gordon, Marilyn McCoon, Lamonte Mc Lemore and Ron Townson ten years ago in California or the world might have been deprived of The 5th Dimension.

Cash Box lists the Pointer Sisters "How Long" (Betcha Gotta Chick On The Side); "Games People Play" by the Spinners; "This Will Be," Natalie Cole; "Do It Anyway You Wanna," People's Choice and "It Only Takes A Minute" by Tavares as the top R and B, singles this week.

Top R and B Albums are "Honey," Ohio Players; "Is It Something I said," Richard Pryor; "Ain't No 'Bout A Doubit It," Grand Central Station; "Pick of the Litter," Spinners; and The Heat is On," The Isley Brothers.

The Walters Art Gallery will open its 1975 fall series of weekly midday lectures at noon Tuesday (September 30) when Theodore L. Low, director of the gallery's education department, speaks on "Of Arthur and of Camelot" in Graham Auditorium, Centre Street building.

5th Dimension celebrate 10th Anniversary

Trina Parks, superchick, first to use Karate!

"I was the first black female to use karate in motion pictures," proclaims Trina Parks and those who care to openly challenge her had better reconsider or take another look at the film debut in "Diamonds Are Forever."

In it, she tossed Sean Connery around as the bikinied but deadly "Thumper." As Syreena, leader of a female cycle gang in New World Pictures "Darktown Strutters," Trina reaffirms her physical prowess.

She engages in a comic kung fu display and a climatic free-for-all, vanquishing the bad guys in true comic-book fashion, and through it all remains decidely feminine.

Her dancer's grace is no mystery. "My mother passed away giving me birth and I believe she passed on the talent in me to dance, sing and act," offers Trina.

Her father, musician Charles Frazier, various active with Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Billy Eckstein and Billie Holiday, early spotted his daughter's talents and enrolled her in the Booklyn Academy of Music. She was soon composing piano melodies by ear as well as singing and training in ballet. She majored in music although, occasionally creating her own one-girl music-and dance shows, and specialized in dance under the tutelage of Katherine Dunham, Martha Graham and the New Dance Group in New York.

Vinnette Carroll, director was principal dancer with the Katherine Duham Company in Manhattan and held onto the spotlight when the company played Paris in the production "Deux Agnes Sont Venu." She remained in Paris, was a feature dancer in a television special there with Michel Le Grand, and toured Europe when she rejoined the "Prodigal Son" company.

Back in the States, she continued dancing with various troupes and when another European tour arose, she landed a dramatic role in "The Emperor Jones" starring James-Earl Jone, in Paris. In 1969, Trina was principal dancer with Tully Beaty's company in the New York City Center Dance Festival.

Her arrival on the West Coast did not find her pounding pavements with those dancing feet but, instead, performing with Sammy Davis Jr., Dionne Warwicke, Dean Martin and others, on television and on stage.

She also put together a solo singing act which took her to Las Vegas, Chicago and New York when she wasn't playing Los Angeles and appearing in "The Metamorphoses" at the Mark Taper Forum. Trina also starred in Lester Wilson's "$500 And A Mule."

Since her movie bow in "Diamonds Are Forever," Trina has been seen in "Beyond The Valley Of The Dolls," "The Great White Hope" with James Earl Jones, a segment of television's Night Gallery and a number of live shows and plays.

"Darktown Strutters" presents the multi-talented Parks with her first starring film role which, unlike most of the black "superchicks" that have filled the screens, is carried off with humor and style and hints at other talents waiting to be more fully tapped.

Trina Parks plays Syreena, leader of the Darktown Strutters, a funky female quartet of bikers.

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2nd Big Week!

... and all that jazz

By Bob Matthews

The last time Houston Person appeared in town, this column hailed him as a successor to the crown long held by Gene Ammons.

Last Sunday, Person, along with vocalist Etta Jones, made a return appearance at the Left Bank Jazz Society weekly concert and reinforced my opinion.

While the similarity between tenor sax playing of Houston and Gene is not overly pronounced on upper registers, up-tempo tunes, when Houston drove into bounce tempo, middle and lower register play, the hard, biting tone embodied by Ammons came to the fore.

Was pleased to note that I was not along in my assessment. Several LBJS's regular patrons stopped by the "corner" to add their comments.

The most common among them being "sounds just like Jug."

One if the big surprises of the day was the startling play of organist Sonny Phillips.

Usually organists play a rather passive role when the leader of a group is a horn blower. This time, there was a difference.

Sonny laid down such a strong bass line that the absence of a regular bass . . .either acoustic or electronic . . . was not missed.

When it was time to solo, Sonny took off. Decrying the swooping glissandoes usually employed by organs who tend to fudge a little on making each note distinct, Sonny's technique was that of a classical pianist.

It was quickly evident that he was a complete master of his instrument, and even included a bass line solo, employing just foot pedals.

This is a name to remember, Sonny Phillips . . . you'll be hearing a lot more from him.

Others in the group were Frankie Jones, drums; and Buddy Caldwell, congo drums. Oddly enough, there was a single solo by Buddy. The group seems content to just let him play accents.

Then there was Etta Jones, who seems to improve each time she appears.

Leaning heavily on tunes made popular by Dinah Washington and Billie Holiday, Etta injected enough of her own style to make them just different enough.

The rapport between Etta and Houston seems a liaison that has mushroomed until it is an inseparable meld.

Houston played an obligatto behind the vocals . . . sometimes contrapuntal . . . sometimes harmonic and the results were spectacular.

If you get the impression that I thoroughly enjoyed the concert . . . you're right. Everything came together, and best of all . . . it swung!

Next week LBJS will have a free concert for subscribing members, beginning at 8 p.m. Other guests may attend for half-price tab. Featured will be some of the top vocal artists including Mickey Fields, Arnold Sterling, Donald Bailey, Hugh Walker and Jimmy Wells.

The Baltimore City Fair will have concerts in the evening Friday at 7:30 p.m. two generations of Brubeck, Saturday, 8 p.m., Barbara McNair; Sunday, 7:30 p.m., the Maynard Ferguson Big Band.

Damon Richard Evans is Lionel on The 'Jeffersons'

Baltimorean Damon Evans, known as Richard Evans when he was a highly talented youngster a few years back at Lemmel Junior High School and Douglass High School will soon join the cast of the popular CBS-TV show "The Jeffersons."

He will probably join Isabel Sanford, Sherman Hemsley, Roxie Roker, Franklin Cover, Zara Cully and Paul Benedict on September 27th with his new girlfriend, Berlinda Tolbert.

Evans started studying acting at the Children's Theatre Association when he was 10 and the study of voice at the Peabody Conservatory at 12.

His mother, Mrs. Berteal Matthews is now living in NYC. His grandmother Mrs. Alice R. Matthews lives in Glenburnie. Aunts are Mrs. Betty M. Shelton and Mrs. Anne Warner.

He attended Frederick Douglass High School until his senior year (1966) when he received a Reader's Digest Foundation scholarship to Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. At Interlochen, he studied voice and completed his high-school education.

Following graduation, he attended the Boston Conservatory of Music. After one semester, he was cast in his first professional role, in the Boston production of the rock musical "Hair." He spent six months in "Hair" and then journeyed to New York, where he made his off-Broadway debut in the shortlived "A Day in the Life of Just About Everyone." In 1971, he made his Broadway debut in the musical "The Me Nobody Knows."

Evans' first television series role came in 1973. While appearing on Broadway evenings in "Don't Bother Me, I Can" Cope," he also spent 20 weeks doing the CBS Television Network daytime drama, "Love of Life."

In the 1975-76 television season, Evans is to do the ABC movie "The Silence" and the "CBS Playhouse 90" production of "The Tenth Level."

Evans' other credits include Broadway's [illegible] the Stars" and "Via Galactica," off-Broadway's "Love Me, Love My Children" and "Godspell," national tours of "Jesus Christ Superstar" and Pearl Bailey's "Hello Dolly!" as well as summer stock and repertory theatre.

Now an accomplished actor, Evans is still very concerned about his singing. In fact, he left acting in 1974 to take advantage of a full scholarship to major in voice at the Manhattan School of Music.

Evans is an avid reader, but finds little time to do things not directly related to acting or music. He is 5'10 tall, weighs 140 pounds; has back hair and brown eyes. Is single, lives in New York.

The Jefferson family with their new son Lionel. Baltimore's Damon Evans, right. Other cast members, Isabel Sanford, Sherman Hemsley, Roxie Roker, Franklin Cover, Zara Cully, Paul Benedict, and Belinda Talbert.

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MOST MEMORABLE BOOK: "Pathos of Power" by Kenneth Clarke
LAST ACCOMPLISHMENT: Wrote the encyclopedic "Naomi Sims' Health and Beauty for the Black Woman."
QUOTE: "I feel that true beauty must be a reflection of the spirit as well as a quality of the face or body. Good health is crucial to beauty, and too many women overlook the importance of an annual checkup."
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'God' is dead

"I don't give a damn about-nothin' and nobody no more. Baby here has grown up . . ." says Godfrey Cambridge in the October issue of Essence Magazine. The one-time round funny man has dropped out . . . nobody wants him. Disillusioned, broke and bitter, he is in serious trouble, but no longer desperate. "I'm through pretending, particularly to myself. I am what others want me to be just to get their love." what I am, and I won't be what others want me to be just to get their love."

Recalling some of the circumstances that brought on his ill repute within the entertainment industry, "God" says, "White men have a great distaste for Black assertiveness. Just because I ask "What are you doing for your ten per cent? I'm dabeled difficult. The Black man is supposad to trust. Trust in who? Some white producer who thinks the words coon and pickaninny are funny. Trust what? An Agency? Let me tell you about agencies. Back in the sixties, my then agency negotiated this fabulous TV deal for me to star in my own weekly variety series. I was paid $200,000 for that series, upfront! And the agency took its ten per cent upfront. More important, it kept the NAACP and CORE off the network's back. Of course, it never did get on the air: I don't think it was supposed to. It was just noise to keep the niggers quiet."

Despite the considerable monies he has earned, Godfrey Cambridge reveals to Alan Ebert in the October issue of Essence, that he is near broke today thanks to "a nice white liberal who was in charge of my stocks, my lifestock — my life! He kept on telling me not to worrry, that he taking care of things. Well, he sure did. Wipeout! And I couldn't prove a damn thing. Then another nice white liberal befriended me and that friendship cost me whatever monies I had left. Then that Black person, my ex-wife, the one on the street today screaming her uglies about women's rights, she received $90,000 of my money in a divorce settlement. She is still collecting, which is funny. There she is, a liberated person mouthing off on equality and independence while feeding her face on my money."

Cambridge maintains that "Truth is, the business splits us niggers right down the middle, house niggers and field niggers. The house nigger gets work; he's the one everyone calls such a sweet, nice man. I'm a field nigger, I may get raked over, but I don't get spit on."

Today, "God" is dead and living in Connecticut where few make the pilgrimage to see the man who preached love and brotherhood. Nobody believes in that "God" anymore.

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