Interview with the cast 'Boesman And Lena'

By R.B. Jones

The authenticity of the production of **"Boesman And Lena"** by Athol Fugard may blow the staid, safe theater audience that frequents Baltimore theater out of the building.

The unrelenting authority of the cast, director and playwriter along with the critical immediacy of the coming bloodbath in South Africa make **"Boesman and Lena"** a play that will leave an indelible impression of theatergoers who see it.

The production begins Nov. 1 with a cast and director that know about endurance and courage, prime characteristics necessary for survival and triumph in South Africa. Director Zakes Mokae, a native of that troubled lands, is directing not from his training in some safe artistic haven, as vacuous as it is removed from the realities of most of humanity, but rather from the cruelest and most impressive teacher of all living under aparthied.

That is what **"Boesman and Lena"** is about, living under the crushing burden of South Africa's racial cast system. Rosalind Cash and Paul Benjamin have existed under America's version of apatheid both the legal version and the more current, subtle model. They continue to exist in the arts world with unrelenting determination to project a healthy, positive black image.

Rosalind Cash

Tsepo Mokone the third cast member has also felt firsthand the chains of apartheid. He was born in South Africa which ensures a full education in the injustices and indignities of apartheid. Recently, the cast graciously consented to an interview with the AFRO.

Rosalind Cash is beautiful in a third world sense of the word. Her noble bearing, high cheekbones, expressive face and long flowing dreadlocks gave her a striking look. Her fair complexion might get her classified as colored if she lived in South Africa. She is a consumate actress who loves her work without snobbish distinction. "I love acting. It's something that I have to do. I don't have any hangups or preferences. I can do it all, movies, theater and television. Unlike some people from the stage, I enjoy the whole process of making movies from getting up early to sitting in makeup to doing the scene."

This love for working is not exercised as often as Ms. Cash would like. "Jobs are almost nonexistant for black actors. It is a struggle to get roles. When you do get them they usually do not reflect the full spectrum of African-American life. That is what I want to project, the total picture of black life but you don't get to do that often."

Paul Benjamin concurred. He is playing Boesman to Cash's Lena and the two have worked together before in the Negro Ensemble production of a play, **"The Sixteenth Round."**

"Nothing much has changed for the black artist in America. Hollywood is a reflection of this system as far as black artists are that when the opportunity to work arises, you're still here to project what you are about. Everything you do offstage can be a preparation for what you do onstage. As I said before, acting is something that I have to do.

"One thing that sustains me is the black community. Many people tell me "Girl we need you to be doing what you're doing." And statements like that keep me going when I think about quitting or leaving the country to find work," said Ms. Cash.

Paul Benjamin was quiet, pensive looking. He recently directed and acted in two plays about the crisis in South Africa. He also wrote the two one act plays **"Carrier"** and **"The Box."**

"The struggle continues. I don't work that often and I go through many periods of wanting to write, but my first thought is always acting. Faith in myself as an actor keeps me going," said Benjamin.

Tsepo Mokone listened intently. He knows about struggle. In his native land he worked in the mines until he was forced to relocate back to his home town. He began his theater career in earnest in 1969 and in subsequent years he performed in a number of productions. He came to America in 1980 and since then he has toured the U.S., England, Australia, Scotland, and Canada. Monkone received a 1983 Obie Award for his performance in "Poppie Nongena." He also recorded with Stevie Wonder on his new L.P. **"In Square Circle."**

He is very concerned that the U.S. public come to see the play so that they can understand why there is an international call for divestment. "When you see Boesman and Lena, you are seeing with the naked eye the effect of the genocidal policies of the South African regime. You must see what these people are doing to other human beings and not see them just as an ally of the United States. I have experienced apatheid."

Once again the immediacy of this production becomes apparent. The cast and director are concerned. We have to stop depending on those in power and start banding together to create our own outlets. There's too much separation between us," said Benjamin.

One would hope that two distinguished black actors in 1985 would not have to bemoan the lack of roles available to actors of their stature and talent, but that very fact illustrates why "Boesman and Lena" is a play of urgency and power in the context of America not just the distant Afrikaner atrocities.

Both Benjamin and Cash admitted to being out of work frequently. "When you go through periods of unemployment, you try to stay healthy and survive, so

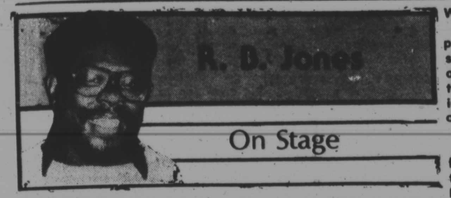
victims of the grotesque manifestations that racism can create, yet they are survivors and liberation fighters. This spirit of defiance and affirmation of humanity will make **"Boesman and Lena"** more than a show or an entertainment. It will be an act of revolt.

In a time as critical as this when inhumanity traverses the earth, art born out of struggle is art at its highest and Zakes Mokae, Tsepo Mokone, Rosalind Cash and Paul Benjamin are committed to art as its summit.

Other Members of the Cast

Tsepo Mokone

Paul Benjamin



"West Side Story"

This is a great weekend for theatre in Baltimore so turn off the VCR, forget about the mediocrities of Dallas and Falcon Crest and get out to see some live theater.

For musical lovers there is the classic, by some people's standards, "West Side Story" presented by the Urban Services Agency Cultural Arts Project at Coppin State College's Johnson Auditorium Nov. 1 and 2 at 8 p.m.

Cultural Arts has done some quality productions in the past and this community based arts program deserves support from the entire Baltimore community.

"West Side Story" is such a sturdy vehicle that it is nearly impossible to mess it up so at the very least one can expect a decent production and if the reports I'm getting are accurate, the show will be much more than decent.

"Home"

A new theater group is producing Samm-Art Williams' classic work "Home" at the Listening - Viewing Room, Levering Hall, Johns Hopkins University Homewood Campus. The Baltimore Actors Theater Ensemble is producing "Home" tonight at 8 p.m.

This group hopes to become a permanent fixture on the Baltimore theater scene and the group, under the direction of Ms. Denise Boston, will be offering acting classes for beginners and advanced students after the production of "Home."

Advance word I have received on the show is highly positive and I look forward to seeing if my sources are accurate. A trusting soul like myself can't be too careful.

"Once In A Wifetime"

Down at the Arena Playhouse on McCulloh St. this weekend ushers in the second show of the season "Once in a Wifetime," a comedy that had great success at the Takoma Theater in Washington D.C.

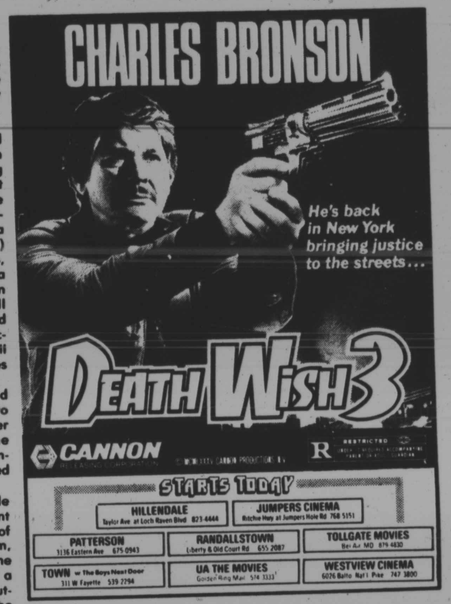
This play concerns the complications that arise when a man seeking to return to his African ancestral practice of having more than one wife, encounters some intercultural conflicts. The play opens Friday Nov. 1, at 8:30 p.m.

"Raisin In The Sun"

The BSU is to be commended for their production of "Raisin in the Sun" last week in Levering Hall. The production was most unusual because of the multitude of accents featured. Julian Procope (Walter Lee) and Oneeka Williams (Lena Younger) featured accents from Barbados, Emelia Dunaway (Beneatha Younger) Jacqueline Wilson (Ruth Younger) and Darrell Frazier (Travis Younger) featured various regional American accents and Charles Greene, II (Bobo) represented the sonorities of the Old South.

Despite this variety of sound the accents began to fade into the backgrounds as the ever compelling story and the generally competent, but unpolished performances carried the show.

Considering the formidable academic load that the student actors carry and the small pool of blacks on campus to draw from, the BSU at Hopkins deserves the highest praise for pulling off a demanding show despite the cutting that the group did in the script.



Black American Jazz is popular in U.S.S.R.

By Vera Stefanova
Novosti Press Agency

The store selling records produced by the Soviet Melodia Company is situated in the very center of Moscow, on Kalinin Avenue. The place is always swarming with people. I approached the jazz department with a crowd of people by its counter and got involved in a conversation with one of the customers, a young man of 20, who introduced himself as Nikolai Gusev.

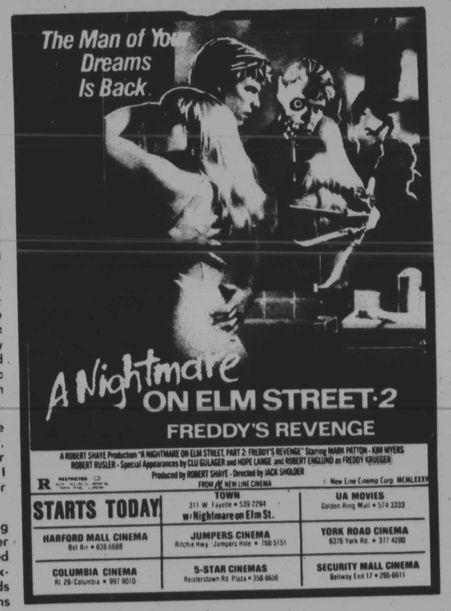
"They're just about to start selling some of the latest records. I would like to buy some for my collection of Black American jazz artists," Nikolai said. "I have recordings of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. I recently brought some records by saxophone player Sidney Bechet here at this store, as well as those by jazz pianist Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie and a record by the wonderful spiritual singer, Mahalia Jackson. It's a wonderful variety of performers, but there is one musician among those stars whom I value most: It's Count Basie, famed for his unique swing. His style makes it possible for him to use just a small number of notes."

While I talked to Nikolai, they started selling records by guitar player Wes Montgomery. They are sold out in no time. According to sales-clerk Irina Novikova. "It's always like this with jazz records."

"People do like jazz," says Irina, "which is obvious not only because American jazz is so popular but also because they show a great interest in Soviet jazz performers who interpret the best of Black American jazz. Recently the most sought-after albums have been the double ones, "Count Basie's 28 Medals," and that by jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery. I'm a jazz fan myself. One can't help loving jazz, for it is rooted deep in folk music. Jazz is always relaxed and emotional, full of improvisations. That's why I'm so fond of Ella Fitzgerald."

"I've been working for this store for 10 years already," continued Irina, "and I've noticed that not long ago mostly middle-aged people were fond of jazz, but now our customers are usually young people who've come to understand and love Black American jazz."

The demand for jazz records is so great that the All-Union Melodia Recording Company has a hard time meeting it. The company has 8 studios, 7 factories and 32 record shops of its own. Its catalogue lists 40,000 titles of records in 70 languages, and its annual output amounts to 220 million records and cassettes. Since 1974 the Melodia Company has been producing records under licenses. In all those years the USSR has produced over 400 titles of records from licenses purchased from the leading record companies of the USA, Japan, West Germany, Italy, Spain, France and other countries. I must also mention the low prices of those records, both home-made and produced by licenses. Anyone can afford them, since they cost from one to four rubles each (that is, from $1.20 to $4.80 U.S.).

"What new jazz records, those by Black Americans in particular, will be available to your customers in the near future?" I asked Melodia's editor Igor Slepnev.

"This year we're going to bring out a record by spiritual singer Barbara Hendricks accompanied by Soviet pianist Dimitri Alexeyev. All in all, about 20 records by Black American jazz musicians are now available in our shops."