

Q Culture

The buzz on Broadway

by Brian D. Holcomb
Q-Notes Staff

This season has potential to be one of the largest and most varied in recent Broadway history. If, that is, all of the shows reported in the last issue of *Q-Notes* actually open. We'll see. In addition to the musicals mentioned in that issue, there is a long list of plays which are scheduled for the season. The complete list will be run in a future issue, but attention should be called to one in particular this week.

Any play about Jackie Kennedy Onassis would be of interest to the gay/lesbian community. Talk about your icons. However, with the recent tragic death of Princess Diana, it seemed appropriate to mention this play, about America's own royal princess.

Jackie: An American Life is readying for an opening at the Belasco Theatre in New York. Previews begin October 10 and opening is set for November 10. The title role is to be played by Margaret Colin, an acclaimed actress more familiar to Off-Broadway audiences. In addition, there is a seven-member ensemble, who play a total of 100 roles, aided by 180 costumes and 86 wigs. There are also some puppets...12 feet tall.

OK, this sounds a little wierd, don't you think? Well, it is supposed to. Gip Hoppe has constructed the show as a zany farce, feeling that the style lends itself to her life and the world during it.

"Jackie is treated very pristinely," says producer Mark Schwartz, "and very straight. It's the people around her who are all zany. All I can say is that anyone who's anybody in her life, from her father to Jack Kennedy to JFK

Theatre

• Art

• Music

• Dance

• Film

Jr., is in it. there's even a Nixon-Kennedy debate scene."

Jackie has played, in some fashion at theaters around America since 1992. Most recently, it had a four-month run at Boston's Wilbur Theatre. We'll see if New York audiences, who lived with Jackie as a neighbor for many years, are as appreciative.

Diva Gossip

Betty Buckley, now fully recovered from her *Sunset Boulevard* stint (isn't it odd how people are saying that...*recovering* from *Sunset Boulevard*?), will be opening, as reported earlier, in *Triumph of Love* this autumn. She will be taking a short break from preview performances on October 3 to be the featured performer for the grand reopening of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. Tickets for the evening range from \$150-300. Not bad, Betty.

Bernadette Peters may be back on Broadway soon, if only for a day. A ten-year reunion concert of the original cast of Stephen Sondheim's musical *Into The Woods* is scheduled for November 9 at the Broadway Theatre (currently the home of *Miss Saigon*). Apparently, the entire original cast is to reprise their roles, with one rumored exception: narrator Tom Aldredge will perform the evening show, but Rosie O'Donnell may fill in for him at the matinee. Proceeds will benefit Friends in Deed, an AIDS-related organization that was also involved in the tenth-anniversary concert of another Sondheim classic, *Sunday in the Park with George*, in 1994.

Patti LuPone has been very visible on PBS stations around the country (but not in Charlotte...maybe, hopefully, during the pledge drive) with her one-woman show, *An Evening with Patti LuPone*. but even if you can't see her from the comfort of your home, you can see her in person in North Carolina. She will perform November 8 at Aycock Hall on the campus of UNC-Greensboro as part of the university's concert series. Tickets are not on sale yet, but should be in early October. See you there! ▼

Charlotte's Bohemian district?

by Brian D. Holcomb
Q-Notes Staff

Theoretically, every great city has a Bohemian district. A place where artists and wannabes can meet and mingle, exchange ideas and create art. And, perhaps more important, can afford to live. Although there has been much said about Lloyd Scher's "bohemian district" at the County Commission meetings, the Dilworth and Elizabeth neighborhoods don't quite count. They are too expensive. Charlotte needs a place that has been overlooked, that has retained its character while prices have dropped. The arts need a home.

That home may have been discovered in recent years. The North Davidson Street area, recently dubbed NoDa by somebody, has all of the necessary qualities. Solid homes left untended for decades, just waiting to be lived in. Old factories and storefronts for gallery and performance spaces. A dedicated stable of stores, restaurants and galleries. Now we just need to keep Hugh McColl from discovering it. He would champion it, pump millions of dollars into it, and destroy it on the way to turning it into a showplace.

Theatre in Bohemia

There is an exciting new presence in NoDa. The Neighborhood Theatre is a new entity that exists in a familiar space. The old Astor Theatre on 36th Street, which after its heyday in the mid part of the century became an adult movie theater and then later a church (some history, huh?), is under renovation to become a prime theatre space. A thrust stage dominates the space, bringing the action on stage out into the audience. There are some refinements still needed, but the building is fully functional as a theater and has already seen its first fully-staged production.

George Gray, one of the masterminds of the Neighborhood Theatre project, has staged local playwright Laddy Sartin's play *Blessed As-*

urance. The premiere coincided with Race Day, where Charlotteans were encouraged to spend the day with members of other races. The play concerns racial issues as well, in a story that is not unfamiliar to audiences, but has been treated in a new and exciting way.

Blessed Assurance concerns a county in Mississippi in the 1960s that is denying its black citizens the right to vote. Rather than a young male firebrand, which is the more conventional treatment of such a topic, Sartin has written the story around Olivia, an aging black woman who resolutely marches to the courthouse day after day to be registered, only to be denied, beaten, harassed and insulted. And then she goes back again.

Her quiet determination is a marvel and is played eloquently by Margaret Freeman. Along her journey, she converts an aging black man (Wayne Dehart), with whom she shares a touching love story, and her employer, a white restaurateur played by Dennis Delamar.

Changing the minds of those close to her is not too difficult, but Olivia is also up against a figure of white domination and stupidity, played explosively by Mark Sutton. All of the action takes place within the White House Cafe, Delamar's establishment that hires blacks, but will not serve them.

Sartin has crafted an original tale out of what has become a standard setup of late. This play does not take place the day that Martin Luther King was killed, nor in conjunction with other milestone political events that usually provide a catalyst for stories of racial tension. Instead, this play takes place on the day when one woman simply grew too tired of her station to keep quiet. No particular day. Just Olivia's day. It is well worth following her along, just to see where she goes.

Blessed Assurance plays through September 21, so you'd best be quick if you want to get tickets. Information is available by calling (704) 335-1119. ▼

Kevin Kline

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In & Out



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