

Performers say they received worthless checks

By JOHN HINTON
Chronicle Staff Writer

Several performers of a black opera presented in Winston-Salem last month say they were paid with worthless checks and haven't received their full salaries.

"This was the first time that I was promised pay and did not receive it," said William S. Adams, a member of the chorus in the production of "Treemonisha," which was presented June 13 to 15 at the Stevens Center.

The opera, written by Scott Joplin in 1907, is a folksy tale of a community of former slaves who learn that education is the key to progress. More than 50 performers participated in the opera.

Defoy Glenn, executive and artistic director of the opera and co-founder of GM Productions, allegedly wrote worthless checks up to \$100 each to several members of the chorus and orchestra, five performers told the Chronicle in interviews this week.

The checks were written on a GM Productions' checking account at the North Carolina National Bank and signed by Glenn, the performers said.

Some cast members were able to cash the checks, while others were told by bank officials that there were insufficient funds in Glenn's account to cover the checks, Adams said.

Glenn said that every performer would be compensated by July 19. "GM will honor every commitment that it has made," he said in a telephone interview Monday from his Charlotte office.

Glenn sent a letter dated June 26 to every chorus member explaining that he wrote the checks expecting the opera to receive the box office receipts, outstanding ticket reports and promised contributions.

"After all funds were totaled, there were insufficient monies," Glenn said. "Additionally, there were unexpected charges associated with overtime at the theater. We had no recourse but to pay the Stevens center immediately."

GM Productions used the Stevens Center longer than it expected, said Mary Kay Bell, an administrative assistant at the center. Theatrical companies that use the center are charged a fee of \$125 per hour, she said.

Glenn declined to say how much money GM Productions owes to the performers, nor would he discuss the financial troubles of GM. "There were problems that are being resolved," he said.

Adams, who was able to cash his check for \$100, said the chorus members signed contracts to receive \$200 each for their work in the production.

The performers were not given a copy of the contract, Adams said. "A lot of people expected their money, and they were hurt by this," he said.

Glenn reportedly told members of the orchestra and chorus on June 15 that the opera was experiencing financial trouble and asked them to accept a pay cut, two other performers said.

"We were not given much choice," said Katherine C. Clark, a violinist in the orchestra. Miss Clark, who signed a contract to receive \$100 for her work, was paid \$85 with a GM check signed by Glenn.

"I took the check to the bank, and it bounced," Miss Clark said. "I am very disturbed about all of this."

The majority of the 25-member chorus agreed to take a wage reduction of \$100 after Glenn told them of the opera's financial troubles on June 15, said Serenus T. Churn Jr., a member of the chorus.

They were not able to cash

their \$100 paychecks because of insufficient funds, Churn said. "After weeks of rehearsal and practice, I was very upset about this," he said.

Many performers thought some of the \$25,000 grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation would be used to pay their salaries, Adams said.

The money was intended for pre-production activities such as developing the set, according to Valeria L. Lee, program officer for the foundation. "It was not intended for salaries," she said.

The production did not have enough money to meet its expenses, Ms. Lee said. "It was obviously an expensive show."

Many actors have called the foundation to complain that they had not been paid, said Martha H. Pridgen, an administrative assistant at the foundation. "That is not our problem," she said. "That is between them and GM Productions."

Glenn said that there is a financial risk involved in any theatrical production. "I chose to undertake this monumental production with the belief that I would meet all financial obligations," Glenn said in his letter.

"You simply cannot know how devastating this has been to me after so many years in theatrical production," Glenn wrote. "I have agonized and wrestled with it in hopes of finding an immediate solution."

The opera failed to raise enough money to pay its performers because the ticket sales were low, said a member of the orchestra who asked not to be named. "It (the opera) didn't receive adequate publicity," she said.

There were 527 tickets sold for the three performances of the opera at prices ranging from \$10 to \$25, Ms. Bell said.

Adams said that he and two other performers are considering legal action against Glenn. "We want to make sure that this does not happen again," Adams said.

Despite its financial problems, the opera gave blacks in Winston-Salem an opportunity to perform in a black production, Glenn said in the interview. "It was an historic occasion."

"I am going to chalk this all up to experience," the unnamed orchestra member said. "I enjoyed doing 'Treemonisha.' Money is not everything for me."



By the way...

By Joe Black

Sometimes the criticism that I receive because of my "By The Way" commentaries makes me *Feel Like A Motherless Child*, alone and misunderstood. And there have been moments when those feelings make me pause and wonder why should I continue to put myself in the position of being castigated.

That's when I remind myself that I was not seeking popularity; no, it was my intent to encourage people to strive for success by utilizing the minds and bodies given to us by God. So here I go again with another commentary.

Black athletes are now challenged to be achieving students as well as performers in the sports arena. The NCAA has ruled that starting with September 1986, all incoming freshmen must have a 2.0 scholastic average or score a minimum score of 700 on the S.A.T. exams. This is not a racist move; it is an attempt to remind the athletes that they are students, not balls.

Excelling in the classroom will not diminish the athlete's ability to perform on the athletic field. The athletes who are successful as students are a definite asset to Black America. You see, Black people don't need more athletic heroes, but we do need more doctors, lawyers, teachers and engineers.

Joe Black

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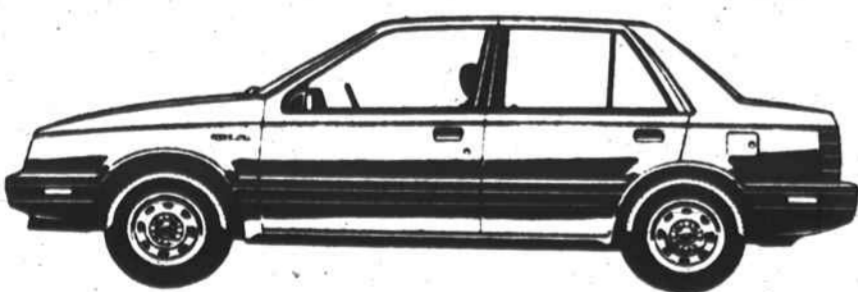
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