

Education + Economics=1991 National Black Theatre Festival

by Patricia Smith-Deering
Phoenix Community News Editor

Black theatre has its roots in the oral traditions of West Africa where village "griots" handed down tribal history, folklore, and stories to the next generation. Those oral traditions were re-shaped when the griots arrived in America to fit their experiences in this country, thus maintaining some portion of the village culture. "since the 19th Century, theatres such as the African Grove Company, Lafayette Players, American Negro Theatre, and Negro Ensemble Company have housed the new griots."

culture and heritage on to the latest generation

single most historic and culturally, artistically triumphant event in the

contributions made by America's black theatre companies and this

playwright to have his work produced on the Broadway theatre stage. Then, there was the fine young actor, Denzel Washington, who has "Mo' Better Blues" and "Glory" among his most noteworthy performances, also guest of honor. The festival as an opportunity to teach Blacks about themselves was not lost on him

things, people, and places to learn. Twenty black theatre companies from across the United States strutted the stuff of their performers onstage at 12 locations that included the downtown Stevens Center, the North Carolina School of the Arts, Winston-Salem State University, Wake Forest University, and the Arts Council

The week was filled with pages from history.



Photo by L.B. Speas Jr.

Fans of Black theatre came from across the United States and around the world for the six-day run of plays and celebrity receptions.

All during the week of August 5, thespians and theatre aficionados alike, spread the sights and sounds of the performing arts across the city, epitomizing the festival's theme: "A Celebration and Reunion of Spirit," and continuing to pass the

of griots. And the aura of that ancestry was everywhere.

The Opening Night Gala Monday, August 5, set more than the tone and spirit for what turned out to be the

national black community. The gala put forth in no uncertain terms an opportunity to continue the education of blacks in particular and the whole multi-ethnic community in general on the

country's black performing artists.

Even the dinner recalled a page from history as George C. Wolfe received the Garland Anderson Playwright Award, designated for the first black



Photo by L.B. Speas Jr.

Larry Leon Hamlin, the festival's producer/artistic director, proclaimed the event a "marvastic" success.

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