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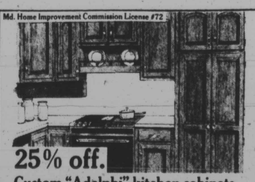

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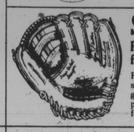

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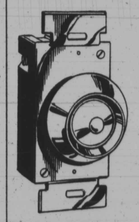

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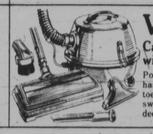

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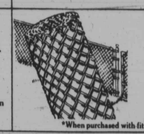

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Ira Aldridge 1807-1867

Shakespearean actor 113 years ago

Ira Aldridge died in Poland, 1867

By Ida Peters

Ira Frederick Aldridge was one of the world's greatest actors and during his lifetime 113 years ago he had a magnificent career in Europe.

He donated a large portion of his funds to the American Abolitionists but he made his most splendid contribution to the struggle of his people on the stages of Europe, presenting man in all his massive dignity and enriching the ancient art of acting with his understanding and excellence.

— —

Like many a great man who rose from humble surroundings and left no autobiograhy, his early life and birthdate are different in the various history books.

— —

Father George F. Bragg in 1925 says that Aldridge was born in Bel-Air, Md. in 1804 and about 1826 became the valet to Edmund Keene the celebrated Shakespearean actor, traveled to Europe with him where he became famous as the Moor in "Othello".

Edward Mapp in "Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts" says that Ira Aldridge was born July 24, 1807 in New York City. He attened the African Free School (1820-24) then attended the University of Glasgow and Schenectady Collge. He began acting at the African Grove Theatre, New York in 1821 and in the amateur corps at Brown's Theatre.

— —

Another story has it that he was born in New York City the son of an African prince of the Fulah tribe in Senegal, West Africa and a black woman. His grandfather, a humane ruler, in the face of a common practice of selling captives into slavery, preferred to exchange them. This anger- ed his chiefs and he was murdered together with his family and attendants.

— —

One son survived and escaped with an American missionary. This son was the father of Ira Aldridge. His father trained as a minister of the gospel and married an American black and returned to Africa and his tribe. Civil War broke out, and about this time Ira Aldridge was born and his fugitive parents hid out nine years in Africa.

— —

This story says the father settled in Bel Air, Md. among the Germans of Western Maryland where Ira learned to speak the German language.

Some of Ira Aldridge's early beginnings are lost because some enterprising press agent has tampered with them. In those days dark blacks were given royal origin. If fair, he was distinguished because of his white ancestors.

— —

We do have hard facts about the honors won by Ira Aldridge in the Schomburg Collection, Harlem, New York City Public Library.

Ira Aldridge worked to become a great actor and as Shakespeare says "Some men are born great; some achieve greatness while others have greatness thrust upon them".

— —

He made his first appearance in 1826 in "Othello" at the Royalty Theatre in London. Critics praised him and letters of congratulations poured on him. From London, he began a tour of the provinces accumulat- ing fame as he went.

He played Aaron in "Titus Andronicus", Gambia in "The Slave". Crowds flocked to see him and the press hailed him, as "The African Roscius".

— —

Roscius was the greatest actor of ancient Rome and though born a slave, he rose by sheer force of genius to a position of first rank under Julius Caesar.

— —

Other famous roles preserved in documents of Ira Aldridge's time (memoirs, letters, essays, playbills) were the title roles in Charles Maturin's tragedy "Bertram"; Walter Scott's "Rob Roy"; Schiller's "William Tell" and Thomas Southerne's" Oroonoko" from the novel by Aphra Behn denouncing slavery and Dred the Avenger, heroic leader of a rebel band of slaves, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel "Dred".

Ira Aldridge died at Lodz, Poland on August 7, 1867 on one of his tours. His body said in state in the Hotel Haentschla and he was given a solemn state funeral described in the Polish press, "The Warsaw Courier".

The King of Sweden had knighted him and his official title was Sir Ira Aldridge K.C.M. His first wife was English and his second a Swedish baroness by whom he had three children. At his death he owned nine villas, each handsomely furnished and he left an estate of $250,000.

— —

The medals with which he had been decorated were borne in front of his coffin on a state cushion together with a hero's laurel wreath. The funeral procession was led by the president of the City of Lodz.

What's Happening Late City More Ira Aldridge

(set 1 col., page 11)

Now a national shrine in Lodz, his grave is marked by a monument

(Continued on Page 11)

'Annie' ...genuine hit!

Terrific cast from (R). Annie, Miss Farrell, Daddy Warbucks, Lily and Rooster.

By Ida Peters

People seem to have a sixth sense when it comes to a genuine Broadway musical hit and that may account for the way Baltimoreans are reacting to "Annie" now sold out at the Mechanic.

This much awaited musical is an elaborate production with a cast and company of about 50, six full scene changes, expensive tracks and heavy moving expenses.

And since this play opened at the Kennedy Center three years ago and has been playing before capacity audiences since then, Baltimoreans figure they had better run not walk to see it, because the rest of the Mechanic season is not so hot . . . Leonard Nimoy in "Vincent: The Story of A Hero"; the London musical "A Day In Hollywood; A Night In the Ukraine"; "Fiddler On the Roof" and "Equus" with the Maryland Ballet.

— —

"Annie" is a good old - fashioned rags to riches story based loosely on the comic strip "Little Orphan Annie" created by Harold Gray in 1924. He died in 1972 and in the past year Annie and her dog, Sandy have returned to the comic pages with Annie being captured by the oil - rich Arabs and Daddy Warbucks and Sandy searching for her in the vast desert.

"Annie" is about how Little Orphan Annie who was found in the New York Municipal Orphanage by the billionaire Daddy Warbucks. Act I is Dec. 11 - 19, 1933 and Act II is Dec. 21 - 25, 1933.

What story there is revolves around the search for her parents, how she finds her dog, Sandy, a stray on the streets of N.Y.; and how she finally finds a home with Daddy Warbucks with help from the F.B.I. The only thing missing is the giant, Punjab.

— —

Patricia Drylie as Miss Hannigan, the matron at the orphanage, is clearly the star of the show as she drunkenly whips the orphans in line and plots to substitute false parents for Annie's real, long - dead ones.

Miss Drylie performed in "Annie" on Broadway and won a N.Y. Drama Desk Award as Angie in the Broadway production of "Ballroom".

— —

Little Rosanne Sorrentino as "Annie" caught at the hearts of the opening night audience and was outstanding in all her numbers especially "Maybe" and "Tomorrow."

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This is a tight professional cast and even the dog, Sandy drew raves in the first act. Nitpicking would say we just didn't see enough of him.

— —

Harve Presnell as the elegant Oliver Warbucks is commanding in manner and voice in his role. It's a little far - fetched to have him call President Franklin D. Roosevelt and ask his help in finding Annie's parents.

Shades of Watergate too tells the president to put the FBI on the case, stop looking for Dillinger and he'll pick up the tab.

Funny also his philosphy of life. He bragged he didn't have to be nice to people going up, if you don't have to meet them going down.

— —

After inviting Roosevelt to stop by his Fifth Avenue mansion for dinner, he tells his secretary to call up Al Smith and find out what Democrats like to eat.

For you young people, the joke here is that Al Smith was the first Jew to run for president of the United States and Franklin Roosevelt was from a wealthy blue - blooded Dutch stock, the first family of New York society.

Excellent performances are given by Deborah Jean Templin as Grace Farrell, Warbuck's secretary; Michael Leeds, Rooster Hannigan, Miss Hannigan's crooked, scheming brother and his floozy girl friend, Katharine Buffaloe, Lily.

— —

"Annie" has won seven Tony Awards including Best Musical; N.Y. Drama Critic's Circle Award and Best Musical, 1978 Grammy Awards.

It was produced by Alvin Neaderlander Associates, Inc. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Icarus Productions.

Music by Charles Strouse with lyrics by Martin Charnin is memorable and will send you home humming.

From Sambo to Superspade to Sambo

By Portia A. Badham Part I

The film industry has been one of the major sources of entertainment in this country since its origin in the 1890s. It has been so dominated by white actors, directors, producers and others that the majority of the film audience is almost convinced that beyond a handful of black actors from the early days, blacks have no real history in the film industry.

However, well researched and written histories show that blacks were present in the film industry from almost the very beginning. Blacks have participated in American film in one way or another since the beginning of the industry about 1888.

According to Phyllis Klotman, "Frame by Frame: A Black Filmography" for many years it was assumed that Afro-Americans and other black peoples of the world had little or nothing to do with the art of film-making. Their presence in films often went uncredited and even as late as the thirties, type names were given in cast title such as "Snowflake" instead of Fred Toones and "Sleep 'n' Eat" instead of Willie Best. Until a few years ago when scholars began publishing in this area, black film companies were scarcely known to have existed.

Blacks have played a very significant role in the development of the black film industry, if only viewed on a small scale. But, how does this industry of today compare to that of the early 1900s? Has the quality of black films improved? Has the number of black directors and producers increased? In short, has the black film industry progressed or regressed?

To try to find an answer, one might first take a look at today and then go back to the beginning of film and then make a comparison. Starting with the present, black films in recent years have not reached the kind of quality to really show that we've gone far beyond those days of squealing mammies and "yes suh" butlers.

In the last few years, black films have been almost non-existent except for those produced and directed by Sidney Poitier, champion actor who has been able to sucessfully produce a total black packaged film. Such films as "Buck and the Preacher," "Uptown Saturday Night," "A Piece of the Action," and "A Warm December," varied in themes from inner city youths preparing for the working world, blacks in the Western frontier to comedy in Harlem life.

In a 1968 article on Poitier in Screen Parade, Lawrence J. Quirk stated, "Sidney Poitier is no sentimentalist. He has no patience with vague panaceas for the world's heartbreaking problems. He considers concepts like brotherly love too vague to take hold in reality to be spelled out in action.

"Rather he plumps for what is deeply human in all of us . . . the consummate human essence, the mystic instinct that makes us all one. And he asks in his person and his performance that we act upon that essence and that instinct and work together to make strengthful realistic love, spelled out in badly needed social, economic and in institutional reform."

THE VERDICT

This cartoon, part of the NAACP's vigorous campaign against *The Birth of a Nation*, appeared in the October, 1915 issue of its magazine, *The Crisis*.

It is important to note that even in the television medium, there is a lack of good quality black programming. Alex Haley's "Roots" will be placed in television history as the most important program truly depicting real black life. Yet much of the script deviated from Haley's original book with the production's writers making several changes.

And it wasn't until the

(Continued on Page 11)

Patricia Drylie as Miss Hanningan steals the show

Night Scene

By Bob Matthews

Travelled to Walbrook junction this week to check out the Night Scene, and discovered almost a brand new look. Focus of the visit was the Garrison Lounge, which was once the beacon in the junction which drew people from all over the city.

Now, there is a shopping center rapidly nearing completion in the junction, the stores and facilities which once were on the street (Clifton Ave.) have been demolished, but the Garrison, and WEBB radio still remain, as does the Chinese food carryout shop.

Was immediately struck by the bright lights in the area. Evidently, there has been an all-out concentration on reducing crime, thus the mercury-vapor street lights.

Inside the Garrison, the package goods counter was doing a brisk business. Was at a bit of a loss to explain the upsurge in activity at this location, but then realized that with The Suburban gone, the Garrison was the only package-good outlet within an 8-block area.

Sauntered past the package goods into the bar proper, and found it crowded. The clientele was well-dressed, orderly and seemed perfectly at ease.

Was told that the majority of them were there for a nightcap after leaving a wake. Mary Brown, behind the bar, told me that each night is more or less different—that you can never predict what sort of crowd will appear.

In general, however, the overall crowd has modified a bit. While the Garrison remains a haven for the older Night Sceners, the younger element is establishing a beachhead in the place.

People still drop into the Garrison to get crab cakes, or some other seafood delicacy. Was chatting with Persis Butler (we call her Juanita, her middle name) and reminiscing about the crab cakes in the old days.

Then, they cost 50-cents, were almost the size of your fist. Today, they are $2.75, and according to Purdy, still as tasty as ever. We'll check it out at a later date and let you know.

Lots of times, you can get a clue to the regulars in a bar simply by checking the music on the juke box. Scanned the Garrison's, which still lists a preponderance of jazz offerings — an indication of mature patrons.

Big things are in the plans for The Garrison, although we were not allowed to even guess at them, but the shopping center is nearing completion with the MacDonalds, and a Chicken George due to open early this Spring.

They didn't have our favorite dark beer available at the bar, and explained it away saying the storage space is limited. Biggest selling beers at the lounge is Millers, followed closely by Colt-45.

Barmaids are still dressed in white blouses and black skirts, the rest rooms are clean, so all in all, it is a distinct pleasure to see a bar maintaining its standards despite the existing developments

— —

MOSTLY FOR MUSIC

First, we have to bemoan the loss of one of Baltimore's top d.j.'s to another station in town. Talking about Alfie Williams, who this morning did her last show on WEAA-FM, the Morgan State University station.

Hers was the second resignation from the station in less than two weeks—Al Quigley was the first. Alfie, fortunately, will be heard on another AM station in town from 7 p.m. - 11 p.m., but we are not at liberty to say which station—yet.

— —

At the Left Bank Jazz Society concert this Sunday, it will be the Gary Burton quartet. Gary is a young vibes player who has been listed on every DownBeat Magazine poll since 1968.

Formerly with the George Shearinge Shearing and Stan Getz groups, Gary has branched out to become a leader in his own right. His most recent recording is Times Square, with Larry Coryell on guitar, Steve Swallow, bass and Roy Haynes, drums.

At the Bandstand in Fells Pt., Lee Konitz is heading up a group consisting of Reuben Brown, piano; Hugh Walker, drums, and Steve Novosel, bass.

Konitz, of course, is one of the leading exponents of the so-called West Coast "cool" school, and recorded an album with Miles Davis appropriately called "Birth of the Cool." He'll be on hand through Sunday night.

— —

Jazz jam at The Sportsmen's lounge this Saturday spotlights organist Dennis Fisher, along with Jennifer Jones. Mickey and Shirley Fields, plus Johnny Polite and Sonny Fowlkes, are the weeknight attractions at the club.

— —

At The Closet, it's Brenda Alford and her trio through the month of February. Haven't made the scene there yet, but promise we will—very soon.