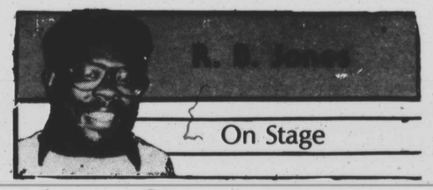

Arena Players current production lacks polish

"227" is a play that has become quite famous. It has been performed around the country and it has inspired a television series that is a hit.

Is it that good a play? No. Is it a play that pulls on the emotions? No. Does it tell some great universal truth? No.

The play is a slight comedy that attempts to teach a moral lesson that is done with a very heavy hand.

It shows the tables being turned on a neighborhood busybody who wreaks havoc on her neighbors and finally gets her just reward.

The current production at the Arena Players is either the second or third time that the group has produced the play. This current production is uneven.

I must immediately commend the group for cutting down on the length of the scene changes which have seemed almost eternal at other productions.

This play moves well in general. Actors entered and exited on cue and the stage movements were executed well. Crisp is a way to describe the movement. The large cast never seemed unsure of where it was supposed to be on stage.

The busybody, Mary Jenson, was played by Sam Washington and her best friend and stoop sitting partner Carrie Cross was played by, on the night I saw the play, Joan Coursey. .

These two characters are the center of the play. Carrie attempts to curb Mary's more malicious gossiping, but Mary does her damage regardless.

Mary taunts one neighbor into a suicide, attempts to harass another for being too uppity and snobbish, and spreads rumors of sexual misconduct that drives another neighbor from the community.

Ms. Washington's performance is quite energetic as is Ms. Coursey's. However they were very mannered in their performances and these recurrent mannerisms proved distracting as the play went on.

The two women also seemed to be competing with each other rather than playing off each other. Too often they seemed to be pulling in opposite directions.

Cynthia Francis played Lenora, the character who was transformed into Saundra on the television show. Lenora eventually runs off with Mary's husband while Mary is busy minding everybody else's business. Ms. Francis was too nice in the part.

Lenora is supposed to be a manipulator of men and a calculating woman, who has a hard edge to her because she's been around the block a few times. Ms. Francis was too sweet when she needed to be demanding.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise of the play was the performances by the Youtheatre Apprentices Tiffani Barbour, Darla Jones, Damon Cephas, Nikia Barbour, Sheilynn Wactor, and Walter Slowe.

These young people performed like real pros. They played off each, responded to cues and created very distinct characters. Those young people displayed a maturity on stage that was like a breath of fresh air in a stale closet.

"227" is a low comedy that comes very close to being a collection of stereotypes. It is sporadically amusing, but it is too long. It is well directed by Amini Courts, but there was not much in the script to inspire an evening of great theater.

The question lingers, couldn't the Arena Players pick something better for Black History Month.

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Chuck Maxx, Program Director

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'Going Home: Living the Dream, 1987' is coming to the Kennedy Center

Soprano Pierson Poulard will grace the stage of John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Concert Hall, February 24, 1987, with the moving production "GOIN' HOME: Living the Dream, 1987." Curtain time is 7:30 p.m.

This highly acclaimed presentation, in celebration of Black History Month and in remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., features Negro Spirituals with narration and dance. The United States Information Agency has chosen "GOIN' HOME," with its dramatic message of the triumph of the human spirit, as a featured program for Worldnet, their international network, broadcasting to 21 countries in Wes tern Europe.

"GOIN' HOME,", first presented by the Kennedy Center in 1981, met with such enthusiasm that Ms. Poulard was invited to have a return engagement this month. Dr. Carolyn T. Brown developed the script of "GOIN' HOME" and Cathy Simpson will narrate the program. Among the performers on stage with Melvin Deal, drummer, include Gwendolyn Jennifer and Ronald Harber, responsible for the piano segments, numerous choral groups from the D.C. public schools and The African Heritage Dancers and Drummers.

Also featured are The Men-O-Tones and The Washington Male Choral; and dancers Carolyn Watson and Alfred L. Dove. Samuel Bonds is Music Director and Kelsey Collie is Stage Director.

Annette Pierson Poulard has been described by the internationally-known baritone, Todd Duncan, as being "blessed with a glorious soprano voice, endowed with a special talent of communication and charisma."

A native of Shreveport, Louisiana and a graduate of Southern University, Ms. Poulard is a performer of diverse talents. She has appeared in major cities across the United States in recitals and operatic productions as well as on national television networks. Her principal engagements in the D.C. area have included solo performances at the Kennedy Center, Constitution Hall, Lisner Auditorium, the Washington Cathedral, and Wolf Trap. She has also sung with the National Symphony Orchestra, the Washington Opera Society, The Choral Arts Society, and the Urban Philharmonic in its 1979 presentation of "Tribute to Afro-American Composers."

In Spring 1985, Ms. Poulard appeared in the premiere of "Golden Precepts," a work written especially for her by Washington composer, Ruth Norman. Later that fall, she was presented in recital with pianist, Dr. Raymond Jackson, by the Fair Park Cultural Series in cooperation with the Shreveport Regional Arts Council and the the Gannett Foundation.

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Richard Pryor's new movie puts him back on track

THE CHAOTIC AFTERMATH of a power failure in a big city hospital brings many unexpected occurrences. Here Rachel Ticotin and Richard Pryor congratulate themselves after successfully surviving the near-catastrophe.

CRITICAL CONDITION is a subtle comedy of errors with dramatic overtones that gets funnier as the story progresses. Richard Pryor stars along with a bevy of seasoned performers in this fictional piece based on truth.

The storyline is well written and draws from a "what if" pngle of thought paralleling the near catastrophic blackout of New York in 1977.

Even the acting in CRITICAL CONDITION is worth taking note. Not that any one in the movie gives an Oscar-winning performance, but they did do well with what they had and it looked like they had fun, lots of it.

Pryor's last cinematic endeavor, JO JO DANCER..., scored low on the acting and even lower for the writing. However, the film represented an apt vehicle for Pryor to purge his troubled, guilt-ridden soul by literally confessing and exercising his past transgressions for all to see and judge.

So now he's back on the comedy track after a long hiatus and it's noticeable that Pryor enjoys acting as well as stand-up comedy. Some Pryor fans are not as flexible though, wishing he'd do nothing but his concert-album material when it seems the talented performer wants to stretch out to higher plateaus. I say "Go for it."

CRITICAL CONDITION centers around a day in the life of a con man who, under pressure, becomes a hero changing the lives of the people around him and, ultimately, is changed himself by the experience.

The chaotic goings-on in the movie are both inventive and fascinating. This normal occurrence (a blackout) is causing a tragedy in a hospital whose back-up generator is on the fritz too. Enter the con man with a heart of gold buried deep beneath his greed.

In the midst of confusion, he is mistaken for Dr. Ed Slattery, the new pinch-hit doctor for the emergency room, who offers some highly unorthodox, yet workable solutions to the mounting problems at hand.

Voila! The makings of a movie, tailor-made for a veteran cast. Bronx-born Rachel Ticotin stars opposite Richard Pryor as the beautiful, harried assistant administrator of the hospital, a reluctant defender of disorganized medicine and Slattery's techniques.

Singer-writer-composer Ruben Blades has been nominated for Grammy Awards four times and is a lawyer with a masters degree in International Law from Harvard. Not bad for someone playing a super-hip orderly, probably the only one who really knows what's going on in the hospital at all times.

Another of the cast to point out is Randall "Tex" Cobb who can also be seen in THE GOLDEN CHILD, starring Eddie Murphy. Tex plays a big-hearted guy with a very small brain, numero uno of the psycho ward, but bent on the thought (get this) that he's black. His best friends are Pryor and his dog (convincingly played by Lucius Houghton).

Other performers whose faces seem familiar are Joe Dallesandro, a murderer on the loose; Sylvia Miles as the toughly humane head nurse; Bob Dishy as a surgeon who doesn't care where it hurts just as long as he's not to blame; Joe Mantegna as the hospital administrator who really hates medicine and his work until he's forced to "see the light"; and Garrett Morris (of Saturday Night Live fame) who has a great cameo role as a junkie.

What is interesting to watch is the development and interaction of the main characters, namely Pryor, Ticotin, Dishy and Cobb. Pryor turns into a caring human being, whose first concern (for once) is not himself. Ticotin softens from a scared but capable administrator with disaster in her lap into a trusting, cool, calm and collected woman doing what's necessary to keep her ship afloat.

Dishy knows only the sound of the word m-a-l-p-r-a-c-t-i-c-e and can't get past the thought of litigation in order to practice medicine. A few choice words from the imposter Dr. Slattery (Pryor) combined with a chaotic moment to sink in and the thrill of victory never smelled sweeter.

CRITICAL CONDITION is a comedy rooted in reality, meaning the story could have happened with a hit of far-fetched thinking thrown in for good measure and entertainment. The special effects are very realistic-looking, except the skyline is somewhat reminiscent of GHOSTBUSTERS at times.

Filmed in High Point, North Carolina and Governor's Island off of lower Manhattan teamed with professionals determined to conquer seemingly impossible tasks, the script works well.

Creating torrential rains, flooding, 10 foot-high waves, helicopters in lobbies, flying body parts, a 7-ton wall of water, etc., etc., etc., principal photography still finished one day ahead of schedule. Now that's Hollywood!

Yes, Pryor's back on familiar territory in CRITICAL CONDITION, "you need pain to be funny," he once said, and his own experiences were turning him into one of the funniest men in the world. But, Richard is uniquely suited for comedy/acting and now with a new attitude toward his life and career, the real Richard Pryor is no longer in "critical condition." Thank goodness!

The nominations are in for this year's Academy Awards

By Vernon Scott

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — The Vietnam War epic "Platoon" and "A Room With a View," a Victorian comedy-drama, received eight Oscar nominations each, including best picture, to lead the field in the 59th Academy Award nominations announced today.

Also nominated for best picture of 1986 were "Children of a Lesser God," "Hannah and Her Sisters" and "The Mission."

Nominated for best actor were jazz saxophonist Dexter Gordon for his acting debut in "Round Midnight," Bob Hoskins for "Mona Lisa," William Hurt in "Children of a Lesser God," Paul Newman for "The Color of Money" and James Woods for "Salvador."

Best actress nominees were Jane Fonda for "The Morning After," Marlee Matlin from "Children of a Lesser God," Sissy Spacek for "Crimes of the Heart," Kathleen Turner in "Peggy Sue Got Married" and Sigourney Weaver for "Aliens."

For best supporting actor the nominees were Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe from "Platoon," Michael Caine of "Hannah and Her Sisters," Denholm Elliott from "A Room with a View" and Dennis Hopper for "Hoosiers."

Best supporting actress nominations went to Tess Harper for "Crimes of the Heart," Piper Laurie of "Children of a Lesser God," Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio from "Color of Money," Maggie Smith of "A Room with a View" and Diane Wiest for "Hannah and Her Sisters."

Nominated for best director were David Lynch for "Blue Velvet," Woody Allen for "Hannah and Her Sisters," Roland Joffe for "The Mission," Oliver Stone for "Platoon" and James Ivory frpor "A Room with a View."

The nominations for best foreign language film of the year were "The Assault" from The Netherlands, "Betty Blue" from France, "The Decline of the American Empire" from Canada, "My Sweet Little Village" from Czechoslovakia and "38" from Austria.

Newman's nomination was his seventh but he has never won an Oscar. He did, however, receive an honorary Academy Award last year.

It was also the seventh nomination for Fonda, who won for "Klute" in 1971 and "Coming Home" in 1978. Another victory would allow her to join Katharine Hepburn as the only actresses to win three oscars.

Hurt would make it two consecutive Oscars should he win, having won last year for "Kiss of the Spiderwoman."

Spacek was voted four previous nominations and won the Oscar in 1980 for "Coal Miner's Daughter."

The best original song nominees are "Glory Of Love" from "The Karate Kid II," "Life In A Looking Glass" from "That's Life," "Mean Green Mother From Outer Space" from "Little Shop of Horrors," "Somewhere Out There" from "An American Tale" and "Take My Breath Away" from "Top Gun."

Following "Platoon" and "A Room with a View" for popularity among Academy voters were three pictures with seven nominations each — "Aliens,"

(Continued on Page 8)