SHOWTIME

Clifton Davis: Reverence is his way of life

By Bob Queen
AFRO Writer

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The real Rev. Clifton Davis stood up in the pulpit of the real TV "Amen" Church on Sunday morning, June 19 and electrified a large congregation that spilled over into the balcony and downstairs via loudspeakers.

It was at the Mt. Pisgah AME Church at 41st and Spring Garden Sts., the edifice seen all over the nation on the weekly "Amen" sitcom starring Actor Sherman Hemsley as "Deacon Frye" and Davis as "Rev. Reuben Gregory," mythical pastor of the "First Community Church of Philadelphia."

The throngs began to gather early at Mt. Pisgah, and when visitors were called to stand at this otherwise regular Sunday services, nearly half rose from their seats.

WAITING — Unlike the times when he awaits a cue in any of his many movie or TV roles, Rev. Clifton Davis (1) star of the "Amen" comedy drama, above awaits as he is introduced by Rev. James L. Dandridge (r) pastor of Mt. Pisgah AME church in Philadelphia. A portion of Pisgah's great choir is in the background.

Welcomed by the pastor, Rev. James J. Dandridge, the congregation responded to his apology for not introducing each one individually as is the usual custom. They chuckled as he said, "I know why you're here."

Scores of members and Mt. Pisgah neighbors were gathered outside in the extreme heat when the black stretch limo pulled up and Rev. Clifton Davis entered the very same spot where on the TV drama, "Deacon Frye" parks in his restricked area.

A long time star of the movies and TV, Davis has not only lived the role as the "Amen" pastor for the past two years, but as pastor of his own church of 5,000 members in Loma Linda, Cal.

There was a moment of real-life drama when Davis stepped out of the limousine, when he yelled out "Paul" and embraced a strapping Police Sgt. on duty there, Paul Brown. It was a great reunion for the two were boyhood friends who lived in the same house in the 2900 block of Philly's Columbia Ave.

Sgt. Brown, attached to the 16th Phila. police district, said that they were lifetime friends and that Davis on occasions visits and stays with his family. He recalled that they both graduated together in 1963 from the Pine Forge Academy and that in school, Davis always won the oratorical contests. Sgt. Brown has served 21 years on the force.

It was Father's Day at Mt. Pisgah and bolstered by the highly motivating music by the church's senior and junior choirs. Davis praised Mt. Pisgah's "awesome" choir and added that the children were waiting in the wings" to take their places.

Davis opened his part of the service following an introduction by Rev. Dandridge, with greetings from his "TV Church family," Deacon Frye, Thelma Frye, Elder Rolly Forbes, Rev. Reuben Gregory and all members of the TV "Amen" cast.

One might say that it was the week that "Was" for the Amen show, for the June 19 cover story for the Philadelphia Inquirer's weekly TV Guide was "Jester Hairston, A Series regular at 86." Hairston will be 87 on July 9 and states in the item that he is signed up for another season.

But at Mt. Pisgah AME, Rev. Clifton Davis opened his sermon based on the scripture, Psalm 133 and his subject "Dwelling Together in Unity."

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" as he focused on the first of three verses and pointed out that David wrote the verses as a pilgrim when the Israelites "reaffirmed their ancestral unity."

Having been engaged in electronics before show business, Rev. Davis described the many components in a TV system required to bring many transmission phases into a single TV picture, and it wasn't long before he turned up his own rheostat and launched into an old-fashioned revival-type preaching.

Comparing todays' problems facing the populace, he stated that David was surrounded by conflict, even as he sought unity and he told of the son of Absalom turning against his father, "even marched an army against him." Concluding a better than 45-minute sermon that brought forth at times, near cheers and applause and told the congregation that unity and true friendship is found only "at the foot of the Cross."

The selection of Mt. Pisgah AME as the fictional church of the TV Amen show, came about through the choice of the star, Sherman Hemsley, a Philadelphia native.

This venerable west Philadelphia church was founded 155 years ago and is one of the keystone houses of worship in the city where Richard Allen founded his great denomination. Rev. Dandridge is Mt. Pisgah's 30th pastor and laid down two special requirements when the church was chosen from approximately 200 local churches.

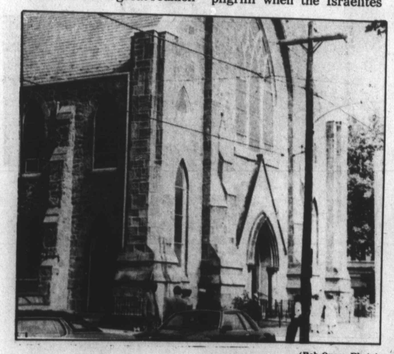
Rev. Dandridge advised the producers from Carson Productions Group, Ltd., that there could be no fictional preaching from his pulpit and anything done inside the church, must have his approval. Now into its 3rd year, "Amen" has not really shot too many scenes inside Mt. Pisgah.

THE REV. CLIFTON DAVIS

Much of it is done in California, but the opening scenario has established Mt. Pisgah as one of the sites sought by visitors. Church officials won't say that it even comes close to threaten the popularity of Richard Allen's Mother Bethel AME a few blocks from Independence Hall.

Once inside the visitor will find no interior office and surroundings seen on the TV screen — But the front entrance is easily identifiable. Also, the general surroundings on No. 41st St., have been somewhat altered when the opening "Amen" shot focuses on the beautiful slate gray edifice, probably from a helicopter.

But there was one weekly tie with Mt. Pisgah that remains and is familiar to millions of TV viewers each week. When Hemsley, as "Deacon Frye" steps from his car, then skips rope with some little girls, he extends a handshake to a member in the doorway — That member of Mt. Pisgah was there on that Sunday, this time to shake hands with "Rev. Reuben Gregory" in the flesh of Rev. Clifton Davis. He is Mr. Harry Richardson, who was serving as one of the church's security men.



(Bob Queen Photo)

THE "TV AMEN" CHURCH — The edifice above is familiar to television viewers of the comedy series for the past two years upon opening of the Sherman Hemsley-Clifton Davis, drama, but for 155 years it has been the Mt. Pisgah AME Church, located at 41st and Spring Garden Sts., Philadelphia, Pa. A few early arrivals gather for the appearance of Rev. Clifton Davis.

IN NEW YORK:

Tenn. Williams' 'Iguana' receives lustrous revival

NEW YORK — Tennessee Williams lived long enough to see his shimmering reputation, established by such works as a "Streetcare Named Desire," "A Cat On A Hot Tin Roof," and "The Glass Menagerie," tarnished by a series of lesser works.

Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to know that his greatest plays would be revived and revered by a new generation.

The Circle in the Square Theater, which established its reputation with its original production of Williams' "Summer and Smoke," is returning the compliment this season by staging three Williams' plays — "Streetcare," "The Night of the Iguana," and a third to be announced.

"Iguana" opened last week with a strong and stunning production.

In an unusual but eminently successful piece of casting, Jane Alexander, was chosen to play the lusty Maxine Faulk, owner of a seedy hotel on Mexico's Pacific Coast. Playing against her usual image of the cool intellectual, Alexander gives a powerful physical performance as an aging sensualist who now settles for whatever works.

She bursts onstage in her bra and panties, loosely covered by an open shirt, wresting herself from the kisses of a Mexican servant whose job clearly goes beyond serving guests.

She leaps on top of Shannon, a defrocked minsiter who is now a tour guide, as he stretches out on the Veranda Hammock, straddling him as she ministers to his state of exhaustion with cool compresses and cold beer. She accepts the pinches of a German tourist with the aplomb of a woman who enjoys her own body and is delighted to share it.

Maxine Faulk is, as actress Alexander has described her, "All about heat, smells, sounds, the ocean, the rain forest, birds and sky. And she carries that through her own body to other people's bodies."

Opposite her healthy, pragmatic sensuality is the shattered, guilt-ridden Shannon, played very effectively by Nicholas Surovy as a man who can't make peace with his own libido. Yet he hates himself for the excesses to which it drives him.

Cast out of his church of "fornication and heresay in the same week," he has become a tour-guide shepherding dready groups around the world and always finding at least one young tourist to seduce.

Peopled with rich, full-drawn characters, "The Night of the Iguana" creates marvelous counterpoints.

The most telling is the contrast of Maxine and Shannon with the lovely, mysterious Hannah Jelks. Beautifully portrayed by Maria Tucci, she is a coll container of repressed sexuality. Sensitive, artistic, kind and responsive, she is everything Maxine isn't and she is drawn to Shannon for his pain.

This is a production that does one of Tennessee Williams' most fascinating plays proud, fully realizing the wit, pathos, poignancy and incomparable humanity of his work.

Have you heard?

By Penny S. Demps

THAT a 30-year-old recording by Ella Fitzgerald is soaring up the music charts. The recording, "Ella In Rome: The Birthday Concert" was made on April 25, 1958 on Ella's 40th birthday. New York jazz historian Phil Schaap discovered the tape in a New Jersey library. The tune was re-leased in April to mark the 70th birthday of the First Lady of Song.

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THAT the new British musical about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., received a six-minute standing ovation recently during the London premiere. Obba Babatunde, a New Yorker who won a 1982 Tony Award nomination for his role in "Dreamgirls," received the lion's share of the cheers for his portrayal of Dr. King.

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THAT black extras appearing in a U.S.-produced anti-apartheid film starring Marlon Brando are angry because a dog was paid more than they were during filming. The film, "A Dry White Season," filmed in Zimbabwe, does feature a dog who earned twice the $15 a day black extras were paid. A spokesperson explained the canine was hired from a professional dog handler and trainer and did earn more than extras, black or white. Some black tech crew members, he added, earn upwards of $4,000 a month. In Zimbabwe, minimum monthly wage is $54.

RAY CHARLES

MELBA MOORE

* * *

THAT songtress Melba Moore, currently celebrating her 20th year in show business, has embarked on a nationwide promotional tour in conjunction with the release of her new album, "I'm In Love." Some of the stand out tunes include the duet with Freddie Jackson "I Can't Complain," Love & Kisses, "and the title song, "I'm In Love," a duet with Kashif.

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THAT even after two days of wall-to-wall jazz, the great Ray Charles still brought the Hollywood Bowl sellout crowd to their feet as he closed the 1988 Playboy Jazz Festival. This year's festival broke all records of the 10-year Hollywood Bowl run with early sellouts and dozens of the art's biggest stars.

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THAT famed fight promoter Don King was recently awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. King, an Ohio native, brought Muhammad Ali with him to the campus for the degree ceremony before a standing-room-only audience. Ali was presented a special University clock and King pledged $25,000 to Central's endowment campaign.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE — Gospel star Sandra Crouch, twin sister of international gospel star Andrae Crouch, was recently wed to Mr. Greg Phillips, a realtor and investment banker, at Christ Memorial Church in Pacoima, California. Over 1,000 people attended the event, which featured ballet dancers and music written by Sandra Crouch. The couple honeymooned in the Caribbean.

METRO PROFILE

■ People 2C
■ High School Sports 3C

Jazz Festival Season is under way!

By Bob Matthews

The annual jazz festival season is underway, and a goodie it is, with an outstanding lineup scheduled for the Baltimore-Washington area.

Noticed an interesting thing while doing research for this piece—just about all of the top jazz female vocalists will have made an appearance in this sector before the end of the festival season.

Coming up this weekend, there will be Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson and Roberta Flack. At the Eubie Blake fest a week ago, there was Carmen McRae and Dianne Reeves.

And, at ArtScape next week, Cleo Laine and Dianne Schuur are scheduled, but more about this later.

Maryland Jazz Festival

The 1st Annual Maryland Jazz Festival will take place at Oregon Ridge Park beginning Friday, July 8, and for three days jazz lovers will be able to feast on an array of topflight musicians internationally known.

Friday beginning at 7 p.m.: **Tony Bennett, Ramsey Lewis, Sarah Vaughan, and Gary Thomas.**

Saturday at 6 p.m.: **Roberta Flack, Maynard Ferguson, Herbie Mann, and McCoy Tyner Trio, with Freddie Hubbard and Benny Golson.**

Sunday, also starting at 6 p.m.: **Mel Torme, Nancy, Count Basie Orchestra, and Great Guitars, Charlie Byrd-Herb Ellis-Barney Kessel.**

Haven't been to Oregon Ridge for a concert in a while, and did a bit of checking to find out about the facilities, and it remains an outdoor arena in a natural setting.

Actually, it is a picnic-style setting, with no seating. You'd be wise to bring along lawn chairs, or at the very least, a blanket to sit or lie on.

Food and beverages are available (no hard liquor) and you are allowed to bring in your own picnicking accoutrement—no hard liquor though.

Keep in mind there is no reserved spaces or seating—it's strictly on a first come basis. There is ample parking, and getting there is simple: Take I-83 to Hunt Valley area. However, when you get to the Shawan Rd. exit, take the West exit. From there, simply follow the signs—it's about a quarter of a mile.

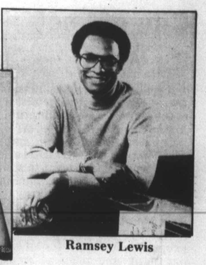
Further information: (301)338-0300.

Sarah Vaughan

Roberta Flack

Herbie Mann

Nancy Wilson



Ramsey Lewis

Maynard Ferguson

McCoy Tyner

Cleo Laine

Moon August

Ahmad Jamal

Ruby Glover

Nathan Carter

ArtScape

Dates for this year's ArtScape is July 15 - 17, and if you have meandered through Mt. Royal recently, you can see preparations under way.

Musically, this is an outstanding presentation, with both national and local artists featured. Two main stages will be employed, Fox and Decker, with happenings on both throughout the festival.

Friday starting at 7 p.m.: **Hubert Laws,** followed by **Cleo Laine/Johnny Dankworth.** This takes place on Decker Stage, which is the big area near the old B&O station.

If you're not familiar with Cleo Laine et al (Johnny Dankworth is her husband) you are in for a treat, for she possesses a 5-octave voice that can evoke all sorts of moods.

Watching her work with her husband, who is a bandleader of note, is like being a part of a love scene as the vibrations go back and forth, all the while exuding exquisite music—jazz music.

On Fox Stage at 7 p.m., **Ruth Brown** is the featured performer. Yes, that Ruth Brown of "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean" fame.

Saturday at 8:30 p.m.: the **Gary Burton Quintet**; at 9:45, **Ahmad Jamal.** This is on Decker Stage. On Fox Stage at 8 p.m.: **Gary Thomas and Seventh Quadrant.** This is, of course, Baltimore's own Gary, who has branched out as a recording artist on his own, as well as being a part of the Jack DeJohnette and Miles Davis groups.

Sunday at 7 p.m.: **Paquito D'Rivera** on Decker Stage, followed by **Dianne Schuur with Keter Betts, bass, and Chuck Redd, drums.** They are scheduled for 8:30.

And that's not all. Among the many other acts scheduled are **Morgan State Univ. choir, Moon August, Fat Tuesday, Scott Cunningham, Uptown Rhythm King, Ruby Glover,** and more.

Forgot to mention that we will be emceeing the Gary Thomas presentation, do stop by to say howdy.

Sonny Rollins

Charlie Rouse, tenor
Claudio Roditi, trumpet
Michael Formanek, bass

Ira Sullivan

Flip Phillips
Scott Hamilton

Gary Bartz

J.J. Johnson, trombone
Rufus Reid, bass

Frank Morgan

Walter Davis, Jr.

CPFOJ festival

What we feel is perhaps the top festival in this area happened a couple of weeks ago, as the Central Pennsylvania Friends of Jazz presented its 8th annual fest.

What makes this particular fest special, beside the plethora of music presented, is the fact that it is practically self-contained. It is held at a hotel, which also is the site of the performances.

A camaraderie exists between the audience and the musicians that heightens the presentations, often to the surprise of the performers, who don't expect to find such a knowledgeable jazz audience in a place such as Harrisburg, PA.

Best of all, attendees at the CPFOJ fest are there to hear the music. They are quiet and attentive, plus really responsive. Having attended all eight of the festivals—can say without equivocation, that they continue to improve. In fact, they have outgrown their current site—which should tell you something.

Have been asked which act we felt was the most outstanding, and it was a tough decision. But, must say that we thoroughly enjoyed the **J. J. Johnson** set.

With him were **Ralph Moore,** tenox sax; **Stanley Cowell,** piano; **Rufus Reid,** bass, and **Victor Lewis,** drums. This set sparkled as you can imagine. J. J. still has it.

Next, we'd have to pick the **Charlie Rouse/Claudio Rodi Sextet** which had **Walter Davis, Jr.,** piano; **Kenny Washington,** drums; **Michael Formanek,** bass, and **Romero Lubambo,** guitar.

A tough choice, when you remember that such artists as **Sonny Rollins, Ira Sullivan, Valery Ponomarev, Flip Phillips, Frank Morgan, Buddy DeFrance, Joanne Bracken** and **Gary Bartz** were among the artists performing.

In a word — Outstanding!