'The Serpent and the Rainbow' doesn't meet the challenge

By Kim Moir

Political corruption, voodoo, and zombies are all elements in the new horror-thriller, "The Serpent and the Rainbow," starring Bill Pullman, Zakes Mokae, and Cathy Tyson.

Filmed on location in Haiti, "Serpent," the latest effort from "Nightmare on Elm Street" director to Wes Craven, is the story of the phenomenom of zombies.

Mercenary anthropologist Dennis Alan (Pullman), is seeking the secret formula which causes zombification on behalf of a shadowy corporate medical interest.

The formula works by reducing a victim's vital signs to undetectable levels approximating death; while at the same time, allowing the victim to be consciously aware of the doctor's pronouncement of death and his own forthcoming burial.

Alan's search for a man believed to be dead for eight years leads him to the understaffed hospital of Haitian doctor Marielle Celine (Tyson). Together they locate the victim, now a virtual zombie residing in a Haitian cemetery, and begin to unravel the zombification mystery.

Meanwhile, the couple's search arouses the curiosity of voodoo priest, Dourgent Peytraud (Mokae). As the leader of Haitian dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes, Peytraud terrorizes Alan by magically entering his dreams where the film's most terrifying scenes come into focus. Unfortunately, at this point, the film's most glaring weakness is also apparent- the script.

Alan's arrogant dealings with Peytraud fail to jibe with the reality of Peytraud's supernatural power, not to mention his position as head of a corrupt and dangerous police force. In other words, Alan's screen persona in a similar real-life situation would have been left dead with the film not quite half over.

However, the film's nightmarish special effects and bone-rattling score by Brad Fiedel keep the thrills coming, taking the viewer to the point of no return only to be wholly absconded by a lame and derivative "Rocky" — like ending.

Of no consequence is the film's central love story, a developing romance beteeen Alan and Dr. Celine. Not only does the coupling fail to generate any heat despite a prolonged nude love scene, it furthers demonstrates a disturbing trend in the mainstream of filmmaking; the sole presence of a black female character for the illicit sexual fantasies of a white audience, with supernatural and satanic inferences thrown in to boot, (a la "Angel Heart").

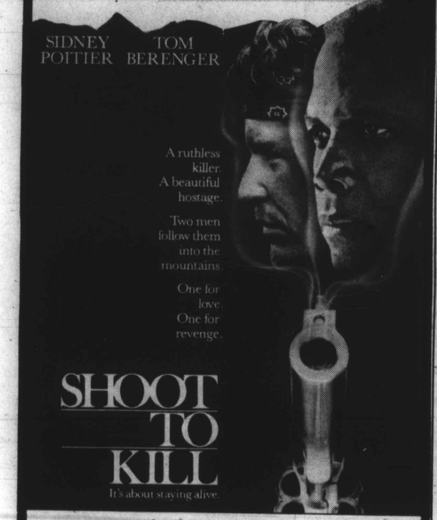
Strangely, it's during this love scene that Pullman gives his worst performance. While being mounted by the passionate and lithesome Tyson, Pullman is more than zombie than nearly at any other time.

While possessing a credible storyline, rich and detailed cinematography, and excellent special effects, not to mention a terrifying vivid performance by Mokae as the evil Peytraud, "Serpent's" weakness of character, pandering to racially offensive stereotypes and a cop-out ending just left me — cold!

Dennis Alan (Bill Pullman) is taken prisoner by Peytraud (Zakes Mokae, left) and Gaston (Badja Djola) and introduced to their methods of torture.

Marielle (Cathy Tyson) performs a sensual voodoo dance for Harvard anthropologist Dennis Alan (Bill Pullman).

"Sidney Poitier is back.
'SHOOT TO KILL' has it all:
suspense, drama, mystery and comedy."
—Lon Braithwaite, NBN RADIO



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'Zora and Langston' premieres at Enoch Pratt Library

"Zora and Langston," a ninety-minute play by Laurence Holder which re-creates the era of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, will be given its premiere performance at 2:30 P.M. Sunday, February 21, at the Pratt Central Library, 400 Cathedral Street in Baltimore. Admission is free.

Based on the lives, careers, and personalities of black writers Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, the play will feature New York actors Willie Ann Gissendanner and Samuel Foster in the title roles, under the direction of Bette Howard, also of New York City.

Incidental music for the play is by Baltimorean Dianaruthe Wharton, whose works include compositions for the Broadway hit "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf" and the premiere album of the popular music group, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Laurence Holder has been writing plays for some twenty years and has had his work performed by such stars as Phylicia Rashad, Denzel Washington, and Mary Alice. His best known play is "When Chickens Came Home to Roost."

The presentation of February 21 continues the Pratt Library's series of special programs planned in honor of Black History Month: "To Be the Best: Role Models for the Future."

The public is invited to attend. Further details are available from Pratt's Public Relations Office (301) 396-5494.

'The Colored Museum' is worth seeing

By Misty Brown
AFRO Staff Writer

Exotic. Colorful. Thrilling. Chilling. Tear-jerker. Side-splitting. Deadly Original. "THE COLORED MUSEUM."

"Git on board," to George C. Wolfe's tongue-in-cheek near-musical revue. This wonderful play is right on time exposing the raw nerves of the black stereotype idiosyncrasies.

"What I loved about this play is that it dared to look at the black bourgeoisie, homosexuals and all the negative things we do to ourselves to fit into a society that views the black person as an inferior human being said", Traci Halima Williams, actress in the play.

There are 11 "exhibits" which are "live sketches:" Upon entrance of "The Colored Museum," Wolfe's greets the audience with a one-of-a-kind stewardess, hysterical Miss Pat played by Alexria Siglinda Davis, an actress who "gits" underneath your funny bone and lingers in the marrow.

"Celebrity Airlines," is the slave flight tour to America the land of opportunity. This exhibit prepares you for the ribald sights yet to come, especially when the luggage was live humans dressed in shackles going through the baggage tunnel.

Each exhibit was brought on stage by a revolving turnstile in the floor. "You never tasted finger licking grub until you have a brainstorming session with "Cookin with Aunt Ethel." She is not just another Aunt Jemima on a pancake box. It's Lynda Gravatt, a big-boned, gusty, serious woman with a dark sense of humor, stirring a steaming, smoking caludron of colored secrets.

"Sterotypes are dangerous. All our entertainment life we are told to sing and dance even if we are a serious performer," said Gravatt.

You gotta have soul and guts for spice when you take a poke at "Ebony" Magazine's fashion models. This skit was a breather allowing all the self-conscious folks to air their dirty laundry.

The play was worth three scenes. One was seeing Valdred Doug Brown star as Miss Roj, a man dressed up as a women out on the town in "The Gospel According to Miss Roj."

"The role was a challenge and I knew I would grow as a human being and as an actor," said Brown. Brown has a range of personas lurking in his closet wearing every role as a custom-designed hat.

Talking about hats. How about blacks favorite headgear: Hair. One of my favorite exhibits featuring all three actresses, is "Hairpieces." Two wigs, LaWanda, straight and long, and Janine, wild and bushy Afro, discussing the pros and cons of hairstyles when dumping your lover.

Blacks have been conditioned by Hollywood and Broadway to hearing the white man called "the man" but knowing on the streets all black men of style and class are called, "The Man." Low and behold this play takes this symbolism onto higher levels in "Symbiosis."

Michael W. Howell played 'The Man,' a pinstriped buppie destroying his roots and even his alter ego "The Boy," played by Brown. Howell's performance was haunting as he said, "man kills his own rage. Film at 11."

Throughout "The Colored Museum" the omnipotence drum was beating in the background emphasizing the denials and acceptance of our African heritage. William Caudle was an enchanting percussionist.

The flaws are minor, a different doll or custume. "It is very important for blacks to support black plays that are not strictly song and dance. This play was extremely symbolic and filled with controversial issues that we rarely discuss in public. Very uplifting and informative," said Patricia Hilliard, theatre goer and film graduate student, Howard University.

The play is a must see, hear, touch and feel satire. "The Colored Museum" continues through March 6 at The Studio Theatre (202) 332-3300 in Washington, D.C.

Permutations, one of the satirical exhibits in George C. Wolfe's "The Colored Museum", features Alexria Siglinda Davis.

(Photo Credit: Joan Marcus)

Cookin' with Aunt Ethel, one of the satirical exhibits in George C. Wolfe's "The Colored Museum", features Lynda Gravatt.

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