

★ In the Spotlight ★

Kuumba Theatre Keeps Blues Alive

Poet Carl Sandburg once said that a tree is best measured when it is down. If one tried to measure the musical era between 1920 and 1930, popularly known as the Blues — only a giant measuring device could effectively assess the talent, feelings and personalities that contributed to the blues.

With creative talent and a strong desire to keep the blues alive in the 1980's, Val Ward and Buddy Butler of Chicago, Illinois, found an appropriate "measuring stick" for the Blues era — they designed Kuumba Theatre.

The January 17, 1987, Kuumba Theatre presentation of *'The Heart of the Blues'* in UNC's Memorial Hall delighted and educated the audience with emotional song, dance and narration that extended into the audience a greater understanding and appreciation for the blues, its history and its singers.

The eight-member cast, accompanied by a five-member musical team, portrayed six of America's classical blues singers: Bessie Smith, Victoria Spivey, Ma

Rainey, Alberta Hunter, Mamie Smith and Billie Holiday.

Songs, varying from expressing broken hearts to discouraged souls to spiritual enlightenment, bellowed from the cast's talented voices while the audience enjoyed the opportunity to relive the blues and "meet" the era's most popular singers.

The "jazzy" introduction by the company's musicians was followed by master of ceremony, Clifford C. Gober, Jr.'s (M.C.) introduction to the show itself and a duo of "Drink Muddy Water," by "M.C." and "Melody." The two act revue continued with a combination of historical facts about the lives of the blues artists and songs that helped the audience feel the pain and joy common to the era.

Among the songs performed were: "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," "Good Mornin' Blues," "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," "It Makes My Love Come Down," "T'ain't Nobody's Business If I Do" and the finale, "In the House of the Blues."



Alphas Pay Tribute to Martin Luther King

By Taundra S. Woodard, News Editor

Alpha Phi Alpha paid tribute to slain civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., Sunday, January 18, in the Great Hall, as it held its third annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration.

Second year law student, James Exum, reminded the 125-member audience that the hardships that our black forefathers faced should challenge the blacks of today to overcome oppression and strive to be the best they can be.

Exum said blacks should not be

threatened and pulled apart on the university's majority white campus.

Stuart Scott and Kenneth Smith presented a dramatic interpretation entitled, "Seven Days." The presentation, which was adapted by Smith from Toni Morrison's novel, *Song of Solomon*, was about a young man who joined an organization that killed innocent white people for every black person killed. The purpose of the organization was to "keep the numbers straight," as Scott echoed throughout the presentation.

The keynote speaker of the evening was attorney Melvin Watt, a graduate of UNC, who attended the university during the turbulent years of the Civil Rights Movement.

Watt admitted that he did not participate as actively as others did, such as in sit-ins and protests, but strived to gain the best possible education that he could.

Watt said racism and resistance to change was apparent everywhere, even on Franklin Street.

In addition to the speakers, two sub-

groups of the Black Student Movement performed. The Ebony Readers performed an original work by Eric Walker, artistic director for the group.

The play entitled, "Legacy," was about a group of adults trying to educate children about the teachings of King. In the play, the adults are met with resistance from the children. The adults and children resolved the conflict through the use of King's own words.

The BSM Gospel Choir closed out the program with two inspiring songs of praise.

Off-Broadway Production to Recount Life and Times of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Raleigh, NC Chapter Continental Societies, Inc., will present the Off-Broadway Production of "I Have A Dream." The evening of theatre and music, based on the words and life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., will be February 8, 9 and 10 at the Raleigh Memorial Auditorium.

"I Have a Dream" blends King's speeches, sermons and other writings along with 28 musical numbers into a drama retracing King's life and hardships from the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycotts to his death in Memphis in 1968.

Among the familiar freedom songs, spirituals and gospel hymns of the play, adapted by Josh Greenfeld, are "We Shall Overcome," "Precious Lord," "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," and "Free at Last."

The National Black Touring Circuit - LeCarbi International Enterprises, Inc. production received rave reviews for its performances in New York and Alaska.

New York Times critic Stephen Holden called the show a "pageant like

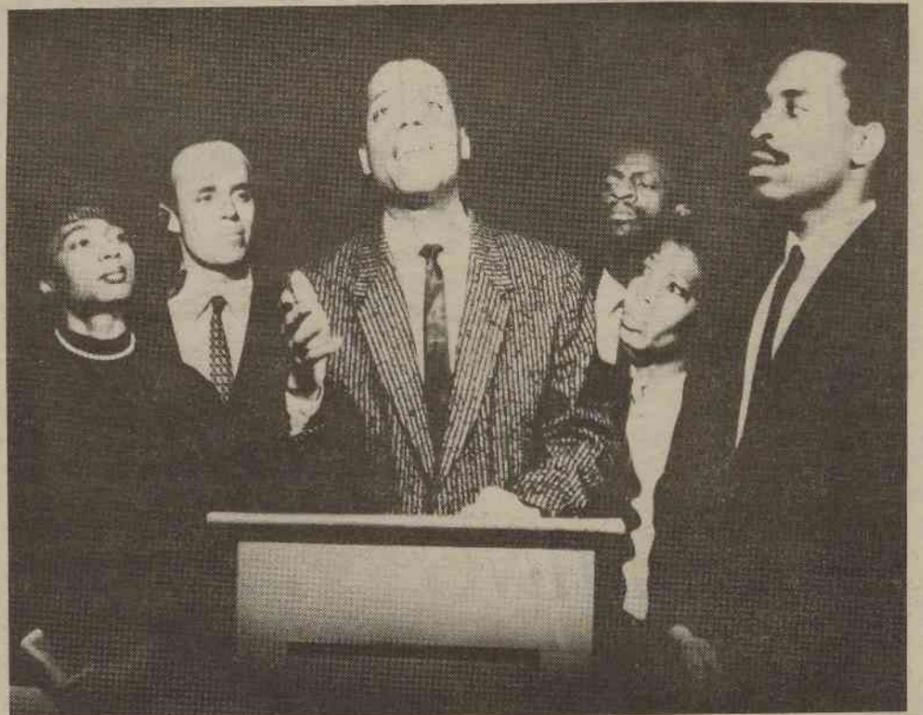
musical-drama recounting (King's) life and times."

The National Black Touring Circuit, founded in 1974 by Woodie King, Jr., serves to make existing Black theatre productions available to larger audiences, colleges and Black art centers, according to director Woodie King.

"There's a rhythm in the words like poetry," Bruce Strickland, who will portray King in the show, told the *Daily News-Mover* in Fairbanks, Alaska. "A color in the sometimes short, sometimes extended syllables reminds us what we've always known but sometimes keep secret from ourselves: we are all capable of and worthy of love."

Tickets are \$10 per person. For tickets call (919) 755-6060. For tickets and group information call (919) 772-7382 or (919) 829-1621.

The Raleigh, NC Chapter Continental Societies, Inc., is a nonprofit organization and funds from the show are dedicated to underprivileged children.



Chequita Jackson, James Curt Bergwall, Bruce Strickland, Dwight Witherspoon, Diane Weaver, Herman Jones in a scene from "I Have a Dream".
(photo by Bert Andrews, Chicago Tribune)