Lavish reception opens....

Ceremonies in Dark Old Men

By Ida Peters

The opening of the Negro Ensemble Company's new Classic Series with a revival of Lonne Elder's award - winning "Ceremonies In Dark Old Men" at Ford's Theatre drew a sparkling array of guests to greet Douglas Turner Ward the director as he recreates his 1969 role of Russell B. Parker.

This acclaimed drama was made possible by a Citicorp - Citibank grant of $100,000 which will permit the NEC to travel to Chicago, Raleigh, New York and other cities throughout the year.

The play set in Harlem in the late 1950s is about a poor family caught up in bootlegging and numbers rackets at a time when the Mafia gangs were fighting for control and the Muslims were urging guns instead of passive resistance.

Douglas Turner Ward is Russell B. Parker a former vaudeville dance and owner of a barber shop. His two sons, Theopolis (Ruben Hudson) a dreamer who avoids work by various schemes to be an artist, a bootlegger; and Bobby (Walter Allen Bennett) who gets his pocket money by stealing, are always after their father to join their get - rich - quick schemes.

Adele (Patty Holley) is the daughter and the only wage - earner in the family. She bugs her father and the boys to find work or she is putting them out in the street.

Graham Brown (William Jenkins) is Ward's crony who plays checkers with him every day and Ward's dream is to win "a game" one time.

The current underlying this play is about the black man's struggle to find jobs after returning from World War II and the bitterness many men feel when they can't find meaningful jobs. They tend to vent their anger on "whitey" not realizing that education is what they need.

Keith David as Blue Haven is easily recognized as the "devil" in the black community who pushes, bootlegging and numbers.

"Ceremonies is powerful and not too outdated if you are aware of the 1950's and even today as the family comes to realize that crime is harder work that leads to jail and death.

Douglas Turner gives a powerful performance as he enacts the story of an old hoofer who lives to have a little taste and tell tall tales about his past. The old bluffer is ready for quick money and a fast roll in the "hay" with a young chick . . just touch her a little bit. The con takes too long and he falls asleep.

Graham Brown is remembered for his role in the NEC touring company's "A Soldier's Play" as T-Sgt. Vernon C. Waters.

Ruben Hudson as Theopolis and Walter Allen Bennett Jr. as Bobby give good solid performances as the sons. Hudson played Captain Davenport in the NEC "A Soldier's Play," Bennett has appeared in the NEC "American Dreams" and has written eight plays. He got his training at Shaw University.

Patty Holley, a graduate of the Circle in the Square School gives a solid performance as the daughter in her acting debut. Tracy Camila Johns in the role of young pick - up is also making her acting debut and should gain more confidence as she grows into the role.

The historic Ford's Theatre is intimate with cane chairs and beige cotton seats and backs. Charles Henry McClennahan has designed a 1950s barber shop with murals of Harlem as backdrop. Faithfully recreated to the left is a bedroom and kitchen real vintage appliances of that era.

Judy Dearing's costumes were right on target for the era including Ward's baggy pants and shoes.

The lavish reception hosted by Mrs. Alma Rangel, wife of the New York Congressman, Charles Rangel was held in the Museum of Ford's Theatre following opening night.

In attendance were many of the NEC's board members, cast members and members of the Citicorp group.

Distinguished guests included Ambassador and Mrs. Rene Amany, Sir John and Lady Carter, The Hon. and Mrs. Horace Dawson; the Hon. and Mrs. George Brown, Mrs. Louis P. Stokes and daughter, Miss Maureen Stokes; Mrs. Allison Leland, Ambassador and Mrs. Keith Johnson; Rep. Cardiss Collins, Illinois Rep. Ronald V. Dellums, California; Rep. Augustus Hawkins, California; Rep. Major R. Owens, of New York; Rep. Alan Wheat of Missouri; Mr. and Mrs. Ike Raspberry, the actress, Ms. Clarice Taylor;

From Baltimore, Del. and Mrs. Elijah Cummings, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Tildon, Mrs. Frances Murphy, Mrs. Thelma Rice and Mrs. Louise Murphy.

"Ceremonies In Dark Old Men" will play Ford's Theatre thru March 3. It is located in downtown Washington, D.C. at 511 Tenth St., NW. For information (202) 347-4833.

Mrs. Alma Rangel (L) hosted gala reception for Douglas Turner Ward, cast members and invited guests in the elegant Ford's Theatre Museum at opening last Thursday. Above, Congressman Charles Rangel, Mrs. ViCurtis Hinton and Congresswoman Cardiss Collins.

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Douglas Turner Ward (L) and Graham Brown, his checker-playing buddy.

1969 — Rosalind Cash, William Jay and Douglas Turner Ward in the February, 1969 award winning production that opened at St. Marks Playhouse in New York.

Skatemobile

The Skatemobile will be traveling throughout Baltimore City to various recreation centers during the month of February. Skates will be provided for children of all ages. The Skatemobile will be in operation from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the dates listed below:

Saturday, Feb. 16- Cecil Kirk Recreation Center, 2000 Cecil Ave.

Saturday, Feb. 23- Waverly Recreation Center, 700 East 34th St.

The Skatemobile Program is sponsored by the School Community Center Program, the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Mayor's Office of Adventures in Fun. For more information call 396-4891.

Ice Skating

The 1985 Ice Skating Program will be held during the months of January and February. Children from Baltimore City Recreation Centers will be given the opportunity to skate at the Patterson Park Ice Rink. The ice rink is located in Patterson Park near the Linwood Avenue and Pratt Street entrance. For more information call 396-4891.