SHOWTIME

★ Theatre
★ Art
★ Music

What's Happening

By Ida Peters

Little Theatres at Morgan State University and Bowie State College take the spotlight this week. "An American Passport" an original play by Dr. Samuel Hay is now playing at the Little Theatre at Morgan State University.

Also opening tonight (Oct. 17) James Baldwin's "Amen Corner" by the S. Randolph Edmonds Players at Bowie State College. Thru Oct. 26.

Coming up — The University of Maryland Baltimore County Theatre Department will present "Strange Bedfellows" a comedy, Oct. 30-31 and Nov. 1.

Next week a preliminary planning meeting of The Festival of Art Series to be presented by the Cultural Arts Program for 1980-81, Tuesday, Oct. 21 at 4 p.m. at Gallery 409. Cider, apples and cheese will be served.

Gladys Knight and the Pips with Jerry Butler at Painters, Mill, Oct. 18 and Oct. 19 for three shows.

Center Stage is still drawing crowds for "The Front Page" Over in D.C. "Fiddler On The Roof" starring Herschel Bernardi has been held over at the Warner Theatre thru Oct. 19. The Warner Theatre will have the premiere performance of Israel's "Puppet Theatre" on Tuesday morning Oct. 21 at 10 a.m.

"Tricks of the Trade," the Broadway bound production starring George C. Scott is at the National Theatre in D.C. thru Oct. 26. The New York City Ballet at the Kennedy Center thru Oct. 19. "Lunch Hour" starring Gilda Radner, a new martial farce by Jean Kerr, thru Nov. 1 in the Eisenhower Theatre of the Kennedy Center.

Franky and the

Franky and the Spindles play for Edmondson High reunion.

Spindles a Baltimore - based group, popular on the Eastern Seaboard for the past 15 years is working to get their hits re-released again including "Crazy About Your Love" and Sam Cooke's Soul Stirrers, "Xmas Joy-Soon It Will Be Xmas Day" by a national food firm.

The group plays this weekend at Blue Crest North for dinner-dance by the Edmondson Class of 1960.

The vocal group includes Frank Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Joe Shields, Raymond Shields and Charles Stanbach Graves. Paul Sollers is the manager and Donald Johnson the MC and Business-Manager-Percussionist.

Members of the band are Mike Baker, lead guitar; Tony Natzel, bass; Carey Wright, keyboards; Johnny Mason, drums.

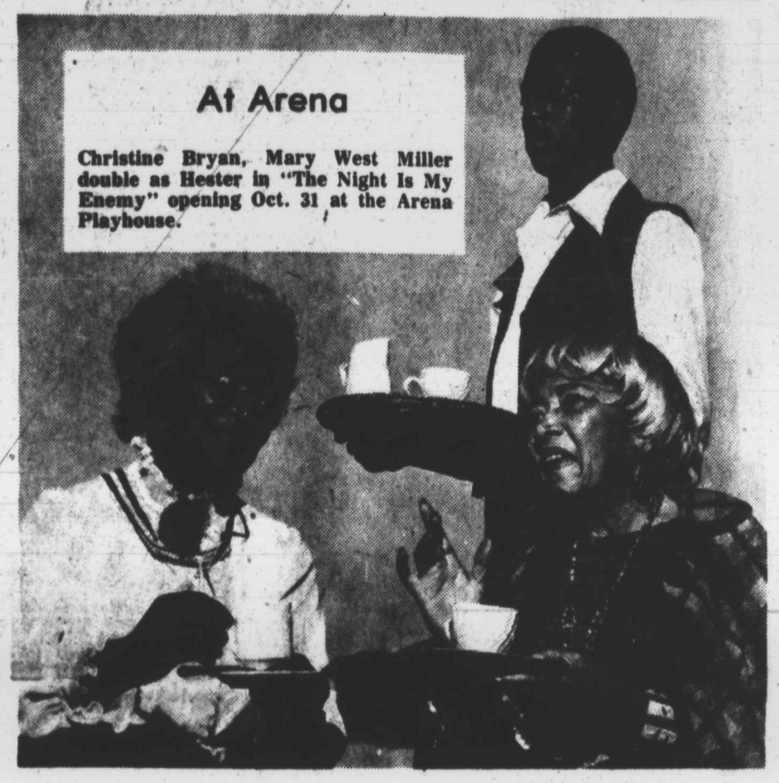
The popular iperalecture series at Catonsville Community College will begin again on Wednesday, Oct. 22. Virginia Blair, assistant professor of music at CCC, will lead the opera - lecture series. They follow the schedule of the Baltimore Opera Company. For information - 455 - 4590.

The Barnstormers of Catonsville Community College open the 1980-81 season with a hilarious trio of one-act comedies by popular contemporary English playwrights. "The Real Inspector Hound," by Tom Stoppard and "Mother Figures" and "Gosforths Fete" by Alan Ayckbourne will be performed in the Humanities Theatre on the CCC campus, 800S. Rolling Road, on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 7 and 8.

Hazel Dickens and The Hare Family will be featured artists in a traditional music concert Saturday, Nov. 1, at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

'An American Passport' at Morgan

Wayne Davis and LeMell Artis, students are in the premiere of Sam Hay's play about Paul Robeson opening this weekend at Morgan State University, Little Theatre.



At Arena

Christine Bryan, Mary West Miller double as Hester in "The Night Is My Enemy" opening Oct. 31 at the Arena Playhouse.

Charlie L. Chisholm, owner of the world's most unusually lighted street-driven motorcycle will give a free demonstration of motorcycle safety at Morgan State University, Sunday, 8 a.m. to 12 noon, in back of Morgan's Melvin Cade Armory. Officer William H. Day, Morgan Motorcycle Traffic Safety Division, who has given tips to Chips TV star will give demonstration.

Free and open to the public, the concert will be held in UMBC's Fine Arts Recital Hall beginning at 8 p.m. A covered dish "pot-luck" supper will precede the concert from 6-7:30 p.m. in Fine Arts Room 215.

Dickens, who grew up with ten brothers and sisters in WestVirginia coal camps, moved to Baltimore in the 1930s. The songs she writes and sings reflect her heritage and experience, and address the people and causes closest to her heart — coal mining, poverty, love, feminism, and human rights.

Robert Gerle, professor and head of the instrumental music program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County will conduct the UMBC Community Symphony's seventh Annual Fall Concert Friday, November 7, at Goucher College's Kraushaar Auditorium.

Featured soloist for the program, which begins at 8 p.m., will be Marilyn Neeley, associate professor of Music at UMBC, playing the Piano Concerto No.1 by Franz Liszt. A performance of the Miraculous Mandarin Suite by Bela Bartok will honor the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth. Completing the evening's entertainment will be Haydn's Szmphony No. 104 ("London")

Comic book collectors — and would-be collectors — are invited to hear Steve Geppi's Comic World speak on the monetary value of comics and to start a collection at 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 22, at the Pratt library's Walbrook branch 3203 west North Avenue. Admission is free.

The public is invited to attend the opening of the Community College of Baltimore's Student Art Show, Monday, Oct. 20, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the College's Liberty Campus Gallery, 2901 Liberty Heights Ave. Refreshments will be served.

1939 AFRO file photo shows Billy Thomas in funny scene with oversize glass of milk.

'Our Gang's' Buckwheat

Child star dies at 49

By Ida Peters

William (Billy) Thomas who gained fame as Buckwheat in the "Our Gang" comedies made at the old Hal Roach studios, was found dead of an apparent heart attack at his home in Los Angeles, last week.

Thomas who was 49 played in the "Our Gang" comedy series from 1934 to 1944. He was called Billy or Buckwheat and was born in Los Angeles on March 12, 1932. He was 3 years old, three feet tall and weighed 31 pounds in October, 1934 when his mother first brought him to the Hal Roach studios.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. William Thomas, who then lived at 1162 East 51st St., impressed studio officials even though in his first picture he was shy and cried when anyone talked to him.

The "Our Gang" series started in 1922 and he followed the popular star Frederick Ernest Morrison known as Sunshine Sammy. Later Pineapple, Farina, Stymie were the black boys playing against the roly-poly white boy Spanky.

Critics in the black press often expressed anger at the "Our Gang" comedies because many times the black children were frequently the butt of the other children's humor.

In many comedies of "Our Gang," not all, where Buckwheat was concerned, the black child shared in the high-jinks directed at another member of the gang.

Buckwheat in unused 1935 file photo. AFRO editors rejected it because they said it wasn't cute or funny but degrading to the race.

In 1935, Etta Moton of Chicago visited on the set and Jacob Anderson filed a report for the AFRO. He reports that Buckwheat's mother was at the studio every day and he had a private teacher, a Mrs. Fern Carter.

He watched a hilarious scene where Buckwheat and Spanky went on a fishing trip and while struggling with the fishing line become frightened at an outdoor baptism. (And you know who was preaching and who was doing the baptizing).

Jacobson reports that the director, the cameraman and 30 or 40 assistants all were convulsed with laughter during the filming.

William Thomas is not listed in "Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts" by Edward Mapp or in Daniel J. Leab's "From Sambo to Superspade."

Recent news reports state Thomas was involved with a James E. Frazier who claimed he was the real Buckwheat but Thomas was able to get the seal of authenticity from many of his fellow players.

Unlike Farina and Sunshine Sammy who became vauderville actors after they outgrew the program, William Thomas disappeared after he outgrew the "Our Gang" series.

Top Soul Hits

Albums

1. Give Me the Night — George Benson
2. Diana — Diana Ross
3. TP — Teddy Pendergrass
4. Zapp — Zapp
5. Love Approach — Tom Browne

Singles

1. Another One Bites the Dust — Queen
2. More Bounce to the Ounce — Zapp
3. Funkin' for Jamaica — Tom Browne
4. Wide Receiver — Michael Henderson
5. Give Me the Night — George Benson

Night Scene Seen

By Bob Matthews

The gremlins which infest all newspapers crept into this column last week and the last half of the piece was preempted by a last minute advertisement.

So, to correct the inadvertently mistaken impression that we harbor some malice against local musicians, we print the rest of the column. Under discussion was one of our favorite horn men, Arnold Sterling, who we chided for getting lazy in his play.

Finally got over to the Park Plaza last Sunday night, where the John Lamkins group was the featured attraction. They will also be playing the club Thursday night.

Must admit we were quite impressed with the facilities at the Plaza, for the acoustics in the place were exquisite. The upstairs room is intimate enough to bring you every nuance of the music, which is devoutly to be wished in listening to music.

Although you can hear the music from the downstairs bar, if you want to see the musicians performing, you'll have to trek up the stairs. There is a $2 cover and two-drink minimum.

Have been listening to a lot of people saying that the Lamkins group has really improved, and we really must agree. What we liked best about his presentation is the plethora of new material that he constantly plays.

JIMMY McGRIFF
The Bandstand

At our last hearing, he decided to drop in one of the classics: "Body and Soul," which was magnificently performed. Couldn't help chuckling, however, when we noted that the pianist Lou Rainone and bassist Mark Russell were reading charts on the tune.

Egad! reading a chart on B and S—we were speechless. But then, when we confronted Lamkins, he admitted that he knows all the changes of the tune, but he plays it in the key of F-sharp, rather than the B or D-flat in which it is written.

It was while Joe was wailing away on the podium, that Arnold Sterling stopped by "the corner" to inform me that trumpeter Red Rodney had asked him to sit in with him at The Bandstand that very night.

Smilingly agreed that this was a good thing, but was not overly impressed. Decided however, that maybe this should be checked out.

Following the LBJS set, went down to Fells Pt., and sure enough, onstage was Reuben Brown, piano; Steve Bagby, drums; Donald Bailey, bass, and Arnold Sterling on alto sax.

Now Red Rodney is a former member of the Charlie Parker band, and gigged many years with the legendary alto man. He is indeed steeped in bebop, which is why he was so impressed with Arnold.

For the first time, we listened to Arnold with our eyes closed, and thought it was Sonny Stitt. For years, Sonny has been tutoring Arnold, and it has really stuck.

This all went to reaffirm my faith, for with Red Rodney, et al, Arnold blew like he once did—and swung from the rafters—'twas a beautiful set.

Which brings up the matter of the Fells Pt. Festival. As reported previously, The Bandstand was ignored in the planning for the festival. In fact, participation by blacks was practically zilch.

So, Mike Binsky arranged to hold a couple of matinees at The Bandstand both Saturday and Sunday. There was no admission charge, they merely placed an open sax case at the door, and patrons dropped in whatever they wanted.

One of the participants was Arnold, along With Andy Ennis, and many others, and although Mike isn't talking, methinks Red got a chance to hear the local musicians, and didn't object when Arnold was proposed as a sit - in artist.

It all worked, and prompts us to say to Arnold: "O.k., you can do it— stop fooling around—do it."

When people ask what is wrong with staying put and enjoying the local music scene, we have to reply that their horizons become limited. Unless they do a lot of listening, they don't learn the new sounds and music on the scene, and have to face boredom and stagnation.

At the Left Bank Jazz Society this week, multi-instrumentalist Ira Sullivan is the featured performer, which will undoubtedly make a lot of people happy in this area.

Ira, of course, was last in town at The Bandstand, and really demonstrated that he could play both reeds and horn with equal facility. This time, he will have his own group along, and this should be a concert to remember.

At The Bandstand this weekend, organist Jimmy McGriff will pay one of his rare appearances in Baltimore. McGriff is noted for playing the blues on his organ, but believe it or not, he has an album to his credit done with Count Basie and the big band.

'Tis really a collector's item, and if you find it—let me know!

JUST A REMINDER: One of the top treats in the field will occur on November 1 at The Famous Ballroom, when the Dexter Gordon Quartet and the Johnny Griffin quartet will play two shows, one at 8 and the other at midnight.

'Nuff said.