'Porgy and Bess'

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con-man and hypnotic trouble maker who lures Bess to the Big City life. He stops the show with "It Ain't Necessarily So." Wilma Shakesnider as Serena almost brought the house down as they sang "My Man's Gone Now."

Contralto Carol Brice, well-known to theatregoers in an earlier "Porgy and Bess," steals the show with a gusto performance putting down Sportin' Life.

Reviews of the other principals have been consistent for their raves. Abraham Lind-Oquendo also plays Porgy; Irene Oliver and Esther Hinds play Bess; and Mertine Johns plays Serena. In all casts is Andrew Smith as Crown, Curtis Dickson as Jake and Betty Lane as Clara.

Conductors John DeMain and Chris Nance keep things moving at an exciting pace; the sets which set a believable tone are by Robert Randolph; Nancy Potts has created colorful, flouncy costumes and lighting is ably handled by Gilbert V. Hemsley.

Additional scenic elements for Kittiwah Island have been designed by John Rothgab. Two young dynamic black women hold down jobs in this production rarely handled by minorities or women, that of production stage manager and assistant director.

They are Helaine Head and Mabel Robinson respectively. Miss Robinson also served as choreographer and must be given special credit for the flawless movement of the principals on stage.

Jack O'Brien, the production's director, has a handsome list of credits which underscore his brilliant handling of the cast. He recently directed "As You Like It" at the National Shakespeare Festival in San Diego and has staged various musicals and plays.

His operatic affiliations include the Dallas Civic Opera's "Dido and Aeneas," "Orpheus in the Underworld" and "Le Coq D'Or." Recently he directed the PBS production of "The Time Of Your Life."

Several principals of the opening night cast were asked for their impressions about "Porgy and Bess" and offered advice to young blacks interested in a musical career. Here are some of those impressions:

CLAMMA DALE: "I would want our audiences to get a sense of community and love that moves within the company. We have attempted a performance of honesty and love. There is closeness and supportiveness and it is our desire to make the audience a part of our community."

A clarinetist and pianist, Miss Dale began vocal study at age 14. She is a graduate of the renowned Juilliard School of Music. She found that the voice is the basic communicating instrument and that it is "an extension of the soul." She was a member of the New York City Opera when she was persuaded to take the role of Bess. The list of operatic leads Miss Dale wants to take on is unlimited. She will probably get to do those roles because she follows her own advice: be honest with yourself in terms of your potential and prepare yourself as thoroughly as you can. Her dad, Granvaul Dale has been her inspiration in what seems to be a glittering operatic career.

DONNIE RAY ALBERT: "I hope that audiences will feel proud after seeing our "Porgy and Bess." It is an opera that deals with a wide range of humanistic aspects; as blacks we have been in this position and have overcome many of the things that Porgy does. He sings, "I'm On My Way," at the play's end and that's what black people are all about."

Like the others starring in this production, Albert was called by co-producer David Gockley and offered the role of Porgy. None of the stars auditioned. Having studied the music since last April, Albert feels he is now settled in the role.

His advice is: to be talented enough to put yourself on the line. He could have taken the safer road and become a music teacher, but one college professor convinced him to become a performer. He put himself through various auditions and plans to do recitals to build himself artistically for other starring roles.

He is a graduate of Louisiana State University and Southern Methodist University. In 1975, he won the Southwest Region's Met Opera auditions.

LARRY MARSHALL: a performer with starring stage and film roles to his credit, has appeared in "Rockabye Hamlet," "Two Gentlemen of Verona" and at the Apollo Theatre. His film appearances include "Panic In Needle Park," "Jesus Christ Superstar" and the forthcoming "Baron von Trapp."

Larry sees the current "Porgy and Bess" as having a lot of nuances that really are black and white. "While a white man wrote this opera, it really takes blacks to perform it," Larry says.

He has appeared in two earlier versions of "Porgy" and feels his best advice would include: being true to oneself, getting formal training if you want to do opera and begin anywhere — particularly community theatre groups.

ANDREW SMITH: "I'm very impressed with the fact that this production is finally being done in its entirety. It is powerful and in the past the fruit of the work has been left out. I don't want black audiences to feel offended by this work in any way.

"As blacks, while Catfish Row is set in the 1930's, we can relate to much of what it's about. I feel that if audiences see this opera, they'll like it."

Smith is a graduate of Kentucky State College and Roosevelt University. He has always performed and sung in addition to managing his own sports business in Markham, Illinois.

How To Care For Your Hair

By Marie Phillips-Cooke

For the mahogany-toned woman who is consciously aware (deeply rooted) of who she is and of what she is, is not the woman who adheres to every dictate passed down by those 7th Avenue businessmen who set the fashion and beauty trends.

She's an individual and will make her own decisions concerning how she's gonna look this spring and every other season.

Surely, she wants to know what the fashion trends are — not that it means she's gonna run out and buy everything that's new — and about the season's hairstyles. The main thing here is that black women are no longer following any set rules.

When the natural hairstyle was first seen back in the 60's, folk said it was a fad — knappy hair wasn't gonna be around for long. Now more than a decade later, those kinks are still seen.

Now this is not to say that all black women want to wear naturals, nor is it to suggest that they must. The point I'm simply trying to get across here is that the way you look is up to you . . . IT'S YOUR CHOICE! If **you** want straight hair, that's cool.

Regardless of the way you choose to look this season — super sophisticated or soft 'n natural — there are certain beauty (i.e. personal care) guidelines you should follow. Many are basic while some enhance your natural self:

Hair

The most important rule to follow — every week of your life — is that your hair must be shampooed. (Those bi-monthly washings are long outdated!) Use a mild, ph-balanced shampoo that won't strip hair of its natural oils. There's no need to buy your shampoo at a special beauty supply store. Most drug stores carry acceptable brands.

Wash your hair (two latherings) at least once a week and no more than twice a week during warm weather months.

It doesn't matter how much of a health freak you are, hair specialists say that the hair shaft is damaged regardless of what you eat (to what degree remains unknown). And that's why it is mandatory that you have those split ends trimmed every six to eight weeks AND that you condition your hair on a regular basis.

Conditioning can be done at home if you know what types of products to use. Balsalm is not a conditioner; it's merely a coated creme rinse that removes tangles. A professional conditioning product primarily consists of protein, the main thing hair is made of. It replenishes the hair shaft with protein that's been lost.

One of the greatest arguments amongst those in the industry concerning hair care is whether or not black women should use oil on their scalps and hair.

Some say it serves no purpose and only clogs the pores and makes hair sticky.

Others voice a different opinion and argue that a small amount of oil, preferably baby oil or a light cream helps maintain a healthy scalp while giving dry hair a natural looking sheen.

(More on hair care and the latest spring styles next month).

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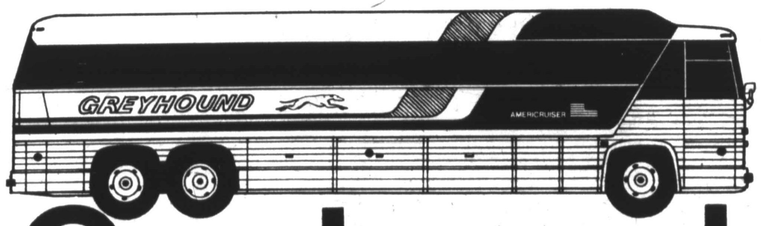

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