

# REBUILDING A VOICE

By Courtney McSwain

When you think of Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre (E.R.O.T.) do you think of Black performance? Well soon you will change your mind. "I want people to think of good Black performance," said Kamillah Williams, who is in charge of E.R.O.T. this year. Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre is a performing arts group and an official subgroup of the Black Student Movement. While entertaining the public by performing poetry, prose, and self-written plays, E.R.O.T. also strives to "enlighten and celebrate" the lives of Black people. By being one of the smaller groups on campus, E.R.O.T. has lost some of its recognition. However, E.R.O.T. plans to make a come back and rebuild a strong voice that needs to be heard on UNC's campus.

In 1973 two separate groups, Ebony Readers and Onyx Theatre, came together to form one performing body that according to Williams was "a force to be reckoned with." Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre was very popular not only on UNC's campus, but also in the community as a whole. Unfortunately, activeness in the group declined along with the recognition that E.R.O.T. held. Now, the members of E.R.O.T. plan to bring the group's name back to the forefront and grow to become a part of UNC's community that everyone knows and respects.

In order to bring Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre back to the forefront, it must first have a strong group of performers. In order to build a strong group, E.R.O.T. holds auditions in both the fall and spring semesters. During auditions, performers must memorize a piece of poetry or prose, perform an improvisational skit, as well as perform a reading on the spot. "We look for characterization, poise, and articulation," said Williams. At the beginning of the 1998 fall semester, E.R.O.T. held auditions and added seven new members to bring

fresh talent to the group. People who tryout do not need to be perfect, but need to have a desire to become the best performers they can. "We're always striving to get better," Williams said.

Along with getting better, one of the goals that Williams has for E.R.O.T. is to learn more about the history of the group, so that they can strongly move into the future. "No one really knows about our history," said Williams. "We can't know about our future, until we know about our past." Getting in touch with history is important to E.R.O.T.'s quest to evolve. Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre offers a unique opportunity to experience the literature created by Black writers who not only influenced the history of Black people, but recorded it through their poems and novels, which so often reflect the times in which they were written. Celebrating the culture of the Black race is important to the black community, and the diversity of UNC's campus.

By attending performances given by Ebony Readers/Onyx theatre, people from all races and backgrounds can enjoy the richness of Black culture. Throughout the year, E.R.O.T. will be performing in small venues including their first performance in the Student Union Cabaret on November 18, titled "Cat Mama's and Cat Daddies." In February, E.R.O.T. presents "Love Potions" an annual tribute to Valentine's Day with love poems that everyone can share with their significant others. Also E.R.O.T. plans to present a major production for the fall or spring semester. The members of Ebony Readers/Onyx Theatre take their performances very seriously and hope that they will encourage more people to support them in the future. As Williams says, "what we do is important to us and we want you to think it is important too."



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