

## entertainment

## Ron Dortch Directs Black History Play For BSM

by Gracie Massey  
Staff Writer

"The show must go on," is a common philosophy of many Hollywood producers, directors and actors. Ron Dortch, a visiting director, actor and writer here at the University shares the same view.

Dortch, who has studied in England and lives in New York, is a native North Carolinian from Goldsboro. He is at the University to direct an original production in celebration of Black History Month.

The past five years he has spent working with youth. "I teach from the stage," Dortch said in a recent interview. "Basically, I serve as a student motivator helping young people to find their dreams and make them come true."

Dortch sacrificed several years of his career to come home to Goldsboro and work in the community with young children.

"There was nothing there for them as a social outlet and nothing to inspire them," he said. "A lot of them were strung out on

drugs and had family problems to deal with because they were not doing anything."

He formed an interracial teen drama group that toured and performed at hospitals, schools and retirement homes.

He also produced a children's television show called "The Grove Line." This show gave children an opportunity to express themselves through their talents.

Working with the local police department, he produced a show dealing with drug abuse that was endorsed by Nancy Reagan.

He also worked with the school system producing shows that involved various social issues. After seeing the shows, the students and teachers would go to seminars and discuss the issues.

The production Dortch is working on here at the University also deals with social issues.

Tonya Smith, performing arts coordinator of the UNC Black Student Movement, contacted Dortch to ask if he had a play he could do for Black History Month.

"Usually what I like to do when I go

some place I haven't been before is find out what the spiritual needs are at the institution," Dortch said. "Then I create the work centered around that information."

The show, titled "It's Time for a Change," evolved out of interviews with BSM members, Black faculty and Black students on campus about some of the problems and issues that Black students face.

"Because I've put together a program that communicates the information I got, it's a documentary," Dortch said. "But its purpose is to teach and entertain."

However, the plot of the show gives a better understanding of what it is intended to do.

The story line begins with Stevie Wonder (an actor) performing at the Greensboro Coliseum. A group of BSM members ask him to come to the University because he is such a positive role model for Black students; they want him to speak at the Black History Month celebration.

Wonder wants to know what some of the problems are for Blacks at the University. Dortch uses a series of flashbacks to illustrate these problems.

After Wonder agrees to come, the scene changes. BSM subgroups and some local talent serve as opening acts at his performance.

In the finale, Wonder appears. But before he actually sings he makes a speech encouraging the students to be proud of their accomplishments and to remember that their strength lies in God. The show concludes with Wonder singing "Heaven Help Us All."

Dortch has been in Chapel Hill for three weeks. The first week was spent researching issues on campus, and the second was spent recruiting and organizing

talent. The final week was spent in rehearsal with the BSM subgroups.

The time element is one very interesting factor surrounding the production. What many people think should take several months to do Dortch said he will prove can be done in one week.

Remembering his days as a student in England, he described a production that he was involved in that only took three days to do. "The professor made us think very fast," Dortch said. "All the time you waste trying to think you could be thinking."

"The object of any meaningful piece of work is to teach students what can be done and how to make it entertaining and educational at the same time," Dortch said. "Since I've been doing this in a lot of schools, I know it can be done."

Dortch said he wouldn't worry about the small amount of time left for rehearsals. "Anything can be done if you have the will to do it," he said. "And I know it can be done because I've got some of the best talent in the world in this show."

He said he had seen no concern about the time element from the students involved in the performance. "They're ready to go; they're telling me they're all fired up," he said.

Dortch said his only advice to the students to help insure the success of the production was: "Whatever you do, do it like its the last time you'll have it to do in your life."

He said he was confident that the show would be a success, because he had the full support of the performers.

"The Black students here are the type of people who go on and get the job done while others are still thinking about doing it."

## Dance Theatre Music Takes Away From Performance

by Kevin Washington  
Assistant Editor

It never fails! A professional dance company seems to always spoil its performance with poorly recorded music. Granted, a dance company isn't a professional orchestra—nor does it necessarily carry one around—but it seems to me that good dance needs good music.

And *Joseph Holmes Dance Theatre* was no exception. Holmes must have forgotten to bring a good sound system. Holmes' company, a ten-year-old Alvin Ailey spinoff, recently visited Memorial Auditorium as a part of the Triangle Dance Guild Series. Holmes, who studied under Ailey with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, brought his interracial troupe from the Windy City and made an impressive stop.

Dance Theatre opened with a Gospel medley called "A New Song" (1984). No question here—Holmes created a first class piece which was evocative of the spiritual power behind the gospel music he chose. Although the first and second movements carried very well, it is the third which carried the audience along into the sweeping universal feel which Gospel music has.

That was, when the ticks, pits and saws in the recording didn't intrude. Holmes was at fault here, for the dancer should understand that the music enhances the dance (as much as dance often enhances good music).

"Oh, Mary, Don't You Weep" (1974) seemed to move much more slowly—which wasn't bad. It simply should have been first to prepare the audience for the power of the first piece. The symbole of the cross and the red sash were quite effective however, in heightening the audience to the emotional power of the piece. Unquestionably, the

costuming here was probably the best of the night, too.

After the first intermission, Holmes lost his audience. The male dancers performed "Pursuit" (1984) to fusion music done by Weather Report. It seemed as if Holmes were looking for a piece to give the performance variety, yet he sacrificed continuity. If "Pursuit" didn't break that continuity, "My Brave Young Warrior" (1984) certainly did. The story of girl in love with boy/boy off to war/boy dies in war/girl grieves over boy was well done, but seemed out of place. The opera music didn't have the earthiness of the Gospel that had preceded it and lacked the power which good dance needs to be totally effective.

"Aretha" (1983), the end piece, rated in between "A New Song" and "Pursuit." It was fun—certainly the medley of Aretha Franklin hits which Holmes and dance captain, Randy Duncan, have put together keep the piece entertaining. In fact, some performances stood out, such as the female dancers in *Evil Gal Blues* and the company's performance in *I Wish It Would Rain*.

At the same time, other dances during the medley lacked conviction—it was as if the dancers were simply going through the motions more than anything else. *Do Right Woman, Do Right Man* especially seemed rough around the edges as well as rather unemotional—a sin when dealing with Franklin's music.

Needless to say, Holmes Dance Theatre could easily be considered an Alvin Ailey dance theatre. The quickness, style, technique were all Ailey trademarks. Nevertheless it was good Ailey. One does not walk away wishing he had seen good Ailey, only that Holmes had better music.

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